

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Transhumance as an Adaptive Strategy of West Coast RV  
Retirees

Abstract approved:

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This ethnography describes RV [recreational vehicle] seasonal migration as an adaptive, transhumant strategy. The study population is retired, transhumant migrants, who are members of a nation-wide, membership camping organization. Fieldwork was conducted over a period of seven months at two sites located on the West Coast. These sites reflect northern and southern locations corresponding to seasonal migration patterns.

Standard scholarly orientations to the study of retired RV seasonal migrants manifest ethnocentrism and a tendency to stereotype RVers as amenity-migrants. An original and primary objective of the present study was to reach beyond these conceptualizations and popularized images through first-hand, descriptive accounts collected within the context of the culture.

This research expands on two existing studies focusing on social and cultural aspects of RV seasonal migration. In

contrast to these accounts, the present study provides ✓  
cultural description of the daily life of retired RVers ✓  
focusing on the distinctive ways that members of this ✓  
subculture express mainstream American cultural values ✓  
underlying their adaptive strategies. ✓

This study proposes an alternative conceptualization of  
RV seasonal migration, derived from the culture itself. The  
conclusion is that these adaptive strategies reflect  
patterns of social organization, patterns of resource  
management, and patterns of social, familial, and  
interpersonal relationships, that are congruent with  
mainstream American cultural values of self-reliant  
individualism, equality, and material comfort; values that  
have historical, philosophical roots in the Protestant Work  
Ethic.

The RVers' identity derives from maintaining membership  
in a temporary, fluid, mobile community. They have cohesive  
social networks with well-defined boundaries, which they  
defend against threats to group identity. This study  
contributes to an understanding of what RV seasonal ✓  
migration means to the participants themselves, and by ✓  
extension, to their families, to communities, and to our ✓  
aging society.

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Transhumance as an Adaptive Strategy  
of West Coast RV Retirees

by

Diane Williams

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, John and Dorothy Williams. You taught me to appreciate and value people and diverse ways of life. This thesis is a culmination of those valuable life lessons. I thank you for your love, support, and understanding, as I have stepped through life to the beat of a different drummer. Finally, this thesis is also dedicated to Belle -- a first-rate dog!

# TRANSHUMANCE AS AN ADAPTIVE STRATEGY OF WEST COAST RV RETIREES

## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

### Problem Statement

Retired RV (recreational vehicle) seasonal migrants possess a core of cultural features, distinguishing them as a subculture. These basic cultural features, or patterned ways of life, are generated through the formation of identity and through shared values specific to these RVers. According to Barth (1969) acquiring an understanding of the identity and values of the members of a subculture is inseparable from conceptualizing their form of social life. Supporting this perspective, DeVos (1975) notes, "Defining oneself in social terms is one basic answer to the human need to belong and to survive" (p. 17).

The formation of identity and the integration of cultural values are dynamic processes influencing and constraining choice and decision-making (Barth, 1969). Specifying these processes is critical for understanding the role of identity and values as important motivations of social behavior. In the decision-making process, strong biases on choice are generated from cultural values resulting in marked behavioral patterns (Barth, 1966). Identity and values also define the parameters of culturally acceptable behavior within the RV culture.

Cultural symbols specific to RVing are important as they allow members to express, maintain, and transmit their sense of RV identity and values (Gladney, 1991). DeVos (1975) notes the "...identity of a group of people consists in their subjective symbolic or emblematic use of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups" (p. 16).

Mobile, retired RVers have inspired a romantic image as free-spirits, unfettered by the possessions and constraints of their sedentary peers. This popular image portrays RVers as individualistic, independent, autonomous, self-reliant, and unconstrained by convention.

While our society sanctions these qualities, this romantic image is illusory. RVers are not isolated individuals, but members of culturally constructed groups and communities with whom they identify. The cultural values of these RVers are discernable in recurring patterns of behavior (Barth, 1969). These shared cultural values reflect the principles, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors defining RVers as members of this subculture. Like other mobile peoples, individual RV households are tied to these social groups. These social groups set standards for conduct binding individuals "... tightly to cultural norms which they cannot ignore" (Barfield, 1993, p. 205).

Diverse ways of life are human expressions of what is meaningful. The responsibility of the ethnographer is to respect those expressions through descriptions of the

culture. These descriptions reveal what the informants regard as meaningful in their lives (Spradley, 1979). The research problem guiding this study is to describe, from the native point of view, the formation of identity and shared values of a subculture of retired RV seasonal migrants.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to write a descriptive ethnography of a subculture of retirees who migrate seasonally in recreational vehicles. In 1969, Born (1976) reported that an estimated 8 million people of retirement age lived in recreational vehicles. Despite this estimate, there is a paucity of research on RVing as a form of elderly seasonal migration.

The results of this study may add to existing knowledge and challenge biased perceptions of RVers promoted by the widespread, popular, commercialization of this lifestyle, and by ageist perspectives. These biases contribute to ethnocentric stereotypes. These stereotypes veil the social complexities and realities of elderly seasonal migration and produce cultural distortion. The stereotypes of retired RVers point to the need for cultural accounts of this lifestyle.

An anthropological perspective has the potential of influencing policy by redefining problems and solutions. Anthropology brings the "native" or "insider" point of view

to the attention of policy makers. The native point of view is crucial for policymakers developing plans reflecting the social complexities of this migrant population. Cultural studies can be used to orient policy makers to the issues and problems RVers consider relevant and important. The advantage of this perspective is in the definition of alternative ways to address these issues, and ways to negotiate culturally acceptable, effective solutions.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are: 1) to describe the daily life of the members of this subculture within the context of a RV membership organization from the RVers point of view; 2) to identify recurring patterns of behavior; 3) to describe the process of identity formation; 4) to specify the cultural symbols representing identity and cultural values; 5) to explain the motivation of RV seasonal migration; 6) to suggest ways knowledge about RVers gained through this study can be applied to address general social policy issues.

The cultural description in Chapters 5 through 9 meets the first five objectives. The discussion and conclusion in Chapter 10 is a synthesis of these descriptions. Chapter 10 also addresses the sixth objective, suggesting ways this knowledge about RVers can be applied to general social policy issues.

## CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Transhumance

The geographic movement of people with the seasons is known as transhumance (Cressey, 1923). Transhumance is a world-wide cultural phenomenon expressing human ability to adapt to social, cultural, and physical environments.

Primary sources in the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) reveal rich cross-cultural accounts of various forms of transhumance. The HRAF literature reflects several recurring themes. First, seasonal migration is viewed as a meaningful system of action involving all the members of an entire clan or tribe. Second, the process of seasonal migration is a response to constraints and opportunities in the natural and socio-cultural environments (Chatty, 1980). Third, changes of orientation and activity from one locale to another are often changes of emphasis or shifts of lifestyle patterns rather than radical transformations from one way of life to another (Chatty, 1980). Fourth, specific patterns of behavior, activities, language, lifestyles, and orientations can be associated with the migration process and are associated with the season and the temporary or permanent living site (Caspani & Cagnacci, 1947; Combe, 1925; Spencer, 1952; Vidal, 1954).

Descriptive accounts of tribes, clans, and families migrating to access pasture land, planting, harvest, and trade permeate cultural descriptions of seasonal migration.

Seasonal migration reveals a highly uniform pattern of culture (Spencer, 1952). Attention to the patterned nature of this phenomenon was noted by Caspani and Cagnacci (1947) in their descriptions of the Kuchi tribe in Afghanistan:

It is necessity, then which prompts the migration of these people, a seasonal shifting of entire tribes which is mistakenly called nomadism. In leaving as in returning, the migrating tribes called Kuchi in Afghanistan move in accordance with a traditional order; each clan or family moves on a prearranged day, along fixed routes in fixed daily stages and stopping at prearranged intermediary pasture lands.

Caspani and Cagnacci (1947) continue to note that the Kuchi took portable household utensils, flocks, cattle, and dismantled sections of tents with them on the seasonal journey.

An elaborate, highly specialized system of migration patterns with intricate terminology has been recorded for seasonal camel migration in Saudi Arabia (Vidal, 1954). Vidal (1954) observed that the seasonally migrating Hasawi, a Saudi Arabian tribe, had "...developed detailed patterns for oasis irrigation and date culture and a correspondingly complex vocabulary" (p. S-5).

In Tibet, the phenomenon of vertical nomadism describing a seasonal migration pattern of movement up and down mountain slopes corresponding to the seasons is described as a "...leisurely movement from place to place, so one day is very much like another" (Combe, 1925, p. 12). An early on-site description of a Tibetan winter site documented people working outdoors, gathering fuel, tending

cattle, and engaging in a period of merry making (DAS, 1902). Seasonally migrating Cherokee Indian tribes divided the 12 month calendar year into two distinct seasons, summer and winter (Anonymous, no date). The Cherokee year was a natural, functional year based upon their agricultural way of life. The summer season began at planting and continued until harvest. The winter season followed harvest and lasted until spring planting (Anonymous, no date).

Differences in lifestyles corresponding to particular seasons are widely documented across cultures. Winter time was particular important for the Arapaho Indian tribe. In the summer they lived on the prairie. In the winter time, the tribe lived in protected areas in woods and along streams. During the winter season, specific tribal traditions were related by elders to children beginning at the first snowfall until grass began to grow. All other cultural information was told year around (Hilger, 1942). Fox (1938) interviewed Afghani seasonal migrants and contrasted the hard working summer months with the winter months. In winter, the primary focus of the men was socializing through storytelling and repeating stories about the bravery of their fathers.

The definition of official residence is determined by the culture group. For example, Mormon farmers living on the American Fork maintained temporary residences on their farms in the summertime and moved to town in winter



(Nelson, 1950). Nelson (1950) observed that these farmers always considered the town or village home as their official residence.

Interestingly, issues concerning taxation of seasonally migrating populations is a recurring theme. Shepherds moving across the Saudi frontier with their flocks were subject to a sheep tax by officials (Philby, 1951). Fox (1938) also identified taxation as an issue for Afghani migratory shepherds. If the tax collector could locate the sheep, the shepherds were taxed by Kabul according to the number of sheep in their herd (Fox, 1938).

#### Elderly Seasonal Migration

Elderly seasonal migration in North America is a form of transhumance. Elderly seasonal migration patterns are to warmer, sunbelt states in the south in the winter, and to cooler, snowbelt states in the north in summer.

#### Snowbirds

Snowbirding is a kind of temporary, seasonal migration in winter months to states with warmer climates (Sullivan & Stevens, 1982; Wiseman, 1980).

#### Sunbirds

While snowbirding is acknowledged widely in the literature, there are only occasional references to migration patterns known as sunbirding. RVers known as

sunbirds migrate to cooler geographic locations in northern states during the summer season (Happel, Hogan, & Pflanz, 1988).

## Dislocative Studies of RV Seasonal Migration

### Demographic Characteristics

A demographic profile of retired RV seasonal migrants indicates that this population is primarily Anglo, middle to upper income, retired, married, with a median age of 67 (Jobes, 1984; Martin, Hoppe, Larson, & Leon, 1987; McHugh, 1990; Mings, 1984; Sullivan & Stevens, 1982). RV seasonal migrants tend to be younger and healthier physically than other members of their cohort (Martin et al., 1987).

### Census Data

RV seasonal migration is considered an increasingly important trend (Martin et al., 1987). Research points to a need for Census migration data responsive to the various mobility patterns of RVers, reflecting "...the nature of elderly population mobility as it is evolving within the United States" (Happel et al., 1988, p. 130).

Traditional Census of Population definitions of migration are overly restrictive, categorizing populations based on self-identification of home state, point of origin, and permanent destination (McHugh, 1990; Happel et

al., 1988, Mings, 1984; Sullivan & Stevens). Similarly, the Housing and Current Population Survey assume that a move is a change in the usual place of residence. These surveys provide respondents with narrow classifications, identifying themselves as local movers, intrastate migrants, interstate migrants, or immigrants (Sullivan & Stevens, 1982). Sullivan and Stevens (1982) point out that there is a bias underlying the concept of usual place of residence, which does not allow for temporary seasonal migration patterns (p. 160).

McHugh (1990) pointed out that a considerable amount of geographic movement does not fit the traditional notion of moving from one permanent residence to another. The Census survey's restrictive definitions do not adequately portray continuously mobile RVers who have no precise destination, point of origin or permanent home state (Mings, 1984). Census surveys do not allow self-definitions of home that are unconnected to a point of origin.

Mings (1984) reports that these data collection procedures result in the number of full-time, mobile RVers being either overlooked or misrepresented in the data. As presently structured, these surveys cannot assess the magnitude of elderly RV seasonal migration. Additionally, the ability of census statistics to reflect a true picture of the scope of RV seasonal migration is limited (Happel et al., 1988; Mings, 1984; Sullivan & Stevens, 1984). Happel et al. (1988) contend that the Bureau of the Census needs

to stay abreast of changing lifestyles. Accordingly, researchers recommend that Census surveys, including the Census of Transportation and the National Travel Survey, the Decennial Census, and the monthly Current Population Survey, include questions reflecting seasonal migration and multiple residences (Happel, et al., 1988; Mings, 1984; McHugh, 1990).

Census survey information is considered crucial data in estimating the economic impact of inflows of wintering RV seasonal migrants in sunbelt locations (Happel et al., 1988). Happel et al. (1988) note that important equity issues are raised as state and federal revenues are often allocated on the basis of permanent population statistics provided by census data.

#### Impacts on Host Communities

Seasonal migrants are viewed as either an economic boon or an economic burden to host communities (Haas, 1990). Researchers contend that the increased inflow of RV seasonal migrants creates the need for census data in order to predict and estimate the economic effects of these inflows on local retail establishments, public service, medical, security, education, recreational transportation, tax revenue, and employment in host communities (Mings, 1984).

Permanent residents point out that qualitative costs of hosting RVers is evident in the increased scope of

community planning problems, increased demands on utilities, public facilities, environmental degradation, and increased congestion on the road (Happel et al., 1988).

Arizona policy makers have discussed imposing a snowbird tax to offset the economic and social burdens created by RVers, charging that winter migrants do not pay their fair share of taxes and government fees (Happel et al., 1988). Consumer spending by RVers, however, is a significant source of revenue to host communities (Happel et al., 1988). From a survey of RVers conducted during the peak of the 1986-1987 winter season outside Phoenix, Arizona, researchers estimated that RVers and mobile home seasonal migrants injected an estimated \$220-\$226 million into the local economy (Happel et al., 1988). The perception of RVers as an economic boon is enhanced by the observation that retired RVers do not utilize public services such as schools or increase the crime rate in these communities (Happel et al., 1988).

#### RVing as a Prelude to Permanent Migration

RV seasonal migration has been considered a prelude to permanent migration, allowing retirees to explore and vacation in other geographic regions (McHugh, 1990). McHugh (1990) hypothesized that demographic characteristics, the strength of place-ties, and commitment to the RV lifestyle

were important variables in the decision-making process linking seasonal migration with permanent migration.

In a survey of 1000 part-time RV households wintering outside Phoenix, Arizona, McHugh (1990) found that place ties have a strong influence on migration plans and decisions. This survey revealed that the majority of RV winter visitors had strong social ties to their home communities (McHugh, 1990).

McHugh (1990) also found that the locational flexibility RVers experience through seasonal migration, allows them to build ties in two or more places. However, multiple place-ties render traditional definitions of permanent and usual residence problematic (McHugh, 1990). McHugh (1990) concluded that retiree RV seasonal migration was a lifestyle, rather than a planned prelude to a permanent migration.

#### RVers

##### Seasonally Migrating RVers

Migration is defined as a type of residential mobility requiring a change in environment (Cribier, 1980). The differentiation of RV migrants from other types of seasonal migrants is the recreational vehicle, which is the retiree's mode of transportation and also their physical residence and home. The RV is the retiree's primary residence enroute and upon reaching their destinations.

McHugh (1990) and Martin et al. (1987) point to the existence of a large, growing seasonal RV population. McHugh (1990) estimated that 75,000 to 150,000 visitors resided at RV parks in Phoenix during the 1988-1989 winter season.

### A Typology of RVers

A typology of retired RV seasonal migrants, based on the amount of time spent living in an RV, was proposed by Jobes (1984). Jobes (1984) hypothesized that the amount of time spent living in an RV reflects the degree of commitment to the RV community. This classification was based on behavioral differences observed between three types of retired RVers: full-timers, part-time seasonal migrants, and vacation travelers (Jobes, 1984).

#### Full-timers

RVers living full-time in their RV's have a high degree of commitment to the RV community (Jobes, 1984). Full-timers are characterized by continuous mobility. Jobes' (1984) profile of full-timers portrays the majority of RVers as retired, and financially and temporally independent. Full-timers place minimal demands on relatives or other support sources. Often, old social ties are severed as new ties are formed on the road (Jobes, 1984). Traditional, sedentary retirement is viewed by full-timers

as an isolating and boring lifestyle and is contrasted with their own lifestyle of active independence (Jobes, 1984).

#### RV nomads.

Mobile full-timers, engaging in travel as a way of life rather than being destination oriented, have been considered nomadic (Counts & Counts, 1992; Jobes, 1984; Mings, 1984). In a study of winter RVers camping on public lands in the southwest, Mings (1984), a cultural geographer, concluded that retired RVers were an emerging class of recreationists best described as nomadic. He described the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of a population of retired RV nomads practicing a form of recreational transhumance. Mings (1984) describes these RVers as "... nomadically circulating between a set of camping locations on public lands in the Southwest during winters and similar campsites in northern areas during summers" (p.97).

#### Full-time housing alternative.

Full-time RVing was considered an important housing and lifestyle option for retirees by Hartswigen and Null (1989). According to a survey of full-timers in a membership camping organization, the most important reasons for full-timing were the desire to travel, and to have an outdoor lifestyle. Freedom and the lack of responsibilities



were the most desirable aspects of full-timing. Full-timers also enjoyed traveling and meeting people. ]

The majority of respondents indicated that there was nothing they disliked about the lifestyle (Hartswigen & Null, 1989). Frequent moves and limited stays, missing grandchildren and children, and restricted living and storage space were considered minor negative parts of being on the road full-time (Hartswigen & Null, 1989).

The ability to take life as it comes, enjoy a relaxed lifestyle, nature, traveling, and experiencing new adventures were articulated by respondents as the outlook required for successful full-timing (Hartswigen & Null, 1989). Compatibility between couples living in restricted living space was also cited as a crucial factor in maintaining this lifestyle (Counts & Counts, 1992; Hartswigen & Null, 1989; Moeller & Moeller, 1986).

Compared to traditional housing forms, Hartswigen and Null (1989) concluded that full-time RVing is a flexible economic strategy fitting a wide variety of financial resources of retirees. For many retirees, purchasing a RV, and RV living costs are substantially less than owning a permanent home, enabling many full-timers to save money for later years (Hartswigen & Null, 1989).

Economic strategies such as reducing the number of miles traveled, and boondocking on public land free of charge, are ways living costs can be reduced (Counts & Counts, 1992; Hartswigen & Null, 1989). Membership in

national camping organizations requiring an initial fee and yearly dues was also identified as an important economic strategy, when purchased at an early age and used regularly (Hartswigen & Null, 1989).

### Part-timers

Part-time, seasonal migrants, who spend at least four months living full-time in their RVs, fall half-way between full-timers and vacation travelers in their commitment to the RV community, according to Jobes' (1984) criteria. These seasonal travelers are typically referred to as part-timers (Counts & Counts, 1992; Hartswigen & Null, 1989).

The pattern of movement for part-timers is primarily to regional destinations dictated by the climate (Martin et al., 1987). According to Jobes (1984) seasonally traveling migrants frequently become part of a mobile community once they are committed to an annual pattern of seasonal travel.

Part-timers maintain permanent residences elsewhere and consider their conventional home base as their primary social network (Jobes, 1984; McHugh, 1990). A general profile of part-time seasonal migrants reveals economic independence, good health, and an orientation seeking recreational amenities in favorable climates (Sullivan & Stevens, 1982).

### Vacation Travelers

Vacation travelers have a low degree of commitment to the RV lifestyle. This lack of commitment was demonstrated by the limited two to three week vacations spent living and travelling in their RVs each year.

Vacation travelers include weekenders who are typically younger, and often still employed, and retirees with demanding commitments at home preventing extensive travel. Jobes (1984) observed that vacation travelers are less likely to be integrated into mobile travel networks of full-time and part-time seasonal migrants.

### Conceptualizations of RVers

#### Amenity Migrants

Retirees who migrate in recreational vehicles have been conceptualized as amenity-migrants (Happel et al., 1988; Martin et al., 1987 Sullivan & Stevens, 1982). Retirement amenity-migration is the dominant conceptualization of full-time and part-time seasonal migrants described as "...economically and otherwise robust [who] tend to migrate to retirement communities in search of climatic and recreational amenities, while those deficient in such resources remain residentially stable..." (Wiseman, 1980, p. 142-143).

Wiseman (1980) proposed a decision making model of residential satisfaction to explain retirement migration.

Wiseman's (1980) model viewed retirement migration as a multi-stage decision making process rather than an event. This decision making model is supported by a behavioral typology identifying three primary types of long-distance, elderly migration motivations (Wiseman, 1980). The three motivations identified were, retired migrants seeking amenities; migrants needing assistance from their families and; migrants returning to their state of birth.

Wiseman (1980) posits that the major motivation behind long-distance, amenity-migration is the retiree's desire to change his or her lifestyle to a more leisure-and recreation-oriented way of life. The desire for leisure and recreation amenities is the primary triggering mechanism which starts retirees thinking about a move. The decision-making process is triggered when "The pull of recreational and climatic amenities is paramount" (p. 149).

During the decision making process, retirees consider factors facilitating or impeding a move. Push and pull factors provide motivation for making decisions about how, when, and where to migrate (Wiseman, 1980). The type of relocation is the next consideration, followed by destination selection. The destination selection is influenced by the location of desired amenities, promotional inducements by migrant recruiters, location of social support networks, and former experience vacationing or living in the area and knowledge of the location. If a destination is selected, there is a migration outcome.

Amenity-migration outcomes include the distance moved, living arrangement, housing type and tenure, and neighborhood type (Wiseman, 1980).

A variation of Wiseman's (1980) model is proposed by Haas and Serow (1993), conceptualizing retirement amenity-migration as a decision-making process beginning with, "...remote thoughts about leaving undesirable aspects of one's present community and migrating to a location with attractive features" (p. 214).

In this model, amenities are conceptualized as push and pull factors influencing remote thoughts and the actual migration decision (Haas & Serow, 1993). Push factors are reasons for retirees to leave previous communities. These reasons include dissatisfaction with the climate, problems of urban areas, tax rate, cost of living, few family members living in the area, and lack of recreational and leisure activities. Pull factors are reasons for retirees to select an area. The eight top factors cited by Haas and Serow (1993) included in this category were scenic beauty, four mild seasons, recreational opportunities, cultural amenities, modest tax rates, warm year around, housing costs, and cost of living (Haas & Serow, 1993).

In the tradition of social gerontology, Litwak and Longino (1987) offer a developmental perspective of retirement amenity-migration. This model views young, healthy retirees making environmental, and leisure-amenity migrations. In the course of life-events such as illness,

disability, or widowhood, other migrations may be made to secure support-amenities from family or institutional settings (Litwak & Longino, 1987).

RV parks offer amenity-seeking migrants physical, social, and environmental amenities (Counts & Counts, 1992; Hapel et al., 1988; Martin et al., 1987; Sullivan & Stevens, 1982; Hoyt, 1954). Retirees, migrating in recreational vehicles, travel to and temporarily reside in RV parks, offering a wide variety of services and amenities to attract retired, mobile populations (Happel et al., 1988).

RV parks advertise scenic locations nearby national amenity areas. The recreation amenities available at larger parks typically include a large meeting room which often functions as a dining room, dance and social halls, craft rooms, libraries, board game rooms, television rooms, billiard rooms, pool tables, swimming pools, shuffleboard courts, golfing areas, and fishing (Hoyt, 1954; Sullivan & Stevens, 1982). RV parks often have hired recreation directors to coordinate and plan most activities (Sullivan & Stevens, 1982). Organized, park-hosted social functions are an important aspect of RV parks according to Martin et al. (1987).

## Social Theories of Aging

### Successful Aging

Social gerontologists have identified two kinds of normal aging. Usual aging involves extrinsic factors that heighten the potentially negative effects of biological, cognitive, and social aging (Hendrix & Leedham, 1991). Usual aging is contrasted with successful aging. In successful aging, the social and physical environment play a neutral or positive role in the aging process (Hendrix & Leedham, 1991).

Proponents of successful aging support the empowerment of the elderly, stressing the importance of autonomy and control, and disparaging socially created roles of dependency (Hendrix & Leedham, 1991). Social gerontologists support theoretical orientations and research into the lifestyles of older Americans, showing how "...a transition of usual to successful aging can be facilitated" (Hendrix and Leedham, 1991 p. 55).

### Activity Theory

Activity theory is a dominant theoretical perspective in social gerontology. Activity theory posits that older people who are active are more satisfied and have better self-concepts when they participate in roles characteristic of middle age (Cox, 1993). Maintaining an active, busy, middle-age lifestyle is also a way of minimizing the

withdrawal of members of our society from the elderly (Cox, 1993). Gerontologists theorize that social withdrawal is minimized as elderly individuals take on new roles supported by cultural values of work and productivity (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). Active retirees are viewed as aging successfully.

Sullivan and Stevens (1982) described RVers as the "...archetype of the activity model of aging" (p. 173). In this study of wintering RV snowbirds, RV seasonal migration was conceptualized as an alternative lifestyle, composed of people with "...similar interests in traveling, socializing, and a desire to live an active lifestyle" (Sullivan & Stevens, 1982, p. 173).

Sullivan & Stevens (1982) reported that the respondents in the travel trailer and mobile home park valued opportunities to socialize, whether passive as in card games, or through participation in physically exerting activities. Return migration to the same parks, year after year, was viewed as a commitment by the retirees to an active lifestyle (Sullivan & Stevens, 1982).

### Disengagement Theory

Disengagement theory posits that as people age, they experience a loss of roles and energy. In response to these losses, the elderly adapt by withdrawing from productive, competitive, active orientations and roles (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). As the number and complexity of roles and



interactions are reduced, new, simplified roles and leisure activities are embraced by the retiree. Disengagement is viewed as a successful form of adaptation to aging, as roles, status, and power are handed down to members of the younger generation (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993).

Sullivan and Stevens (1982) qualified their conceptualization of RVers as the archetype of the activity model, referencing evidence of disengagement. Typically active RVers were viewed by Sullivan and Stevens (1982) as "...disengaged only in their retirement status and choice of an age-segregated community" (p. 173).

#### Adaptation Model

Jobes, (1984) a sociologist interested in new lifestyle options of retirees and the formation of temporary communities by RVers, conducted 156 unstructured interviews with RVers over a period of 15 years. As a participant-observer, Jobes (1984) met RVers in campgrounds in Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast states while he was seasonally traveling or vacationing.

Jobes (1984) challenged the notion that RVing was a form of disengagement by retirees. Jobes (1984) rejected the concept of disengagement, concluding that RVers were moving toward "...active, meaningful community interaction..." possible through withdrawal from long-standing, conventional orientations (p. 183). Jobes (1984) conceptualized RVing as an adaptive response to

conventional retirement, gains in life expectancy, and an increase in the numbers of healthy, economically secure, young retirees. Jobes (1984) posited that RVers were engaged in adaptive, mobile lifestyles with new sets of rewards which were amply supported by societal values.

Jobes (1984) describes sociative adaptations in RV communities such as cardplaying, sharing meals and conversing. These leisure pursuits facilitate the integration of members into the community. Leisure pursuits are also viewed as a mechanism of community maintenance. Jobes (1984) describes economic and utilitarian forms of adaptation in utilizing former occupations or skills in ways that support a mobile lifestyle.

Similarly, RVers adapted the value of independence through separating themselves from their former permanent homes, placing minimal demands on relatives and formal sources of support, and by entertaining few formal obligations (Jobes, 1984). RVers often define apparent disadvantages in favor of mobility (Jobes, 1984). For example, separation from immediate family members is justified as desirable, viewing time spent together as quality time (Jobes, 1984).

Jobes (1984) notes that the RVer's conventional background generally extends into their new life. Honesty, hardwork, independence and a concern for others are extolled by retired RVers. Jobes (1984) reports that RVers feel self-supporting and independent and "...openly and

happily admit to the freedom and fun of their lifestyle. They feel justified in pursuing it and they feel they have earned the right to it by hard work and responsibility prior to retirement" (p. 191).

### Temporary Mobile Communities

Jobes (1984) noted that, RVers establish meaningful community interaction as they are actively forming temporary communities. The salient quality of these temporary mobile communities is their physical impermanence. Community formation is volitional, and community members are drawn together because they share values and preferred behaviors (Jobes, 1984).

The transitional nature of these temporary communities is reflected in their changing location and membership. Jobes (1984) hypothesized that community awareness is not a function of space or membership. Community awareness is created by permanent commitment to the mobile RV community through social interaction and adaptation. This awareness is evident in intricate social networks and travel circuits, allowing full-timers to maintain a sense of community in a variety of locations (Jobes, 1984).

### Communities of Interest

With the rising popularity of the RV, Counts and Counts (1992) report that there are at least 40 RV clubs with over one million members, reflecting the heterogeneity

of needs and interests of retired RVers. Varied RV clubs and organizations exist for people who own a certain kind or brand of RV, while other clubs are based on gender, marital status, former occupations, hobbies, or interests (Counts & Counts, 1992).

Other clubs or organizations reflect particular styles of RVing, such as boondocking, full-timing, flea-marketing, and seasonal migrants returning to the same location year after year (Count & Counts, 1992). Membership in these clubs and organizations are ways RVers organize themselves into communities of interest.

### The RV Community

In a seminal study of seasonal migrants in 1954, Hoyt observed that mobile home retirement communities are essentially self-contained communities with little social interaction with members of the host community. Hoyt (1954) described the social life in this community as inwardly focused and self-contained. In a recent study, Martin et al. (1987) concurred with Hoyt's observation, concluding that,

Except for technological improvements in recreational vehicles and mobile homes, as well as in park design and construction, there seems to have been little change over the years in the lifestyle of seasonal migrants while in host communities (Martin et al., 1987, p. 142).

The ways RVers form temporary communities was the focus of a recent two and one-half month comparative, pilot

study of membership park residents and "boondockers" by Canadian anthropologists (Counts & Counts, 1992). Counts & Counts (1992) reflected that the increased mobility of North American society, has obscured traditional Western socio-ecological definitions of community based on common territory and shared common history. This study posited that shared territory and common history has become less important, while shared social organization has become increasingly important in establishing temporary communities (Counts & Counts, 1992). The use of space and an ethos of equality and reciprocity were identified as key principles creating instant social bonds between members of temporary mobile communities (Counts & Counts, 1992).

