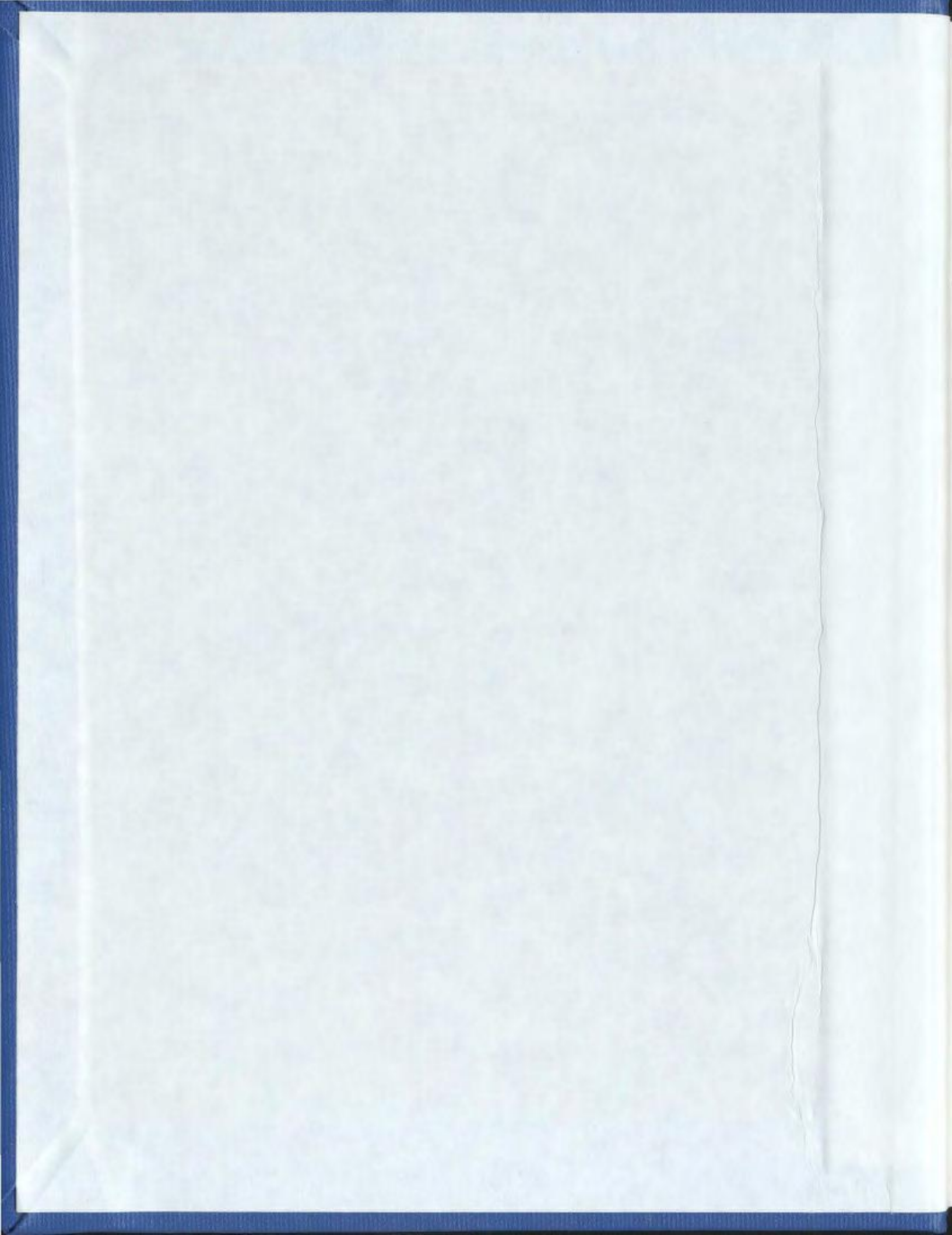


MORE SUNSETS: THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF
THE FULL-TIME RVER SUBCULTURE

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More Sunsets: The Social Organization of the Full-Time RVer Subculture

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ABSTRACT

Recreational Vehicles (RVs) have enjoyed popularity since their invention in the 1920's. Sociological studies of RV users (or RVers) have demonstrated to date how RVing is associated with retirement, freedom, friendship and reciprocity. However, previous studies of RVer culture have been conducted almost entirely in Southern U.S. locations, which may lead to mislabelling all RV users as snowbirds, those who maintain a traditional home and travel a linear and seasonal North-South pathway. This study focused on indentifying and describing the unique subculture of RVers who live and travel in their RVs full-time. This included an examination of the full-time RV phenomenon using several theoretical frameworks, including social organizational typologies, rituals, and rites of passage. I conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven full-time RV travelers staying at a campsite in the northern Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador during the summer. Thematic analysis of the interviews suggested the importance of new communications technologies, brand of RV, RVing as tourism, and circular, full-time travel for defining the parameters of the full-time RVer subculture.

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INTRODUCTION

Recreational vehicles (RVs) have been used in a wide variety of places and cultures since they were first manufactured in the early to mid twentieth century. Indeed, across cultures their presence has taken on a meaning that is dynamic and multifaceted. Even within the same cultural context, for some an RV is associated with freedom and retirement, for others with leisure and luxury, and still for others with deviance and exile. With the variety and sheer size of the RVs available, the amenities required to support travel, and the multitude of RV campsites, there is little doubt that over the past eighty years, RVing has become a well-established component of North American economies and societies. Chapter 1 of this thesis presents the historical, cultural, and academic history of the RV.

Perhaps because of its multifaceted nature, the depth of academic interest in the RVing phenomenon is not extensive. Early sociological and economic investigations were successful in describing the activity of snowbirds – people, often retirees, who spend the winter living in RVs or other dwellings in the southern United States and returning to their permanent homes further north in the summer. However, the popularity of ‘snowbirding’ as a mainstream construct may have lead researchers to overlook the greater complexity and circularity of people who travel in their RVs full-time, abandoning their stationary homes in favour of a life spent on the road. Furthermore, relatively little has been done to nest the cultural dimensions of RVing in a theoretical context.

In this study, I examined the full-time RVing phenomenon from a different perspective. Drawing on the information gathered in a series of eight semi-structured interviews, I sought to better describe the travel patterns of full-time RVers who, oscillate between locations in the southern United States in the winter and spending summer months in the northern locations such as St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. Through the interviews, I explored how these dedicated full-timers attached meaning to their transitory lifestyle, touching on what motivates them to travel, how they interact and socialize with one-another, and how RVers work together to sustain the sense of community that they enjoy in the face of vast geographic separation and sporadic physical contact. I was interested in how RVers make sense of their full-time travel as a means of maintaining their social and physical health beyond retirement.

In a separate layer of analysis, I attempted to apply a socio-theoretical lens to the information provided by interviewees; first by approaching the phenomenon from a sub-cultural perspective; second by overlaying social organizational structures using the framework developed by Best and Luckenbill (1980), and third by examining RVer's activities as rituals and rites of passage that reinforce and replicate their sub-cultural values and beliefs. Chapter 2 presents a detailed discussion of the theoretical constructs that I used to guide the interpretation of this study's findings. This layer of analysis will provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of RVing nested in a sociological context.

Within the context of these particular objectives, I sought answers to the following three main research questions:

- 1. What drives the decision to RV fulltime?*
- 2. What is the organizational structure of the full-time RVer subculture?*
 - 2 a) Does a full-time RVer community or subculture exist?*
 - 2 b) What constitutes membership in the full-time RVer community?*
 - 2 c) How does the full-time RVer community sustain itself?*
- 3. What are the particular travel patterns of the full-time RV community?*

To gather information about these research questions, I developed a fifteen-question semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) and approached RV users staying in Pippy Park in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador in the summer of 2008. Participants were identified and approached based on their resemblance to those full-time RVers described in previous research studies. I conducted eight interviews, but because three interviews took place with two RVers at the same time, a total of 11 individuals were included. The research questions, interview methods, participants and sampling procedures are presented in greater detail in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 4 of this thesis I present the results of the study obtained through a thematic analysis of eight transcribed interviews with eleven RVers. The results are structured in a way that corresponds to the questions on the interview and the overall research questions of the study. In the results chapter I attempted to formulate and describe the answers in accordance with each of the study's research questions, and present excerpts from the interviews as evidence in support of my interpretations.

Chapter 5 features an in depth discussion of the interviews as they relate back to the outlined historical and academic contexts previously presented in chapter one and the

theoretical constructs previously presented in chapter two. In this discussion I attempt to highlight where my interviewees provided support for previous findings and to integrate and explain their perspectives where they differed. I also discuss the limitations of the methodological approach of the current study, areas for future research into this phenomenon, and to reconceptualise the full-time RV subculture based on my observations within the boundaries of the study's limits.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

A thorough understanding of RVing must begin with some background regarding the RV's rise in stature in popular culture. In this chapter, I present an introduction to the phenomenon of full-time RVing, beginning with a brief history of the RV industry – the conditions that led to its popularization and how these conditions shape how people view themselves as RVers.

Following this brief historical summary, I present a review of the relatively few academic studies that have focused on describing the characteristics and activities of full-time RVers. This review centres around three general topics. First, many studies of RV users have highlighted the uncommonly high proportion of retirees amongst the population of full-timers. As several researchers have noted, the relationship between retirement and RVing is likely related to the extensive dedication of time resources required to travel full-time; resources those with permanent, stationary jobs surely lack. Because of the association with retirement, I also include a discussion of the implications for full-time RVers' healthy aging.

A larger body of research is available describing how RVers organize their shared activities, particularly through formal associations that provide services to their members. The services provided by RV associations – roadside assistance, camping fee discounts, and health care services, for example – enable full-time RVers to travel continuously with the security and comforts of a permanent, stationary residence. I also discuss the findings of studies of RVers' informal social structure, insulating themselves from the isolation of the transient lifestyle.

Finally, in this chapter I discuss the findings of a variety of studies that examine the travel patterns of full-time RVers, and how these travel patterns serve as a feature that distinguishes them from other types of RV users. Previous studies have typically focused on the linear, north-south route traveled by retirees who stay the winter in RVs in southern locations, only to return to their permanent northern homes in the summer. I highlight how this travel pattern, typical of 'snowbirds', does not adequately describe full-time RVers, who typically travel in a circular, continent-wide pattern without remaining in one location for any extended period of time.

The History of RVs and RVing

Traveling via camp trailer originated in the 1920s and 1930s with the popularization of the motorcar and the development of a dependable highway network. For the first time in the United States people could travel anywhere at any time as they wished (Cowgill, 1941). According to Thornburg (1991), a portion of these early automobile owners began travelling to the southern United States during the winter where they would stay in parks and campgrounds. Commercially manufactured tent trailers were available as early as 1921 and around that time arose as an alternative to tent camping (Cowgill, 1941). Trailers were designed to be little towable houses complete with kitchen, living, eating and sleeping space.

Thornburg (1991) notes that much stigma surrounding trailer dwellers arose in the 1930s. For example, early concerns that trailer inhabitants did not contribute to the tax base led some municipalities to close campgrounds in an effort to prevent them from becoming shanty towns. This sprung from perceptions of trailer dwellers as poor,

homeless and potential criminals, possessing no pride in themselves or their surroundings (Counts & Counts, 1996). In spite of this animosity, the trailer manufacturing industry experienced dramatic growth in the 1950s (Counts & Counts, 1996). The increase in trailer owners, park owners, and trailer-focused businesses were also influenced by the inception of associations dedicated to promoting the positive aspects of the trailer lifestyle.

Thornburg (1991) argues that this way of life came to an end after the Second World War with the introduction of the mobile home. In 1963 a split occurred between the manufacturers of mobile homes and those producing recreational vehicles (RVs) in the United States (Counts & Counts, 1996, p. 42). As independent industries they represent two different types of products: mobile homes are pre-fabricated in a factory and transported to a location where they are incapable of further movement. Where mobile homes were destined to sit on the ground, RVs were made to travel over it. The split was formalized when the RV industry in the United States formed their own lobby group called the Recreational Vehicle Association (RVA); Canadian manufacturers followed suit in 1975 to form the Canadian Recreational Vehicle Association (CRVA). Mobile homes and RVs grew out of the same industry but they developed along two different lines. On one side was the growth of the mobile home industry while on the other was the continuation of travel trailer manufacture. The latter of these would become the RVs of post-war North America (Counts & Counts, 1996).

The Retired and RVing

This history highlights the ready adoption of trailer life by retirees and several activities and themes that would become standard for the RVers in the decades to come. These include north to south seasonal travels, the development of associations, trailer campgrounds, and owners living exclusively in their trailers. At the heart of Thornburg's (1991) historical analysis is the revelation that in the 1920s and 1930s people lived in trailers, regardless of age, criss-crossing the country in search of work or a warmer climate.

Even though recreational vehicles have existed in one form or another since the early twentieth century, there are few academic studies on the subject that predate the 1980s. One such study is a 1941 PhD dissertation by Donald O. Cowgill. For his study, *Mobile Homes: A Study of Trailer Life*, Cowgill traveled at leisure across the United States in a travel trailer for two years, observing trailer life (Cowgill, 1941). Cowgill reported that for 'trailerites', as he called people who lived in their travel trailers, the trailer constituted a legitimate residence, a hybrid between a transient existence and traditional, fixed homes. Because trailerites, constantly move through geographic space, Cowgill argued that only two groups could feasibly be full-time trailerites: those with mobile jobs and those who are retired, as such circumstances freed full-time trailerites from the stationary obligations of a full-time job. This meant that they could use the trailer for purposes beyond vacation travel and become permanently mobile. Interestingly, Cowgill concluded by saying that living and travelling in trailers do not destroy personal and family connections but rather: "we find them a stable, happy,

dependable group living in communities that on the whole are well regulated and becoming more so" (1941, p. 90).

Hoyt (1954) studied the lives of retired trailer dwellers residing in a park in Florida from November 1952 to February 1953. Hoyt observed that retirees availed of trailer campground life as a response to the pressures of living on a fixed income, writing that "one answer would be the development of communities composed entirely of retired persons, preferably located in a suitable climate, such as trailer parks" (1954; 362). Of the 1093 trailer campground occupants observed by Hoyt, 92.8 percent were either retired or quasi-retired, at least 30 percent had no other home except the house trailer, 73.7 percent came from the East-North-Central group of states, and of those, 17 percent came from New England states (1954, p. 363). Hoyt's findings were significant because they represent an early example of trailer dwellers from the north travelling south for the winter. However, Hoyt does not comment on the living situation or activities of trailer dwellers in the summer when they traveled back up north.

Yet Hoyt's findings are limited because he confined his analysis to residents of the park and did not explicitly make connections to a larger nation-wide trailer subculture as later researchers would attempt to do. However, Hoyt's findings serve as evidence that trends in the RV subculture such as retirement, living full-time in trailers, north-south travel, and community organization have been present for decades.

There is a substantial body of gerontological literature on migration but only a handful of studies on full-time RVers (Counts & Counts, 1996). RVing caught the attention of researchers in the later decades of the twentieth century, coinciding with

academic interest in the aging of contemporary North American society (see Counts & Counts 1992, 1996; Hartwigsen & Null, 1990; Jobes 1984). The RV lifestyle was studied as an alternative strategy to traditional retirement with health, financial, and social benefits for participants. Counts and Counts (1992, 1996) have written extensively about the community experience between RVing seniors. As anthropologists, they conducted anthropological field work in late 1991 while living and travelling throughout Canada and the United States in an RV. Based on their research, Counts and Counts reported that RVers experience a greater sense of community than those who have chosen other forms of retirement and they argue that because of this, RVing is a modern retirement alternative for North Americans.

Hartwigsen and Null (1990) explored these themes further in their study of 100 full-timers in RV parks in Arizona and California, focusing on the full-timing lifestyle among RVing seniors. Their conceptualization of RVing was framed around the RV as a full-time home for retirees and a legitimate alternative to other housing for the elderly. Hartwigsen and Null interviewed 100 full timers belonging to a US based camping organization. They received permission from the organization and visited camping resorts in Arizona and Southern California during the spring of 1987. The age of respondents ranged from 50-78 for males and 45-81 for females. This observed age spectrum indicated to Hartwigsen and Null that while full-timing may be more suited to younger retirees because of the physical challenges that go hand in hand with constant travel, it continued to be a feasible option into old age. Indeed, 86 percent of respondents in Hartwigsen and Null's study planned to continue full-timing into old age indicating

that not even failing health could keep them from RVing (1990, p. 143). Hartwigsen and Null highlight the unique features of full-timing that makes it so appealing:

It provides affordable homeownership, a stimulating lifestyle, variety, flexibility and ease of maintenance. Gone is the worry of living in a deteriorating neighbourhood. If the campground or RV park they have settled in is not to their liking a full-timer can leave on a whim. (1990, p. 135)

The combination of travel and accommodation is one of the most attractive features of RVing, but RVers also leave family and friends behind for extended periods of time when they travel. On the surface, the nomadic lifestyle of full-time RVers seems to sever social ties rather than create them. However, this does not result in total social isolation. Analyses of the communities and associations have formed the backbone of key studies of RVers.

Conceptualizing RVers' Social Organization: The Literature

RVers have been formally organizing themselves for nearly as long as RVs have been manufactured. Perhaps the earliest example of a formal RV association is the Tin Can Tourists, which was founded to promote fraternity among auto campers (Thornburg 1991). As with early trailer dwellers organized as the Tin Can Tourists, contemporary RVers form associations to serve particular needs and interests. RV associations and clubs can form along lines of RV brand, marital status, hobbies, social groups and former occupations (Counts and Counts, 1992). For example, Air Stream owners may join the Wally Byam Caravan Club International (WBCCI) or Newmar owners might join the Newmar Kountry Klub. Single full-timers can join Loners on Wheels, and full-timers of the Baby Boom generation can join the Boomers club (Counts & Counts, 1996). The

Good Sam Club constitutes one of the largest associations, providing many services and benefits to members such as discounts at campgrounds, RV technical advice and information, trip planning, a club magazine and club activities (Join The Good Sam Club Today!, 2010). Of the Good Sam Club, Counts and Counts wrote: “Good Samers identify themselves with a bright orange decal showing a smiling Good Samaritan. This association is founded on the principle that RVers *can trust each other*” (1992, p. 154).

Associations are an important characteristic of RVers and have been noted by other researchers. Jobes (1984) also studied a particular RV association by interviewing members of the Wally Byam Caravan Club international (WBCCI), the club of Airstream RV owners, and observed two WBCCI rallies. Jobes found that possible risks inherent in full-time travel are mitigated when individual RVers become members of a community for mutual protection.

As a result of this research, Jobes (1984) developed a typology to describe the variation between RVers and RVing activities. In his typology, Jobes described three categories of RVers depending generally on *the amount of time* spent living in recreational vehicles. *Vacation travellers* spend the least amount of time in their RVs and use their RVs only a few times a year for vacation purposes. *Seasonal travelers* spend at least four months of the year in RVs while retaining a permanent home elsewhere. Finally, Jobes used the term *full-timers* to describe persons who identify their RV as their primary residence and spend most or all of their time travelling and camping (1984, p.184). Since Jobes’ work, the ‘full-timer’ label has been used as the standard within the socio-anthropological sphere to refer to RVers who abandon their permanent

homes in favour of an RV (Counts & Counts, 1992, 1996; Hartwigsen & Null, 1990).

The three categories are linked together in a linear, temporal fashion – Jobes observes that vacation travellers often spend more and more time in their RV as they age, later becoming seasonal and full-time RVers themselves, suggesting a developmental model of full-time RVers:

These persons tend to be younger and fully employed in contrast to the nearly universal retirement of full-time and seasonal travellers. Vacation travellers in their fifties are often anticipating becoming full-time or seasonal travellers following retirement and regard their rigs as an investment in retirement living. (1984; p.185)

Despite the temporary nature of their travel, seasonal travellers easily integrate into the full-time community because of their similar travel and living patterns.

Jobes' (1984) typology provides a useful tool for understanding the behavioural differences that distinguish RVers by status by the amount of time spent in the RV. Yet Jobes' research does not discuss vacation or seasonal travellers in detail, perhaps because Jobes' interest in RVers was from the perspective of RVing as a retirement activity that completely disengaged RVers from traditional stationary communities. Vacation and seasonal travelers, in contrast, maintain traditional homes and employment positions.

In his analysis Jobes (1984) contends that RVers form 'temporary communities' in the sense that the physical locations RVers occupy are impermanent, but interactions often continue nevertheless. RVers are drawn together by shared values and behaviours and the temporary community is formed when they meet in specific locations such as RV parks and rallies. Rallies and campgrounds are the places where RVers come together to

meet friends both old and new, serving as points of contact to reaffirm the existence of community in the hearts and minds of RVers.

Jobes (1984) provides a very useful conceptualization of the importance of lifestyle in the formation of social networks between full-time RVers. However, Jobes' conceptualized these networks as temporary because RVers can only meet and interact in physical locations intermittently. Jobes' use of the term 'temporary community' is misleading because the network ties and sense of belonging to a wider community between RVers does not disappear upon departure from physical locations. Community exists as much as in the hearts and minds of RVers as in physical space and home and friendship are located wherever the RV happens to be. Jobes, states that: "...in no case does a single location act as the location for the community. While the interaction networks remain relatively stable, locations may change periodically" (1984; p.194)

Since the mid-1980s when Jobes conducted his study much has changed regarding how RVers keep in touch. For example, the development of communication technologies such as cell phones, email, web groups and social networking websites have provided RVers the means to interact no matter how far flung their travels. Because much of the research on RVers was conducted prior to the year 2000, the impact of these important characteristics of communication has remained understudied.

Considering Migration

There are many studies on the migration and mobility of retirees. It is important to recognize the full extent of migration and seasonal populations, since both can have great economic and demographic impact on different areas. For example, during the

winter months the city of Phoenix, Arizona, experiences a great influx of people that affects population and the local economy. However, studying migration in this context is difficult because of the challenge of tying migratory populations to a fixed place of residence (particularly full-time RVers), thereby creating problems when collecting information on the population. As McHugh and Mings write:

The prevailing view has been that upon retirement elders either age in place or migrate to another community. This simple dichotomy fails to capture the diverse mobility histories and place-based experiences of elders. We introduce a variant of aging in place-the notion that elders may reside in multiple locales, forging place attachments and experiences via seasonal migration and recurrent mobility. (1996; p. 530)

The prevailing view that McHugh and Mings (1996) speak of is that Sunbelt locales are fun places where retirees can escape the cold of the winter back north, only giving up in advanced age to live their final years among family. These are the 'snowbirds' - retirees from the northern states and Canada who winter in southern locations like Arizona, Texas, and Florida. It is estimated that Arizona is the temporary home of approximately 273,000 long term seasonal residents who come to escape cold winters in the northern United States and Canada (Happel & Hogan, 2002). However, the snowbird label has been so widely adopted that it is often used to describe all types of post-retirement recreational travel. McHugh and Mings (1996) have observed that this conceptualization ignores the variation of motivations behind the actions of elderly migrants and fails to explain the significance multiple places hold in their lives. Furthermore, the seasonal shift in residence typified by snowbirding does not adequately describe the mobile residence and travel lifestyle of full-time RVers. Instead, full-timers use their RVs as

their principal residence and display travel patterns that are more complex than the simple *point A to point B* travel pattern, typically seen with snowbirds.

An accurate account of these travel patterns including an accurate estimate of the numbers of full-time RVers remains elusive. Happel and Hogan (2002) attempted to obtain a more accurate estimate of the size of the seasonal migrant population by asking Arizona snowbirds if they had multiple residences. In their survey, Happel and Hogan asked participants about the details of other residences, locations of alternative residences, kind of residences, and whether they spend 30 days or longer in the second residence. Happel and Hogan concluded that there is no standard by which to estimate seasonal population either on a local or national level, although they estimate that as the overall elderly population increases, then so will the seasonal migratory population. The increase of the elderly population during the winter could have significant impacts on both the receiving communities in the Sunbelt and the northern community left behind. This is especially important to consider for communities wishing to invest resources and infrastructure in catering to seasonal populations. Happel and Hogan do not mention RVs specifically as a place of residence. However, RVers, as winter migrants, would ideally be included in such an analysis to obtain complete profile picture of seasonal migrants to Arizona.

Like Happel and Hogan (2002), McHugh and Mings (1991) investigated seasonally migrant RVers who travel from the northern US and Canada to spend the winter in Arizona RV parks primarily to investigate the migration patterns of park visitors. Interestingly, they discovered that snowbirds may choose campgrounds based

on shared background, suggesting that wintering locations are not chosen at random but are influenced by prior relationships and experiences. For example, Canadian snowbirds tended to reside close to other Canadians (McHugh and Mings, 1991). However, the authors only comment briefly on full-time RVers and do not specifically explore the possibilities that full-timers are a distinct group from snowbirds. Instead, the authors described full-timers as nomads who travel through the southwest in the winter, staying primarily on undeveloped public land, rather than establishing a permanent home base in a park¹.

McHugh, Hogan and Happel (1995) continued this line of seasonal migration research through an examination of the US census. In US census data people are ascribed one main place of residence and migration is defined as a relatively permanent change of usual residence to differentiate migration from other types of travel such as vacations or business trips. However, McHugh et al.'s findings highlight how this definition is problematic when applied to seasonal migrants in Phoenix, Arizona. The southward migration of snowbirds is not adequately described by the US Census definition as a 'permanent change of usual residence' because seasonal migrants usually do not intend to stay any longer than the winter. McHugh et al. (1995) use Arizona retirement communities as a case study to illustrate their proposal of a life course framework to understand migration; that is, the behaviours of elderly people are grounded in earlier experiences. For example, full-time RVers may have moved around

¹ The RVers to whom McHugh and Mings (1991) refer may be those who stay at Slab City – an abandoned US air force base in California named for the concrete slabs that served as floors for buildings. Many RVers camp at Slab City during the winter, rather than in RV parks. McHugh and Mings do not go into detail about camping on public land and perhaps overlooked this subgroup in their study.

a lot as children thus lessening their tendencies to be attached to specific places.

According to a life course framework, residential decisions are linked with specific moments in the life course such as education, career, or marriage.

