A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF
THE EXPERIENCE OF HOUSEHOLD CROWDING
IN SOUTH AFRICAN HOSTELS:
THE CASE OF KWESINE HOSTEL

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DEDICATION

In memory of my parents

GARTH RAYDON WILSON
ALETTA CATHARINA MCLEAN
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ABSTRACT

The problems associated with the relationship between humans and their environment are especially marked within the remains of a political system enforced on millions in South Africa. One of the complications of the Apartheid regime was the practice of migrant labour. Migrant labour in itself led to other complications such as disrupted family life, the disintegration of existing social structures and crowding in low-cost housing compounds, commonly known as hostels. It is obvious that the removal of Apartheid from the Statute Books has not resolved the practical problems stemming from its practice.

South African hostels are generally characterised by high levels of both social and spatial density. Research (for example Oliver-Evans, 1992; Payze & Keith, 1993; Ramphele, 1993) indicates that several people often share the same bed in one hostel, while a minimum of four beds are usually found in a room of about 3m x 3m. This is usually accompanied by an insufficient infrastructure resulting in for example 16 families sharing one toilet. Other factors also seem to exacerbate the subjective experience of crowding, such as the lack of privacy which frequently accompanies inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of services such as garbage removal, sewerage maintenance, and water and electricity supply. The above research illustrates several discrepancies between the needs of hostel residents and the realities of their physical environment. Within this context the current study qualitatively investigates the subjective experience of household crowding at Kwesine Hostel on the Reef.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

When faced with the large body of research in the field of environmental psychology, the escalating number of problems arising from the relationship between humans and their environment is striking. As time progresses, so it has become increasingly important to study this relationship, together with the consequences of environmental manipulation on human behaviour.

One such manipulation concerns the notion of a limited amount of physical space simultaneously allocated to several individuals, commonly referred to in the literature as crowding. Holahan (1982:197) motivates the necessity of research into this area as follows:

The psychological effects of crowding and the ways people cope with it have become the topics of an important and especially interesting body of research in environmental psychology. Environmental psychologists have examined how crowding affects people's physical health, as well as social processes such as cooperation, help-giving, withdrawal, and aggression. Other investigators have focussed on the ways people cope with crowding at both a group and a personal level. The psychological study of crowding can make an important contribution to the design of multifamily housing and public institutions, planning for urban and suburban transportation and planning to meet people's recreational needs.

In general, the problems associated with the relationship between humans and their environment are especially marked within the remains of an oppressive political system enforced on millions in South Africa. For example, one of the complications of the Apartheid regime was the practice of migrant labour. Migrant labour in itself led to other complications
such as disrupted family life, the disintegration of existing social structures and crowding in low-cost housing compounds, commonly known as hostels.

Unfortunately the removal of Apartheid from the Statute Books has not resolved the practical problems stemming from its practice. Since 1994, the year of South Africa's first democratic elections, hostels have remained a topical and problematic issue.

South African hostels are generally characterised by high levels of both social and spatial density. Previous research (Oliver-Evans, 1992; Payze & Keith, 1993; Ramphele, 1993) indicates that several people often share the same bed in one hostel, while a minimum of four beds are usually found in a room of about 3m x 3m. This is often accompanied by an insufficient infrastructure resulting in for example 16 families sharing one toilet. Other factors also seem to exacerbate the subjective experience of crowding, such as the lack of privacy which frequently accompanies inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of services such as garbage removal, sewerage maintenance, and water and electricity supply (Bernhardt et al, 1992; Payze & Keith, 1993; Social Surveys, 1992). When assessing the literature on hostels in South Africa, it becomes evident that little information exists concerning the experience of the crowded nature of such housing and the various complexities surrounding the issue. It is hoped that the present study will serve to elucidate many of the hitherto unexplained issues concerning hostel accommodation, with specific reference to the experience of crowding.

This study commences by reviewing the current literature available on the subject of South African hostels, after which theoretical considerations pertaining to household crowding are addressed. Here several relevant environmental theories are discussed in order to create a theoretical framework for the current study.

As far as methodological considerations are concerned, the current study argues for the
use of a qualitative research design (situated within the interpretive-hermeneutic paradigm) in order to facilitate the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and respondents, rather than a singular construction by researcher as would be the case when using a quantitative design (situated within the empirical-analytical paradigm).

The use of a qualitative research design is also argued for in light of the fact that this study aims at gaining an understanding of the life-world of the respondents with regards to household crowding, rather than at testing a preset hypothesis. As such the methodological chapter sets out to justify all methodological decisions taken with reference to the current study.

After the establishment and presentation of the theoretical and methodological parameters of the current study, the results of the current study are presented and discussed, followed by some conclusionary remarks.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the research done on the topics of hostels in South Africa and crowding. It is hoped that this overview will provide the reader with a fairly comprehensive, critical impression of what has been done on the subject of crowding during the last 25-30 years. However, before the actual literature review, some terms and concepts used in the present study are first defined.

2.2 Definitions

2.2.1 Bedhold

Hostels in South Africa were originally intended to house only male migrant workers for extended periods of time. They were also built specifically to restrict the rights of black South Africans during the apartheid era (Rampele, 1993:16; Segar, 1991:42; Oliver-Evans, 1993:114, Coplan, 1995:33; Ramashala, 1997:14). As such, the wives and families of these workers were forbidden to live with their male migrant relatives in the hostels. To ensure that male migrant workers lived alone, these restrictions were continually enforced by raids (Segar, 1991:43). Hence it can be seen that hostels were never designed, nor intended to house families.

However, with the abolition of the apartheid system, families began to live together in the hostel compounds. This led to a hostel population consisting of more than one person per bed (Oliver-Evans, 1993:116, Segar, 1991:48). To address the academic semantic difficulty resulting from the above, researchers began speaking of a bedhold to describe all those
persons sharing the same bed, or having claim to the same bed (Ramphele, 1993:20). Furthermore the use of *bedhold* also denotes a sense of the meaning associated with beds (as homes) in hostels. Ramphele (1993:20) describes this accordingly:

*The common denominator of space allocation in the hostels is a bed.*

*Every aspect of life here revolves around a bed. Access to this humble environment depends upon one's access to a bed; it is the basis for relationships within the hostels, between different hostels and between hostels and places of employment. One's very identity and legal existence depends on one's attachment to a bed.*

2.2.2 Crowding vs density

In the literature the term *crowding* is sometimes used in two ways. The first is to describe various characteristics of physical settings, and the second to indicate the emotional responses individuals or groups have to those settings (Altman, 1975:149). This use of the term *crowding* creates difficulties in distinguishing information relevant to the first from that relevant to the second (Stokols, 1972:276; Altman, 1975:149; Holahan, 1982:197).

To combat this problem some researchers utilize the distinction proposed by Stokols (1972:276-278; see also Loo, 1977:164; Bonnes, Bonaiuto & Ercole, 1991:532) between physical characteristics relevant to the crowding phenomena (density), and humans' subjective psychological experience of it (crowding). Accordingly, the current study also differentiates between the terms *density* and *crowding*, as is explained below.

**Density**

*Density, as it is used in the current study, refers to those physical or spatial characteristics*

*Lepore (1994) defines household density as the number of people in the household or as the ratio of available rooms and people living in the house.*

Furthermore, a distinction is made between *social density* and *spatial density*. According to Holahan (1982:199):

*... investigators have defined social density in terms of the number of people in a given area, [and] spatial density in terms of the available space in a given area.*

For example, in one hostel the level of social density may be around 2 persons per bed (i.e. two persons are sharing the same bed and thus make up one bedhold), while the level of spatial density might be around a total of just over 3m² per person (i.e. the total amount of available living space to any one person in the hostel is just over 3m²).

Finally, within the concept of density, distinction is also made between inside and outside density. Holahan (1982: 200) describes this as follows:

*Inside density has been defined as the number of people per spatial area within a dwelling unit ... Outside density is the number of people (or residences) within a broader geographic area ...*

**Crowding**

Gustave Le Bon is generally considered to be the founder of Crowd Psychology. This is, however, contested by several authors, including Freud (1966:1953), Park (1972), and van Ginneken (1985). These authors support the claim that a substantial part of Le Bon’s
thinking is based on the earlier work of others, without their efforts being credited by Le Bon. According to van Ginneken (1985: 375):

*The relations among the early authors and works on crowd psychology have remained largely obscure. The most well known of these theorists, Gustave le Bon, seems to have derived a number of his key concepts from earlier authors, without properly crediting them. Specifically, Schipio Sighele, who first tried to integrate the various fragmentary analyses on crowd behaviour; Gabriel Tarde, who played an intermediary role which can be reconstructed from the unpublished correspondence; and Henry Fournial, an obscure author, all contributed to Le Bon's work.*

However, since these other authors' work is mostly either unpublished or in Italian, French, or other European languages, this study will make use of Le Bon's English translations on the Psychology of Crowds.

According to Le Bon (1979:58), a crowd can be defined in the following manner:

*In its ordinary sense, the word "crowd" means a gathering of individuals of whatever nationality, profession or sex, and whatever the chances that have brought them together. From the psychological point of view, the expression "crowd" assumes quite a different significance. Under certain given circumstances, and only under those circumstances, an agglomeration of men [or women] presents new characteristics very different from those individuals composing it. The sentiments and ideas of all the persons in the gathering take on the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes. A collective*
mind is formed, doubtless transitionary, but presenting very clearly defined characteristics. The gathering has thus become what, in the absence of a better expression, I will call an organised crowd, or, if the term is considered preferable, a psychological crowd. It forms a single being and is subject to the law of mental unity of crowds.

While Le Bon’s definition is usually applied to studies of groups of people coincidently meeting or coming together (for example parliamentary committees, juries or soccer crowds), the underlying intrapsychic principles he uses are also applicable to the study of large crowds living together over extended periods of time. While these are not empirically tested for in the current study, it is expected that some of Le Bon’s criteria may present within the current data set just the same.

However, for the purposes of the current study, definitions pertaining specifically to household crowding, are also required. For this reason, crowding as it is used in this study refers not as much to Le Bon’s definition of groups, but rather to the more recent environmental psychological definition of household crowding. This definition entails humans' negative experience and/or perception of being subjected to high levels of density (Stokols, 1972: 275; Loo, 1977:164; Bonnes et al., 1991:532).

In this regard a distinction is made between social and spatial crowding. While social crowding refers to the number of people in a certain space leading to adverse experiences or perceptions of the situation, spatial crowding refers to the spatial dimensions per person leading to a person(s)’ adverse experiences or perceptions of the situation (Loo, 1977:165; Holahan, 1982:202, Altman & Rogoff, 1987:23, Stokols, 1987:62). Research (Pennartz & Elsinga, 1990: 675) further indicates that the subjective experience of one's environment differs not only individually, but also, and supporting Le Bon’s argument, according to group
affiliation. This is aptly illustrated by Loo (1977:166):

*The effects of crowding are individually and situationally variable.*

*Thus research and theory on crowding must address the question of "for whom" and "under what conditions" crowding has and fails to have an effect.*

As can be seen from the above, while high density is a pre-requisite for crowding, it is not, of itself, enough to cause crowding (Loo, 1977:164; Stokols, 1972:276, Holahan, 1982:202; Evans, Lepore & Allen, 2000:209).

### 2.2.3 Stress

Plug, Meyer, Louw & Gouws (1987:351) defines stress as follows:

*Die totaliteit van liggaamlike en psigiese reaksies op nadelige en/of onaangename stimuli (insluitend eksterne omgewingstimuli soos lawaai en gevaar, asook interne stimuli soos - veral langdurige - angs, hewige emosies, bekommerenis en spanning). Stres word in die algemeen gekenmerk deur versteuring van die homeostase van die liggaam, en meer spesifiek deur verskynsels soos hartkloppings, voortdurende moegheid, angs, spanning en gejaagdheid. Soos veral uit die werk van H. Seyle blyk, kan dit in ernstige gevalle tot siekte en selfs dood lei.*

Holahan (1982:201) cites Seyle (1967) in explaining that stress involves bodily reactions termed *general adaptation syndrome* (GAS) which entails three phases. Firstly, GAS needs to be initiated by a bodily alarm involving increased adrenaline secretion, heart rate, blood pressure and skin conductance. Secondly, GAS entails a phase in which coping strategies meant to resist the stressor on physiological, behavioural, and cognitive levels are activated.
Finally, should the attempted coping strategies fail, the person will become exhausted.

The above definitions are intended to provide the reader with a guideline of the meaning of terms as used in this study and an overview of research on hostels in South Africa can now be presented.

2.3 Overview of research on hostels in South Africa

It was decided to begin this section with an extract from my personal journal regarding the first time I ever entered a hostel residence in order to indicate something of my initial self on the journey of that which I am writing about in this work.

It is dark. We (my co-author, Trevor Keith and I) are driving through Katorus to pick up our key informant. We have recently embarked on a study on violence in South African hostels and are currently just starting out on a nationwide fieldwork exercise. We arrive as she is preparing liver for her kids who, like most, aren’t all that keen on eating it. She is very busy. The phone has just rang and she is now dealing with some unfinished business from the day, while talking and gesturing to us at the same time.

Her bustle allows me a precious moment to sit down and take in everything around me. I am surprised by my own experiences. I feel as though I may as well be in my own home, ordering my kid to eat what I think she should, while I am trying my best to consolidate all the many roles I take on each day. Mother, researcher, friend, partner, colleague - it is a lot to cope with.

After the phone call is finished she walks over and starts telling us about the drive-by shooting in Khumalo St this morning. At around 07:00, a taxi drove past the hostel and opened fire with AK47 semi-automatic rifles. Seven men were killed as they lay asleep in their beds. It is only now that I realise how angry she is. It is 1992 and the violence on the East Rand is intensifying almost by the day. While we
are only beginning our project, the people we work with have been living here most of their adult life, and have become accustomed to the high levels of violence, and are still intensely touched by it.

After a while we leave for a hitherto unknown destination to meet with some of the hostel residents and talk to them about their life experiences in the hostel. Our key informant is still talking. I feel tired and drained - the subject matter of our project is intense and exhausting, and I am simultaneously coping with being in the so-called townships. I thought life in black areas would be so different, and the more I see, the more I realise how similar it actually is to the area in which I myself grew up. Different skin colour, place, and standard of living, but the same life. I keep thinking about the liver she served, it may as well have been my house. My middle class, Afrikaans upbringing is really not helping here.

After some time we reach the hostel and are introduced to those we will be meeting with. There are so many people that we all have to cluster together in a smallish dining area. People are sitting on top of each other and do not seem to mind. Babies are being passed to and fro between the women present and I cannot figure out who belongs where. The discussion centres around living conditions and violence.

Trevor is doing a lot of the work and once again I have time to take in the people and their surroundings. I know that he is doing the same and that, after this meeting, we will still be talking long into the night. This ensures that I stay on my toes and take careful note of the content, context and various processes relevant to the project.

The room is hot and I can see people perspiring. I wish I could go outside for a minute. To the left there is a passage cordoned of by a blanket. I wonder how it looks behind the blanket. Is it really as bad as everyone says? Somehow I find it difficult to imagine an entire family living on one bed. Yet, everyone here is talking freely about it, and my head also tells me that it is impossible for women and
children, many of whom are here now, to live here in any other way.

People are telling their stories. Of living, loving, hating, hurting. They tell of their dreams for themselves and their children. They tell of dreams of the future — great dreams of health and prosperity, of jobs and peace and owning their own homes. They tell of dreams that have been crushed by violence and poverty and lack of privacy. The stories they share are profound and striking. Eventually, after several hours, the meeting draws to a close. Our key-informant wants to get home to her children and is in a hurry to leave. I am magnetically drawn to the closed blanket. As our respondents go to their beds, I begin to see glimpses of life behind the blanket. My sense is one of darkness and too many people in one space. I want to go out into the fresh air, but cannot take my eyes of the blanket. Some of the respondents see me stare and start talking to me. Eventually the blanket is lifted completely. The room is actually a hall with no partitions and many beds placed in two rows along the length of the room. The residents have used blankets, plastic bags etc. to partition every two beds on off from the others. Here two families live together — mother, father and children all sharing one bed with the rest of their family. Their belongings are pushed under the beds, scattered on the floor and very practically arranged. The system works well and people only need to reach out to find what they are looking for.

I sense residents embarrassment about me seeing their home and reflect on it without realising that the look on my face is probably what brought it on. We speak for a while and then depart. Although I would get sensitised to my effect on people with regard to issues like poverty and crowding very quickly, our work would not bring us back to this hostel for a meeting with residents again. (Also see Payze & Keith, 1993)

Research on the subject of hostels in South Africa can be subdivided into three main areas of focus, namely investigations into the violence in and around the hostels (see, for example, Riots Commission, 1957; Segal, 1991; Hudson, 1992; Independent Board of Inquiry, 1992;
Rubenstein, 1992; Minnaar, 1993; Zulu, 1993; Sitas, 1996); attempts to bring to light the plight of hostel residents, as well as to challenge the apartheid system for having caused this plight (see, for example, Segar, 1991; Development Bank of South Africa, 1992; Social Surveys, 1992; Du Plessis, 1992; Sloth-Nielsen, Hansson, & Richardson, 1992; Hunter, 1992; Ramphele, 1993; Crush & James, 1995; Sitas, 1996); and research on the planning, design, and upgrading of hostels (see, for example, Welch, 1988; Butler & Steuerwald, 1991; Du Toit, 1993; Noero, 1993; Welch, 1993; Bezuidenhout, 1996; Ramashala, 1997; Spicer, 2001).

None of these main areas of focus specifically address the issue of the experience of social or spatial crowding and its concomitant effects from an environmental perspective, although some of the research does mention high social density with bedholds varying from 1.8 persons to 5.5 persons per bed (Ramashala, 1997:64; Woods, 1993:66; Segar, 1991:48). Research also mentions high spatial density in the hostels. Oliver-Evans (1993:131), for example, describes spatial density at one hostel in the Western Cape which holds 16 beds at a bed occupancy rate of 1.8 persons per bed, per total living area of 94.5m². This results in a total living area of 3.28m² per person (including beds, lockers and ablution facilities). Although high social density also occurs at this hostel at 9.6 persons per room, no specific mention is made of the relation between various forms of density and crowding.