Instant communities are established through strategies defining the ways space is used. Space is used in ways to define "a sense of we-ness" (Counts & Counts, 1992). An ethos of equality and reciprocity were also identified as key strategies supporting the formation of temporary mobile communities (Counts & Counts, 1992). RVers share common values of freedom, equality, and independence that underlie the ability of RVers to quickly form communities according to Counts & Counts (1992). The spatial expression of these values distinguishes membership park residents and boondockers.

Counts and Counts (1992) observe that, "When RVers select a place to park their rigs they are also making a choice about lifestyle and about identity" (p. 169). The

selection of place reflects a commitment to specific attitudes, beliefs, and patterns of life instrumental to the processes of inclusion and exclusion in the formation of community (Counts & Counts, 1992). Ideas of territoriality, ownership of space, personalization of space, privacy, security, social hierarchy, and views of outsiders are sanctioned by the community (Counts & Counts, 1992).

Spatial use and social organization within membership parks mirror the spatial arrangements of suburban neighborhoods (Counts & Counts, 1992). RVs are parked in rows allowing efficient access to water mains and sewer lines. Maximum privacy is attained as RVers park their rigs with their doors facing the back of their neighbor's rig. Private membership parks commonly have a variety of shared social spaces, including lodges, recreation halls, picnic areas, and outdoor areas (Counts & Counts, 1992). The rule-oriented nature of private membership parks is reflected in regulations upholding standards of middle-class affluence, respectability, orderliness, social standing, consumption levels, and age similarities according to Counts and Counts (1992).

In comparison, boondockers are characterized as more independent, individualistic, and non-conforming than RVers who belong to private, membership parks. Boondockers are described as being opposed to rules and external organization, scornful of amenities, recreational

facilities, and external protection from outsiders. Boondockers express values of freedom in their choice of unregulated and unlimited use of external space (Counts & Counts, 1992). Boondockers typically park in a circle, with their doors facing inward. This spatial arrangement creates a common community center or social space (Counts & Counts, 1992).

Counts and Counts (1992) suggest that the social organization of membership parks typifies Bellah, et al.'s (1985) concept of a lifestyle enclave rather than a community. Conceptualized as a lifestyle enclave, private park members are viewed as "...socially, economically, or culturally similar, whose chief aim is the enjoyment of being with others who "share one's lifestyle"" (Bellah, et al., 1985, p. 72). Members of lifestyle enclaves explicitly contrast their standard of living and lifestyle with others who do not share their lifestyle (Bellah, et al., 1985). Lifestyle enclaves are contrasted by Counts and Counts (1992) with temporary communities formed by boondockers. Boondocker communities are characterized as inclusive, interdependent, and tolerant of differences.

Counts and Counts (1992) identify an inherent tension between Boondockers and private membership park RVers based upon stereotypical perceptions. Boondockers have stereotypes of members as cliquish, affluent conformists. In turn, membership RVers distance themselves from free-spirited boondockers, pointing to their unconventional

lifestyle as low class, describing it as a kind of "....trailer trash, that is left over from the stereotypical association of trailer parks and poverty" (Counts & Counts, 1992; p. 172).

While boondockers and membership park RVerS are distinguished by social organization and their use of space, they are united through shared values and principles (Counts & Counts, 1992). Both boondockers and membership park RVerS rely upon principles of reciprocity and equality to reinvent and reinforce ideas of home, society, and community (Counts & Counts, 1992). Principles of sharing and exchange allow these nomadic RVerS with no common past, to recreate a familiar social structure, in the absence of traditional, permanent, defined space (Counts & Counts, 1992).

The principle of balanced reciprocity between equals was documented in food-sharing rituals, the expectation of giving and receiving help, sharing problems of retirement and age, and problems unique to a nomadic lifestyle, such as "...difficulty getting access to funds, illnesses far from one's own physician; mechanical breakdown; the fact that they spend so much of their time among strangers..." (Counts & Counts, 1992, pp. 164-165).

Expectations of trust and reciprocity are critical to the temporary formation of community (Counts & Counts, 1992). The principle of reciprocity begins with rituals of greeting. These greeting rituals include an immediate



exchange of relevant camp information and personal histories (Counts & Counts, 1992). Newcomers receive important instructions and quickly learn the rules contributing to feelings of security. Reciprocity contributes to the newcomers experience of "...immediate bonding..." between RVers, according to Counts and Counts (1992, p. 163).

Ritual sharing of food, formally at holiday dinners, and informally through spontaneous potlucks is another example of reciprocity. Food-sharing is a method of participation allowing newcomers to be incorporated into the community (Counts & Count, 1992).

A sense of community is also rooted in other kinds of rituals, particular to full-time RV nomads. Divestment rituals of home and personal possessions are viewed as a rite of passage for full-time RVers (Counts & Counts, 1992). This rite of passage ritual creates a sense of community, through shared experiences of relinquishing the past and embracing a new lifestyle (Counts & Counts, 1992).

Social space for community activity is crucial to the creation of RV communities. Social space is an important part of any RV setting (Counts & Counts, 1992). Community spaces include all areas used by RVers for activities, socializing, spontaneous and organized social events contributing to a "...strong sense of belonging among the participants" (Counts & Counts, 1992, p. 179).

Temporary communities of interest also have highly developed social networks permitting information exchange and informal interaction (Jobes, 1984). These travel networks are the RVers primary social network. Jobes (1984) notes that, "While interaction networks remain stable, locations may change periodically" (p. 194).

The small, particularistic, culturally homogenous, nature of RV communities promotes face-to-face, primary interaction between the members. Jobes (1984) observed that members, "... generally eschew prior involvements with achievement-oriented social systems, through rejecting conventional activities, formal organizational recognition, and obligatory attachment to place" (p. 189).

Interaction within these communities is characterized by a laid-back, live-and-let-live ethic (Jobes, 1984). Jobes (1984) observed that "Although each style [of RVing] is based upon personal convictions of desirable living, pejorative statements regarding other styles are practically non-existent" (p. 185). Authoritarian attempts to develop rules, regulate participation or contributions to the community, are socially controlled through mechanisms such as gossip, or admonitions to RVers to relax their expectations of other members (Jobes, 1984).

Relationships are characterized by cooperative and supportive interaction rather than competitive, alienated interaction (Jobes, 1984). Jobes (1984) suggests that RVers

strive to keep the peace by being uncritical of fellow travelers.

### Identity and Values

Theoretical models of culture, according to Barth (1969), should explain how observable, frequent patterns of behavior are generated. This requires that cultural models concentrate on what is socially effective in explaining complex patterns of group behavior. Socially effective processes restrict, channel, and affect the course of human action and interaction (Barth, 1969).

The cultural construction and expression of identity is an important process fashioning and defining the behavior and motivations of members of this RV subculture. Similarly, cultural values are also important social processes referring to the goodness or desirability of certain actions or attitudes among members of a culture (Stewart & Bennett, 1991).

Barth (1966) uses the example of membership in a subculture to demonstrate how identity and cultural values are integrated. He states that, "Belonging to a subcultural category implies being a certain kind of person, having that basic identity, it also implies a claim to be judged, and to judge oneself by those standards that are relevant to identity" (Barth, 1969, p.15).

### Self Identity and Social Identity

Self identity and social identity are constructed through the processes of social interaction (Lopata, 1978). Within the framework of social interaction, individuals engage in the processes of associating, cooperating, conceptualizing, defining, symbolizing, aspiring, and valuing (Breakwell, 1983; Lopata, 1978; Meltzer, 1978; Singleman, 1972).

Social interaction between humans is symbolic as the actors response "... is not to the behavior or acts of others, for some inherent quality in them, but for the significance imputed to them by the actors" (Singleman, 1972, p. 415). Humans respond to each other on the basis of the intentions or meanings of gestures (Mead, 1977). It is the meanings and intentions associated with acts or gestures that give them their symbolic character. The formation of self identity is possible through the ability of human beings to respond to their own gestures (Meltzer, 1978). Mead (1977) discussed the importance of the interpreting symbolic meaning for social interaction. Essentially, interpretations resulting in shared meanings form the basis for human social organization (Breakwell, 1983; Lopata, 1978; Meltzer, 1978; Singleman, 1972). A consensus of shared meanings in the form of common understandings and expectations is required for cooperative human social action (Mead, 1977). These shared meanings contribute to the formation of social identity.

### Role-taking

Role-taking is an important mechanism for identity development in symbolic interaction. According to Mead (1977), taking on the role of the generalized other provides a platform for getting outside oneself and viewing one's self as an object. Shibutani (1978) describes taking on the role of the generalized other as a way individuals approach their world from the standpoint or frame of reference of the culture of their group. The generalized role represents a set of standpoints shared by members of the group (Breakwell, 1983). When individuals assume the role of the generalized other, they take on perspectives shared with others in social transactions (Shibutani, 1978).

In role-taking, individuals acquire a culture-specific perspective frame of reference from which they view themselves and evaluate their behavior (Breakwell, 1983; Mead, 1977; Meltzer, 1978). It is through these roles and the internalization of the gestures that go with these roles, that individuals build a composite pictures of themselves. Self-identity is formed through these composite pictures (Breakwell, 1983; Mead, 1977).

Identities are formulated in a complicated process of social interaction involving symbolic definitions of the self, the other, and the situation (Lopata, 1978). Repeated interaction with others in similar situations results in definite, stabilized self-identities. These identities are

modified as the self, the other, or the definition of the situation change (Lopata, 1978).

### Group Identity

Social identity is defined as "...that part of the self-concept that is derived from the individual's group memberships and interpersonal relationships, social position and status" (p. 9). The salient feature of group membership is self-identification as a member (Gladney, 1991). Gladney (1991) explains that the members' self-identification with a group can be attributed to "...the particularities of their differences and shared imaginings of their similarities..." (p. xi). Barth (1969) agrees and comments that

Socially relevant factors alone become diagnostic for membership not the overt, objective differences which are generated by other factors. It makes no difference how dissimilar members may be in their overt behavior - if they say they are A, in contrast to another cognate category B, they are willing to be treated and let their own behavior be interpreted and judged as A's and not as B's---they declare their allegiance to the shared culture of A's; They are A's. (p. 15)

Identity and ascription are critical in maintaining the boundaries of a subcultural group, through the dichotomization between members and outsiders (Barth, 1969). This dichotomization is reflected in a wide variety of beliefs, rituals, and symbolic behavioral practices that define, express, and reinterpret the identity of a community (Gladney, 1991). These constructions and expressions of group identity can be very powerful in that

they "...strike at the very core of one's self and one's ontology" (Gladney, 1991, p. 14).

Additionally, Barth (1966) points out that the dichotomization of familiar people from strangers implies recognition of limitations on shared understandings. Dichotomizing also accounts for differences in criteria for evaluating and judging whom to interact with, and who shares the same understanding and mutual interests (Barth, 1966).

Barth (1969) maintains that identity remains clear, despite the flow of members across boundaries. He recognizes that the flow of members across established boundaries reflects changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories (Barth, 1969). Group identity is sustained through the continual social interaction of its members (Barth, 1966). Social interaction permits enduring, continual expression and validation of group identity (Barth, 1966). Individuals join groups or associations of people who share a collective sense of identity, who have common interests, and who cooperate in joint activities (Peoples & Bailey, 1988).

Cohesiveness, symbolic expressions of identity, and communication are also important aspects of group identity. Cohesiveness is an important characteristic of group identity. Cohesiveness is the degree to which individuals identify with the group and act as a single entity

(Breakwell, 1983). Cohesiveness is associated with allegiance to the group (Breakwell, 1983).

Group identity is expressed in the subscription to values, rules, norms, and through the group's use of symbols (Breakwell, 1983). Breakwell (1983) notes that "Conformity to rules and norms differentiates the member from the non-member, and circumscribes the substantive identity of the group" (p. 21). Similarly, group identity is differentiated from other groups through the use of symbols (Breakwell, 1983).

Complex symbol systems allow group members to communicate effectively and express their identity (Peoples & Bailey, 1988). Communication within groups signifies shared meanings (Strauss, 1959). Members of groups share important symbols, such as language, contributing to the formation of points of agreement (Strauss, 1959). Shared meanings permit community action (Strauss, 1959, p. 148).

#### Threats to Group Identity

Group identity is produced through the social interaction of its members and through social interaction with other groups. Social interaction with other groups has been characterized as a negotiation process involving the relative power of the group (Breakwell, 1983). This negotiation process has implications for group identity. Negotiated social power influences the ways groups express their identity (Breakwell, 1983).



Breakwell (1983) explains that an objective challenge to the power of the group can be regarded as a threat to identity, "...if only because a change in power will result in a changed capacity to control social processes whereby identity is negotiated" (p. 24). Material threats involve changing the resources available to the group. Symbolic threats involve changing the conceptualization of the group primarily through rhetoric and propaganda (Breakwell, 1983).

The response to threats can vary the way group identity is expressed. Threats can decrease the membership base making group existence precarious or problematic. Resisting or fighting threats may involve mobilizing the membership and resources in an attempt to renegotiate identity (Breakwell, 1983). If a group fails to fend off the threat, members who remain in the group will revise their group image and their personal social identities derived from membership (Breakwell, 1983). Breakwell (1983) emphasizes that "...threats to the identity of a group and threats to the identity of its members are never independent" (p. 25). The meaningfulness and power of identity is evident in the flexible formation and expression of identity through social interaction, which is responsive to threats from the wider social system (Gladney, 1991). This power was recognized by Barth (1969) who commented that despite changing boundaries, cultural characteristics, or organizational form, identity remains a

central concept supporting cultural continuity, and organizing interaction. Group identity is further maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories (Barth, 1966).

Common identity and loyalty to a group become "... explicit, salient and empowered in the context of social relations...just as the Self is defined in terms of the Other... groups coalesce in the context of relation and opposition" (Gladney, 1991, p. 77). This supports the interactive premise that identity is a relation inscribed in culture (Gladney, 1991).

### Values

Definitions of cultural values generally incorporate concepts of what is meaningful, significant, and worthwhile to members of a group (Barth, 1966). Cultural values have been defined as the "...goodness or desirability of certain actions or attitudes among members of the culture. As such, values prescribe which actions and ways of being are better than others" (Stewart & Bennett, 1991, p. 14). Values have also been conceptualized as "...ultimate criteria by reference to which alternative actions are evaluated, and on the basis of which choice is exercised" (Barth, 1966, p. 12). Shils (1988) considers values as ideal states or conditions. Values are criterion or standards used to assess or evaluate an existing or possible state or condition (Shils, 1988). Values are components of an

action, an evaluative attitude or an orientation of action (Shils, 1988). Values are not in themselves behavior. Rather, "...they are processes that govern what people in a particular culture agree they ought to do" (Stewart & Bennett 1991, p. 14).

Human action occurs with reference to values. Values are acquired from the culture group with whom one identifies. Values are considered indispensable guides to social conduct (Shils, 1988). Values are acquired and used as guides to conduct in social interaction.

Cultural values are considered an important component of the situational framework in which social action takes place (Blumer, 1978). Values influence individuals to the extent that they shape situations in which people act, and supply a fixed set of symbols that people use in interpreting their situation (Blumer, 1978). Values are an innate component of both cooperative and conflictual social interaction. It is within social interaction that values impart meaning to persons and social relationships (Mukerjee, 1965, p. 28). Inquiry into cultural values reveals the motives underlying individual behavior and social institutions (Mukerjee, 1965).

According to Barth (1966) collective choices or patterns of behavior are shaped by shared values. Barth (1966) explains, as values become progressively shared and made known through transactions, values as principles of evaluation become public and serve as guides in the choices

of others. Blumer (1978) concurs and remarks that common repetitive behavior often results in fixed definitions of how to act. Blumer (1978) reiterates, however, that these familiar acts are still socially constructed through the processes of interpretation. It is through these common understandings and interpretations that collective action based on shared values takes place (Blumer, 1978).

Barth (1966) explains that the process of repeated transactions reinforces choices and evaluations, contributing to the systematization and sharing of values. Institutionalized principles of evaluation are adopted, minimizing the process of "...groping for solutions to value dilemmas" (Barth, 1966, p. 14). These institutionalized values result in systemized, consistent, collective values specifying evaluations of what is worthwhile, significant, and desirable (Barth, 1966, p. 14).

Barth (1966) suggests that threats to identity and cultural values often bring out value dilemmas. Value dilemmas force members to reevaluate choices in which values cannot be reconciled. Barth (1966) points out that conflicting values may be adjusted or changed through a period of bargaining, trial or conflict over the terms of a social transaction (Barth, 1966).

Deviations from dominant cultural values may be manifest in important subcultural variations (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). These variant values have the potential

for "...rich diversity in expression by members of the subculture (Stewart & Bennett, 1991, p. 14).

### American Cultural Values

Self-reliant individualism, equality, and material comfort have been identified as three dominant American cultural values. These dominant value orientations contribute criteria for guiding behavior, and for defining and interpreting social reality (Williams, 1970).

### Self-reliant individualism

The American stress on individualism and individuality begins at a very young age (Stewart & Bennett, 1991). Personal preference, decision-making, developing opinions, solving problems, owning personal possessions, and viewing the world from the point of view of the self are acceptable norms in American society supporting individualism. Bellah et al. (1985) note decisions are largely motivated by self-concerns, self-interest, and personal achievement.

The subjective side of individualism is expressive, evident in the individual's right to pursue personal happiness, material comfort, and enjoy expression free from constraints and conventions (Bellah et al., 1985). The value of individualism extends to the concept of individual liberty. Individual liberty champions maximum freedom within society, necessary for individuals to fully express

personal qualities and powers within them, and achieve desired ends (Gabriel, 1974).

The value of individualism and self-reliance has produced mythic individualism (Bellah et al., 1985). Mythic individualism is embodied in American descriptions of heroic, Western, frontier cowboys who break free from community and inherited ideas. These idealized individuals pursue autonomy, save frontier towns singlehandedly from the bad guys, and then ride into the sunset. The mythic hero, sporting the image of the independent, self-reliant American individual at the center of activity, also reveals an absence of community, personal ties, tradition, shared meanings, and history. The persona of rugged individualism defines continuity as existing in the immediate personal choices that individuals make (Stewart & Bennett, 1991).

Self-reliant individualism has deep roots in the philosophical and religious traditions of the Protestant Work Ethic, and the ideology of the self-made individual (Weber, 1920). Work Ethic standards promise material rewards for individual, hard work.

These ideologies promote democratic ideas of self-formation, by minimizing inherent inequality (Bellah et al., 1985). Individuals bear ultimate responsibility for their own character and success in life. In American society, individuals learn they can rely upon no one but themselves for the outcome of their life (Bellah et al., 1985).

Acquiring self-reliant habits or right principles of living early in life, is an important concept of the self-made, self-reliant individual (Roberson, 1995). Self-reliant habits shape and build character. Self-reliant habits and a self-reliant character are essential for success in the work place and in life (Roberson, 1995).

### Equality

The value of equality is an important element in the formation of social, horizontal, interpersonal relationships of Americans. Stewart and Bennett (1991) note that Americans ascribe to each person an irreducible value because of his or her humanness. This ascription tends to equalize people and lubricate social relationships. In the event of a confrontation, the implicit tendency for Americans is to establish an atmosphere of equality, through the use of first names, and to minimize attention to the differences accorded to lineage, education, rank, or hierarchy (Stewart & Bennett, 1991).

### Material Comfort

According to Stewart and Bennett (1991) "...material comfort is an American cultural value" (p. 14). In 1955, DuBois observed that Americans believe that hard work pays off in material well-being. DuBois (1955) asserted that materialism was less a value per se than an optimistic assertion of the value premise of man's ability to master

material nature. Stewart and Bennett (1991) state that "Americans consider it almost a right to be materially well off and physically comfortable" (p. 119). The American focus on acquiring material possessions is also associated with a belief in the sacredness "... of private property, a value commonly asserted to be at the root of the Constitution and the American conception of democracy" (Stewart & Bennett, 1991, p. 118). Americans have clear distinctions between private and public property that are not shared by other non-Western cultures.

#### Retirement

In 1990, 12% or one in nine Americans was 65 years old or older (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). Gains in life expectancy have contributed to the rapid growth of a heterogeneous, age-stratified older population. With increased longevity, retirement has become an expected part of the life course. Most people retire between the ages of 62 and 64, and very few continue to work past age 70 (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). Employment and retirement policies have been directed toward encouraging early retirement by offering financial incentives and pension benefits (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). Hooyman & Kiyak (1993) observed, "...the trend toward early retirement, combined with increased longevity means that retirement as a life stage is more protracted" (p. 341). Today, people are spending approximately 20% of their adult lives in retirement (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993).



In Western cultures, retirement marks a stage of aging separating the older individual from "productive" economic and social roles (Ostor, 1993). For these retirees, their "productive" time is past. Productivity, as the defining characteristic of man in our society, focuses on the future, positioning the elderly in powerless social roles in Western culture.

Non-Western cultures, however, provide meaningful roles for their aging members. In India, according to Ostor (1993), advanced age, "bura", is respected, and considered "...not merely old but ripe, potent, wise and powerful" (p. 70). Furthermore, Ostor (1993) notes, "gurujan," elders in this society are accorded attributes of divinity and sacredness. The elderly are the teachers in this culture.

#### Disruption and Loss

The stages of loss, grief, mourning, and resolution are important processes often resulting in the formation of new identities and changes in values. Sullender (1985) articulates the magnitude of the effect of loss upon identity and values:

Every loss involves changes in our identity, particularly if we define ourselves by that which was lost. Every loss is also a possible change in our values, particularly if we valued that which is lost or that which is lost represented a cherished value. Loss events trigger changes in our identity and values ... (p. 37).

The effect of loss can result in many significant changes as "...any loss has the potential for calling into question the basis on which people go about their daily life" (Schneider, 1984, p. 35). When a loss is encountered, assumptions, beliefs, and values are challenged (Schneider, 1984).

Grieving a loss through to resolution means the person is able to reformulate loss in terms of opportunities, possibilities, and growth. Reformulation involves the internal process of finding new meaning and purpose in life. There are many outcomes of the resolution process. Many individuals experience a greater sense of freedom, more energy, clarity about future plans, changes in priorities, and exploration of alternatives (Schneider, 1984). Schneider (1984) explains that individuals often experience "...an increased motivation for growth and an enhanced sense of the extent and limits of personal power" (p. 210).

Transformation is also part of the reformulation process. Individuals may need to alter the way they view any life experience. This may result in a redefinition of self and identity requiring a commitment to new knowledge, new understanding, and new ways of approaching life. This process results in an openness in ways that transform and liberate people from the necessity of roles, predictability, and structure in their lives (Schneider, 1984). The consequences of such openness is that familiar

surroundings, roles, and expectations may no longer be tolerable.

### Intergenerational Family Relationships

Changing intergenerational family relationships are attributed to increased life expectancy, and decreased fertility leading to the growth of more vertical, intergenerational family ties (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). According to social gerontologists, the effects of these trends is that families are smaller, and there are fewer individuals within which to invest emotionally (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). Parents often remain, "...invested in their offspring for as long as they live" (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993, p. 504).

Geographic, residential separation of family members is generally due to mobility of the adult children and not the elderly (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). Proximity does not seem to affect the quality of parent-child relationships according to Lee and Ellithorpe (1982). Socio-economic distance is often more important than geographical distance. Most adult children feel "close" to their older parents despite geographic separation (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993).

### Grants Economy

Patterns of intergenerational assistance establish a reciprocal support between older and younger family members

that continue throughout an individual's lifetime (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). Exchange theorists cite that the rule of exchange is from those with more valued resources, to those with fewer resources (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). Emotional and social support are important patterns of assistance exchanged between family members.

A grants economy is defined by Bivens (1976) as a one-way transfer of resources that takes place outside the market system. Grants between family members are characterized by transfers that do not have contractual reciprocal arrangements of exchange (Bivens, 1976).

Bivens (1976) identifies the giving of grants as either malevolently or benevolently motivated. Benevolently-motivated grants are commonly made among family members. These grants facilitate the creation of trust, good will, and affection (Bivens, 1976). In contrast, malevolently generated grants erode bonding between family members. Regardless of the motivation of the giver, grants may be perceived by the receiver as either negative or positive (Bivens, 1976).

There are many kinds of grants made between family members. Grants include money, time, and human resources according to Bivens (1976). Grants between family members also include sharing know-how, teaching ways to cope with risk and uncertainty, transmitting cultural attitudes and values, and teaching attitudes conducive to human development and health (Bivens, 1976).

Good communication between parents and children is a key to identifying the kinds of interfamilial grants that are needed, according to Bivens (1976). Changes in family structure and functioning, changes in support and living arrangements, increased family mobility, growing urbanization, evolving housing patterns stressing independent living arrangements, and increased economic dependence of children on their parents, have contributed to the creation of strained communication patterns often resulting in estrangement between parents and children (Bivens, 1976).

Relations of estrangement precipitate a change in giving patterns, and changes in the form and structure of grants between and among family members (Bivens, 1976). One example of these changes is a trend toward monetization of grants. The monetization of grants to supplant time grants of attention, or space grants of shelter between parents and children.

An important effect of this trend, according to Bivens (1976), is a weakening or loosening of intergenerational bonds between parents and children. The reduction in the integrative structure between intergenerational family members, anticipates tightly drawn boundaries around the nuclear family encouraging independence (Bivens, 1976).

### Age-based Relationships

Many older persons develop age-based interpersonal relationships offering friendship and social support. Both men and women tend to select their friends from people they consider their social peers. Social peers are considered others who are similar in age, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, and socio-economic class (Cox, 1993).

Age homogeneity plays a strong role in facilitating friendships in later life, in part because of shared life transitions, reduced intergenerational ties with children and work associates, and possible parity of exchange (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). As ties to other networks are loosened, friendships between persons of similar age may become primary relationships (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993). For older individuals, well-defined friendship groups contribute to positive self-concepts and higher morales than those not part of such a group (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1993).

### Time

Time is basic to the internal ordering of all cultures (Adjaye, 1987). The ways in which time is perceived and organized reflect cultural concepts about time reckoning and time use. In each culture, temporal symbols emerge out of human interaction (Owen, 1991). Time influences the pace and rhythm of a culture. The ways people perceive and use time influence ideas of what is culturally acceptable in

terms of punctuality, efficiency, speed, haste, investment, planning, and goal setting (Levine, 1985). These temporal patterns contribute to the structure of social life.

### Economic Models of Time

Linear-separable models of time and economic models of time dominate Western cultures. In linear-separable models, time is viewed as progressing chronologically, with a definite past, present and future. Time is divided into discrete units. This model of time perception is often referred to as "clock-time." Clock-time is mechanically imposed on social activities (Owen, 1991).

Economic time is closely identified with the linear-separable model of time, according to Owen (1991). In the United States, capitalism inspired economic views of time as a commodity, evident in market economy metaphors, suggesting time can be saved, spent, or wasted (Schor, 1991). Schor (1991) suggests that capitalism raised the price of time, prompting Americans to think of time as a scarce resource.

### Anthropological Models of Time

Anthropological models of time include the linear-separable, economic models governing Western cultures. Anthropological models of time, however, recognize other methods of time-reckoning prevalent in non-Western cultures.

### Cyclical or Circular Time

Cyclical or circular time is sensorially responsive to the rhythms of nature. Unlike linear models of time, cyclical models of time are not quantifiable and do not operate on the assumption that time can be controlled. Time is considered to be patterned after past cycles or periods. The view of time in terms of planning is short-term and may only extend as far as the next period or cycle (Owen, 1991). This perception of time responds to outside, natural forces such as the change of seasons, lunar phases, or changes in weather. The significant unit of time depends upon a qualitative analysis of conditions that are met within a cycle. Within a cycle, there are signs prompting action. For example, in agricultural cultures, there are natural signs corresponding to the season, indicating when to plant and when to harvest.

### Social Time

Anthropologists have detailed the ways temporal systems reflect the social structure of various cultures. This kind of time-reckoning is known as social time (Levine, 1985). Social time is a qualitative experience. Social time is organized and perceived in terms of participation, social interaction and rituals.

Cultural definitions of social time, according to Levine (1985), require that rules are learned, transmitted, and influence behavior. Tacit, informal patterns of



culture, such as the pace of a culture, can be attributed to perceptions of social time. Similarly, temporal symbols are socially constructed and emerge out of interaction (Levine, 1985). Social time is described as the heartbeat of a culture (Levine, 1985).

Social time focuses on the duration of social interaction. Social interaction or participation in rituals focuses on the non-fragmented completion of the process. Social time is a way of maintaining ties with the past. Social time is oriented to the present and the process (Ostor, 1993). In social models of time, satisfaction is a function of the process, resulting in proper completion of the interaction or ritual, regardless of how much clock-time it might take.

## CHAPTER 3 - METHODS

## The Ethnoscience Paradigm

The concept of culture as a cognitive system, "... composed of whatever one would need to know in order to operate in a manner acceptable to the culture's native members..." is associated with the paradigm known as ethnoscience (Lett, 1987, p. 56). This ideational approach to culture is dependent upon language as a symbol system through which native categories of thought can be discerned through rigorous empirical methodology. This approach has rich roots stemming from philosophy, psychology, and from linguistics and ethnography within the discipline of anthropology. This rich heritage has contributed to a definition of culture that "...does not consist of things, people, behavior or emotions, but the forms or organization of these things in the minds of people" (Goodenough, 1957; quoted by Frake, 1962, p. 14). The ethnoscience paradigm was founded on a strong tradition of ethnography combined with a rigorous, positivist approach to linguistics, which contributed to the development of an ethnosemantic approach to discover and understand native systems of meaning through language (Frake, 1964; 1980; Pelto, 1970; Spradley, 1979).

### The Emic Perspective

Ethnoscience offers a theory on how to describe cultural behavior, necessarily implying a theory of culture (Frake, 1964). An emic or native point of view is foundational to this theory of culture. An emic approach is predicated on obtaining the insider's point of view (Pelto, 1970; Spradley, 1979). An emic approach to cultural description contrasts with an etic, or external approach generated outside of the culture (Pelto, 1970).

An emic, or "insider" approach to cultural description, is theoretically conditioned upon the ability of language to reflect cognition (Frake, 1964). An emic approach to cultural description defines the role of the ethnographer as one who listens to what the natives have to say (Frake, 1977). This requires the conceptualization of language as cultural objects for thought (Frake, 1980). The commitment to an emic point of view dictates that the ways a culture conceptualizes its experience should be discovered rather than imposed by the investigator (Frake, 1964).