From their review, McHugh et al. (1995) described four types of 'migratory' residents. The purpose of this typology was to compare resident types in terms of socio-demographic characteristics that tap into life course positions and related circumstances. The most transitory were described by McHugh et al as 'temporary in-movers', people who are not Arizona residents who are visiting for less than one month. Second, 'temporary out-movers' were Arizona residents who left the state for 30 consecutive days each year. Third, 'dual residents' in Arizona, referred to respondents with a second legal residence in another state in addition to that in Arizona. Single 'year-round residents' typified respondents who had legal residence in Arizona, did not leave the state for 30 consecutive days, and had no additional residences besides the one in Arizona.

The work of McHugh et al. (1995) was an attempt to shed some light on the migratory movements of snowbirds in the Phoenix area, yet McHugh and his colleagues concluded that the influx of seniors was only one aspect of a larger pattern of behaviour. They stated that a conventional definition of migration did not account for cyclic migration and multiple residences. This is especially salient if the full-time RVer lifestyle is to be understood beyond the case study of Arizona. However, as a migratory population, it is difficult to develop a sampling frame for full-time RVers because they cannot be contacted in conventional ways through a permanent address or telephone. This creates problems in identifying, sampling, and studying migratory populations. This

particular study also illustrates the difficulties of employing traditional sampling methods to migratory populations.

McHugh et al. (1995) utilized telephone surveys of Arizona households over the course of 13 months, an approach that presents a problem for migratory residents who could potentially have limited access to telephones. Full-timers would be especially vulnerable because given the nature of the RV they generally do not have access to land line telephones or listed phone numbers. McHugh (2000) argues for the relevance of using qualitative methods such as ethnography when studying these populations. The exclusive use of quantitative methods limits understanding of the social connections of migration that people forge as part of the experience of transitory movement. McHugh argues that understanding the individual and social motivations that underlie the decision to migrate using ethnographic methods can deepen researchers' understanding of migration beyond making inferences from demographic statistics. Since 1993 McHugh has honed this approach by establishing a panel of 12 elderly RVers in Arizona RV parks (McHugh, 2000). Through contact with this group, McHugh gained a view of the social and personal dynamics of the migratory population that a strictly quantitative-survey based analysis may have missed.

McHugh's (2000) focus group study identified characteristics of the migratory population including a strong sense of community and an acceptance of the simultaneity of home and journey. McHugh integrated the results of this study with his earlier work to describe three key themes. First, the lives of seasonal migratory RVers are defined by the juxtaposition of home and journey; second, RVers migrant culture fosters a strong sense

of community and collective identity in aging; and third, three archetypal life course trajectories in migration and place attachment are evident in elderly migratory populations. These life course trajectories identified by McHugh are *still rooted*, *suspended*, and *foot loose*, with each corresponding to migrants' level of attachment to a permanent community. *Still rooted* migrants maintain deep attachments with their home communities, *suspended* divide their time between summer and winter locations in the northern and southern locations and *foot loose* represent those whose past life experiences of constant moving have encouraged a nomadic retirement (McHugh, 2000).

Discussions with the panel of RVers expanded McHugh's understanding on how RVers simultaneously experienced home while engaging in seasonal travel. This new understanding uncovered the social motivations behind the winter arrival of RVers in Phoenix, AZ. In addition, McHugh also speculated on the connections between season and RVer travels, stating:

Over a period of years, cycling between summer and winter places take on a matter-of-fact quality, it becomes part of an annual space-time routine. Departure from northern homes is as sure as the descent of arctic air in autumn, and return as certain as the coming of spring. Sense of place among snowbirds not only includes summer and winter homes but also encompasses their comings and goings along well worn paths. (2000, p. 78)

Here, McHugh advocates for a more holistic approach in the study of snowbirds, and by extension RVers, that considers a year-round cycle of travels that connects both summer and winter travels as one continuous journey, emphasizing the importance both place and journey to gain a full understanding of the RV subculture. The connection between the summer and winter travels of RVers has been mentioned by few others – for example,

Counts and Counts (1996) wrote about encountering RVers summering in Victoria, British Columbia in June. Jobes (1984) also commented on the cyclical nature of seasonal travels in his discussion on the fluid nature of location in the RV community. Accordingly, RVers can stay in Arizona in winter, take side trips in Mexico, and liaise with other RVers. Later that same year they travel throughout South Dakota or Ontario in summer (Jobes, 1984).

The RV as home is central to facilitating the success of the north-south summer-winter travel pattern. It simultaneously provides shelter with the means to travel freely and RVers have been known to sum up this relationship with the phrase: "Home is Where I Park It" (Counts & Counts, 1996). Hoyt (1954), Counts and Counts (1992, 1996), Hartwigsen and Null (1990) and Jobes (1984) all state the time of year and places where they carried out their studies but these times and locations are limited to winter travel in the southern United States and Mexico. Furthermore, these researchers do not explicitly connect these travels to summer travels in the northern United States and Canada. While winter travels do form an important component of full-timer lifestyle and practice, it does not represent the complete range of RVer's nomadic circulation throughout North America. Researchers have mentioned that RVers travel northern locations during the summer but the details of northern summer experiences have yet to be explored in a manner similar to that of winter travel.

RVing seniors are visible throughout North America but a holistic analysis that encompasses the scope of RVer's activities has yet to be produced. Instead, research tended to compartmentalize RVers' activities and travels in terms of 'snowbirds' or 'full-

timers' but without making meaningful connections between activities. The literature leaves one with many questions such as: what *exactly* do RVers do in the summer? What about RVers as tourists? If there truly is an RV subculture, how is it organized and does it influence the motivations of its members? Questions arise about where they come from, the patterns of movement RVers typically engage in and what happens when RVers when extreme age and health problems prevent them from travelling. Overcoming research limitations and completing a holistic view of RVers and RVing will reveal a dynamic and engaging alternative to retirement that will push boundaries and perceptions of travel, mobility, and community.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the historical and academic context for the current study. As discussed by Thornburg (1991), the RV was conceived in a culture that valued independence, mobility and luxury; its popularity grew in the post-world war II era. Yet despite the promise of freedom and community, trailerites and full-timers came to be viewed by some as rootless freeloaders.

As discussed in this chapter, a number of socio-anthropological studies set out to describe the sort of activities and characteristics that full-time RVers typically display. Through a review of the available literature I focused on three basic descriptions of the full-time RVer demographic. First, there appears to be a strong link between RVing and retirement, most likely because the large investment of time necessary to support continuous travel is prohibitive for those with stationary jobs and homes. Multiple researchers have also commented that RVing acts as a channel for healthy aging because

of the social supports inherent in the RV community. Second, I outlined a selection of studies that cast light on the way that RVers organize their social world, both formally through the creation and active participation in RVer associations and informally through the spontaneous creation of temporary communities. For RVers, the social organization serves many purposes, acting as a buffer against ostracism and the isolation of continuous travel. Finally, in this chapter I described a series of studies that described the travel patterns and camping behaviours of 'snowbirds'. I argued that these studies may not provide an accurate overlay for the travel and camping patterns of those RVers who choose the RV as their principal dwelling and travel all year round.

Having provided some background on the types of academic studies of full-time RVers, in the next chapter I present a series of theoretical perspectives that can provide an insight into how the activities of RVers can create personal and sociological meaning.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this chapter, I will discuss several of the most prominent sociological theories that will help to explain and describe the full-time RV phenomenon. First, I discuss some of the issues surrounding lack of consensus on definitions of subculture and I assess the utility of subculture theory for describing full-time RVers. Additionally, I examine the social organization of full-time RVers on a higher level using Best and Luckenbill's (1980) organizational typology. Finally, I discuss the importance of rites and rituals as theoretical tools for understanding full-time RVing, framed by the work of van Gennep and Turner.

Subcultures

One of the key considerations of this research is whether or not full-time RVing seniors in North America today constitute a subculture. Although sociologists have been successful in describing subcultures, they have been less successful in arriving at a consensus on their definition. Indeed, sociology's conception of 'subculture' has suffered from ambiguous language and disparity among theorists resulting in inconsistent application throughout the sociological literature. This is apparent as terms like community, sub-group, counter-culture and secret societies are often applied when addressing subculture topics without consistency. As McCarthy-Smith points out: "A profusion of mediocre definitions of subculture are directed toward lay readers, students and social scientists alike" (1991; p. 5). Inconsistency in the labelling of subculture can be problematic because it makes it more difficult to identify and describe sub-cultural groups and then communicate results. As Fine and Kleinman explain, "Even though the

concept of subculture has been used in sociological theories, particularly those of deviance and delinquency, the term remains imprecise and unclear.” (1979, p. 2)

An example of this inconsistency and ambiguity of terms can be found in the literature on RVers. Both Counts and Counts (1992; 1996) and Jobes (1984) refer extensively to an “RV community” as a concept to describe and explain the social connections between RVers. Counts and Counts also refer to RVers synonymously as a community and a subculture in the same work (1996). McHugh (2000) discussed how snowbird migrants constituted a ‘subculture in aging’. But what is meant by these designations and why they are used was not explained, hindering efforts to clearly define the organization of RVers social ties. McCarthy-Smith (1991) points out that terms referring to ‘subculture’ are often applied in the literature as if their meanings are self-evident and require no further explanation.

Jenks (2005), like McCarthy-Smith (1991), says those definitions of community suffer from similarly ambiguous conceptualizations as the term subculture itself. Interestingly, according to Jenks, out of all the sociological terms referring to subculture, ‘community’ is perhaps the one most conceptually close to subculture. However, he emphasized that there are several important differences between the concepts of community and subculture that impact when and how the terms could or should be applied. He insisted that communities tend to be geographically associated with a particular location, permanence and family and kinship groups. In addition, ‘community’ has positive connotations and applications in wider society. For RVers, the centrality of transiency, the impermanence of living arrangements and historically negative

stereotypes point to a clear break from traditional views on community and would suggest that subculture be a more flexible and appropriate term for their group.

Equally as elusive is agreement on the degree to which subculture differentiates from wider society (Jenks, 2005). Early case studies frequently used groups of criminals and/or immigrants as a basis for clearly defining the activities that identified the subculture. Sociologists in the Chicago School first examined the coalescence of delinquent behaviours from a purely geographical standpoint, setting out to study inhabitants in zones of increased instances of disease, insanity, disorder, crime and suicide. As understanding of the phenomena deepened, Chicago theorists began to shift their focus to cultural similarities amongst inhabitants rather than assuming that it was the 'natural areas' themselves that produced deviance (McCarthy-Smith, 1991, p.6-10).

The focus on criminality in examinations of sub-cultural deviance remained prominent, with a multitude of studies on organized crime outfits, motorcycle gangs, insane asylums, drug users (Willis, 2006) and particularly juvenile delinquency, amongst many others. Presumably, this focus made sense because of the practicality of using the legal code of a jurisdiction as a convenient, explicit proxy for the norms and values of society at large. However, as social scientists came to understand, deviance does not necessarily mean violating the law. For example, Aversa Jr. (1990) conducted an in-depth examination of the social organization of the Neptune Yacht Club, comparing and contrasting the lifestyles of blue- vs. white-collar members. In that club, the white collar members opened up club membership to blue collar or more working class members as a trade-off to obtain their skills to repair the crumbling club house. Aversa Jr. then

describes the differences in how each group approaches boating, socializes and judges each other, none of which involved illegal activities. Likewise, extensive sociological research has been conducted on a wide variety of subcultures, such as runners and body builders that do not violate criminal laws (see Ewald & Jiobu, 1985).

The reality for full-time RVers may be somewhere between legality and illegality. As previously discussed, RVers were ostracized in the 1930s and 1940s because it was perceived that they were trespassers and transients, consuming municipal services without paying taxes or contributing to settled communities in any meaningful way (Thornburg, 1991; Counts & Counts, 1996). Negative stereotypes, by extension, developed in response to the animosity between local and legitimate landowners and traveling RVers. Additionally, a lack of a permanent address presents challenges for full-time RVers' participation in the democratic and census processes, which further embeds the group in a legal gray area. Beyond these complications, the activities of full-time RVers may not resemble deviance in the classical sense, and with greater organization and infrastructure development the issue of illegal land occupation has receded. Campgrounds are established areas that RVers may stay overnight, and indeed, RVers recognize Wal-Mart parking lots as havens for sanctioned overnight parking and a location like Slab City in California (by virtue of their communication with one another – see RV Basics, 2011).

Despite the difficulties posed by ambiguity of terms, the absence of a physically grounded location, and uneven concepts of deviance, there appears to be some consensus among theorists as to the broad-term criteria for describing a subculture. For the

purposes of this study, I have identified three general elements to guide an examination of the full-time RVer subculture.

Common Problems

Sub-cultural groups appear to form around what its members perceive to be a common and unique problem and work together to formulate a solution. Parker, Mars, Ransom and Stanworth (2003) contend that overcoming the challenges faced by group members is central to the existence of the group, stating that,

One way of characterizing culture is to say that it consists of processes and mechanisms which enable the past to be carried into the present and the future. These processes enable people to live in a world with some degree of continuity. They always have some way to begin dealing with whatever they find themselves having to do. (2003; p. 78)

For example, Clarke notes that skinheads living in the United Kingdom band together because of their desire to overcome the oppression of authority, writing that,

...the sense of being 'in the middle' of this variety of oppressive and exploitative forces produces a need for group solidarity, which though essentially defensive, in the skinheads was coupled with an aggressive content, the expression of frustration and discontent through the attacking of scapegoated outsiders. (2006; p. 100)

Similarly, full-time RVers have banded together to address common problems since the popularization of the recreational vehicles. The types of problems that RVers face have been clearly documented. On a demographic level, the fact that the decision to RV full-time coincides so closely with retirement has two important impacts for RVers. First, in the absence of a steady income, increasing costs of full-time travel pose difficulties for full-timers, especially concerning fuel prices and accommodation costs. Although RVers, alone or together, may hold little sway over fuel costs, RVers have

organized to explore options to reduce the costs associated with camping and storing their RVs. This can take the form of discounts for RVers belonging to specific RV associations, RV parks owned by RV associations and targeted for full-time travelers, or boondocking – parking the RV for free in areas such as parking lots, gravel pits, rest areas or shopping centers (Counts & Counts, 1996).

The second way retirement poses a problem for full-time RVers is health concerns associated with aging. Obtaining health care can be difficult for RVing seniors as they travel across jurisdictions and through long stretches of uninhabited land. For RVers, the desire for freedom and experience overcomes the limitations posed by aging, to the point where they sometimes continue to travel despite failing eyesight, mobility and/or other faculties that may prove dangerous to themselves or others on the road (Counts & Counts, 1996; Hartwigsen & Null, 1990). The fact that such a variety of stable, complex associations provide specialized health care services to RVers is an excellent example of the group's approach to address their common problems.

Isolation is a further concern for full-time RVers as they struggle to maintain relationships. The prolonged physical separation from family members and friends in familiar settings (such as home towns or neighbourhoods) can certainly be challenging. Not all RVers are highly social, some are even fiercely independent (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011). Additionally, full-time RVers are rarely stationary long enough to develop new relationships in a meaningful way, and neither are the campers in adjacent sites. Even where occasionally full-time RVers may remain in one campsite for an extended period, their neighbours may change on a daily or weekly basis, departing in any and all

directions. Such isolating factors may only be partly offset by the use of new communication technologies (Hardy, Hanson & Gretzel, 2012).

Because of their transiency, full-time RVers are also faced with challenges in participating in regular civic and democratic processes. In the United States, RVers with no permanent address may find it difficult to vote in municipal, gubernatorial, primary and presidential elections. In select Canadian provinces, a prolonged absence can result in revocation of health care coverage (Counts & Counts, 1996). National censuses do not do an adequate job of locating, assessing, or describing the full-time RVer demographic (McHugh & Mings, 1991, 1996). With jurisdictional disputes, taxation processes can often be hindered. The Escapees Club website lists several major issues which the association seeks to remediate, including United States postal service/CMRA regulations, voting disenfranchisement challenges, unfair RV-specific taxes, and unreasonable RV-related restrictions (Escapees RV Club, 2011).

Ultimately, many of the efforts to legitimize and enable full-time RVing may serve to abate the negative stereotyping that has plagued the group since the popularization of recreational vehicles. Counts and Counts list several labels that others have used to describe RVers, including "...homeless, untrustworthy, tax-avoiding 'trailer trash'." (1996, p. 51).

Symbols, Values and Norms

Second, a subculture can be defined by its shared symbols, values and norms. The importance of signs and symbols is particularly well articulated by Parker, Mars, Ransome and Stamworth, who write:

At the heart of cultural methods lies the use of signs to represent experience and the world and the development of rules, general principles, formulae and recipes... Culture would not work if it were some enormous shed, electronic or not, filled with the lessons of the past. We need some way of deciphering the relevance of these lessons for the present. (2003, p. 78)

Although members of subcultures may not consciously regard their actions as a means of reinforcing their shared values, they regularly employ symbols and values to communicate their membership to others. For example, Aversa Jr. (1990), used these shared values to differentiate between white- and blue-collar members of the Neptune Yacht Club, commenting that the two factions used different symbols and values to identify themselves with one group or the other. White-collar members adhered closely to the norms traditionally associated with yachting, placing a focus on gentrification and identifying themselves through formal dining etiquette, structured dancing and formal and strict observance of club dress codes. Blue-collar club members identified themselves as distinct from their white-collar club members through an emphasis on informal fraternity rather than gentrification, which manifested itself in symbols such as relaxed table manners, free-style dancing, and casual clothing. The importance of shared recognizable symbols is also evident through Austin's (2009) qualitative study of brand specific motorcycle rallies. The brand of motorcycle formed both the impetus for gathering and a means of communicating common values and riding experiences. Austin also describes a norm of trust that exists for attendees of motorcycle rallies with the same brand.

The symbols, values and norms that identify a subculture can take less tangible forms as well. Rose (1994) argued that for Black culture in contemporary America, the

elements of *flow*, *layering* and *rupture in line* were infused into all culture expressions, from graffiti to breakdancing to hip hop music. These elements serve as symbols that identify these expressions unmistakably with Black culture. Individuals use music particularly often as an intangible means to identify themselves with and communicate within a sub-group. In their study of determinants and lifestyle correlates of musical preferences, Tanner, Asbridge, and Wortley (2008) concluded that musical tastes and peer group cultural practices were closely linked.

RVers frequently employ such symbols, values and norms. Fine and Kleinman (1979) contend that culture is meaningful in the context of social interaction and this is especially in the case for RVers, who through communication, technology, and shared meanings, constantly recreate the hallmarks of their subculture wherever they go. For RVers, one predominant value inherent in social interactions is *reciprocity*. Putnam (2000) conveyed the importance of reciprocity in the building and maintenance of social networks, which function on mutual obligation, not necessarily that of specific obligations or tasks, but the general expectation that good deeds are rewarded in kind. As Putnam remarked, "A society characterized by general reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society... Trustworthiness lubricates social life. Frequent interaction between a diverse set of people tends to produce a norm of generalized reciprocity" (2000, p. 21).

Counts and Counts (1992; 1996) affirm that for RVers, reciprocity is essential for coping with the common problems that full-time RVers face on the road. Acts of reciprocity, such as the exchange of knowledge and experience, goods and services, or uncommon courtesy, serve to immediately strengthen the social bonds between RVers,

overcoming the barriers of unfamiliarity and building trust. In essence, RVers value reciprocity because it provides a shortcut to forming meaningful relationships given limited time constraints and unfamiliar territory.

RV association logos act as a strong symbol of this reciprocity. Placards were used as early as the 1920's by the Tin Can Tourists as a way to identify other members of their club and as a means of communicating a need for assistance. As Counts and Counts write: "In 1966, the Good Sam Club revived the idea of a logo used to signal membership and to encourage mutual help with its Good Samaritan sticker. The Escapees Club emblem... is another such insignia" (1996; p. 36). For RVers, these stickers communicate a willingness to establish friendships, provide assistance and exchange advice and knowledge - they are a social 'green light.'

Another important symbol for full-time RVers is brand and type of RV. Several RVer associations are brand exclusive, which attests to their importance. For example, there are brand-exclusive associations for Airstream (Wally Byam Caravan Club International), Newmar (Newmar Kountry Klub), and Holiday (Holiday Rambler Recreational Vehicle Club), among others – the RV Clubs website lists over 70 brand name specific clubs (RV Clubs, 2011). Presumably, the idea behind the significance of RV make and model is that brand communicates something about the characteristics of their owners. RVers who choose a particular brand of RV therefore assume that they will have much in common with other RVers who drive the same brand. Like stickers, brand can open a door for RVers to create friendships quickly. Brand has also shown its importance through examinations of motorcycling cultures. The importance of

motorcycle brand was explored by Austin (2009), who concluded that the brand of motorcycle one rides functioned as an avenue for group identity and the criteria by which the degree of membership may be assessed by other motorcyclists.

Finally, it must be stated that full-timers place tremendous value on freedom and independence. As Cowgill (1941) describes, the popularization of automobiles in the early twentieth century brought a new level of freedom of movement to the masses. This freedom ushered in a new enthusiasm for camping and tenting that would later synthesize with a preference for comfort and convenience to create a demand for recreational vehicles. The romantic view of independence was never abandoned by RVers, who regard themselves as self-reliant neo-pioneers, forging a new internal frontier of discovery (Counts & Counts, 1996). Full-time RVers may hold this view of themselves as pioneers as a means of combating the negative stereotypes others hold; what better way to assert their Americanism? Furthermore, this particular style of freedom serves to differentiate RVers from other motorists who travel frequently such as motorcyclists, who see themselves as renegades rather than frontiers-men and -women (Austin, 2009).

Through their interviews with full-time RVers, Counts and Counts (1996) highlighted that, although a common value, the meaning of freedom tended to differ between RVers. For some full-timers, freedom meant the ability to travel wherever they wished, whenever they wished – essentially freedom from *physical constraint* and the limitations of traditional housing (Hartwigsen & Null, 1990). For some others, freedom manifested itself in more socio-economic forms, as in freedom from *financial bonds*

associated with home ownership. There was also freedom from *things*, a residual of the restricted storage space inherent in full-timers' transient lifestyle.

Shared Activities

Third, subcultures have been described on the basis of the unique shared activities of their members. These activities not only serve to strengthen and reaffirm group identity, but also differentiate members from the dominant culture at large. Rose (1994) suggested that for contemporary Black culture, shared activities included break dancing, rapping and graffiti art – all of which transmit the values of the culture to its members and help to draw a distinction from the dominant (read: white) culture. Aversa Jr. (1990) uses shared activities to differentiate between two sub-groups within the same yacht club. In his ethnography, Aversa Jr. compares the activities of blue-collar members (drinking, boat-ownership, and fishing) with those of white-collar members (cruising, yacht-ownership, & racing). Aversa Jr.'s distinction illustrates how subgroups can exist even within a seemingly homogeneous culture, and may overlap structurally with the distinction between snowbirds and full-timers.

For youth growing up in urban Great Britain, even 'doing nothing' constituted a shared activity. In Corrigan's ethnography of street-corner boys living in Sunderland, the author noted that "the major activity in this venue, the main action of British subculture is, in fact, 'doing nothing'" (2006; p.101). Corrigan describes that the major element of doing nothing is talking, not to communicate ideas but rather to communicate the experience of talking itself. This talking normally leads one of the boys to have a 'weird idea' - an inspiration to perform an act normally mischievous in nature, such as smashing

milk bottles in the street. The street-corner boys then group-identify with the act of mischief; however it is the 'doing nothing' from which the act originates.

RVers' shared activities function in a similar way to reproduce group identity and transmit group values. Counts and Counts (1996) argue that RVers in contemporary North America comprises a subculture based on their shared *activities*, rather than shared *territory*. This illustrates the importance of RVer's social interactions for the persistence of the subculture. Some of the shared activities of full-timers are obvious – owning and living in an RV instead of a conventional house is a prime example. Previous researchers have identified several other, less conspicuous activities, the most prominent being travel. As Jobes describes, "...permanent travel ...generally involves becoming part of a loosely-linked community of interests, which acts to reinforce and protect its members. Full-timers are recognized and generally respected by other travelers for their commitment to a lifestyle centered around travel" (1984, p. 186).

For full-time RVers, travel remains an essential ingredient for group identity. Sociological research has not revealed any benchmarks regarding the frequency, direction or duration of travel that delineate the criteria for group membership. However, regular travel appears to be the main factor in separating full-time RVers from other mobile home users, such as snowbirds, vacationers, or others who inhabit RVs as a substitute for a traditional home. This distinction is important for full time RVers because travel is closely tied to their values of freedom and their pioneering self-image. Indeed, freedom and travel are intertwined, leading RVers to report a sense of dread when faced with the prospect of retirement from full time travel (Counts & Counts, 1996).

Camping is another shared activity by which full-time RVers create meaning and transmit their culture. Indeed, because of the lack of consistency in travel patterns, RVers may spend just as much time camping as they do traveling. Where convenient, RVers will stay in campgrounds (especially those owned and operated by RV associations) that provide forums to both seek and provide assistance, strengthening the importance of reciprocity. The other option for RVers is boondocking (parking for free in gravel pits, parking lots, or rest areas), which as a practice can be thought to represent the freedom associated with RV ownership. In boondocking, RVers have the opportunity to exercise the self-reliance and independence that they value, and simultaneously generate the experience that seasons a full-timer's credentials.

The exchange of food and experiences is a shared activity that reflects the importance of reciprocity for full-time RVers. There exists a normative expectation amongst full-timers that when encountering each other in a crisis, any support, advice or assistance required is freely exchanged (Counts & Counts, 1992, 1996). For example, the name of the "Good Sam" RV Club is based on the biblical story of the Good Samaritan who helped a man robbed and left injured on the road. Like the Good Samaritan, RVers are expected to help each other when in trouble on the road. The sharing of food is particularly important in displaying reciprocity, as highlighted by Counts and Counts' (1992) description of the potluck dinner. For full-timers, the potluck dinner is a powerful symbol of togetherness; it is seldom that newcomers to a campground or common boondocking site go very long without being offered food of some kind. In turn, those newcomers are expected to bring food along with them, and their participation is

generally met with approval from other RVers. Potluck dinners are often weekly events in campgrounds, and are featured at other special occasions such as holidays and weddings.