Furthermore, some of the suspected effects of crowding are also mentioned, although the focus in these studies is frequently on the empowerment of residents (Ramphele, 1993) or the redressing of the damage done by the practice of migrant labour during the apartheid era (Segar, 1991; Oliver-Evans, 1993; Ramashala, 1997).

When looking at the body of research on hostels in South Africa, it seems that as yet, little has been done to investigate the relationship between high social and spatial density, and
hostel residents' response to such density. Hence the focus of the current study.

2.4 Overview of research on crowding

The issue of crowding is a very topical one and much has been said about it in the popular press. For example, there is an ongoing debate on the upgrading of hostels and why many promises of funding for upgrading purposes have not been kept (Cresswell & Mazibuko, 1997). Scientific research on the topic of crowding over extended periods of time can be traced back to the fifties and before. Perhaps the most well known work on the subject prior to 1970 is that of Calhoun (1962), in which experiments with rats living under conditions of high density for long periods of time were conducted. These rats began to exhibit what Calhoun termed *behavioural sink*, or deviant behaviours such as autism, delinquency and cannibalism (Calhoun, 1962:147), very much like what Le Bon (1960: 62) stated about human crowds:

*By the mere fact that he forms part of an organised crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a ... creature acting by instinct.*

This can be seen, for example, in a discussion between the author and one of the respondents in the present study who describes how she was raped in the ablution facility of the hostel and then told that it was her own fault for using the men’s ablutions and showering in front of them. (No women’s ablution facilities existed in this hostel at the time of the interviews).

However, most of the groundbreaking research on the subject of crowding with the accompanying conceptualization on a theoretical level from an environmental perspective began in the seventies. Firstly, the distinction between density and crowding, together with
a distinction between the social and spatial aspects of both density and crowding was made (Stokols, 1972:275; Loo, 1977:163).

Furthermore, two main hypothetical perspectives emerged, namely those for and against the view that high density has negative effects on humans.

2.4.1 Does spatial or social density lead to crowding?

Social and Spatial Density: No negative effects on humans?

Studies supporting this perspective first emerged in the seventies (Freedman, 1975:135; Baldassare, 1979:25, Anderson, 1972). For example, Freedman, (1975: 134) states:

*Many planners, urban specialists, and city dwellers fail to recognise that life in the city is very different from life in the suburbs or country. They want the city to have features of the country that it simply cannot have. People complain that it is difficult to get a sense of peace and relaxation in the city, that the parks are either dangerous or too crowded, that houses almost never have lovely, peaceful private gardens in which people can be alone and enjoy the outdoors... These complaints are foolish; cities cannot have certain features of the country as it is the essence of the city to have large populations concentrated in fairly small areas. Any failure to recognise and accept this condition is ridiculous. ... There is no point complaining that there are too many people around - that is what makes a city a city... it is perhaps even more important that people recognise that high density does not have negative effects on humans... the cities' problems are not due to high density; if the cities can be made healthy, pleasant places*
to live in, the high density will enhance the positive aspects of city living...

However, because this view was contested from the outset, researchers are currently suggesting that, rather than density having no negative effect on humans, the context in which this density manifests will determine whether it has adverse effects or not (McAndrew, 1993:158). For example, Evans et al. (2000:204) claim that while tolerance of crowding may be equally low across cultures, different cultures may perceive the notion of crowding as a result of density in different ways. Thus, what for some may be intolerable density and thus also crowding, may for others simply be normal occupation rates of available space.

**Social and Spatial Density: Negative effects on humans?**

As stated above, those supporting this perspective challenged the results of Freedman (1975) and others and questioned the validity and reliability of research yielding such results from the outset (Loo & Smetana, 1978:228, Loo & Ong, 1984:56; Stokols, 1987:62).

Many claim that crowding is detrimental to humans. One example of this can be found in the work of Johnston-Brooks, Lewis, Evans & Whalen (1998:597):

*Research with humans has shown that when density is measured as people per household, as opposed to people per city block, greater household density is associated with negative physical and psychological outcomes.*

Those in support of the perspective that high levels of density are indeed negative in their effect, hold that density could be detrimental to humans on various levels of their existence (Altman, 1975:155; Loo, 1977:164; Ruback & Pandey, 1992:527; Lepore, Evans & Schneider, 1992:795; Kaitilla, 1993:514; Evans et al., 2000:209; Sinha & Nayyar, 2000:726).
Such negative effects are subdivided into two main areas for the purposes of the current study. These are interpersonal effects and intrapersonal effects. They are briefly reviewed below.

2.4.2 The negative effects of density on humans

Interpersonal effects

The first of negative interpersonal effect of high levels of household density is interpersonal conflict. The issue of social conflict within and between crowds was one of the most detailed areas addressed in the early works of Le Bon, for example where he discusses the impulsiveness, mobility and irritability of crowds. According to Le Bon (1979: 37):

*The varying impulses which crowds obey may be, according to their exciting causes, generous or cruel, heroic or cowardly, but they will always be so imperious that the interest of the individual, even the interest of self-preservation, will not dominate them. The exciting causes that may act on crowds being so varied, and crowds always obeying them, crowds are in consequence extremely mobile. This explains how it is that we see them pass in a moment from the most bloodthirsty ferocity to the most extreme generosity and heroism. A crowd may easily enact the part of an executioner, but not less easily that of a martyr.*

One of the best known studies to document social conflict as a result of high density during this century, is that of Calhoun's (1962:147) experiments with rats in which he concluded that high density led to social conflict between the rats. Later studies have drawn similar conclusions about humans. These include the work of Hutt & Vaizey (1966:1371) and Loo
& Kennely (1979:140) in which experiments on humans indicate greater levels of anger and aggressive behaviour under conditions of high density. Loo & Ong (1984:72) also point to resultant social conflict in their study of crowding among the Chinese of San Francisco's Chinatown. Furthermore, Loo & Kennely (1979:143) indicate that high density leads to higher levels of aggressive behaviour in men than in women and in boys than in girls.

More recently Sinha et al (2000:726) state that high density means competition for scarce household resources such as toilets and bedroom space and Evans, Lepore, Shejwal & Palsane (1998:1521) claim that interpersonal conflict in high density living areas correlates positively with pathology.

Two other interpersonal effects faced by those living in high density areas are that of withdrawal and lack of support. McAndrew (1993:157) writes that when individuals are subjected to, for example, high levels of household density, they may develop an interpersonal style of withdrawal and that this in turn, may have as its consequence the fact that such individuals will not have a support network to help them address the stress and other negative effects of such levels of density. Evans et al (1998:1521), as well as Ruback & Pandey (1996:432) also state that social support deteriorates amongst those subjected to high levels of household density.

The literature also addresses the issue of social adjustment. Evans et al (1998:1521), for example, report that children growing up in high density households tend to exhibit behavioural adjustment problems at school and do worse in academic assessments than those from less densely populated households.

**Intrapersonal effects**

Impaired personal functioning is often associated with high levels of density. A commonly
described area of impairment is that of information overload (Milgram, 1970: 1461; Bell, Fisher, Baum, & Greene 1996: 120). According to Milgram, individuals subjected to high levels of density screen out important information in an attempt to cope with the simultaneous bombardment of more stimuli than they can deal with at once.

Another area of impairment is that of behavioural interference (Schopler & Stockdale, 1977: 81). From their study, Schopler & Stockdale claim that high density interferes with goal-directed behaviour, increasing the costs in terms of time, effort and energy of completing goals under conditions of high density. Furthermore, studies such as that of Paulus & Matthews (1980: 119) also indicate that high density may adversely affect task performance.

There are also several studies which point to impaired health, specifically within crowded hostel contexts. Impaired health encompasses both infectious disease such as tuberculosis and non-infectious disease such as hypertension, heart disease, asthma etc. For example, the Tuberculosis Research Committee (1932) looked at the (currently still prevalent) spread of tuberculosis, while Swanson (1977) addressed bubonic plague.

Loo & Ong (1984: 72) describe air pollution and unsanitary conditions leading to disease, and symptoms such as headaches and breathing problems among Chinese individuals exposed to high density and Johnston-Brooks et al (1998: 597) state that high density correlates positively with acute illness, heart disease and impaired immunological functioning in individuals subjected to high levels of household density.

Furthermore, the definition of stress cited earlier indicates that it is not easily measured in ways other than physical symptoms. Some physical symptoms related to stress as a result of adverse environmental conditions are described by Endroczi (1991: 158). These include hypertension and cardiovascular disorders. Johnston-Brooks et al (1998: 597) also report
stress related symptoms including hormonal responses, higher adrenaline secretion, increased cardiovascular rates and blood pressure rates and hypertension.

Marcella, Escudero & Gordon (1970:288) also found a positive correlation between high density and psychosomatic illness among Filipino men. Levi & Anderson (1975:85) quote the work of Strotzka (1964) which shows higher incidences of non-hereditary mental disease such as alcoholism or schizophrenia in areas where high density is prevalent.

However, researchers dealing with crowding often describe stress as a result of crowding without necessarily describing physical symptoms of such stress. In the current study this is referred to as psychological distress. For example, Evans et al (2000:209) and Sinha et al (2000:727) indicate greater psychological distress in persons subjected to high levels of household density.

Also, Loo & Ong (1984:72) claim frustration, tension, annoyance, depression, irritability and impatience to be indicators of psychological stress.

Loo's research is also supported by the work of Zeedyk-Ryan & Smith (1985:245) which showed that humans subjected to high density showed higher levels of anxiety and hostility than humans not subjected to high density, and that of Lepore, Evans & Schneider (1992:795) which indicates that perceived control of the situation by individuals decreases with increased density. A sense of control is also reported to decrease in persons in a high density environment by Ruback et al (1996:419).

Finally the literature also talks about the relation between crowding and economic, social and political disempowerment. It has long been argued that power (defined in its broadest notion) has a direct bearing on the amount of space, resources and general quality of life. Since the time of Karl Marx those who have and those who have not, have been identified, described and carefully noted for the sake of posterity. As far as crowding is concerned,
much has been said about the above premise.

The relationship between crowding and disempowerment is strongly stated by Loo & Ong (1977:82) who, during a study on crowding perceptions of residents of San Francisco's Chinatown, concluded that Chinese do not prefer crowded conditions. Rather they are economically and socially disempowered to the extent that they have no options beyond living under conditions of high density.

In local literature this view is also strongly put forward by Ramphele (1993:8) who argues that, by the nature of their existence (including the characteristic of high density), hostels add to the disempowerment of residents on social and political levels. The relationship between crowding and disempowerment is taken a step further by Eichhorn (1988:38) who argues that the bulk of research on crowding has taken for granted disempowerment as a necessary accompanying variable. He claims this to be a theoretical flaw in crowding research. To illustrate this point, namely that some human beings (in power) do not perceive those without power to share their basic human needs, he firstly quotes Yancey (1974):

> If housing must be designed for the ghetto ... the architect can make some small contribution by facilitating the constructive adaptations that have emerged as a means of defence against the world of the lower class.

He then concludes that the very housing project about which Yancey spoke has since been demolished due to its failure. Eichhorn's point is especially valuable within the context of South African hostels. Designed to house black migrant labourers who were to provide cheap labour for the benefit of ruling class whites, no concern was shown for the needs of these workers. Hostels often lacked basics like mattresses or pillows. Ablution facilities were designed to service large amounts of people showering or using toilets simultaneously,
and of course, wives and children were strictly forbidden lest they should, purely on account of their numbers, pose an even greater “swart gevaar” near white areas. The cultural values, family structures, individual rights and needs of hostel residents were all disacknowledged in favour of the ease and low economic output with which the white ruling class could use migrant labourers to build a so-called first world for themselves.

Two issues emerge from the above. Firstly, it is obvious that disempowerment on various levels frequently accompany high levels of living density. Secondly, it is essential to note that the very act of taking various levels of disempowerment for granted during the research process focussing on crowding, is perpetuating the cycle of disempowerment.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has attempted to indicate diametrically opposed views on the effects of high density on humans. On the one hand high density is thought to be possibly detrimental to humans, while on the other hand it is not thought to be detrimental at all.

The result was the incorporation of a new variable into the literature, namely interaction between variables. This variable includes the interaction between density and crowding, as well as interaction between density and other variables. Hence studies on crowding would need to become context bound. As such each study on crowding should simultaneously make use of at least one of the existing, fairly universal hypothetical views on crowding, while simultaneously incorporating the effects if variables unique to the study (Stokols, 1987:63). In this study, for example, South Africa’s history of Apartheid, the various cultural beliefs prevalent in specific hostels, the original purpose of the hostels, the government’s tardy attitude to upgrading the hostels, etc. are crucial variables to be considered in relation to crowding.
Hence the value of utilizing a context based approach when studying the phenomenon of crowding is also argued for in light of the applicability of the information gathered for the alteration of high density living conditions to the benefit of residents (Eichhorn, 1988:38; Stokols, 1987:63). Those in support of this view cite the ineffective interventions based on policy decisions made from research which did not take unique contextual variables into consideration. An example of this is stated by Stokols (1987:63) who explains that community planners, following advice from proponents of the point of view that high density has no adverse effects on humans, designed very different housing to planners following advice from proponents of the view that high density is, or can be, detrimental to humans.

In the present study a context based position which incorporates the variables of density, crowding, and the interaction between these variables and between these variables and other variables, is taken. This view will be expanded upon in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a theoretical framework which served as the basis for the current study. It begins by providing a brief overview of some of what exists in the literature, moves on to the specific postulations of three theorists deemed particularly relevant to the current study, and concludes with the theoretical frame which governs the current work.

3.2 Overview of some Environmental Psychology theories relevant to household crowding

It can be seen from the literature (for example, Cassidy, 1997:40; Bell, Fisher, Baum & Greene, 1996:146) that environmental theories are generally subdivided into three categories, namely theories that focus on the individual, theories that focus on the environment and theories that focus on the interaction between the two. An overview of some theories falling into the first two categories are briefly discussed here as background, after which specific theories from the last category are presented as the basis of the theoretical framework of the current study.

3.2.1 Theories that focus on the individual

The best-known theories in this category are the Arousal / Adaptation Level theories (Cassidy, 1997:37-38; Bell et al, 1996:117-118; McAndrew, 1993:158), and the Stimulus Load / Social Overload / Environmental Load theories (Cassidy, 1997:37-38; Bell et al, 1996:348). These are briefly discussed below.
**Arousal / Adaptation Level theory**

According to Cassidy (1997:37), Bell *et al* (1996:117) and McAndrew (1993:158), higher levels of arousal have often been linked with high density and the experience of crowding. Furthermore, heightened arousal can impact negatively on individuals by stunting their concentration or ability to perform complex tasks, by facilitating or exacerbating aggressive behaviour and by leading to a decreased tendency to help others (McAndrew, 1993:158; Cassidy, 1997:342; Veitch & Akkelin, 1995:245). Increased arousal is also associated with increased heart rate, blood pressure, respiration rate, adrenalin secretion and epinephrine secretion (Cassidy, 1997:337; Bell *et al*, 1996:337).

The theory used to explain the above (Arousal Level theory) is based on the thesis that an optimum level of arousal, or homeostasis exists for all humans. This thesis was first put forward as the Yerkes-Dodson law in 1908 and was produced by those whom it was named after. The Yerkes-Dodson law essentially states that people tend to prefer medium levels of anxiety for optimal performance and that when their levels of anxiety are too high or too low, an optimal performance cannot be obtained. It also states that high levels of anxiety tend to correlate positively with high levels of arousal and that low levels of anxiety tend to correlate positively with low levels of arousal. In an ideal situation, according to the above theory, an individual would experience homeostasis and, since humans naturally strive towards homeostasis, would therefore also continuously attempt to maintain such.

Adaptation Level theory is an extension of Arousal Level theory and focusses on an individual’s ability to adapt to external circumstances over time. According to Cassidy (1997:38) two factors are considered when applying Adaptation Level theory in practice. The first of these is that all humans have at least some capacity to adapt or habituate to new environments and the second, that all individuals also differ in this ability to adapt. When
these factors are taken into account, it is clear that a possible optimum adaptation level exists uniquely for each person and that this level can only be discovered by taking into account both the individual’s environment and their possible adaptation range.

A special case of Adaptation Level theory is found in the writings of Freedman, who produced the Density-Intensity model (McAndrew, 1993:158). According to this model individuals can adapt to their environments continually and therefore, high levels of density are not always harmful. In special cases, such as a party for instance, such high levels of density may even be desired.

Stimulus Load / Social Overload / Environmental Load theories

Stimulus Load and related theories (see, for example, the work of Cohen (Cassidy, 1997:37-38; Bell et al, 1996:348) tend to focus only on the extreme ranges of psychological arousal. According to Bell et al (1996:119), humans have a limited capacity to process incoming stimuli and they will also only invest a limited effort in processing such stimuli at any one time. Under certain conditions, such as long-term household crowding, for example, stimulus overload occurs. This means that more information is presented than what the individual is capable of processing. According to Bell et al (1996:120) the result of such overload in humans is called tunnel vision, a condition whereby individuals will begin to ignore less important stimuli and respond only to inputs deemed to be of high priority. Over extended periods of time, as is the case with household crowding, the individual will eventually become exhausted and less and less capable of handling incoming stimuli. McAndrew (1993:157) adds that when individuals are subjected to constant conditions of stimulus overload, they may develop an interpersonal style of withdrawal and that this in turn, may have as its consequence the fact that such individuals will not have a support
network to help them address the stress and other negative effects stemming from, for example, the crowded living conditions.

3.2.2 Theories that focus on the environment

According to Cassidy (1997:40) and Mc Andrew (1993: 159) the Behaviour-Constraint model is one of the theories to focus specifically on the impact which the environment has on individual behaviour. The main thrust of this theory is its emphasis on environmental determinism and its focus on the environment as a source of either reward or punishment (Cassidy, 1997:40). As such, the Behaviour-Constraint model states that operant conditioning is applied to alter human behaviour in all daily life events.

Therefore this theory focusses on the effects of everyday environmental conditions on behaviour. These could include crowding and urban environments, noise, weather and air pollution (Bell et al, 1996:115).

A related theory is that of Environmental Control which is described by both McAndrew (1993:159) and Veitch & Akkelin (1995:241). The basic tenet of this theory is that individuals perceive that they are in control when they believe that they have the freedom to make their own decisions. In the field of research on crowding this would entail a sense of control (or freedom of decision-making) in areas such as social and spatial density or privacy. McAndrew (1993:159) states that high levels of density could affect both the behaviour and emotions of individuals subjected to it, because these individuals may feel that they have little or no control over their living conditions.