Frake (1980) illustratively underscores the need for a commitment to language as a prerequisite to an emic approach to culture, "What people do mostly is talk. It is through talk that people construe their cultural worlds, display and recreate their social orders, plan and critique their activities, and praise and condemn their fellows" (p. 334). Frake (1980) continues to note that "Ethnography

requires careful listening to and watching of people talking to each other in the natural scenes of their social life" (p. 334). This emic or insider approach emphasizes the importance of collecting data in the form of verbatim texts from native informants in order to preserve the original meaning (Pelto, 1970).

A primary assumption of ethnoscience is that when people talk and interact with each other, they communicate the significant, meaningful features of their culture (Frake, 1980). Language is viewed as the most flexible, productive symbol system and communication device used by the members of a culture (Frake, 1980). Frake (1964) observed that the ways in people organize and categorize their worlds is discoverable through language. The power of language as a discoverable symbol system is expressed by Kelly (1955):

...through language, the principles by which people in a culture construe their world reveal how they segregate the pertinent from the insignificant, how they code and retrieve information... how they anticipate events, how they define alternative courses of action and how they make decisions among them.  
(Kelly, 1966; quoted in Frake, 1962, p. 14)

A contribution of this theory of culture is the intimate connection made between language and meaning for culture. Frake (1980) notes that, "People mean things, intend things, and do things with words. And they accomplish these deeds in concert with other people in social situations" (p. 334). Theoretically, this approach is conditioned on the assumption that there is one "right" description of, or

logical organization of, a given semantic domain and that "...all or most of the members of a given society "know" that particular system" (Pelto, 1970, p. 75).

### Ethnoscience

The approach of ethnoscience preserves the sanctity of the native point of view through the employment of a rigorous methodology providing a way of discovering and understanding the principles generating culturally meaningful behavior. This methodology is dependent upon common, everyday terminology, used by the native culture, as the foundation of cultural description. Frake (1962) explains, "It is those elements of our **informants' experience** which **they** heed in selecting actions and utterances, that this methodology seeks to discover" (p. 13). [Emphasis in the original]. Ethnoscience offers a way of discovering and analyzing behavior considered culturally meaningful from a native point of view. This process involves an "...operationally explicit methodology for discerning how people construe their worlds of experience from the way they talk about it" (Frake, 1980, p. 74). The methodology does not assume that the task of simple translation of native terms into the researcher's language is adequate. The ethnographer does not simply match labels for things in two languages. The task of the ethnographer is redefined as finding the "things" that go with the words (Frake, 1962). This methodology allows the researcher,

"...a way of finding out what are in fact the "things" in the environment of the people being studied" (p. 2). This method generates a range of terminological categories. Once these categories are established, systems of terminological categories may be discerned. These systems are subject to an analysis of semantic contrasts. These contrasts further distinguish the ways experience is conceptualized by the informants (Frake, 1962).

#### Knowing the Code or Rules

The purpose of formal analysis of conceptual systems and their corresponding terminological categories is to discover the conceptual principles required for cultural performance. Frake (1964) explains that the task of ethnographic analysis is expanded beyond recounting the events of a society to the discovery of conceptual principles specifying what one must know to make those events maximally probable. Theoretically, Frake (1962) states that, "No object has been described **ethnographically** [emphasis in the original] until one has stated the rules for its identification in the culture being studied" (p. 19). Frake (1964) aptly observed that "The problem is not to state what some one did but to specify the conditions under which it is culturally appropriate to anticipate that he [sic], or persons occupying his [sic] role, will render an equivalent performance" (p. 145). The theoretical

importance of knowing the code or rules for cultural performance is further developed by Frake (1964):

Expectations from a cultural code that define distinctive settings and the sequence where by one moves through settings and signals for initiating and terminating moves. To one who knows the code, variations in performances signal something about the social occasion at hand. The purpose is not to describe what has happened or predict what will happen, but to set forth what one needs to know in order to make sense of what does happen. (p. 145)

A description of cultural behavior is attained by a formulation of what one must know in order to respond in a culturally appropriate manner in a given context.

#### Descriptive Adequacy

The criterion of descriptive adequacy supports traditional anthropological concern that ethnographic accounts are holistic. Descriptive adequacy prompted Frake (1964) to expand the definition of the ethnographic task to include holistic description of the scenes discovered within a culture. In the ethnoscientific paradigm, the ethnographer is held to the standard of descriptive adequacy. The ethnographer is challenged with the task of discerning the significant categories of actors, identifying the actors with their appropriate scenes, and specifying their roles as they emerge in the performance of those cultural scenes (Frake, 1964). Frake (1964) observes that

...by attending to the way occasions are contrasted, defined, classified, distributed among settings scheduled and linked by planning sequences, dimensions

of cultural structure are revealed that give overall views of a culture's conceptual landscape, tying together the informant's cognitive maps. (p. 145)

This aspect of the methodology allows the ethnographer to learn in a meaningful and precise sense what role various factors play in the cultural behavior of the members of a particular society (Frake, 1964).

#### Developmental Research Sequence Method

The methodology proposed for this study is the Developmental Research Sequence Method (D.R.S. Method) on conducting the ethnographic interview as a participant-observer (Spradley, 1979). The D.R.S. method is based on the ethnoscientific paradigm of ethnographic cultural description.

The D.R.S. Method is predicated on the problem-solving process (Spradley, 1979). While the steps are sequential they are not static, and the iterative nature of the ethnographic problem solving process requires flexibility in their application. Realistically, the ethnographer will engage in analysis throughout the entire research process (Spradley, 1979).

#### The Sample

The sample was a non-random, purposive sample of men and women of retirement age that seasonally migrate by traveling and living in a recreational vehicle. These informants are members of a nation-wide camping



organization. From time to time, snowball sampling was involved as informants referred the researcher to other more knowledgeable informants. I estimate that in the two different field site locations, I spoke with 400 to 500 RVers.

While the sample is non-random, I feel confident that the sample is representative of retired West-Coast RV seasonal migrants belonging to nation-wide camping organizations. The high mobility of this population is not amenable to random sampling methods. Informants checking into the campground may stay at a site for an hour, for an afternoon, overnight, or for a full two weeks. It is not uncommon to suddenly find an informant's campsite vacated without warning. On the other hand, informants did return to a campground several times in a season, and reestablished existing social ties with other RVers and with the researcher.

Non-random sampling occurred as informants were encountered in a wide-range of situations at the campground. Informants were met on paths or roads winding around the campground, in the family lodge, at the swimming pool, at meetings, at indoor or outdoor events, in the general store, waiting for a telephone, or even at the camp laundromat.

### The Site

Informants were contacted at two membership campgrounds located on the West Coast, in the fall, winter, spring, and summer. The purpose of doing fieldwork at two sites was to experience the annual cycle of seasonal migration, and to acquire an understanding of the way life is conducted in these different locations at different times of the year. The locations were chosen for their representative populations reflecting the annual cycle of seasonal migrants to these areas.

Fieldwork was conducted at a site located on the coast of Pacific Northwest during weekends from September through December 1993 and again full-time during the summer of 1994. RVers who decide to winter at this campground in the Pacific Northwest, refer to themselves as rainbirds. This population rents sites on a month-to-month basis at the campground from September through April. The rule requiring members to leave the campground every two weeks is suspended during the rainbird season. During the summer season, from May through September, RVers known as sunbirds migrate from sunbelt states to camp in the cooler region of the Pacific Northwest.

The second location was in the desert of southern California. This southern location drew snowbirds migrating from snowbelt states to this temperate area. This site involved collection of data from snowbirds wintering there from December, 1994 through March 1995. This campground has

very little activity from May through November due to the hot climate.

### The Membership Camping Organization

Membership in this nation-wide camping organization guarantees the RVer access to a network of private camping systems, called preserves. Membership is contractual and can be purchased for a specified price varying with the demand. In addition, annual dues are collected from the members. Depending on the kind of membership purchased, there may be a nominal charge of one or two dollars per night to stay in the preserve. As members, RVers have rights to a site, and full access to the amenities provided at the preserves.

The rules of the camping organization limit the occupancy of a campsite to a maximum of two weeks at each preserve. The members are then required to leave the park for a minimum of two weeks before returning to the same park. Technically, members are required to spend one week out of the system before returning to camp at a preserve. This rule, however, is not enforced when the preserves are not at full capacity. The suspension of this rule allows members to travel from preserve to preserve within the system. Members are able to make advance reservations to stay at other facilities in the organization's camping network. At the preserves there is a constant stream of RVers arriving and leaving the campground. Although an RVer

may have reservations to stay for two weeks at a preserve, the RVer is not bound by that reservation and may leave at will.

## Data Collection

### Participant-Observation

Cultural meaning is derived from 1) what people say, 2) from the way people act, and 3) from the artifacts people use (Spradley, 1979). Deciphering and understanding cultural meaning requires that the researcher view the culture in context (Bernard, 1988). Contextual understanding of the group under study requires that the researcher engage in fieldwork in the community of interest (Bernard, 1988).

Participant-observation is one strategy for collecting field data within the context of the culture (Bernard, 1988). Spradley (1979) views participant-observation as a strategy for listening to people and watching them in natural settings. This strategy allows the culture group to teach the researcher what is important, meaningful, and hence significant (Bernard, 1988). This strategy requires that the researcher develop skill at being a novice or maintaining naivete (Bernard, 1988).

To gain entry and acceptance into the group, an initial commitment of time is required to develop trust and build rapport with the informants. Participant observation

requires daily, direct, firsthand contact with informants on their home turf (Bernard, 1988). The researcher would be expected to participate in the daily activities of the informants as well as observe, but without going native or in other words, without becoming an actual member of the culture group (Bernard, 1988).

The purpose of the participant-observation strategy is to become an insider with knowledge of tacit and explicit rules and meanings (Spradley, 1979). This requires that the participant-observer learn the native language and become explicitly aware of the details of ordinary life (Bernard, 1988).

In the fieldwork settings, the researcher employed several strategies to build rapport, to learn the native language and to learn the cultural rules specific to this subculture. Daily, the researcher took long, leisurely, walks in the campground several times a day with her dog. These walks allowed the researcher to familiarize herself with the campground and the rigs parked in particular spots. These walks also allowed the researcher to be seen in the campground by the RVers. Typically, the researcher would be engaged in several conversations during the course of these walks. The researcher spent many hours in the family lodge and on the grounds outside of the lodge, observing, listening, and talking to informants.

Researcher participation in food-sharing rituals was important. Food-sharing rituals such as potlucks, scheduled

dinners prepared and served by member volunteers, ice-cream socials, and pie and coffee breaks were well-attended by the members. The researcher routinely attended early morning social events at the family lodge. Typically, the researcher lingered over coffee, talking with different groups of RVers throughout the morning. The researcher typically ate breakfasts and dinners with members at the family lodge.

Late mornings and early afternoons were typically spent participating in various scheduled activities around the preserves. Evenings were typically spent participating in informal activities generated by the members, such as playing cards, dominoes, or other board games. Washing clothes on site in the laundry, purchasing groceries at the campground stores, taking trash to the dumpster, using the campground shower facilities, and waiting in line for a telephone were other ways the researcher gained familiarity with members.

During the winter, the researcher lived in a 14 foot, 1964, Teepee Trailer, parked purposely in a visible site backing up to a large open area containing the horseshoe pits, and childrens' playground. Approximately 35 rigs backed up to this area. Since this was a highly visible area, the researcher established a routine path from her trailer to the family lodge cutting across this open area.

The researcher was similar in age to management and to staff employees. This age association sometimes led RVers

to assume that the researcher was an employee of the system. To circumvent this perception, the researcher established cordial relationships with management and staff but refrained from socializing with them.

The researcher developed joking relationships with member volunteers. Member volunteers typically spend an entire season working part-time at one preserve. These member volunteers were knowledgeable about the culture. Key informants at both fieldwork sites were member volunteers.

The demands of participant-observation require the researcher to separate from the culture on a daily basis in order to analyze the knowledge gained. Bernard (1988) emphasizes that it is important for the researcher to intellectualize what has been learned and to put it into perspective in order to write about it convincingly.

This strategy assisted the researcher in meeting the first objective, to understand how retirees actually experience RV seasonal migration and how they view this experience. Involvement with key informants, recording various kinds of field notes, and the process involved in the ethnographic interview also allowed the researcher to meet this objective.

### Key Informants

Key informants in the sample population are crucial to the success of ethnographic research. Key informants are knowledgeable members of the culture possessing a wide

array of contacts and comprehensive knowledge of the culture (Bernard, 1988). Key informants were found at both preserves. The key informants for this study were competent members of the RV subculture group, selected by the researcher for their willingness and ability to aid in clarifying, identifying, interpreting, and explaining the data.

### Recording Field Notes

Field notes are systematically recorded observations and interviews that occur with members of the group in the field setting. Field jottings are immediate recordings of observations or conversations. Field jottings are the basis for field notes. They are taken on the spot and act as triggers to recall details when writing up field notes (Bernard, 1988). I took jottings on 3 x 2 " note pads. Written field notes are managed by separating the note-taking processes into three separate kinds of field notes (Bernard, 1988).

### Kinds of Field Notes

Bernard outlines three kinds of field notes the researcher will take in the field (Bernard, 1988).

#### Methodological field notes.

Methodological field notes are notes that document the methods successfully used in the field. An example of a methodological field note for this study:

At the Santiam Rest-stop on 1-5, I wore an OSU sweatshirt, took my dog and waited to approach the informants until after they had seen me at my car. This approach seemed to establish my credibility as a student and reduce suspicion and apprehension that I had encountered earlier with RV retirees. (Williams, March 1993)



### Descriptive field notes.

The bulk of field notes are descriptive notes detailing conversations, interviews, and observations. Some ethnographers rely upon tape recordings of conversations while others prefer to make notes during interviews. Bernard (1988) suggests that all ethnographers rely heavily upon their memories. Descriptive field notes capture detail, behavior, and actual word-for-word conversation.

### Analytic field notes.

Analytic notes are the product of the researcher's understanding of the way the culture is organized that comes from reviewing the descriptive and methodological notes (Bernard, 1988). Analytic notes reveal patterns and relationships allowing the researcher to fit the pieces of the puzzle together (Bernard, 1988).

### The Ethnographic Interview

Ethnographic interviewing involves two distinct complimentary processes: developing rapport and eliciting information (Spradley, 1979). Rapport is the process of building a harmonious relationship built on trust between the researcher and the informant. The rapport process proceeds through the stages of apprehension, exploration, cooperation, and participation (Spradley, 1979).

Spradley (1979) notes the distinguishing feature of the ethnographic interview is that both the questions and

the answers must be discovered from the informants. One strategy for discovering questions is to ask informants to talk about a particular cultural scene using general descriptive questions. These general descriptive questions should be formed in ways that do not reflect the researcher's culture (Spradley, 1979).

### Descriptive questions

Descriptive questions are the foundation of the ethnographic interview. There are five major types of descriptive questions.

### Grand-tour questions

Interviews begin with general descriptive questions designed to give an overview or take the researcher on a grand-tour of the informants world. Examples of grand-tour questions include: Can you describe your trip to this RV campground? Tell me about the RV campground? Answers to these general, descriptive, grand-tour questions provide the researcher with necessary information needed to formulate questions focusing on more detailed, specific aspects of the grand-tour. The purpose of these descriptive questions is to identify areas to explore within the culture.

### Mini-tour questions

Mini-tour questions are descriptive questions exploring smaller units of experience of a grand-tour question or answer. Mini-tour questions are designed to ask informants to expand their descriptions on a particular aspect of their experience (Spradley, 1979).

### Example questions

Example questions ask informants for specific examples of a single act or event identified by an informant. This type of question would take the following form: Can you give me an example of the kinds of things you typically do when you are getting the RV ready to go? (Spradley, 1979).

### Experience questions

Experience questions ask informants to recall a particular event or experience in a particular setting. Experience questions are intentionally open ended. Spradley (1979) cautions that experience questions may elicit atypical events rather than recurrent, routine ones (Spradley, 1979). An experience question might take the following form: You've probably had some interesting experiences while on the road, can you recall any of them?

### Native-language questions

Native language questions ask informants how they would directly refer to some aspect of their lives using

their own words. Native-language questions are designed to minimize the influence of the informants' translation competence (Spradley, 1979). An example of a native language question: Is your rig set up for boondocking?

### Analysis of the Ethnographic Interview

An analysis of the ethnographic data will be based on Spradley's relational theory of meaning. The basic premise of relational theory is that the meaning of any symbol is its relationship to other symbols (Spradley, 1979). Relating one symbol to another involves decoding the symbol and discovering the rules encoded in the relationship (Spradley, 1979).

The final analytical step is to discover and identify cultural themes giving a holistic view of a cultural scene (Spradley, 1979). This process will meet the sixth objective, to discover cultural themes. Spradley (1979) defines a cultural theme as a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, tacitly approved or openly promoted in society. Themes recur throughout different parts of a culture and they function as general semantic relationships among domains (Spradley, 1979). Spradley elaborates, noting that cultural themes are recurring, larger units of thought, with a high degree of generality, consisting of a number of symbols linked into meaningful relationships (Spradley, 1979).

Although some cultural themes are explicit, the majority of cultural themes remain at the tacit level of knowledge and they are not easily expressed (Spradley, 1979). Tacit themes are formulated from observations and from inferences. Themes can connect different subsystems of a culture (Spradley, 1979).

Spradley suggests a systems approach for discovering cultural themes and visualizing relationships among domains (Spradley, 1979). A schematic systems diagram of a cultural scene would visually detail the elements and processes involved in the domain. This systems approach could be elaborated to show links to other scenes in the wider culture.

## CHAPTER 4 - THE PRESERVES

This study was conducted at two different preserves located on the West Coast. Both these preserves are part of the same nation-wide RV camping membership organization. The purpose of conducting fieldwork at two different preserves was to experience and observe the annual cycle of north-south seasonal migration by retired RVers. Fieldwork conducted in the fall of 1993 and in the summer of 1994 was at the Coastal preserve campground located in the Pacific Northwest. Fieldwork conducted in the winter of 1994-1995 and the spring of 1995 was at a preserve campground located in southern California. The geographic contrast between the location of the Coastal preserve in the Pacific Northwest and the Desert preserve in southern California was a factor in site selection. These sites were representative of typical, seasonal locations chosen by this transhumant population.

Three different kinds of retired RV seasonal migrants were found at the two preserves. The Coastal site hosts two different kinds of migrants. The Coastal preserve hosts a small population of retired RVers known as rainbirds. Rainbirds are RVers who choose to reside in the Pacific Northwest throughout the rainy season from September through April. During the late spring and summer months, the Coastal site has a large population of sunbirds. Sunbirds are RVers who travel northward to escape the summer heat of the

sunbelt states. The Desert preserve was populated by a large number of RVers known as snowbirds. Snowbirds migrate to mild, dry, southern locations in the winter, to avoid the harsh, cold winters of the snowbelt states in the north.

Both preserves have comparable facilities and have approximately the same number of sites. Although the facilities at each preserve are fairly standardized throughout the system, there are differences responsive to the unique demands posed by the environment, weather, and the populations frequenting each preserve.

#### The Coastal Preserve

The Coastal preserve is perched on 105 acres of wooded hills and cliffs overlooking the ocean. The beach is within walking distance of the campground. The preserve is located approximately three miles from a small inland village. The preserve has 305 campsites. There are 24 rental trailers at the preserve. The preserve amenities include an adult lodge, beauty shop, basketball court, children's play areas, enclosed swimming pool, wading pool, family center, gazebo, horseshoe pits, laundry facilities, rest rooms, five outdoor telephones, RV storage, shuffleboard, miniature golf, propane station, dump station, cable television, and trading post.

### The Desert Preserve

The Desert preserve is the larger of the two preserves with 850 acres. This preserve is located in a remote area of the southern California desert. The chaparral setting is dry with a landscape of rolling hills, boulders, and sagebrush. The only local services in the area are a post office and a general store. The nearest small towns are located approximately 20 to 30 miles away from the preserve, on winding two lane highways. The preserve has 271 sites and 10 rental trailers. The preserve amenities include an adult lodge, family center, basketball court, children's play area, dump station, a large fishing lake, horseshoe pits, laundry facilities, rest rooms, five telephone booths, recycling center, propane station, RV storage, emergency helicopter pad, shuffleboard, spa, swimming pool, trading post and volleyball court.

### The Preserve Facilities

The entrances to the preserves are concrete expressions of the symbolic separation between the public world and the private world of the membership campground. Both preserves are bounded by fences and have one main entrance. An arm-type gate bars entrance into the preserves. The entrance is defined by a kiosk-like security station. All vehicles passing through the arm-type gates into the preserve are first required to stop at the security station, where they receive clearance to enter from a security ranger.



The lay out of the preserves is characterized by a continuous maze of paved and hard-packed dirt roads. These roads typically intersect, curve, and occasionally end in cul-de-sac sections. The roads have low, dim lighting. Both preserves have maximum speed limits posted. The Coastal preserve's signs read, "Give me five," using a hand print with five fingers to indicate the acceptable speed of five miles per hour. The Coastal preserve has right-of-way signs for wild rabbits roaming the preserve. The Desert preserve's speed limit is 10 miles per hour.

The camp sites are fairly uniform in character, although the size of the site can vary according to the geography and vegetation. The camp sites are identified by site numbers located on wooden post markers at the Desert preserve and on utility boxes at the Coastal preserve. The camp sites are defined by a narrow, rectangular, cleared area with a paved driveway leading into the site. Generally, the sites are long enough to accommodate a 40 foot RV and one vehicle. Vehicles are typically parked in front of the RV or at the side of the RV at the site.

It is customary for the front of the RV to face the road. This requires that the RV be backed into the site. Backing into the site allows easier access to water, electricity, and sewer hookups. It is also easier to back into a site, than to back out of it onto a narrow road. This positioning also provides the RVer with more privacy, as the door of each RV faces the back-side of their neighbor's RV.

Each site has a utility box for electricity and a faucet for water. All the sites at the Desert preserve have sewer hookup service in addition to electricity, and water. This is known as a full-hookup site. Sixty-one of the 305 sites at the Coastal preserve are full-hookup sites. The remaining 244 sites provide only power and water. Each camp site has a picnic table and an outdoor grill.

The campsites are marked by natural foliage such as a hedge, bushes or trees, defining the boundaries between the sites. The RVer has exclusive use of the campsite while in the preserve. RVers often erect temporary enclosures, awnings, screened-in tent patios, and fenced areas for pets on their sites. Bicycles and miscellaneous outdoor items such as lawn chairs, or potted plants are commonly seen at campsites.

Campsites are personalized in various ways. Indoor-outdoor carpet or woven mats are often placed in front of the door of the rig. Adding tablecloths on the picnic tables, potted plants, ceramic figures, nameplates, strings of lights, lanterns, wind chimes, wind socks, and flags are ways of personalizing campsites.

## CHAPTER 5 - THE RV COMMUNITY

Identity is expressed and perpetuated through complex strategies of community maintenance (Gladney, 1991). In a seminal study of urban nomads, Spradley (1970) recognized that mobility becomes internalized as a part the social identity of members of highly mobile communities. Social identity is expressed through versatile strategies promoting and maintaining mobile communities.

A commitment to a mobile lifestyle is a prerequisite for entrance into the RV membership community. Members of this subculture consider mobility a resource. As a resource, mobility is utilized as a strategy structuring social interactions between members. These social interactions contribute to the mobile, social identity of these RVers and to the solidarity of the RV community.

Membership in the System is an important strategy for constructing definitions of self. These definitions contradict stereotypes by outsiders of RVers as unconnected, homeless, nomads or gypsies. Social identity is part of self-concept. For these RVers, social identity is derived both from membership in the System and from interpersonal relationships with other members. Social interaction permits enduring, continual expression and validation of group identity (Barth, 1966). Members of this mobile community share a collective sense of identity and common interests. RVers employ specific strategies aimed at community

maintenance. Participation in collective, cooperative joint activities by members is an important way of contributing to community (Peoples & Bailey, 1988).

System policies impinging on the rights and privileges of membership are perceived by the RVer as threats to self and threats to group identity. These threats jeopardize the cohesion and stability of the RV community.

### The Retreat System

A brief synopsis of the history of The Retreat System [the "System"] provides a context for viewing mobility as a strategy expressing the identity and values of the members. This historical framework highlights important concepts and orientations originally introduced and promoted by The Retreat management. These concepts and orientations are integral to this RV community. These concepts and orientations contribute to the ways members define themselves, others, the RV community, and the System. These expressions of group identity have become strategies of community maintenance by the membership.

The Retreat is a nation-wide membership camping system primarily for campers with recreational vehicles, although tent camping is allowed. The System has 39 campgrounds or preserves located in scenic areas across the country.

The Retreat was originally an independent membership camping corporation. After experiencing financial instability in the late 1980's, The Retreat was acquired by

a parent corporation, Pathways, Inc. This parent corporation has a number of holdings in the recreation industry. In the late 1980's the parent corporation merged The Retreat with another nation-wide membership camping system, The Haven. This merger created Haven-Retreat, Inc.

Members have the option of expanding their original membership to include both camping systems or retaining membership with the original Haven or Retreat systems. By exercising the option of purchasing a combined membership, members are subject to new contractual rights and dues structures. Members receive camping privileges in both systems. The decision not to purchase a combined membership restricts entrance of the member into the other preserves. Both the Coastal Preserve and the Desert Preserve are in The Retreat system.

In its original concept, The Retreat was developed as a private, camping membership system, with scenic locations conveniently sprinkled across the country. The management marketed the Retreat's motto, "We are Kin," emphasizing the incorporation of family values into the camping concept. The family concept set the tone for the camping experience. Members identified with the Retreat's motto, reflecting a camping system with an orientation based on traditional family values. Members willing to invest in a private membership camping organization, with geographically convenient locations, based on traditional American values were salient factors in the RVer's decision to purchase a

membership. After The Retreat was acquired and subsequently merged with The Haven, The Retreat's motto, "We are Kin," was extended to include members of the Haven who purchased the combined membership.

Many RVers purchased memberships prior to retirement anticipating that they would pay their contracts in full and begin to use the System when they retired. According to RVers, as the number of members in the System retired, and searched for alternative retirement strategies, retired RVers began to "live full-time in the System." One RVer explained, "The System wasn't designed for full-timing. It was originally designed for weekend or week-long family vacation camping. They [the management] never dreamed that members would start full-time living in the System." Currently, with 250,000 members, the management estimates that the average age of the members frequently using the System is 65 years old. The preserves are generally considered to be RV campgrounds frequented primarily by retired, seasonally migrating members.

The management estimates that only 10% or 25,000 of the members are "full-timers," living in the System. Active, retired members, however, give much higher estimates. The members believe that the majority of active, retired members are full-timers. Members commonly estimate that at least 50% of active members are full-timing.

### The Membership Price

The price of memberships has fluctuated over the years. Each membership contractually guaranteed a dues structure, camping rights, and privileges. Originally, the membership price was symbolically significant of the kind of member willing to make an investment in order to belong to the System. One long-time member explained the significance of the membership fee. He stated that the fee "...told you who the members were and what they were all about...we were really kinfolk back then..." He commented that, "...nowadays anyone can become a member for just over \$1,000.00. He noted, "We paid \$7,000 for our membership."

Originally, the membership price had symbolic meaning for the creation of community among the members. The membership price was a social symbol allowing the members to identify with each other. The price conveyed important socio-economic information to the RVers. Members that could afford to buy the relatively expensive memberships in a system promoting family values were considered trustworthy. The price of membership was a symbol of social solidarity contributing to the formation and maintenance of the RV community.

Through the years, the decline in demand for memberships was reflected in a decline in membership prices. The symbolic meaning of the membership price no longer communicates the same kind of information. The membership price no longer defines the social structure of the RV

community. The declining significance of the membership price is reflected by comments made by long-time members about the cohesiveness of the community. Long-time members frequently remark they no longer feel the sense of unity symbolized in the motto, "We are Kin."

These RVers cite the decline in membership prices and the merger with The Haven, as contributing to the disintegration of the family feeling and the lack of cohesiveness in the RV community. One 18-year member explained why she thinks there is a different feeling among members in the System:

"...the price dropped and a lot more people joined up. We didn't want the merger. No one asked us what we wanted. Members in the Haven were a different class of people. The Haven campgrounds aren't like ours. The Retreat is considered the cadillac of camping organizations by RVers. Things aren't the same.

We used to know everybody in the System. Now, it's different. Sometimes you don't even get to know your neighbor. A lot of these people bought in for a place to camp...so they stay to themselves. We all bought in because we wanted a place that felt like family. They didn't buy in because it was family...and so they don't act like family."

She continued to explain the differences between original Retreat members and new members noting,

They don't have the same investment in the System that we do. We invested in more than a campground. We invested in each other. We were kin. Now, there's no investment. Newcomers don't value the System. It's just one more convenience.

The volatile membership price structure has also impacted the cohesiveness of the community. Members who paid a premium for their memberships do not view the price as being responsive to demand factors. They feel the unstable



price structure reflects poor management. These members frequently expressed feeling as though they were "taken" by the System.

Members who paid a premium for their purchases rationalize they will get their moneys worth with intensive, high use of the System. These rationalizations are based on amortizing the purchase price and the annual dues over a number of years. The conclusion is that the amortized amount will eventually be equal to or lower than the per night fee charged at State campgrounds. These members are quick to add that they feel at risk in State campgrounds. RVer's are willing to pay for the security and safety provided by a private membership camping system, something they say cannot be measured by dollars alone.

#### Membership Number

Membership numbers also convey symbolic information about members in the community. Each member received a membership number when they joined the System. Unlike other membership organizations, membership numbers are not displayed on the RV. Each member receives a card with their membership number. This card is part of the identification needed to enter the preserve. Members frequently refer to their membership numbers during the course of conversations.

The relative position of the membership number itself out of the total number of memberships, conveys specific information about the RVer. The membership number is a

symbol expressing how knowledgeable and familiar the RVer is with the System.

From the membership number the length of membership in the System can be roughly determined. For example, one member indicated that her husband had a "low number" in the 3,000's issued in the early 1970's. This number is a symbol indicating to other members that he has been a member for over 20 years. This member would be considered an original member. These members are often referred to as "old timers" in the System. This reference is independent of chronological age, as the member may have purchased the membership while working and only recently reached retirement age. In most cases, however, a low membership number is also an indicator of actual RV experience.

A low membership number also is a rough indicator of the amount the member paid for his or her initial membership. Older members generally paid a premium for their memberships, while newer members bought memberships at lower prices reflecting the current market demand for memberships.

The relative position of the membership number is often used by members to support their identities as members who are knowledgeable about RVing, and who are familiar with the history, changes, and policies of the membership system. The relative position of the membership number defines the status of the RVer within the System. Membership numbers support a hierarchial strategy of community maintenance, identifying members with low numbers as the most

enculturated RVers, and those with high numbers as newcomers in the System.