Finally, attending rallies is an important shared activity that attracts some of the most enthusiastic and dedicated full-timers. Indeed, rallies have been the setting for several sociological investigations into the phenomenon of RVing. Jobes' (1984) study took place at two rallies of Airstream-owners; he notes the importance of the events for bringing together a group of otherwise dispersed individuals to reinforce group identity. Rallies serve a similar function for motorcyclists as well – Austin (2009) explained that for BMW motorcycle owners, the rally represented an opportunity to solidify the identities and lifestyles of attendees. Counts and Counts contend that, "...the purpose of a rally is to revitalize the spirit of the group that comes together" (1996, p. 181). Interestingly, Counts and Counts describe a convention for all RV rally attendees to arrive at the same time, so that all attendees are equally newcomers. This convention forces attendees to form social relationships quickly and efficiently, following the custom of RVers.

Social Organization

In order to understand more about RVer subcultures it is helpful to explore the relative sophistication of relationships between them. Best and Luckenbill (1980) developed a theoretical framework, originally designed to understand the social organization of deviants, yet that may be used to more broadly conceptualize the pattern of relationships between actors within a group. In their framework groups are organized

according to relationships between group members in the context of the occupational pursuits of members of the organization. Best and Luckenbill explain that “...forms of organization which display high levels of complexity, coordination, and purposiveness are more sophisticated than those forms with lower levels” (1980, p. 15). Following these observations, Best and Luckenbill categorized organizations in five groups in terms of four dimensions: 1) members’ mutual association with one another; 2) mutual participation in the group-specific activities together; 3) a division of labour; and 4) organization’s activities extend over time and space (see Table 1).

Table 1. Best and Luckenbill’s five deviant organization groups

	Dimension			
	Mutual Association	Mutual Participation	Division of Labour	Extended Organization
Loners	-	-	-	-
Colleagues	●	-	-	-
Peers	●	●	-	-
Mobs	●	●	●	-
Formal Organizations	●	●	●	●

According to Best and Luckenbill’s typology, *formal organizations* are the most sophisticated of the five groups because their members’ mutual association, mutual participation and division of labour persist over space and time. Best and Luckenbill contend that their five types of groups represent ideal types and there is much variation within and between each group as well as overlap among each level: “Organizational sophistication can be viewed as a continuum, with deviants located between, as well as on the five points” (1980, p. 15). Here, I argue that the social organization of full-time

RVers resembles that of formal organizations in Best and Luckenbill's typology, primarily though the services and supports provided by RV associations.

The first dimension along which RVers qualify as a formal organization is association. Best and Luckenbill (1980) contend that members of formal organizations do not engage in their culturally distinctive activities in isolation from one another. In contrast, full-time RVers actively seek out opportunities to communicate and share information with other RVers. An emphasis on the sharing of experiences and advice is a central value within the full-time RVer subculture (Counts & Counts, 1992, 1996; Thornburg, 1991; Jobes, 1984; Cowgill, 1941). Indeed, the fact that RV associations continue to maintain a wide variety of newsletters, email groups, and web forums can be interpreted as further evidence. These associations provide the means to socialize new members, define the RVer's identity, and promote new techniques and approaches to RVing.

The second dimension characterizing formal organizations is participation (Best & Luckenbill, 1980). Counts and Counts (1992; 1996) contend that, when travelling, RVers seldom operate alone; it is much more common for them to travel as couples, or occasionally in multi-RV 'caravans'. According to Counts and Counts, even when RVers do travel alone, supports are available through specific RV associations such as the 'Loners on Wheels Club'. Participation with other RVers truly blossoms in RV parks and at rallies, where RVers engage with one another and enact greeting rituals, help set up or tear down campsites, and attend potluck dinners and happy hours.

Full-time RVers appear to represent a formal organization because of where they fall along the third of Best and Luckenbill's (1980) dimensions – division of labour. Best and Luckenbill contended that more sophisticated subcultures require more specialized and skilled social roles to carry out their activities successfully. In their discussion Best and Luckenbill focus squarely on criminal behaviour, citing examples such as pick-pockets and con artists to illustrate how two or more people work together in complementary roles to achieve a goal unique to their sub-group. RVers divide their labour mostly through their various associations, all of which operate to provide a wide array of services to sustain their full-time travel activities. For example, many associations own and operate RV parks, with RVers encouraged to volunteer to host events, help clean the facilities or to help beautify the park (Counts & Counts, 1996). The CARE program operated by the Escapees Club is an excellent example of a highly specialized service coordinated by RVers, for RVers. The Good Sam Club makes several highly complex services available to their members, including extended RV warranties, roadside assistance, insurance, event organization, and emergency services (Good Sam Club, 2011).

The characteristic that separates formal organizations from the other four types of groups in Best and Luckenbill's (1980) framework is persistence over space and time. The difference between formal organizations and other groups is a measure of scope – formal organizations' activities have generally been operating for a long period of time and are likely to continue in a routine manner into the future, regardless of changes in structure or leadership. Similarly, the geographical area in which their activities take

place is more expansive than those of other types of groups, which tend to be localized to one community or region. Furthermore, Best and Luckenbill content that within formal organizations there is extensive, hierarchical division of labour, with departments responsible for specialized services. The examples in support of full-time RVers' status as a formal organization along these lines are abundant. In North America, people have been living and traveling in their mobile homes since the 1920s (Thornburg 1991). The value placed on independence within the RV subculture ensures that travel and camping activities would perpetuate themselves regardless of changes in leadership or structure. RVing takes place across North America, spanning a tremendously large geographical area. Finally, RV associations display the complexity and departmentalization described by Best and Luckenbill.

A final note on the conceptualization of deviance may be useful to provide clarification for its use in this study. With the case of full-time RVers, their unique subcultural activities are neither profitable (taking a strictly financial meaning) nor illegal. Given the non-criminal nature of full-time RVing as a leisurely and recreational activity, RVers could hardly be categorized as deviants in the example of Best and Luckenbill's (1980) original studies, which, in the tradition of early Chicago school subculture studies, focused on criminal populations. Yet full-time RVers do display living and travel behaviours that are certainly distinct from those of society at large, which could suggest that Best and Luckenbill's typology could be used to describe their social organization. Indeed, Best and Luckenbill argued that their framework of dimensions of organizational sophistication can be applied to non-traditional groupings.

Rituals and Rites of Passage

Shared activities, and the values and beliefs they represent, are used to create meaning for members of subcultures through rituals (for overviews, see van Gennep, 1960; Coleman & Eade, 2004). Rituals are sequences of actions performed or experienced by individuals or groups that hold special cultural significance, be they sacred (tied to religious practices) or profane (part of everyday social interactions), and communicate social meaning (Jary & Jary, 1991). At the subcultural level, rituals can play an important role in a wide variety of contexts – for example, demonstrating membership; strengthening group identity; creating, maintaining or destroying social relationships; or marking special occasions over the course of individual or communal life (Aversa Jr., 1990; Corrigan, 2006; Austin, 2009). In her summary of the history of ritual theories, Bell (1997) contended that many cultural theories of ritual serve as a channel by which cultural and social systems can coexist.

Rituals that mark a special event are often referred to as ‘rites’. Yet as Bell (1997) describes, to think of rites as simply a subset of specialized rituals is to overlook a fundamental difference in the scope of the cultural activity. Rites differ from rituals because they evade more formal cultural definitions, and may constitute activities that are “ritual-like, but not quite ritual” (p. 94). Rites that mark a transition from one social status or situation to another are frequently referred to as ‘rites of passage’. As Bell states,

Rites of passage are ceremonies that accompany and dramatize such major events as birth, coming-of-age initiations for boys and girls, marriage, and death. Sometimes called a ‘life-crisis’ or ‘life-cycle’

rites, they culturally mark a person's transition from one stage of social life to another. (1997; 94)

Rites of passage have been an important area of focus and a useful framework to describe and understand a wide variety of cultural activities.

Liminality

Arnold van Gennep (1960) built on his analysis of multiple studies of 'primitive' cultures to identify commonalities among the rituals that marked significant changes in the lives of members. According to van Gennep, all rites of passage could be further described using a threefold structure. The three types of passage rites exist along a continuum of what van Gennep termed liminality, based on *limen* - the Latin word for thresholds. *Pre-liminal* rites are those that mark a *separation*; for example, those associated with death or departure. *Liminal* rites are performed to mark the moment or period of crossing the threshold from one state to another, and are often referred to as *transition* rites. Finally, *post-liminal* rites (or *incorporation* rites) take place as the individual or group, changed by the crossing, returns to society with a new social identity.

Because of their focus on transition and their coincidence with life course events, van Gennep's concept of liminality may serve as a useful tool for contextualizing the activities of full-timer RVers. According to Best and Luckenbill, formal organizations often have rituals to denote rites of passage and a code of conduct to guide members (1980). From a broader viewpoint, the entire lifecycle of RVing full-time can be described using van Gennep's tripartite classification of rites. Events designed to mark retirement can operate as rites of separation, whereby the full-timer withdraws from the

world of employment and physical and financial restraint and detaches from the home. Indeed, Crawford (1973) noted the importance of such pre-liminal retirement rites for facilitating the breakage of emotional and social ties to the workplace.

It is unclear what, if any, formal rituals RVers perform to mark the transition from full-time work to full-time RVing – to date, few sociological researchers have explored this topic. Because most RVers have a history of part-time RVing and/or recreational camping prior to retirement the transition may be more gradual. This is evident in Jobes' (1984) developmental RVing typology, where RVers begin as vacationers, then experiment with the notion of full timing through seasonal travel, and eventually leave their conventional, stationary homes behind altogether. Most full timers already owned their RV, joined an RV association and had developed a wish list of places they would like to travel before transitioning to full-time travel. However, it would be imprudent to take some of the other steps towards full timing before first retiring. Maybe the best example would be selling the house and storing those possessions determined to be worth the hassle to keep (Hartwigsen & Null, 1990; Counts & Counts, 1996). This process requires a substantial investment of time and emotional effort, and although the divorce from possessions may not be a communal experience, for those participating it may represent a separation rite.

Following retirement is a prolonged period of liminality. Unlike other conceptualizations of the threshold, there is no simple doorway or border for RVers to cross. Their threshold is an open space between destinations; this space extends in all directions indefinitely. Yet it is through travelling the space that RVers eventually

emerge into a new social status, with the new norms, values and shared activities that strengthen the full timer subculture. The transition rites of RVers may include boondocking, sight seeing and indeed, traveling itself (Counts & Counts, 1996).

Incorporation rites are tremendously important for full time RVers because they facilitate the formation of the relationships and communities that allow RVers to establish their campsite as a temporary home. The arrival at a campground or park is marked with two types of incorporation rites – first RVers set up their RV for the stay, not only by connecting to the utilities such as water and electricity, but also by decorating their site with lights, lawn furniture, ornaments and awnings. This establishes the sanctity of the campsite and provides campers with the familiarity and comfort of a traditional home. Second, RVers will greet the other campers, exchanging food or other gifts as tokens of reciprocity. The latter category of incorporation rites may become elaborate ceremonies that recur throughout the duration of an RVer's stay; for example, the frequent potluck dinners and 'happy hours' organized by campgrounds (Counts & Counts, 1992). Recurring incorporation rites send a message to their participants: as long as you're here, you're part of this community. Counts and Counts describe the greeting ritual that accompanies entry into the Escapees home park in Livingstone, Texas called Rainbow's End:

Your first act at Rainbow's End is to pull the rope on the big ol' bell. As the tones ring out over the grounds, people with smiles as big as Texas appear and they're there for one reason: Hugs all around. Handshakes and introductions. Invites to happy hour, dinner, a trip into town, Offers to help find a spot, hook-up, settle in. Oh, boy, your tired body says gratefully, this feels like home! And that's the intent. (1996, p. 170)

The rites of separation associated with departures from the campsite don not seem to have received as much academic attention as have rites associated with RVer's arrival to the campsite. These separation rites may best be described in terms of the reversal of incorporation – water and sewer hook-ups must be detached, decorations must be removed, awnings taken down, and goodbyes said. However, there is no evidence currently that suggests a formal or communal ceremony that marks departure. The lack of a formal separation rite may be reflective of the value that RVers place on freedom of movement. As Hartwigsen and Null describe, "...if the campground or RV park they have settled in is not to their liking, a full timer can leave on a whim...Just batten down the hatches, buckle up and move on" (1990; p. 135). A ceremonial departure creates a social obligation to remain at the campsite, which hinders the ability to pack up and go at a moment's notice.

The cycle of separation, transition and incorporation continues for full timers for as long as they wish to travel between campgrounds. Additionally, this cycle persists in the context of a transitional state on a broader level, which began with retirement (separation) and ends when RVers must cease full time travel due to overwhelming health, social or financial concerns. RVers regard the end of full-time travel (and by extension, incorporation back into sedentary life) with dread (Counts & Counts, 1996).

Communitas

Through a series of ethnographic studies, Victor Turner (1967; 2002) explored the concept of transition rites in greater depth, observing that the liminal period in rites of passage are frequently longer and more involved than simply crossing a threshold.

Prolonged periods of liminality create ambiguity within societies because their agents (or 'neophytes' as Turner often calls them) belong neither to the state from which they are separating, nor to the state into which they are incorporating. In many cases, this ambiguity serves to 'pollute' society, since the neophyte is "neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere (in terms of any recognized cultural topography), and are at the very least 'betwixt and between'..." (Turner, 1967; p. 97). During a liminal phase, participants are culturally 'invisible'.

In addition to the absence of cultural visibility, Turner (1967) notes that participants in prolonged liminal states can be characterized the absence of possession – the neophyte owns no property and has no personal effects. Furthermore, the neophyte is also without immaterial possessions, such as social status, secular clothing, rank or kinship position. This lack of possessions was referred to as poverty by Turner.

Because of the 'betwixt and between' nature, the liminal phase is marked also by duality, commonly featuring symbols that can be used to simultaneously evoke aspects of both pre- and post-liminal stages. Turner's ethnographic work provides several useful examples, as he writes that,

...logically antithetical processes... may be represented by the same tokens, for example, by huts and tunnels that are at once tombs and wombs, by lunar symbolism (for the same moon waxes and wanes), by snake symbolism (for the snake appears to die, but only to shed its old skin and appear in a new one), by bear symbolism (for the bear "dies in autumn and is "reborn" in spring), by nakedness (which is at once the mark of a newborn infant and a corpse prepared for burial). (1967; p. 99)

As such, the liminal phase is a place where seemingly opposite states can exist in a united form, which is neither separated nor incorporated, yet at the same time, is both.

The ambiguity, invisibility, poverty and duality that characterize the liminal phase serve to create a specific set of social structures for its participants. Turner contends that because they abandon all previous status and possession, all neophytes are absolutely equal; even birth order hierarchies amongst siblings frequently break down in the liminal phase. This equality leads those in prolonged rites of transition to experience a profound emotional and social connection to one another, akin to brotherhood or sisterhood. This transcendence beyond even the most basic social structures was labelled *communitas*, and the liminal period is particularly conducive to its development. For example, in Clarke's (2006) examination of skinheads in the U.K., it was the liminality of their situation that led to the need for solidarity amongst one another; even in the face of aggression towards every other group. Turner (2002) cites Buber's (1961) example as an adequate description of his concept, writing that *communitas*

...is the being no longer side by side (and one might add, above and below) but with one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from I to Thou. (Buber, 1961; p. 51)

Turner's (1967; 2002) work with liminality and *communitas* can be appropriately applied to full time RVing. To begin, their constant traveling may represent a prolonged period spent in the transition phase. Full-timers' transiency leads non-RV'ers to view them with ambiguity, since they fit neither into the category of permanent resident nor that of alien, visitor or passerby. White and White (2004) commented on the relevance of liminality for describing the experiences of long-term travellers in the Australian Outback. In their qualitative tourism study, White and White highlighted how their

interviewees described their travel in the Outback as a neutral zone and a rite of passage bookmarked by the end of one phase of life (in many cases, the end of work) and a new beginning at the conclusion of the journey. Furthermore, in keeping with the assertion that liminality somehow is associated with pollution and corruption of the purer society at large, the transitory nature of trailer-dwellers has historically been associated with negative stereotyping and ostracism (Thornburg, 1991; Counts & Counts, 1996). Whether the traveling preceded their marginalization or visa versa, according to Turner, both liminality and marginality are essential components for the development of *communitas* amongst subgroup members.

RVers are hardly physically or socially invisible – of the four characteristics that Turner identifies, this may be the least relevant for full-timer RVers. The conspicuousness of the mobile home, the sustainability and size of the industry, and the ready association with retirement are testaments to that effect (Thornburg, 1991; Counts & Counts 1996). However, because RVers travel so frequently, and park their RVs in campgrounds that are often outside city limits or located in the wilderness, one could argue they at least far-removed from everyday life. Furthermore, little has been written about RVers' appearance – unlike other travel-based subcultures (e.g. motorcyclists; see Austin, 2009) there are few, if any, distinguishing features that would give away a full-timer walking down the street.

The best example of RVers' liminality may be their willingness to abandon personal possessions (Hartwigsen & Null, 1990). Here, a distinction may be necessary: as was discussed earlier, for RVers the process of ridding oneself of all burdensome

possessions may be part of a separation rite. However it is a state of possessionless-ness that characterizes RVers in full-time travel. The lack of possessions is not entirely physical either – the full-timer may also sacrifice any achieved social status within their former community for the sake of the freedom they experience while RVing. A balance of poverty and equality is even maintained and reinforced through potluck dinners; what you have you offer to the group; all attendees leave with empty dishes (Counts & Counts, 1992)

Finally, RVers exist in a world of duality regarding their dwellings. The RV simultaneously represents both a permanent home and a vehicle for escape. Even RV associations use symbols that represent this juxtaposition; Escapees Club stickers portray a house situated on wheels to denote their membership. RVers endeavour to set up each campsite in the fashion of a permanent home, however their RVs are parked in the context of a temporary arrangement on land that they do not own.

With all four of Turner's conditions met, the experience of *communitas* can be observed amongst RVers. Their experience is further evidenced by the value they place on reciprocity and the ease with which they form friendships. For full time RVers, constant travel and time spent 'betwixt and between' links them together and creates immediate and enduring social bonds. As Counts and Counts (1996) describe:

Because nomadic RVers share neither common territory nor common history, they have developed ways to create instant community. These include the use of space and symbols to identify and define themselves and create a sense of 'we-ness' that quickly brings newcomers into the circle. (1996, p. 168)

As such, *communitas* becomes a driving force for RVers, who seek to strengthen their own identities by sharing their experiences and camaraderie with one another.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical concepts within fields of sociology and anthropology and attempted to apply these concepts to the behaviour of full-time RVers as they have been described in previous research. The purpose of this exercise is to deepen the understanding of full-time RVing as a social phenomenon, not a recreational activity that some individuals do occasionally and in isolation from one another.

An overview of subculture theories has led me to identify three important aspects of a group that could be used to frame that group as a subculture: common problems that serve to bond group members to a cause, shared values and beliefs that facilitate communication and relationships between group members, and shared activities that reinforce the group's values and beliefs through action. From this perspective, full-time RVers appear to represent a subculture because they face common problems, have shared values and beliefs and engage in shared activities that are unique to their group.

Best and Luckenbill's (1980) typology of social organizations also proved a useful tool for placing the structure of full-time RVer subculture in a social context. As I outlined in this chapter, full-time RVers appear to organize their subculture in a structure that resembles what Best and Luckenbill termed a formal organization. Like their archetypal formal organization, full-time RVers a) associate with one another, b) participate in activities with one another, c) divide their labour, and d) extend their activities across a wide expanse of space and time.

Finally, I attempted to contextualize the activities of full-time RVers by describing their activities as a rite of passage, using the work of van Gennep and of Turner as a foundation. According to van Gennep's tripartite theory of ritual, I outlined how RVers reinforce their beliefs and values through separation rites, transition rites, and incorporation rites. Because RVers travel so frequently and so extensively, I expanded on RVers' transition rites using Turner's concept of *communitas* to describe how their prolonged travel could lead to strong sub-cultural ties despite limited physical contact with other RVers.

For the purposes of the present study, these theories will serve as tools to examine data collected from my interviews with full-time RVers. It is perhaps best to think of these theoretical frameworks as lenses through which this new information on RVers can be viewed and interpreted, showing where to look, not necessarily what to see. Because one of the purposes of this research is to examine the phenomenon of full-time RVing in a new context – as it occurs in a less accessible northern location during the summer months – these theoretical tools will be useful to determine how my research findings support, challenge, and relate to the ways previous theorists viewed RVing as a social phenomenon.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I outline the methods used for the current study to gather new data on the phenomenon of RVing in the context of travelling to a remote northern location such as Newfoundland and Labrador. In comparison to other locations in North America, Newfoundland and Labrador is fairly remote and as an island, Newfoundland is costly to access in an RV. I begin with a review of the methodologies used in a number of comparable studies previously described in detail in Chapter 1. Following the findings from this literature review, coupled with those of my own pilot study undertaken at Pippy Park in 2008 and the boundaries of the scope of the current study, I will outline how the most appropriate methodological approach for the current study involved using purposive sampling and a semi-structured interview.

As will be explained in this chapter, interview data were collected in order to formulate answers to three primary research questions (and three sub-questions). First, I sought to explore what drives RVers to abandon their traditional homes and travel full time. The second primary research question examined the organizational structure of the full-time RVer subculture, featuring three sub-questions; namely, whether RVers consider such a subculture to exist, what is required for membership in the subculture, and how the subculture sustains itself in the face of geographical and social barriers. The third primary research question focuses on the travel patterns of full-time RVers that differentiate them from other groups of RVers.

The participants for this study were approached on the basis of their resemblance to the characteristics displayed by full-time RVers as described in previous research,

particularly that of Counts and Counts (1992; 1996). I conducted total interviews with 11 RVers using a semi-structured interview schedule that I developed for the purposes of this study. Finally, I describe in detail how each question on the interview schedule relates back to a specific primary research question, thereby helping to structure the analysis of the recorded interviews.

Sampling and Selection Considerations

Collecting data from RVers presents several unique challenges. Sampling has always been a problem for researchers as most RVers do not have a fixed home address or telephone number by which researchers can readily locate or contact them. Furthermore, there is no comprehensive database in the United States or Canada that identifies the current number of RVing seniors, nor variations in RV lifestyles and travels, making it difficult to identify, describe and track their movements and obtain a random sample from the population (McHugh & Mings, 1991). Cowgill identified this problem as far back as 1941, writing that figures from manufacturers, organization membership, magazines subscriptions, or numbers of individuals in a given area or campground would not provide a reliable sample that presents an accurate picture of the entire population. Despite these challenges, researchers have reported that RVers themselves are very friendly to well-meaning strangers, and have proven willing to engage with researchers (Counts & Counts, 1996).

Several studies have sampled from RV parks or association rallies. Adopting this approach has several advantages, the most attractive of which is convenience because a large number of RVers are assembled in one place. RV parks, campgrounds and rallies

are important parts of the RV lifestyle and they are the places and events where RVers congregate together frequently. Hoyt (1953) researched retirees in a trailer campground in Florida. Similarly, McHugh has collected a significant amount of data through survey based and focus group methods from RVers in parks and campgrounds in and around Phoenix, Arizona (see McHugh et al 1995; McHugh & Mings; 1996; McHugh 2000). In the 1991 study, *On the Road Again: Seasonal Migration to a Sunbelt Metropolis*, McHugh and Mings went to Phoenix area RV parks and spoke to managers, activity directors, and residents over two winter camping season in 1988 and 1989 (McHugh & Mings, 1991). McHugh and Mings administered questionnaires in January and February 1988 to nine randomly selected RV parks in the East Mesa-Apache Junction section of the Phoenix Metropolitan area.

The work of McHugh and Mings (1991) was primarily concerned with two issues: migratory patterns of elderly snowbirds into the Arizona Sunbelt and snowbird demographic information including housing, economic impact, age, income, community of origin, and level of commitment to staying in Arizona year-round. These became central to McHugh's approach to the study of snowbird migrants. Hartwigsen and Null (1990) also conducted research at RV resorts in Arizona and southern California to learn more about full timers' current lifestyle, activities, and anticipated future housing. They collected 100 questionnaires, administered to full timers on Saturday morning meetings from February through April 1987, at RV parks belonging to an unidentified camping organization. It is interesting to note that Hartwigsen and Null limited the length of the questionnaire to two pages to make participation in the study more attractive to full

timers whose busy schedules necessitated something that would not disrupt their day and could be answered in a few minutes.

Jobes (1984) administered questionnaires at the 1977 rally for the Wally Byam Caravan Club International (WBCCI) for owners of Airstream trailers, collecting a total of 517 completed questionnaires. Although a sample size of 517 may be adequate for statistical power, the author does not report a response rate, thus limiting the extent to which the results can be generalized to the overall RVer population. Conducting research at a rally for Airstream trailer owners could also be problematic as the WBCCI rally would have been for Airstream owners only. The sampling bias inherent in this approach is important because of the significance that RVers attach to RV brand. As such, Jobes' sample at the WBCCI rally is not entirely representative of RVers living and travelling in other brands of motorhomes or travel trailers. Yet despite this sampling bias, Jobes' approach is an example of a successful method to isolate and gather information from a subset of the RVer population.

Jobes (1984) also conducted unstructured interviews with RVers as a seasonal traveller over several camping seasons from the late 1960's to the early 1980's. These participants were chosen based on the convenience of sharing the same campground. Jobes' study is unique in that its setting was in the Rocky Mountains and Pacific Coast areas as opposed to other studies on RVers completed primarily in Sunbelt locations. However, Jobes does not go into detail about the activities or travels of RVers in northern locations and does not focus on location in his examination of his results. Nevertheless, as Jobes places RVers in a northern location, his research provides a more complete

geographic picture of RVing that demonstrates that RVing encompasses both north and south travel activities.

Administering questionnaires to full-timers in RV parks is a useful method to meet RVers and learn about their lifestyle. However, as RVer populations are more difficult to access than stationary populations because they generally do not have permanent addresses or telephones, it is problematic to isolate a representative sample large enough to collect valid empirical data. To overcome these limitations researchers employed ethnographic methods to capture the scope of the mobile lifestyle. Counts and Counts (1992; 1996) conducted an extensive ethnography of RVing seniors in North America during the 1990s. Using an approach similar to that of Jobes (1984), Counts and Counts collected data using participant observation in combination with questionnaires. Counts and Counts (1996) sent questionnaires to individuals who responded to open letters the researchers wrote in *Trailer Life* and *Motor Home* magazines. They also conducted extensive interviews with 105 full-timer RVers, collected 369 questionnaires, and archival reviews of letters and articles appearing in the *Escapees Newsletter* published between 1984 and 1996. Because Counts and Counts approached full-timer RVers throughout their field studies, this sample was not random but based on a convenience sample of available RVers encountered by them over the course of their ethnographic study.