The early ecological work of authors such as Barker, Bronfebrenner and others (Cassidy, 1997:41; Bell et al, 1996:139-146; McAndrew, 1993:156) is also often classified here (as opposed to under the category of theories which focus on the interaction between humans
and their environment) because they tended to focus on the impact of the environment on humans almost exclusively, rather than more broadly on the interaction between humans and their environment. However, the work of such authors also focuses, for example, on what Barker calls the extra-individual behaviour pattern and which is the result of the interdependence between behaviour and the environment (Bell et al, 1996:139-140).

3.2.3 Theories that focus on the interaction between individuals and their environment

All theories that focus primarily on the interaction between humans and their environment, have their origin in the work of Kurt Lewin who proposed the following (Cassidy, 1997:43):

$$B = f(P,E)$$

This formula indicates that behaviour (B) is seen as a function of the interaction between a person (P) and his/her environment (E). Three main theoretical tenets flowing out of the above are described by Cassidy (1997:43). These are first, interactionism in which an individual and his/her environment are seen as separate and independent entities; second, transactionalism in which the interdependence of an individual and his/her environment is emphasised and finally, the organismic approach of which Cassidy (1997:43) states:

*The organismic approach emphasises the person-environment relationship as an interdependent system in which social, societal and individual factors operate in a complex process. This approach unites the system perspective with multiple levels of explanation.*

The current study attempted to create such an organismic approach as a theoretical framework, based on the work of Ecological and Interactionist theorists as well as others.
### Table 3.1: Abbreviated summary of some theoretical perspectives on household crowding (Adapted from Bell et al. 1996:348).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Conceptual approach</th>
<th>Critical contributors to crowding</th>
<th>Primary coping mechanisms</th>
<th>Theorists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Arousal / Adaptation</td>
<td>Personal space violations. Appropriate attributions</td>
<td>Lower arousal to a more optimum level</td>
<td>Evans, Paulus &amp; Matthews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Social overload / Stimulus load / Environmental load / Moders stimulation overload</td>
<td>Excessive social contact. Too much social stimulation</td>
<td>Escape stimulation. Prioritize input and disregard lower priorities. Withdrawal.</td>
<td>Milgram, Saegert, Cohen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Behaviour constraint / Interference / Environmental control</td>
<td>Reduced behavioural freedom. Disruption or blocking of goal-directed behaviour</td>
<td>Aggressive behaviour. Leave situation. Coordinate actions with others. Create structure.</td>
<td>Stokols, Sundstrom, Schapler &amp; Stockdale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction between individual and environment</td>
<td>Ecological / Interactionist</td>
<td>Scarcity of resources. Interaction between individuals and their environment</td>
<td>Defence of group boundaries. Exclusion of outsiders</td>
<td>Lewin, Barker, Wicker, Stokols, Bronfenbrenner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction between individual and environment</td>
<td>Privacy regulation</td>
<td>Inability to maintain desired privacy</td>
<td>Privacy control mechanisms</td>
<td>Altman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.3 Focussing on the current study: Chalsa Loo's model of social and spatial crowding stresses

It was decided to begin the theoretical conceptualization phase as it is relevant to the current study with Loo's model of social and spatial crowding stresses for several reasons. Firstly, it is argued for the purposes of this study, that high levels of social and spatial density often have negative consequences for those subjected to it. Loo's model is useful in this regard because it allows one to address the negative effects of both crowding and undercrowding,
as well as to draw a distinction between social and spatial crowding. It is also important to address the question posed by Loo concerning for whom and under which conditions crowding begins to exert an influence (see Chapter 2). As far as this is concerned, her model on social and spatial crowding stresses not only allows for the occurrence of negative effects of high social and spatial density, it also allows for a condition of uncrowdedness, in which no negative effects are found. Loo (1977: 163) concisely describes the model of social and spatial crowding stresses in the following manner:

A model for the relationship between environmental constraints and individual differences integrates social-spatial needs of the individual, a continuum of states of crowdedness, and pathological classifications that serve as descriptive examples of a disharmonious relationship between the environment and the self. The model combines clinical and social-psychological phenomena.

According to this model, a distinction is drawn between the social and spatial needs of the individual. These are directly impacted upon by the levels of social and spatial density facing an individual in a given environment at a specific moment in time. However, it should be borne in mind that the social and spatial needs of an individual are also impacted on by other factors such as levels of empowerment, state of health, access to resources etc.

The social and spatial model of crowding stresses is presented as such by Loo (1977:163):
Figure 1: Chalsa Loo's model of social and spatial crowding

According to Loo (1977: 164) the social needs of an individual firstly pertain to the desired number of people in an environment at one time. This desired number of people with which an individual needs to surround him/herself varies from none (labelled by Loo as a high need for social privacy) to many (labelled by Loo as low need for social privacy). Secondly, the social needs of an individual also pertain to the amount of personal space an individual needs around him/herself, also called the body-buffer zone of an individual.

According to this model the spatial needs of an individual also warrant attention. Loo argues that the aspect of personal space has more to do with the relevance or irrelevance of boundaries than with the size of the interpersonal space concerned, although the size of the
interpersonal space is also of some importance. Hence, what matters is the extent to which an individual is affected by other people in his/her personal space, more so than the size of that space.

Furthermore, Loo's model introduces three points on the continuum of crowding, namely undercrowded, uncrowded and crowded. When the points on this continuum are combined with the social and spatial needs of the individual in relation to a specific environment at a given time, the resultant effects on the individual's life can be described in terms of social or spatial undercrowdedness, social or spatial uncrowdedness or social or spatial crowdedness.

According to Loo a state of harmony between an individual's needs and his/her environment result in a state of uncrowdedness. By contrast, however, a lack of harmony between an individual's needs and his/her environment will result in negative effects manifesting either in the form of undercrowding or crowding; and also leading to a human response in the form of crowding stress. Two types of crowding stresses are distinguished, namely social crowding stress and spatial crowding stress.

Social crowding stress manifests in people when their need for personal space is mismatched with the space available in the environment or when the number of people in their environment are contrary to their needs. Accordingly, social crowding stress could be the result of two different conditions, namely the socially undercrowded condition and the socially crowded condition. During exposure to the socially undercrowded condition too few people are present in an individual's environment (resulting in extreme cases in monophobia, or the fear of being alone); or the space representing the individual's environment is too large.

During exposure to the socially crowded condition, by contrast, an individual is faced with more people in the environment than s/he can deal with at one time (leading in extreme cases to ochlophobia, or the fear of crowds); or with a smaller personal space than that which is
Spatial crowding stress results from a discrepancy between an individual's environment in terms of physical space and his/her levels of comfort. This is due to the importance of physical boundaries for the individual concerned. Once again, two different conditions can lead to crowding stress, namely the spatially undercrowded condition and the spatially crowded condition. During exposure to the spatially undercrowded condition an individual experiences discomfort due to a need for more enclosures, sometimes manifesting in agoraphobia, or the fear of open spaces. By contrast, exposure to the spatially crowded condition leads to a reaction of discomfort in an individual, which is due to less space available than that needed by the individual, and which sometimes manifests in the form of claustrophobia, or the fear of closed places.

Furthermore, Loo (1977:165) also states:

Crowding is dependent upon the individual's perception and experience of the environment; thus definitions of crowedness, uncrowdedness, and undercrowdedness are all individually defined. And since all individual perceptions are made within a particular cultural context, definitions of crowedness, uncrowdedness, and undercrowdedness are culturally as well as individually defined.

This study focusses on both social and spatial crowdedness rather than uncrowdness or undercrowdedness and hence, also on social and spatial crowding stress as it relates specifically to individuals exposed to the long-term effects of crowded living conditions.

As can be seen from the above, for Loo the issue at stake when looking at crowding and specifically crowding stress, is not so much the physical parameters of the environment within which individuals lead their lives, but rather their subjective, individual perceptions of, and
reactions to these parameters. While this provides a very useful conceptualization for the current study, it is, of itself, incomplete and requires the input of other theorists as well.

3.4 Expanding on Loo's View: Daniel Stokols' need for a contextual theoretical framework on crowding

Stokols (1987:50) describes the importance of an approach which takes into account social-structural and cultural variables and processes with regard to environmental psychological research as follows:

Several areas of environmental research suggest that social-structural and cultural processes are crucial to an understanding of person-environment transactions. Studies of crowding, for example, indicate that group structure, composition, and cohesion moderate the intensity of stress reactions to high density settings ... Also, research on territoriality and personal space suggests that cultural norms influence the nature and intensity of people's reactions to territorial infringements and interpersonal proximity with strangers. Thus it is important for environmental psychologists to consider sufficiently the possible links between the target phenomenon and various aspects of the socio-cultural environment over the course of their theorizing and research.

Research also indicates that a variety of variables have a significant impact on people's subjective experience of crowding. For, example, specifically as far as hostels are concerned, research indicates that the gender, age, and cultural grouping of hostel residents are important variables in relation to the subjective experience of household crowding.

Stokols (1987:42) explains the emergence of his more contextually based research approach to environmental psychology as a result of several factors. Firstly, there has been a growing opposition to decontextualized research as a result of its inherent deficiencies. In the current study this is of particular relevance when examining the two opposing positions which have found crowding either to be good or to be bad, depending on the methodology used, rather than depending on the contextual environmental factors which are at play.

Secondly, contextual approaches to research and theory building have, according to Stokols, been popularised by intellectual and societal developments. On an intellectual level the move away from strictly intrapersonal explanations of behaviour towards more systemic approaches have supported and sustained the development of contextual approaches, while growing concerns with global environmental issues have also contributed.

Stokols (1987:42) distinguishes several core assumptions of the contextual perspective in psychology:

1. that psychological phenomena should be viewed in relation to the spatial, temporal and socio-cultural milieu in which they occur;
2. that a focus on individuals' responses to discrete stimuli and events in the short run should be supplemented by more molar and longitudinal analyses of people's everyday activities and settings;
3. that the search for lawful and generalizable relationships between environment and behaviour should be balanced by a sensitivity to, and analyses of, the situation specificity of psychological phenomena ... and
4. that the criteria of ecological and external validity should be explicitly considered (along with internal validity of the research) not only when
designing behavioural studies but also when judging the applicability of research findings to the development of public policies and community interventions.

Furthermore, Stokols (1987:43) also argues for a critical approach to contextualizing research and theorising. For this purpose he distinguishes several criteria for the evaluation of a study in terms of the value which contextualizing may or may not have for it.

Specifically the researcher needs to assess whether a contextual approach best suits a particular study. As far as the current study is concerned it is argued that this is indeed the case, in light of the fact that the results of previous decontextualized research on crowding have been so discrepant; and also in light of the fact that an understanding of the social and spatial experience of crowding in South African hostels requires an imbedded, in-depth look at all the factors at play in the lives of those who are exposed to crowding in order to elucidate the relationships which other factors in the environment have to social and spatial density, and which in turn, lead to the subjective experience of social and spatial crowding.

Furthermore, Stokols (1987:43) also argues that it is necessary to distinguish between non-contextual and contextual analyses and thirdly, that the researcher should consider how broadly to draw the contextual boundaries of the phenomenon. These two arguments are discussed in more detail below.

3.4.1 Contextual research

Stokols (1977:45) identifies the main gist of contextual theories as a focus on situational rather than intrapersonal moderators of environment-behaviour relationships. It is argued for the purposes of the current study, that while other theories, such as Le Bon's (1979) work on crowds, may serve as a useful base for this study, they are not used for the following
reasons. Firstly, many crucial issues pertaining to intrapersonal factors may evolve from a study such as the current one. However, in the absence of personality tests and a research design grounded in the empirical-analytical paradigm, it is the explicit focus of the current study to address those interpersonal variables specifically pertaining to the relationship between hostel residents and their environment. Hence, it is also argued that systems theory is useful in the current study. This is due to the fact that several factors other than those of social and spatial density impact on people's experience of crowding in their living environment. For example, Payze & Keith (1993:52) found that issues such as ill health, lack of physical facilities (such as ablution or kitchen facilities) and high levels of crime greatly exacerbated South African hostel residents' negative experiences of their living environment, while Stokols (1987:45) indicates that people's reactions to crowding have varied across different situational contexts.

3.4.2 Systems Theory: Embedding contextual research

It is argued here that contextual theory can be viewed as one manifestation of systems theory. Systems theory is defined by Plug et al (1986:16) as:

'n Benadering tot die studie van sisteme soos individue en groepe wat
... veral gekenmerk word deur die volgende uitgangspunte: (a) Alle sisteme, lewend en nie-lewend, besit dieselfde algemene struktuur, alhoewel dit inhoudelik grootliks kan verskil. So word alle funksioneerende sisteme gekenmerk deur invoer, transaksies of prosesse wat in die sisteem plaasvind, lewering en die noodsaaklikheid van terugvoering. (b) Alle sisteme, van atome tot gemeenskappe, vorm 'n hiërargie van sisteme van toenemende kompleksiteit. (c) Veranderinge

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According to the above, systems theory can be defined as an approach to systems such as individuals or groups, with specific reference to the following:

(1) All systems, living or non-living, have the same general structure, despite the possibility of great variance as far as content is concerned. Thus the qualities of input, transaction and feedback are present in all systems.

(2) All systems, from atoms to communities, form part of a hierarchy of increasing complexity.

(3) A change to any component of the system will affect the entire system.

When looking at systems theory it can be seen that such a theory would allow for the incorporation of other variables not directly related to the target phenomena, but dependent upon their impact on the target phenomena. For example, Sundberg, Taplin & Tyler (1983:28) describe the following characteristics of systems theory:

*The essence of systems thinking is that the entity studied is a set of interacting units rather than separate entities or cause-effect linkages.*

*The key word is relationship. Everything in a system is related to everything else in it ...*

This is in line with what Stokols proposes and means that in the current study the social and spatial experiences of crowding are not seen as isolated phenomena, namely the effects of subjection to high levels of social and spatial density. Rather these variables are viewed as systemic manifestations of the way in which people interact on a larger scale with their perceived environment. Since high social and spatial density may not necessarily impact the experience of crowding, other variables are also considered in terms of their relationship to the social and spatial experience of crowding.
Stokols (1987:44) explains that one of the main differences between non-contextual and contextual research lies in the selection of variables. While non-contextual research focuses only on the relationship between the target predictor and the outcome variables, contextual research also incorporates alternative (supplementary) predictor variables from the immediate situation or form other areas of an individual's life, depending on their relationship with the target predictor and outcome variables. However, these alternative predictor variables are only selected when they are thought to be able to further elucidate the research results with regard to the phenomenon being studied. Stokols, (1977:44) also states:

*A fundamental idea underlying the notion of contextual research is the concept of embeddedness. That is, a particular phenomenon is thought to be embedded in (and influenced by) a surrounding set of events.*

From the above it can be seen that the central or target phenomenon needs to be identified first, together with those variables directly associated with it. In the current study, the target phenomena is that of the social and spatial experience of household crowding. The target variables (variables identified as associated directly with the target phenomena) are:

- the spatial experience of crowding (Bonnes et al, 1991:532; Loo, 1977:164; Stokols, 1972:275)

Given the above target variables, contextual variables also need to be selected. This can be
done in two ways, namely in an atheoretical manner from an exploratory point of view, or alternatively, based on theoretical assumptions concerning the target phenomena (Stokols, 1987:45; Babbie & Mouton 2002; Smaling 1994a:233; 1994b).

The current study utilized the first of these ways, namely selecting contextual variables in an atheoretical manner from an exploratory point of view. Although Stokols (1987:45) argues that this is the less powerful form of contextualized research, it is used here for the following reasons. Firstly, the literature review did not yield any comprehensive contextual theories about the social and spatial experience of household crowding. Of those which are available in the literature, that of Loo (1977) seems to be the most comprehensive. However, Loo’s model of social and spatial crowding stresses does not address any of the possible variables which may impact on individuals in such a way as to cause one of two people simultaneously exposed to the same situation to experience crowding, while the other does not. Also, no contextual theory which bears in mind either the culture of people currently residing in South African hostels, or those environmental factors impacting on them specifically, exists.

In light of the above, it is argued that it was not possible to have this study explicitly guided by an existing contextual theory. Hence, it was also not possible to distinguish in advance an existing pattern of cross-situational variation in the target phenomena of social and spatial experience of crowding. Finally, it is also not possible as yet, to explain why certain cross-situational variations occur in the target phenomena (Stokols, 1987:45).

3.4.3 Selecting contextual variables

Before possible contextual variables are postulated, attention will first be given to a theoretical framework of criteria which can guide and evaluate the selection of such
variables. Stokols (1987:50) distinguishes five criteria applicable to contextual theories, namely contextual validity, relative power, efficiency, generativity and applied utility. These will be briefly explained.

**Contextual validity**

Stokols (1987:47) explains that contextual validity refers specifically to the accuracy of a theory in specifying a pattern of relations between the target variables, contextual variables and the target phenomena. Contextual validity can be distinguished from methodological conceptualizations of validity, since it is conceptualized on a theoretical level rather than a methodological level. Stokols also claims that:

> the contextual validity of a theory is low to the extent that it incorporates situational factors that have no influence on the occurrence and form of the target phenomenon, or those that affect the target variables in a manner that is contrary to the predicted pattern.

Due to the fact that no previous contextual theory on crowding in South African hostels exists, the contextual validity of the research results from the current study cannot be determined at this point in time. Such a determination necessitates various other studies of crowding in other contexts, in order to facilitate an evaluation, by means of comparison, of the accuracy of the contextual theory resulting from the current study across different situational contexts.

**Relative power and efficiency**

Stokols (1987:49) explains the relative power of a contextual theory to be:

> the extent to which they [contextual theories] encompass the full range
of situational factors that qualify a particular phenomenon.

This means that contextual theories can be placed on a continuum of powerfulness. According to Stokols, while a theory which fails to incorporate most of the situational factors influencing a phenomenon will fall on the lower end of the continuum, a theory which incorporates many situational factors influencing a phenomenon will fall on the higher end of the continuum. However, it is also possible to include several permutations not considered by Stokols’ theory. For example, a theory could easily become so complex that it may serve the needs of only a special few. It can also be argued that theories, like most other clusters of information, will spontaneously fall into a normal distribution, rather than a continuum.