### Mobility as a Condition of Membership

Geographical mobility is a condition of membership in the Retreat system. Contractually, members are allowed to reside in the preserve for a maximum of 14 days. After the 14 day limit, the rules require that the RVer spend one week outside the preserve before re-entering the same preserve. There is some flexibility allowing RVers to extend their stay, depending upon the space available in the preserve, and the willingness of the RVer to pay per diem site rent beyond the 14 day maximum.

A centralized system called "MRS" an acronym for Member Reservation System, allows the members to call and make advanced reservations in preserves. MRS is a centralized reservation service operated by management for The Retreat and The Haven systems. Using the MRS system, members schedule their travel routes within the System up to four months in advance. The use of the MRS is a strategy of community maintenance as it reduces the uncertainty generated from mobility (Jacobsen, 1986).

### Mobility and Social Continuity

Mobility also generates the expectation of social continuity, according to Jacobson (1986). Despite mobility, people may find "...they are able to and they expect to meet

over time...and to see again those they have met before. They are aware of their continuing relationships" (Jacobson, 1986; p. 104). This awareness gives highly mobile people a sense of confidence in the continuity of their friendships (Jacobson, 1986). This continuity encourages them to participate in the System despite limited stays in any one place (Jacobson, 1986).

Bill and Millie are self-described, "full-time, part-timers." They explained although they have a permanent home in southern Idaho, they are spending more time in their RV traveling within the preserve system than living in their home. Bill and Millie enjoy RVing in the System, "...because that's where all our friends are anymore. Regardless of where we go, we'll always see someone we know at one of the preserves." They acknowledge that they participate in the System primarily because of the sense of continuity that these relationships provide for them.

Confidence in the long-term continuity of friendships within the System was illustrated by Andrea. Andrea, a full-timer, met another member two years ago, who had attended the same high school in the early 1950's. As they reminisced about their high school days, the other woman wished aloud that she could have afforded to buy a high school yearbook. Andrea explained:

I told her that I would pick up the yearbook next time I was at my sister's home where it was stored. I promised to put the yearbook in our rig, so that next time we met we could look at it together."

Then Andrea said excitedly,

"...it was right here! Two years later, I met her right here in this preserve! She was parked just up the road. I got out the yearbook, and we went through every page of it together! It was great to see her again!"

Mobility is an important strategy contributing to the cohesiveness of the RV community. Many experienced members comment that the "two weeks in and one week out rule" limiting the number of days a member can stay at a preserve effectively prevents the formation of cliques. One member stated directly that although cliques form from time to time, "...cliques have no place in this System. We are all equal here."

Mobility is also a strategy for maintaining social networks within the community that might otherwise might become frayed. The prescribed, limited period of time RVers spend in the preserve contributes to an attitude of tolerance for personal traits, opinions, and actions not otherwise tolerated or accepted in a non-mobile, permanent community.

One RVer commented although he enjoyed socializing with another member, he had limited tolerance for the member's wife whom he described as a "motor-mouth." He described his relationship with his friend noting, "Jim and I have a lot in common. We both hunt, fish, collect coins, and we both grew up in the Depression back East." The men made the arrangements to meet annually at a preserve during the winter. He acknowledged that his friend's wife was a

"...nice woman...likeable...but it's just hard for me to be around her." He reasoned that for two weeks a year, he makes an effort to tolerate his friend's wife despite the fact that "...her constant talking grates on my nerves." He added he was relieved to find out that they would be going separate directions when they both left.

Other RVers expressed a willingness to be tolerant of their neighbors because they knew that they would be there for a limited stay. This tolerance extends to pets, noise, lights, trespassing on campsites, and even occasional, unsightly use of site space by neighbors. Many RVers have commented, that they weigh the "hard feelings" that might be created if they complained, against living next door to someone for a few days. RVers commonly express the cultural rule governing relations with neighbors, noting that, "If we don't like our neighbors, we just move!" Mobility both extends tolerance for other members, and circumvents confrontation between members in the community. These adaptive strategies of community maintenance, are supported by the RVers' mobile identity.

Social relationships among RVers persist for years and are renewed as they cross paths in the various preserves. In particular, full-time RVers can anticipate seeing one another off-and-on over time; they may expect to meet and re-meet because they have a similar pattern of circular migration within the System. Many members also belong to the

same outside RV clubs and attend rallies sponsored by these associations.

Even though contact with specific individuals in the System may be intermittent, Jacobson (1986) noted that, "...the probability and expectation of a long-term association may underwrite predictability and stability in social relationships (p. 104)." Identity as members of a mobile sub-culture is sustained through the continual social interaction between members in the System (Barth, 1966).

Friendships made within the preserve are often lasting and endure lengthy separations. Social continuity is accomplished through annual rituals such as reunions. Yearly reunions allow RVers to reestablish social ties. At these reunions, travel plans for the next season are shared, and plans are made to hook-up down the road with their friends.

One part-timer related how she and her husband posted a sign on a board inviting RVers from their home state to their RV site for a potluck dinner. This invitation resulted in five or six couples from various locations around the same state, contributing to the potluck. This initial social interaction has resulted in a decade-long tradition of holding an annual reunion. This ritualized reunion occurs at the same time of year, at the same preserve, with the same group of RVing friends.

Mobility often severs or weakens ties with extended family members, friends, and former attachments. For full-timers, living within the System often confines the majority

of their interactions to the social network of members within the System. Consequently, mobility often reduces interaction with friends who are not RVing. As these RVers are cut off from their family and friends, they tend to lose prior identities and roles (Spradley, 1970; p. 255). One couple relayed the experience of feeling alienated from their old neighborhood:

We recently spent an entire evening with our former neighbors. We took a long walk and boy, have things ever changed in the neighborhood. We've only been gone two years. You should see what the people that bought our house have done.. We talked for awhile about the neighborhood, and about all our kids and grandkids...but we ran out of things to talk about! Our lives are so different now. They (their friends) just don't understand our lifestyle. We've been to places all over the country, and they haven't been anywhere or done anything. They just sit home. After we left, we realized we just don't have much in common with them anymore.

RVers often described feeling "out of step" as their neighborhoods "turned over" and younger neighbors with different needs and interests moved into their neighborhoods. RVers described feeling alone and isolated in neighborhoods they had lived in for most of their working lives.

Confining social interaction primarily to other RVers is a strategy reducing the uncertainty of mobility, in ways contributing to the mobile identity of the RVer. When the membership network is the primary source of social interaction, the commitment to the community is heightened.

The uniformity of the preserve system is also a strategy for community maintenance. This uniformity removes



the uncertainty of entering a different preserve every two weeks. The uniformity within the preserve system enables members to immediately become part of the community without the necessity of relearning what to do, where to go, and new social rules governing those activities. This perception was expressed succinctly by an RVer who noted that, "Each preserve is different, and each preserve is the same." According to RVers, geographical locations, the size of the preserves, and the management are important ways preserves differ.

Another distinguishing factor is the emphasis different preserves place on particular activities. This emphasis gives each preserve a particular reputation among the members. For example, a particular preserve in southern California was noted for the emphasis on line-dancing. Another preserve in the Pacific Northwest was noted for the emphasis on nature walks in the local area. Other preserves were known for their Friday night sing-a-longs, fishing, and food-service.

Membership in The Retreat also produces a degree of predictability or certainty about a person's relationships with others in the community. Within the membership system the person is "known" and his future location within the System is trackable within the social networks. As RVers enter the preserves they can anticipate recurrent interaction with other members. These fluid social networks, and the social interaction RVers experience in the preserves

reduces the RVer's anonymity and the uncertainty of acceptance within the community. Trackability within the System is a strategy of reducing the uncertainty of mobility. Trackability strengthens the social ties of the absent RVer. Trackability is an effective strategy of community maintenance respecting the RVer's mobile identity.

There are many opportunities for informal socializing because there are few formal demands on the RVer in the preserve. For example, leisurely morning coffees give RVers ample time to visit and talk. Members often meet each other walking down a road, at the adult lodge, at the family center, at activities, or outside their RVs. These informal encounters result in conversations cementing relations with one another. Staying informed about the preserve system is an important part of this socialization, according to RVers.

Information about the whereabouts of other members not at the preserve is often informally exchanged among the RVers. These informal conversations allow mutual acquaintances to be identified, elaborating, and strengthening the social networks within the System. Informal conversations also allow RVers to keep track of each other, as short-term and long-range travel plans are often announced by RVers. This strategy is a way RVers anticipate overlapping stays at preserves. It also provides RVers with opportunities to coordinate travel plans.

Clark, a young-looking-and-acting 83 year old, has belonged to The Retreat since its inception. Clark has been

RVing in one form or another since the early 1940's. After World War II, he was a "boomer." He explained that a boomer was a skilled construction worker who followed the "construction boom," or work around the country. Clark, a finish carpenter by trade, used a model T Ford to haul a trailer around to various work sites. Clark has had 15 to 20 different kinds of RVs in the last 50 years. According to members who have known Clark for 25 years, he is considered an "old timer" in the System by the members.

Clark described the "...way the manager's meeting used to be..." Manager's meetings were always on Saturday mornings at 11:00 a.m. The primary reason everyone went to the manager's meeting was to see who was in the preserve. He said it was like a "homecoming." According to Clark, "Even if you just got in, you just parked your rig, and went to the meeting." Members rarely missed these meetings. It was at these meetings that the members felt like "kinfolk." The Saturday morning manager's meeting was "something you could count on, no matter what preserve you were in." Since the manager's meetings have been changed to a different day and time, Clark reflected that "...half the people I know don't go anymore."

Many members feel threatened by the seemingly arbitrary change in the day and the time of the manager's meeting. The members view this change as a threat to the cohesion of the community. Many members echoed Clark's sentiment, "They [the

management] don't want to see us all together...they're trying to break us up."

### Mobility and Displays of Identity

RVers employ a combination of strategies to cope with the uncertainty of mobility and to facilitate social continuity. For example, RV members often display their identity with the Retreat system by attaching bumper stickers to RVs and vehicles with the Retreat logo on it proclaiming, "We are Kin." Other bumper stickers may announce support for supplementary membership programs offered by the Retreat. Bumper stickers are a common way members announce their allegiance to these programs. These bumper stickers provide important information about political allegiance within the Retreat system.

This information contributes to social solidarity between RVers by recognizing compatible allegiances with which the RVer can identify. This information also alerts members to the possibility of conflicting commitments and political allegiances. This information allows RVers to skirt these issues. Conflictual issues can be avoided or minimized with neighbors. This avoidance behavior is a strategy of community maintenance.

Flags proclaiming the Retreat motto or logo are often flown next to flags with state or country emblems. Symbolically, the Retreat flags close the social distance created by flags and license plates identifying the RVer

with a particular state, region, or country. The Retreat flag flown side by side state and country flags. The position of these flags symbolize the equal importance RVers attach to their identity as members of this camping system.

RVers may be observed wearing Retreat membership pins and insignia on clothing such as caps, sweatshirts, T-shirts, or jackets. Similarly, many RVers collect commemorative pins illustratively depicting each preserve. These pins are either worn on clothing, or displayed as wall decorations inside the RV. These pins symbolize the RVer's familiarity with the System, as the pins can only be purchased at each of the preserve locations.

### Threats to Identity

#### The Pact

The Management developed two programs impacting the identity of membership in distinct ways. The first program called "The Pact" was an internal program aimed at increasing corporate revenues to offset low membership dues contractually frozen and, therefore, not subject to cost of living increases. According to the management, The Pact program was designed to raise revenues to continue operating the preserves in the Haven-Retreat system. The goal of the program was to rescue the Haven-Retreat system from financial instability. Even though the financial health of the System was addressed at each of the manager's meetings,

members were generally unclear as to what the financial deficits were, and how they would be met through revenues generated by Pact membership.

Management stated that another goal was to attempt to establish parity in the amount of the membership dues paid by the members. The members' annual dues range from \$50 per year to \$750 per year, depending upon their contracts.

Members voluntarily decide whether or not to join The Pact. The terms of The Pact void the member's original contract and establish a new contractual relationship. Under the new contract the RVer becomes a member in both the Retreat and the Haven systems. The new contract authorizes the management to call for annual dues increases equal to the Consumer Price Index.

The Pact contract changes the rights of access to the System. The Pact specifies a maximum of 100 free nights in the System. After 100 nights, Pact members are required to pay a nominal fee of \$1.00 for all other nights spent in the System. Full-timers are encouraged to subscribe to the minimum dues structure and upgrade to a dues structure reflecting on-going heavy use of the System, rather than pay the extra fee per night. Under the terms of The Pact, Part-timers generally paid the minimum annual dues reflecting less intense use of the system.

The members have mixed feelings about the Pact. RVers who did not support The Pact perceived that the management wanted to squeeze them out, "...by telling us we have to pay

for this and for that." Members supporting The Pact rationalized that they were using the System more, the cost of living had risen over the years, and that the extra dues and fees were still cheaper than renting an apartment and paying utilities.

The Pact has been a source of friction between members. One man recalled hearing Non-Pact members taunting Pact members: "...we didn't pay extra or agree to a dues increase and we have the same benefits as you do!" He has seen members scraping off the Pact bumper sticker off their trucks in the middle of the night, to avoid harassment and confrontations with other members.

Anna, a widowed full-timer, aired her views about members who do not support the Pact:

Complainers don't belong to the Pact. The complainers at the Manager's meeting don't support the Pact. If it wasn't the Pact, they would find something else to complain about. They won't consider the benefits and they don't want to pay for them. They won't admit that the price of camping has gone up, and should pay their fair share, so instead they complain.

Many RVers said they would have gladly donated extra money per year and were angered when the corporation would not accept it. One old-timer explained why he was angry:

I sent in \$100 just to help them [the Haven-Retreat system] out, just like you would help out a member of your family. They wouldn't take my money unless I agreed to changing my contract! I told them that I will never agree to them putting a tie on my original contract. When they returned my check, I said to hell with them.

The subject of The Pact has resulted in the exchange of heated opinions among the members. The membership is divided

in their support of the Pact. Pact members feel strongly that RVers who did not join are not contributing their fair share to the System.

In contrast, members who did not join The Pact believe that the System should honor their original contracts. They do not believe they should be pressured to revise their original commitments. Non-supporters also perceive that their annual dues are adequate. Non-supporters believe that the precarious financial health of the System is an indication of the need for better financial management. These RVers express doubt concerning the validity of the management's claims of financial deficits requiring programs to increase revenues. They believe that the increased revenues will go first to managerial salaries and trickle down to the preserves. Many non-supporters do not believe that the System is facing a severe financial crisis. These members also believe that Pact members did not see any significant tangible return for increasing their dues and fees. They perceive the Pact members as being penalized for joining The Pact, and agreeing to revoke the terms of their original contracts.

The Pact has been a divisive issue within the RV community. One member said, "This Pact thing...I'm sick of it. The first thing that people ask anymore, is if you are a Pact member." This divisiveness has suspended the tacit social rule of avoiding confrontation and controversial



issues. This divisiveness has also reduced the cohesion of the RV community.

The Pact challenged the cohesiveness of the membership base. This challenge has weakened group identity with the membership System. The Pact was implemented on the heels of a corporate acquisition and subsequent merger of two camping systems. Although the legal acquisition and merger was accomplished several years ago, members are still in the process of resolving these corporate actions. RVers do not identify with the Parent Corporation, Pathways, Inc. Similarly, RVers are still attempting to find common denominators between the two merged systems unifying the membership.

Within The Retreat system The Pact became a threat, altering the allegiance of the members from seeing themselves as a single cohesive membership community, into two distinct factions. Members were forced to identify as being either for or against the Pact. Among the many effects of the Pact, two relate directly to the identity of the RVers and to the RV membership community. First, the divisiveness of The Pact threatened community solidarity through the creation of the two factions, splitting group commitment to The Retreat system. Second, there was a reduction in the identification and allegiance of the membership to The Retreat system. The Pact effectively reinforced the mobile identity of these RVers based on

values of independence and self-reliance, enabling them to continue their lifestyle with or without The Retreat system.

### Be Our Guest Program

The goals of the second program marketed by the Management were to attract new members offsetting declines in membership, and increasing individual preserve revenues. The "Be Our Guest" program was developed to maximize the use of the preserve resources by allowing controlled public access to the preserve and its camping and recreational amenities. Groups of outsiders are welcomed by management and encouraged to "try out" the System, by organizing a social function in the System. The management promoted this program, requiring the preserves to host public groups.

Opening the preserve to the public is perceived by the RVers as a threat to their identity and values. Non-members entering the preserves, enjoying explicit privileges and rights of membership, do not understand the implicit social rules defining social interaction. The important distinction between public and private has been blurred by this program. The public is viewed as a threat to the integrity of the RV community. The magnitude of this threat was described by a long time member:

When I bought my membership for \$8,000, I was also buying the slogan and reputation of the organization: "We are Kin." People were buying memberships into an elite camping system with some of the most beautiful campgrounds anywhere. The concept was that they would buy a membership that would allow them to take their families camping into the kind of environment and be

around the kind of people that still had good values and not camp next to some guy with hair down to his waist and crouching around a fire smoking who-knows-what, and drinking and drugging. We bought memberships so we wouldn't have to be in the State Park system and have to contend with all of that. We don't want to camp in a place where there's music blaring, boozing, and where we have to worry about locking everything up. We bought memberships because we wanted to be in a park with security, where only certain people were admitted and where we could leave our doors open and our things outside. Now with all these trial programs open to the public, people are getting in for a few dollars a day without belonging at all. They don't know who they are letting in. You can't leave your door unlocked anymore. These people could be anyone...they could be murders or child molesters...they could rob you...they could be anyone. And now, they can't guarantee us safety. When memberships were expensive, people had to put down a substantial down payment and finance the rest. We went through a credit check. In those days, the corporation didn't give out memberships to flakes. We were referred to the System by friends, and we've referred our friends and introduced them to what we considered the best camping organization in the States. I can't say that now....now they let anyone in...things have really changed..."

A full-time woman noted she was shocked by the "scruffy appearance" of a shopper in the preserve trading post. He smelled, looked weird, and scared her. When she openly brought her concern to a manager's meeting, it was confirmed the man was a local resident who shopped in the store from time to time. At the meeting, she was told by the manager she should not judge people by their appearances. After the meeting, she was upset because she did not receive a satisfactory answer to her concern. She countered, asking why should she not judge an obvious outsider by their appearance?

The expectation that membership guaranteed that the System would remain private and continue to reflect the

shared values of the members was expressed by Linda, a recent widow, RVing full-time in the System:

We joined the organization because of the family concept and the fact that it is not open to the public. In public campgrounds you have to watch your things. Here, I've left things in the rest rooms or in the family lodge, and when I go back the next day, my things are still there. The members are honest here. You don't know who you're dealing with in public campgrounds. When the System opens its gates to the public, they don't abide by our rules. They [outsiders] walk around the preserve drinking out of open containers. For example, I've seen many [outsiders] with too much to drink. We just don't do that here. The System shouldn't let them [outsiders] in.

Linda vented her frustration about a Be Our Guest group that camped in one preserve last winter:

There was a whole section of prime camping sites reserved for them! We can't reserve sites. The kicker was, that they had sewer sites! Members,---paying members--- were dry camping, while these outsiders took our sewer sites! We couldn't even go into the adult lodge and play cards at night. It was taken over by them for the entire holiday weekend. They had one big-deal, private event there after the other. At one point, when we were over there, they even asked us, the members to leave! They acted as if we were the outsiders. It isn't right...they [management] should not allow this to happen [emphasis in the original].

Another man in his early 60's noted "...the main gripe among the members is that we bought into a private organization that was not open to the public." He feels the "...public has a big influence on the park...people in public parks aren't friendly...they can't trust each other." He continued, "...the We are Kin slogan is a bunch of bull. How can we be kinfolk when outsiders are injected into the System?" His perception is that behavior by outsiders, which is not acceptable to members, is tolerated because the

management and members have no way of compelling outsiders to respect the rules of the preserve. He explained:

We used to feel more private, more secure....we slept better at night in the preserves. But now, you don't know who your neighbor is...you don't know their motivations...you don't know if they are criminal. The public has no investment in these parks. Tell me, who is responsible if they do some damage, act up, or destroy property?

He stressed he did not buy his membership as an investment.

"I bought my membership as a tool to use in the way I want to live. I thought I would eventually turn over my membership to my son."

Other members expressed similar frustration with the Be Our Guest program. A group of members agreed that, "...they [management] are after the almighty dollar...above anything else." The suggestion that the Be Our Guest program is a marketing strategy to replace a declining membership is generally met with disdain by the members. One member spoke for the rest when he commented, "People who are like us, will find us [The Retreat]. They [the management] don't need to recruit every Tom, Dick, and Harry."

The public is considered a threat to the family values promoting continuity, stability, and security within the System. The general public are considered outsiders who have entered the preserve without going through the rites of membership. The perception of the members is that these outsiders have trespassed both the territorial and social boundaries of the preserve and community. The members expected that territorial boundaries and social boundaries

would be respected and defended against public trespass by the Management. The threat to the identity and values of the members is amplified by the active promotion by Management for this program. This promotion coupled with the lack of sanctions through which the members might compel outsiders to comply with membership norms, heightens dissatisfaction within the membership ranks.

### Interpretation

The perception that the preserve is private and the members are kin suggests the preserve is considered "home" by the members. The social definitions of home and family are the underpinnings of this membership system.

Similarly opening the preserve to the public violates concepts of kin and of home. Divisions in the membership, and outsiders, are threats to the integrity of the community. These gestures are perceived as threatening to these RVers who consider the preserves to be home. The perception of the RVer is that the preserve as their home is at risk. The definition of home as a place of privacy, safety, familiarity and comfort, where people share the same family values, has been opened to redefinition by The Pact and by the Be our Guest program. The members are angry that the System does not respect the traditional family values integral to the membership community.

## CHAPTER 6 - DISRUPTION, LOSS, AND RESOLUTION

Bateson (1989) suggests that people with common interests share recurrent, common themes in their life histories. A recurrent theme often "...echoes from one life to another" (Bateson, 1989, p. 16). The experience of disruption, requiring a reformulation of purpose and identity, is a common, recurrent theme echoing from one life to another among many full-time, retired RVerS.

These disruptions were significant as they interrupted the sense of inner sameness and continuity defining identity. The kinds of major life disruptions posing threats to the identities of these retirees included expected life events such as aging and retirement. Other disruptive events recounted by RVerS included unexpected events such as fires, floods, accidents, and financial losses. Changes in family relationships, such as divorce, separation, and the death of a spouse or child, were painfully discussed by informants in terms of disruption and loss. Life threatening changes in physical well-being such as heart problems, cancer, and surgeries also pointed to themes of disruption experienced by these retirees.

The recurrent pattern in these experiences is that the disruption became an unexpected catalyst for a dramatic change in the lives of these retirees. In each personal account, the experience of disruption was a motivating

factor resulting in their decision to become full-time RVers.

RVers frequently described disruptions in their health as shocking or numbing experiences. The disruption in health status often precipitated a re-evaluation of priorities and commitments to career, existing priorities, and sources of social and emotional support. The decision to go full-time was a way of resolving discrepancies in priorities, commitments, and support.

#### Life Threatening Disruptions

In 1985, at age 57, Hal learned he had cancer. He described his reaction as disbelief:

When the doctor said I had cancer, I couldn't move...my feet were nailed to the ground...I felt numb. I had assumed that I would follow in the footsteps of my old man...he was a cop. I assumed I would work a couple more years on the beat, then get a desk job and sit it out until I retired.

When he was in the hospital taking chemotherapy treatments, he "...never felt more alone and scared" in his life. While he was in the hospital, he realized he could not depend on his three adult sons when he was sick. He reflected, "I found out they don't need me anymore." As he was recovering he decided to pursue an early retirement option offered by the police force. He sold his home, purchased a membership in the System, and began to travel full-time in his RV. He joined an independent RV cancer support group, and he joined the System's singles group.



Two years later, he suffered a recurrence of the cancer and he underwent chemotherapy treatments. Hal felt supported by members of the singles' RV group, and the RV cancer support group. Hal received long distance telephone calls and letters from RVing friends all over the country. He described these RVers as, "...truly friends...the closest thing to family a guy could have." He now plans his travel itinerary to attend rallies sponsored by the RV singles club and by the RV cancer support group.

Pat and his wife Donna, both in their late sixties, are "trying to be full-timers." Pat and Donna have been married for 47 years. They founded and operated a heavy equipment business for 30 years. Three years ago, Pat suffered a stroke and a heart-attack. During Pat's recovery, they realized they no longer wanted to be tied down to a business. They decided they wanted to share new experiences together and lead a more relaxed lifestyle. They bought an RV and a membership in the System with the intent of full-timing. Pat said, "We had never done anything like this [RVed] but we said let's try it...let's see if we like it." Pat and Donna view RVing as another way of building a life together.

Pat is surprised he does not miss the business:

We worked hard building that business up from nothing. We didn't have anything when we started out. I worked twelve and fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. I had a reputation of being the best around. I made a good living, and I don't have any regrets. But, I don't miss it either!

Pat reflected he was learning about "another world out there." He described the kinds of things he was learning:

I'm learning all kinds of things, every day. Donna and I go shopping together. I never had time for that before. I even cut coupons! You know, we can afford anything we want, but I like to go shopping on double coupon day. When we shop, we make a day of it...go out for breakfast and lunch, and take in a movie. We never did that while we had the business.

We're learning a lot about RVing. There's a lot to it. How to hook up, how to pack. We learned the hard way about not forgetting to secure the refrigerator. Food was thrown out everywhere. It was a real mess. I'm learning how to drive on different kinds of roads, how to back up in tight spots, and change lanes. You learn where to go, where not to go, where to stop, where not to stop. This is all new to me. Hell, taking it easy takes some learning too. I never used to sit around like this, shooting the breeze all morning!

A part-timer recalled that after an extended illness, she decided if she ever got well again, she would "take off" and RV by herself, regardless of what her family thought. She explained:

My husband objects to me being on the road alone, but he doesn't want to do anything but work. We've never gone on a real vacation together. My sons side with their father, but my daughter understands. I spent years taking care of a house and kids and going nowhere. Now, I want to see things. I caravanned down to Mexico and saw some Indian ruins. That trip changed the way I think about life and death. Recently, I've been reading about reincarnation. I don't think we have all the answers.

When asked about the kinds of things she enjoyed doing, she said she rarely misses the opportunity to swim at the preserves. She learned to swim after her illness. She explained swimming was not only something she had always wanted to learn, but it was also a way of accepting herself:

I always wanted to swim but I was always on the plump side after I had my children. I never lost the weight. I was so self-conscious that I would never put on a bathing suit and go in a pool. I know I'm overweight, and I don't have the greatest figure in the world, but I made up my mind to learn to swim, and I did. There's other women that are just as heavy as I am, and they're out there swimming. So now, I go and I don't worry about what someone else thinks about the way I look. Swimming is good for me and it's relaxing. I should have done it years ago.

### Loss: Letting Life Unfold

RVers view life disruptions as unavoidable. In conversations, however, they focus on ways to cope with disruptions based on their life experience. RVers talk about the importance of being flexible when faced with disruptions. RVers do not necessarily view disruptions as bad, but rather as an unavoidable part of life. The adage, "God never gives us more than we can handle" is commonly heard at the preserve.

RVers often talk about what they have learned from life. Candy is a slim, high energy, 68 year old, full-timer with a soft, southern accent. She recounted the sudden death of her first husband, and the unexpected way she met her second husband. She views both of these events as lessons in letting life unfold. From these situations, she learned the importance of taking life day-by-day, and the importance of being flexible and open to change. Her initial reaction to her husband's suggestion that they go full-time, was "Why not?" Candy is poignantly aware of the impermanence of life. She explained, "There ain't nothing in this life that's

going to stay the same. So we might as well get out there and enjoy it."

Robert is an energetic 80 year old retiree who began full-time RVing eight months ago with his beagle, "Rover". Robert said his wife of 54 years died one year ago, after being bedridden for a year. During the last year of his wife's illness, he said he did all the household work. Robert said, "I did everything...I cooked, cleaned, shopped, and even sewed." After his wife died, he knew he could not stay in the house anymore. Robert described his decision to go full-time:

I had always enjoyed camping, but my wife was never really too excited about it. I had always wanted to try full-timing but I knew she would never consider it. After she died, I knew immediately that I had to do something...but I didn't know what. I was reading through the classified ads one day, and I saw a membership for sale. I thought about it for a few days. Then I called and went over and talked to the people. They said that they were just too old to continue to RV and they had decided to settle down and they wanted to sell their membership. Here they were 80 years old and settling down, and here I am 80 and just starting out!

Robert decided he wanted to see as much of the country as he could while he was physically and mentally healthy. He bought the advertised membership, sold his home, and bought a 16' foot cab-over-truck RV, and began full-timing within the System. Robert assessed the past year on the road:

I am having a good time. I've met a lot of nice folks. I found out that I can take good care of myself. I even like my own cooking. If I want to be with people, fine. If not, they'll leave you alone. I don't have any regrets about selling the house. Rover and I are out there seeing the country!

### Resolution: A Lifestyle Change

Lori and Kurt, both in their early 50's have been full-timing for five years. This is their second marriage. Both Lori and Kurt's children were in their early teens when they married. Now, all four of the children are either working or attending college. Blending their families together 14 years ago was described as "a real struggle." Lori was working full-time, managing their home, and rearing four teenagers, primarily by herself. Kurt had a successful, yet demanding business with two partners on the East-coast. He worked long hours and usually every weekend.

Five years ago, the sudden, unexpected death of a business partner coupled with the scare of a financial reversal and the onset of a potentially serious health problem forced Kurt to slow down and take a look at his life. At the same time, Lori realized she was experiencing burn-out on her job, and too much stress at home. She was also concerned her marriage might not survive these disruptions:

We finally stopped. Just stopped. We sat down together, alone, and just talked, and talked, and talked. We looked at our life. I mean we looked at every part of it. I told Kurt I was scared. I didn't want him keeling over with a heart attack. And I knew I couldn't keep going. We realized we needed to make some changes and we knew we wanted to stay together. We talked about what was really important to us. We reprioritized. That's when we started talking about alternatives to what we were doing. Suddenly, doors started opening for us. Like RVing. We considered RVing because it was the only thing we knew would really take us away from all the stress and demands we had built into our lives.

Kurt said full-timing has changed his life. He described the decision to go full-time to having a near death experience without the risk:

I see things differently now. My priorities are different. I have healthy priorities now. I was a type A, work-a-holic. RVing has saved us. We're living now, not just making it through the week. We used to be so exhausted and stressed out that we couldn't do anything but work. Now we have time to do what's important to us. We talk. We go places. We meet interesting people. We pursue interests. Money is important. You need it to live. But I learned that it isn't everything.