The Current Study

The goal of this research is to understand the organization of the RV subculture in the context of understudied northern travels. I proposed to do this by answering three

primary research questions, which themselves complement the earlier works that have been completed on RVers by closing the geographic and seasonal gaps currently present in the research. This study can provide insight into the lives and experiences of RVers and provide a spring board for other researchers interested in pursuing further research.

1. What drives the decision to RV fulltime?

The current study set out to explore the circumstances that lead RVers to decide to travel full-time in their RVs. Collecting information about this, what lies behind this decision, is helpful for two reasons. First, this information will facilitate a comparison of the circumstances of my participants to the circumstances of participants in previous studies of RVers. For example, Counts and Counts (1996) worked to determine who exactly RVers are and Jobes (1984) developed a typology to determine the differences between RVers who travel full-time and those who are just vacation travelling. Second, it will highlight the issues pertinent to the decision to travel to Newfoundland. Any comparisons or descriptions will be constructed with acknowledgement to the limited generalizability to full-time RVers as a whole.

2. What is the organizational structure of the full-time RVer subculture?

Because of the ambiguity associated with theories of subculture discussed, my approach to formulating a response to my second research question involves three sub-questions that allow a more targeted and specific methodology.

2 a) Does a full-time RVer community or subculture exist?

Although the terminology and definitions of subculture previously used in other subculture studies have varied greatly, the importance of determining whether or not full-

time RVers self-identify as members of a full-time RVer subculture or community is central for my analysis.

2 b) What constitutes membership in the full-time RVer community?

Should participants confirm that a unique full-time RVer community exists the next step will involve an exploration of the parameters of membership in that community. If full-time RVers constitute a subculture it is likely that inclusion in the subculture involves much more than simply purchasing a recreational vehicle, which anyone with means may do. Given this, one of my research sub-questions became examining how RVers identify other recreational vehicle users as 'true' RVers and not just vacation travelers or snowbirds, or people engaging in other similar non-full-timing activities. In the current study, I was looking to confirm and strengthen the observations of other researchers who suggested that living arrangements, organizational membership, and brand of recreational vehicle were significant (Jobes, 1984; Counts & Counts, 1992, 1996; Hartwigsen & Null, 1990).

2 c) How does the full-time RVer community sustain itself?

The RVer community at large faces many unique challenges because of transitory activities of its members. In a context that involves little or no face-to-face contact and sporadic geographic proximity a stable and resilient subculture of full-time RVers would require a high degree of organization and complexity.

3. What are the particular travel patterns of the full-time RV community?

Another goal of my research was to explore the unique travel practices to RVers and how those travels differentiate them from other groups like snowbirds. I also wanted

to explore the possibility that, for full-time RVers, the act of continual travel may serve to bring them together through a shared identity. Furthermore this study will cast light on the summer travel activities of full-time RVers, a topic on which researchers to this point have remained strangely silent. McHugh et. al. (1995) reported that winter migrants in arrive as early as November and begin their exodus from the Sunbelt as early as March but travels during the rest of the year remains largely unaccounted for. This begs the question: if RVers are concentrated in the south during the winter, where do they go during the summer?

Newfoundland and Labrador is an ideal setting to examine the motivations behind this phenomenon because travelling to the island presents unique challenges for RVers. The summer season is fairly short, the infrastructure for RVers is not as extensive as it is in the United States or other parts of Canada and visiting the island requires a 6 to 14 hour ferry trip, incurring extra costs. Yet these difficulties do not deter full-time RVers from travelling to Newfoundland and Labrador in summer; indeed the remoteness of the province, from the perspective of RVers from other more central locations of the United States and Canada, may attract a subset of full-time RVers that are still more dedicated to their lifestyle and culture. Thus, by conducting this study among RVers who have travelled to Newfoundland and Labrador during the summer, I hoped to demonstrate that for full-time RVers the travel pattern is not a mere linear north-south migration but is actually cyclical in nature encompassing all directions and seasons, influenced by relationships among RVers and the appeal of the journey itself.

The Interview Approach

Although previous RVing researchers have used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, for several reasons I determined that a qualitative approach would be most appropriate for the context of the current study. For example, the most detailed and rich discussions of the RVing phenomenon thus far have been based on interviews conducted in a nested and immersed context. Counts and Counts (1996) conducted their interviews at numerous campgrounds while traveling in an RV, and Jobes (1984) interviewed RVers at campgrounds and at an RV rally. As other researchers have noted, the transient nature of individuals who RV full-time makes structured sampling techniques and representative samples prohibitive; this is especially true in the setting of the current study. Full time RVers change location frequently, and do not normally maintain a published telephone number or civic address. Obtaining a valid and reliable set of quantitative data would necessarily involve distributing questionnaires to a large number of RVers across multiple sites in order to overcome the sampling issues discussed in my review of previous research (Jobes, 1984; MgHugh & Mings, 1991), a task that was beyond the scope and purpose of this study. The fact that there were a low number of full-time RVers available to take part in this study with a limited amount of time to collect information about their experiences suggested that a qualitative approach would optimize the amount and quality of data that I could collect.

There are a number of drawbacks to the current study's qualitative approach. First, because of the low sample size and the single location used for sampling, the overall generalizability of the study may be somewhat limited. Additionally, the use of a

single method does not provide the holistic view of any research topic that would be provided by a comprehensive, mixed method approach. Qualitative data can also be difficult to analyze and interpret, and a different researcher with a different perspective may interpret qualitative data differently. Yet despite these shortcomings, I believe that the context of the current study outlined above would accentuate the strengths of a qualitative approach, while the use of a quantitative approach would only serve to accentuate its own weaknesses.

Given what King (2004) writes about the types of qualitative interviews, it would appear that the interview approach used in the current study may best fit the description of social constructivism. As King describes, the semi-structured nature of these interviews, allowing for probes and for active discourse, is a common feature of the constructivist approach. Take for example the question on whether or not a full-time RV subculture exists; in conducting these interviews, I took interviewees' responses not simply as a reflection of the natural existence (or non-existence) of such a subculture, but rather I assumed that in formatting their responses, interviewees are in fact creating the subculture as they described it. But perhaps the most compelling feature of my interview approach that would identify it as constructivist is its contrast to that of a more phenomenological interview method; I made no conscious attempt to lay aside any presuppositions I held about full-time RVers, as would be done in a phenomenological interview.

Participants

RV parks are one of the few places where RVers can be found stationary for at least a few days. Through a field investigation informed by research by Counts and Counts (1992, 1996), I determined that Pippy Park Campground in St. John's, Newfoundland was a suitable place to locate participant for this thesis².

The current investigation uses purposive sampling to access participants. According to Berg (2001), when developing a purposive sample, researchers use their special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent this population. In some instances, purposive samples are selected after field investigations on some group, in order to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study.

Purposive sampling has been demonstrated to be an appropriate, effective and efficient method for recruiting RVers for research similar to the current study. Previous studies examining the RV phenomenon suggest that purposive sampling represents a best practice in this branch of research. For example, Counts and Counts (1996) employed a similar method as one component of their research. Whenever they arrived in an RVer park or campground they would just start knocking on RV doors and asking the occupants if they would like to participate in their study. Additionally, Jobes (1984) utilized this kind of approach in his research. Jobes stated that the sample he obtained

² Pippy Park Campground is situated inside the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial capital, St. John's. It is operated by the C.A. Pippy Park Commission which is a provincial Crown Corporation. Pippy Park is primarily an RV campground with over 200 serviced sites for RVs. The campground's urban location makes it very popular with both locals and tourists.

though participant observation was not random but chosen based on proximity to a particular campground and his perceived suitability of the people he found there.

One alternative to purposive sampling would be to contact a specific RV organization for a list of members. However, using this channel would introduce a different form of sampling bias whereby only full-timers who actively seek out membership in that particular organization would be included in the sample and other RVers would be missed. The purposive sampling in this study captures RVers who both belong and do not belong to such organizations without sacrificing the attributes which define the target population.

Finally, the use of other, more expansive sampling methods was beyond the scope of my resources for this project and inappropriate given the chosen methodology. Had this study utilized a wide-spread telephone or survey methodology, a different sampling approach would have been appropriate. However, because a semi-structured interview was used to ask RVers about their experiences a higher sample size or random sample was not necessary. The purposive sampling used in this study was successful in obtaining a demographically and geographically diverse sample of interviewees, with respondents hailing from a variety of origins and backgrounds.

Permission to interview RVers staying in the campground was obtained from Pippy Park's management. This approach is in line with that of prior researchers (Counts & Counts, 1992; 1996; Hartwigsen & Null, 1990; McHugh & Mings 1995; Hoyt, 1954). I developed a semi-structured interview schedule because it would allow me to gather in-depth information from participants in a short period of time (Appendix A). Additionally,

using this qualitative approach to gather such rich data would accommodate the short season (from May to August) during which full-time RVers were available at this location to participate in the study. These contextual factors often play a role in setting limits on the sample size of interview studies such as these (Thomson, 2011). Thomson also noted that where less sensitive data is being collected from a target population that is highly knowledgeable and imbedded in the phenomenon of study fewer interviews may be necessary to obtain enough reliable and valid data to achieve research goals. Therefore, I determined that a total of between 10 and 15 participants would be a realistic goal given the pool of full-time RVers available from which to sample and the nature of the data I sought to collect.

As an employee of Pippy Park Campground for five consecutive summers, I was in a unique position to develop the relationships and expertise necessary appropriate implementation of purposive sampling. Additionally, in the summer of 2007, I conducted a pilot field investigation to verify that RVers as described by Counts and Counts (1996) did stay in Pippy Park. This included searching for RV association stickers, brands and licence plates on RVs in the campground. Using those symbols as selection criteria, for the current study I approached potential interviewees camping in Pippy Park based on the presence of association stickers, out-of-province license plates, and common RV brands. To protect people's privacy no identifying information was recorded.

It can difficult to locate RVers who because over their transient lifestyle, rarely occupy the same physical space for an extended period of time. These same factors also

limit the amount of time available to interview them. Furthermore, it is difficult to contact RVers through traditional channels. Not all full-time RVers maintain a permanent mailing address, and those who do check their mail infrequently and inconsistently. Accessibility is further hindered by full-time RVers' patterns of telephone use because landline telephones are not an option for them. Instead, RVers prefer cell phones, with unlisted numbers and an unreliable coverage network. As such, I determined that purposive sampling was the most appropriate approach for this study because it presents an effective way to quickly find and recruit participants.

All participants interviewed in this study were sampled from RVers camping in Pippy Park between June and September of 2008. I completed eight interviews with a total of 11 RVers. Three of the RVers chose to be interviewed individually while their spouses declined to be interviewed. One married couple chose to be interviewed individually, resulting in two separate interviews. The remaining three interviews were done with both partners at the same time.

With interview data, theoretical saturation is met when conducting further interviews would not provide researchers with any new information that was not already available with enough frequency and clarity to draw reliable conclusions about emergent categories and themes (Thomson, 2011). Thomson suggests that theoretical saturation can be achieved with reasonable confidence using a sample of 30 interviewees. However, given the availability of full-time RVers in this study's setting, at the time of the current study it was not as important to prioritize theoretical saturation when approaching potential interviewees. In addition, Thomson's recommendation is made in

the context of a grounded theory approach, and the current interview technique could best be described as constructivist, using the theoretical and behavioural findings of previous researchers to structure the interview approach. Although this sample size may be insufficient to achieve theoretical saturation for emergent themes, it was more important that I select participants carefully from an already small target population than try and conduct the number of interviews necessary for saturation.

Of the 11 interviewees, two were from Ontario and the remaining nine were from the United States. Interviewees included five men and six women, all of whom were between 50 and 80 years of age. All interviews were conducted in Pippy Park, with one exception: one couple was later interviewed at their summer home in Twillingate, Newfoundland and Labrador. Participants were very receptive and willingly shared their experiences. The semi-structured interview schedule allowed for many spontaneous questions that revealed much interesting and relevant information that enhanced the interview process. The interviews, which ranged from approximately thirty minutes to an hour in duration, were recorded using a digital recorder then transferred to a computer for transcription and analysis.

Materials

All study materials used in approaching and interviewing participants were reviewed and approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University. To engage with participants for this study, I approached people staying in Pippy Park, explained the purposes of my study and asked if they would be interested in participating. I looked for specific characteristics in

individuals before I approached them, particularly age, out of province licence plates, type and brand of RV, and RV association membership stickers. These identifying characteristics formed the criteria by which I chose potential participants, and were consistent with those characteristics described by previous researchers (Counts & Counts, 1992, 1996; McHugh, 2000; McHugh & Mings, 1991, 1996; Jobes, 1984; Hartwigsen & Null, 1990; Thornburg, 1991). My participants were very friendly and interested in participating in my research.

Participation in this study was confidential and voluntary. Prior to obtaining consent, each participant was presented with an information letter explaining who I was, the purpose of my research, and the details of the interview. Because of the size of the interview space (inside the RV), time constraints, and the relationships between married participants, in some cases these participants were interviewed at the same time. The information letter I provided also explained that participants' identities would be kept confidential and that for analysis and reporting processes, their names would be changed to ensure anonymity. Accordingly, the names appearing in the results and discussion sections are not the participants' actual names. Before the interview began, I obtained consent from each participant by way of their signature on a consent form. Every person I approached agreed to participate, except for one; there was one married couple in which one partner declined to participate.

The Interview Schedule

The interview schedule, which was developed specifically for use with this study (see Appendix A), facilitated conversations directed toward the aspects of the RV

lifestyle relevant for this project. On the interview schedule, questions and topics were arranged and expressed in words and terms familiar to the interviewees, based on a review of the relevant literature. This allowed the interviewer to approach the world from participant's point of view, as per the recommendation of Berg (2007). A further advantage to this approach became evident when confronted with the limited amount of time participants spent at Pippy Park. I was able to present my participants with a set of interview questions along with assurances that the interviews would not take up too much of their time.

The questions were intended to guide the conversation and provide information pertinent to this thesis. In addition to pre-texted scheduled items, interviewers engaged participants in unscheduled probes to elaborate on points that arose during the interview. The flexibility afforded by utilizing a semi-structured interview schedule fostered a conversational situation that often segued into participants discussing aspects of the RV lifestyle not specified in the interview schedule. The comfortable atmosphere and rapport that I developed with my participants provided me greater access to the necessary information and allowed me to deviate from the scheduled questions, thus offering additional or previously unknown information on topics that were of particular personal interest.

The questions contained in the interview schedule were designed to correspond directly to the broader research questions previously discussed.

1. What drives the decision to RV fulltime? A total of three questions on the interview schedule directly relate back to my first research question and help to define the

motivation behind becoming RVers. These questions were designed to establish information regarding participants' backgrounds, how they became RVers and how long they plan to RV full-time. Additionally, because of the nature of the subject matter, these questions allow me to learn more about my participants in order to build rapport. For example, question one asked, "Please tell me a about your background. Where would you consider yourself from?"

2. *What is the organizational structure of the full-time RVer subculture?* Jobes (1984) and Counts and Counts (1992, 1996) reported extensively on the social connections and creation of community between RVers and this line of questioning was designed to reveal if RVers visiting Newfoundland and Labrador are members of, or feel connected to, the wider North American RV community. In addition to learning more about the existence of the RV community in North America, I was interested in learning more about the boundaries of the RV community and what criteria, if any, denoted a full-time RVer as opposed to other types of RVers. A total of eight questions appear to the interview schedule that directly address the parameters of full-time RVers subculture. Accordingly, these questions can be categorized corresponding to my three research subquestions dealing with subculture.

2 a) *Does a full-time RVer community or subculture exist?* Two interview questions directly asked participants to confirm the existence of a full-time RVers subculture. For example, "Would you consider there to be an "RV community" in North America today? Do you consider yourself a part of it?"

2 b) What constitutes membership in the full-time RVer community? Four interview questions opened discussion about the characteristics of belonging in the full-time RVer subculture. RV associations have been previously shown to feature prominently in the RVer lifestyle (Counts & Counts, 1996; Jobes, 1984; Hartwigsen & Null, 1990). Accordingly, I asked my participants to comment on membership in RV associations. Keeping in mind the goal of using language commonly understood amongst my participants, I refer to RV associations as *organizations* throughout the interviews. For example I asked my participants: “Are you a member of any RV organizations? Could you please elaborate?” The interview schedule also included questions on the importance of membership stickers and brands of RV.

2 c) How does the full-time RVer community sustain itself? One question was designed to explore how the RVer community sustains itself despite members being spread across North America. Particularly, I wanted to determine the special importance of telecommunications in maintaining these roles. For example I asked: “How is the RV community connected? How do members stay in touch?”

3. What are the particular travel patterns of the full-time RV community? A total of four questions that deal directly with full-time RVers travel patterns appear on the interview schedule. These four questions approach the issue from different perspectives. The first of these four questions asks participants to outline the difference between full-time RVers and snowbirds directly. A second question asked participants to comment if they considered themselves tourists and if being a tourist was compatible with being an RVer. Exploring the issue of tourism will illuminate more about what RVers do during

the summer and will offer a perspective previous studies may have overlooked. The third and fourth questions deal specifically with how RVer communities influence travel decisions. For example, I asked participants “Have you met other RVers who visited Newfoundland? Did their visit influence your decision to travel here as well?” This question in particular addresses the phenomenon of full-time RVing in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador, which is a focal point of the current study.

Analyses

Completed interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and were subsequently transferred onto a computer for transcription using Express Scribe software. Once the interviews were transcribed, I applied the research questions described earlier as a constructivist framework for interpreting participants’ responses. In reading and re-reading the transcribed interviews, I attempted to formulate answers to each of the research questions that were supported by direct evidence from the interviewees’ responses. Although the interview schedule was designed so that specific interview questions would correspond to the research questions, I considered any information from the entire interview that was related to the research question in compiling these answers. The themes that emerged from this small number of interviews revealed a high level of consistency in my participants’ responses. Analysis began after all interviews were completed.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I outlined the methods that I used to collect data by conducting semi-structured interviews with RVers staying in Pippy Park Campground in St. John’s,

Newfoundland. Using a framework of purposive sampling, I selected participants based on their resemblance to characteristics described in previous research. Specifically, I searched for RVers in Pippy Park with out-of-province or country licence plates, type of RV, and membership organization stickers or plates. I was successful in recruiting a total of 11 interviewees for this study.

I developed a semi-structured interview schedule specifically for the purposes of this study. The schedule included twelve interview questions centered around three main research questions. Three questions were designed to capture experiences about what drives the decision to leave the traditional home and travel full-time. Seven interview questions were designed to gather perspectives about the social organization of the full-time RVer subculture, including how my participants self-identified with the subculture, what they felt constituted membership parameters for the subculture and how the subculture sustained itself. Finally, four questions were designed to explore in detail the travel patterns of full-time RVers and how they may differ from those of other RV users. The interviews, once completed, were transcribed and all responses were analyzed using these research questions as a constructivist framework.

In the following chapter, I present the general themes that arose during the interviews in response to each of the interview questions, providing quotes from the responses to illustrate how my participants described their experiences as full-time RVers.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter describes the key themes that emerged through the interview process using the research questions identified in the previous chapter as a framework for contextualizing the results. As was presented in Chapter 3, this study sought answers to three main research questions, with three sub-questions:

- 1. What drives the decision to RV fulltime?*
- 2. What is the organizational structure of the full-time RVer subculture?*
 - 2 a) Does a full-time RVer community or subculture exist?*
 - 2 b) What constitutes membership in the full-time RVer community?*
 - 2 c) How does the full-time RVer community sustain itself?*
- 3. What are the particular travel patterns of the full-time RV community?*

In general, after approaching respondents as discussed earlier, I engaged in discussion about the RV lifestyle with my participants. The setting of most of my interviews was at each participant's RV campsite. If the weather was nice we would conduct interviews outside, sitting the picnic table at their campsite; if it was raining my participants would invite me inside their RV. They were always hospitable, quick to offer coffee or soft drinks whether we conducted interviews inside or outside. Two interviews were conducted in the community of Twillingate, NL. The interview schedule provided a guide and all of my questions were addressed in some way during the interviews. Furthermore, the semi-structured schedule facilitated discussion on the RV lifestyle beyond the initial questions and yielded information I would not have obtained otherwise.

Drivers of the decision to become full-time RVers

Each interview started with a discussion of participants' backgrounds, not only to learn where they came from but to also obtain more information about how and when they started RVing. I wanted to learn more about the processes behind the decision to begin RVing, especially the point in their lives when my participants began to consider themselves 'RVers.' Overall, three general themes emerged in participants responses. First, many indicated that their families moved around when they were children or they themselves moved around considerably as adults. Indeed, several participants disclosed that camping or RVing was an activity that they engaged in throughout their childhoods and as adults before becoming serious or full-time RVers. This is evident in my participant's responses to questions one and two of the interview schedule:

Ellen: And when did you starting RVing and how old were you?

Geoff: We've had this (RV) four years this summer and we were 61 and we went from camping over a period of 20 years to this, so for four years.

Gilbert: Well, I was born outside Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1953 and I lived in that area until my family moved to Los Angeles in 1969, at that point we lived in Los Angeles for quite a number of years and I've done many things in my life, all different types of owning of businesses, entrepreneurial, and I bought my first RV in 1969, when I was 16 years old

Ellen: When you were that young?

Gilbert: Yeah, it was a called a Coleman pop-up trailer and I paid \$250 for it, it was a 1962 model and I've always had some type of RV ever since then.

Ellen: What is it about RVing that draws you to it?

Gilbert: How I got involved? Well, I was in cub and boy scouts so, I enjoyed camping and everything else, the whole outdoor lifestyle and

that's what started me into it and then when I got old enough and could afford to have something better than a tent that's what I stepped into.

Sofia: Well, I'm an American and I was born in Nebraska but I grew up and was raised and did all my work career in California and then we travel to Arizona a lot and we have a little place in Idaho, so I'm kind of from all over, we have a residence, our domicile is in South Dakota 'cause that's where we get our mail, and that's where we register our vehicle. So, I'm from the USA.

Ellen: When did you become an RVer?

Sofia: Hmm..., I started out as a kid with my parents doing lots and lots of camping, and then they, my dad sold trucks and then we had motorhomes. Then early in my marriage, I had a back pack tent and we back-packed, then we bought a Volkswagen camper and when I could make my own coffee, that was better than a tent! Then we had a van and I got a port-a-potty, we decided to rent a motorhome over one weekend a Thanksgiving weekend, and once I had my own bathroom I was never going back. So we have had class 'A' motorhomes ever since then. I became an RVer probably at age ten and I'm 60 so... 50 years.

The second theme that emerged was the role that retirement played in the transition to full-time RVing. Although my participants indicated that they engaged in RVing and camping activities throughout their lives, generally none of my participants began living or travelling in RVs full-time until after retirement.

Ellen: When or how did you start full-timing?

Sofia: At the end of my career, knowing that I didn't want to work forever, and my husband retired five years before I did, we bought a motorhome and we just went out on weekends and we knew we had this big house and we didn't use the living room except for the Christmas tree for one week at Christmas and we didn't need that, so we sold the big house and moved into a little rental that we owned and fixed up and we lived there for the five years until I could retire and then we started full-timing.

Ellen: Ok, and when did you become an RVer and how old were you when you started RVing?

Herb: Um, actually I had my first RV when I was 26 and had a camper and pickup for about 8 years and the price of gas got so high

that we sold it and no longer had one and didn't get another RV until I remarried and retired in '03.

Ellen: Are you both retired now?

Geoff: Yes.

Ruby: I never worked.

Ellen: And when or how did you decide to start full-timing?

Gilbert: Well, it's an interesting story. In all my middle years, I had always seen lots of people coming into campgrounds that are a little older, retired and so on, they saved up all their lives to buy this beautiful RV and then unfortunately one of them gets sick or the rig is too big for them to handle and it's already too late in their lives to try and go back and do something to fulfil their dreams and I always said, if I ever got the opportunity and things worked out properly then I would love to go live in my RV and go and do that for as long as I can. Then Terri and I got married almost 14 years ago now, she'd never RVed at all. We got a small RV and she enjoyed it and as things progressed, we owned our own business at the time, one thing led to another, and it was the right time, we sold off the close parts of our businesses and so on and so forth, and in 2000 it was the right time for us to say "ok, we're going full-timing!" and that's what we did.

Gilbert offers an interesting explanation behind his and his wife's decision to retire relatively early to RV. This is evident when he describes how when he encountered older RVers in campground, many appeared too sick to fully enjoy an RV retirement. This led to Gilbert's vow to seize the opportunity to fulfil his and his wife's dreams before they became too old and sick to enjoy it. Gilbert was not the only participant to discuss RVing as a means to live life to the fullest; Herb also had something to say on the subject.

Ellen: When or how did you decide to start full-timing?

Herb: It happened actually because of the movie "The Hours" with Nicole Kidman. We went to see the movie 3 times in a week and we both got the message from it: to live your life now and not to put things off. I had been eligible for early retirement and we thought we better just go play while we still have our health, and our energy. And I had never seen much of the country outside of the Northwest, and

Northern California, so for me it was fun getting to see the rest of the country.

One participant offered a unique perspective on the role of retirement in the transition to full-time RVing because she was approaching the age of retirement but had not yet actually retired. At the time of the interview, she indicated that she and her husband RV for several months during the year and that they intended to full-time after retirement:

Eleanor: Our dream is, when I retire, Tim is old enough to retire, when I retire in another four years, and then I'll still continue to work part time, but because I'm a nurse I can work anywhere. Now we did take one year actually two years off full-time work, and I worked as a travel nurse and lived in our RV, and that gave us the opportunity to go to Arizona, Texas, and I worked out there and we saw the country out there as we worked. So we were kind of full timers at that time. My dream is to retire, go up the West coast, in through British Columbia up to Alaska.

A third theme that emerged is health and aging. Many of my participants indicated that they began RVing because they wanted to have the experiences afforded by RVing during retirement and they wanted to retire early when still relatively young and healthy. Health and aging are serious considerations for RVers as RVing involves varying amounts of physical work, such as parking, setting up camp, hooking up the RV to campground services and long hours of driving. As well, RVers run the risk of facing health emergencies in unfamiliar places where health services are potentially unknown. Several participants identified poor health as a major factor that would prevent them from continuing their current lifestyle.