Another criterion for the evaluation of contextual theories identified by Stokols (1987:49) is that of efficiency:

A contextual analysis is efficient to the extent that it includes those and only those situational factors that exert a significant influence on the target variables.

In the current study this criterion is met during the data analysis phase where only those variables found to have a relationship with the social and spatial experience of crowding are selected and included in the concluding experiential contextual theory about social and spatial crowding in South African hostels. Thus the current study attempts to identify various significant situational factors influencing the social and spatial experience of household crowding. This is done in two ways. Firstly, all those factors identified by previous studies to have possible relevance are included. However, because none of the work previously done in South African hostels focuses specifically on household crowding, the relationships which these factors have with the target phenomena needed to be tested in the data gathering
and analysis phases before such factors were included in a contextual theory of household crowding in South African hostels, and given the qualitative experiential focus of information in the current study, this was not measured empirically here. Secondly, all those factors which have not been addressed in previous research, but which emerged from the data gathering and analysis phases of the current study as related to the target phenomena, are also be incorporated into the contextual theory as contextual variables at the conclusion of the current study.

Generativity

Of this criterion Stokols (1987:50) states:

The generativity of contextual theories is defined here as their capacity to provoke new insight about important contextual moderators of a target phenomenon that were not explicitly stated in the initial version of the theory or earlier theoretical and empirical work.

This criterion is one of the motivating factors for using a research design based on the interpretive paradigm which allows for the kind of in-depth exploration not possible in the empirical-analytical paradigm. Furthermore, since it is the aim of the current study to provide a first contextual theory about the social and spatial experience of crowding in South African hostels, it is intended that the one of the results of the current study be exactly the insight Stokols speaks of here.

Applied utility

The final criterion specified by Stokols (1987:61) is that of applied utility, which he explains as follows:
the degree to which they [contextual theories] contribute to an understanding of community problems and suggest guidelines for developing effective policy interventions.

Stokols further claims that the applied utility of a theory is heavily dependent upon the four criteria previously discussed. This is due to several reasons. Firstly, a theory with low contextual validity cannot be applicable across contexts, and will, therefore, have a very limited applied utility. However, in the South African context where people from different cultures utilizing different cultural norms often are confronted with similar environments, it is very difficult to find a theoretical perspective applicable to everyone. For example, Payze & Keith (1993:50) found that many hostel residents required family accommodation while others required single accommodation, often depending on their cultural background. Hence, the current study does not attempt to satisfy the criteria of high contextual theoretical validity.

Secondly, the efficiency of a contextual theory also has bearing on its relative utility. The inclusion of irrelevant variables in a contextual theory can have negative impact in at least two ways. In the first instance, issues which are completely irrelevant may be pursued during the implementation of policy, wasting valuable resources such as time and money, and possibly hindering norms of trust and open communication between the community and implementors. In the second instance, variables which are included in a contextual theory and which do not have bearing on the target phenomena may have an array of adverse effects. This was very aptly illustrated by the hostel fencing débâcle of 1992, when hostel residents asked for their car parks to be fenced as a security measure against crime, and as a result, a needs analysis on those hostels came out stating that hostel residents required whole hostels to be fenced. In turn, the results of the needs analysis partly prompted Nelson
Mandela to publicly call for all hostels on the reef to be fenced. This was immediately interpreted by some Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) supporters as a call for war by the African National Congress (ANC) who wanted to fence them in like animals. At the time an all out civil war between IFP and ANC supporters was only prevented by much negotiation and peace keeping efforts from peace monitors and others. In a country so plagued by continuing high levels of violence, sometimes linked to political agenda's, it is crucial that any contextual theory should be efficient, not allowing those vying for power more space than necessary to abuse research results for their own political gain by incorporating unrelated variables into the implementation phase of policy decisions.

Thirdly, should the relative power of the contextual theory be low, those factors which are most important to the individuals subjected to them, may be overlooked. For example, Payze & Keith (1994:4) found that the need for open communication between certain South African hostel residents and the authorities, with regard to their physical environment, was far more important than whether those needs were addressed to the satisfaction of residents. Hence, in practice, the relative power of contextual theories on crowding, standards of living, disempowerment, etc. all became subservient to communication and much of the improvement to living conditions in the hostels deemed necessary by all, have not been implemented. Hence, it can be seen that a contextual theory with high relative power will be more useful in practice, since it will indicate as many of the issues relevant to policy implementation as possible, and as such, will also prevent undue hold-ups in implementation as a result of relevant issues having been overlooked.

Finally, the generativity of a theory is also important in determining its relative utility. One of the aims of the pursuit of scientific knowledge in the social sciences is that of generating new insights into existing social issues. As is mentioned elsewhere (See Chapter 2) the
average bed occupancy rate in South African hostels tends to vary between 1.8 and 5.5 persons per bed. While both those living in the hostels and those in power who are addressing social issues such as crowding agree that this needs to change, not enough has been done in the built environment to improve these conditions. It is argued here that while the limitations in resources available from the former Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and other, more recent sources such as local government structures (for example the Kwa-Zulu Natal Provincial Housing Board (PHB), hinder speedy and effective policy implementation for the improvement of living conditions (see, for example Anon, 1996:48), a lack in insight into many of the intricacies of life in South African hostels, such as the power relationships etc. which apply, also function counter to effective interventions.

3.4.4 Drawing contextual boundaries

Stokols (1987:51) also distinguishes various ways in which the boundaries of contextual variables can be drawn, namely according to the scope, focus, level and structural dimensions of a phenomenon. These are now discussed briefly.

Scope

Stokols (1987:51,52) describes contextual scope as follows:

*The contextual scope of research refers to the scale of contextual units included in the analyses ... For any phenomenon, the researcher must try to determine at what point increasing or decreasing the scope of the contextual variables brings diminishing returns in terms of the explanatory power of the analysis.*

Stokols identifies four types of contextual units, namely settings (geographic locations),
situations (sequences of individual or group activities), life domains (different spheres of a
person's life, e.g. family life or education), and the overall life situation (all the major life
domains in which a person is involved at one time).

Furthermore, these contextual units consist of spatial, temporal and socio-cultural
dimensions and can be differentiated according to the complexity and scope of the unit. Of
this Stokols (1987:51) states:

*The spatial scope of an analysis increases to the extent that it represents places, processes, and events occurring within a broad rather than narrow region of an individual's (or group's) geographical environment ... the temporal scope of an analysis increases to the extent that it represents places, processes, and events experienced by the individual or group within an extended rather than narrow time frame ... the socio-cultural scope of an analysis increases to the extent that it describes behaviourally relevant dimensions of an individual's or group's socio-cultural environment.*

When looking at the above, it is possible to determine the scope of a study on a continuum,
where a reductionistic (in terms of theorizing and methodology) approach can be placed at
the narrow end, while the current study, encompassing both target and predictor variables,
as well as contextual variables can be placed more towards the broad end. However,
foocussing four dimensionally, on other level the broad end of this continuum can also be seen
as a continuum, where the current study can be placed on the narrow end. This is so because
the situations, settings, life domains and overall life situations of hostel residents will only be
examined from within the hostel surroundings. Hence all aspects of their overall life
situations outside the hostel will be excluded from the current study. Although Stokols
argues for choosing a scope which will maximise the explanatory power of the analysis, the choice of scope in the current study was determined by pragmatic factors (see Chapter 4) such as limited resources and time constraints, and hence will not include all the life domains of hostel residents' lives which may be relevant to their social and spatial experience of crowding.

**Focus**

Stokols (1987:54) describes the focus of contextual research as follows:

> Contextual and target variables can be represented in objective terms, irrespective of the individual's perception and cognition, or, alternatively, from the subjective vantage point of the individual or group.

Stokols argues for a combination of objective and subjective focus, because of the individual methodological and conceptual weaknesses of both types of focus which can be neutralized to some extent by combining them with each other. In the current study, these types of focus are not combined extensively with each other, and the subjective perception by individuals of their environment, is only minimally supplemented by an objective indication of the environment (in terms of physical measurements etc.).

**Level**

Stokols (1987:55) argues that a decision about which level (in terms of individuals or groups) to use in a study also needs to be made for any study utilizing contextual theory. Stokols further argues that while both the individual level and the group level have their own merit, a study may benefit more from combining both than just utilizing one of the two. The current
study will, however, look only at individual perceptions with regard to crowding in South African hostels.

Structure

Stokols (1987:56) also distinguishes between composite and partitive representations of people and their environments:

*Partitive analyses view places and their occupants as independent entities and emphasize the interactive effects of environmental and personal attributes on various criteria of behaviour and well-being* ...

*Composite analyses, on the other hand, treat people and places as closely interrelated within a common behavioural setting or system.*

The current study will utilize a composite analysis for the following reasons. In the first place, composite analyses make possible a focus on the relationships between variables. This is in line with a systemic approach and not possible with partitive analyses. Also, composite analyses make it possible to look at an event in place and time, from a gestalt point of view, as something which consists of more than the sum of its parts. For example, a group of hostel residents who use their room as a shebeen can be described in more comprehensive terms by saying that they run a shebeen, than by simply stating how many people are involved, which activities are involved, what environment is involved and which time dimension is involved. The use of the term *running a shebeen* entails more in terms of meaning than does the sum of the individual components creating it.

3.4.5 Bearing in mind the drawbacks of Stokols' contextual theory

While contextual theories of social phenomena exhibit many strengths which could further
the insights of social scientists through the processes of research and theorizing, they also have several inherent weaknesses. Stokols (1987:64) identifies firstly the relativity of the stability of relationships between target and contextual variables. While these relationships may or may not exist at any given time, they are also continuously subject to change. Hence, while a contextual theory may incorporate all the variables which have bearing on the target phenomenon at any time, such a theory may no longer be valid, nor may it have any applied utility at some future stage.

Furthermore, Stokols argues that chance variables which impact on the target phenomenon may also be incorporated into a contextual theory, while their impact may in actual fact be random and spontaneous. In order to make an effective decision about such variables, it is firstly necessary to decide which of the variables included in the theory are in fact chance variables - a decision which is not easily made.

The current study is probably hampered by the first of these drawbacks, as can be seen, for example, from statements like that of Segar (1993:104) which claims research to indicate that hostel populations are generally highly mobile and that bedholds may be particularly fluid. However, the second drawback is addressed and minimized through peer examination and an audit trial (see Chapter 4).

While the current study has attempted to control for most of the above, a much more fundamental area of Stokols’ theory needs to be assessed with great care. Is the negative experiences of people in the described contexts really only about excessive levels of social and spatial density?
3.5 Beyond social and spatial density: Irvin Altman on privacy in relation to crowding

Altman, a close colleague of and co-editor with Stokols on two volumes of the Handbook of Environmental Psychology (1987), differs greatly from Stokols on one point with regard to the theory on crowding, namely the impact which a lack of privacy may have on humans’ subjective personal experiences of crowding. Accordingly Altman (1975:10-12) provides a comprehensive explanation for the concepts involved in his definition of the construct “privacy” which include the following:

*Privacy is an interpersonal boundary-control process*

According to Altman (1975:10) this process paces and regulates interaction with others. He describes privacy regulation as similar and comparable to the shifting permeability of a cell membrane. In line with this a person may either be open or closed to inputs from the outside environment.

*Desired privacy and achieved privacy*

According to Altman (1975:10), the term *desired privacy* indicates an ideal level of interaction with others in terms of the amount of contact which a person would prefer at a specific point in time. The term *achieved privacy*, on the other hand, refers to the degree of contact one actually has with others. In similar vein to Loo’s comments on uncrowding, Altman states that optimum privacy is attained when desired privacy is equal to achieved privacy.
Privacy is a dialectic process

Altman (1975:11) states that privacy as a dialectic process involves both the restriction and seeking of interaction, as opposed to the traditional view which focusses only on the restriction of interaction. As such individuals are required to find a balance between restricting other people’s access to them on the one hand, and seeking interaction with them on the other. According to Altman the whole range of openness and closedness of the person should be included in the idea of privacy.

Privacy is an optimizing process

What Altman (1975:11) seems to be indicating with this, is that there is an optimal degree of desired access or lack thereof in relationship to other people at any specific point in time and that any deviation from this optimum in the direction of either too much or too little interaction is unsatisfactory.

Privacy is an input and output process

Altman (1975:11) states that individuals will always attempt to regulate the nature and frequency of contacts coming from others, as well as the nature and frequency of outputs they make to others.

Privacy can involve different types of social units

According to Altman (1975:11) such social units include individuals, families and various social groupings. As a natural consequence of this a diversity of social relationships exist, for example between individuals or between an individual and a group.
Behavioural mechanisms are used to achieve privacy goals

According to Altman (1975:12) these mechanisms encompass both the content and the style of verbal speech, personal space (or an area immediately surrounding each individual), territory (the use, possession and ownership of areas and objects) and cultural mechanisms. Altman believes that the most important aspect of the above behavioural mechanisms is the fact that they operate in a combined manner as a unified system.

Privacy functions

Three basic components of privacy regulation are identified here by Altman (1975:12). They are first, the control and management of interpersonal interaction, second, plans, roles and strategies for dealing with others, and finally features of self-identity.


Using all of the above, Alman then proceeds to define privacy as: selective control of access to the self or one's group. Altman's work on privacy bears resemblance to Loo's work on the constructs of social and spatial crowding, while simultaneously adding a new dimension, namely privacy, to the academic debate on crowding. Hence it is considered to be very useful to the current study.

3.5.1 Propositions on personal space with specific reference to issues of privacy

Altman (1975:101) also states a number of propositions based on his own research and an overview of the work available during the time of his study. He claims individual differences in use of personal space, a point which can be substantiated from the raw data of Payze &
Keith (1993) and will be qualitatively evaluated by this study; that children learn how to develop their own personal space, a proposition which is not addressed by this study; and that positive others (friends, family members or others with whom an individual holds close interpersonal relationships) are reacted to with more permeable, open and accessible self-boundaries, which will also be qualitatively evaluated by the current study.

At this point the theoretical aspects of the aforementioned will be combined into a framework which is both recent in its conceptualisation, and applicable to this study.

3.6 Creating a theoretical framework for the current study

It is now possible to use the above as a basis for the current study. After providing a definition of crowding to be used here, other issues of importance, such as the selection of contextual variables and a consideration of privacy are addressed.

3.6.1 Towards a useful definition of household crowding in the 21st century

Edwards, Fuller, Vorakitphokatorn & Sermsi (1994:3) have taken up the debate on the topic of household crowding again in the nineties after a slump in publications in this area from the early eighties onwards (and which has already been discussed in the current work). Using the same authors as the current study, i.e. Stokols, Altman, Ittelson, Proshansky, etc., they indicate that the term “household crowding” is a complex construct encompassing various concepts. In accordance, they have conceptualised the following definition of crowding from all of the above:

*Density refers to the number of persons in a defined spatial area... as Gove & Huges (1983) point out, density is actually a composite of different measures of the use of space and it may be calculated in*
several different ways. In addition to referring to the population per acre, density can denote the number of dwelling structures in a given unit of land area, the number of dwellings per structure, the number of rooms per dwelling unit, and the number of persons per room. Because of its multi-dimensional character, two neighbourhoods could have the same density, but for very different reasons. Measures of density thus may or may not reveal a great deal about what happens at the interpersonal level. Density is useful, though, in telling us something about the objective level of crowding... Obviously, there is a subjective side to crowding as well... Subjective crowding has been approached by researchers in two fundamentally different ways. Stokols, for example, defines subjective crowding "as an experience in which one’s demands for space exceeds the supply" (1978:222). In short, there is a mismatch between one’s demand for, and the supply of space. Altman (1974), on the other hand, suggests that the experience of crowding results when a person is unable to achieve some desired level of privacy, that is, when an individual is exposed to more contact with others than he or she desires. Each of these approaches, we think, is valuable in that they compliment one another in tapping into the total experience of crowding. Accordingly ... one we call “perceived crowding” and the other ... “lack of privacy”... Crowding is a complex concept. When we treat it as a variable, it is necessary to distinguish between its objective and subjective components, for there is no one-to-one relationship between how objectively congested a situation may be
and how people may perceive the circumstances. The perceptual component of crowding may manifest itself in either the feeling that there is too little space available or in the sense that one's privacy has been violated.

The above definition is particularly useful since the current study is qualitative in nature and focussed specifically on the perceptual and/or experiential component of crowding in South African hostels. Based primarily on this definition by Edwards et al, but also including the original work of Loo, Stokols and Altman, the following is proposed.

3.6.2 Selecting contextual variables

Based on the preceding review, the following variables are postulated as contextual variables for the target phenomena of social and spatial crowding.

*Levels of empowerment of hostel residents*

It is argued here that the levels of empowerment experienced by hostel residents may directly impact on their experience of crowding. Studies by Loo & Mar (1982); Woods, 1993:73 and Ramphele (1993:10) support this. Hence, the nature of the relationship between disempowerment and crowding is also argued to be of importance for the current study.

*Levels and nature of employment of hostel residents*

The levels and nature of employment of hostel residents is thought to be a relevant contextual variable because residents who are unemployed and therefore "trapped" within the confines of the hostel may have a different experience of the levels of social and spatial density to which all hostel residents are exposed, than residents who have employment outside the
hostel. Furthermore, residents who are self employed from within their own rooms (for example those who run spaza shops or shebeens) may also have a different experience of the levels of social and spatial density in the hostel than other residents. The selection of this variable is supported by the work of Payze & Pretorius (1995) and Woods (1993:71).

Health conditions of hostel residents

This variable is included as a contextual variable because Payze and Keith (1993:53) found ill health to be an exacerbating factor in the experience of crowding. This is illustrated, for example, by one respondent who explained the difficulties of queuing for one toilet serving all sixteen bedholds, while suffering from diarrhoea. The selection of this variable is also supported by the work of Payze & Keith (1993:53) and Zulu (1993:93).

Cultural issues

Cultural issues are thought to have possible relevance to the social and spatial experience of crowding, although this cannot be satisfactorily substantiated from the literature at the present time. However, in their study on hostels in South Africa, Payze and Keith (1993:50) noted differences in the experiences of hostel residents from different cultural backgrounds. Segar (1993:109); Oliver-Evans (1993:119); Rubenstein (1993:148); Woods (1993:74); and Loo (1977:165) also state culture to be relevant to the experience of crowding.