He saw his former partners recently. They were still incredulous that he had sold his home and airplane to live in an RV. He mused again, "I see these guys and I was just like them...living to make money and killing myself. On the other hand they say they don't understand who I am anymore, and they can't fathom what we are doing." Kurt said he and Lori thought they were being original when they started RVing. They were surprised to learn thousands of people were living on the road full-time.

One recently divorced full-timer said he is haunted by the possibility he might end up in a nursing home and would have regrets about not living. He described his second marriage, his subsequent divorce, and how it contributed to his decision to go full-time:

We tried to make it work for 22 years and we did all right as long as I was working. When I retired things changed. I've only got 10 or 15 good years left, and I can't see sitting in a house day after day, never going anywhere. We were just too different when it came right down to it. Of course, we're still friends...I still see her kids and think of them as my own. And I do repair work for her [his former wife] when I get down that way. Divorce is tough...things are different. But

every time I go there, I'm thankful that I'm not stuck there. I think to myself, you might end up in a nursing home someday, and you don't want to sit there and have regrets about what you didn't do.

Maddie is an attractive, comfortably dressed woman about 60 years old, with a warm smile. She and her husband Darrel have been full-timing for two years. Smiling, she confided, "If anybody had told me that I would be living in an RV and enjoying it five years ago, I would have said they were crazy!"

Maddie described their mutual decision to go full-time:

What it really came right down to was that we both needed a change. We had been through a lot before Darrel retired. Darrel was miserable at his job. He wanted to do a good job, he was there 35 years, but he was being constantly harassed and belittled by his supervisor. There was nothing that he could do but wait to retire. I had been in a serious accident, and one of our children was also in a serious accident that same year. When Darrel was finally able to retire, we knew we had to do something different. Darrel actually told me that he felt like he didn't have anything to live for, he was so unhappy.

Maddie described their family home as "historic." She said, "Historic is another way of saying it was old, large and needed constant upkeep." They felt their house, neighborhood, and community where they grew up and lived during their marriage was dragging them down. Darrel said he did not want people to associate him with the company after he retired. He wanted to be free of the image as a factory worker. He did not want to be "one of them" after he retired. RVing has given them the fresh start that they needed. Like Kurt, Darrel feels full-timing has changed his life.

### Divestment Rituals

For most full-timers, moving into an RV is generally preceded by the sale of the family home and personal household possessions. The tasks of sorting and disposing of personal household possessions is almost exclusively the domain of women. Women make decisions regarding the disposition of household and family items, sorting and identifying items to be given away, or sold.

Women discuss divestment and disposition rituals in detail. Men, on the other hand, rarely talked about these rituals. When men do discuss disposing of personal belongings, they often refer to personal possessions as "stuff" or "junk." Men frequently comment that they had no attachment to these personal possessions.

Women who have been on the road for a long period of time also refer to personal possessions as "stuff" or "junk." These women rarely express any regret about disposing of their personal belongings. They often describe these divestment rituals as empowering, liberating experiences.

Michelle and John bought their brand new 40' RV one year ago, after selling their home. John and Michelle have been married for 32 years. Since John needs to work another two years before he can retire at age 55, they decided to purchase an RV and make large payments on it while John is still working. They decided not to wait for retirement to begin full-timing. Although most RVers wait until they



retire to go full-time, RVers frequently wish aloud that they had taken an early retirement to begin this lifestyle.

Michelle described a divestment ritual as a way of giving her permission to dispose of personal memorabilia. One afternoon she sat down and reread all of the Valentine, Christmas, Birthday cards, and letters she had saved from her husband during their courtship and marriage. She then ripped them up and burned them in the fireplace. She kept only a few letters. She stated, "I don't need them. I know how much he loves me." Disposing of the letters and cards reaffirmed their commitment to enjoy each day together. She has not regretted burning the letters and cards, even though her best friend was shocked and upset by her actions.

From a practical standpoint, Michelle reasoned that boxes of memorabilia would have taken up valuable storage space in the RV. She said that this would have prevented them from taking something else that they can enjoy daily.

Florence, a full-timer for nine years, noted she and her husband were originally from the deep south. They had both grown up with a sense of tradition and history. They had lived in their family home for 34 years and reared their three daughters there. Selling the house was not hard, but actually disposing of 34 years of possessions was difficult. Florence described breaking up housekeeping:

It was a wrenching experience for me. I had furniture and antiques from my mother and grandmother. I had things that my mother, and mother-in-law had given me when I got married. Some of those things had been passed down to them by their mothers and grandmothers.

The things that were in my home had been part of my daily life for almost 35 years. I did keep those things that were irreplaceable in terms of the memories they hold. I kept things like my wedding china and silver. As I sorted through all our things, I remembered different times in our life. I cried a lot, but I kept on sorting! I gave a lot of things to our daughters for their homes with the understanding that if we decided to go back into a home, that some of the furniture pieces were just on loan. Although, I think I can say that they've found permanent homes as far as we're concerned now. But, at the time, I didn't want to put things in storage but I wasn't able to just part with my things without conditions.

She gave her views on collecting over the years:

I think that collecting things gives us a sense of continuity. And I collected for over 34 years! What am I collecting now? Pictures. Memories. Experiences. I do want my daughters to collect things for their homes. It's part of that stage of life. But, people are more important to me now. For instance, I have two close girl friends from school. One lives in North Carolina and one lives in Hawaii. It's important to me to call them more now and talk. I'm attached to people now instead of things, houses, and places.

Other women echoed similar sentiments about selling their homes and disposing of their possessions in order to pursue full-timing. Danielle and her husband have been full-timing for 13 years. Danielle vividly recalled sorting through their things and making decisions about their possessions. "When I sold my electric knife and cutting board, I cried. It was important to me...I don't know why....it was an important part of all those Thanksgivings and Christmases at our home."

Danielle kept their silverware and china but no furniture. She predicts that when they are no longer able to RV, they will probably move into a small, condominium or duplex in the southwest. She anticipates furnishing a

smaller home with contemporary furniture that is smaller, more to scale, reflecting color schemes complimenting the southwestern environment. She observed her traditional colonial furniture would have been out of place, and she wanted "everything new" if they decided to put down roots again.

Danielle said furniture generally gets ruined in storage unless it is temperature controlled. Storage fees can be costly and monthly fees add up fast. After two years, the monthly fees usually exceed replacement costs. She thinks RVers are better off to get rid of everything and buy new furniture once they decide to settle down again.

Susie, a congenial, young 60 year old, also recalled having a garage sale before they moved into their RV. Susie said at one point, she "just wanted to get rid of it all." Susie was animated as she recalled a conversation with her adult daughter: "My daughter said to me, 'Mother! How can you do this to me? You're selling my childhood!' I turned to her and said, 'Shut up, kid...I'm selling 30 years of marriage!'"

Peggy and her husband have been full-timing for eight years. Peggy says full-timing requires that "...you think about living life differently." She repeats her advice to other women who are considering going full-time, "Simplify! Simplify! Simplify!" Peggy also refers to household possessions as "stuff" and said a couple considering going full-time needs to think in terms of "getting ready, getting

rid." Peggy shared her views with several part-timers who were considering going full-time:

Get rid of all that stuff. Have garage sales. Give it away. Giving all that junk away can be a good experience for you and for the other person who takes your stuff. I felt no resentments when I gave stuff to the Girl Scouts, when I had to find a home for something. It was emotionally satisfying and peaceful. However, I did feel resentment at the auctioneer because I got about two cents on the dollar and he practically gave things away."

Peggy's guiding motto is, "if in doubt, dump it later."

Nothing was kept that could easily be replaced later. She recalled how she felt:

There was tremendous freedom in simplifying my life. I kept the silver, silverware, and antique china. You should keep what you need. If there is a change in health or change in fortune, keep enough to make a home and make it comfortable for you. Remember, children are not dependable when it comes to keeping things for you.

She is a realist and comments, "Don't think you are ever done. You will accumulate stuff in the rig too. You have to learn to pass clothes on. Recycle. Give things away. The rule is "something in and something out." This sentiment echoes an important cultural rule heard in the oft quoted motto RVers tell their children, "If we can't wear it, eat it, or spend it, don't send it!"

Moving into an RV restricts the available space for possessions. A minimum of household possessions has changed the ways these women spend their time. Barbara contrasted owning a home with full-timing. She identified the greatest difference as the increased amount of personal time she now has available:

The difference between having a house and full-timing is that I have more personal time. Things are simpler to manage now. We don't have an electric bill, power bill, water bill, trash bill, or house insurance, so it doesn't take a much time to pay the few bills we have. I shop more often, but I cook less. I keep things up a little each day. I can clean the whole rig, top to bottom in two hours!

Both men and women have found paring down their personal belongings to essentials and a few precious items to personalize their RVs has changed the ways they use their time. RVers often observe they have much more personal time. They also have more time to socialize and relax. RVers view possessions as encroachments on their time. They consider the time required for maintenance, and care possessions require, as outweighing any symbolic and emotional attachment. RVers often comment they are not owned by their things.

RVers contrast the time they spent maintaining their family homes with the ways they choose to spend their time on the road. Part-timers indicated that they spend much more time in household production when they are at home than they do on the road.

The absence of telephones also contributes to a feeling of uninterrupted time that is not fraught with demands. Telephone calls are considered unwanted interruptions. RVers do not miss the convenience of having a telephone. There are very few complaints about waiting in line to make a telephone call. Very few RVers have cellular phones. One

full-timer contrasted how she spends her time now with the ways she spent her time when they owned their home:

Sometimes, I just sit and read all day long. I don't have the same interruptions and demands that I used to have at home. I'm not jumping up to answer the phone 10 times a day. I don't run around in the car as much. I admit it...I'm selfish about my time now.

### Interpretation

Life threatening or life changing disruptions are retrospectively viewed by full-time Rvers as precipitating a reprioritization of needs, wants, and goals. These disruptions led to a dramatic change from a sedentary life in a conventional neighborhood to a mobile lifestyle.

The decision to go full-time among couples was made together. Disposition and divestment of personal possessions was done primarily by women. These rituals were considered empowering, liberating experiences. RVing is viewed as a lifestyle not hampered by collecting and maintaining possessions, or by unwanted interruptions. The RV lifestyle supports a change in the ways these retirees use their time.

## CHAPTER 7 - INTERACTIONS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

Values of individualism and self-sufficiency shape the kinds of interactions RVers have with the members of their family. Interactions, roles, and obligations express these values in ways supporting the RVers' mobile lifestyle.

RVers perceive traditional roles as limiting and constraining mobility. Mobility is a strategy restructuring family relationships, roles, and obligations in ways avoiding infringements on their mobile lifestyle. The RVers' commitment to mobility loosens anchors to traditional roles and family ties with adult children, and grandchildren. Intergenerational roles, obligations, and expectations are recast to reflect the RVers commitment to mobility, and concurrent values of self-reliant individualism.

Within the Retreat system, the majority of retired RVers are married. While mobility may loosen anchors to children and grandchildren, this is not true for the marital relationship. The marital relationship is typically characterized by closeness, compatibility, and mutual commitment to the RV lifestyle.

### The Marital Relationship

Married RVers consider compatibility a prerequisite to a successful mobile lifestyle. Compatible marriages are characterized by partners who are temperamentally well-

suited to each other, harmonious, who enjoy spending considerable amounts of time together, and who are friends.

Volatile marriages and temperaments, combined with the constrained interior space of an RV, are viewed by RVers as potentially disastrous combinations. RVers have elaborate mythologies built around themes of non-compatibility. Throughout these mythologies, situations are recounted, repeatedly restating cultural rules of compatibility and mutual commitment supporting mobility. These myths have predictable story lines of non-compatible marriages ending in divorce, or alternatively with couples abandoning the RV lifestyle.

Typically, the narrator skillfully inserts his or her own wisdom regarding compatibility, weaving these lessons throughout the story. These myths were validated by personal accounts. One part-time couple adamantly said, "They [RV manufacturers] could not make an RV big enough" for both of them to live in full-time. Independently, both partners expressed serious concern that if they had continued to go full-time, their long-term marriage may have ended in divorce.

Compatibility is an important aspect of RV marriages. Compatibility is supported by the reduced time demands of RV maintenance and household production. One woman, married for 36 years, described her marriage since they have been full-timing:



After all these years, we have a closer, more compatible relationship. Now, I listen to what he wants to eat for dinner. When I was working, I was rushing constantly. I used to just fix dinner and set it in front of him. He ate it and never complained. But, when we started this business [RVing] I found out he has certain likes and dislikes! That man has personality traits that I didn't even notice before! It's a darn good thing they're things [personality traits] I can live with! And I'm different now too. I don't stay up until midnight doing dishes like I used to. Now, if I find I'm too tired to do them, I just park my butt and take it easy. After all, the dishes will get done, sooner or later. If we want to go someplace or do something, we just go and I don't think twice about things that aren't done.

RVers observed full-time couples spend more time together than part-time couples. This ethnographic fact is attributed to the full-timers' lifestyle of continuous, year-around mobility. RVers also note space constraints of living full-time in an RV do not allow couples to pursue as many independent interests. Part-timers frequently express a need for individual space, and time apart from their spouse. Part-timers considered a permanent residence the only solution to structuring their life in ways to meet these needs. From time to time, full-timers would also verbalize their need to be away from their partner. These comments were generally voiced by RVers who were responding to several days of bad weather forcing them to spend more time inside their RVs, with their spouse, than they would have preferred.

Overall, both full-time and part-time RVing couples appear to have close marital relationships. Typically, RV couples have close relationships reflecting traditional

spousal roles, obligations, and expectations. For these couples, the marital relationship is the primary relationship, and source of social and emotional support. Both full-time and part-time couples appear to enjoy participating together in a wide range of activities, as well as socializing together. RVers can often be identified as marriage partners by their matching clothing such as hats, shirts, jackets, shoes, or distinctive logos.

RVing couples typically sit together during social functions and activities. They can be observed playing board games together, taking walks hand-in-hand throughout the preserve, and talking together. One full-time couple on the road for the past 15 years, noted they did most things together. They stated they preferred and enjoyed each other's company. This couple estimated that they had only had a half-dozen "tiffs" during the past 15 years on the road.

Many RV couples were eagerly anticipating the celebration of their 50th wedding anniversary in 1994 and 1995. A comparison of life histories revealed a typical scenario involving the courtships and marriages of this war-time generation.

The scenarios take place in the 1940's, with men enlisted in one of the armed services. Accounts revealed short courtships and simple weddings, attended by family and often by friends in the military service. According to these accounts, the probability of an enlisted man being sent

overseas during these war-time years motivated couples to marry after knowing each other for only a short time.

These couples believed their marriages had stood the test of time because of their shared values, commitment to their marriage and to each other, and a similar outlook on life. They frequently mentioned being forced to rely upon each other from the beginning of their marriages.

After the war, men choosing to pursue military careers often moved their families with them to different posts across the country and overseas. Typically, these military couples had long histories of multiple moves. The decision to pursue a mobile lifestyle upon retirement was perceived by these couples as an extension of a pattern of continuous mobility spanning their married lives.

Stories of military life recalled ritualized packing and unpacking, searches for affordable housing, ways to make a home, ways to make friends, ways to make money stretch, and ways to leave when they were reassigned to a new post. Women often recalled how they searched for off-base housing when their husbands were transferred. One woman described herself as a "good scrounger" who always managed to find affordable, acceptable housing accommodations. A military career demanded families move frequently, and readjust quickly to new environments and people. Military life also demands flexibility, adaptability, and independence on the part of each partner. Frequent moves were perceived as a test of a couple's commitment to their marriage.

RVers have traditional, specified marital roles and expectations. The division of labor between marriage partners typically follows traditional, gender-based patterns. RVers view gender-based divisions of labor as inherently complimentary. Although there are exceptions, the majority of tasks are performed by either men or by women. There are few typically shared tasks.

Men are typically responsible for tasks outside the private domain of the RV home. Men are typically involved in maintaining and repairing the rig and tow car. Maintenance jobs include washing the rig, testing the engine and testing the electrical system. Men generally engage in checking the tire pressure, propane tank, the generator, and the rig's utility system.

Women, are typically responsible for private domain inside the RV. Women are involved in traditional household production, such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, laundry, and ironing. While men tend to perform limited numbers of household tasks, women are less likely to be involved in rig maintenance or repair jobs.

Men tend to cross-over gender specific divisions of labor more than women. Women often note that when their husbands retired, they also retired from cleaning, from doing dishes or from other specific household work. Men often perform these household chores on a regular basis. Wives are generally accepting of their husband's voluntary roles in household production. They often admit, however, to

suspending their standards in order to maintain harmony and avoid confrontation with their husbands.

Hooking-up involves the couple in performing a ritualized series of complimentary, gender-specific tasks. The hook-up ritual refers to physically attaching or hooking-up a trailer or fifth-wheel to a truck. In the case of a motorhome, a tow vehicle is hooked-up to the back of the RV.

Ritual hooking-up begins the night before the day of departure. The night before leaving the preserve, the men generally drain the sewer and water lines, dump holding sewage tanks, fill propane tanks, secure antennas, awnings, satellite dishes, and close vents. Hoses, clamps, and other utility parts are generally placed in an outer storage compartment on the RV. Men typically secure bicycles, lawnchairs, and ladders on the RV itself.

Women are typically responsible for removing and storing smaller items such as plants, lights, and decorative items. Women are also responsible for placing pillows inside cupboards to prevent shifting. Women are usually responsible for putting restraining bands across refrigerator doors and cupboards to prevent spillage.

On the morning of departure, men can be observed checking and rechecking the rig. They often walk around it and look under it numerous times, looking for leaks, hanging or loose wires or parts. Men generally remove and store the blocks securing the wheels. Men typically can be seen

cleaning windows, closing vents, and double-checking that items are properly secured on the rig.

A joint task on departure day involves hooking-up the tow vehicle to the rig. If the truck pulls the trailer or fifth wheel, then the man typically backs the truck into place and proceeds to hook-up the trailer to the truck. Women often stand at the back and to the side of the truck, giving directions to guide the truck into place.

The procedure, however, is different if the tow vehicle is hooked-up behind the motorhome. Typically, after the entire rig is secured, the man will drive the rig to an open parking area or road in the preserve. The woman will drive the tow car while the man stands to the side. As the woman drives the car into place, she is guided by the man's verbal directions. Once the car is in place, the man proceeds to physically hook-up and secure the car to the tow bar behind the rig.

Before leaving, most couples engage in a ritualized process of checking and re-checking the rig to ensure all is secure and nothing is forgotten. Part of this ritual includes checking the brake lights and turn-signals. These sequential tasks do not appear to be gender specific.

The driver in the rig tests the brakes and turn-signals, while the partner stands in back and to the side of the rig in the view of the driver's side mirror. Most couples have ritualized procedure of hand signals, or

terminology to indicate if the brake lights and signal lights are functioning properly.

Men generally do the majority of driving while on the road. While most women acknowledge they need to learn to drive the rig, most women admit that they do not know how to drive a rig. Other women indicated that they will drive the RV for short periods of time to relieve their husbands, or on long stretches of traffic-free highway. The reasons women do not drive vary. Many women are intimidated by the size and length of the rig. Others are constrained by their lack of experience in pulling a vehicle. The stress of driving is identified as a reason not to drive by women.

The inability of many wives to meet their husbands' standards for driving is a primary reason women do not drive RVs. Driving often precipitated conflict among couples. Many women indicated their husbands did not trust them to drive the rig. While most women said they should be able to drive the rig in the event of an emergency, they often contradicted this observation by noting they "probably wouldn't learn" to drive it. Most women acknowledged that if something happened to their husbands, they would have to give up their mobile lifestyle.

In general, women perceive their roles as "navigators," for their husbands. Navigating includes reading maps, watching for signs, and alerting their husbands to road conditions, and the movements of other cars

on the road. This information is relayed in an effort to assist their husbands while they are driving.

### Interactions with Children

Both full-time and part-time RVers use the RVing experience as a strategy for defining the kinds of interactions they have with their children and grandchildren. Full-timers and part-timers have different commitments to RVing as a mobile lifestyle. These differing commitments influence the ways full-timers and part-timers interact with their families.

Full-time RVers view traditional family roles as constraining, inflexible, and burdensome. Full-timers consider conventional homes and lifestyles as supporting traditional roles and expectations. Full-timers no longer want to participate in these roles. Full-timers use mobility as a strategy to restructure familial obligations in ways supporting their mobile, self-reliant identity.

Full-timers often structure their familial relationships in ways promoting self-reliance in their adult children. RVers comment frequently that they live separate lives from their children. This individualistic, self-reliant philosophy is evident in an oft heard comment made by RVers indicating, "...we have our life, and they have theirs [adult children have their own lives]."

RVers frequently make comparisons of their lives with the lives of non-mobile friends, and family members. One



RVer compared her mobile lifestyle with her sister's conventional lifestyle:

I compare myself to my sister. She gets upset if her daughter doesn't call or if she calls and just wants something. I think if we were sitting in a house, our kids would think, "well, we haven't been over for two weeks...I need to go see mother." I think they would feel obligated to come over and visit us, the way my sister's kids do. This way [RVing] they can come and see us or we can go and see them. I don't want to be like my sister.

The desire to restructure relationships with adult children was often traced by RVers to their own past experiences with parents and in-laws at obligatory family events. The desire to restructure their relationships with their children is perceived as an effort to relieve their children of the same kinds of conflicts and burdens they faced as young adults and parents. One couple recalled the kinds of family obligations they had faced:

We were obligated our entire married life. We felt guilty all the time. Guilty that we weren't doing things right, or good enough or often enough to please our folks or in-laws. We dreaded every holiday. We'd go to my folks house at 2:00 p.m. for Thanksgiving dinner and his folks house at 6:00 p.m. for another dinner. Christmas was worse yet. We'd go to here and there and cart the kids around. If it was at our home, we would kill ourselves...myself...cooking and cleaning. We'd clean cupboards, bathrooms, closets, the garage, and shed. We cleaned everything. We would be exhausted. We were so tired and stressed out....we never enjoyed the holidays. And after everyone left...We would end up having to clean it all again. But if we hadn't done it, we would have felt as though we had failed...We would have felt guilty.

Another couple with a similar experience of holiday obligations with their families, vowed they would not "do

that" to their adult children. The wife spoke for this couple as she explained their position:

We did it for 30 years. That's enough. We're not going make our kids feel guilty about what they want to do. They don't guilt trip us. We don't guilt trip them. We don't ask them to meet us for holidays, and they don't ask us to be home in Michigan for Christmas. We see it [guilt trips] all the time out here. For example, people will kill themselves and practically go broke just to fly across the country to see their kids at Christmas time. It all comes down to one day. All that money for one day. After Christmas, their kids go back to their lives and they're left sitting there. All they end up doing is baby-sitting or being alone with nothing to do but wait for their kids to come home. And face it, most of the time they end up somewhere where its cold. They don't want to be there, and the kids and grandkids probably don't really care if they are there or not after Christmas.

Many RVers are adamant about enjoying RVing, and not being hampered by responsibilities, obligations, and family ties. They have a strong commitment to RVing. They express determination to distance themselves from the demands of their families.

One woman observed other RVing women putting up barriers to full-timing preventing them from, "...getting as much out of it as they should." She identified apron-string ties with children, church commitments, and insistence upon retaining a permanent home, as barriers to the freedom required for successful full-timing. She explained she views her responsibility to her children differently since they went full-time 5 years ago:

It was hard for me, but I realized that I had to let go if we were going to do this [RVing] right. We were responsible for everybody for years...parents, kids, grandkids. Now, we are responsible only for ourselves and not for our all our children. Children need to lead

their own lives. We meet friends at the campgrounds and we enjoy spending holidays with them. I put on Thanksgivings, Christmases, and Easters for 40 years. That's enough. Children need to make their own lives and create their own traditions.

RVers do not necessarily want to alter their travel plans to attend holiday or ritual occasions in the lives of their adult children and grandchildren. Births, christenings, first communions, birthdays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter are generally acknowledged, but not necessarily attended.

Many Full-timers expressed the sentiment that these events were important times in their children's marriage. RVers believe that adult children need to focus upon the relationships they have with their own children. RVers rationalize their absence at these events, saying they should not interfere in their children's lives. RVers viewed their absence at these occasions as a way of promoting their children's independence and self-reliance. Their absence encourages their married children to rely on each other, and not to rely on them. RVers often revealed when their own families were young, their preference would have been to celebrate some of these events with only their immediate family and not with parents and in-laws.

#### Ways of Maintaining Contact

RVers often plan their traveling itinerary several months in advance. Writing and sending a monthly newsletter is one way RVers advise their families to anticipate seeing

them. Newsletters often give descriptive accounts of recent trips. One RVer described the newsletter as "advance warning we are coming!" The newsletter also allows family members ample time to plan for their visit.

One long-time RVing couple said they enjoyed seeing their family and friends but they have learned never to stay more than three days. They commented, "...to be honest, after three days with anyone, that includes our kids, grandkids, and best-friends--anyone--we are more than ready to get back on the road."

RVing is a strategy structuring the amount of involvement RVers have in their adult children and grandchildren's lives. Spatial distance, mobility, and regularized telephone contact with their children are ways of decreasing or monitoring their involvement in their children's lives. In contrast, proximity, permanence, and frequent, spontaneous telephone contact with children is undesirable as it leads to increased involvement in their children's lives.

RVers have devised ways to keep in touch with their families. Many RVers have established telephone trees in their families. Each week, on a prescribed day, at a prescribed time, they call one of their children. This child is expected to call siblings and relay information about the conversation.

RVers keep telephone calls brief. The telephones available at the preserve are public phones, in semi-open

booths enclosed on three sides but without a door. There is very little privacy in these telephone conversations. The presence of other people waiting to make calls and the preserve's informal rule to keep calls short, contribute to brief conversations with family members.

Other RVers call a telephone service weekly, to find out if they have any messages from their children. Many RVers have codes for messages. For example if a message reveals that an aunt called, this is a code indicating there has been an emergency. If the message service notes that a sister called, then everything is fine. Full-timers generally do not make lengthy calls to family members.

#### Disapproval by Adult Children

The retiree's decision to engage in a mobile lifestyle is not always well-received by adult children. Disapproval by adult children is a common reaction to their parent's decision to go full-time.

One couple, full-timers for 13 years, expressed sadness at the estrangement of two of their four children. When they decided to go full-time, their two oldest children declared they were "social misfits," and cut off contact with them. During the course of the conversation, the wife reflected, "...perhaps they are right, perhaps we are social misfits." The husband countered this reflection, noting they have a right to live the way they want to and pursue a lifestyle they enjoy. Both husband and wife said they had "paid their

dues." They expressed fear of "getting trapped again" with family demands and obligations they observed in the lives of their non-mobile friends.

Negative reactions to full-timing by adult children is a thread running through the lives of many full-timers. RVerS described the kinds of reactions they have had from their adult children. Adult children felt their parents had "taken leave of their senses," "flipped out," "gone crazy," "used poor judgment," "made bad, impulsive decisions," "not thought it through, or considered the consequences." RVerS explained that the general tenor of these reactions was summed up in admonitions that their parents "don't know what is good for them."

One couple said they have met many full-timers who have experienced similar negative reactions from their adult children. Sharing these experiences with other RVerS has helped them realize they were not the only ones whose children disapproved of what they were doing. Sharing these experiences has garnered both understanding from other RVerS as well as encouragement and support for their decision to be full-timers.

One 81 year old RVer, full-timing for 17 years by herself, said when she told her five adult children she was going to retire, sell her home, and travel full-time in her newly purchased van, they were adamantly opposed to her plan. She said her children had a family meeting to discuss her plans. She was not invited to this meeting. Her oldest

son later told her that at the meeting they wondered if she was capable of traveling by herself. Their main concern was for her safety. Her children came to the conclusion they would probably not be able to persuade their mother to do something other than what she wanted to do. They decided at the meeting they would let her travel full-time for one year to give it a chance. She laughed and said, "Now wasn't that generous of them? Letting me live my own life!" Seventeen years later, she said they are proud of her independence, and they brag about her lifestyle to their friends.

#### Divorce: Restructuring Roles

Divorce within families is a disrupting factor reshaping family networks, and the relationships RVer's have with their adult children. The divorces and subsequent remarriages of their adult children frees RVer's from performing the traditional roles of parent, in-law, and grand-parent. A full-time couple with a blended family of six adult children, discussed the effect of divorce on their relationships:

We used to worry about going to see the kids and them coming to see us, but we just don't think about it anymore. Between us we have six kids. In the last 20 years, we've been through countless marriages, divorces and remarriages of our children. Some of their spouses we like and some we don't. The grandkids don't really know us. We tried to keep in touch, but now, we just accept the fact that they won't get to know us. We don't worry about our kids and we don't worry about whether or not we see them.

Families and obligations have been restructured through the processes of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Full-timers have responded to these disruptions by altering the kinds of interactions they have with their children. Mobility is a strategy for distancing the RVer from the worry and problems associated with the processes of change and the upheavals experienced by their children and their families. These kinds of disruptions in their children's lives indirectly support the RVers' mobility. This was evident in a comment made by a couple discussing their relationship with their children since they began RVing:

Since we moved into the fifth wheel, our life has been peaceful. We don't mind a little distance between us and the kids. We don't like having to worry about what the kids are up to, their latest problems, or what they think of us. And we don't want them trying to run our lives.

#### Disassociating From Problems

Full-time RVers agree that disassociating themselves from their children's problems is a key to leading a mobile lifestyle. RVers commonly express relief to be living away from their children. RVers are satisfied with regularized, but infrequent contact with adult children.

One couple stopped calling their daughters once-a-week, because it was "too depressing." Even while expressing concern about their two adult daughters who "...have one problem after another...", they concluded there was nothing



that they could do about their daughters problems, except continue to support them financially.

In contrast, another full-timer aired his decision not to support his adult child:

I am not going to support these grown up kids of mine! My younger daughter is divorced, 34 years old and she does not work or go to school. I told her I would pay for her education, but she refuses to face reality. I don't know what she is thinking...she doesn't think she needs to provide for herself. Life is not easy or free.

Many RVers do provide financial assistance to their adult children. This financial assistance is generally treated as an informal, family loan. RVers expect that their children will repay them, even though there are no formal loan repayment terms.