Ellen: And how long do you plan to keep RVing?

Ruby: as long as we can do it, as long as we're healthy enough to do it. We like to see what's around the corner.

Sofia: We plan to travel in our RV as long as our health holds out, we have found that that stops more people than any other thing. If you have significant health problems and you're tied to medical facilities or chemo or surgery or something like that, then those folks lay down more roots, right now we're good so we don't have any worries, it's indefinite.

Gilbert: the first thing is our health. If something happens to us and we can't do it any longer and we have to settle down that would be number one. Number two is our family's health.

One participant noted that it was not just her own healthy aging she was concerned with. For this participant RVing enabled her to look after her mother and grandchildren.

Eleanor: For us, because we're still working, we travel Florida and come up the eastern sea board or in land a little bit and into... some summers we'll go to Ontario. But our main destination is Newfoundland. We still have family here, my mom is still here, she's getting elderly. So Newfoundland is our destination.

Ellen: Okay.

Eleanor: But now, I would like to go travel out west, because I have grandchildren out there. But right now my mom takes priority. And after that it will be my grandchildren.

Organizational structure of the RV subculture

The current study set out to examine how the RV subculture was organized by first confirming the existence of the subculture and then outlining its membership criteria and exploring how the members sustain subculture. RVs enable occupants to live and travel simultaneously in the same vehicle and thereby remove the pressure to secure accommodations when traveling and provide occupants with the unique opportunity to travel for as long as they wish, wherever they desire. Counts and Counts (1996) have written that RVers have formed social networks and communities, constituting a

subculture throughout North America in order to overcome the physical barriers their transiency creates. Results pertaining to this research question are presented here in three sub-sections.

Existence of a full-time RVer subculture or community

I asked my participants to describe their perspectives on the RV community.

When I asked, many of my participants agreed that yes, there is a North America wide community of RVers:

Ellen: Would you consider there to be an RV community in North America today?

Eleanor: Oh, absolutely. Very large RV community. And it has become more diversified because what you're seeing now is younger people.

Ellen: Oh, really?

Eleanor: With children. And what they're doing is self-educating. They're doing self-schooling or home schooling as they call it. And within the home schooling program that they're doing, they're also doing the travelling in the RV.

Ellen: Do you consider yourself a part of the RV community?

Eleanor: Oh, absolutely.

Herb: Yes, there is a large RV community with lots of subsets. What we found with retiring younger was that we were younger than most of the RVers out there by about 10 or 12 years, but we did find a lot of younger RVers, the Escapees Club especially as 15 or 20 subsets of what they call special interest groups and so the one we joined up with was the Boomers which is younger people who like to travel and not have such a structured organization.

Sofia: Yes! The RV community is anytime that we pull in next to another RVer and we wave. Definitely we have that in common right away and we have more friends now in the RV community than we ever had living in our stick house, 'cause in our house we would go out and get the newspaper and wave at the neighbour and now we generate much more conversation with people.

However, not all my participants agreed that the term 'community' was the best way to describe the social connections between RVers:

Ellen: Ok, let's move on. Would you consider there to be an RV community in North America today and do you consider yourself a part of it?

Gilbert: Well, I don't know if we're a community because I think of a community as a city, or a state or a province, or something like that, I would think it more as like a culture or a... it's terrible to say a group because we're more than that. There's approximately ten million on the road in the United States that goes for everything from a five foot trailer that pops-up into a tent through a 45-foot Prevo (a brand of RV) which runs in excess of two-million dollars, so there's somewhere in between there all these people exist.

It is interesting that Gilbert would reject the term 'community' to describe the RVers of North America and instead prefer the word 'culture' to explain the relationships RVers have with each other. Conversely, Sofia accepted 'community' as an adequate term to describe RVing; Eleanor also identified with the term 'community' and even identified younger families travelling with children as legitimate RVers. Gilbert and Sofia are both full-timers. Ruby and Geoff do not see themselves as full-timers in the sense that they do not live in their motorhome exclusively all year round. Yet, they identify with being RVers:

Ellen: Can you be and RVer without being a full-timer?

Ruby: Oh yeah!

Geoff: Some people don't consider RVing as true camping but I think, whatever you call it, once you've gone somewhere, in a recreational vehicle then you can consider yourself and RVer, I feel like we are one when we're out and about.

From personal experiences and encounters, both Ruby and Geoff *do* consider there to be an RV community in North America. However, even though they identify

themselves as RVers, they do not consider themselves as a part of the RVer community in North America:

Ellen: Just from your experiences, would you consider there to be an RV community in North America today?

Ruby: I think I've seen that, I think it's more with full-timers though,

Ellen: Do you guys consider yourselves a part of it?

Ruby: No.

Geoff: No.

Ruby and Geoff equate the RV community with full-timers, and when questioned, they said they spent no more time socializing with full-timers than they did with people who RV for part of the year.

Ellen: So, do you meet a lot of full-timers when you're out travelling?

Geoff: We have but we don't necessarily spend a lot of time with them, almost any kind of campground that we've been in we meet them and we have a discussion and we discover that they're full-timers or maybe we won't, but it's fairly common and I think just about everywhere we've been that we've encountered full-timers vs. other people like ourselves who may go out for five or six months at a time. We met somebody a few days ago who said that they went out for 9 months; I guess they weren't full-timers 'cause they went home for three, 9 months, that's pretty full-time.

So while Gilbert expressed that there is an RV culture encompassing a variety of RV styles, Ruby and Geoff did not consider themselves as a part of the RV community because it is reserved for a specific type of RVer, namely, full-timers. This illustrates the variation present among RVers and the difficulty in establishing the parameters of the RV subculture.

Membership in the RV subculture

One theme that emerged in the course of discussing manners is that my participants identified respect for the campsite as a characteristic of RVers as opposed to other users of recreational vehicles, like vacation campers.

Gilbert: We'll sit and talk, when we pull into a campground and when we're walking through. RVers are very friendly, they're always talking and willing to share stories and as we pull into a campground somebody has a campfire and we'll be invited to sit down or I'll have a fire and invite people to sit down and we sit and trade stories.

Ellen: If you've ever met somebody who wasn't friendly like that,
Gilbert: It happens.

Ellen: Do you still consider them true RVers?

Gilbert: Of course, I mean personalities don't make you an RVer because you might have friends who don't get along with your other friends they're still your friend. So, RVers is the name of someone who owns an RV, their personality makes them either a social person or not a social person. And I've always thought that the nice thing about being a full-timer and not owning a home, when you own a home and your neighbour is a real nasty person, you have him forever. In an RV either he's gone in three days or you are, I don't have to stay have to stay parked next to them. You never have to worry about nasty neighbours.

Ellen: Ok, um, so, what do you consider are good or bad manners for an RVer and do RVers manners determining whether or not you consider them true RVers?

Sofia: Hmm... interesting, well, bad mannered RVer would be somebody that pulls up to Wal-Mart and pulls out his BBQ and lawn chairs and stays for a week! That's a bad mannered RVer, good mannered RVers, they wave they pick up after themselves, they adhere to the quiet hours and follow the rules of the campground. I suppose to a small degree, whether or not they're good or bad mannered RVers is whether or not I consider them true RVers. An RVer is an RVer, most of them are good and you're going to have a few rotten eggs, your always going to have a few but not too much.

Herb: Yeah, because people that full time, and it took us about six months to think about, people that full-time you never meet, you rarely meet two people who do not get along and are not happy because they never make it out on the road if they aren't happy in that small space

together and so, typically people with good manners meet people who aren't nice or taking care of the campsite, then they're probably not full-timers they're probably people who are out on a vacation. One thing: beware of the rental RVs because those are typically people who have no idea what they're doing and some are very nice people but others have no idea or especially in the States up around California you get some that are very rude and could care less about how they treat others or the campsite.

The value that full-time RVers place on respect for the campsite may be a reflection of their tendency treat the RV as a traditional home, wherever it is parked. RVers understand that the site is an extension of the RV home and must be respected as private space because that is all they have. This became apparent during a discussion with one participant.

Ellen: So something I was curious about, your actual lot, the space that you're on, is that part of your home while you're here?

Eleanor: Yes, it is! And that's why when we're here for a month, we like to kind of set it up a little bit because we make it homey. And that is our lot. I would not want to see people walking through our lot. And you don't see that here in Pippy Park. There are some areas that people will do that.

Ellen: Oh, really? Because I know that if ever I have to walk on to somebody's lot, I always feel like I'm invading them somehow.

Eleanor: Yes, because they pay for that lot, that's your private spot!

RV associations (or *organizations*, as they are referred to in the interviews) are an important aspect of RVing. Associations can encompass several different styles of RVing such as full-timing, part-timing or occasional vacation travel. Many of my participants said that they are members of RV associations, mainly because of the benefits associations provide such as rallies, discount camp sites, mail services, websites, health services, and newsletters.

Ellen: ok, so are you a member of any RV organizations?

Sofia: Yes, we are a member of FMCA Family Motorcoach Association and it has infinite numbers of benefits for us. Number one Medex, should I become ill or my husband become ill, someone would drive our rig back home, or to the destination spot for hospitalization, they have rallies at various points through North America where you can go get information on RVing and RVs and campgrounds, and they hold international rallies a couple times a year, a national rally, east coast, west coast and so FMCA is a big general origination that we belong to. We also are Good Sam members, Escapees members,

Ellen: You and your husband are Escapees?

Sofia: And that's primarily because they have such good camping facilities, you can boondock there inexpensively, so lots of organizations we belong to we'll find out that there'll be a cost benefit for us because if we can stay there at a reduced rate it pays for itself.

Ellen: Which clubs are you a member of?

Gilbert: FFCM, Good Sam, the manufacturer of my motorhome, Newmar,

Ellen: I've heard of Newmar, they have a club.

Gilbert: Yes, and we've been very active in their club, we've lead lots of their tours and rallies with as many as 350 rigs at it, ok so that's fine! Hmmm... what other clubs are we members of? That's all, so that's good.

Ellen: are you a member of any RV organizations?

Herb: We're members of Escapees, Good Sam Club and the FMCA.

All of my participants were either current or past members of RV associations.

However, it must be noted that although organizational membership is a common practice for full-time RVers, in line with research by Hardy and Gretzel (2011) the attitudes of my participants were not unilaterally positive. Three participants pointed out that the services provided by the associations were not very helpful for their RV experiences and in one case, one participant explained how associations sent out too much paper mail and engaged in too much cross-marketing for her to continue her membership. Another participant indicated that the poor services provided one association lead to her leaving that particular association. Based on this it became

evident that although membership in RV associations is an important aspect of RVing, it is not a prerequisite for being an RVer. In fact, some of my participants indicated dissatisfaction with aspects of belonging to RV associations.

Ellen: Are you a member of any RV organizations?

Eleanor: No. We were in the Family Motorcoach, and we dropped that because really, there are not that many benefits to it as far as we're concerned. So we just have our regular insurance that you have to carry. And that gives you kind of a membership, but it's not membership that you're thinking of. We belonged to Passport America, which is for camping. That gives us - if we stay in a campsite that it's a member of Passport America we can stay there from anywhere from 5 to 10 dollars a night. You don't find that in Newfoundland.

Deborah: We belonged to Good Sam's.

Bill: That's the one that they said we should belong to at the first place after we bought this (meaning their travel trailer).

Deborah: And we did.

Bill: And we did, we joined Good Sam and that's probably the most common group in the States, but they cross market to death! We get more mail, phone calls...

Deborah: We get letters like literally every week from them. It's such a waste of paper, I mean they must take trees and just take forests and just knock them all down, so we literally just said "forget it, take this away!"

Membership in RV associations provides many useful services to RVers as they travel, as well as the opportunity to meet other members of the association. Associations such as Good Sam, Escapees and FFCM have membership stickers and decals that RVers can display on the RV. These stickers clearly advertise membership in specific organizations and function as a symbol to identify belonging to the RVer subculture. I asked my participants if they looked for membership stickers while travelling in order to determine if stickers played a significant role in facilitating interaction. About half of my participants had stickers on their RVs (see Figure 1). However, some participants

indicated that in their responses that, although they looked for stickers they did not play a central role.

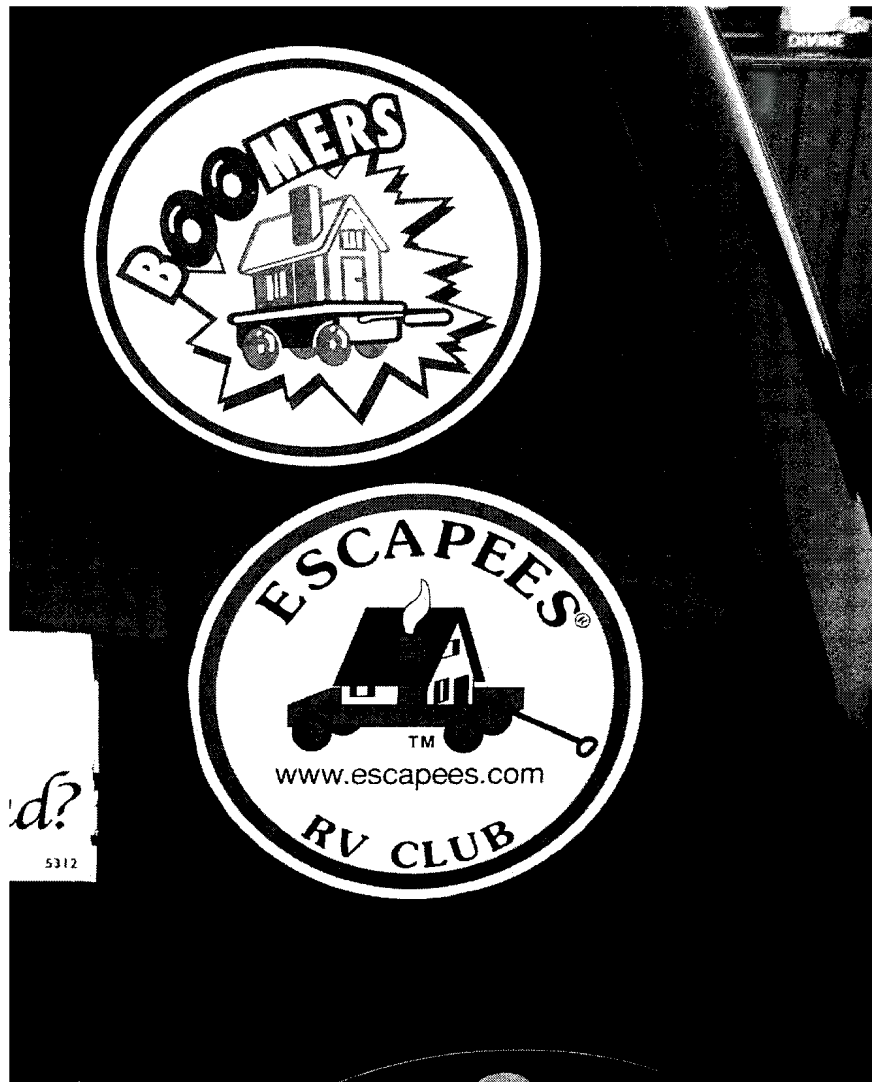


Figure 1: RV association membership stickers on the back of one interviewee's vehicle.

Ellen: And do you look for RV organization membership stickers on other people's RVs?

Sofia: I notice them, I don't look for them some people do, I more look at the licence plate to see where there from.

Herb: We do watch for them, we don't always seek people out because we're not as group oriented as some RVers are, we're a little more independent but we do watch for other Escapees, that's the one organization that that we're fairly active in. the others have mainly been to be a part of a group for camping benefits because you get discounts for the various clubs that you're a part of.

Ellen: I know there's one called Good Sam

Herb: yeah, Escapees is another one and they have some of their own parks you can stay at for very cheap where people buy in. The Escapees are probably the one sticker we watch out for.

Ellen: Do you look for RV organization membership stickers on other peoples' RVs?

Eleanor: Yes, but it's not really that important.

Ellen: Oh, okay.

Eleanor: What we'll look for is to see if they're part of a caravan. And it's just because we've met some of the caravan leaders and we'll see them. But other than that, the stickers don't really mean a lot.

Interaction among RVers is not initiated only through RV associations. Many of my participants seem to be just as interested in specific brand of RV as in membership in specific associations. Indeed, the importance of brand is reflected by the fact that many associations are exclusive to brand. RVs such as Airstream, Monaco and Newmar have clubs specifically for RVers who drive their brand with their own rallies and services. My participants indicated that when they encounter other RVers their particular brand of RV becomes a focal point of interaction, facilitating conversations and troubleshooting on the specifics of their particular model.

Ellen: What about brand of RV? Does that hold any significance for you?

Sofia: We have a Country Coach and because we do we look for other Country Coaches primarily because they have rallies and we may have seen or met these people before it's a small organization, it only builds about 400 a year, so there aren't hundreds of them like Winnebagos or Fleetwood's, brands like that and we travel with our friend Russ so they troubleshoot while driving down the road: "What's your RPM, and what's that stuff?".

Ellen: Are the country Coaches made to order?

Sofia: You can, at this level; we got to pick a lot of options.

Herb: It's true because people with the same brands tend to meet up and you have something in common to discuss. Ours is by Fleetwood and some people with similar Fleetwood but not the same exact model you tend to discuss your engine if you're having problems, what dealers will handle your problems etc.

Ellen: Does brand hold any significant when you encounter new RVers for the first time?

Bill: It does for them...It does for us too!

Deborah: Yeah,

Bill: It does for us! It's funny 'cause when you're out on the road, you can be in the middle of no place and you'll be like pulling out of some place, and you'll look across the highway and you'll see some arm going crazy like this (Bill waves his hands) and they've got a Casita, and they only sell these in Texas, one little factory, there's no dealers, you have to go down and get it, they don't deliver, so it's, when we see other Casita people from way off, you recognize them immediately.

As Sofia explained, she is a member of an association for owners of Country Coach RVs, and Sofia and her husband look for other Country Coaches while travelling, attend Country Coach Rallies and socialize with friends who also own country coaches. Bill and Deborah did not indicate if there was an association for Casita owners but, like Sofia's RV, Casita RVs are not mass produced and encountering one on the road facilitates interaction. However, my participants did point out that sometimes brand or particular style of RV is exclusionary.

Herb: and then you also watch which people are in the higher end RVers and that they kind of tend to go together too yeah, it's interesting to watch.

Bill: and they only sell these (Casita trailers) in Texas, one little factory, there's no dealers, you have to go down and get it, they don't deliver, so it's, when we see other Casita people from way off, you recognize them immediately. My son's got an Airstreams and they are the biggest snobs in the world.

Ellen: Oh really!

Deborah: Not our son! (Laughing)

Bill: Airstream people are just really snotty, because they think they're the best, you know, it's like that forever. They take a lot of trips together.

Ellen: Well, I suppose it's very distinctive.

Deborah: It's very distinctive, they're very expensive units, and between his (Deborah's and Bill's son) and in ours the only thing I'd change is to have a little bit longer feet room, cause' he's got more length, his bed is skinnier, but longer, and ours is wider and shorter, but he's tall and we'd take a few inches from his trailer. Other than that, I think our trailer is good or better.

Ellen: What about brand of RV? Does that hold any significance when you encounter new RVers for the first time?

Ruby: Oh, yes!

Geoff: Ha! I don't know if a lot of people do this, it's kind of like, people tend to live in neighbourhoods that are reflective of their social-economic situation. Now, there are some campgrounds that are exclusive and you don't get in there unless you're driving a certain kind of rig, a big motorhome, that cost many thousands of dollars, I think when someone comes in you immediately do some kind of assessment as to where they fit in this strata cause and it's been incredible, because you get so many different kinds of people from one end of the strata to another, and I know, I feel strongly about this, there were some people I'd call exhibitionist they were so extroverted in their style and they put their expensive motor home in a place where everyone had to come back and forth and around it was huge with stainless steel sides, and all that, they kind of looked down on people.

Ruby: No one liked him.

Eleanor: No. Of course you've got your high end RVs, you've got your mid line, you've got your low line. The only difference is you know the person in that Monaco or one of the higher end RVs or the Prevo, which is like, a half a million dollars or more, you know, these people are - have money. They have large amount of money. Probably most likely. But it doesn't impact on the type of person they are. So even though they have all this money and they have this big RV, they're just as friendly with myself if I'm in a 26 footer Island RV renter as if I was one of them. So it impacts because you like to see that side, and look at some of these nice RVs. It's like going around any city and looking at the big homes.

The animosity described by Ruby and Geoff is an indication that using brand as a status symbol contravenes the shared value of inclusiveness and friendship expressed by interviewees like Eleanor who said “...even though they have all this money and they have this big RV, they're just as friendly with myself if I'm in a 26 footer Island RV renter...”. For Bill and Deborah the importance of the type of RV influenced the way they viewed themselves as related to full time RVers. Even though they participated in the same activities as other full-time RVers they did not self identify as RVers. In the context of the RV subculture brand can represent both a source of contention and a cohesive force, depending on how RVers use it to communicate to other RVers.

Sustaining the RV community

Full-time RVers face a variety of unique challenges in creating and maintaining their subculture in the face of transiency and geographical separation. This research set out to explore the ways that RVers who travel throughout North America overcome these challenges. In their responses to earlier questions, my participants have already indicated their reliance on the services of RV associations as one method which agrees with previous research in the area. However, in the times since that research was conducted, communications technologies have become more advanced and accessible. Communications technologies including e-mail, message boards, chat groups, blogs, personal web pages, social media, and cell phones are now essential equipment for RVers. Communications technologies are used to connect RVers with each other and with family and friends. It allows for RVers to simultaneously share their travel experiences and remain connected to others. This ensures that the amount of contact

RVers have with one another is not limited to being in the immediate area of other RVers. My participants have demonstrated how readily they have adopted the use of communications technologies in their lives and how these technologies have become fundamental to being an RVer.

Ellen: How is the RV community connected? And how do members stay in touch?

Sofia: Through the internet, through e-mail, and through, a smaller degree through cell phones, hardly anyone has a landline, and in the US my friends all have Verizon, so Verizon to Verizon phone service they can call one another and there's no cost. and I do my nights and minutes after 9:00 and there's no cost, so its a good way to stay in touch.

Sofia: It's important to me because I wouldn't be doing this if I couldn't communicate through e-mail. I still phone but e-mail gives me back and forth updates on where people are and I can do a group and I can communicate with seven or eight people using the same method: "Here I am! I'm fine! Here's what's going on! How are you?"

Eleanor: One big asset now is email. So we email people. Very little telephone, because telephone is not always that easy to access. But through e-mail we can. We have e-mail addresses for people in South Dakota and North Dakota, in the Carolinas, and we keep in touch with them. E-mail also over Christmas.

Gilbert: We have all the modern technology and conveniences and all the same ways of being connected that you would have in a home, we have internet available. I'm sure that one of the first questions that people ask when they pull into the park is there Wi-Fi available? OK, part A. I'm on a cell plan from the States from Verizon Wireless, when I go into Canada I put on the Canadian plan, my cell then partners up with TELUS up here, Verizon still bills me, anywhere there's TELUS I have Verizon service and I everyone or the companies, Sprint is a big company in the United States, Verizon, AT&T, T-mobile, they all have systems like that. And most RVers carry those things so they can also stay in contact. When there is no Wi-Fi in parks, we carry an USB air card. That gives me a little lower speed then high speed DSL line but that's on the Sprint network, so as we drive down the road we can be on the internet, and as long as we have cell towers and Sprint available to us, our air card works. There's a

third method people use to stay in contact which is these really big satellite dishes that come up on the back of some of the rigs and it's called Direct Way. That's like your Bell Express View, they have the Direct Way and that's two way communication satellite system for internet communication purposes.

Ellen: So technology is important?

Gilbert: Absolutely and they've made huge, huge advances in the last five years.

The importance of communication technologies for RVers has even influenced the design of RV parks and the services offered by RV parks and campgrounds. This is the same for Pippy Park campground in St. John's, where in 2007 and 2008 park management constructed a new section of the campground to accommodate the demand for WiFi service.

Full-time RVer Travel Patterns

One of my objectives was to learn if the RVers frequenting Newfoundland and Labrador during the summer are the same as those who travel to the American Southwest during the winter. This is to connect the RVers documented by Counts and Counts (1992; 1996) and McHugh (2000; McHugh & Mings, 1991; 1996) to RVers in northern climates during the summer, thus establishing the travel patterns of RVers as North American-wide and influenced by the changing seasons. My participants generally confirmed that RVers alternate locations seasonally in order to find favourable temperatures.

Ellen: Generally, where do you travel?

Herb: In the winter we are generally in southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and sometimes Texas, summertime, now we're going to be spending in Newfoundland, but prior to that we spent summers in Montana, Colorado, we spent our first month there, then we went to South Dakota to the Black Hills, it's one of our favourite places in the country, a beautiful park, a great group of people and volunteers that

run the park, just an amazing area, a little like your Pippy Park, good people attract more good people and some parks everybody is stern and I'm here cause I have to work but that particular park is well maintained and because it's a state park they can manage things like the buffalo herds. It's really a well kept park.

Ellen: And in the summer where did you go?

Herb: We would go farther north because we liked cooler weather, we've got friends in Grand Rapids, Michigan we like to visit then we've been up to New England and just stay up where the temperatures are around 70 degrees, any in the northern tier states.

Geoff: Because I was still working and that was stretching it then, but we took off and we took the tent and that's how we travelled in BC and Alberta and the north western part of the United States, seeking cooler climates from our summers.

Sofia: If we don't like it cold, we'll move out of the cold and if we don't like it warm we'll move out of the heat, so it is similar. It is interesting, in Arizona. In the community there they no longer refer to the folks as 'snowbirds' it's 'winter visitors', because winter visitors is more politically correct.

Herb described how he and his wife Mary meet annually with RVer friends in Quartzite, Arizona. Herb detailed how this group exchanged travel stories and advice that influenced many RVing decisions made by he and Mary such as the decision to join Escapees and to travel to Newfoundland for the first time in 2007.