Structural conditions and physical facilities in the hostels

residents. It is argued here that this issue may also exacerbate the experience of crowding by hostel residents.

**Crime**

Payze and Keith (1993:55) found that residents were extremely unhappy with high levels of social density when coupled with high levels of crime. Residents complained that they were subjected to theft and other forms of crime, due to the fact that so many people shared the same living environment. Therefore, crime will also be included as a contextual variable in the current study.

**Access to the outside world**

It is argued here that under conditions of isolation, the experience of social and spatial crowding is exacerbated. Hence, when hostel residents do not have free and open access to their surrounding outside world, whether due to lack of monetary resources, violence, or some other reason, they may also have more acute reactions to exposure to high levels of social and spatial density. The selection of this variable is supported by the work of Payze & Keith (1993:57); Zulu (1993:87); Segar (1993:110); and Woods (1993:69).

**Political issues**

Due to the rapidly changing political context in South Africa, it is unclear at this point in time whether political issues currently feature strongly in South African hostels. What is clear, however, is that it has been a crucial issue for hostel residents in the past (Zulu, 1993:83, Rubenstein, 1993:145; Woods, 1993:71) and as such was also directly related to residents' experience of their living environment. For this reason, this variable is included in the current
study.

Issues concerning privacy

The work of Altman (1975) is considered to be of primary relevance to this study. Furthermore, research by Segar (1993:109) indicates a relationship between compromised privacy and hostel residents' experience of their environment. Hence this variable is also included as a contextual variable in the current study.

Daily activities

This variable is included in the current study because residents whose daily activities keep them within the confines of the hostel premises may be exposed to the high levels of social and spatial density to a greater degree than residents who leave the hostel premises on a daily basis. It is also suspected that, as such, this variable will be closely related to that of employment. The relevance of this variable is also addressed in the work of Oliver-Evans (1993:132).

3.7 Summary

This chapter started out by providing a general overview of the environmental psychology theories of household crowding and then went on to present the social and spatial model of crowding stresses, as conceptualized by Chalsa Loo. Loo's model forms the basis from which the target variables for the current study were selected in relation to the target phenomena. This model also presented the first step towards a contextual approach, since it argues that while high levels of social and spatial density are a necessary precondition for social and spatial crowding, it is not enough in and of itself to cause the experience of
crowding. Hence, the criteria for and boundaries of contextual theories as conceptualized by Daniel Stokols was presented as a framework to guide the current study and from within which the first contextual variables were then postulated. However the postulation of these variables is purely tentative at this point in time and their relationship with the target phenomena remain to be seen at the end of the data analysis phase. It is only at that point that a comprehensive contextual theory which complies with the criteria of relative power, efficiency, generativity and applied utility; and which falls within the contextual boundaries specified in this chapter, is presented. Nevertheless, these variable are:

- levels of empowerment of hostel residents
- levels and nature of employment of hostel residents
- health conditions of hostel residents
- cultural issues
- structural conditions and physical facilities in the hostels
- crime
- access to the outside world
- political issues
- issues concerning privacy
- daily activities
4.1 Introduction

The literature review of research on crowding as discussed in chapter 2 reveals that a considerable number of studies on this topic have been conducted within the (traditional, positivistic) empirical-analytical paradigm. Popular designs include laboratory and field experiments (for example Calhoun, 1962; Loo, 1977; Loo & Kennely, 1979), correlational studies (for example Marcella, Escudero & Gordon 1970; Loo & Ong, 1984) and other, (positivistically based) quantitative approaches. These have no doubt elucidated the area of investigation, but as Gürkaynak & LeCompte (1979:1) succinctly put it:

Crowding is good; crowding is bad; crowding is both good and bad; crowding is neither good nor bad. All of the possible variations in the effects of this phenomenon have been claimed in one context or another ...

Because of the abovementioned difficulty with the study of crowding, a different research design, resulting from systematic reflection on various elements pertaining to crowding, will be utilised in the current study.

It is argued that a research design is influenced by two different sets of factors, namely paradigmatic and pragmatic factors (Smaling, 1994a:234). Both these sets of factors will be discussed as the bases from which methodological decisions about the current project are made. Furthermore, attention will also be given to an alternative conceptualization of objectivity, namely Münchhausen-objectivity (Smaling, 1989:159). It is proposed that Münchhausen-objectivity (as a contra-factual regulative principle) be used as a metaparadigmatic methodological norm to guide and evaluate the current study throughout.
Finally, the research techniques utilised in the current study will be explained.

4.2 Paradigmatic factors influencing a research design

Several paradigmatic factors influence the choice of methodological tools in a research design. It is this choice upon which much of the responsibility for scientific accountability lies. For example, questions such as "which instrument will best answer the research question?" or "in what way can this project best contribute to scientific knowledge?" are crucial in ensuring a relevant research design for any research project in the social sciences.

However, different answers to the above (and other) questions are often the result of differences of opinion on a variety of philosophical levels underlying different paradigms. Hence, persons who support apparently mutually exclusive, incompatible ideas about the choice of research tools and/or other methodological issues, may operate from different paradigmatic perspectives, often without reflection on this fact. Bearing in mind the above, the first question relevant to any research project in the social sciences is: Which paradigm(s), including their specific methodological tools, should be used in the current project and to what extent do they add to, or detract from the scientificity of this project?

Before this question can be answered though, some attention needs to be given to definition. Smaling (1994a:234) concisely defines a paradigm as a set of beliefs, values and norms which guides scientific endeavours. The way in which a paradigm is ordered or categorised, varies from author to author. For example, the father of the idea of multiple simultaneously functioning paradigms is Thomas Kuhn (1962), an historian who stated that there can be no one paradigm of social scientific research.

This basically means that more than one theory of truth can (and does) exist and that social scientific researchers are free to choose any one or more paradigms to find ‘the truth’,
create “a truth”, or act upon one or several “truths” according to their ideological, scientific, and/or personal preferences. Building on the work of Kuhn, Cook & Reichardt (1979) distinguish between the qualitative and quantitative paradigms. On the other hand, Guba and Lincoln (1988) distinguish between the conventional paradigm and the alternative paradigm, while Smaling (1994a; 1994b) distinguishes three different research paradigms, namely the empirical-analytical, the interpretive and the critical paradigms. Because Smaling’s (1994a:234; 1994b) conceptualization of the different paradigms is the most recent of the above and because it builds on the work of the philosopher Habermas, it will be utilised in the current study. Smaling’s work is also very comprehensive in terms of the philosophy of social science research, as will become evident from the discussion below.

Smaling (1994a:233; 1994b) argues that the empirical-analytical, interpretive and critical paradigms can be distinguished from each other on several philosophical levels, namely ontology, epistemology, axiology, meta-theory and methodology. These philosophical levels will now be briefly discussed, where necessary, and their relevance to the current study indicated.

4.2.1 Ontology

According to Speake (1979:255) ontology can be defined as follows:

*The branch of metaphysical enquiry ... concerned with the study of existence itself ... The assumptions about existence underlying any conceptual scheme or any theory or system of ideas.*

With regard to research design, ontology implies the way in which the researcher views the world and reality and, as a consequence of this, also the way in which the researcher views that which is studied. For the empirical-analytical perspective this implies realism (the object
of study has an independent existence of what is thought about it), and a view which regards a person as an organism which can be studied independently from the researcher (Smaling, 1994a:236; 1994b). In juxtaposition to this, ontology from the perspective of the interpretive paradigm implies idealism (the nature of the existence of the subject of study is constructed by the researcher), and a view which regards a person as an interpreter in interaction with the interpretive researcher while both are subject to the process of hermeneutics and the hermeneutic circle (Denzin, 1989:141; Smaling, 1994a:235).

The same ontological distinction can also be made on lower levels of abstraction such as the theoretical level, as can be seen for example, from the ethnographical work of Vidich & Lyman (1994: 24):

*Qualitative ethnographical research, then, entails an attitude of detachment toward society that permits the sociologist to observe the conduct of self and others, to understand the mechanisms of social processes, and to comprehend and explain why both actors and processes are as they are... Sociology and anthropology are disciplines that, born out of concern to understand the “other”, are nevertheless also committed to an understanding of the self. If ... we grant that the other can only be understood as part of a relationship with the self, we may suggest a different approach to ethnography and the use of qualitative methods, one that conceives the observer as possessing a self-identity that by definition is re-created in its relationship with the observed - the other ...*

The current study utilises an interpretive ontological point of departure. Hence, the reality created throughout this work is the result of an effort towards constructing, in partnership with the respondents involved, within the context of South African hostels, a truth about the
meaning of social and spatial crowding for those exposed to it.

Finally, for the sake of comprehensiveness, the perspective of the critical paradigm is also postulated. From this perspective, ontology implies materialism and a view which regards a person as an emancipator (Smaling, 1994a:235). This is expanded upon by Kincheloe & McLaren (1994: 144), who state that:

Critical research has never been reluctant to point out the limitations of empirical research, calling attention to the inability of traditional models of inquiry to escape the boundaries of a narrative realism. The rigorous methodological approaches of empirical inquiry often preclude larger interpretations of the forces that shape both the researcher and the researched. Empirical observation cannot supplant theoretical analysis and critical reflection. The project of critical research is not simply the empirical representation of the world, but the transgressive task of posing the research itself as a set of ideological practices. Empirical analysis needs to be interrogated in order to uncover the contradictions and negations embodied in any objective description. Critical researchers maintain that the meaning of an experience or an observation is not self-evident. The meaning of any experience will depend on the struggle over the interpretation of that experience...

4.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is defined by Speake (1979:109) as follows:

The branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge.

Traditionally, central issues in epistemology are the nature and derivation of knowledge, the scope of knowledge, and the reliability of claims to knowledge.
Once again, as far as the research design is concerned, the nature and derivation of knowledge differs considerably within the three paradigms. In the empirical-analytical paradigm sensory experience is valued highly. Hence the emphasis is placed on what can be seen, heard and measured independently from the researcher (Smaling, 1994a:236; 1994b; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1999:8; Babbie, 1998:43). However, in the interpretive paradigm, language, the use of the metaphor, intuition, and interpersonal skills underlie the conceptualization of the nature and derivation of knowledge; while action underlies the nature and derivation of knowledge in the critical paradigm (Smaling, 1994a:236; 1994b, Silverman, 1997:121).

The epistemological dimension of the philosophy of social science research also concerns the theory of truth (Smaling, 1994a:236; 1994b; Ellis & Bochner, 1996: 19). While truth is seen as correspondence in the empirical-analytical paradigm (for example, to what degree does what is found during the research process correspond with the hypothesis (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1999:45)), it is seen as coherence in the interpretive paradigm (for example, to what degree is what the researcher hears coherent with what the respondent says (Ellis & Bochner, 1996:20)), and as consensus in the critical paradigm (for example, to what extent does consensus exist about the actions chosen by the group).

In the current study, the interpretive paradigm was chosen for the freedom which it allows the researcher to co-construct the reality of the research subjects through dialogue and mutual understanding, rather than trying to fit their reality into some pre-conceived hypothetical ideas as would be necessary when utilising the empirical analytical paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is also preferred above the critical paradigm since the interpretive paradigm is concerned primarily with the process of knowledge construction as opposed to the critical paradigm’s primary concern with the implementation of emancipatory action.
4.2.3 Axiology

This is defined by Speake (1979:34) as:

*The philosophical study of values, undertaken especially in the fields of ethics, religion and aesthetics.*

Both the empirical-analytical paradigm and the interpretive paradigm attempt to obtain a value-free view of that which is studied, while the critical paradigm utilises an emancipatory ideology from within which knowledge is obtained and utilised in the formulation of various liberating actions (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994:144; Smaling, 1994a:236; 1994b; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997:11-12).

As far as axiology is concerned, the inter-paradigmatic difference between the empirical-analytical and interpretive paradigms lies primarily in the way in which an answer to the research question is obtained. While the empirical-analytical paradigm relies heavily on the often predictive value of mathematical formulas copied from the Newtonian-based natural sciences, the interpretive paradigm has continued to lean increasingly toward the understanding of human experiences. The position of those working within the interpretive paradigm is illustrated by Ellis & Bochner (1996:18), who state:

*The walls between social sciences and the humanities have crumbled. In the 1970's and 1980's post modernists, poststructuralists and feminists challenged us to contemplate how social science may be closer to literature than to physics. These critiques helped draw ethnographers who thought of themselves as sociologists and anthropologists closer to colleagues in history, women's studies, folklore, media studies and communication...*  

The interpretive paradigm is thus primarily concerned with the meaning which people construct around their experiences - another reason for utilising this particular paradigm for
the current study. Such meaning cannot be objectively measured outside of a relationship between researcher and respondent. Rather, meaning is created through interaction. According to Kvale (1996:109):

An interview inquiry [from within the interpretive paradigm] is a moral enterprise: The personal interaction in the interview affects the interviewee, and the knowledge produced by the interviewee affects our understanding of the human situation.

Spradley (1979: 17) expands on the meaning construction process as follows:

Language is more than a means of communication about reality: it is a tool for constructing reality. Different languages create and express different realities. They categorise experience in different ways. They provide alternative patterns for customary ways of thinking and perceiving. In setting out to discover the ... reality of a group of people, the ethnographer faces a crucial question: What language shall I use for asking questions and recording the meanings I discover?

The current study has strived toward a language wherein bias on the part of the researcher has been avoided as far as possible, where information has been mutually exchanged in a context of reciprocal trust and where all concerned have had an opportunity to contribute to the meaning creation process.

Again, for the sake of comprehensiveness, the critical paradigm, contrary to the other two paradigms, is not so much concerned with the actual creation of knowledge, as it is with how such knowledge is applied to bring about liberation through change. With a focus on action and liberation, knowledge construction becomes a means to an end, instead of the end in itself.
Also, the axiological dimension of any paradigm needs to take cognisance of the ethical issues confronting such a paradigm. Ethical issues common to the interpretive paradigm include harms and benefits for the respondent, anonymity versus confidentiality of respondents, informed consent and deception, leading questions and sharing the results of the study with informants (Spradley, 1979: 34; Beauchamp, Faden, Wallace & Walters, 1982:46; Gorden, 1987: 84; Kvale, 1996:153; Johnson & Christensen, 2000:64, 75-88). These will now be discussed briefly.

**Harms and benefits to the respondent**

Babbie, Mouton, Payze, Vorster, Boshoff & Prozesky (2001:522) state that research in the social sciences should never harm the research participants, irrespective of whether or not such participants have given informed consent for inclusion in the study.

Spradley (1979: 35) states that informants should always be considered first, a view which is applied throughout the current study. In practice this means that several factors need to be considered before and during the research process. First, the researcher needs to clarify exactly what sponsors will require and whether this can be provided without harming the respondents. Also, successful negotiations need to be undertaken to bypass gatekeepers and ensure that all the necessary interviews can actually take place. Finally, it is of the utmost importance to ascertain carefully which actions will be in the best interests of respondents.

The avoidance of a conflict of interests is an extremely complicated principle to apply in the actual research situation. For example, Payze & Keith (1993) were at one point confronted, via senior hierarchical organizational power structures, with pressure to reveal certain confidential data. While no information was eventually revealed, the experience clearly indicated how difficult it may become to put the interests of respondents first in the
face of other stakeholders competing for preferential treatment.

Another way in which respondents may be harmed, namely intentional bias reporting, is explained by Gorden, (1987: 90). Intentional bias reporting occurs when a researcher intentionally, or otherwise, alters the outcome of the meaning construction process for the sake of pursuing his or her own interests. For example, a study may exaggerate the difficulties of a group of respondents in order to try and rally more effective support for the group.

However, according to Gorden (1987: 91) even valid results may be used with the intention of pursuing a hidden agenda. For example, highlighting the plight of those living in hostels may be used to either alleviate such plight or to simply shut the hostel system down, depending on the agenda of those utilising the research results. Thus, while intentional bias reporting has been avoided as far as is humanly possible in the current study, the researcher cannot take responsibility for actions by others which may stem from reading the results of the current study. Respondents were also not pressured to disclose information which may reflect negatively on themselves or their living environment, and where respondents did disclose potentially harmful data, this has been carefully integrated into the context of the current study, rather than utilised out of context for the sake of effect.

Respondents may also enjoy benefits from research projects (Spradley, 1979:38; Gorden, 1987:104; Kvale, 1996:117, 155; Johnson & Christensen, 2000:86). Ideally the researcher needs to determine a “fair return” to respondents for participating in the study. These include payment, helping respondents in various ways (for example in helping them to find employment or providing information which can improve respondents’ quality of life), providing respondents with a voice within the context of the broader society, etc.

During the current study most respondents were glad for the opportunity they had to voice
their views and feelings. Many respondents struggle to find work and do not have the opportunity to leave the hostel premises. The fieldwork stage of the current study provided hostel residents with the chance to get together and talk about their various needs and wants. One of the hostel shebeens also provided lunch for those taking part in the study, and in this way respondents could benefit in terms of a meal and some generated income.

**Anonymity versus confidentiality**

The safeguarding of research participants’ rights to privacy is stated as paramount by Babbie *et al* (2000:522). In this regard, Gorden (1987: 101) makes the important point that researchers are often not protected by law against being forced to reveal confidential data. Hence, especially in South Africa’s context of high crime rates and potentially volatile political situations, it may be important to ensure that the researcher does not know anything of use in, for example, a court of law. The difference between anonymity and confidentiality thus becomes relevant.

According to Gorden (1987: 104) and Babbie *et al* (2001:523), respondent anonymity means that the researcher never knows identifiable information concerning the respondent. Payze & Keith (1993), for example, used this principle by never asking respondents surnames and sometimes not even their names. Meetings were held at central venues and always included residents from several hostels. As such the authors never knew which respondents belonged with which hostel. Although interviews were tape recorded, no video footage was taken. The basic underlying assumption to this approach was: What we did not know could hurt neither ourselves, nor our respondents. In other studies confidentiality may be applied (Gorden, 1987:104; Babbie *et al*, 2001:523). This means that researchers know the biographical details, such as names and addresses, of their respondents, but that this
information is never divulged. In yet other contexts, respondents may wish to claim co-authorship of the meaning construction process, in which case their full details should be published in the appropriate sections of the research report.

The current study makes use of anonymity as was agreed upon by both the researcher and respondents.