RVers realize that a decision to withhold financial assistance from adult children has implications for the well-being of grandchildren. One man described how he and his wife "stuck by their guns" regarding their decision not to financially support their son and daughter-in-law. However, when health became an issue, this couple did provide the needed financial support. They structured their financial support in a way ensuring that their children and grandchildren would receive needed medical attention. This informant said it was important to him and to his wife, to ensure their children and grandchildren's well-being:

We just don't understand it. We don't know where their money goes. They [son and daughter-in-law] have two children ages one and three. They won't move and yet he's always getting laid off. They live in a constant state of crisis. You could give them buckets of money,

and it still wouldn't help. Last time our daughter-in-law called she was really sick. She said that the doctor wouldn't see her unless she had the cash to pay him. They got the money together and she did go to the doctor, but then she didn't have any money for the prescriptions. She had been so sick, she wasn't able to work. I guess the kids had continuous colds, earaches and coughs all winter. So, I called my credit card in to the pharmacy and I told them that she could charge any prescribed medicine she needed for herself and for the children on it. But I told the store that I only wanted it used for medicine...nothing else. I'm not going to pay for her cigarettes! I'm not having them buy soft-drinks, and chips and junk with my money. But I don't want those babies to be sick, because they don't have medicine. I don't want to see her [daughter-in-law] sick either...

RVers often compare their lives when they had young families with the lives of their adult children and grandchildren. One recurring difference in these comparisons is the way RVers view responsibility. One RVer acknowledged his adult children's financial and career struggles with a young family. He noted it was difficult starting out. He remembered he and his wife had very few material comforts during the first years of their marriage. He attributed their material and financial security to their shared goals and hard work. He said he felt compelled to meet his responsibility to provide and care for his family, without relying upon financial assistance from their parents.

Other RVers also expressed frustration at seeing their children "go through one situation after another." RVers identified their children's problems as a lack of planning for the future, an inability to manage their finances in ways preventing crises, and a failure to save. These were

major sources of worry by retired parents about their adult children. One man expressed his frustration saying:

... there's nothing I can do about it, and nothing I will do about it. We just can't get involved in their lives. They just resent us and the advice we give them. It's depressing. I used to call once a week to see how they were doing but sometimes I just don't even call that often. We just don't want to go through it anymore.

### Housing Grants

Housing or shelter grants are a recurrent theme in the accounts of part-time and full-time RVers. Typically, adult children and grandchildren live rent-free in the RVer's home while they are traveling on the road. One long-time full-timer reflected on the frequency of housing grants between RVing parents and children:

If you had a circle of 10 friends at one of the preserves, at least three or four would be full-timing in order to let their children live in their houses. Each one would say, "I thought that I was the only one." After each one tells their story, someone else will tell a story about their children's situation that is worse.

Divorce and unemployment are the primary reasons for adult children returning home to live with their parents. The majority of these RVers pointed out after attempting to have their adult children and grandchildren live with them, they learned it was impossible for three generations to live under one roof.

One couple, in their mid-80's has been full-timing since 1986. They decided to become full-timers when their daughter and three teenage grandchildren moved into their

home. In the late 1970's, their middle-aged daughter was divorced. She could not find affordable housing for herself and her three teenage children. She also found she could not support herself and her children while she attended a job-training program. She asked her parents if she and her children could move into their home until she completed a one year job-training program.

They agreed she could live with them for one year. They rearranged their home to accommodate their daughter and grandchildren. After one year, their daughter had completed her program and secured a job, but she could not afford to move out. At this time, the couple decided they could no longer cope with living with teenagers. They decided to move into their trailer parked at the side of their house. One year later, they made the decision to go full-time. He noted they "just could not stand being around their teenage grandchildren, and their friends."

This RVing couple has decided it is unrealistic to plan on moving back into their own home. They do not go home for holidays, preferring to have their daughter meet them at a nearby preserve when they are near their home. They do not plan to spend winters at their home in southern California. They rarely go to their home. They are upset and disillusioned with the maintenance and condition of their home, since their daughter and grandchildren moved in to it. Seeing their home only makes them worry about it. They said

that their daughter pays the taxes on their home and all the utilities and repair bills.

Three years ago, their unwed, teenage grand-daughter became pregnant. They now have two great-grandchildren living in their home. They rarely see their grandchildren or great-grandchildren. Their daughter is now the primary support of her children and grandchildren. Their young grand-daughter would be homeless with her two children if they were to move back into their home.

They enjoy RVing and plan to continue traveling as long as they can. If they decide they should not be on the road anymore, they will rent a site in a private RV park and live in their RV. He explained, "...basically, we just let go of the house. We know we couldn't stand to live there the way it is now. Three and four generations living under one roof is hell...it's impossible."

Other accounts by full-time RVers echo similar situations, strategies, and themes. The inability of two or three generations to live together under one roof is a recurring theme in these stories. Another recurring theme encompasses RVers' concerns for the stability and well-being of their grandchildren. Many RVers acknowledge they made the decision to full-time so that their grandchildren could have stability in their lives and opportunities they would not otherwise experience with their parents. All these RVers expressed a desire for their grandchildren to complete high

school, go to college, or acquire a skill to support themselves.

Although some RVers relinquish control of their family homes to their adult children and grandchildren, others refuse to give their homes to their children. These RVers conclude that their adult children would not appreciate the magnitude of the gift since they did not work for it. They also point out their children unrealistically expect to have the same standard of living as before they were divorced. Another criticism RVers leveled at adult children was their children's unwillingness to make sacrifices in order to have stability.

Several RVers in similar situations with adult children and grandchildren think present-day families do not know how to pull-together during hard times. One RVer reflected, "...things were different during the Depression, my parents and four of us kids lived with my grandparents, and with our aunt and uncle, all under one roof...and it seemed to work out."

Retired RVers often refer to the depression as their standard for rearing families. One depression-era, old-timer contrasted growing up in the depression with modern families:

I was born in 1922. During the depression we didn't have much, but we had enough to eat. We didn't know what we didn't have. We had our family. Extra children came along and my folks just used the diapers and clothes from the one before...there wasn't this talk of adopting them out or abortion. You just added one more to your family. Couples stayed together then. If you

lost your job, your family would take you in. Later on, you returned the favor. But, you didn't take advantage of the situation. You didn't make it a lifestyle.

When I was raising my family in the 1950's it was more difficult. Things got more complicated. But we did it, we stayed together and we had fun as a family. My wife stayed home with the kids while I worked. Now, it's got to be hard to raise a family. All the divorce, single parents, working mothers...and kids are in counseling. The focus is on things and not time. There isn't any time to cuddle the kids on the couch and read to them at night. There isn't the value for it. Things. They just want things. If we could get the economy back on track and if women could get back into the home, I think that families might have a chance these days.

### Full-timers and Grandchildren

RVing is also a strategy for structuring time spent with children and grandchildren. Many full-timers spend blocks of time each year at their children's homes.

Typically, these RVers use their children's home as a base and often take day trips in the area. A number of RVing grandparents include their grandchildren on these trips.

Most RVers prefer to stay in their RVs rather than physically stay in their children's homes. Many RVers said their rigs were off-limits to all children. One couple said if their grandchildren wanted something, they were encouraged to come to the door and knock. The grandchildren did not go into the rig unless they were specifically invited in by their grandparents. Another couple noted they were not used to being around young children. Mornings at their son's home were chaotic and noisy. They preferred to stay in their mobile home and enjoy their morning routine.

Full-timers often take their grandchildren with them, during school breaks and for one or two week vacations during the summer. One woman pointed out her 13 year old granddaughter in the pool and commented:

We have three grandchildren. We want to get to know our grandchildren, so we take one child with us each summer. The little ones only go out for a week. But, Darla who is 13, will be with us for over a month by the time we take her back home.

Another proud grandmother said she and her husband take their two grandchildren together for a week at a time, three times a year. They tolerate short visits better than long visits. She also said that her son and daughter-in-law both work. She described their adult children's feelings about this arrangement:

They love it! They don't really miss the kids, and the kids don't really miss them. We don't get too exhausted this way either. It also gives Tim and Diane an opportunity to have some time alone. They say it's like having a second honeymoon three times a year! Sometimes they plan to take their vacations together alone when we take the kids! It works for all of us.

The amenities at the preserves provide a natural playground for grandchildren. Grandchildren can often be seen at the preserves riding their bicycles, skating, swimming, or accompanying their grandparents to activities or to dinner at the family lodge.

### Part-timers and Grandchildren

Part-time RVers often have children and grandchildren who live near them. In comparison to full-timers, part-timers are often very involved in their children's and



grandchildren's life on a day-to-day basis. Many part-timers plan their traveling schedules around their children's and grandchildren's vacation schedules.

One part-timer and her husband travel four months on the road during the winter time when their grandchildren are in school. She said they are always home by the time school recesses for the summer. It was important to them to be home by summer to provide child care for their three grandchildren during summer vacation. She enjoys participating and interacting daily with her grandchildren during the summer.

Part-time RVers often cite the need to be close to their children and grandchildren as the main reason they have not seriously considered going full-time. "They need us, and we need them," said one part-time grandmother about her children and grandchildren. She described their decision to go south after Thanksgiving as a mistake:

We left early this year purposely, before Christmas. We thought we would spend Christmas alone...just the two of us. The kids were so disappointed. They said that it just didn't feel like Christmas without us. We felt the same way...next year, we won't leave until after the New Year.

Part-timers viewed their involvement in their children's lives positively. One part-time couple noted,

Young families really have it rough these days. They both have to work. They have no choice if they want to buy a house. If we weren't there, [to provide child care] the kids would be alone in the house until my daughter came home from work.

Another part-timer with his pre-school age grandson in tow, related how his son had cancer and was undergoing radiation and chemotherapy treatments. He explained their role in their son's illness,

...his insurance doesn't cover it all, so we're helping to pay for his treatments. We'll just pull together so he's not on welfare...just on our charity. We watch our grandson once a week while he has a chemotherapy treatment. Our son is so sick after each one...it takes him time to recover. It's hard to watch. But he knows we are here for him, his wife, and his kids.

### Future Relationships with Children

RVers often project what their life will be like in the future. While full-timers vow to travel until they cannot, they also express determination not to be a burden to their children in the event of failing health. Full-timers generally plan for the time when they will no longer be able to travel. Their plans often include purchasing a site space for their RV, in a mobile home park or a lot with hook-ups. Other full-timers plan to purchase a mobile home, condominium, or townhouse. Renting an apartment is also considered a less-desirable option.

Full-time RVers project they will RV as long as they can, then live independently as long as possible before moving into a care facility. They are generally adamant about not living with their adult children if they become incapacitated. They do not expect their adult children to provide care for them. They frequently express their desire "not to become a burden" to their children. Full-timers

rarely participated as full-time caregivers to their elderly parents. Full-timers do not want their adult children to experience being sandwiched between the competing responsibilities of caring for them and for their own children.

In contrast, part-time RVers express their preference to age in place in their family homes. Part-timers have established and maintained close ties with their adult children, and with their neighborhoods, and communities. They often comment they have helped out their children, and they will rely on their children to help them out in the future. Part-timers often provided care to their own elderly parents before they died.

Part-timers do not tend to project into the future as much as full-timers. Like full-timers, part-timers also acknowledge that there will come a time when they will no longer be able to be on the road. Unlike full-timers, however, they rarely discuss future plans in the event of failing health, or address the possible need to reside in a care facility.

#### Friends as Kin

Full-timers said they would rather depend on their RVing friends who would respect their decisions, rather than cope with adult children interfering in their lives. The typical response of adult children is to encourage their parents to give up RVing, and live with them or near them

during recovery. This is considered a last resort by most full-timers. Several RVers recovering from serious surgeries in their RVs, said they prefer to rely upon RVing friends, rather than family members to provide support.

An RVer recovering from by-pass surgery said her children did not really understand her lifestyle and were concerned that she was isolated and alone in the preserves. She said that had she agreed to convalesce in their home, she would have certainly been isolated and alone. She preferred to live in her RV within the System, during her recovery period, relying upon RVing friends and neighbors. She stated that "...we [RVers] have been through the wars together. We understand why we are out here, and we support each other."

An old-timer recalled spending two months recovering in three different preserves, in close proximity to each other. Members helped him hook-up and move his rig every two weeks. Other members offered to shop for them, prepare dinners, and provide respite care for his spouse. They also dropped by frequently to inquire if they needed anything and to inquire about how he was feeling. He was appreciative of their concern. He reflected, "RVers have time to show they care." RVers commonly believe that the absence of telephones encourages friendly, drop-in visits by neighbors and friends to check on the recuperating RVer.

### Interpretation

RVers believe a successful mobile lifestyle requires compatibility between married couples. The RVers' commitment to mobility is reflected in the ways relationships are structured with their spouse, and their adult children and grandchildren. The kinds of interactions and involvement RVers have with family members are structured by the RVers values of self-reliance, and material comfort.

Full-timers and part-timers structure their relationships with their families to reflect their differing commitments to mobility. Relationships are structured in ways promoting rather than limiting the RVers mobility. RVers spend specified kinds and amounts of time with their children and grandchildren. RVers tend to see their friends as their family. Common experiences, shared values, and a mobile orientation encourage RVers to support each other.

## CHAPTER 8 - ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

The members of the RV community share common economic strategies. These economic strategies influence the ways RVers transact and interact in ordinary, daily socio-economic activities. Economic transactions between RVers, in the RV community, and with local host communities are structured by these informal, economic strategies.

These strategies influence present and future economic transactions and interactions. The social nature of these economic strategies reflect cultural rules governing the ways RVers manage, produce, distribute, allocate, protect, and consume resources. Cultural rules include socio-economic notions of cost-minimizing, accountability, fairness, and reciprocity. RVers, like other groups, have culturally specific techniques to audit the behavior of community members to compel compliance to these cultural rules.

These shared economic strategies contribute to the complex manner in which RVers define themselves, and maintain their identity (DeVos, 1975). RVer values of self-reliant individualism, equality, and material comfort provide criteria for these strategies.

### Mobility as an Economic Strategy

Mobility is an economic strategy employed by RVers. Mobility distinguishes these members from other RVers. Mobility is an economic indicator of financial resources.

While RVing within the System is an economical way to live, costs associated with mobility, such as gasoline, insurance, over-night stays at RV parks while on the road can be expensive.

Mobility protects the RVers' investment in the preserve system. Members support the Retreat's policy of mandatory mobility. Mobility is a strategy protecting the System from attracting "trailer trash." According to RVers, trailer trash historically refers to a stereotype of "poor, White people living in RVs because they have to" [for economic reasons] rather than as a chosen lifestyle.

RVers stereotyped as trailer trash are less mobile due primarily to income constraints. The RV parks attracting less mobile RVers were commonly described by members as "ticky-tacky." This term referred to the unsightly predominance of older, poorly maintained RVs in various stages of disrepair. Members described these RV parks as typified by the unsightly use of site spaces. These sites were often cluttered with junk, such as appliances, spare auto-parts, and litter. Members considered the use of site space and the unkempt grounds at these parks as highly undesirable. In general, these RV parks lack security, common facilities, and amenities. Members commented these RV parks attracted "...a different class of people."

Members disassociated themselves from this stereotype. They distinguished themselves from less mobile RVers living in stereotypical RV parks, by pointing out they had access to

financial resources to support the mobility required in the preserve system. Access to financial resources contributes to the RVers' mobile identity.

Mobility contributes to the System's image as a kind of leisure or recreation RV facility. Membership in the System is a way of refuting stereotypical perceptions of outsiders who perceive a mobile lifestyle as purely an economic strategy, rather than a lifestyle choice. The requirement of continuous mobility is an economic strategy protecting the RVers' investment in the Retreat system.

#### Economic Aspects of Owning a Rig

The majority of RVs owned by members in the preserve are fairly new. The age and type of RV, however, is not necessarily a reliable economic indicator of financial resources and stability. One RVer observed:

You never know by looking. See that rig, it's in the \$150,000 to \$175,000 range...but you don't know if they sold their home and put every dime they had into it. That may be all they've got. See that rig over there? It's older. It looks like a late 1970's model. And yet what you don't know is the RVers living in that older rig could be rolling in dough. I've learned you can't tell by looking at a rig how much somebody has or doesn't have.

Mobility is expensive. RVers point out that the price of a new motorhome, trailer, or fifth-wheel is beyond the reach of a person with severely limited financial resources. RVers point out that operating and maintaining a rig is costly. For example, gas mileage on a 35 foot motorhome can



range from four to seven miles per gallon. RVers with larger rigs typically estimated it cost approximately \$90 to \$100 per day to drive 400 miles.

Discussions and debates on the economic pros and cons of various kinds of RVs are commonly heard in the System. In particular, discussions about gas mileage are common. A group of men discussed gas mileage, comparing solid tailgates with tailgates with holes. There was unanimous agreement that tailgates with holes allow air to flow, preventing resistance. These tail gates resulted in one extra mile per gallon. When one RVer adamantly stated, "I'll take all the miles I can get," this comment was received with nods of agreement from the rest of the men in the group.

There are a number of strategies members use to finance the purchase of their rigs. One strategy is to purchase their rigs while they are still working and pay them off before retirement. Another strategy is to trade in an old RV on a new RV. Liquidating assets, such as a family home, to finance the purchase of a rig is a widely used economic strategy by full-time RVers.

### Selling the Family Home

Full-timers and part-timers have divergent views about home-ownership. Full-timers generally sell their homes once they decide to go full-time. Part-time RVers, however, do not sell their homes. Part-timers maintain conventional

homes while they are on the road. Part-timers consider their homes as a primary source of financial security. Part-time RVers are often adamant about not selling their homes, explaining they have more financial security than full-timers who have sold their homes and invested the proceeds in their rigs. Part-time RVers are quick to point out RVs are depreciating assets while real estate is considered an appreciating asset.

Part-timers have strong attachments to their family homes. They view RVing as an enjoyable, comfortable, economical way to travel. Most part-timers, however, consider RVing as an economic strategy to stage long-term vacation travel, rather than a permanent migrating lifestyle. Part-timers plan to age-in-place in their homes when they can no longer RV. Many part-timers expressed a difficult time understanding how full-timers are able to sell their homes and travel on the road full-time.

Part-timers believe full-timing requires a temperament described as "easy going, and being able to take life as it comes, day-by-day." While part-timers may make substantial financial investments in their rigs, they do not view their RVs as their primary homes, or as their primary way of life. Part-timers often refer to their rigs as their "home-away-from-home."

Part-timers look forward to going home. They often talk about the kinds of things they will do when they get home. Part-timers often pursue hobbies or interests demanding

space, such as weaving, sewing, woodworking, or photography.

One part-timer said that he and his wife had retained their family home, when they went full-time for one year. He summed up their experience,

We tried to be full-timers. We found out that living in a tin box was not for us. It's a great way to travel, but it's no kind of life long-term. What are they [full-timers] going to do when they can't do this anymore? Where will they go if they get sick? If the husband dies where would the wife go? We enjoy being out for four or five months a year. But it is important to us to know that we have a place to go home to...a real home.

In contrast, full-timers regularly disparage the demands and responsibilities of home ownership. Full-timers rarely regret selling their family homes. They view the demands of maintaining permanent homes as a physical and economic drain.

The burdens of home ownership for men centered around time demands of maintenance jobs, such as cutting the grass, painting, and making repairs. Women also commented on time demands of home ownership. Housework, meal preparation, shopping, laundry, and running errands were typically described as "never-ending and time-consuming." In particular, the demands of household production in conventional homes reduced the amount of personal time available to these women.

There are economic incentives encouraging RVers to sell their family homes. The proceeds from the sale of their homes are often used to purchase new, reliable, comfortable rigs, and tow vehicles. The proceeds are generally

considered savings. As savings, these accounts have the advantage of generating interest income, and offering the RVer liquidity. Savings from the proceeds are also a form of additional financial security, protecting them from unexpected events and losses while on the road.

Full-timers consider the sale of their conventional homes freedom from the financial and managerial burdens associated with home ownership or rental property. Renting the family home creates managerial problems for the RVer, as an absentee landlord. Managing and maintaining rental property is difficult due to the geographic distances traveled by RVers. RVers view the management and maintenance required to rent their homes as infringements upon their independence and mobility. Full-timers do not want to be burdened by irresponsible tenants or unexpected house-related expenses. In addition to the costs of maintenance and management, rental property requires continuous monitoring. RVers do not want to have to schedule annual trips home to manage or work on rental property. RVers expressed doubt about relying on professional real estate management firms, or upon their adult children to adequately manage and maintain their homes in their absence.

A mobile lifestyle does not have the same time demands of home ownership. Full-timers and part-timers recognize that an RV lifestyle is less demanding of their resources and time. An increase in personal time is a tangible benefit of RVing. RVers believe that increases in personal time are

due to primarily to the simplification of household work and maintenance. Personal time is relegated to pursuing interests and hobbies, reading, socializing in a leisurely manner, neighboring, walking, and participating in activities in the preserves.

Full-time RVers recognize that their decision to RV is not totally an economic decision. A group of full-timers enjoying coffee one morning at the family lodge pointed out that they were "buying a lifestyle. We bought a kind of satisfaction that you can't put a price on, when we purchased our rigs and our memberships."

#### Living Together as an Economic Strategy

A number of single retirees live together for economic reasons as well as companionship. Several couples told me although they are not married, they act as if they are married in order to avoid gossip and disapproving comments about their marital status. Most of these couples are divorced or widowed. Most of these couples emphasize they are in committed relationships.

Living together is an economic strategy. Widows and divorcees are particularly reluctant to remarry and forfeit entitlements such as pensions and alimony. These women recognize remarriage would place them in a position of financial dependence upon new husbands. One woman expressed concern that not only would she be financially dependent upon her new husband, but if something happened to the

marriage, she would have no source of support. A divorcee rationalized that after 43 years of marriage, she was entitled to alimony in exchange for the years spent in her first marriage supporting her husband's career by providing child-care and maintaining their home.

All of these women viewed their decision to live with their partner as a strategy to protect these entitlements. Living with their partners is also a way of maintaining primary control over the allocation of their personal funds. Without exception, these women believed retaining financial autonomy was more important than marrying. Financial autonomy reflects RVer values of independence and self-reliance.

Many women, living in their partner's rig, make contributions in the form of household production. Cooking, cleaning, shopping, and doing laundry were household contributions regularly made by women. From time to time, these women occasionally made contributions for household purchases or fuel. In general, however, they did not contribute financially to repair bills on the rig. Repair bills were viewed as their partner's responsibility as the owner of the rig.

Living together is also a strategy providing the couple with more economic freedom. The consensus of couples living together was that "at their age," they could not rationalize "getting married for the sake of convention, and giving up hard-earned money," that the woman was rightfully entitled

to receive. This additional income provided many of the "extras" these couples would not otherwise be able to afford. The kinds of extras mentioned included, maintenance of one or both family homes, trips to see their children and grandchildren, entertainment costs, and the freedom to travel geographical distances, without concern for fuel and travel costs.

### RVing as a Response to Economic Constraints

The majority of retirees appear to have access to ample retirement incomes. Some retired members, however, have limited financial and social resources. RVing in the System is an economic strategy for members with severe financial constraints. For these retirees, RVing is a strategy offering an option to homelessness, or circumventing the need for state-subsidized housing.

Social security is the sole source of income for many of the financially constrained RVers. Work histories revealed employment factors limiting the retirees income to social security. Key factors included long-term employment without the benefit of private pension plans, health or long-term disability benefits. Other factors identified by RVers were, a lack of education or technical knowledge, a loss of stable income due to lay-offs, sketchy work records, part-time work, or work at low-paying service jobs. Other accounts described situations in which pension plans were cashed in prematurely to meet family emergencies. These

factors prevented some RVers from purchasing a family home while they were working. These RVers did not have the benefit of selling a family home to subsidize their mobile lifestyle in retirement.

### RVing: An Economic Strategy for Single Women

RVing is an economic strategy mediating severe economic constraints for many single women. The dominant perception of these single women is they were at risk of becoming homeless before pursuing a mobile lifestyle. One woman described her decision to RV as, "...backing into it [RVing] and out of despair."

Separation, divorce, death of a spouse, and single-parent status were cited as factors contributing to their precarious economic status. These women were economically dependent upon alimony, child support, the proceeds from the sale of a home, or other divisions of property entitling them to a portion of a former spouses's pension. These sources of income enabled these women to "make ends meet."

A common theme in the life histories of these women contributing to their precarious economic circumstances, was a lack of education and skills. These deficits were compounded by their entry into the work force late in life, and by the absence of a continuous work history. These factors prevented them from securing well-paying jobs with benefits and retirement programs. The majority of these women had been forced to enter or return to the work force,



accepting jobs paying minimum wage. Working multiple part-time jobs as strategy to make a living wage, was a recurrent theme in their work histories.

The majority of these now-single women attributed their present economic circumstances to their trust in their marriages and their reliance upon their husbands to provide for them. They assumed that their marriages were secure, and their roles as wives and mothers were more important than pursuing educational or career goals. Divorce for these women translated into economic insecurity.

Purchasing an RV and a membership in the System was an investment strategy, providing them with affordable shelter in a safe, secure environment. Purchasing a membership in the System and going full-time were generally interrelated decisions. These decisions were primarily financial decisions rather than leisure or lifestyle decisions. In the decision making process, the high initial membership fee was weighed against the benefits of the contractually fixed dues structure. The fixed dues structure guaranteed them that RVing within the System would remain an economically viable strategy. Membership in the System offered many advantages to these women. The primary advantages were fixed costs and security. These women liked knowing the preserves were not open to the public. They also feel that there is an acceptance of their single status by other the married members in the RV community. Many RVing women join the

System's singles-group. The single's group provides an additional source of social support.

A combination of creative economic strategies allows these women to live in the System. One woman explained, when she was still working, she spent two weeks in the System and for her mandatory week out of the System, she would park in her daughter and son-in-law's driveway. This strategy allowed her to save money she otherwise would have spent for site rent at a private or state RV park. In exchange for the site space, electricity, and water she did housework, cooking, and child-care for her daughter.

Prior to this arrangement, she would stay in parking lots of chain restaurants and grocery stores. The managers of these chain stores rarely objected to her occasional overnight stays. Nevertheless, after several minor but frightening incidents, she did not feel secure with this arrangement. After these incidents she arranged to park in her daughter's driveway.

One widowed RVer, in her late seventies, retired, and on the road for 20 years, explained, full-time RVing is the only way she can live life independently in a way she describes as "rich and unencumbered." Her husband died prematurely at the age of 52 and did not have a retirement plan at the factory he had worked at for 25 years. She went back to school after his death and obtained a teaching credential to support herself and her children. She was an

elementary school teacher at a private, religious school for 15 years. The school did not have a pension plan.

She lives on Social Security allotment of \$220.00 per month. She is able to meet her basic living expenses on a month-to-month basis. In December, however, when her annual membership dues are renewed and automobile insurance comes due, she has to dip into the proceeds from the sale of her home. She considers the proceeds from her house as her safety net. This nest egg or safety net enables her to pay her bills when they exceed her income rather than cut back on food or gasoline.

Family members provide a variety of services for her, which she would otherwise have to pay for at market rates. She describes her sons and grandsons as "ace mechanics, willing to keep my RV in tip-top shape." She always comparison shops, and uses coupons. She routinely buys products and merchandise on sale and produce in season. She cooks all her meals in the RV to keep her grocery bill low. For variety, she occasionally goes out to dinner or attends morning coffees at the preserves. She pays for these meals using money gifts for holidays or birthdays from her family. About three times a month, one of her five children, or 17 grandchildren will meet her and take her out to lunch, dinner, or to a movie.

She buys the majority of her clothes at thrift shops. Her clothes are altered by her eldest daughter who is a good seamstress. Her daughter recently altered seven pairs of

pants for her. She bought them for \$2.50 each on sale, at a thrift shop. As she showed me each pair of pants, she remarked on their lack of wear, the quality of the cloth, the color, and style. She observed the pants, "fit her perfectly, and suit her fine." She received four new designer sweatshirts matching her pants from her daughter-in-law for Christmas.

Approximately three months each summer, she travels to Idaho, staying one month with each of her three children. She said her children refuse to take any money from her. She said that her children are aware and appreciative of the struggles she faced rearing five children after their father died. Occasionally, however, she reciprocates by providing limited child care for grandchildren. She also enjoys helping her daughters and daughter-in-law in weeding their gardens and canning produce each summer.

Within the System, she relies upon long time friends to cut her hair in exchange for hand crocheted items such as washcloths, coat hangers, and slippers. From time to time, she relies on men friends in the System for minor repairs on her rig or on appliances. In general, she always reciprocates with handmade crafts, or with food gifts. She indicated offering money for their services would offend these RVing friends.

### Full-timing: An Economic Necessity

Other members, who initially decided to go full-time based on lifestyle considerations, find RVing has become an economic strategy out of necessity. Many full-timers, who retired at an early age, are realizing their fixed pension incomes in current dollars are not "stretching" as far as they thought they would. Many RVers took advantage of early retirement programs offered by their employers. Participation in these early retirement programs was usually contingent on the retiree accepting a reduced pension income.

Older members in their 80's, who have been retired for 15, 20 or 25 years, are experiencing the effects of inflation on their fixed retirement pensions. Many of these full-timers are spending-down the reserves from the sale of their family homes to supplement their pension incomes.

Accounts reveal that many of full-time RVers have considered moving back into a conventional home. With the inflation in real estate prices, most of these full-timers recognize they no longer have the option of returning to a conventional home in their origin communities. They can no longer afford to buy back a house in their old neighborhood.

These economic realities were often offset by public declarations of commitment to the RV lifestyle. Several RVers revealed that their financial circumstances will not support a return to conventional homes in old neighborhoods. This economic reality was mediated by public declarations.

Several RVers agreed that "You couldn't pay me enough to go back [to living in their old neighborhoods]." Similarly, other full-timers adamantly declared that they "do not want to put down roots anywhere." Another commonly heard full-timer axiom is that "home is where we park it." These public declarations and definitions of home reveal cultural values of self-reliance, reinforcing the RVers mobile identity.

### Economic Benefits of Living in the System

RVers recognize the economic benefits of living full-time within the System. After the initial lump-sum membership fee is paid, members pay annual dues. The dues cover site rent, utilities, water, sewer, road and garbage services, and access to all recreational facilities at rates substantially below permanent, private, residential rates. Dues also cover costs of operating the preserves, such as security, management, staffing, insurance, maintenance, and replacement costs. Staff-planned activities, events, and entertainment are usually free, or have a minimal cover charge.

RVers frequently compare the costs of renting an apartment on a month-to-month basis with the annual membership dues. Amortized annual dues do not exceed two dollars per day. Concerns about the dues structure are often countered by other members retorting, "Where else could you live, with all the things we have here, for \$2 per day or \$60 per month?"

One full-timer, a member for 20 years, who has been living in the System for 11 years, estimated the return on his initial membership investment and annual dues over the last 20 years. His estimates included his initial membership investment of \$5,000.00, annual dues averaging \$400.00 per year, and 250 camp nights per year spent in the System. He compared those estimates with an estimated \$16.00 per night to stay in a private or state campground. Using these figures, he estimated he had received \$16,000.00 of "free" camp nights, in the System during the last 20 years.