Herb: Actually when we first hit the road we ended up in Quartzite in our camper and pickup and there was another couple towing a large fifth-wheel and they were trying to sell a medium duty collar, and she was blind with a dog and we got to know them. So they started talking to us about the benefits of the Escapees club and you could join because they have an RV show and you could join the Escapees there for like 20 dollars off a year. And I think it costs us 60 dollars a year to join, I think. And at that time we didn't know what we were going to need. They provided things like a mail forwarding service e-mail and on and on, there are a lot of different benefits you can use and we weren't certain of how many of those we would need. And so it seemed like a great way to stay in touch and meet people.

Through this interview, I also sought to further distinguish the travel patterns of full-time RVers from those of snowbirds. Despite sharing the same climate-related motivations to engage in seasonal travel, my participants' responses generally indicated that full-time RVers travel cyclically and travel continuously, as opposed to snowbirds, who travel in a linear, North-South pattern with extended stationary periods between trips.

Gilbert: Now also, what ends up happening is something as people call themselves snowbirds, and what they are is that they own an RV of some sorts and let's say they have a place in Arizona and they, you can buy RV lots, just like you have a camping space here, you can buy camping spaces throughout the United States so what they'll do is buy a camping space in AZ, they will be there on that camping spot from let's say winter time because it's nice and warm in AZ or southern California or Florida or in Texas then what they'll do is in, when it's too hot to be in those locations they'll have another lot in Minnesota they'll drive from point A to point B in Minnesota, stay there until the weather gets bad and drive back to point A. So, even though they live in their motorhome full-time there're really not full-timers in the sense that they're out travelling all the time; the true full timer, like my wife and myself, spends literally no more than a few weeks at a time in one area.

Herb: Snowbirding is more like people who go south for the winter, they a lot of times are not full timers - they'll have a place in the central parts of the States or Canada and they'll go south to avoid the cold weather. A lot of time they'll go to one place and stay for four months without really a lot of travel. We didn't consider that real RVing, we considered that like having a mobile apartment and wonder why they didn't buy a condo somewhere. It just seemed to be an oxymoron, to have an RV to just go sit somewhere and have 5pm show up and have happy hour and go sit inside with air conditioning and watch TV for the rest of the evening and really never get out and interact with the community other than their little RV Park. That to us wasn't RVing.

Ellen: So, have you ever considered yourselves snowbirds? Or your activities ever were like those of snowbirds?

Herb: In the winter time we go to Texas and they have signs that say welcome snowbirds, and yeah, we've gone to Texas for the winter and

spent a couple of months, in a sense that's snowbirding, but in the RV community typically, its more thought of as those people are part-timers, who are just, down for the winter for a few months and most of those people tow fifth-wheels or they drive gas engage motorhomes because they're cheaper and they don't have to put as many miles on them and people that are full-timing typically use diesel units because they're built heavier and they accommodate more miles which you need when you're living in it full time. and part of the full-time definition for us and most of the others we've met, is that meaning that they move around all year long, that they don't just sit in one in one campground in the north all summer or in the south all winter.

Evidence from my interviews suggests that, for this group of RVers, prolonged travel activities through areas and seasons differentiates them from snowbirds. When in the southern United States, full-time RVers may travel to California, Arizona, on into Mexico and back again; Gilbert talks about this when he says that he and his wife spend no more than a few weeks at a time in a given location. Conversely, snowbirds are more likely to spend time primarily in one place, even if they own and travel in an RV. Herb said that he didn't consider this real RVing. He elaborates by discussing the difference between the types of RVs preferred by RVers and snowbirds. The more sedentary practices of snowbirds are reflected in their choice of vehicle - according to Herb, when snowbirds travel in RVs, it's generally in vehicles with gas engines, whereas full-time RVers prefer diesel engines that can better handle the rigours of constant travel.

These data were helpful as one of my objectives was to learn if the RVers frequenting Newfoundland and Labrador during the summer are the same as those who travel to the American Southwest during the winter. This was to connect the RVers documented by Counts and Counts (1992; 1996) and McHugh (2000; McHugh & Mings, 1991; 1996) to RVers in northern climates during the summer, thus providing evidence

that the travel patterns of RVers are North America wide and influenced by the changing seasons.

RVing as Tourism

Living and travelling in an RV allows RVers to see and experience places without having to worry about time or accommodations. I wanted to know the extent to which the *desire to experience places* was a motivator for RVers by asking my participants about tourism and if they consider themselves to actually be tourist. Initially, I assumed that my participants would reject the moniker of 'tourist' because of their perspective of the RV as a home on wheels. However, my participants readily accepted being called tourists.

Ellen: and as an RV do you consider yourself a tourist? Is being a tourist compatible with being an RVers?

Herb: It's a part of what we do but we consider ourselves different from typical tourists because for us we are home and what's outside our living room changes every day. We try to be gracious to the communities we visit because we realize we're outsiders and in that sense we're tourists but it's not like we're on holiday with lots of extra money to spend that's on a week or two vacation, who's saved up and know they're to be curious and things to take home with them because this is where we live and this is how we live.

Ellen: As an RVer do you consider yourself a tourist?

Gilbert: Absolutely, no question about it because, I think a tourist is anyone who is coming into an area that is new and doing social functions within that area, visiting landmarks, monuments, state parks, sure, we're all tourists, and if we go to the same place over and over I'm still a tourist.

Ellen: Do you have a map of North America, the kind where you fill in the states and provinces?

Gilbert: Yes.

Ellen: Is something you like to collect and show people?

Gilbert: We have it up there it's a talking point when people ask "where have you been?" And we'll look at the map.

Ellen: So, being a tourist is compatible with being an RVer?

Gilbert: I think they're synonymous...

Ellen: Ok, as an RVer, do you consider yourself a tourist? And is being a tourist compatible with being a full-timer?

Sofia: I am a full time tourist, I am a full time tourist and that is because we choose to go and learn about thing. We show up at the visitors centre and I just acknowledge that I am a tourist I want to know where to go, I want to know, I have this many days, it's all I can spend, what are the highlights? And they'll often say to me do you like to hike, do you like museums, what do you like? And I'll tell them what we like. So, yes I am a tourist but the difference between being a tourist in my life is that as a tourist I usually had fourteen or twenty-one days vacation and you had to do something all the time and now if I'm a little tired or I need to do laundry then I take a day off and I do laundry, go to the grocery store and clean my floors and so that's not so much like a tourist, that's like just having a house, being home.

Eleanor: Sure, wherever we go, we're tourists! Any city now, I don't consider myself a tourist here in Newfoundland because I'm from there. But anywhere else I would be considered part of the tourist trade, part of the tourist industry. And that's one big thing, RVers are a very big part of tourist trade here in Newfoundland, and unfortunately, with the price of gas this year, and the cost of the ferry, I'm sure it will have an impact on the economy here in Newfoundland. So it's a very big part of tourism.

Ellen: Okay, so is being a tourist compatible with being an RVer?

Eleanor: Of course! It kind of goes hand in hand.

The evidence provided in these interviews suggested that some full-time RVers at least view themselves as full-time tourists as well.

The Influence of Other RVers

The final two questions on the interview schedule were designed to explore the influence that other full-time RVers have on decisions about travel. Encountering other members of the RV subculture while on the road is assumed to affect travel decisions through the exchange of stories and experience encouraged at the cultural level. According to my participants, RVers frequently interact with each other during travel,

these encounters and conversations not only build and strengthen personal relationships, but also play an influential role in where an RVer will choose to travel to next.

Ellen: Do you ask other RVers for travel advice?

Gilbert: We'll sit and talk, when we pull into a campground and when we're walking through. RVers are very friendly, they're always talking and willing to share stories and as we pull into a camp ground somebody has a campfire and we'll be invited to sit down or I'll have a fire and invite people to sit down and we sit and trade stories.

Sofia: We kind of think of places that we've had on our 'what's that about list?' and yes, where other people have gone has influenced us, it does, um, because they show us their pictures and so that sounds exciting, so we'll go.

Ellen: This is kind of a general question: generally, where do you travel? Do conversations or encounters with other RVers influence your decisions about where you travel?

Deborah: Oh yeah, yeah oh yeah

Bill: (In kind of busy-body old lady voice) "Well, listen sweetie you ought to turn left."

Deborah: and then we do, we completely do. Today some lady told us to go up to, when we were traveling to Trinity (Newfoundland), she told us to go there, she thought that we would like that, so we're mulling that over.

Ellen: and when you arrive in a place you've never visited before, do you ever ask other RVers for travel advice? *Eleanor: Absolutely. Other RVers that have probably been there before.*

Additionally I was interested in understanding the decision to travel to Newfoundland in spite of the unique challenges that accompany travel to the island. Indeed, the fact that RVers would travel to Newfoundland on the advice of other RVers is a testament to the trust that exists between members of the subculture.

Ellen: Have you met other RVers who visited Newfoundland? And did their visit influence your decision to travel here?

Herb: Yes, we met people, our group that meets in Arizona every January, a group of us met there in January of '06, and that's the first time we talked about it 'cause we had wanted to come to the

Maritimes but we weren't ready yet. So in January of '07 we had a group, some had been here, and one person brought a CD of photos and passed it around, of all the different provinces and shared their information of where they've been and what not to miss. So out of that about 8 couples said that they intended to get to the Maritimes and we wanted to try and stay in touch with each other over the summer months as we travelled and indeed we did. We met up with four different couples out of that group while we were in Newfoundland. And then once we were here we met with one couple in particular; we'd spend a day or two together and go our separate ways and then meet up again. It was a lot of fun, we had a good time.

**Ellen: Have you met other RVers who visited Newfoundland?
And did their visit influence your decision to travel here?**

Sofia: Yes, two of the couples on our RV forum have very extensive blogs on their month-long trip here, one in 2000 and one in 2006, and I think Jerry and Audrey have seventy pages of detailed writings on the area, five days in St. John's, and she saw more than, she wrote more than I'll ever know, but yeah that very much influenced us.

**Ellen: Have you met other RVers who have visited
Newfoundland?**

Gilbert: Yes I have,

Ellen: And did their visit influence your decision to come here?

Gilbert: a small bit, its some place I wanted to see anyway this is our first visit here. There's so much cool stuff up here.

**Ellen: Do conversations or encounters with other RVers influence
where you travel?**

Ruby: Oh yeah, when we came here we knew very little about Newfoundland but I chatted up some people and found out a whole lot, wrote it all down and as you go...

**Ellen: Okay. And have you met other people who have visited
Newfoundland?**

Eleanor: Oh, yes! And they just love it!

Ellen: Oh yeah?

Eleanor: Especially Americans. Americans have said to us "what are you doing living in a place like Florida when you come from Newfoundland?" And of course our answer is, "You haven't been here in the winter." And that's why, and of course the economy. I mean I could work here in Newfoundland. Both of us worked here full time, and as a nurse I'd have no trouble anywhere.

Ellen: Before you came to Newfoundland did you meet other RVers who had gone to Newfoundland? And did their visit influence your decision to travel here?

Deborah: Ooooooh,

Bill: Oh yeah, that's why we're here, in a lot of ways, cause our son was here about three or four years ago,

Deborah: He and my daughter-in-law absolutely loved it here, said it was the most beautiful place on earth, that everyone's so lovely, wonderful and friendly, and they said we really, really had to come here, so that greatly influenced our coming,

Ellen: That's good, for me that question is really important because of Newfoundland's accessibility, it's an island.

Bill: Yeah, if it wasn't for them I wouldn't have paid what it cost to get us over here. I was shocked. And when we got here in the morning, it was \$380 or \$340 more than what they had quoted us originally.

SUMMARY

This chapter presented the themes that emerged in my participants' responses to the interview questions, along with select excerpts from the interviews to support each theme. The first topic I examined was the drivers of the decision to RV full time. My participants had several drivers in common. Several respondents mentioned that they had a history that involved moving frequently and camping throughout their childhood and adulthood, which supported a developmental model of RVing posited by Jobes (1984). Retirement played a significant role in the transition from casual to full-time RVing. My participants also commented on how RVing was important for healthy aging by enabling social connections and supporting mobility.

My participants had much to offer on the social organization of the full-time RVing subculture. Most (but not all) of my participants agreed that there was indeed an unique community of full-time RVers in North America to which they belonged.

Membership in the subculture involved showing a profound respect for the campsite and

for the campsites of others, and extending friendship to other RVers. Belonging to an RV association appeared to be an important component of membership especially for bringing likeminded RVers together; yet several respondents indicated that they did not view associations' services to be as useful in the context of their travels. Association stickers did not play a large role in helping full-timer RVers identify one another; however the brand of RV was identified as an important symbol for forging relationships with and for inferring characteristics of other RVers. The main way that my participants indicated they sustained their lifestyle and connections with one another was through the use of advanced communications technology such as email, blogs, social media and cell phones.

Additionally, I asked my participants about their travel patterns. The responses to this question indicated that this group of RVers have had a very wide array of experiences, ranging from as far south as Belize and as far north as the Northwest Territories. There was generally a consensus that the travels did tend to follow warmer weather, spending the winter months in southern locations and the summer months in the north. However, with this group of interviewees, the pattern was described as circular rather than linear, driving down one coast, crossing the continent, and returning north up the other coast, timing their arrival at each location with the onset of temperate weather. My participants looked on travel as a further indicator of belonging in the full-time RVer subculture.

Contrary to my expectations, most of my interviewees indicated that they regarded themselves as tourists. They are very active in sharing their experiences,

consulting with one another and recommending destinations, campsites, and attractions. The advice of other full-time RVers often influenced my participants' decision to make the trip to Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the implications of these findings for interpretation of previous research and their relative fit with theoretical predictions.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In the previous chapter, I presented the data I collected and transcribed from my participant interviews. With my participants I explored themes surrounding the decisions to RV, the organizational structure of the RV subculture, and the significance of travel patterns of RVers. This chapter will be structured in a way that corresponds to this study's three main research questions:

- 1. What drives the decision to RV fulltime?*
- 2. What is the organizational structure of the full-time RVer subculture?*
- 3. What are the particular travel patterns of the full-time RV community?*

My major findings provided general support for the existence of an RV subculture through evidence that respondents shared beliefs, values, norms, and symbols by which they can identify each other, determine who is and is not an RVer, and that they find meaning in their social interactions. I argue that because these descriptions of travel patterns and motivations differed from those of snowbirds as described in previous research, the interview data provides some evidence that full-time RVers are indeed distinct from snowbirds. I also highlight how RVers utilized many communications technologies to overcome the issues that are presented by geographic separation, and the emergent importance of the brand of RV for my participants' identification as full-time RVers.

The Decision to RV Full-Time

One of the focuses of my research involves the motivations behind the decision to live and travel in an RV. Retirement allows people who choose to live in an RV the

opportunity to travel for the entire year and the RV itself facilitates travel by combining the means to travel with accommodations. However, there are other considerations for those who choose to RV, such as separation from family and friends, the loss of their previous permanent home, and the logistical issues of RVing, including arranging health care, travel costs, and isolation on the road. Given the many potential negatives presented by RVing, why choose it as a lifestyle? RVing provides people with experiences and a sense of freedom living in a permanently fixed home cannot provide. For those who choose this kind of life this is more than an adequate trade-off, it is the primary motivation to become and stay RVers.

Counts and Counts (1992; 1996) and Jobes (1984) both discussed the circumstances surrounding the decision to live and travel in an RV on a full time basis. As Hartwigsen and Null (1990) reiterated, full-timers are not on vacation but actively participate in a lifestyle that they choose. They observed that vacation traveling is too expensive for many RVers and also too fast paced for people who value sightseeing and relaxing.

Jobes (1984) observed that full-time RVers often began RVing years earlier as weekend vacation travellers, gradually shifting into a seasonal and finally a full-time lifestyle after retirement. This position was also supported by the work of McHugh and his colleagues (McHugh et al., 1995), who suggested that RVers were more likely to have moved frequently in their youth. My participants described similar circumstances that led them into adopting the full-timer lifestyle. Although the small number of interviews limits the extent to which these findings can be generalized to all full-time RVers, several

participants disclosed that camping or RVing was an activity that was very important for them throughout their childhoods and as adults. They did not just one day 'become' RVers, rather they feel they've been RVers their entire lives and that retirement provided the ideal circumstances to become full timers. For example, Sofia explained how when she worked as a nurse she and her husband would camp on the weekends. They did this for five years waiting for Sofia to retire:

At the end of my career, knowing that I didn't want to work forever, and my husband retired five years before I did, we bought a motorhome and we just went out on weekends...we sold the big house and moved into a little rental that we owned and fixed up and we lived there for the five years until I could retire and then we started full-timing.

This finding is strongly supported by previous findings in RV research. Once Sofia retired, both she and her husband made the decision to RV full-time.

The Social Organization of the Full-Time RVer Subculture

This study was also concerned with how full-time RVers organized their subculture. My review of relevant sociological research into the phenomenon of full-time RVing, along with my discussion of several pertinent theoretical perspectives, suggests that the answer to this question is multifaceted. However, it must be noted that the scope of my investigation does not support a strong generalization from these interviewees to all full-time RVers.

All of my participants' responses were generally supportive of the existence of a unique full-time RVer subculture in North America. This finding is consistent with the results of previous investigations in the phenomenon (Counts and Counts 1992; 1996; Jobes 1984; McHugh 2000). Curiously, while all of my participants agreed that a RVers

subculture does exist, four respondents later indicated that they did not feel they should be included in its membership.

The nature of the RV lifestyle has indeed meant that RVers face many common problems. Researchers such as Austin (2009), Clarke (2006) and Parker et al. (2003) have found that subculture groups tend to band together to address and find collective solutions for shared challenges. In chapter two, I contended that RVers may share several common concerns, such as financial and healthy aging demands in the face of retirement, difficulty accessing democratic and civic processes, and isolation. This list of potential common problems was based on the descriptions of Hoyt (1954), Jobes (1984) and Counts and Counts (1992; 1996).

Responses from my interviewees provided some support for this prediction. For example, as Herb discussed, RVers will frequently share information with one another regarding the best places to buy "...things that are expensive like tires, people will discuss where to buy tires across the country, and as people that are full-timers make their rotation around the country, sometimes people will make plans ahead of time." Herb reinforced his reliance on other RVers for financially-advantageous planning or advice by noting that "...there's things like that that people do to save money but the economy of it is - most of us really have to watch, because we're on fixed incomes..." Furthermore, in her interview, Sofia described an annual gathering of some 200,000 RVers in Arizona, and mentioned that one of the major reasons why RVers congregate there (despite a profound lack of RV facilities) was the extraordinarily low monthly camping fee. The issue of low fees was mentioned specifically by several of my participants, which lends

some support to the centrality of financial pressures as a common problem for many full time RVers.

There was moderate support in my interviews for the importance of healthy aging as a cohesive issue for RVers. The topic was raised directly by Gilbert, who mentioned that health concerns, for himself or his family, were the main factors that could force him to stop RVing full time. Sofia also discussed health care in the context of services provided by an RV association, describing that, “should I become ill or my husband become ill, someone (*from the association*) would drive our rig back home, or to the designated spot for hospitalization...” Speaking of health concerns in these two contexts – as a barrier to RVing full time and as a service provided by associations enabling members to continue their travels – is consistent with the reports of Counts and Counts (1992; 1996), whose ethnography remains a definitive work in the field. However, the issue of healthy aging was only mentioned spontaneously in these two interviews, and in the absence of an interview question that asks about the issue directly, the extent to which we may assume this to be a problem for all my participants is limited.

Isolation that results from transiency and geographic separation was a third potential common problem highlighted in previous research. Several of my participants discussed their approaches to combat this isolation. Thanks to access to vastly improved communications technology such as wireless and satellite internet, several of my participants indicated that email and web-based messaging were important tools for them to remain connected to family and friends. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, these technologies were not available to RVers when previous researchers conducted their

studies. As such, the importance of communications technologies in the lives of RVers remained undocumented. The prominence of communications technologies to my participants demonstrates that RVers actively choose to utilize whatever tools they require to adapt to the transient lifestyle. The dynamic use of these technologies also contradicts the stereotypical view of elderly people as unwilling or unable to learn about new technologies. The example of RVers may in fact demonstrate that *social* relevance is more important than age in the adoption of new technologies. For my participants, the ability of technology as a tool to overcome the barriers faced by the group overcame any age related reluctance to adopt its use. Additionally, several of my participants discussed the importance of rallies for meeting and interacting with other RVers. As such, the inclusion of isolation as a common problem for full time RVers was supported in my interviews.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, individuals typically identify with their subculture through the symbols, values and norms that they share with other members (Aversa Jr., 1990; Rose, 1994; Austin, 2009; Clarke, 2006; Counts & Counts, 1992; 1996). My review of the relevant literature suggested that, for full-time RVers, some of the most commonly held values could include reciprocity and freedom and independence, and these values are reinforced through symbols such as RV brand and association stickers. Throughout their interviews, my participants did provide some confirmation for these previous findings.

Counts and Counts (1996) contended that for full-time RVers reciprocity often took the form of uncommon courtesy and the exchange of knowledge, experience, and

services amongst full-time RVers; these acts served to hastily connect to temporary neighbours as a tactic to assuage the challenge of isolation on the road. Several participants in this study indicated that courtesy was a necessary component to be considered a true full-timer. As Sofia stated, "...whether or not they're good or bad mannered RVers is whether or not I consider them true RVers." Herb's comments echoed the need for RVers to have good manners, stating that "people who aren't nice or taking care of the campsite, then they're probably not full-timers, they're probably people who are out on a vacation." Deborah regarded "snooty RVers" with disdain when they wouldn't respond after she said hello. Yet even as these participants spoke about the importance of courtesy, they did not explicitly connect that convention with the need to combat isolation.

The interviews provided more evidence of commonly sharing experiences and knowledge. According to Bill, full-time RVers are constantly sharing advice on where to travel. As was mentioned earlier, Herb indicated that RVers are sharing their experiences relating to where to find the best price on expensive items such as tires. In one case, one participant actively maintained a blog where she posted recommendations on which campsites or restaurants to visit, along with more detailed information about the sites like "...don't go in the bushes in the other parts, you have to go to Loop 4 (*of Pippy Park to access wireless internet*)."

My participants indicated that the formal ritual of actually joining an RV association was an important part of beginning to RV full time. As was suggested by previous researchers, the services provided by RV associations do provide support to

RVers as they learn to cope with the demands of full time travel. Presumably, as RVer make the transition to full time status, they inherit the common problems of the subculture, as previously discussed. However, as several of my participants gained experience with the challenges of full time travel, their relationship with RV associations grew more complex and less unilaterally positive. Interestingly, those interviewees who indicated that they did not feel they were true members of the RV subculture also mentioned that they were no longer members of any RV associations. This may be indicative of how central membership with an association is to a self-concept of membership in the subculture. Alternatively, the lack of unanimous enthusiasm for RV association members with this group of RVers could also be a residual of the contradiction in the values that full-time RVers hold about themselves as simultaneously independent and familial. Indeed, since the conclusion of these interviews, Hardy and Gretzel (2011) have described groups of fiercely independent full-time RVers that travel in relative isolation from other, more community-minded full-time RVers.

If some RVers continue to travel full-time without maintaining a membership with any RV associations, this casts some new light on the findings of those researchers who interviewed RVers at association or brand rallies (see Jobes, 1984; Counts & Counts, 1996). By focusing on those full-time RVers belonging to these associations, those researchers may have inadvertently left out an important group of individuals who still travel full time in their RVs, thus limiting the extent to which we can generalize their results to all RVers. Indeed, the apparent requirement to register with an RV association

which may not provide the services one requires in order to be considered part of this subculture may conflict with the freedom that RVers value so dearly.

The importance of RV associations is clearer, however, if interpreted through the lens of liminality. Evidence from my interviews suggests that association membership may be more important for RVers as they enter the full-time domain. As one interviewee described the Good Sam Club, “that’s the one they said we should belong to at the first place after we bought this (meaning their RV)... and we did, we joined Good Sam.” The act of joining an RV association may be a part of a rite of passage, where new members separate from their previous identities and incorporate into an order of equal peers.

Another value that RVers commonly display is independence and freedom. Counts and Counts (1996) observed that RVers identify themselves with the pioneers of the old American West. As the legitimate heirs of the pioneering spirit, RVers espouse collective values of freedom, independence, self-reliance, community, and mutual assistance. In some cases, my participants did express this value in a traditional sense (For example, Gilbert spoke of how an RVer can simply pack up and move if they did not get along with their neighbour). For many of my participants, this value was manifested in the adventurous and pioneering spirit of following your dreams and living life to the fullest. Both Herb and his wife Mary spoke of how their inspiration to finally leave their traditional home and RV full-time came from the film *The Hours*, which made both of them realize they only had one chance to pursue their passion for life. When asked whether she would ever join a caravan of RVs, Ruby emphatically responded that they were ...”too independent for that.” My participants frequently made comments such as

“life’s too short” and “live your life now and not to put things off”. As Bill exclaimed, for him full time RVing was about “more sunsets and less bullshit!”

Based on the results of previous research, I was expecting to find wide-spread usage of RV association stickers amongst my participants as a symbol to broadcast full-time RVer status. Yet support for this prediction was lacking from this sample of interviewees. Mostly, this group of RVers did admit that they casually watched for association stickers, but did not actively seek them out. As Sofia related, “I notice (*stickers*), I don't look for them; some people do.” This lack of strong support for the use of and focus on RV association stickers may be related to the complex relationship that this group of RVers reported with the RV associations themselves.

For my interviewees, RV brand was a far stronger theme than RV association.³ My participants indicated that they relied on RV brand in a variety of contexts to make assumptions about other RV users. First, several interviewees indicated that they used RV brand as a way to break the ice with others. This could be particularly true where the brand of RV is uncommon or rare, as indicated by Bill. He and his wife Deborah travel in a Casita RV, which are only manufactured and sold in one town in Texas. As Bill described, “Other Casita people invite us to their houses everywhere we go...” and “you'll look across the highway and you'll see some arm going crazy like this (*Bill waves his hands*) and they've got a Casita.” Herb observed a similar phenomenon, stating that “people with the same brands tend to meet up and you have something in common.”

³ It should be noted that although RV brand appeared to be a stronger theme than RV association with this group of participants, the two are indeed related, as many RV associations are brand-exclusive. See for example the Wally Byam Caravan Club International and the Newmar Full-Timers association, which are exclusive to Airstream brand vehicles and Newmar brand vehicles, respectively.