Informed consent and deception

It is important to any study utilizing the interpretive paradigm that informed consent be obtained before the actual meaning construction process begins. Beauchamp et al. (1982:61) discuss several ways in which consent may be obtained in an unethical manner:

... consent [is] generated by the use of deception and by the violations of informed consent in social science research. I shall use the term pressure as a shorthand designation of the various ways in which an individual’s freedom of choice in the situation may be curtailed. At the extreme, this refers to the use of coercion or direct threats of punishment to induce participation in the research. Less extreme forms of pressure include efforts to induce participation by indicating that powerful authorities expect it, by offering irresistible rewards, by implying that failure to participate would result in penalties or place the individual in a bad light, by putting the individual on the defensive, or by identifying refusal with a lack of courage, courtesy, or patriotism. Both deception and pressure may occur at the point at which participation in the research is solicited, where they have a direct impact on the individual’s capacity to give voluntary, informed consent. They may also occur at different points throughout the research itself. For example, participants may be misled...
about various features of the situation or given false information about their performance; and they may be pressured to reveal information that they would prefer to withhold, or engage in activities they would prefer to avoid, or continue in the research when they would prefer to quit.

As far as it is known to the researcher, no pressure was exerted on any individual involved in the current study at any time. Rewards were fair, but not excessive. No pressure was applied. Access was gained through existing structures with the knowledge and input of all concerned. The meaning of informed consent was also explained to respondents and such consent individually obtained from them.

Babbie et al. (2001:525) also discuss the issue of deceiving research participants and state that this can be done in several ways, including withholding relevant information about the study, lying about certain aspects of the study or not properly debriefing participants after the study, should they not be able to be fully informed at the outset. The current study attempted to function according to the norm of transparency, with both the motivation for and purposes of the study explained before informed consent was obtained.

Leading questions

In the author’s experience, this is the most common form of abuse toward respondents. Often researchers use interpretive (or qualitative) techniques to verify their original empirical-analytical results, rather than to provide respondents with a fair chance to co-construct meaning within the relationship between researcher and respondent. However, the interpretive paradigm may also have room for such questions (for example in the use of the technique know as devil’s advocate), although it requires advanced training, high integrity on the part of the researcher, and very specific content to be researched. Kvale (1996:157)
also speaks out on the use of leading questions:

*It is a well documented finding that even a slight rewording of a question in a questionnaire or the interrogation of an eye witness may influence the answer.*

... In a psychology experiment on witness reliability, different subjects were shown the same film of two cars colliding and were then asked about the cars' speed. The average speed estimate in reply to the question: “About how fast were the cars going when they smashed into each other?” was 41mph. Other subjects - seeing the same film, but with 'smashed' replaced by 'contacted' in the question above - gave an average speed estimate of 32 mph (Loftus & Palmer, 1974)... [Yet t]he qualitative research interview is particularly well suited for employing leading questions to check repeatedly the reliability of the interviewee's answers, as well as to verify the interviewers interpretations. Thus, contrary to popular opinion, leading questions do not always reduce the reliability of interviews, but may enhance it...

The current study did not employ leading questions as a research technique and for both ethical and methodological purposes, leading questions were actively avoided during the interviewing phase of the current study.

4.2.4 Meta-theory

As with all paradigmatic dimensions of social science's research, the meta-theoretical underpinnings of paradigms can also be juxtaposed. In the empirical-analytical paradigm the meta-theoretical focus is on explanation (often of a causal nature) in the context of justification, such as the justification of an hypothesis (Smaling, 1994b; Babbie, 1998:69; Johnson & Christensen, 2000:11). By contrast, the interpretive paradigm deals on a meta-
theoretical level with understanding in the context of discovery, such as the discovery of the world of the respondent (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997:19). Finally, the critical paradigm deals with praxis, which may occur in terms of a dialectical combination of the other two paradigms (Smaling 1994b).

The main aim of the current study was to come to some sort of understanding of the subjective reality of hostel residents, concerning their experiences of household crowding. For this reason, the use of the interpretive paradigm was ideal.

4.2.5 Methodology

This level is of particular importance in the design of any social sciences research project. Speake (1979:230) defines methodology in the following manner:

_The study of method, usually covering the procedures and aims of a particular discipline, and enquiry into the way in which that discipline is organized._

As far as the methodological dimension of social science research is concerned, attention needs to be given specifically to those norms which govern the measures of scientificity in research, and notably to the conceptualization of objectivity, validity and reliability. In the current study, these three norms are treated as _contra-factual regulative principles_ (Smaling, 1989:159). They are regulative because they guide the actions of the researcher and they are contra-factual because no study can ever be completely reliable, valid or objective.

According to Smaling (1992b: 171), objectivity is equated with regimentation (for example in the standardization of tests), consensus (for example as can be seen from intersubjective testability such as in the work of Popper (1968) or inter-observer agreement such as in the work of Kerlinger (1970), or intersubjective controllability (to be as explicit as possible about the used materials, methods, and designs and the arguments used for the selection of
particular data, concepts, methods, designs, interpretations, explanations and theories) within the empirical-analytical paradigm. The interpretive paradigm holds a conceptualization of subjectivity (utilizing the trained subjective qualities of the researcher as an aid rather than a hazard) (Ely et al. 1997:28; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997:11-12). Finally, the critical paradigm conceptualizes objectivity as an orientation towards historical emancipatory tendencies (Smaling, 1994b; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). The issue of objectivity is regarded as crucial in the current project and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Two other norms of particular importance in governing social sciences research are those of reliability and validity. However, since the meaning and implication for application of these norms vary according to paradigm, it is necessary at this point first to indicate certain paradigmatic decisions about the current study.

To begin with, a choice was made about which paradigm to use as the basis for the current study. In this regard it is argued (in addition to the preceding discussion), that the discrepancies amongst the results of various studies on crowding can at least partially be accounted for on a methodological level in the following manner: Research conducted within the empirical-analytical tradition is increasingly being criticized in a number of respects. The decontextualized, fragmented nature of such research, combined with the uncritical construction of knowledge (on a methodological level) as referring to 'factual reality', serve as examples of these.

Secondly, it is argued that the philosophical underpinnings of the interpretive paradigm, as discussed before, aid the construction of reality from the point of view of the respondent in such a way that the use of this design lends itself naturally to the uncovering of knowledge which is not to be obtained from the use of a design with the empirical-analytical paradigm.
as its base. Hence, it is proposed that the present study be conducted within the interpretive paradigm (viewed here as complementary to - rather than in opposition to - the empirical analytical paradigm (Van Strien, 1986:100)).

Validity and reliability

Reliability

Babbie et al (2001:125) summarise the general (empirical-analytical) definition of reliability as:

That quality of measurement method that suggests that the same data would have been collected each time in repeated observations of the same phenomenon.

Ideally this definition of reliability has specific reference to the consistency of a measuring instrument, as well as the related issue of generalisability of research results. However, one of the main strengths of research conducted from within the interpretive paradigm is that the researcher is able to become part of the co-construction of unique meaning as this is relevant to the life-world of the respondent. This means that reliability in its empirical-analytical definition is not applicable to the interpretive-hermeneutic paradigm.

Consequently, reliability as re-conceptualised so as to be applicable to the interpretive paradigm, is utilised in the current study. This is discussed in detail by authors such as Smaling, 1992a:309, Kvale, 1996:163, Kelle & Laurie, 1995:21; Lincoln & Guba, 1999:398; Johnson & Christensen, 2000:207). Smaling (1992a:309) defines reliability across paradigms in the following manner:

Reliability is a methodological requirement that can be imposed on procedures (such as observations, techniques, methods, (measuring) instruments, research
processes (and frameworks) and on the results of research studies (such as collected data, interim and final conclusions and assessments). The core meaning of methodological reliability is the absence of random errors. These are errors that distort the object of study and for which no definite regularity or system is assumed.

Lincoln & Guba (1999:398) describe two types of reliability in the interpretive paradigm, namely applicability and consistency. With applicability, these authors mean being able to determine the extent to which one or more findings may be applied across contexts, such as to other studies or other respondents. With consistency the authors mean being able to determine how well a study could be replicated in similar contexts. On a practical level, Smaling (1992a: 313) describes the following steps for enhancing reliability:

- Triangulation (using more than one researcher, method, paradigm etc.)
- Peer examination (talking to one’s research colleagues)
- Member checks (checking the research findings with respondents)
- Reasoned consensus (reaching agreement amongst project participants after open and rational debate)
- Training of fellow researchers, observers, interviewers, encoders etc.
- Audit trail (independent methodologists examine the entire project)
- Automation of aspects of data processing and analysis (such as with the use of the software package ATLAS.ti)
- Description and explication (precise description (thick or dense description) of: the status and the role that the researcher had in the eyes of the research subjects, the relevant characteristics of the selected subjects ... the concepts used, theoretical ideas and research methods, etc.)
Validity

According to Babbie et al (2001: 122) validity can be defined in the following manner:

In the conventional usage, the term validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration.

Because meaning within the interpretive paradigm is seldom based on empirical measures, this definition, again based on the dominant empirical-analytical paradigm, is not useful within the context of the current study. Like reliability, the concept of validity therefore also needs to be re-conceptualised in order to become applicable to the interpretive paradigm.

Validity is defined by Smaling (1992a:314) across paradigms as:

... a methodological requirement for procedures (such as observations, techniques, methods, (measuring) instruments, research processes and frameworks) and research results (such as collected data, assessments, interim and final conclusions of the analysis). An important meaning of validity is the absence of random and systematic errors...

Validity within the interpretive paradigm can also be seen as the result of a thick (or dense) description of the phenomenon under study. This term was coined by Norman, K. Denzin (1989: 83) who states:

Description is the art of describing or giving an account of something in words.

In interpretive studies, thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts of problematic experiences. These accounts often state the meanings and intentions that organize an action. Thin descriptions, by contrast, lack detail, and simply report facts.

Smaling (1992a: 314) distinguishes between two forms of validity, namely internal validity
and external validity. Various types of internal validity are distinguished. According to Smaling (1992a: 314) the first type of internal validity is content validity which refers mainly to the validity of the instruments used, for example the interview schedule. The second type of internal validity is concept validity which is also described as descriptive validity by Johnson & Christensen (2000: 209) and refers to the factual accuracy of the data. Johnson & Christensen also add the notion of interpretive validity, referring to the degree of coherence between the meaning intended by the respondent and that reported by the researcher. Smaling also speaks of logical validity, which refers to the degree to which the research project is defendable in terms of its design and the results obtained. This is closely linked to Johnson & Christensen’s (2000: 210) notion of theoretical validity.

Two types of external validity are distinguished by Smaling (1992a: 314). Generalizability refers to the degree to which the results of the study can be applied to populations other than the one which was studied, while transference validity refers to the utilization by others of some of the findings, rather than an across the board generalization to another population. Johnson & Christensen’s (2000: 214) also add the notions of naturalistic generalisation and replication logic with regard to external validity. Naturalistic replication holds that generalisation is more likely to be valid when groups and situations generalised to are very similar to groups and situations generalised from. Replication logic states that the more times a finding is the same in different studies, the more likely that finding is to be valid.

According to Smaling (1992a: 318) the following practical steps can be applied in enhancing validity in practice:

- Preparing a comprehensive register of data, notes of relevant events and the state of affairs, and theoretical and methodological memoranda
- Regularly studying the above notes and memoranda
Arranging and interpreting data without making use of special knowledge of the literature

Member checks

Peer debriefing

Audit trail

External validity may be enhanced by the use of theory-driven data collection

In terms of transferential validity the research report should firstly contain an accurate description of the research process, and secondly an explication of the arguments for the different choices of the method etc., and thirdly a detailed description (thick description) of the research situation and context.

With regard to the current study, it is argued that the following of Smaling's criteria apply directly to the present study and were therefore used.

In terms of internal reliability, peer examination, an audit trial and automated data processing and analysis were utilised. As far as external reliability is concerned, both thick description and explication was used.

In terms of internal validity, a comprehensive register of data, notes of relevant events, theoretical and methodological memoranda and an audit trial were used. Furthermore data was also analysed separately from the theory in the first instance. It is argued that the logical validity of the current project was ensured by theoretical and methodological justification, used throughout the current project. Transferential validity was adhered to by means of a description of the research process, justification of methodological decisions and a thick description of the research situation.
Objectivity

Plug, Meyer, Louw & Gouws (1986:240) describe objectivity as follows:

*Die aspek van waarneming of beoordeling wat bepaal dat dit nie beïnvloed word deur die waarnemer se persoonlike voorkeure, sydigtheid of gevoel nie.*

*Dit behels dus waarneming of beoordeling wat dieselfde resultaat oplewer vir alle bevoegde waarnemers.*

In turn, Reber (1985:484) defines objectivity as:

1. *The quality of dealing with objects as external to the mind.* 2. *An approach to events characterized by freedom from interpretive bias or prejudice.* Sense 2 is assumed to be derived from 1 in that the nonsubjective quality results from approaching phenomena as having an external (objective) reality uncontaminated by internal interpretation.

It is obvious from the above definitions from within the discipline of psychology, that objectivity is still very much conceptualised from within the philosophical framework underlying the empirical-analytical paradigm. However, since the current study has been chosen to function from within the interpretive paradigm, and since any study attempting to contribute to the domain of scientific knowledge must comply with objectivity, an alternative conceptualization of objectivity is provided below. It is also argued that this conceptualization meets the requirements of subjectivity as required by the interpretive paradigm.

*Münchhausen-objectivity*

Münchhausen-objectivity, which is applicable to any research paradigm, and which incorporates both paradigmatic and pragmatic factors, will now be discussed. *Münchhausen-
objectivity is doing justice to the object of study. Smaling (1989:159) explains the conceptualization of Münchhausen-objectivity by means of the following mapped sentence and explanation:

( an attitude (D₁) ) ( behaviour (O₁) )

( ) ( lets speak (R₁) ) ( )

( a way of acting (D₂) ) ( ) ( acting (O₂) )

( ) ( does not distort (R₂) ) ( )

( a product (D₃) ) ( psychic phenomenon (O₃) )

(a question )

( ) ( a frame of reference )

with regard to (a problem or goal ) and

( ) ( F₁ through Fₙ )

(G₁ through Gₙ )

A short notation for this mapping sentence is: 'DRO|G,F (D has the relation R with O given the conditions G and F; the vertical line indicates that the conditions are not absolute: (aspects of) G and F can, occasionally be questioned).

It has to be pointed out that the five facets (D,R,O,G and F) of the mapping sentence can be read disjunctively. For instance, an author may use the term 'objectivity' as follows: objectivity is an attribute of a special product, namely a proposition (D); a proposition is called objective if it is free from value judgements (R); the psychological object is outwardly observable behaviour (O); the research question is which of the two behavioural therapies is the better one (G), and the frame of reference is a positivistic philosophy of science.
Another author may use the term 'objectivity' in a different way: objectivity is an attribute of scientific procedures (D); a procedure is said to be objective if it is intersubjectively controllable as a criterion for freedom of bias (R); the object of study concerns mental processes (O); the research problem is how to evaluate an educational program (G); and the frame of reference is the cognitivistic approach to psychology (F).

Furthermore, Smaling (1989:161) argues for the use of this conceptualization of objectivity as a contra-factual regulative principle - contra-factual because it can never be fully attained, and regulative because it should serve as a norm guiding the rigorous pursuit of social-scientific knowledge.

In the current study, Münchhausen-objectivity was applied in the following manner:

(An open, respectful, which aimed to let the respondents understand attitude; a non-respondents speak freely leading; non-deceiving way of) (without judging and which) (and act openly acting; and only one, open) (also aimed to come to a interview question) (clear understanding of the world of the respondents with regard to) (their subjective experience) (as investigated in the current) (of household crowding) (study from the perspective) (of the interpretive paradigm)

4.3 Pragmatic factors influencing a research design

Concerning the pragmatic factors which influence a research design, Smaling (1994a:245) states:
Within the pragmatic factors, eight dimensions can be distinguished, which fit into the following propositional structure: a researcher or research team (R) investigates an object of study or a domain of entities (O) that is in a certain situation (S) with a certain research question (Q), a certain research goal (G) and with several audiences (A), while certain conditions have to be met (C) and while the conduction of the research is a process in time (T). The eight dimensions (R, O, S, Q, G, A, C AND T) are variables on which scientific enquiries may differ. Let us now construct an example by fixing each dimension: educational psychologist Jansen (R) investigates pupils of a primary school (O) who reside in the poor districts of Amsterdam (S) with the question how these pupils experience the practical relevance of mathematics (G), which arguments should be acceptable to curriculum-developers as well as to the relevant policy makers (A), while the research results have to be reported within five months, because decisions are to be made in six months (C) and a detailed planning of research stages seem necessary.

Smaling also explores each of these dimensions. Firstly, researchers (R) may come from different disciplines and vary in methodological education. They also differ in personal preferences and personality traits. Secondly, the object of study (O) may vary resulting in researchers not necessarily speaking the language of research subjects, research subjects trying to give socially acceptable answers, etc. Thirdly, the situation of the research subjects (S) varies, and could consist of a research laboratory, natural environment, or other situations. Of the research question Smaling (1994a:245) states:

*The influence of the research question (Q) on choosing a research method is generally accepted, and even desired or prescribed. But a research question*
does not necessarily and exclusively represent one particular paradigm. Hence pragmatics enter into it.

The research goal (G) may be based on theory-oriented or practice-oriented research. While theory-oriented research could employ quantitative or qualitative methods, it may be more valuable to utilize qualitative methods in practice-oriented research. Furthermore, the researcher may have a personal need, for example the need for new research experience or exposure, which can influence the choice of techniques. The choice of a research design is also impacted on by the relevant audiences (A). These include the respondents, clients, colleagues, sponsors, scientific communities, society, etc. Furthermore certain conditions (C) have to be considered in the choice of a research design. These include time limits, budgets, infrastructure etc. Finally the choice of a research design is also influenced by time (T).