Many members consider their fixed dues memberships an important economic strategy for living on a fixed retirement income. Members who joined the Pact, however, agreed to new contracts approving annual increases in the dues to cover inflation. Pact members perceive they are subsidizing non-Pact members. Pact members charge that non-Pact members are not paying their fair share. Non-Pact members are also viewed by Pact members as acting solely in their own self-interest, to the economic detriment of the RV community and future of the System. Pact members frequently state their belief that capital investments are needed to protect the System's reputation as the "cadillac of RV membership organizations."

Non-Pact members defend their decision not to join by restating their intention to meet the terms of their original contracts. The management is held accountable for drafting the terms of their contractual obligations. Non-

Pact members often refuse to acknowledge increased operating costs. Their perception is they are living up to the terms of their contract, and their annual dues cover their fair share of use. They frequently indicate a distrust of the management, and state if the terms of the contract do not cover costs, then the System needs better financial management.

RVers believe that members should pay their own way. RVers often noted that larger rigs and full-time living in the System creates an increased demand upon the utilities and services in the preserves. Many full-timers and part-timers think that there should be park fees to reflect this increased consumption.

RVers frequently point out that the System was originally designed to accommodate camping vacations. The System was not designed to support full-time or part-time residence. Other members observed if utilities and water were metered, RVers would have an incentive to conserve these resources. Air-conditioning and electric generators were cited as examples of the increased demands full-timers and RVers with large rigs make on the System. Members point out that these kinds of demands did not exist when the System was primarily used for camping vacations.

#### Volunteering as an Economic Strategy

Securing a volunteer position at one of the preserves is an economic strategy allowing members to live within the



System for a specified period of time. Most volunteer positions last from two to six months. Member volunteer positions require approximately 20 hours of work per week.

Members apply for particular volunteer positions based on their skills. Member volunteer positions include cooking, cashiering, stocking the store, security, maintenance jobs, preserve hostess, and teaching crafts and games. The major economic benefits of volunteering are suspensions of the two week moving rule and the \$16 per diem fee charged after two weeks is waived.

#### Secrecy and Sharing Strategies

Secrecy is an economic strategy RVers use to limit access to the System. In contrast, sharing is also an economic strategy maintaining the RVers' cultural rule of reciprocity. Both secrecy and sharing shape and govern interactions and transactions in this community and with outsiders.

Although RVing is a highly visible, well-developed market, RVers adamantly state that they do not want this lifestyle broadcast to outsiders. "This lifestyle is one of the best kept secrets in America," observed one old-timer. RVers do not want to attract outsiders to this lifestyle.

RVers use secrecy to minimize competition in obtaining temporary access or rights to desirable locations, sites, places, and resources while on the road. Secrecy is also a strategy keeping RVers invisible from bureaucratic agencies

and governmental policies. Many RVers expressed explicit distrust of the government.

RVers use secrecy as a strategy to limit outsider access to the System. RVers do not promote the System to outsiders. Many RVers can contractually transfer their membership rights to the System to their children, when they decide to quit RVing. This further increases the RVers vested interest in controlling access to the preserves. The mechanism of secrecy is in direct opposition to managerial marketing strategies offering incentives for RVers to introduce new members to the System. The System's incentive programs encouraging members to actively recruit new members are outweighed by the member's rights of access to the preserves.

#### Social Interaction as an Economic Strategy

The contributions RVers make to collective gatherings are assessed by the members in terms of their economic as well as social value. For example, there is a pervasive feeling of disdain for members who are, "...cheap and unwilling to pay their fair share." These contributions are informally audited by members to determine whether or not members are contributing their fair share.

Collective social events are often structured to hold members socially accountable for their contributions. Member contributions are assessed in economic terms of time, money, and materials. For example, at a Sunday evening potluck,

cultural rules specify that each member make a fair contribution to the meal. To ensure compliance with these rules, each member is required to place their dish in front of where they sit. This allows all the members to see what each member has contributed. This strategy is designed to embarrass members whose contributions to the potluck are "chintzy" or "cheap." This strategy allows everyone to see the contributions of each member. Rvers explained that the time and money cost of making a casserole, or making a home-made cake, or pie are weighed against contributions reflecting dishes comprised of hastily opened cans.

At these potlucks, the arrangement of the tables in a U- shape was purposeful, so the potluck dishes were accessible from both sides of the table. Several members agreed it was "upsetting to spend five dollars worth of ingredients on a casserole and not get enough to eat because they were at the end of the line." This subtle strategy increases the opportunity of each member having a "...fair chance at tasting a variety of dishes."

#### Saturday Flea Market

Informal economic transactions take place at the Saturday flea markets located near the family lodge. The purpose of the Saturday flea market is to provide an outlet for showing and selling handmade craft items. RV vendors offer a wide variety of hand-made crafts. Although most

sales are money transactions, from time to time, crafts-people will trade craft items with each other.

The Saturday flea market is also an important site for relaxed socializing after the pancake breakfast held in the family lodge. In one preserve, the flea market was set up on picnic tables outside the family lodge. While they are waiting in line for their breakfasts, RVers generally wander around the tables viewing the displays.

The vendors pay a small fee to rent the tables and participate in the "show and sell." Although couples can be observed setting up the display tables together, the vendors are primarily women selling craft items. Occasionally, women will sell items for men at their tables. Husbands often participate indirectly, by engaging in conversations with potential buyers near the display table. A few men also manage their own craft tables generally selling woodworking, carving, R.V. equipment, laminating, or telephone and satellite services.

The motivation for selling crafts at the flea-market varies. Some members are productive and want to sell extra craft items rather than store them. Other members sell crafts as reimbursement for the costs of the craft materials. Some RVers, however, participate in the Saturday flea markets to supplement their incomes through the sale of their hand-made crafts. The flea market offers the buyers a relaxed time to browse and talk to sellers. There is no pressure to buy from sellers. In fact, sellers often state

"it doesn't matter to them whether or not anyone buys their things."

### Economic Transactions with Local Communities

There are socio-economic benefits from belonging to the System. The reputation of the System lubricates economic transactions in local towns. Membership within the System confers upon the RVer the attributes of reliability, responsibility, and dependability. These attributions are important in economic transactions with local merchants. For example, credit rules are often eased for members. Members are able to conduct transactions using out-of-state personal checks, simply by stating their affiliation to the System. The service RVer receive is enhanced by their reputation as members of the System.

The shopping trip to town is an event in the routine week of the RVer. Shopping trips are well-planned in advance. RVer usually plan to "make a day of it" when they go to town. Trips to town are often scheduled on days with doctor or dental appointments.

RVer use coupons when they shop. The coupon exchange box in the family lodge is organized by kinds of household goods and foodstuffs commonly purchased by RVer. The coupon exchange box contains coupons for ordinary day-to-day purchases such as cleaning supplies, dairy products, canned and frozen foods, pet food, and bread stuffs. Coupons are regularly cut out by members from local newspapers and

magazines. Unused coupons are filed by the members into the box.

Frequently, couples can be seen browsing through the coupon box together, making lists, and planning shopping trips to town. Married couples often comment that when they are RVing, they are much more aware of the kinds of products and goods they buy. They also agree they have more consensus about what kinds of goods are needed. There is also an increased awareness by men about how much food and household items cost. Many couples noted when they shop together they do more comparison shopping.

RVers generally go to a variety of different stores when in town. Many shopping trips include stops at a variety of grocery stores, and drug stores, RV supply, hardware stores, barber or beauty shops, crafts stores, and sometimes at a specialty store. RVers usually frequent the local canned foods outlet. Stops are planned at one or more large retail stores, such as Walmart, K-mart, and Target. Membership in one or more regional discount stores such as Price-club or Cost-co is considered essential when living on the road. National and regional discounts stores and retail stores offer the RVer consistent quality. RVers shop at stores offering liberal, no-hassle exchange policies for merchandise purchased in one locale and returned in another locale at a later date.

A number of RVers wintering in California routinely go to Mexico to buy prescriptions and eyeglasses. One RVer described a recent trip across the border:

Mexico is an awful place. It's dirty and it smells, and it's so poor. I hate it there, but we walk across the border. We can buy months worth of the prescriptions we need, for a fraction of what it would cost here. We don't always need a prescription there [in Mexico]. It's worth it [worth the trip to Mexico].

RVers consider themselves good consumers. Discussions of price comparisons, availability of products, quality, and return policies are frequent topics of conversation among members at the preserves. One RVer told me about long-time friends who were full-timers. He said they had made investments providing them with a disposable income of over \$5,000 per month. He noted,

...still, they were very careful. They shopped at K-mart and Walmart just like the rest of us. They bought at the canned food store. They knew they had a lot of money for RVers. Yet, they still checked the prices. Most of us have good pensions, but not lots of money. You never would have known they had that kind of money.

RVers patronize business establishments recognizing the System and welcoming their out-of-state checks. Particular restaurants and stores were preferred and patronized by RVers. At restaurants, RVers often compare the size of the portions, and the quality of the meal with the price. RVers take advantage of senior discounts. They often try to frequent restaurants on days when they can have two-for-one specials. RVers also take advantage of early-bird economy prices at restaurants, and movie theaters.

RVers make purchases based on the recommendations of other members. For example, a particular kind of white wine at a discount store was promoted by the RVers at one preserve, for its economical price and good taste. The wine recommendation was supported by the claim, "...it's as good as anything else. You can't beat the price. No one buys anything else. This is what everyone is drinking at the Desert preserve."

The members are aware local communities often have negative perceptions of RVers. Many RVers disseminate business type cards, identifying RVers as members of the System. These cards are a strategy to dispel negative stereotypes about Retreat RVers. These cards also are designed to stimulate an awareness of the economic contribution that Retreat RVers make to the local community.

RVers generally give the cards to the merchants in the stores they patronize. Another common strategy is to leave them on the tables in restaurants with the tip. RVers use these cards to indicate their support of local community businesses.

### Interpretation

Economic strategies reflect the influence and importance of social interactions. Some strategies are responses to financial and social constraints. Other strategies are focused on allocating, conserving, protecting, and distributing resources in ways supporting



the RVer's mobile identity and corresponding values of self-reliance, equality, and material comfort. The recreational image of the Retreat system symbolizes RVing as a lifestyle choice rather than purely an economic strategy.

## CHAPTER 9 - ATTITUDES AND ACTIVITIES

Bateson (1989) noted that, "Relationships need the continuity of repeated actions and familiar space almost as much as human beings need food and shelter" (p. 120). Within the familiar surroundings of the family lodge and the adult lodge, RVers can be observed interacting and participating in a wide range of activities at the preserves. These familiar spaces and routine activities provide an environment of continuity fostering and promoting relationships between RVers.

## Positive Attitudes

Cultural rules supporting a positive, relaxed, fun attitude are apparent in license plates, and signs displayed on RVs. One wooden sign in a window read, "no home--no phone; no hurry--no worry; Just passing through." Another sign read, GYPSYRUS [gypsies are us]. Another playful sign on a back of a truck window indicated that it was a "toad vehicle" [towed vehicle]. RVers were often observed wearing pins with sayings such as "Hi! I don't remember your name either."

Participation in activities at the preserves are mediated by tacit cultural rules supporting a positive attitude, and censoring complaining behaviors. RVers frequently talk about RVers with habitual complaints. Complaints generally center around the preserve facilities,

activities, management, staff, security, maintenance and cleanliness of the facilities, preserve sites and roads, the Pact, the System's dues structure, projects at the preserves, the other preserves in the System, the price of items at the trading post, the weather, road conditions, driving conditions, and camping facilities at other RV parks.

The general perception shared by RVers about complaining members is that nothing would make the complaining members happy. One RVer expressed a shared sentiment noting, "Regardless of where they were, or what they had, they would find something to complain about. That's just who they are."

RVers react to habitual, complaining behavior by identifying the complainers and discussing their negative behavior among themselves. In one discussion, a chronic group of complainers were compared to "young people with a first job." One man elaborated this comparison noting:

They are like the complainers we had in the union. They didn't want to pay dues, but they wanted to have the benefits of a union. The ones that were complainers were the ones right out of school. The ones who had never been in the real world before. This was their first job. They bitched and moaned about every little thing. They tried to change everything. They didn't know how good they had it.

Complaining behavior is either redirected or censored. For example, complaints about rainy weather were refashioned by RVers describing it as "liquid sunshine". Complaints

about fierce winds were playfully described as "strong breezes."

One afternoon at a boardgame, an RVer was observed repeatedly complaining about the rules. The rules differed at this preserve from the rules at another preserve. Her complaints were met with silence for the most of the afternoon. Twice, different members supportively told her she would catch on soon. Finally, a member stopped the game and told her directly, that this was the Desert preserve, and they followed the Desert rules here. The rules at each preserve govern the ways activities are played. It is unacceptable to complain or challenge those rules.

RVers adamantly enforce the cultural rule suspending habitually complaining, negative attitudes. Indirectly, but often so they are overheard, RVers will suggest to each other that the complainers should "move on if they are so unhappy." Other suggestions include the option that they "go back home," implying the complaining members are not cut out to be RVers.

Many RVers repeatedly stated complaining has no place ✓ in the System, and they were not there to listen to complaints. RVers leave various preserves in order avoid recurring, tiring complaining scenes. When it becomes apparent members are negative, other RVers can be observed "...fanning out around them, and soon they are standing by themselves." RVers typically state they are here [in the preserves] "to have fun."

### Kinds of Activities

The organized activities at the preserve have a highly ritual quality about them. Monthly and weekly calendars are posted revealing, "...an often repeated sequence of highly patterned events" (Spradley, 1970, p. 224). There are three kinds of activities at the preserves. First, social activities involving eating, such as morning coffees, dinners, and ice-cream and pie socials. The weekly manager's meeting is also a scheduled event many RVers classify as a social activity. Religious services held on Sunday mornings and mid-week Bible studies are also scheduled activities at the preserves. Second, skill activities include crafts, cards, boardgames such as dominoes or scrabble, line-dancing, pool, and horseshoes. Third, entertainment activities, such as dances, musicians or comedians are primarily scheduled on the weekends. Sporadically, there are educational activities in the form of a lecture or video. These talks encompass a wide range of subjects such as finance, legal matters, tips on RV care, wildlife and local history. The predictable, repetitive character of the activities schedules at the preserves allow RVers to plan their days well in advance.

### Competitive Activities

Many RVers avoid competitive activities and tournaments because of the increase in complaining behavior and unsocial attitudes. Long-time members commented on participation in

competitive activities that throughout the years they had observed cheating, swearing, name-calling, anger, negative attitudes, and complaining during competitive tournaments.

RVers observed awarding prizes of any kind, such as ribbons, trophies, token pins, or script at the trading post heightened the competition among the RVers. Regardless of whether or not there were awards, the competitive interaction was disruptive to the unity of the membership. The motivation to participate in a competitive activity was to be recognized as the winner, as number one, or as the best. These reactions to the competition are viewed as disruptive to the unity of the membership. One man reflected that being "number one," was not important:

When you've been as close to the pine box as I've been, you realize the most important thing in life is to enjoy it and have fun. Relax and have fun. That's what is important. Each day. Each minute. Being number one isn't all that important.

RVers participate in activities reflecting shared interests. RVers participating in the same activities establish friendships and contacts based on these interests. Certain preserves have reputations as supporting one particular activity over other activities at certain times of the year. RVers with interests in particular activities, often plan their travel schedules around tournaments and activities sponsored by certain preserves.

### Gender Specific Activities

Many of the activities at the preserve are gender specific in terms of participation. Craft activities are well-attended by women in the preserves. Crafts are taught by staff, member volunteers, or by RVers. Many crafts are often repetitive activities using a minimum of materials. These craft activities are reminiscent of quilting bees, incorporating a large number of women who are primarily there to talk while they work. Women not interested in participating in crafts often assist other women, or simply stay for the conversation. The conversations held by women attending these activities are lively and supportive.

Many crafts are specifically associated with RVing. One woman waved a plastic canvas wallet in her hand, and said, "Concrete people don't know anything about plastic canvas, that's something we do out here." Many of the craft activities are made with found objects, or use low cost objects. These kinds of crafts minimize the costs of participating. Plastic canvas, paper beads, folded paper crafts, paper-clip necklaces, purses fashioned out of strips of plastic bags, and card holders made out of plastic yogurt lids are examples of these kinds of crafts. RVers enjoy these crafts and often reflect upon the simple things they did for crafts and entertainment when they were children or young adults during the Depression years. One woman exclaimed, "I grew up in the Depression...I save everything.

I have a quilt made out of the dresses that my mother made for me out of my grandmother's dresses."

Other crafts reflect the skill and expertise of RVers who teach crafts like beading, tatting, cro-hook, crocheting, t-shirt designing, knitting, bookmaking, and art projects. New and unusual projects are met with skepticism by members. For example, a class on animal and color symbolism was met with disapproval. There was support for the comment that, "We don't want any of that weird stuff in our park. We are all Christians out here. We don't want to learn about tarot cards and occult stuff." The class was canceled due to lack of interest.

Men are generally considered more competitive than women. One woman said her husband would no longer play pool, because it was dominated by competitive players, who complained about the less-skilled partners they drew for the men's pool tournaments held every afternoon.

Pool and horseshoes are activities primarily dominated by men. Although these are open activities, in general, women who play with men in routinely scheduled pool tournaments are tolerated but not accepted by men players. Several men indicated they were uncomfortable playing with women or against a woman. Other men indicated they did not want to draw a woman as a partner, as they would be subject to kidding by the other men. In general, men did not want their wives to play pool during the daily men-dominated tournaments. Several wives said their husbands did not



consider a woman who played pool with men "a lady." Many of these same men recognized their wives as good players, and enjoyed playing pool with them and another couple during the evenings at the adult lodge.

The pool tables were reserved solely for women players, one hour per day, three times per week. This activity was called "women's pool practice" on the schedule. From time to time, there was a male staff member instructing the women on how to play pool. However, these women did not want to be instructed. A small, but dedicated group of women pool players played during the reserved practice time for women.

The men's reactions to the women's reserved time at the pool tables was mixed. A sign was posted barring men from going into the pool room during the practice sessions. Men, however, often stood at the wide, arched doorway and watched the women play. One woman explained that the "keep-out" rule was to prevent the men from pressuring, intimidating, or instructing them as they played.

Several women witnessed men becoming irate when they realized time had been reserved solely for women players, or if the women went over their specified time limit. At the end of the hour, men often congregated at the doorway waiting to play pool. This was perceived as intimidating by many of the women, who would either abandon their games or quickly finish to avoid needing overtime.

Horseshoes is another game primarily dominated by men. The few women players are generally accepted by the men as

serious players. Women also passively participate, keeping score, pairing and rotating partners each round.

Men who play horseshoes or pool recognize skillful players. RVers do not, however, defer to expertise when it is used to show-up other members. Nor do they tolerate members who berate or instruct other players. The cultural rule, "everyone is equal here" is enforced when expert players expect deference to their skill or past achievements.

Verbal challenges and abuse are not tolerated and can result in physically threatening behavior. RVers, particularly men, participating in these activities apply powerful punitive and remuneratory sanctions to force members to alter inappropriate behavior. For example, a group of men were observed silently boycotting an activity in order to coerce the management to take action with regard to an offending member.

#### Technology: Changing Symbols of Community

The kinds of activities in the preserves have subtly changed over the years. RVers vividly recall past "camping" experiences 10, 15, and 20 years ago. Although RVers sometimes call life in the Retreat system "camping," they generally agree that the term "camping" means something different today than it did in the past. RVers are inclined to say RVing is now a "different kind of camping."

Descriptions of camping experiences, "in the old days," revealed these members had much smaller RVs with fewer amenities. Many older RVs typically had a sink, top stove, toilet, and beds. Ice boxes and coolers substituted for refrigerators. Few older RVs had private bathrooms or showers. Storage in these RVs was extremely limited.

Stories of camping trips focused on ritual activities such as cooking meals on a campstoves outside on picnic tables, heating water in tea kettles to wash dishes outside, washing out laundry by hand, and toting water to the site.

During the day, meals were often prepared when family members got hungry. Dinner was typically prepared, eaten, and cleaned up before it got dark. In the evenings, lanterns lighted picnic tables, where RVers sat outside with coats on, playing cards, and talking. Other RVers recalled on cold nights, when the sun went down, the whole family went to bed after dinner.

Many old-timers said they missed socializing and singing at community campfires, regularly held in the evenings. The campfire was described as a community ritual attended by "most everybody around." In the absence of a campfire, night-time activities took place at neighboring campsites or at family lodges.

Technology has radically reshaped the RV over the last 35 years. Modern RVs have every modern convenience available in conventional homes. RVs commonly range from 35 to 40 feet in length. Typically, the newer RV today has a sewer system,

an electrical system, a generator, a stove, oven, microwave, an ample refrigerator with freezer, a double sink, hot and cold running water, shower, toilet, washer and dryer, television, vcr, stereo-system, and radio. Less common are dish-washers, trash-compactors, and saunas. Many larger rigs have basements for storage, opening on the outside of the rig.

Satellite dishes are a common feature perched on rigs in the preserves. RVers often select sites based on the kind of reception they will receive from parking in a certain locale, at a certain elevation, or in a certain direction. Poor television reception is a valid reason to move to another site in the preserve.

Most televisions in these rigs are set up for cable as well. RVers observed a pattern of site selection for cable sites situated closer to the road and farther away from the family lodge. The sites with cable access are considered some of the most desirable sites. Scenic, view sites without cable, closer to the family lodge, were generally the last to be taken in the preserve. Other RVers also observed fewer members participating in evening activities, since cable service became available in the preserves.

One Part-timer, who described himself as a baseball nut, recalled the angry responses of his friends 20 years ago, when he brought a battery operated television to watch the play-offs, instead of attending the evening campfire.

Now, he reflected, evening social activities cannot compete with "good television nights."

### Interpretation

Ritualized activities promote the continuity required to sustain relationships between members of this highly mobile culture. Cultural rules mediate activities in ways promoting and facilitating cooperation and positive interaction. Competition, complaining behavior, and exclusion are viewed as disruptive to the unity of the community and are subject to sanctions.

The kinds of interactions RVers had with each other have been altered over the years in response to technological advances in the RV. Prior to modern conveniences in the rigs, RVers structured their activities to be more responsive to the natural cycles of day and night, warmth and cold, and hunger. Without electronic entertainment, RVers gathered in the evenings and shared a communal campfire. Evening campfires were a symbol of community to the RVer.

## CHAPTER 10 - DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

## RVing as a Transhumant Subculture

Human migration has been described as "...a world wide phenomenon as old as the human species itself" (Hunter & Whitten, 1976, p. 269). Anthropological accounts of geographic movement of people describe many forms and patterns of mobility. Today, RVs dotting the highways and byways of the north-south corridor on the West Coast are evidence of modern-day transhumance. The geographical direction of movement on these highways corresponds to the seasonal migration routes of growing numbers of retired RVers.

The growing trend to seasonally migrate is incongruent with the paucity of published research on this phenomenon. Decision-making models, social aging models, and studies of dislocation have often yielded narrow, inadequate, or stereotypical conceptualizations of RV seasonal migration. These theoretical orientations have obscured the unique cultural and social aspects of RVing.

The present study conceptualizes retired RV seasonal migrants as a transhumant subculture. Americans, Spradley (1979) observed, do not simply belong to different generations, classes, or racial groups, they have "...acquired distinct values, goals, and life styles - they come from different subcultures" (p. 4). Subcultures are

evidence of the pluralistic, multi-cultural nature of American society (Spradley, 1979).

As a subculture, RVers have regular patterns of behavior and patterns for living which are distinct from most other retired Americans. RVers use cultural knowledge to organize their lives in ways supporting their mobile lifestyle, identity, and values.

RVers have developed adaptive transhumant strategies reflecting culture-specific ways of responding and adapting to constraints and opportunities arising in their physical and socio-cultural world. Cultural adaptations are motivated by the ways that RVers perceive themselves, and by cultural values expressing what they believe to be meaningful, significant, and worthwhile.

#### Amenity Migration

The dominant view in the literature conceptualizes RVing as a kind of retirement amenity-migration. The amenity-migration conceptualization supports the popularized image of retirees pursuing active lifestyles of "fun and sun," motivated by the attraction of environmental, recreational, and leisure amenities (Wiseman, 1980). The amenity-migrant conceptualization is a behavioral typology, developed by researchers, to support decision-making models of residential choice (Haas & Serow, 1993; Wiseman, 1980).

Similarly, a survey of seasonal snowbirds surmised that the RVer's "...principal explanation for seasonal migration

is to escape the severe winters of snowbelt states" (Martin, et al. 1987, p. 143). While climate is certainly an amenity and a motivating factor, this explanation is inadequate to explain RVing as a patterned form of social organization.

Amenity-migration is a uni-dimensional concept devaluing the social nature of RVing, reducing it to a mere pursuit of amenities. The amenity-migrant conceptualization disregards the way that RVers see themselves. RVers neither refer to themselves as amenity-migrants, nor do they view themselves as the leisure-oriented wanderers as implied by the term "recreational nomads" (Mings, 1984). Accounts reveal that RVers are transhumant. However, characterizing seasonal migration as "recreational transhumance" (Mings, 1985) also obscures the social and cultural fabric of this mobile lifestyle by emphasizing the central attraction of recreational amenities.

Valid, cultural conceptualizations should reflect the significant, working categories with which members of a group actually operate (Neely, 1991). Insider definitions of seasonal migrants as RVers, full-timers, part-timers, snowbirds, sunbirds, or rainbirds are significant working categories expressing social identity.

In a classic ethnographic study of the transhumant, pastoral Nuer of southern Sudan, anthropologist Evans-Pritchard (1940) noted that the Nuer tend to relate all topics of discussion back to something of universal meaning to them: cattle. Cattle is the central, significant,



organizing working category of the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). Evans-Pritchard (1940) noted that the social idiom for the Nuer was a bovine idiom. Similarly, RVers refer to themselves and relate all topics of discussion back to RVing and mobility, and not to amenities. Their social idiom is a mobility idiom. This researcher maintains that valid, culturally constructed conceptualizations of this subculture are required to understand the motivation behind adaptive strategies used by RVers in their mobile lifestyle.

### The Social Theories of Aging

RV seasonal migration has also been conceptualized through the lens of two of the primary theories of social aging: activity theory and disengagement theory. These theories have been used to explain the behavior, status, and social organization of retired RVers. RVers have been described as the "...archetype of the activity model of aging," based upon their participation in a variety of activities (Sullivan & Stevens, 1982, p. 173). RVers have also been characterized as disengaged in their "...retirement status, and choice of an age-segregated society" (Sullivan & Stevens, 1982, p. 173).

At the root of these divergent points of view about RVers are assumptions that middle-class American value orientations emphasizing activity, productivity, and youth are desirable if not necessary, for a successful life (Cox, 1993). Ideas of activity, productivity, and success are

deeply ingrained in middle-class America. The tenets of the Protestant Work Ethic link ideas of activity to productivity, and shape middle-class American definitions of a successful life. Americans subscribe to the Protestant Work Ethic proposing that individual hard work will be materially rewarded, and reflect social worth. The Protestant Work Ethic indirectly supports the American preoccupation with youth. The assumption in these disparate theories is that middle-age is the ideal, youthful, active, productive, successful stage in life.

RVers have been measured against the yardstick of successful aging, relying upon behaviors, and activity levels attributed to youth and productivity. These theoretical orientations support popular gerontological ideas of successful aging. These theories reflect ethnocentric concepts contributing to ageist stereotypes of RVers. This researcher contends that aging among humans is not a matter of success or failure. Rather, humans adapt to the limitations and opportunities they encounter and face them as they age. Successful aging is a normative, ethnocentric concept that denies retirees have social worth in our society.

In Activity theory, successful aging is an objective related to RVers adhering to middle-class, middle-age norms of activity. The superficial appeal of activity theory is the construction of middle-aged images of RVers as active and productive. These stereotypes provide little insight

into who RVers are, or the distinct values and identities supporting the cultural aspects of this lifestyle. This stereotype also marginalizes older, physically limited members of the RV community, who may not be ready to hang up their keys (Counts & Counts, 1992).

RVers engage in activities that are meaningful to them. The accounts in the present study reveal that participating in activities is a social strategy for acquiring information, learning and teaching cultural rules, exercising sanctions, building cooperative relationships of mutual trust and support, and reinforcing social ties. Through participation in activities, friendships based on shared interests form, joking relationships develop, nicknames are bestowed, genuine admiration for skill is shown, stories of past encounters are told and retold, future invitations to socialize are extended, and life experiences on the road are shared. Activities provide a forum for powerful symbols of acceptance and comradeship to be given and acquired.

RVing as a form of disengagement is viewed as evidence of successful aging, as RVers relinquish roles and status to members of the younger generation by withdrawing to an age-segregated lifestyle. Retirement status and participation in an age-segregated society has also been characterized as disengagement by Sullivan and Stevens (1982). A cultural perspective offers a different interpretation of RVers. The ethnographic data collected in the present study

characterizes age and the accompanying status of retirement as important building blocks of social organization in the RV community. Age-mates serve as a framework for RVers, whose families are geographically distant, and who have highly individualistic, variable mobility patterns. Age-based relationships create a ready-made structure for interaction.

RVers, like the highly mobile Turkana nomads, find that "...in traveling, he [sic] finds men [sic] who are his [sic] age-mates, comrades, and supporters" (Barfield, 1993, p. 40). Like other mobile people, social ties are recreated, renewed, reinforced, and expanded through subsequent interaction. RVers expect to meet each other down the road. This cultural expectation underscores the importance of establishing ties based on shared life histories and common interests within these temporary, mobile communities.

Age-sets often create a fraternity of equals across a society (Barfield, 1993). RVers share common histories and life experiences. Growing up in the Depression of the 1930's, and participation in World War II, are shared, unifying experiences described as pulling together, contributing, and belonging. These sentinel events were followed by an accelerating post-war technology: increased mobility, education made possible through the G.I. bill, unprecedented economic opportunity, and consumerism, all of which shaped the lives of these retirees. Shared histories and life experiences contribute significantly to the ethos

of the RV community. Depression era Americans have been described as living religiously by the rules, because "...rules give the community shape, coherence, and a shared view point and make the faithful feel worthy of the rewards they are promised" (Gelernter, 1995, p. 50).

Cultural rules support egalitarian, horizontal, fraternal relationships between RVers. Inclusion is an important cultural rule, allowing members equal access to resources. Egalitarian, fraternal relationships are promoted by positive attitudes facilitating social interaction and minimizing divisiveness. Social ostracism is a strong sanction used as an incentive for RVers to realign their behavior within the accords of cultural expectations. The cultural value of equality gives form to cultural rules contributing to the sense of fraternity and community experienced among RVers, echoing the "sense of belonging" of by-gone years when Americans "pulled together" to overcome hardships while the country was at war.