Not only does brand operate as a means to quickly facilitate relationships with other RVers, but according to several interviewees, brand is used to infer characteristics of other RVers who drive a different brand of RV from their own. Specifically, there appears to be division based on the size and luxury of the RV that they drive. Despite driving a large Fleetwood RV herself, Mary rolled her eyes with contempt as she recounted receiving an invitation out to dinner by a group of Monaco RV owners (Monaco being a particularly high-end brand of RV). Bill and Deborah referred to Airstream owners as “snotty” and “snooty”. Perhaps Geoff’s comments phrase this sentiment the best, as he stated that,

I don't know if a lot of people do this, it's kind of like people tend to live in neighbourhoods that are reflective of their social-economic situation. Now, there are some campgrounds that are exclusive and you don't get in there unless you're driving a certain kind of rig, a big motorhome, that cost many thousands of dollars, I think when someone comes in you immediately do some kind of assessment as to where they fit in this strata...

This evidence of stratification amongst full-time RVers along the basis of RV brand appears to disagree somewhat with the conclusions of previous full-time RVing researchers. Counts and Counts placed a greater emphasis on reciprocity and on how RVers regard each other as ‘family’ and whose relationships may be “more ideal than the reality because they are short-term and focused on mutual help” (1996; p. 176). Yet Counts and Counts did not provide any comment on the significance of RV brand for how full-timers felt and acted towards one another. Jobes’ (1984) research may also be limited for a different reason because of his focus exclusively on Airstream owners at a WBCCI rally. Jobes did not consider the influence of RV brand when forming

conclusions about how temporary communities are formed amongst rally attendees, nor could he without expanding his study to include perspectives on other brands of RV. As such, Jobes' description of the temporary community formed by his participants may not apply equally to all full-time RVers.

The reality regarding the role RV brand plays for full-time RVers may more closely resemble the situation described by Austin (2009). Austin's study on the rituals and social organization of bikers at a motorcycle rally has implications for this study because of his focus on a particular brand of motorcycle – BMWs. Unlike Jobes (1984), Austin examined the importance of motorcycle brand for creating a unique self-image that separates a BMW rider from other types of bikers. Compared with other bikers, BMW owners regarded themselves as more refined and quiet, with more sophisticated bikes and less lewd and raucous behaviour. Furthermore, using Durkheim (1915/1965) as a touchstone, Austin contended that for his participants, the motorcycle functioned as a 'sacred object' which operated as a unifying symbol for a unique subset of motorcyclists.

Considered from the perspective outlined in this study, the BMW motorcyclists described by Austin (2009) had a set of shared beliefs and symbols that differed from those of the motorcyclist culture at large. For RVers, brand may be the unifying point for members within a subculture. This conundrum is further evidence of the limitations and challenges of subculture research, namely, that the boundaries of subcultures are often poorly-defined and difficult to ascertain.

The stratification of RVers by RV brand does not provide support for the development of *communitas* as described by Turner (1967; 2002). From Turner's

perspective, the transiency of RVers could reasonably be conceptualized as a prolonged rite of transition, characterized by a state of ambiguity, invisibility, poverty and duality and culminating in a sense of temporary 'togetherness', an intense emotional connection with others termed 'communitas'. Although much has been written about the equality felt amongst full-time RVers, feelings of communitas may not develop fully with this group because the differences between brands of RV is reflective of a socioeconomic difference between individuals. Some RVs inevitably cost more than others. Possessing a more luxurious, more expensive RV than others would seem to violate the assumption of poverty amongst the transient group, providing a barrier to the development of communitas - except perhaps among the owners of specific brands themselves.

Previous researchers such as Counts and Counts (1992; 1996) and Jobes (1984) cited the exchange of food, experiences, and continuous travel as examples of shared activities that are unique to full-time RVers. Interestingly, the exchange of food was not commonly mentioned by interviewees in this study, providing little evidence for food-sharing as a ritual of importance. This lack of support may be partially explained by the phrasing of the interview questions specifically related to such rituals. It is also worth noting that Pippy Park where the research was conducted has no areas to facilitate pot luck dinners or a 'community centre' for 'happy hour' style socialization. Looking at the interview questions, far more emphasis was placed on the exchange of experiences and travel. Given this, it is not surprising that participants with this study provided considerably more support for the importance of the exchange of travel experiences in their interviews. Generally, this sample of interviewees conveyed the importance of

full-time travel as they described the rich history of locations and encounters they had accumulated over the years. These eleven interviewees discussed their travels to a wide array of places, including Belize; the Yucatan peninsula region of Mexico; U.S. states such as Texas, Arizona, California, Massachusetts, Washington, Florida, Oregon, Indiana, Alaska, South Dakota, Nebraska; and Canadian provinces such as Ontario, the Maritime provinces, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Many interviewees mentioned that they had a “wish list” of places to which they’d like to travel in their RV, with reference to more distant locations such as Alaska and Atlantic Canada, farther away from main population centres, as a figurative holy grail of RV travel. For one interviewee, travel was far more ambitious. Gilbert, who frequently organizes and leads caravans of RVs on planned tours, mentioned plans to lead a caravan to northern Manitoba; several of his more ambitious travel locations included Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Interviewees also commented on how the way that one travels in their RV matters when determining full-timer status. For example, Herb commented that having a gasoline-powered RV was indicative of less dedication to actual full-time travel because of the maintenance and fuel costs associated with gasoline engines.

Shared activities and values have played an important role as the full-time RV community sustained itself in the face of vast physical and temporal intervals. Information provided by my interviewees provided some support for the assertion that services provided by RV associations aid in maximizing travel activities within the confines of health and financial challenges. Additionally, my participants have provided some support for the role that symbols and rituals serve to strengthen cultural identities

and build relationships. One important focus of this study is the way that new communications technologies are changing how the RV community sustains itself.

My participants made frequent use of email, cell phone and internet technologies to maintain relationships and share their experiences as they traveled. For example, as was previously discussed, Sofia described how she shared detailed information about travel and campsites via her online chat forum and blog. Other interviewees highlighted how they sent emails to other RVers to let them know where they would be and when so that they could meet at a favourite campground or share a major milestone. As Herb discussed,

...thanks to the internet, most everybody has a computer and e-mail and also cell phones. Groups at yahoo.com is one of the ways that people stay in touch because there a number of boards: RV-talk another one is called all about RVing and people from all over the country discuss problems, where to stay what brand of RV you have etc.

Gilbert underlined the importance of technology, commenting that “I’m sure that one of the first questions that people ask when they pull into the park is, is there WiFi available?” Gilbert provided an in-depth description of the multiple methods RVers use to maintain internet connectivity, the most advanced involving direct two-way access to satellite systems by way of dishes mounted to the RV. Indeed, Pippy Park Campground, the setting for my interviews, has recently invested in wireless internet technology and has designed its most recent expansion to accommodate internet access for its patrons; this feature itself was broadcasted online by Sofia on her travel blog.

Interpreted in the broader context of this study, my participants’ increased reliance on communications technology may be related to their lower reliance on RV

associations. As Gilbert admitted, there have been “huge, huge advances in the last five years” in the availability and capability of mobile wireless communications. As these technologies become more common place, full-timers may rely less on RV associations to provide the social connections that hold the community together. These technological advances could also in part explain how my respondent’s comments did not echo the degree of enthusiasm for RV associations as described by Counts and Counts (1992; 1996) and Jobes (1984), whose research was conducted before the rise of wireless information networks.

The importance that my participants placed on communications technologies as a means to sustain their activities may have implications for how the full-time RVer subculture fits into Best and Luckenbill’s (1980) social organization framework. As discussed in Chapter 2, Best and Luckenbill argued that as the activities of subcultures become more complex, the culture becomes more sophisticated, requiring higher levels of coordination and association amongst its members. The authors gave the label ‘formal organizations’ to the most sophisticated subcultures, stating that these groups must have mutual association, shared participation, division of labour and persistence over time and space to be placed in this category.

My participants’ responses have provided some support for a classification of full-time RVers as a formal organization. Building from the lowest levels of complexity in the framework, my participants indicated that they regularly associate with other RVers and participate in RVing alongside their peers. Many of my respondents indicated that other RVers influence how and where they travel. Gilbert’s experiences as a caravan

leader are an excellent example of how full-timers often organize and participate in their activities together. Although their attitudes towards RV associations were somewhat ambivalent, the fact that most of my participants mentioned that they relied on associations to provide diverse services that allowed their travels to continue is evidence of how labour is divided in this group.

The penultimate criteria for establishing a group as a formal organization is persistence over time and space. My participants' reliance on communications technologies is an example of how full-time RVers achieve this end. Not only did my participants state that they use email and the internet to keep in touch with their friends and family back in their former communities, but they indicated that they used these technologies to *support other RVers as they traveled*. Sofia's blog about her experiences RVing and Herb's indication that RVers share travel advice on yahoo.com's online forum are excellent examples.

Full-Timers Vs. Snowbirds

In identifying full-time RVers as a subculture, it also became important to explore how full-time RVers differed from other types of RV users. Some past research has tended to generalize RVers' activities and travels as 'snowbirding' without fully exploring if there are distinctions between groups within RV users as a cultural super-group. One of the goals of this research was to examine the travel patterns of RVers and identify if there are differences between full-time RVers and other elderly migratory RVers labelled snowbirds. I surmised that just because RVers are also known to travel to and stay in warmer locations during the winter does not mean that they are analogous to

the snowbird group. However it should be noted that the fact that I did not interview any self-identified snowbirds acts as a limitation to the extent to which the responses from this group of interviewees can be used to compare and contrast with the travel patterns of snowbirds.

McHugh (2000) wrote extensively about the arrival of snowbirds in the Phoenix, Arizona area every winter. Snowbirds' residences can take many forms; they can arrive and live in RVs, they can live in mobile trailer homes, or they can live in condos in dedicated retirement communities (McHugh et al. 1995). For snowbirds, the primary purpose of travel is to escape cold winter weather, which according to Sofia, was one thing that snowbirds and full-timers shared: "...we follow the weather if we don't like it cold, we'll move out of the cold and if we don't like it warm we'll move out of the heat".

This poses another question: if like snowbirds, full-time RVers also spend their winters in warm southern climes, what are the difference between RVers and snowbirds? Are RVers just another kind of snowbird or are they more distinct? When I discussed this with my participants, some of them indicated that snowbirds are a separate activity from RVing. As Gilbert said,

Now also, what ends up happening is something as people call themselves snowbirds, and what they are is that they own an RV of some sorts and let's say they have a place in Arizona and they, you can buy RV lots, just like you have a camping space here, you can buy camping spaces throughout the United States so what they'll do is buy a camping space in Arizona, they will be there on that camping spot from let's say winter time because it's nice and warm in AZ or southern California or Florida or in Texas then what they'll do is in, when it's too hot to be in those locations they'll have another lot in Minnesota they'll drive from point A to point B in Minnesota, stay there until the weather gets bad and drive back to point A. So, even though they live in their motor home full time there're really not full

timers in the sense that they're out travelling all the time, the true full timer like my wife and myself where we spend literally no more than a few weeks at a time in one area.

From Gilbert's perspective, full-time RVers have different goals in travelling than snowbirds. Snowbirds have the singular goal of escaping the cold weather by moving to a warmer place but once they've arrived, they stay put. Full-time RVers, on the other hand, prefer to keep travelling, in keeping with their value of freedom and pioneering.

The difference in travelling goals is also apparent by a comment Herb made:

...those people are part-timers, who are just, down for the winter for a few months and most of those people tow fifth-wheels or they drive gas engine motorhomes because they're cheaper and they don't have to put as many miles on them and people that are full-timing typically use diesel units because they're built heavier and they accommodate more miles which you need when you're living in it full time.

According to Herb, travelling full-time requires heavy duty machinery that can handle the rigors of constant travel. Snowbirds who intend only to travel to a warm location do not need nor do they desire to have an RV capable of that kind of travelling. The different RV equipment, utilized by people intending to only migrate south for the winter, identifies them as snowbirds to full-time RVers.

For future research into the culture and phenomenon of RVing this difference has several important implications, beginning with how to access and accurately sample from the desired group of RVers. Where a researcher desires to reach full-timers specifically, it may be a reasonable approach to seek out RV campers during the summer in less conventional northern locations such as the northern United States or Canadian provinces. Conversely, as was the approach for many previous studies, snowbird-focused research could be adequately done in southern campgrounds during the winter.

Researchers could also focus their studies by using the value differences between the two sub-groups to explain any observed differences in behaviour or activity. Since full-time RVers in this study seem to draw a very distinct divide between themselves and snowbirds, future studies will need to adopt approaches to describe RVing in general that consider this difference.

In the course of this research, I wanted to investigate the possibility that tourism could provide a satisfying motivation to for the RV lifestyle. As we have seen from other researchers, travel for the sake of finding favourable climates has been well-documented. Other reasons that RVers travel, such as tourism, are not as extensively explored. Furthermore, the location and season primarily investigated is the American Southwest in the winter time. That posed the question of where do RVers go in the summer and what do they do when they get there? Why else would RVers travel?

Newfoundland offered a unique location to explore possible answers to this question. Newfoundland is a large island that is geographically isolated, expensive to reach, and has few RVer services comparable to those in other parts of North America. Travel to Newfoundland does not lend itself well to the kind of rambling, accidental exploring that RVers love. Travel to Newfoundland demonstrates that there is a purpose to RVers' travels, and that they also plan trips even though they constantly travel. I wanted to explore the possibility that tourism is an important aspect of the RV lifestyle.

As described by Counts and Counts, RVers often espouse a "home is where I park it" attitude toward RVing (1996, p.139). Based on this interpretation, I assumed that my participants would not respond positively to being called 'tourists' or they would not

identify their lifestyle with anything remotely related to tourism because such a view would contradict efforts to recreate feelings of home in temporary camping sites. However, interviewees in this study generally embraced the tourist lifestyle and label, Eleanor mentioned considering herself a tourist “wherever we go”, and Gilbert indicated that he considered RVing and tourism to be “synonymous”. Yet some interviewees had a slightly different perspective, whereby they agreed that they were tourists but were somehow uniquely different from other tourists. Thinking of tourism Herb indicated that it was “a part of what we do but we consider ourselves different from typical tourists because for us we are home and what’s outside our living room changes every day.” Furthermore, when asked whether he considered himself a tourist, Bill replied, “Yeah, but we’re not; we’ve only taken one tour in our life, and we don’t see things like a tour. It’s more like you get to live different places.” Sofia referred to herself as a tourist, but noted that she differed from typical tourists in that often times she will take a day off from sightseeing to do housework in her RV. It’s clear that my participants had a complex relationship with the “tourist” image.

The simultaneous co-existence of the home and tourist self-images described by a number of my participants closely matches the duality that Turner argues is a component of prolonged transition rites and *communitas*. As I outlined in Chapter 2, the seemingly contradictory view of the RV as both vehicle for escape and permanent haven appears to be represented in the responses of this group of interviewees in their views of tourism and how it relates to their concept of the RV as home.

Limitations

This study has several main limitations, the first of which involves the location of the study. Although the location of this study was advantageous for contacting dedicated full-time RVers, they were not as commonly seen as they would be in other locations in the United States and Canada where large number of full-timers congregate. It is at those large campsites and rallies that the social conventions unique to the full-time RV subculture may be more easily observable. This was the case for much of the previous research on the topic of full-time RVers (see Counts & Counts, 1992; 1996; McHugh & Mings, 1991; Jobes, 1984).

The second main limitation is related to the extent to which interview data can be generalized to other members of the full-time RVer subculture and to other types of RVers. Through my review of the relevant literature and methodological approaches of previous research I determined that a semi-structured interview with purposive sampling was the most appropriate approach to use for collecting the perspectives of full-time RVers. Yet because of the length of the interview, this approach requires gathering in-depth information from a limited number of participants. The richness of the information provided was a strength of this study, but I was only able to conduct interviews with a total of 11 individuals. Furthermore, these eleven individuals were all staying at the same campground, which could lead to a narrower view of full-time RV culture than a methodology that included interviewees from multiple sites. The low number of interviewees and camping sites limits the extent to we can assume that other full-time RVers will share the perspectives of this group of these particular individuals.

In this study, I approached and interviewed only those individuals who appeared to be full-timers, and did not collect any information from other types of RVers, most notably snowbirds themselves. Without the same interview data from snowbirds, a direct comparison between the two groups was not possible for this study, which has implications for the generalizability of its conclusions. This study could best be used as a starting point for future research, highlighting the importance of travel patterns as a marker of the difference between full-time RVers and other RV users. Future research could adopt a different approach to verify my findings through an alternate methodology (for example, by survey) or replicate my interviews with more full-time RVers in other, similar regions, collecting the same information from other groups of RVers concurrently. Alaska was mentioned by several of my participants as a preferred summer destination.

Third, although my interviewees provided a great deal of information about their experiences of the social organization found amongst full time RVers, less information was gathered specific to their individual economic backgrounds or services they need and actually use while travelling. Consequently, the description offered in the current study may be incomplete and could be expanded. For example, we do not have information about the extent to which RVers engaged in transient living arrangements in their youth. Some of my participants indicated that this was the case, but did not provide additional details about how often they moved or for how long they stayed in each location. Future researchers may wish to explore this aspect of RVers' lives in order to determine the process by which transiency earlier in life contributes to the decision to travel full-time,

and the extent of transiency that is required to have an impact. Similarly, we know little about my interviewees' economic status; their resources and income prior to RVing full-time, their expenses while traveling, and how these factors influence where and how they travel. Although I focus primarily on the appeal of full-time RVing as a pull factor for my interviewees (and the availability of resources as an enabler of full-time travel), it is also possible that alternative lifestyles such as maintaining a traditional home, transitioning into retirement or nursing homes, or downgrading the residence could have been factors pushing full-timers to live in their RVs as a lowest-cost option. In extreme cases fulltimers may have had no choice but to sell their traditional homes and move into their RVs. More research into this aspect of RVing is required to clarify this issue. Likewise, more information about these individuals' health status – their particular challenges, their needs to maintain their health and the services they actually make use of while traveling – would help provide a greater understanding of the motivations to begin, continue and finally stop full-time travel.

Finally, this study's findings are limited by its focus primarily on RVing within a North American context. In different global locations and cultures RVing as a symbol may operate to represent different cultural values or meanings to RVers and to the society at large. My review of the North American literature on full time RVing provided evidence that the RV represented independence, freedom and mobility; several other studies done in other continents have highlighted some of the similarities and differences between North American RVers and others. In Australia, RVers as a group appear to be subject to a similar split between full-timers and snowbirds, referred to as 'Grey Nomads'

in the Australian context (Hardy, Hanson & Gretzel, 2012). Indeed, similarities and differences have been discussed within the snowbird/Grey Nomad cluster (Onyx & Leonard, 2005). In a study of the emergent snowbird phenomenon in France, Viallon (2012) noted that 'nature' was listed along with 'freedom' and 'not dependent on others' as the most common characteristics of the RV vacation. A recent international review of camping may serve as a good basis for future research (Brooker & Joppe, 2013).

Directions for Future Study

Having discussed and identified the limitations of this study, there emerged several interesting findings that could prove fruitful for future investigations of the full-time RV subculture. Methodologically, it is clear that the move to more precise research on full-time RVing will first require a larger sample size than was used in this study. Expanding the number of sites (i.e. campgrounds or parks) at which RVers are approached will also be important for strengthening the generalizability of future findings. Additionally, it would be enlightening to include other groups of RVers in future interviews (such as snowbirds, brand-specific association members) in order to provide a methodologically rigorous grounds for direct comparisons. This future research will need to balance the convenience of focusing on specific sub-groups of RVers, such as those attending particular rallies or brand-based RV associations, against more rigorous yet more challenging sampling methods.

The interview schedule developed for use with this study used a line of questioning about the existence of a unique full-time RVer subculture; for example, asking: "Would you consider there to be an "RV community" in North America today?"

However, it is possible that the phrasing of these questions could have had the effect of leading the interviewees to provide the desired response and confirm what they believed to be the ‘correct’ answer. For future interview research with this population, a more inductive line of questions, balanced by more semi-structured use of probing questions, may strengthen the rigour of this study’s design as interviewees would independently provide their perspectives. Such probing questions could allow the interviewer to prompt the interviewee to disclose more details about how they acquire assistance on the road, how they develop and maintain their subcultural network, and the ‘push and pull’ factors that encourage individuals to adopt the RV lifestyle.

As outlined in the limitations section, I collected little information about the demographic and economic profile of my participants. Re-focusing a study of full timers to collect information such as current or previous income levels, expenditures while on the road such as camping fees, food costs, or RV maintenance costs could provide a better understanding of how RVers organize their travels and social lives. Furthermore, an understanding of the socioeconomic conditions of RVers before they begin full time travel could identify some of the “push” factors that could motivate individuals to adopt their RVs as full-time dwellings. Alternatively, this information could highlight how full-time travel is more commonly viewed by RVers as a luxury that is only truly accessible to those individuals who can afford the costs. My interviewees’ responses did indicate that there appeared to be a divide between RVers traveling in different brands of RV, and that this divide was likely a residual of the socioeconomic differences inherent in the brand identity.

This study used organizational concepts originating in, but more broadly relevant than, the study of deviant social organizations as a tool for describing the structure of the full-time RVer subculture. The issue of stereotyping as it pertains to the way that society at large view RVers was not an area of focus for this study. As was discussed in Chapter I, RV users have often been viewed as homeless and disenfranchised drifters in the past. Yet recent studies of full time RVers have cast a more positive light on their activities and characteristics. Have views about RV users changed as a result of this research? How do these views on RVers differ from those of other transient groups? Perhaps knowing more about the economics of full time travel can inform these questions – if RV travel is viewed as a luxury accessible only to affluent retirees, negative stereotyping may abate. One possible approach for exploring these issues could involve doing comparative groups research involving other transient groups. I would speculate that such comparative research would further highlight the uniqueness of the full-time RVer subculture. Anderson's (1923) line of investigations into homelessness and hobos and Frey's (1998) examination of pilgrimage on the road to Santiago, Spain may serve as interesting bases for such comparative work. The concept of pilgrimage may be of particular interest theoretically because of the overlap between modern religious and secular pilgrims, the patterns and meanings of travel for full-time RVers, and the relevance of liminality (Van Gennep, 1960) and *communitas* (Turner, 1967; 2002). Indeed, Jaffrelot (2009) uses Turner's work as a theoretical framework to describe pilgrimages in India, where Hindus participating in a variety of *yatras* (Sanskrit for

journey or pilgrimage) exchange their deep-rooted connection with their caste status for a *communitas* state within the context of the spiritual-religious event.

Previous researchers have also studied transiency as it intersects with the expansion of the tourism industry. For example, Cohen (1973) describes the 'drifter' as the most individualistic and nomadic of his four tourist types. For Cohen, the drifter represented the tourist who abandons the conventional tourist experience, preferring instead to travel without an itinerary or an explicit purpose. Cohen writes,

In the absence of systematic research, it is difficult to disentangle the precise factors and motivations underlying the tendency to drifting; but it is possible to outline some of the forces at work. Foremost among these forces are obviously the cultural ones. (1973, p. 93, emphasis appears in original text)

Cohen's suggestion that the influence of drifter *culture* was a major factor in the decision to travel, and this influence may overlap the cultural attachment that motivates full-time RVers. Additionally, Cohen goes on to outline the way that infrastructure began to develop around the particular travel patterns of drifters, much like campgrounds and associations have arisen to cater to RVers. Cohen's typology of tourists could aid in understanding the relationship between RVing and tourism that my interviewees described.

Cohen and Cohen (2012) reflected upon contemporary sociological and anthropological issues and theories, listing three novel theoretical approaches to the sociological study of tourism. The most pertinent perhaps for interpreting the context of fulltime RVing is the 'new mobilities paradigm' described by Sheller and Urry (2006). Sheller and Urry outlined how previous social research focused on static locations as the

primary stage of social life, whereas a more comprehensive view would necessarily involve how people move *through* places, not just within them. As Sheller and Urry point out, social life seems full of multiple and extended social connections that are organized over vast distances and come together through what they call “nodes” such as hotels, motorways, resorts, airports, leisure complexes and parks. They clarify by stating that “...mobilities thus entail distinct social spaces that orchestrate new forms of social life around such nodes.” (2006; p. 213). This focus on mobilities could be a useful tool for future studies interpreting fulltime RVers’ social organization because of its tolerance for widespread distances between RVers, and the importance of campgrounds as ‘nodes’ within the subculture.

The components of the definition of a subculture that I used in interpreting the set of interviews I conducted included an emphasis on the use of shared symbols between RVers. Naturally future researchers could further speculate using the symbolic interactionist perspective on the phenomenon of RVing. In particular, I sought and found evidence on the significance of RV brand as a symbol that communicates additional meaning about the authenticity of the RVer and his/her belonging to the subculture. Furthermore, previous researchers placed little focus on the brand of RV their subjects used, and considering that their studies often took place at brand-specific RV rallies (see Jobes, 1984), accounting for brand could have added another layer of analysis. Indeed, because brand seems to play a role in reinforcing the connection between activities (traveling and camping) and culture, it could be described as an important component of an aligning action, whereby it strengthens the link from shared activity to the

maintenance and replication of cultural norms (Stokes & Hewitt, 1976). Austin's (2009) study could serve as a useful framework for such an exploration. Future studies should consider RV brand and the role it plays in the lives and experiences of RVers.

The very use of subcultures as a theoretical framework for understanding the full-time RVing phenomenon could be challenged by future researchers. For example, Bauman's conceptualization of liquid modern community may apply directly to RVers particularly well, since they would seem to share many of the symptoms of a post-community world (Bauman, 2001; Blackshaw, 2005). For Bauman, community cannot exist in a liquid, modern society because its constant state of flux does not provide the solid ground the community depends upon for sustenance. The effects of this groundlessness could be exacerbated for full-time RVers, whose transiency would only inflate feelings of homesickness and make temporary peer bonds all the more important.

Furthermore, recent studies have argued that subculture theories may not provide the most appropriate framework for understanding non-mainstream cultures. This study used subculture theory to define the full-time RV subculture in terms of common problems, beliefs, values, norms and shared activities (McCarthy-Smith, 1991; Clarke, 2006; Willis, 2006). However, Bennett (1999; 2011) criticizes subculture theorists for applying the rigid structure of subcultures as coherent or fixed groups while ignoring the contradictory way the term is used, the high degree of cultural overlap between groups, and the blurred lines between the group and society at large.