In the current study, the abovementioned pragmatic factors apply as follows. Only one researcher was in the field, which reduced problems concerning differences in training or exposure, but also eliminated the opportunity for researcher triangulation or peer debriefing. The main problem with the object of study revolved around the researcher not speaking the language of the respondents. This meant that respondents needed to answer in a foreign tongue, or that the interviews needed to be interpreted. The situation of the subjects was their natural setting. While the research question had played an important role in choosing a paradigmatic base, it also had pragmatic bearing. To assemble a representative sample which is effectively stratified and large enough for subjection to inferential statistics would require financial expenditure well beyond the resources of the current study. In the current project the goal is theory-oriented and for degree purposes. This fact determined the audiences which were essentially academic staff and other academics, together with the
respondents. The goal also played a major role in the conditions which applied to the current study, and which included very specific time, financial and infrastructural constraints. The time dimension is not of particular relevance here, since the current study is not a longitudinal one.

4.4 Research techniques

As a result of the inherent openness of a qualitative approach, a detailed, fixed description of the techniques used, providing a step by step account of the research process preceding the actual study was not necessary. Rather, use was made of an emergent design (Guba & Lincoln 1989:175). These authors motivate the use of an emergent design as follows:

... constructivists are unwilling to assume they know enough about the time / context frame a priori to know what questions to ask. That is, it is not possible to pursue someone else's emic construction with a set of predetermined questions based solely on the enquirer's etic construction ... Another way to say this is that, whereas positivists begin an enquiry "knowing" (in principle) what they don't know, constructivists typically face the prospect of not knowing what it is they don't know... But as the design proceeds, the constructivist seeks continually to refine and extend the design - to help it unfold.

Against this background the research design of the current study (a case study of a hostel community) is postulated in fairly broad terms, and discussed in detail only when deemed necessary. Firstly, a literature study involving current literature on the subjects of crowding and hostels is presented in chapter 2. Following this, observations were made to inform some decisions concerning the emerging research design and methodological choices (for example the identification of key role-players, the choice of participants and data collection.
techniques, the formulation of interview questions etc.). At different stages observation served as both a qualitative data gathering technique, as well as as a way of informing decisions about the emerging research design and methodological choices. Comprehensive field notes were documented throughout the research process, the results of which are stated throughout the current study.

4.4.1 Data collection techniques

The following data collection techniques which were utilised in the current study will now be discussed:

Observation

A period of time was spent inside the hostel in order to gain first hand experience of the phenomenon in the field, as well as to facilitate an understanding of living conditions in the hostel. Information such as the physical size of rooms, the general layout of the hostel site, residents' access to services such as shops, transport, refuse removal, water, electricity etc. was also obtained. This information was used for the sake of contextualising the information obtained and to determine the degrees of social and spatial density to which residents were subjected.

Individual interviews

Individual interviews (Spradley, 1979; Gorden, 1987; Patton; 1980; Vrolijk, Dijkema & Timmerman, 1978; Hunt & Eadie, 1987) were utilised in the current study and an interpreter was sometimes used during the interviews. Specifically, the vrije attitude interview as described by Vrolijk et al (1978: 7) was used.
This technique basically consists of four steps (opening question, reflective summary, clarifying question and closing summary) and some non-verbal techniques, used in various combinations with each other. Consequently, the researcher asked only one question at a time and then summarised what the respondent had said during different stages of the interview (on this specific question) in order to circumvent as much misunderstanding as possible. Furthermore, questions were also asked in order to clarify certain words/terms used by the respondent.

While the *vrije attitude interview* formed the basis for individual interviews, other techniques such as those described by Spradley (1979: 86, 126, 160) were also used when necessary. These include descriptive, structural and contrast questions.

The individual interviews provided tremendous insight into the different perspectives of the above role-players with regard to both the physical conditions in and around the hostels, and their perceptions of residents' experiences of living in the hostels.

All interviews were audio-taped after permission for this was obtained. These recordings were then transcribed verbatim and the resulting texts analysed.

### 4.4.2 Data analysis

The data was analysed using the thematic approach as described by, amongst others Maso (1989), Miles & Huberman (1994) and Hughes (1994). It is important to note that the data analysis was done with the aid of the software package ATLAS/ti, in order to enhance accessibility to the data, improve rigour in the pursuit of scientific knowledge, reduce errors and contribute to internal reliability.

The phase of data analysis included some basic steps described by Miles & Huberman (1994: 9):
• Noting reflections or other remarks in the margins

This step involves noting aspects of the interview which are not reflected in the transcript of the interview. Such aspects include non-verbal behaviour, for example facial expressions, general comments about the setting wherein the interview took place, etc. ATLAS/ti has extensive memoing facilities specifically designed for this purpose.

• Sorting and sifting through these materials to identify similar phrases, [what is termed in quantitative methodology] relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences

This step refers to what is commonly termed 'thematic analysis' by qualitative researchers, and involves the identification of certain themes from the interviews according to which the data from these interviews will be structured and analysed.

• Gradually elaborating a small set of themes that cover the consistencies discerned in the database

This is the final step in the process of thematic analysis. It involves the incorporation of all the information transpiring from all the interviews into the various identified themes, as well as the creation of new themes where necessary.

All quotations were linked to themes or categories in ATLAS/ti, after which they were printed and presented in the presentation of the results. It was hoped that this would enable the reader to assess independently whether sensible themes were selected and whether the quotations cited in support of theme selection were meaningful. Furthermore, since ATLAS/ti facilitates the creation of relations between themes, this enhanced a holistic global view of, not only the issues at stake, but also of the interrelatedness of these issues.
4.4.3 Interpretation

The study was concluded with an interpretive phase during which the residents' experience of social and spatial crowding was assessed. This is done according to Miles and Huberman (1994: 9) by:

- *Confronting those [themes] with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories*

The interpretative phase consisted of a process whereby the practical and theoretical aspects of the study were integrated in such a way as to expand the current body of theoretical knowledge on the subject of crowding from a environmental psychological perspective. It was hoped that, as a result, a thick description of the experience of social and spatial crowding in South African hostels was provided by the current study from within its embeddedness in the theoretical framework presented in chapter 3.

4.5 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology utilised during the current study. The results stemming from the application of the methodological framework discussed above, are presented in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of what transpired during the data gathering and analysis processes, as well as some of the data itself, after its refinement through the preliminary process of data analysis. During the preliminary process of data analysis, all relevant comments, for example, non verbal behavior, were also noted and incorporated into the gathered data. Finally, themes were sifted and their relevance evaluated for inclusion in the current study. Hence, it is now possible to present some comments on the data gathering process, as well as the preliminary analysis of the data.

5.2 The process of data collection

The process of data collection began with a search for someone who would be able to provide me with access to a hostel in the Katorus area, since it had been a while since my last official visit to this area. Such a person was found via the Simunye Community Group, and he subsequently agreed to arrange access via the hostel Induna’s and also to organise a group of respondents. So it came that, on one sunny morning, myself, a very helpful colleague from RAU and close contact with Simunye, and our guide/contact person, arrived at Kwesine hostel on the East Rand. We spent some time looking around the hostel, both before and after the interviews took place. We also had the opportunity to have a meal with our respondents. This informal time together provided us with the opportunity to talk informally amongst ourselves,
and greatly enhanced the information gained through the interviews with the five women and two men. A tour of the hostel was also taken and detail about the physical outlay of the hostel obtained.

5.2.1 Individual interviews

In the current study, seven respondents, all resident in the hostel were interviewed. Some difficulty was experienced during the fieldwork entailing the individual interviews. This was mainly due to fact that few respondents spoke English, and hence interpreters were necessary; and our guide/contact person had to leave midway during the course of the fieldwork. To address these difficulties, use was made of two hostel residents who acted as interpreters. However, careful perusal of the transcribed interviews has left me wondering whether the questions and answers exchanged by the interviewer and respondent actually reached their destination without interpreter contamination. Since this is highly unlikely, one should automatically assume that the reliability of the current study has been compromised, at least in some way. This is a very good example of what Smaling (1994b) addresses when he separates the paradigmatic from the pragmatics in qualitative research.

The other concern which still stands, is an ethical one. It is clear from several of the responses that our mere presence at the hostel block raised expectations of change amongst hostel residents. What follows is some of what was said in this regard by hostel residents.

Interpreter:  

   So, if you can get something to work, like any kind of work,  
   because she can make the piece job or whatever. She'd move  
   out and find another place. [Interview with Respondent #5]
Interviewer: *Mmm. Is there something else you’d like to add?*

*Zulu conversation.*

Interpreter: *Just that things are going slowly and that we want to see things are better after this [our visit to the hostel]. [Interview with Respondent #2]*

Even though we tried repeatedly to state that our goal was not to petition the Government for change, I am unsure that the hostel residents were able to hear it.

5.2.2. The use of documentation

During the course of this study, several articles from newspapers, magazines and other sources of information were studied. These proved valuable in keeping me up to date with issues pertaining to all hostels. All of the information that was deemed relevant from these sources were also gathered and collated with the rest of the data gathered during the study.

5.2.3 Observation

*Kwesine hostel - a physical description*

Kwesine used to be a municipal, rather than a mine hostel. At the time of the gathering of this data, there were around 101 rooms with an average of fifteen people per room, leading to a total estimate of approximately 1500 people in the hostel. It must be borne in mind, however, that hostel occupancy rates are very fluid and that this estimate may or may not reflect the current reality.

The hostel buildings are in the form of two semi-circles, facing each other and creating two openings where they are about to meet. One of these buildings houses sixty-six fairly large...
rooms, and the other fifty-five small rooms. Each big room measures approximately 6m x 9m and each small room around 3m x 3m. All 3m x 3m areas have a single bed. All big rooms are subdivided, usually into 4 smaller areas. While some of these divisions consist of real walls, although never to the ceiling, most people use cupboards, curtains, etc. to create a less public living domain for themselves. Kitchens measure around 6m x 8m, and dining halls 6m x 6m. Washing rooms are around 9m² and contain six showers and four basins each, as well as a urinal and five toilets.

At the time of our visit the general condition of the hostel appeared to be in a state of rapid decline. The ablution facilities were sticky, dirty, and smelly, with water all over the floors. There was graffiti on the walls and locks had been broken off the doors. Due to the suspension of electricity deliverance at the time of the interviews, long passages in the hostel were so dark that I was almost unable to make out the silhouettes of those passing us. A strong smell of paraffin was also prevalent throughout the building.

The hostel did have one or two of its own facilities. For instance, there were apparently two shebeens on the grounds at the time of the interviews (we only saw one), and a spaza shop was also run by one of the local residents. Meetings were also being held on Sundays, and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) rallies held three times per year.

5.3 The process of analysis

Once the data for the current study had been gathered, transcribed, and the marginal notes inserted, the interview data was then imported into the computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (Caqdas) package, Atlas.ti for analysis. All the steps proposed by Miles & Huberman
(see Chapter 4) were followed. Below is a list of the themes identified during the course of the study, as well as a list of the verbatim quotes that were assigned to the various themes, as produces by the Caqdas package Atlas/ii.

5.3.1 Themes emerging from the data

Six main themes were identified in the current data set without confronting the data with the theory. These are:

- Privacy
- Crowding
- Resources
- Control
- Isolation
- Health

These themes are individually presented below, prior to the data-set being confronted with the theoretical framework of the current study (which is presented in the next chapter).

*Privacy*

Several residents spoke around the issue of privacy. In a hostel where a dormitory-type sleeping arrangement was intended, it is almost impossible to now accommodate whole family systems in such a way as to also provide for their privacy. Some told of how the lack of privacy affected them:

Interpreter: *He said the best thing is to own your own room. The reason why: Our*
things are not the same. They are sitting at one house, one room. But everything, its not the same. Others they say the same thing. Sometimes they are going to working outside home. But right here, right now they can only do one thing. They've only got to share this place when they come here. When they come here they have to share this. That's why he say - The best is to have your own room. Not sharing this room. [Interview with Respondent #4]

Interpreter: She said ... mmm ... That house. Its very small. This house is two rooms. And this people and the family too. There’s no privacy. Even there comes a visitor from outside - they come to see her, they don’t have a place to stay like in the township or where ever - some place with privacy. And then, then the BEDS are here in the kitchen. All the house is full of BEDS and when you cook you cook here in the house. It shouldn’t be here. Everything its here. [Interview with Respondent #1]

Respondent: Somewhat I am still in a big room. So we are three. So on the one side is for another guy and these guy we share this room. There’s no wall to provide privacy. It’s a big room. [Interruptions]

Interviewer: Okay. So you are saying, ahm the guy and his wife stay this side. You stay that side. There’s no divides.
Respondent: *No divides. So sometimes the guy and his wife they want to be alone and so you ... on the other side...*[Interview with Respondent #6]

Others told of ways in which they have tackled the lack of privacy pro-actively:

Interpreter: *Yes, yes. And the beds are really small. Little single beds just like a bed. The beds that they use ...*

Interviewer: *Mmm. How many beds in two rooms? [Zulu conversation]*

Respondent: *Four.*

Interpreter: *Four beds.*

Interviewer: *Four beds.*

Interpreter: *Mmm.*

Interviewer: *Twelve people? [live here?]*

Interpreter: *Mmm. Because they are divided... She says the others they sleep down [on the floor under the beds] because of the beds.*

Interviewer: *Okay.*

Interpreter: *Yes. You can take a cloth and make it around - even in the kitchen.*

[Description of cloths being used as dividers in order to create bedrooms (even in the kitchens)] *[Cause the other rooms, they use it as a kitchen where they put a table, something like this. So that they can be able to stay here and live their lives. [Interview with Respondent #2]*
Respondent: *This woman she says she makes this room ... got curtains to make her room, her room which looks alright. There's no doors. They are dividing by curtains. To make a house.* [Interview with Respondent #7]

From the press clippings relevant to privacy in hostels it is evident that this issue is relevant to other hostels as well. Seripe (1996), for example, indicates that residents at Meadowlands hostel have faced more than 20 years of a lack of privacy while bathing, or using the toilet facilities.

**The subjective experience of crowding**

Hostel resident's subjective experience of crowding frequently featured during the course of the interviews. Residents spoke of their living areas being too small and of too many people being constantly present. It seems that residents addressed the lack of space by converting kitchens and / or the areas under their beds into sleeping space for children at night. Even so, some told of how they slept with their partners and at least one child in the bed each night.

However, others also spoke of the hostels being less crowded than before and of the hostels being adequate, at least to some degree. Apparently residents' experience of crowding was greatly exacerbated by the bunk-bed system and one or two of the people I spoke to commented on the fact that their subjective experience of crowding was relieved by the removal of the top beds.

Some of the residents' sentiments on the above are presented below:

**Interviewer:** How big is this house?

**Interpreter:** It's two rooms. I can show you.
Interviewer:  
So in two rooms its you and four children and their partners ...

Interpreter:  
Yes.

Interviewer:  
... and four grandchildren?

Interpreter:  
Yes.

Interviewer:  
So that's two, four, six, eight

Interpreter:  
Ten.

Interviewer:  
Thirteen

Interpreter:  
Ten. Ten ja. Because its four children and their partners and her grandchildren. Twelve?

Interviewer:  
Thirteen I would say. Yes and her.

Interpreter:  
Ja. Thirteen with her.

Interviewer:  
And children.

Interpreter:  
Ja and they use all together the two rooms. And when you want to make a business, so what can you do? Its just, just mind cause that's very very small. 'Cause its her and her children in that SAME house. All things are happening in that same house. [Interview with Respondent # 1]

Respondent:  
Ja, ja. In my room we are many.

Interviewer:  
How many?

Respondent:  
We are nine. Nine. But we've got six beds. So we share these beds. Others sleep in two's you see....
But in our rooms we are so many, that you find that there are six bed, that you really find that we are NINE! Or eight. We have to share. Two in one bed, three in one bed. [Interview with Respondent #3]

Mmm. Is there something else you'd like to say about having to share - the toilets and the kitchen and the room and everything?

No. Toilets are not so bad. Not so bad. Bathroom and kitchen - they are not so bad, because they are away. Bathroom, kitchen, they are alright. [Interview with Respondent #3]

High levels of household density is a common theme in South African hostels and was also described in some of the press clippings. Msomi (2000), for example tells of the Alexandra Women’s Residence, originally built to house 4000 women, but by the year 2000 housing around 7500 adult women and at least 500 children. Seripe (1996) also graphically describes how residents from the Meadowlands hostel:

... had to pack like sardines in the tiny rooms with broken windows, damaged communal toilets and washing laundries.

A seemingly chronic lack of resources

South Africa is a country still plagued by tremendous differences between the rich and the poor - those who have almost everything in terms of financial, educational, recreational, health and power resources and those who have almost nothing of these. In many ways this divide still runs along race lines and in the case of a predominantly migrant working base, this is even more
marked - many hostel residents support two families, one on the Reef and one in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal.

During all the years in which I visited various hostels all over the country, one theme which repeatedly struck me was the sense of desperation and intense frustration residents' seemed to be experiencing about their chronic lack of access to resources. As was already stated, there was no electricity at the time of our visit to Kwaresine hostel. It seems that, although some of the residents had made their required contributions, the sum total of these was not enough to keep the power going.

Also, many of the residents were without employment during the time of the interviews. This meant that they had little or no access to food, paraffin and, in one case, even their bed. Some spoke of transport being a problem because the railway had been sabotaged during the Reef War of 1990-1992, and trains had not been an easy option since.

For a community where financial resources were clearly limited, taxi rides into town were a luxury few could afford. Of those who could and tried to find jobs, some spoken to during the interviews and the rest of our visit said that they could not find jobs even when they did take taxi's into town to look. Some of what the residents said is presented below:

Interviewer: It sounds like it's BAD for you. It feels bad?

Respondent: Ja. Its bad for me. Bad for me. Not for me only, alone. Ah most of the people here, as you see: all of these people - all of them that you see are not working. So ah too bad for all of us. [Interview with respondent #3]
But now she doesn’t get electricity.

Okay. So now they’ve cut off the whole hostel, even though some people have been paying.

Good. Good.

But now some people have not been paying and that’s why they’ve cut it off?

Yes.

Okay.

Some people, those they are not working, you see. But they are. But the ones who are working, they paid but not ALL.

Everybody’s was cut?

Yes.

Oi. Okay.

Then she hasn’t got the money for the paraffin. No money. No nothing. [Interview with Respondent #1]

And even the clinic. That’s another problem for them, their clinic. The clinic opens at 9 o’clock maybe. But at 11 o’clock ...

Its closed.

And the others that are still staying in the gate are closed. The sister will tell you that: “We’re closed”. So there’s no such thing. In other words, we are suffering our health.
Interviewer: Which clinic is it?