#### Studies of Dislocation

RVing has also been the subject of studies of dislocation in elderly migration, focusing on permanent or semi-permanent change of residence. In these studies, only a limited number of economic, social, and environmental factors have been considered.

### Demographic Data

A demographic description of the informants in the present study mirrors those of previous studies, characterizing RVers as primarily Anglo, married, retired, and financially independent. I did not collect demographic statistics on informants. Attempts to collect statistical data on RVers would have violated their cultural rules minimizing traditional indicators of socio-economic status. RVers are suspicious of and hostile to outsiders conducting surveys (Counts & Counts, 1992). Collecting demographic information would have hindered the process of establishing trust and gaining confidence with the informants. Survey methods establish an unequal relationship between researcher and subject that is not conducive to establishing rapport.

### Census Data

Studies on dislocation have decried the lack of rigor in census data surveys to yield accurate statistical profiles of seasonally migrating RVers (Happel, et al. 1988; Martin et al. 1987). I concur with critics who contend that census data needs to be responsive to various forms of elderly seasonal migration, gathering data reflecting a "...complete picture..." of the scope and nature of the national trend of RV seasonal migration (Happel et al. 1988, p. 130).

The present study supports McHugh's (1990) observation that a considerable amount of geographic movement does not

fit the traditional notion of moving from one permanent residence to another. Ethnographic accounts support McHugh's (1990) conclusion that multiple place-ties render traditional definitions of permanent and usual residence problematic. This finding points to the need for culturally constructed definitions of home and residence.

Insider definitions of home reveal differences between part-timers and full-timers. Part-timers consistently define residence in reference to permanence and place. In contrast, full-timers define residence in reference to mobility, commonly saying "home is where we park it."

Ethnographic definitions of home are also important to identity. These contrasting definitions provide important information as to where RVer's are anchored socially and psychologically. Part-timers shift from sedentism to mobility with relative ease, always returning to their permanent homes. In contrast, full-timers define home as everywhere and nowhere. Full-timers do not like to stay in one place very long, even when they have the opportunity to do so.

These findings underscore the need for census surveys to develop questions and responses based upon sound, ethnographic data that reflect an understanding of mobile lifestyles. Survey responses that are unresponsive to mobile definitions of residence, are considered by RVer's as typical of governmental bureaucracies too large to care about the individual. This perception reinforces identity of the RVer

as self-reliant individualists, which widens the chasm between RVers and government, and fuels the RVers distrust of government. Mobility is a strategy providing the RVer with greater anonymity from governmental bureaucracies.

Another impetus behind gathering census statistics is the goal of assessing the economic impacts of seasonally migrating RVers on host communities (Happel, et al, 1988). Issues and policies characterizing RVers as an economic boon or economic burden reflect only the host communities point of view. This perception marginalizes RVers, positioning them as outsiders who either help or hinder host communities, reflecting an antipathy toward people without permanent address (Barfield, 1993). This study advocates policies reflecting holistic consideration of the values and orientations integrating the economic well-being of both the sedentary population and mobile RVers.

#### A Prelude to Permanent Migration

The social character of RVing was tentatively recognized by McHugh (1990) concluding that seasonal migration is a lifestyle, rather than a planned prelude to permanent migration. McHugh (1990) surmised that part-time RV seasonal migration between home and Sunbelt locales is a strategy for obtaining the best of both worlds (McHugh, 1990). This study supports McHugh's (1990) findings that ties to home and family strongly influence migration plans. Accounts reveal that part-timing does allow RVers the



opportunity to build ties in mobile communities as well as maintain ties in their origin communities. Accounts reveal that family-ties are "the ties that bind" part-timers to their sedentary communities (Sullivan, 1985).

Interestingly, McHugh's (1990) study does not include full-time RVers. Ethnographic accounts reveal that full-time RVers have a different perspective regarding family-ties and place-ties. Full-timers view place ties and family-ties as constraining. The conclusion in this study is that full-timing is a strategy dramatically loosening ties to place and family. This strategy is a means of expressing full-timers' values of self-reliant individualism.

#### Full-timing as a Housing Alternative

The present study supports Hartswigen and Null's (1989) conclusion that full-timing is a legitimate, housing alternative for independent, retired people, who live "normal" lives in a different context (Hartswigen & Null, 1989, p. 321). Context is an important issue that is skirted in their study by survey information identifying preferred types of mobile homes, purchase price and costs, reasons for deciding to RV, and likes and dislikes about full-timing. While this skeletal information supports their conclusion that full-timing is an economic strategy for affordable housing and living, this information does not contribute to a contextualized, holistic picture of full-timing.

The present study maintains that economic considerations and preferences, and indicators of satisfaction, do not necessarily reveal the impetus behind the decision to go full-time. In the present study, accounts collected in the context of this culture, also document, describe, and expand upon similar economic themes. However, holistic interpretation of these accounts reveal that full-timing has cultural, social, and symbolic meaning beyond the economic strategies supporting it.

#### Temporary Mobile RV Communities

There is very little social interaction between members of the System and members of the local communities. This finding supports Hoyt's (1954) initial observation that the social life of temporary, mobile communities is inwardly focused and self-contained. RV communities are characterized by relatively stable, but fluid social networks composed primarily of full-time and part-time RVers. The present study supports Jobes' (1984) description of temporary mobile communities as volitional, composed of members who share values and preferred behaviors.

The present study also corroborates Jobes' (1984) conceptualization of RVing as an adaptive, mobile lifestyle. Jobes (1984) study describes adaptive social and economic strategies used in the creation and maintenance of temporary, mobile communities. In a more recent comparative study of RV communities, Counts and Counts (1992) focus on

key principles of reciprocity and equality as the linchpins in the creation of community. In their study, Counts and Counts (1992) distinguish between boondocker communities and conceptualize private membership park RVers as lifestyle enclaves.

Jobes (1984) and Counts and Counts (1992) concentrate primarily on the structure of RV groups and upon group relations. Although parallel accounts in the present study also describe group structure and interactions, the primary focus of the present study is not on the structure of the RV community, but on the specifying the cultural processes underlying social organization. The present study specifies how cultural values and identity are integrated in the way RVers organize their knowledge to respond to constraints and opportunities in their world. Cultural processes provide members with shared meanings, mutual understandings, and common interpretations necessary to sustain their sense of community. The present study supports Barth's (1956) premise that through the continuous process of adaptation, cultural identities are forged, and values become integrated in ways supporting and shaping the life of a group.

The present study takes exception to Counts and Counts (1992) characterization of private membership RVers as lifestyle enclaves, rather than temporary, mobile communities. This is an uninformed conclusion that does not accurately characterize the social organization of member RVers in the present study.

Accounts in the present study indicate that membership RVers share a collective sense of identity and regularly employ versatile, adaptive strategies to maintain community coherence. Symbols of social solidarity, strategies contributing to the cohesiveness of the community, and strategies strengthening social ties were identified in the present study. Important cultural rules supporting temporary, mobile communities, dictate member inclusion rather than exclusion, minimize competition and complaining behaviors, demand tolerance for members' perceived differences within the community, shape response to threats to identity and values, and specify strategies for conflict resolution. Cultural rules or principles of equality and reciprocity are also valid within private membership RV communities.

The second point of departure between the two studies concerns reports of the antipathy between private membership RVers and boondockers (Counts & Counts, 1992). This antipathy is not supported by accounts in the present study. On the contrary, accounts of members in the present study support Jobes' (1989) observation that pejorative remarks about other styles of RVing are rarely made by RVers.

Boondockers are regarded as highly mobile, extremely self-reliant RVers. Boondocking is viewed as an alternative strategy for RVing. The majority of members are not only familiar with boondocking, but most members have themselves

boondocked or were planning to boondock on public lands sometime in the future.

From a cultural perspective, boondockers and private membership RVers are both regarded as members of the RV subculture. Although their expressions may differ, boondockers and private membership RVers share common values, cultural knowledge, and language allowing them to communicate, interact, and move fluidly between boondocking and private park communities.

### Findings in The Present Study

#### Cultural Values and Adaptive Strategies

Cultural values of self-reliant individualism, equality, and materialism provide a blueprint for understanding the adaptive strategies of this transhumant culture. The adaptive strategies described in this study integrate these uniquely American values in ways that support and shape the daily life of the RV community.

Many complex motivations lie behind the decision to become mobile (Spradley, 1979). Ethnographic accounts reveal that RVers' former lives conformed to mainstream American culture. They held long-term jobs and acquired property, possessions, benefits, and pensions. They pursued ownership and material wealth as a natural goal and right of their status as working Americans.

Retirement is a time of transition for Americans. Accounts here reveal that for many RVers, retirement signals an interruption in the economic and materialist imperatives structuring their lives. Upon retirement, maintaining homes and possessions was viewed as confining and burdensome, impinging on newly acquired free time no longer structured and filled by the demands of employment. In retirement, the roles required to maintain social networks consisting of family obligations, friends, neighbors, and community ties, were also viewed as oppressive and constraining.

The impetus for retirees to exchange middle-class symbols of wealth and social status for a lifestyle of mobility, reveals the unshakable faith of Americans in themselves as arbiters of their own destinies. For RVers, retirement is an opportunity to recast the pattern of their lives, making the most of a future of free, unencumbered time already paid for by years of hard work.

The decision to engage in a mobile lifestyle is an act of self-determination. Retired RVers possess a life-time of experience supporting their conviction in the rightness of their life philosophy. Their life philosophy is built upon mainstream, American ideologies supporting the value of self-reliant individualism.

Self-reliance is a recurrent theme in the ethnographic accounts of retired RVers, presented here. These descriptive accounts reveal the determination of RVers, to chart their own paths, go their own way, see with their own eyes, and

listen to their own voices (Roberson, 1995). In American society, developing and exercising self-reliance requires acts of individuation and ritual separation (Bellah, et al., 1985). Selling family homes, participating in divestment rituals, acquiring a home on wheels, leaving familiar communities, neighborhoods, and family networks are symbolic acts of self-reliance. RVing is transhumant strategy for leaving home. In leaving home, RVers are declaring independence from the shackles of social institutions and tradition, and proceeding on their own course.

RVers firmly believe they have a right and obligation to do what is best for them, irrespective of the concerns, disapproval, and objections of family members and friends. RVers rely on the strength of this conviction, to mediate the social repercussions experienced from unanchoring their lives from their pasts.

Actually living a self-reliant philosophy is often difficult. In the present study, the ethnographic descriptions of RVers who have elected to leave established social institutions and traditions behind, willing to "...go out and do it though he [sic] go alone" echo themes of social isolation (Roberson, 1995, p. 152). Isolation from the structures of the past is both a benefit and consequence of pursuing a self-reliant, mobile lifestyle.

### Disruption and Loss

Themes of disruption, loss, and resolution are symbols of individual, self-reliant inner strength. These themes resemble quasi-religious stories of suffering and release, whereby individuals emerge tested, yet strengthened from threatening ordeals, braced with a renewed faith in themselves and a clear sense of direction (Roberson, 1995).

Surviving such experiences and braced with a renewed philosophy of self-reliance, these retirees made decisions to pursue a mobile life. In the resolution process, RVers viewed themselves as survivors, independent and strong. These experiences renewed their trust in themselves to do what was best for them. Full-time RVing is a symbol of assertion, and an expression of self-reliant individualism. Accounts point out that full-timers asserted their right to listen to themselves and march to the beat of a different drummer.

Actions reflecting self-trust transform what Emerson (Roberson, 1995) called a dead faith into a living faith. Experiences of disruption and loss also resemble quasi-religious experiences of transformation and conversion. For full-timers, RVing was more than a transition from a sedentary to a transhumant lifestyle. RVing is a metaphor for a living faith honoring self-trust and self-reliance.



### Interactions with Family members

Values of individualism and self-reliance shape the interactions that RVers have with family members. These values are reflected in diverse strategies used to structure relationships with adult children and grandchildren. Full-timers and part-timers express these values in markedly different ways.

Symbolically, leaving home is an important rite of passage for full-time RVers. This ritual act of separation is also a strategy for restructuring parent-child relationships. Retrospectively, full-timers believe that when they left home, they were promoting self-reliance in the adult children they left behind.

Full-timers believe that children learn self-reliance by meeting responsibilities, challenges, and adversity without assistance from parents. Successfully meeting challenges creates strong, self-reliant couples and families. Families managing independently teach children solid habits that develop self-reliant characters. Habits of self-sufficiency are considered fundamental to a successful family life.

Full-timers do not want to hear about the problems facing their adult children. These RVers believe that if their children established good habits, they would have steady jobs, be able to support themselves, and become financially secure. Full-timers resist interfering or fixing their children's lives, bailing them out of difficulty.

Similarly, avoiding traditional roles typically assigned to grandparents is a strategy to maintain independence and distance from the everyday lives and problems of their children.

Breaking long-standing traditions are symbolic acts of self-reliance practiced by full-timers. Accounts reveal that adaptive strategies, such as spending holidays away from family members, are ways of declaring autonomy from traditional roles and rituals. New traditions, such as potluck holiday dinners held with other RVers within the System are established, cutting ties to the past and reinforcing the RVers' mobile, self-reliant identity.

Counts and Counts (1992) viewed divestment rituals as rites of passage, creating a sense of community based on the experience of relinquishing the past and embracing a new lifestyle. The present study also views divestment rituals as rituals of self-reliance. Possessions are symbols of tradition and the roles associated with those traditions. In divestment rituals, these traditions and roles are given away or left behind. Divestment rituals foretell breaks in family traditions, releasing full-time RVers from unwanted obligations, and encouraging children to develop traditions and rituals of their own that do not depend upon parental involvement.

Divestment rituals influence personal and social identity. In American culture, people think of themselves in terms of possessions such as homes, cars, clothing, and

personal possessions (Spradley, 1979). In mobile cultures, households carry their possessions with them. Divestment rituals function to pare possessions down to bare essentials. The RVers self-reliant personal and social identity is shaped and symbolized by the absence of material possessions.

In contrast, part-timers do not engage in divestment rituals. Their homes and ties to place are important components in their lives structuring their relationships with their families. In contrast to full-timers, part-timers believe that the roles they play in their children and grandchildren's lives actively support their children's efforts to be self-sufficient. Part-timers believe that the demands of modern life are barriers to attaining self-sufficiency. The demands of working and raising a family, often complicated by divorce, single-parent status and inflation, and job insecurity are challenges and adversities that part-timers believe make marriage and parenting more difficult for their children. Part-timers are not convinced that their children could attain self-sufficiency without their assistance.

Part-timers give liberal grants of time and resources supporting their children's goals of achieving self-sufficiency. Part-timers believe that they play important roles in family cohesion, by providing security and structure, transmitting habits and values to grandchildren,

and by keeping family traditions alive. Travel plans are influenced by participation in meaningful family traditions. Part-timers relationships with their children stress interdependence.

#### Grants Economy: Housing Grants

RVers granting adult children the right to live rent-free in family homes is an important strategy of family resource management. Housing, as an intra-familial grant is identified as an important strategy assisting adult children in achieving self-sufficiency. The RVers' expectation is that the housing costs saved by children will be allocated in ways that increase self-sufficiency. Securing permanent employment, saving for a rainy day, saving for a downpayment on a home, and paying off excessive debts are examples of the self-reliant goals RVers expect their children to achieve. Failure to achieve these goals is interpreted as individual failings of their children to practice habits supporting self-reliance. RVers believe that their children's failure to appreciate a home as a resource can be attributed to the fact that the child did not work for it and, therefore, does not value it.

#### The Impact of Management Programs.

The Pact and Be Our Guest programs are controversial programs revealing management's anxiety about becoming financially solvent, and hence their preoccupation with

increasing the membership base. While these issues may have serious implications, the System's history of financial management policies have strained the credibility of management with the membership over the years. The RVer's mixed response to these programs reveals their conviction in self-reliant individualism and equality as core values outlining individual choice and self-interpretation.

#### The Pact.

Self-reliant members who did not join the Pact have serious doubts about the legitimacy of the Pact. RVer's believe in the binding nature of contracts. Contracts are symbols of honor and character. In a contract, an individual's word is given and made good by living up to the terms and spirit of the contract. Recanting the terms of original contracts and recasting contractual terms are a poor reflection upon the character of the management, casting doubt on the long-term reliability and trustworthiness of management.

Membership in the System is an economic strategy for minimizing costs. Non-supporters point to rising costs and fixed pension incomes as justification for not joining the Pact. In the spirit of self-reliant individualism, RVer's are adamant about looking out for themselves, first and foremost. The primacy of self-interest is at the heart of a self-reliant philosophy.

Informal interviews indicate that although RVers were unwilling to change their contracts, they were voluntarily willing to help the System become self-reliant. The refusal by management to accept unsolicited checks to alleviate financial difficulties is an affront to the maxim "We are Kin." RVers believe that kin should freely offer assistance to support goals of becoming self-sufficient. The decline of help is interpreted as a method of social control, undermining the family feeling and solidarity among members.

The overriding sentiment of non-Pact members is that although they enjoy camping within the System, they do not need the System to continue their mobile lifestyle. Non-supporters view themselves as ultimately self-reliant and able to take care of themselves outside the structure of a membership camping organization. These RVers consider mobility a resource rather than a constraint.

Pact members, on the other hand, express values of self-reliance through protecting their original investment. Pact members believe their original investment is at risk of being lost if the System becomes financially insolvent. Pact members view membership in the System as an investment in a self-reliant strategy.

Membership in the Pact expresses the value of self-reliance, as RVers and management pull together like family members, meeting adversity head on together. Pact members are willing to recast their original contracts, agreeing to changes in access to resources and increased financial

responsibilities. Pact members are willing to take on additional responsibilities in an effort to support the System. Reducing debt and working toward solid, financial footing are goals consistent with the RVers self-reliant life philosophy.

The Pact has publicly altered the status, rights, privileges, and responsibilities of all members. Ideas of equality and self-reliant individualism integral to the RV community have variant interpretations by RVers. Non-Pact members do not view the Pact as a way to equalize responsibilities, but rather as a tool of coercion designed to strip them of existing rights they have paid for over time. Non-supporters view Pact members as overly dependent on the System.

In contrast, Pact members view non-supporters as unwilling to pull their own weight and pay their own way. Pact members see themselves as carrying non-supporters. Refusal to join the Pact symbolically places non-supporters in a position of dependency upon Pact members and the System. These symbolic positions of dependency are an affront to the self-reliant identity of all RVers.

#### Be Our Guest.

While the Pact has become a divisive issue in the RV community, the Be Our Guest Program promoted by management has become a rallying issue for the members. The pivotal

issue is that guests have not earned and paid for the privilege of belonging.

RVers invested in a private membership camping organization touting a social atmosphere supporting traditional family values. The System is a metaphor for kin. RVers experience a sense of belonging, a sense of coming home, every time they drive through the gates of a preserve. The security gate at the entrance of the preserve is a symbolic boundary between members and outsiders, private and public. Inside the preserve, members are kin. The concept of kin rests upon ideas of trust, security, safety, privacy, support, nurturing, and caring. Accounts here describe various ways the physical, social, and emotional needs of RVers are met by other members.

There is a classic dichotomization between familiar, kin members and guests as strangers, reflecting recognition of limitations on shared understandings (Barth, 1966). Guests are not kin. Guests are outsiders, paying for the privilege of accessing recreational resources. Guests are not subject to sanctions for violations of cultural rules. They have no responsibility to uphold and respect the rights of the members, and more often than not, they leave and never return.

The character of outsiders is suspect. The general public is stereotypically described by insiders as unreliable, untrustworthy people who are to be avoided because of their supposedly high incidence of undesirable



traits like drinking, violence, stealing, and vandalism. These traits conflict with RVer ideas of temperance, non-confrontation, honesty, and trustworthiness. RVers regularly denounced the Be Our Guest program at the manager's meetings. They acted assertively in their own interest as individuals, and for the good of the membership community.

### Economic Strategies

Self-reliant habits are foundational to the economic strategies employed by RVers. Habit formation, defined as the customary practices of everyday living, is the core of a self-reliant philosophy (Bellah, et al., 1985). RVers learned lessons of self-reliance, habits supporting hard work, economic strategies circumventing shortages, and ideas of equality, fairness, and pulling together were learned during the Depression and War time. RVers view these lessons and habits as the backbone of American moral life, families, and community.

The adaptive, economic strategies currently employed by RVers are drawn from their earlier experiences of self-reliance. Descriptive accounts of adaptive, economic strategies emphasizing habits of thrift, frugality, saving, recycling, comparing, discount shopping, coupon-cutting, "making do," pooling resources, selling, bargaining, trading, volunteering, and limiting access to resources through secrecy are symbolic expressions of self-reliance. These self-reliant economic strategies uphold cultural

expectations that each household shoulder its own weight and pay its own way. By acting strategically toward economic resources, RVers reveal who they are, who they have been, and what is meaningful to them.

Self-reliant strategies give form to habits. Habits are considered right principles of living and are used as indicators of character (Roberson, 1995). Habits demonstrated in these adaptive economic strategies are obvious, evident, and measurable, allowing RVers to assess themselves, as well as assess the character of others. For example, contributions to group functions are assessed using principles of self-reliance and equality, evidencing habits of frugality, industry, generosity, and fairness. These principles and habits are used to assess the cultural acceptability of each contribution. RVers consider contributions to the group as indicators of character.

These culturally constructed principles of assessment extend to evaluations of outsiders. Ethnographic stereotypes describing poorly maintained RV parks, attracting "a different class of people," reveal the RVers' bias against poor, semi-mobile people. This stereotype is consistent with a self-reliant philosophy premised upon the acquisition of self-reliant habits as the key difference between success and failure. RVers firmly believe that self-reliant individualism, hand-in-hand with "good" habits, are integral to a self-reliant character, empowering individuals to make what they will of their lives.

Member RVers are occasionally subject to stereotyping and discriminatory feelings by members of local communities. In an effort to dispel negative images, members distribute membership business cards as an economic strategy informing host communities that member RVers are patronizing their businesses, and contributing financially to the community.

These cards are also symbols of self-reliant social identity. RVers take pride in identifying themselves as members the System, with a reputation of being self-reliant, fair, reliable, responsible, informed customers, who know value, expect good service, and who can be trusted to pay. Increasing their visibility in the host community is also an economic strategy. Visibility gives RVers a stronger economic advantage, encouraging local businesses to recognize who they are and compete for their dollars.

### Time

The perception and organization of time is an important theme interwoven throughout the descriptive accounts of daily life. The ways that RVers perceive and use their time symbolically identifies what is significant to them (Fabian, 1984). RV transhumance is an adaptive strategy responsive to natural cycles of the season. Accounts reveal that RVers typically migrate with the change of seasons.

Social interaction, however is the focus of daily life, giving form and meaning to time. Interacting with others is a qualitative experience. Leisurely conversations and

collective activities are important forms of social time, contributing to the unhurried pace and rhythm of the preserves.

Conversations between RVers are frequently personalized and contextualized by snap-shot accounts of life-histories and experiences. The repetitive nature of social time can be observed as the same RVers meet morning after morning, in the family lodge, lingering over coffee, talking without regard for time. Social time is an important part of these informal, social rituals, supporting community cohesion.

Social time also renews bonds between RVers. Face-to-face interaction allows RVers to exchange traveling experiences, social and economic strategies, experiences of joy and sorrow, family news, and information about other RVers. These leisurely conversations are important social strategies validating the RVers mobile identity and value orientations.

RVers acknowledge that the preserve system has changed over the years from a family vacation camping concept to a strategy for full-time and part-time RVing. Nostalgic accounts of the past reveal that RVers saw themselves primarily as vacation campers with camping rituals responsive to cyclical time. Without modern, technological, time-saving innovations in RV's, RVers "in the old days" were more responsive to the natural cycles of day and night, hunger and satiety, or cold and heat. Modern, conveniences

in technologically sophisticated RVs mediates these cyclical, natural experiences.

RVers also believe that too many evenings are structured around TV sitcoms, and spending time inside RVs, rather than in community activities. As TV sitcoms are substituted for evening community campfires, the slow-burning, community campfire is no longer a symbol of social time promoting cohesiveness and group identity.

In recent years, technology has increased the privacy and autonomy of the RVer. The RVer is no longer a simple camping vehicle. It is a mobile clone of a conventional home, with every available innovation. The most noticeable effect of these technologically self-contained rigs is that RVers do not come out of their rigs. With the technological sophistication of RV's, social interaction decreases and social isolation increases. While this pattern is consistent with American concepts of privacy, autonomy, and values of individualism and self-reliance, the pattern mirrors conventional neighborhoods described by RVers as boring and isolating. Technology's influence is changing the RVer's traditional concepts of time, altering the structure of social life within the preserves.

#### Implications of the Study

The present study questions and challenges specific theoretical orientations and conclusions about RV seasonal migration. This study suggests that conceptualizing retired

RVers as a transhumant subculture has more efficacy, as it is not dependent upon narrow, biased, deficiency models of human motivation.

The descriptive, cultural accounts in this study, recognize the central position of cultural values as motivating individuals to pursue and participate in meaningful ways of life. In particular, the value of self-reliant individualism provides a framework for viewing a variety of adaptive strategies employed by RVers.

The present study contributes the first, indepth, ethnographic account of RVing within the context of a membership in a private RV organization. The present study suggests that private RV membership organizations should design and implement policies, programs, and marketing strategies in ways that recognize and respect the RVer's mobile identity and value system. Accounts in the present study strongly suggest the importance of cultural awareness in drafting policies which member RVers can support.

Key and Firebaugh (1989) challenged facing the field of family resource management to identify research topics that had implications for policy and intervention, and to engage in interdisciplinary research. As a starting point, Key and Firebaugh (1989) suggested that researchers focus on primary data collection, with the goal of discovering socially relevant issues of importance to families. As part of this effort, Key and Firebaugh (1989) encouraged scholars

to reaffirm their expertise in research methods of root disciplines.

Ethnographic, anthropological studies, such as the present study, generally focus on families, communities, groups, or societies. The goal of the ethnographer is to discover how people define their experience, and what questions and issues are relevant to their informants. Ethnography, as a method of primary data collection, is a rich resource of culturally valid, descriptive, contextualized data. Ethnography provides a sound basis for understanding and identifying salient questions, issues, and areas for further research.

This ethnographic study has identified and described issues specific to this subculture which may warrant further study. The identification of a grants economy, particularly involving grants of shelter between full-timers and adult children, is an important interfamilial strategy warranting further study by housing scholars and by family economists.

Accounts reveal intergenerational conflict and tension resulting in strained communication patterns, restructuring of roles and relationships, and often estrangement between RVers and adult children. These ethnographic facts suggest the need for informed family therapists, who are able to develop strategies responsive to the RVers' mobility, identity, and value system in mediating conflict, and repairing relationships between RVers and their families. Changes in patterns of social and material support have

implications for family well-being, requiring the combined expertise of family therapists, family resource management scholars, and anthropologists.

Future studies exploring alternatives to conventional retirement are also warranted. Older Americans find few roles in retirement allowing a full expression of middle-class norms and values associated with self-reliant individualism. The retired RVers, described in this study, have spent lifetimes learning and practicing self-reliant, character-building habits associated with working, productivity, competition, earning rewards, paying their own way, and collecting material and social symbols of wealth and success. The descriptive accounts in this study reveal that RV transhumance is an adaptive strategy integrating a philosophy of life based primarily on the tenets of the Work ethic and values of self-reliant individualism.

It is not surprising that American retirees have found ways to adapt to a society whose ageist structure, institutions, and perspective marginalizes, excludes, and stereotypes older people and the lifestyles they pursue. Stripped of productive economic and social roles, these retirees have responded to these constraints by shifting from a sedentary to a mobile lifestyle. RVers are taking advantage of the opportunity to participate as members of temporary mobile communities with shared values. This study posits that age is an important building block of egalitarian, social organization for these retired RVers.



In an anthropological study of transhumant nomads, Barfield (1993) commented on the innate antipathy toward people without a fixed address, and towards those with multiple residences. This antipathy exists in our society, directed at people who choose to live mobile lives. Holistic, cultural description renders this antipathy mute. Cultural description diffuses stereotypes and bridges cultural distance created by misconceptions about RVers.

Responsive social policy should begin with acceptance and tolerance for members of this subculture and for their way of life. Policies impacting RVers need to respect and reflect underlying traditional, American values supporting this phenomenon. First-hand, cultural description can be insightful to policymakers, revealing the motivation behind adaptive strategies. This study suggests that policies can be designed to conceptualize mobility as a resource rather than as a liability. Finally, social policies should reflect an understanding that transhumance is not just something that people do, it is central to how they see themselves and others.

Transhumance is a unique response to technological, economic, and social changes experienced by this group of Depression-era Americans. Shared cultural values have given shape and form to this mobile lifestyle. RV transhumance is a symbol of the human ability to adapt to changes in ways that create meaningful lives and cohesive communities.

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**APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX

1. **Ageist.** Negative attitudes toward the elderly (Hooyman & Kiyak, 1991).
2. **Amenity migration.** The cyclical geographic movement of migrants to locations which provide desired amenities such as climate, leisure activities, and recreation.
3. **Boondocker.** An RVer who camps on public land without paying a fee.
4. **Culture.** The accumulated shared knowledge by which human beings interpret their experience and generate social behavior (Spradley, 1979).
5. **Ethnographic research.** A qualitative research methodology designed to explore, discover and describe the cultural meaning systems by which people organize their behavior and conceptualize and interpret their experience (Spradley, 1979).
6. **Full-timer.** RVers who do not have a permanent, sedentary residence, but live and travel in their recreational vehicle all the time.
7. **Leisure.** Free time that is unclaimed by work commitments.
8. **Part-timer.** RVers who live and travel in their RVs for part of a year and who live in conventional, sedentary residences for the other part of a year.
9. **Recreational Vehicle.** Also known as an "RV." A broad cover term describing a multitude of various modes of transportation used as shelter, including motorhomes, travel trailers, fifth wheels, vans, and van conversions, tent trailers, and truck campers.
10. **Retiree.** Persons no longer employed, including spouses, widows, and widowers who live on retirement income. It excludes the retired who have resumed working. This notion of the retired population includes both economic and lifestyle dimensions (Cribier, 1980).
11. **RV.** See recreational vehicle.
12. **RV nomad.** A full-timer (Jobes, 1984).
13. **RVers.** Users of recreational vehicles.

## APPENDIX (Continued)

14. **RV Park.** A park or area with facilities and sites for recreational vehicles to park and reside temporarily.
15. **Seasonal migration.** See transhumance. Cyclical, geographic movement of people that coincides with the seasons (McHugh, 1990).
16. **Subculture.** Members of a group that share acquired knowledge that is used to interpret experience and generate social behavior (Spradley, 1979).
17. **Symbol.** Any object or event that refers to something (Spradley, 1979).
18. **Transhumance.** The geographic movement of people with the seasons (Cressey, 1923).