

More Sunsets

Social Organization of the RV Sub-
Culture

By Ellen Haskell.

Outline

Research Goals

Difference between RVers and “Snowbirds”

RVing and retirement

The RV community

Healthy aging in the RV community

Methodology

Pippy Park

RVer travels to Newfoundland

The Interviews

Preliminary Results

Implications

Research Goals

What “Drives” This Research?

- Difference between RVers and “Snowbirds”
- Travel patterns
- RVing and retirement
- The RV community
- Healthy aging in the RV community

Research Goals

RVers Vs. Snowbirds

Snowbirds...

- Travel from fixed dwelling in the North
- Travel to fixed dwelling in the South
- Habitation oscillates based on season

RVers...

- Travel seasonal, but nomadic
- No fixed dwelling
- Maintain RV as primary residence

Research Goals

Travel Patterns

- RVers may follow the seasons but their travel is not restricted to fixed locations.
- When in a given geographical location RVers tend to travel around.
- “.. The style necessitates a well-maintained and supportive group around them. They cannot effectively maintain their rigs and plan excursions in solitary isolation.” Jobses, 1984, p. 190

Research Goals

RVing and Retirement

“*Skips* (members of the Escapees RV Club) proclaim that their retirement alternative offer them new and challenging experiences, the freedom to control their circumstances, and a system of social networks that allows them to create and participate in community whenever they wish.”

Counts & Counts, 1996, p. 26

Independence

Control

Community

Research Goals

The RV Community

Generally, RVers do not share common territory or history so they developed other ways to establish community identity:

- The development of RV organizations and clubs
- Displaying membership logo stickers on RVs
- By brand of RV
- Participation in RV organization rallies
- Blogs, web-sites, e-mail, message boards, social networking sites
- Newsletters and magazines
- Code of conduct

Research Goals

RV Types*



Folding Tent Trailer



Traditional Travel Trailer



Type A Motorhome

*From the Recreational Vehicle industry Association, www.rvia.org

Research Goals

RV Organizations



Escapes RV Club

Good Sam Club



Wally Byam Caravan Club
(Airstream owners only)

Research Goals

Healthy Aging in the RV Community

There are several advantages of RV living after retirement

- It is an inexpensive way of life; costs of living decrease because there are no longer the property taxes, maintenance or mortgage fees associated with a fixed home.
- RVers have total control over travel, which is their main expense.
- Access to a supportive community of friends.
- Space restrictions limit spending.

Research Goals

Healthy Aging in the RV Community

RVers cannot travel indefinitely! As a group made up of retirees they have developed strategies within the community to cope with members no longer able to travel.

The CARE program:*

- A fixed, leased RV site with a ramp and storage shed
- Registered nursing care
- Security checks, transportation to local services, weekly RV cleaning, laundry service and exercise programs.
- Adult Day Care
- Affordable (\$800 a month)
- RV community volunteers

* www.escapeescare.org

Methodology

Many studies have compartmentalized RVing into either winter migration or summer tourism. The possibility that they are connected through the wider social networks of the RV community has yet to be explored.

Methodology

Finding RVers

Why Study RVing at Pippy Park?

1. Pippy Park Campground is a popular destination for RVers from all over North America.
2. Pippy Park is close to Memorial's St. John's Campus
3. Campground management allowed access to park patrons
4. I was able to focus my research on full-time and serious RVers from other parts of Canada and the United States staying in Pippy Park.

Methodology

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews

Main Topics:

- a) establish the extent to which RVers influence each other
- b) the recruitment process
- c) self-identification as RVers, Snowbirds, tourists
- d) RV community membership

Examples:

“Do you look for RV membership stickers on other RV’s?”

“Do an RVers manners determine whether or not you consider them true RVers?”

Preliminary Results

Status Update:

transcription process and analysis of data.

Emergent themes thus far:

General agreement that there is a self-identified RV community in North America today

RV brand and manners *do influence* RVer status

Snowbirds and RVers are *different*.

The decision to RV is active and well-planned.

Implications

- acknowledge RVing as a legitimate alternative retirement lifestyle with several advantages.
- Consider the implications programs like CARE could have in the wider non-RVing world
- Establish the importance of maintaining control over one's environment, even into old age
- Connecting RVer travels in Newfoundland and Labrador to the wider circulation of the RV sub-culture in North America
- Economic benefits

Thank You

- I would like to thank my supervisors Dr. Scott Kenney and Dr. Jim Overton, the Department of Sociology at Memorial, the management and staff of the C.A. Pippy Park Commission and the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Applied Health Research.

Thank you for your Support.