Interpreter: They've got a portable clinic here. From the city council. So there's no help in that clinic. Sometimes you approach that clinic and you see that there's nobody here to help you. Sometimes this woman hasn't got the money to go to the hospital. Doesn't have any medication.

Interviewer: Mmm.

Interpreter: So there's nothing. [Interview with Respondent #2]

Individuals' perception of control over their surroundings

In my opinion there was a marked sense of lack of control on the part of the residents we spoke to at Kwesine Hostel. This was noticeable from their speech, which frequently indicated an external locus of control (for example, the government / family / the researcher should help them improve their conditions since they cannot do so themselves), as well as blaming (other people, for example the government or some (unidentified) person in the hostel, should get their act together to get the living conditions in the hostel improved). Here is some of what they had to say:

Interpreter: She, her name is Happiness.

Interviewer: Oh Happiness - that's a nice name! [Laughing on part of all three]

Respondent: Yes - Happiness.

Interviewer: I'd like to know how you feel to share uhm this ... your room, your toilet and your kitchen with a lot of people. [Zulu conversation]

Interpreter: She said yes, they all use this thing in this place like it isn't, like I said,
satisfying. Because sometimes you want to clean the toilet. You can

clean the toilet and the other one go and mess the toilet. [Interview

with respondent #2]

Interpreter: Sometimes the Council is supposed to ... to give them the candles when
they pay. But they don’t get nothing. But they are still paying their
service...

Interviewer: Okay.

Interpreter: [The Council] Doesn’t do a thing. And the geyser - there’s no geyser.

In the bathrooms there’s no hot water. But they are, they, the people
who pay the electric here - if the electric here - but still the geysers are
not working. And ah what I still wanted to say - if you can go outside
here you can see the water running. Dirty water, and there are
childrens are inside here so this place is clean sometimes but not a
quality clean.

Interviewer: Mmm.

Interpreter: The disease are here from the dirty water, for children. That’s why, you
see, we are not satisfied. But if you ... they get there own place outside
- township or squatter camp - she would get up every morning doing
that: to wake up and clean up the yard, yes. Just to make it cleanliness.

[Interview with Respondent #1]
Interviewer: Can I ask you about the kitchens and the ablution blocks?

Respondent: Ja. Something like ... I don't go to the kitchen 'cause there's a bunch of guys in our block, and there's a risk to cook. They don't like to find other womens in that kitchen.

Interviewer: What do they do to the women?

Respondent: Well they said that this hostel is not for the women. It's for guys and so I cook in the room. And then on the toilets they give us one toilet ...

The whole floor and its for the women. Even the bathroom wall the bathroom door, you can't close the bathroom door for the women. So a man stands [there using the urinal or just looking at the women].

Interviewer: There is nothing you can do about it?

Respondent: I bath in the room ... So this place its not healthy and it causes even the rash over here [points to pelvic area]. Not for the womens. This place is for the men really, and the womens they come in through the violence.

Interviewer: Mmm. Okay. So it was usually a place for men and the men aren't conceding now that it should be a place for both. They're saying its still for men.

Respondent: Now that they're here its not the same. I asked them: Do they like women? The guys like it. Even at the office they like women. Like women in the mattress. And the Induna's like everything.

Interviewer: Okay. So there were some people who never wanted the women...
Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: ... and there were some who said that it was okay. And now that they [the women] are here you [the men] say: “Okay, we can’t make you leave, but we can make the rules, so we say, okay - you’re not allowed to use the kitchen. You’re not allowed to use the bath.”

Respondent: Yes. [Interview with Respondent #6]

Interpreter: He said he’s not satisfied with this place. That’s the point. If the government can try to make them ... give them a space to stay here it will be better. Even the toilet - even to clean the toilet and clean the ablution or to divide everything for them so that they can work here correctly.

Interviewer: What do you mean correctly?

Interpreter: Well if they use ... this is six houses or seven houses. This is one kitchen. I mean I can’t work with the dishes and wash my dishes ... just leave my dishes. Someone come and moves my dishes and put their dishes on the table. So correctly means that there is order.

Interviewer: So now ... now... ah ... he now... he says that he wants the government to come in and give him more space...

Interpreter: Yes. [Interview with Respondent #4]

The perceived lack of control is an issue which is also addressed by press clippings. According to Cresswell & Mazibuko (1997):
More than two million people in South Africa live in cramped conditions in hostels, facing violent crime and other problems, yet many feel they have no voice at government level.

Isolation

In my view the issue of isolation correlated strongly with that of the lack of resources. Some of those we spoke to stated that they were unable to leave the hostel premises due to a lack of funds. Transport also seemed a problem in general since the railway was not functional at the time of the interviews.

Furthermore, some were still suffering from the backlash of the Reef War in the early 1990's and the renewed outbreak of nation-wide hostel violence during 1996-1997 (see, for example, Minnaar, 1993; Anon, 1996b; Sepotokele, 1996 & Kweza, 1996). This often meant that hostel residents did not feel comfortable or safe enough to venture back into what was traditionally known as the townships. This is what one or two of the respondents had to say:

Respondent: *We stay just here. Cause it's safe here. Because it's the best here because of the violence. That's why they [pointing to other people around] are here. They come in and hide at night and end up staying. They come here to leave behind the violence from 1990.* [Interview with Respondent #6]

Interpreter: *And then most of the people who are staying here are not working ever since the violence. But because of that he wants the government to give*
him something - a place. Sometimes a place is a place to stay. Yes.
No, look where they're supposed to stay. They're supposed to stay here in the hostels.

Interviewer: Mmm. So you are one of the people who's become a refugee? Who ran from the house to the hostel when the violence was going on? [Zulu conversation]

Interpreter: Yes, he was one. That's one of the problems. Who rent a room outside.

Then he ran away at the time of the violence.

Health

The current study did not attempt to objectively measure symptoms associated with possible health problems. Still, residents frequently spoke about their health and how they experienced living in the hostel as far as this was concerned. These comments mainly focused on the lack of access to resources such as a clinic, hygienic bathrooms and toilets, and water free from disease. As such, what residents had to say has already been covered under the discussion concerning the seemingly chronic lack of resources available to hostel residents at Kwesine Hostel.

5.4 Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the main themes which emerged from discussions with residents. A model of these is presented below. It needs to be noted, however, that while other themes were also present, they were often addressed by only one individual or else in a passing
manner. As such they were excluded from the current data-set after the preliminary analysis

Figure 2: A model illustrating the main themes emerging from the current data-set

phase. The following chapter presents an interpretation of the analysed data.
CHAPTER 6
CONFRONTING THE THEORY WITH THE DATA - INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

6.1 Introduction
As the current study nears completion, it is necessary to take cognisance of the final and probably most important part of the process, namely the interpretation of the research results. This was done by returning to the theoretical framework of the current study and confronting it with the data obtained during the fieldwork process. Because the interpretation process is the most subjective of all, care was taken to present an in analysis of the results in the previous chapter, without any mention, and as little as possible cognisance of the theoretical component of the current study. It is now possible to present the results of the interpretation phase.

6.2 Revisiting the theoretical definition of the current study
To begin with, Edwards, Fuller, Vorakitphokatorn & Sermsi's (1994:3) definition, used as the basis definition on household crowding, is stated here again.

*Density refers to the number of persons in a defined spatial area... as Gove & Huges (1983) point out, density is actually a composite of different measures of the use of space and it may be calculated in several different ways. In addition to referring to the population per acre, density can denote the number of dwelling structures in a given unit of land area, the number of dwellings per structure, the number of rooms per dwelling unit, and the number of persons*
per room. Because of its multi-dimensional character, two neighbourhoods could have the same density, but for very different reasons. Measures of density thus may or may not reveal a great deal about what happens at the interpersonal level. Density is useful, though, in telling us something about the objective level of crowding... Obviously, there is a subjective side to crowding as well... Subjective crowding has been approached by researchers in two fundamentally different ways. Stokols, for example, defines subjective crowding “as an experience in which one’s demands for space exceeds the supply” (1978:222). In short, there is a mismatch between one’s demand for, and the supply of space. Altman (1974), on the other hand, suggests that the experience of crowding results when a person is unable to achieve some desired level of privacy, that is, when an individual is exposed to more contact with others than he or she desires. Each of these approaches, we think, is valuable in that they complement one another in tapping into the total experience of crowding. Accordingly... one we call “perceived crowding” and the other ... “lack of privacy”... Crowding is a complex concept. When we treat it as a variable, it is necessary to distinguish between its objective and subjective components, for there is no one-to-one relationship between how objectively congested a situation may be and how people may perceive the circumstances. The perceptual component of crowding may manifest itself in either the feeling that there is too little space available or in the sense that one’s privacy has been violated.
Based on this definition, the current study focusses specifically on the issues of *perceived crowding, lack of privacy*, and those *contextual variables* presented in Chapter 3. These are now discussed.

### 6.3 The focus of the current study

#### 6.3.1 Perceived crowding

As can be seen from Chapter 5, high experiential levels of social and spatial crowding did exist amongst residents at Kwesine Hostel at the time of our visit. However, the issues of disempowerment and a constant lack of privacy were at least as commonly and intensely discussed. This is an interesting finding, especially since respondents were repeatedly confronted with the same question throughout the interview, namely: *"How does it feel to live here in the hostel, having to share a room, a bathroom and a kitchen with everyone all the time?"* The point of this question was to probe directly for hostel residents' experiences as they relate to living in high density households. It is thus postulated here, that although crowding, both socially and spatially were experienced to be significantly detrimental to most respondents, it was not the only loaded emotional issue confronting residents at the time of the current study.

It is also postulated that hostel residents' sense of disempowerment interacts powerfully with their highly dense living spaces to create an exacerbated sense of social and spatial crowding and vice versa.

The data additionally indicates that the experience of crowding is a lot worse for women in
the current study, probably because they are in a more vulnerable position in the hostels.\(^1\) It is postulated that this may be intensified by the fact that the presence of more men means a greater risk of real and imagined abuse, and as such, is coupled with higher levels of fear and anxiety for women.

6.3.2 Lack of privacy

Five of the seven respondents discussed their feelings on the lack of privacy in detail. Accounts were detailed and rich in terms of content as well as emotion. Once again, women felt more exposed than men. While reading and re-reading the transcripts, as well as while listening to the interviews on tape, a very strong sense of this issue as the main issue for residents emerged. While other important issues have been mentioned by respondents, none seems more relevant than this one. Hence, the results of the current study proposes that the theory of Irvin Altman can be particularly useful to any study, whether quantitative or qualitative, focusing on social and spatial crowding.

6.3.3 Contextual variables

*Hostel residents' sense of (dis)empowerment*

Based on the current data-set, disempowerment appears to be the single most important contextual variable in the current study. It emerged frequently, directly and indirectly, both in informal discussions and formalised interviews with hostel residents.

\(^1\) I believe this to be closely related to the following: Because the hostels were originally intended to house men only, beds were issued to men, often on a ticket basis. This means that the women interviewed for this study usually only had access to a bed(hold) via a man.
It is argued here that the levels of disempowerment experienced by hostel residents impacts directly on their experience of crowding. Hence, the nature of the relationship between disempowerment and crowding is also argued to be of much importance for the current study.

The current study indicates that disempowerment, especially as it is experienced by women who do not have male partners in the hostel to protect them, and by those who cannot find employment, is a very relevant issue to respondents of this study.

**Employment of hostel residents**

The levels and nature of employment of hostel residents is thought to be a relevant contextual variable in the current study because residents who are unemployed and therefore "trapped" within the confines of the hostel seem to have a different experience of the levels of social and spatial density to which all hostel residents are exposed, than residents who have employment outside the hostel. Hence, this contextual variable also interacts with the variables empowerment and control and I believe this interaction also to exacerbate hostel residents' social and spatial experience of household crowding.

This became very obvious in one interview, where the respondent spent close on fifteen minutes emphasising that he was trapped. He had no employment and no money. Because of this, he could also not afford a taxi fare into town in order to try and find employment. He continued to indicate his feelings of utter helplessness throughout the interview.

Furthermore, analysis of the interviews indicate that residents who are self employed from within their own rooms (for example those who run spaza shops or shebeens) also seem to have a different experience of the levels of social and spatial density in the hostel than other
Residents.

This could be seen in an interview with a woman who shares two 9m x 6m areas with her four sons, their wives and four grandchildren, while at the same time running a shebeen. This has led to a setup where all thirteen people share two 3m x 3m areas as living quarters, while the rest of the space is used to provide visitors to the shebeen with seating etc. This woman repeatedly commented on the difficulties associated with a lack of physical space in her living environment.

**Health conditions in the hostels**

Access to hygienic facilities and resources which maintain and promote health continues to be a scarce resource in South Africa. In the hostels it is also a problem and many residents spoke of it. In the current study responses around health seemed to be specifically related to hostel residents' sense of control and empowerment and I believe health conditions also to interact with these two variables to produce an exacerbating effect on residents' subjective experience of social and spatial crowding.

**Cultural issues as they pertain to hostel residents**

The one way in which I believe cultural issues pertain to this specific study, is in the fact that the hostel residents of this study are, in the very sense of the word, migrant. Respondents frequently did not consider themselves to be part of the greater community on the Reef and saw their own presence on the Reef simply as an attempt to earn an income for themselves and those members of their families who remained behind in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal, where the prospects...
of raising funds was even more remote than on the often jobless Reef. This meant that some residents had to share what little they had, not only with other hostel residents who had no income, but also with families at home. I believe this to be an added pressure to many of those living in the hostels and earning an income. It is therefore also argued that this added pressure may tap residents’ resources and leave them more vulnerable to the potential experience of household crowding.

**Structural conditions and physical facilities in the hostels**

It is argued here that this variable is relevant to the current study because of the state of rapid decline in which the hostel found itself at the time of our visit. Press clippings as well as residents’ responses addressed the issue of structural conditions and physical facilities in South African hostels as a source of frustration and disempowerment for hostel residents. Based on the analysis of the interviews, it is argued here that this issue also exacerbates the experience of crowding on the part of hostel residents.

**Crime as it effects hostel residents**

Female respondents seemed to be more vulnerable to crime in the hostels than did male respondents from the current study. During the course of the interviews, the women were the ones telling of rape and child molestation while the men never once mentioned crime. Hence, I believe that crimes such as rape specifically taxes the emotional resources of women and, based on the interviews, it is argued that since these involve a sense of physical safety, it exacerbates women’s subjective experience of crowding in the hostel.
Access to the outside world

The sense of hostel residents' isolation was marked during the interviews and, based on the current data-set, I believe it to interact powerfully with residents' sense of disempowerment. It is argued here that under conditions of isolation at Kwesine hostel at the time of this study, the experience of social and spatial crowding is exacerbated. Hence, when hostel residents do not have free and open access to their surrounding outside world, whether due to lack of monetary resources, violence, or some other reason, they frequently also have more acute reactions to exposure to high levels of social and spatial density.

Political issues as they affect hostel residents

The current study postulates, based on the combination of the blaming manner in which hostel residents speak of the government and (frequently IFP aligned/Zulu) hostel residents' avoidance of the (frequently ANC aligned Xhosa and other) townships (in a context where South Africa is currently ruled by an ANC government), that this variable interacts with hostel residents' sense of empowerment. It is argued here that these political issues do exist and that they serve to exacerbate hostel residents' sense of disempowerment and lack of control and relatedly, also their social and spatial experience of household crowding.

The daily activities of hostel residents

According to the current data-set, residents whose daily activities keep them within the confines of the hostel premises are exposed to the high levels of social and spatial density to a greater degree than residents who leave the hostel premises on a daily basis. I believe that this variable
interacts with residents’ sense of isolation and disempowerment because many residents are literally stuck on the hostel grounds with nothing to do and nowhere to go.

6.4 Summary

This chapter examined the main theoretical tenets used to govern the current study. Both the main variables and all of the contextual variables interacted in one way or another and it is argued that the combined effect of these variable’s interacting have a powerful impact on hostel residents’ sense of empowerment and control.

Of all the themes identified, three are deemed key to the current study. These are the themes of crowding, disempowerment and a lack of privacy. Their interaction with each other and with other themes in the current study is graphically illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Based on the above, it is the conclusion of the current study that, while both household crowding and a constant lack of privacy are perceived negatively by respondents in the current study, it is their experience of disempowerment which surpasses other emotions, including the experience of crowding, in relation to their living conditions on the hostel.
Figure 3: Factors exacerbating hostel residents’ experience of crowding, disempowerment and a lack of privacy
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

The key theme, as it emerges from the current data-set and with which most other themes can be integrated, is presented in this chapter as a conclusion to the current study.

7.2 The key theme emerging from the current data-set

Based on the current data-set it is postulated here that three themes, individually and in interaction with each other are evidence of, and simultaneously also perpetuate the key theme emerging in the current study. These themes are:

- (Dis)empowerment
- (Lack of) Privacy
- The Subjective Experience of Crowding

In concluding this work, it is argued that disempowerment was the single greatest existential variable to impact on residents' experience of themselves, and therefore also their experiences around the lack of privacy and high social and spatial density, at Kwesine hostel at the time of this study.

It is also argued that, with regard to the issue of disempowerment, residents' constant experiences, varied across contexts (for example little or no space, little or no privacy, limited jobs, isolation from the wider community, no perceived access to government structures or resources, etc.) exacerbated both their experience of social and spatial crowding and also their frustration and desperation around their lack of privacy.

In turn the lack of privacy and the negative emotional experiences of household crowding served to maintain and perpetuate hostel residents' experiences and beliefs about their lack
of control over their environment and their high levels of disempowerment in general.

Hence it is the finding of the current study that residents at Kwesine hostel were trapped in a cycle of more of the same at the time of the interviews, and that, because of this, a simple change of environment (more rooms, for example) will not in and of itself be sufficient to redress the current emotional experiences of hostel residents around their living environments and general way of life.

Rather, it is argued here that a need exists for a more holistic intervention which could serve to redress the levels of disempowerment experienced by hostel residents and which may then also, as an aside, provide a corrective pertaining to their subjective experience of social and spatial crowding.

In light of the above it is hoped that the current study may perhaps contribute to the formation of a basis from which new and more holistic solutions may be sought.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Msomi, T. (2000). Welcome to women’s hell: It was designed to house 4000 but today this slum is home to more than 8000. *Drum*, 1 June.