As an alternative for subculture theory, Bennett (1999; 2011) suggests that Maffesoli's (1996) concept of neo-tribes may provide a better fit for studying more fluid

groups. According to Maffesoli, the postmodern society operates without the forms and organizations that previous researchers were accustomed to; instead social groups are highly fluid, ambient and often fragmented, held together by their use of language, rituals and emotional bonds. Subsequently, Hardy and her colleagues (Hardy, Gretzel & Hanson, 2013; Hardy & Gretzel, 2011; Hardy, Hanson & Gretzel, 2012) have used neo-tribes as a conceptual framework to describe the behaviours of RV users in Canada, the U.S. and Australia. For example, after conducting a series of interviews and focus groups with RV users, Hardy, Gretzel and Hanson (2013) concluded that RVers constituted a neo-tribe because of their symbolic and behavioural commonalities: mobility, independence and freedom, fellowship, suspended social status, and sharing rituals. While these results may not appear to differ from those suggested by previous researchers (Counts & Counts, 1992; 1996; McHugh & Mings, 1991; Jobes, 1985) and supported by interviewees in this study, the use of neo-tribes as a conceptual framework allows for a greater degree of heterogeneity within the RVer subset and avoids the pitfalls of social, political and economic rigidity inherent in earlier subcultural theories. Moreover, as Bennett (2011) noted, neo-tribes have become a cornerstone of social sub-group research since what he has termed the 'post-subcultural turn' (2011; p. 493), the shift in sociological thinking that has occurred over the past twelve years. Any future research would do well to use neo-tribes as a basis for understanding the motivations and social organization of RV users.

In addition to future studies focusing on the social, economic, and community ties of RVers, researchers could also explore the possibility that RVing presents seniors with

the opportunity to build and maintain social capital. Putnam (2000) argues that in American society over the past forty years there has been an overall decline in levels of social capital, as evidenced by diminishing participation in social groups (i.e. bowling leagues, local parent-teacher associations, and scout troops). Through its focus on reciprocity, Putnam's argument could help to explain a retiree's decision to RV full time as for them it represents an alternative source for developing and maintaining social capital. Putnam describes how even among marginalized groups such as inner city gangs in the United States, the norms of reciprocity and social capital apply: "In many respects these networks and norms of reciprocity serve the interests of (*gang*) members in much the same way that social capital embodied in bowling teams helps their members" (p. 315). The reciprocity exhibited by RVers could help bind the group together across geographical limitations because RVers view their participation in subcultural activities as a means of gaining contextual social capital. As such, another possible direction for future research could be to examine the levels of social cohesion experienced by seniors prior to and after transitioning to fulltime travel.

Social capital and cohesion also plays a role in maintaining healthy lifestyles. Putnam (2000) points to Durkheim's *Suicide* to illustrate the importance of social cohesion and connectedness on physical and mental health (p. 326). For aging seniors, participation in the fulltime RV lifestyle could have an affect on health outcomes in part because of the effect of social cohesion. That is not to diminish the importance of RVing itself – RVing allows many seniors a degree of mobility and freedom that would otherwise be unavailable, and through RV associations can provide a variety of health

care services. A future study on the relationships between RVers' social capital and health outcomes could greatly inform this issue.

Conclusion

Previous researchers who made full-time RVers the subject of their studies highlighted the importance of retirement, healthy aging, RV associations, affordability, and north-south migratory patterns as key components of their social organization. Yet their focus primarily on RVers in the southern United States may have lead to over-generalization of all RVers as 'snowbirds' who split their time between a traditional home in the north and a mobile home in the south. This study attempted to broaden and complement understanding of the RV phenomenon to include those who travel in their RVs all-year long by capturing information from such RV travelers from the viewpoint of a northern location in the summertime.

I described several theoretical concepts that could be useful in framing my exploration of the social organization of full-time RVers. First, I wished to discuss how the full-time RV community could be described as a subculture based on the members' adoption of shared beliefs, symbols, values, and activities to address common problems that were unique to their community. Additionally, I outlined how full-time RVers could be categorized as a 'formal organization' according to Best and Luckenbill's (1980) organizational typology. Finally, because of their constant transiency I discussed how the concepts of rites of passage, liminality (van Gennep, 1960) and *communitas* (Turner, 1967; 2002) could be used to interpret the behaviour patterns of full-time RVers.

Through a series of eight semi-structured interviews with these 11 full-time RVers staying at Pippy Park in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador I explored three main research questions (and three sub-questions):

- 1. What drives the decision to RV fulltime?*
- 2. What is the organizational structure of the full-time RVer subculture?*
 - 2 a) Does a full-time RVer community or subculture exist?*
 - 2 b) What constitutes membership in the full-time RVer community?*
 - 2 c) How does the full-time RVer community sustain itself?*
- 3. What are the particular travel patterns of the full-time RV community?*

Generally, my participants felt that their community could indeed be considered a subculture based on the theoretical criteria I described, although they tended to place a stronger emphasis on RV brand than I expected. For my participants, RV brand served as a symbol that differentiated groups within the full-time RVer subculture as they understood it, whereby RVers with large, luxurious motorhomes were regarded as less friendly and less travelled, and consequently deviated from the exemplar of a true full-time RVer. At the same time, brand also functioned as a unifying symbol, acting as an icebreaker for RVers with the same type of RV.

The importance my participants tended to place on travel factors – the wide variety of places they visited, efforts to make travel affordable and sustainable, and the value they placed on pioneering adventure – forms what I believe to be the distinguishing factor to differentiate this group of full-time RVers from other types such as snowbirds. RVers in this study tended to view themselves as tourists, which contradicted my

expectations. My participations reported less reliance on services provided by RV associations to sustain themselves throughout their travels, perhaps because many of their needs are met through the use of communications technologies that connect them to their friends, families and peers. Because such communications technologies were not available during previous RVer studies, this study offers a unique perspective on the changing context for recreational travel in North America.

Interview responses lent support to a categorization of the full-time RVer subculture as a formal organization under Best & Luckenbill's (1980) organizational typology. Generally, my participants indicated that they associated and participated in acts with their peers, they displayed division of labour through involvement with RV associations, and sustained themselves over wide expanses of time and space as evidenced through continued participation with RV associations despite constant year-round travel.

Although communications technologies tended to undermine the utility of services provided by RV associations in this group of interviewees, all interviewees indicated that joining an association remained an important part of becoming a full-timer. Approached from a ritualistic perspective, I interpreted this finding as evidence that the act of joining an association was a component of an incorporation rite, through which RVers completed the transition from one social stage of life (traditional home ownership and employment) to another (retirement and full-time RVing).

This study has several implications for future investigation of full-time RVing. First, because many of my participants indicated that northern locations represented a

desirable challenge in their travel plans, there may be considerable benefit for replicating this study in other distant locations far from main population centres or areas that have received more attention, such as Arizona in the winter. For example, several of my participants indicated that Alaska was a destination on their 'bucket list' of locations. Full-time RVers who best exemplify the values and beliefs of their unique subculture may be found in greater concentration at these locations. Second, this study generated additional evidence that full-time RVing can serve as a means to enhance healthy aging because it enables mobility and provides social support for retirees. The use of communications technology in this group of seniors contradicted the stereotype that seniors resist adopting new practices. This finding is illustrative of how social relevance can overcome such resistance regardless of age. Finally, there may be many ways to expand upon the role that rituals and rites of passage play for the social organization of full-time RVers; as such this finding may inform areas of focus for future examinations on this topic. My interview schedule did not ask participants to directly comment on their rituals and rites of passage. Other researchers may find it fruitful to focus more squarely on their importance.

In conclusion, I would encourage social and anthropological thinkers to consider the patterns of full-time RVers not as linear, north-south travel that coincides with seasonal fluctuation, but as a great circular cycle that constantly expands to the fringes of North America, constantly seeking out new experiences and undiscovered destinations.

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APPENDIX A – SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Please tell me a about your background. Where would you consider yourself from?
2. When did you become an RVer? How old were you when you started RVing? How long have you been RVing?
3. When/how did you decide to start full-timing? How long are you planning to do this?
4. Do you meet and interact with many other RVers during your travels?
5. Are you a member of any RV organizations? Could you please elaborate?
6. Would you consider there to be an “RV community” in North America today? Do you consider yourself apart of it?
7. (If there is a community) How is the RV community connected? How do members stay in touch?
8. Do you look for RV organization membership stickers on other people’s RVs? How do you feel about membership stickers on your RV?
9. What about brand of RV? Does that hold any significance when you encounter new RVers for the first time?
10. What do you consider are good or bad manners for an RVer? Do an RVer’s manners determine whether or not you consider them true RVers?
11. Generally, where do you travel? Do conversations/ encounters with other RVers influence your decisions about where you travel? Also please comment on the role of the following as possible influences on your travel decisions: (1) e-mail; (2) online blogs; (3) Websites; (4) Cell phones; (5) promotional materials; (6) anything else?
12. Would you consider the travels of full time RVers to be similar to snow birding? Or are they different? What about your travels? Do you consider yourself to be a snowbird?
13. As an RVer, do you consider yourself a tourist? Is being a tourist compatible with being a full-timer?
14. would like to travel? Do ever ask other RVers for travel advice?
15. Have you met other RVers who visited Newfoundland? Did their visit influence your decision to travel here as well?

APPENDIX B – EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW WITH HERB

ELLEN: So, Herb, please tell me about your background. Where would you consider yourself from?

HERB: State of Oregon, I grew up on the coast of Oregon in Tulumuck and then spent 30 years in Portland, Oregon and retired from there in 2003,

ELLEN: Ok. And when did you become an RVer and how old were you when you started RVing?

HERB: Um, actually I had my first RV when I was 26 and had a camper and pickup for about 8 years and the price of gas got so high that we sold it and no longer had one and didn't get another RV until I remarried and retired in '03.

ELLEN: When or how did you decide to start full-timing?

HERB: It happened actually because of the movie "The Hours" with Nicole Kidman. We went to see the movie 3 times in a week and we both got the message from it to live your life now and not to put things off, and I had been eligible for early retirement and we thought we better just go play while we still have our health, and our energy and I had never seen much of the country outside of the Northwest, and northern California, and so for me it was fun getting to see the rest of the country. And so we at the end of that week, the following Monday I put in 30 day notice that I was retiring and we put the house on the market that week and it sold. I retired the first of April and then we were going to go on the road sometime that summer and she fell and broke her ankle sometime in early June so we didn't hit the road until sometime in September '03.

ELLEN: Do you meet and interact with many other RVers during your travels?

HERB: Yeah, you meet with a number of different people around the country.

ELLEN: Are you a member of any RV organizations?

HERB: We're members of the Escapees, Good Sam Club and the FMCA.

ELLEN: Would you consider there to be an RV community in North America today? And do you consider yourself a part of it?

HERB: Yes, there is a large RV community with lots of subsets. What we found with retiring younger was that we were younger than most of the RVers out there by about 10

or 12 years, but we did find a lot of younger RVers, the Escapees Club especially as 15 or 20 subsets of what they call special interest groups and so the one we joined up with was the Boomers which is younger people who like to travel and not have such a structured organization. And we'd meet a lot of different people and meet annually in Quartzite, Az. in January and stay out there with them for a week to two weeks in the desert.

ELLEN: Ok, um and um how is the RV community connected? How do members stay in touch?

HERB: Thanks to the internet, most everybody has a computer and e-mail and also cell phones. Groups at yahoo.com is one of the ways that people stay in touch because there a number of boards: RV-talk another one is called all about RVing and people from all over the country discuss problems, where to stay what brand of RV you have etc.

ELLEN: Do you look for RV organization membership stickers on other people's RVs and how do you feel about membership stickers on your RV?

HERB: We do watch for them, we don't always seek people out because we're not as group as some RVers are, we're a little more independent but we do watch for other Escapees, that's the one organization that that we're fairly active in. the others have mainly been to be a part of a group for camping benefits because you get discounts for the various clubs that you're a part of.

ELLEN: I know there's one called Good Sam.

HERB: Yeah, Escapees is another one and they have some of their own parks you can stay at for very cheap where people buy in. The Escapees are probably the one sticker we watch out for.

ELLEN: How did you decide to become a member of escapees?

HERB: Actually when we first hit the road we ended up in Quartzite in our camper and pickup and there was another couple towing a large fifth-wheel and they were trying to sell a medium duty collar, and she was blind with a dog and we got to know them, and so they started talking to us about the benefits of the escapees club and you could join because they have an RV show and you could join the escapees there for like 20 dollars off a year. And I think it costs us 60 dollars a year to join. I think that's what it is and at that time we didn't know what we were going to need. They provided things like a mail forwarding service, e-mail and on and on, there's a lot of different benefits you can use and we weren't certain of how many of those we would need. And so it seemed like a great way to stay in touch and meet people.

ELLEN: Do you find membership beneficial to you?

HERB: Not as beneficial as we had initially anticipated. Because we found other ways to get things done without having to resort to using all the services that they offered.

ELLEN: What about brand of RV? Does that hold any significance when you encounter new RVers for the first time?

HERB: Its true because people with the same brands tend to meet up and you have something in common to discuss Ours is by Fleetwood and some people with similar Fleetwood but not the same exact model you tend to discuss your engine if you're having problems, what dealers will handle your problems etc. and then you also watch which people are in the higher end RVers and that they kind of tend to go together too yeah, it's interesting to watch.

ELLEN: What do you consider are good or bad manners for an RVer and does an RVer's manners determine whether or not you consider them true RVers?

HERB: Yeah, bad manners in an RVer would be in most campsites would be excessively noisy and not cleaning up around site and being sloppy with their sewage and water and just not taking care of things or look out for the other people around them, good manners I think are people who introduce themselves and intrude themselves and share the knowledge of what's going on or if they have question to ask and... What was the last part of the question?

ELLEN: um, do and RVer's manners determine whether or not you consider them a true RVer?

HERB: When you say true RVers you mean full-timers?

ELLEN: Yeah...

HERB: Yes, because people that full time, and it took us about six months to think about, people that full-time you never meet, you rarely meet two people who do not get along and are not happy because they never make it out on the road id they aren't happy in that small space together and so, typically people with good manners meet people who aren't nice or taking care of the campsite, then they're probably not full-timers they're probably people who are out on a vacation. One thing: beware of the rental RVs because those are typically people who have no idea what they're doing and some are very nice people but others have no idea or especially in the States up around California you get some that are very rude and could care less about how they treat others or the campsite.

ELLEN: and generally where do you travel?

HERB: in the winter we are generally in Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and sometimes Texas, sometimes, now were going to be spending in Newfoundland, but prior to that we spent summers in Montana, Colorado, we spent our first month there, then we went to South Dakota to the Black Hills, it's one of our favorite places in the country, a beautiful park, a great group of people and volunteers that run the park, just an amazing area, a little like your Pippy Park, good people attract more good people and some parks everybody is stern and I'm here cause I have to work but that particular park is well maintained and because it's a state park they can manage things like the buffalo herds. It's really a well kept park.

ELLEN: And in the summer where did you go?

HERB: We would go farther north because we liked cooler weather, we've got friends in Grand Rapids, Michigan we like to visit then we've been up to New England and just stay up where the temperatures are around 70 degrees, any in the northern tier states.

ELLEN: do conversations or encounters with other RVers influence your decisions where you travel?

HERB: Yes, because they will very often give you interesting ideas of where to go and they've either had pleasant or unpleasant experiences and so and some of that depends in the type of vehicle you travel in. Our first 13 months were in a camper and pickup and so we could go wherever we wanted to go. when we got a 38 foot motorhome and have to tow a car, now we have to think more about more where we travel and where we park at night and we plan a lot more than we used to have to and so then you have to know where you're going to end up at night unless you're on an Interstate and there's rest areas and truck stops. So, you do listen to other people and say yeah, these are good highways or bad highways avoid this, avoid that...

ELLEN: Ok, also could you please comment on the role of any of these influences of travel decisions: e-mail, websites, blogs, promotional material....

HERB: For us, promotional material haven't had much of an impact, you do get offered free nights at places but we've had yet to take advantage of any of that, we've met a lot of people who do, we just tend to wander at will a little more, we don't have a schedule for more than a day or two, um, I would say the internet has helped a lot we keep up the Yahoo groups that have to do with RVing.

ELLEN: Would you and Mary ever consider going on a caravan group?

HERB: Nope. Its far to structured for us, and where kind of night owls and sleep in the morning, they have to leave in waves like every 15 minutes or so, yeah, it's even we met up with a guy and he was like in his 30th day of a 40 caravan around the Maritimes and he was tired he was ready to go home and he had ten more days of it, it depends in the individual hoe structured a life they live... we know one couple they volunteer all the time so they don't have to pay, they'll go and assist as staff in order to go along with the caravans. They have an older Winnebago, so they go along with a Winnebago group they're in with and they like to travel with them.

ELLEN: Do you know snowbirding?

HERB: Snowbirding is more people who go south for the winter, they a lot of times are not full times, they'll have a place in the central parts of the states or Canada and they'll go south to avoid the cold weather. A lot of time they'll go to one place a stay for four months without really a lot of travel. When we first got on the road. We didn't consider that real RVing, we considered that like having a mobile apartment and why didn't they buy a condo somewhere. It just seemed to be an oxymoron, to have an RV to just go sit somewhere and have 5pm show up and have happy hour and go sit inside with air conditioning and watch TV for the rest of the evening and really never get out and interact with the community other than their little RV park. That to us wasn't RVing.

ELLEN: so, have you ever considered yourselves snowbirds? or your activities ever been like those of snowbirds?

HERB: In the winter time we go to Texas and they have signs that say welcome snowbirds, and yeah, we've gone to Texas for the winter and spent a couple of months, in a sense that's snowbirding, but in the RV community typically, its more thought of as those people are part-timers, who are just, down for the winter for a few months and most of those people tow fifth-wheels or they drive gas engine motorhomes because they're cheaper and they don't have to put as many miles on them and people that are full-timing typically use diesel units because they're built heavier and they accommodate more miles which you need when you're living in it full time. and part of the full-time definition for us and most of the others we've met, is that meaning that they move around all year long, that they don't just sit in one in one campground in the north all summer or in the south all winter.

ELLEN: And as an RVer do you consider yourself a tourist? Is being a tourist compatible with being an RVers?

HERB: It's a part of what we do but we consider ourselves different from typical tourists because for us we are home and what's outside our living room changes every day. We try to be gracious to the communities we visit because we realize we're outsiders and in that sense we're tourists but it's not like we're on holiday with lots of extra money to spend that's on a week or two vacation, who's saved up and know they're to be curios and things to take home with them because this is where we live and this is how we live. Most RVers have to be fairly thrifty when they're out on the road. So typically we'll park at Wal-Marts, truck stops and rest stops and save our money to eat out and interact with the community rather than going to some place and have hook-ups every night and then not have any money to go out and spend in the community so a lot of times you have to balance what you're doing. One of the interesting things I've seen is in the States a lot of the Full-time RVers are retired military personnel with full pensions to afford to travel and one of the reasons I can travel is that I was a union carpenter and had an excellent pension. And so it's one of the things I've noticed and thought that everyone should be entitled to a decent pension so they can do what they want. But there is a large subculture of ex-military people that travel and so they have fraternal networking as well, common language.

ELLEN: I've noticed them in the park.

HERB: In the States a lot of people spend their 20 years in the military to get their pension and then they'll go work for another 10 years to get another pension and they end up with a very comfortable retirement with that.

ELLEN: When you have arrived in a place you've never visited before, how do you decide where you would like to travel? Do you ever ask other RVers for travel advice?

HERB: Yes, but typically we will go into a restaurant to order or a store and say "what's here that we shouldn't miss?" we go and we try to ask questions of the local people because a lot of times we'll discuss it with other RVers if we see them but typically we won't seek them out for advice about where we are. Because a lot of times they've never been there before either so.

ELLEN: Have you met other RVers who visited NL? And did their visit influence you decision to travel here?

HERB: Yes, we met people, our group that meets in Arizona every January, a group of us met there in January of '06, and that's the first time we talked about it. Because we had wanted to come to the Maritimes but we weren't ready yet. So in January of '07 we had a group, some had been here, and one person brought a CD of photos and passed it around,

of all the different provinces and shared their information of where they've been and what not to miss. So out of that about 8 couples said that they intended to get to the Maritimes and we wanted to try and stay in touch with each other over the summer months as we travelled and indeed we did. We met up with four different couples out of that group while we were in NL. And then once we were here we met with one couple in particular; we'd spend a day or two together and go our separate ways and then meet up again. It was a lot of fun, we had a good time.

ELLEN: Do you have anything else you would like to add?

HERB: What have made RVing different in the last ten years is cell phones because we can stay in touch with family and friends. And the coverage is so much better in the last five years than it was prior, especially in the States. I don't know what it's like across Canada but here in NL it's the same system that we have with Verizon in the States. And so our cell phones work great here in NL but so many people come from Ontario with a different system and their cell phones hardly work. Cell phones and internet; there's a huge group of people who use their cell phone as a modem to get on the internet and quite a few of us have internet dishes on our motorhomes and a lot of people are earning their living that way. Young people doing consulting work; one lady we know does medical transcription over the internet and travels full-time, there's people that do accounting, investing work, things where they can have a mobile office, they can put up their satellite dishes and be online in ten minutes and go back to work. So there's a large community beginning to live out there on the road even with children and they do home schooling work as well. Mainly its younger couples with no children, it's not too often you meet people with kids full-timing. The fact that the RV community has grown so, there's a subculture of businesses now to support that that compete with Escapees; there's a lot more mail forwarding services there's a lot of discussion on the internet about which state is the best to register vehicle in. South Dakota and Texas are the favorites and people have to think of things- everything from inheritance tax and voting to registration to income tax, it's quite an involved thing to try and decided.

ELLEN: Are all of those things difficult for RVers of Full-time RVers?

HERB: I wouldn't say they're... difficult is probably too big a word, it's pretty straight forward once you make the decision. But it's just a matter of like, deciding to buy a car. What car do you want? You just have to weigh the options and decide what the best fit for you is. And now that we're set next spring we'll sell our last two houses in Oregon and so we'll have to decide - we can leave, we can keep our registrations as long as they're valid, but we're going to have to decide whether we become Texans to the Escapees or just to re-register in South Dakota perhaps. So we'll have to just cram to

get... To really immigrate into Canada isn't an option for us because we're retired, so we can't get a Visa to actually come here and live even though we own property. That won't be an option/ We met a couple coming over on the ferry this year that have lived near - just east of Port Aux Basques, they've been coming there for ten or twelve years now, but they have to leave 'cause she said they can't get any type of immigration status. They're retired, and they go see their daughter in Boston for a week or two here and there in the spring and the winter, or the spring and the fall rather. And they've lived there for a number of years but she said - I forget what she said, you have to bring a certain dollar amount with you for economic investment or something and there's all kinds of hoops to jump through. But that's because the States stiffened up all their immigration so Canada responded in kind with that. The other thing I think that the internet for us though is things that are expensive like tires, people will discuss where to buy tires across the country, and as people that are full-timers make their rotate around the country, sometimes people will make plans ahead of time because we have to replace our tires every six years, even if they're in perfectly good shape, cause you start getting blow-outs after six years. And there's things like that that people do to save money but the economy of it is - most of us really have to watch, because we're on fixed incomes, typically, and you know your house isn't appreciating, it's depreciating pretty rapidly. That's probably the biggest thing, people really have to just watch the economy and watch their own dollars and cents. But they're out on the road because they do have sufficient funds to do it. So most people are pretty well versed in taking care of themselves and watching their funds. It's interesting that you meet everybody from people travelling full time in a little Volkswagen bus to the big travel busses. But it's a very - its very class based when you get into the RV parks. People in the class C's are below those in the class A's. And those in the campers and pickups are looked down... When we travelled in our camper and pickup, literally there were campgrounds we could not go into because we had a camper, we didn't have a motor home and we we're pulling a trailer. And they said you're not allowed! It's against the rules! And our pickup and camper were worth more than a lot of the class C motorhomes driving around in there. But there is a definite class distinction between the different types of motor homes when you travel. And people - that's another part of the subculture. Something else to think about as you talk to people and see how they act and react to things. But just, human nature. Some of its self-inflicted, I think as much because one - it was really interesting to read one time a gentleman at the travel wrote into one of the talk groups and he said, "you know people ask if they can come in, do I have to take my shoes off? You see this is my house just like it's your house" he said, "I wouldn't ask that if I walked into your motor home, unless you're covered in mud! No! Come on in!

ELLEN: Yeah.

HERB: He said I'm just another human being; I put my pants on one leg at a time! And you're coming to my house, come on in! I'm no different than you! And Mary loved that because that was just after we'd got through living in the camper for those 13 months, and we moved into the Revolution. And then people looked at it like, Oh, My God!

ELLEN: The Revolution, that's the one you have now.

HERB: Yeah. They only made those for two years when we bought it. The reason - and I thought about it over the years - out licence plate that says the Taj Mahal. And thought well maybe some people think that's bragging like, "We're in the Taj Mahal" but what it was, after being in that little camper and pickup for 13 months you walked inside the motor home, and it's like, Oh my God, I feel like I'm in the Tajo Mahal! And I said well, there's your name! And she loves her personalized licence plates. And the pickup is the Taj Tode. Tode, that's why I took a piece of white tape to make it the long O. but that's why she wanted it for the Jeep because that's what we tow behind, the Tode. But I think that's about it. But we've really enjoyed it. It's been just so interesting to meet all the different people around the country and the different cultures that you run across, and that's many. And it's such a different experience to drive the country rather than fly in to a city and look around get on a plane and fly out again! You just have a whole different experience to see the country and see the land as you drive through it. Almost like you guys did today, driving across Newfoundland. It's just an amazing track.

ELLEN: The drive up here, it was great actually to see it.

HERB: It's such a different experience, it is. The only thing in Newfoundland is there are no shoulders on the road wide enough for us to pull that big thing off on. If there's a downside to Newfoundland for us, it's being in that RV. I'd rather be in a small class C of some sort. That would be ideal for me because it's so nice at night to be in a motor home where you can turn around, walk back and get in bed without having to get out of the cab of the pickup and walk around in the rain and climb into his back door and that sort of thing. Or have to go back and walk into a trailer, since we tend to drive late at night. We'll drive till 10:30, 11:00, 12 sometimes at night then we stop.

ELLEN: Do most people stop before then?

HERB: Oh yeah, most people are stopped by 2 or 3 in the afternoon. Most people start earlier.

