

**With the flick of a key:
RV living in the city**

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Abstract

Compared to traditional homelessness and poverty, RV/vandwellers are not a well-studied topic in the social sciences. This research project fills an empirical research gap on RV/vandwellers living as locals and it focuses on their lived experiences/observations and a municipality's response to this lifestyle. This project is an exploratory, mixed-methods study with interview and documentary analysis components. With informed consent, participant interviews were done through their preferred electronic method. Documentary analysis was conducted by examining municipal documents to better understand the city's response to the lifestyle. I attempted to find shared ideas of moral worth between RV/dwellers and City officials to identify "common ground" between them. I identified several overarching themes from participant interviews and documentary analysis. By "rubbing" a neoliberal critique with ideas from pragmatic sociology, I uncovered how other ideas of moral worth can challenge neoliberal market worth by offering alternative means of evaluating lifestyles.

Keywords: recreational vehicle; vandwellers; municipal bylaws; mixed methods; pragmatic sociology; neoliberalism

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

For many, the 2020 American drama film *Nomadland* was the first introduction to the idea that someone, anyone, has decided to forgo living in a standard house or apartment for living in a vehicle like an RV, trailer, camper or light cargo van permanently or, at least, temporarily, but still for a significant amount of time. Moreover, vehicles such as these are still mobile and not necessarily established as part of a permanently placed “mobile home” residence as one might see in parts of the United States and Canada. These have been portrayed, often unfavourably, in popular culture productions such as the early-2000s Showcase (later Netflix and now Swearnet) black comedy/mockumentary series *Trailer Park Boys*.¹ However, there are fewer depictions of those not living as part of a zoned mobile home park and less which focus on those RV/vanlifers *not* engaged in the nomadic, “Snowbird” lifestyle. That is, those who live their vehicles but try to remain in the same area as they did before and continue to carry on in their careers and lives just as before. One need not look far afoot or consult futurist fiction to identify these people. There are more than enough people living in vehicles yet close to home right now and their numbers are growing all across North America (Berr, 2018) (Hastings, 2019).

People living on the street or sometimes in tents are traditionally understood to be what homelessness looks like. Meanwhile, people living in static permanent buildings or permanently placed “mobile homes” as owners, part-owners, or renting tenants are traditionally understood as having homes. RV/vanlifers or persons living in vehicles built originally for the purpose of temporary recreational shelter appear to exist in a gap between those living on the street or in tents and those whose personal living space is located in static buildings or permanently placed “mobile homes”. Furthermore, city officials are starting to notice the growth of this lifestyle and are responding to it in a variety of different ways—some more welcoming of this phenomenon and others less so (Kurjata, 2019). My research project focuses on the lived experiences and observations of RV/vanlifers. It asks what motivates them to switch from a home anchored to a single

¹ More serious and sensitive portrayals exist as well such as the 2021 Netflix drama miniseries adaptation of Stephanie Land’s memoir *Maid*.

spot on the globe to one they can move with the flick of a key. My project also studies the city government of Surrey, British Columbia through its policies and corporate reports in order to understand what ideas underpin the city's response to the growing RV/van lifestyle.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

Socio-economic stigmas

The study of RV/vandwellers is not a particularly well-studied topic in the social sciences compared to those focusing on traditional homelessness and poverty. The study of people living in trailers, mobile homes, RVs, motorhomes, and parks has yielded a relatively small handful of widely cited authors (Kusenbach, 2009; Kusenbach et al., 2010; MacTavish & Salamon, 2006; MacTavish, 2006; MacTavish, 2007; MacTavish & Salamon, 2009; Notter et al., 2008; Salamon & MacTavish, 2017; Wakin, 2005; Wakin, 2008; Wakin, 2014). Most of these authors have conducted research in the United States with a few others focusing on Australia (Newton, 2006; Newton, 2014; Newton, 2015) and New Zealand (Kearns et al., 2019)². A consistently reported theme in all of these works is the role stigma plays in the marginalization of motorhome dwelling populations.

A number of works on the subject of RV/vandwellers are by Katherine MacTavish of Oregon State University. She has most frequently co-authored published works with Sonya Salamon of the University of Illinois, as well as with other scholars. MacTavish's publications typically involve ethnographic and qualitative research methods that look at the daily lives of those living in mobile home parks with a few special examinations of the experiences of women and youth, and how their living circumstances affects their resilience and life course (Salamon & MacTavish, 2017; MacTavish & Salamon, 2009; MacTavish & Salamon, 2006; MacTavish, 2007; Notter et al., 2008). MacTavish has claimed that women and youths are particularly impacted by their living circumstances as adequate education (especially for youths), social/health services (a particular concern for women), and employment opportunities are more challenging to access (Salamon & MacTavish, 2017, 45-47; MacTavish, 2007, 80-81, 88). Indeed, mobile home dwelling for all demographics often comes with stigmas that contribute to and

² Larger studies from Australia and New Zealand look at vehicle dwellers living on tourist-oriented campgrounds. They are somewhat comparable to the case study for this project. However my project is smaller and a direct comparison between studies is beyond the scope of this project.

exacerbate existing socio-economic challenges and stratification (Salamon & MacTavish, 2017; MacTavish, 2007).

Michele Wakin of Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts has also written about RV/vandwellers, but she looks specifically at those living in vehicles *not* as part of established mobile home parks (street parkers, etc.). Wakin incorporates both quantitative and ethnographic data in her analysis. A good example of how Wakin's quantitative data complements her ethnographic data emerged when she conducted surveys on "transient" vehicle dwellers in Santa Barbara, California. These data showed that a significant proportion of these dwellers were born and raised locally or are long-time residents of the area (Wakin, 2008, 317). Just like these residents of Santa Barbara, my subjects aren't outsiders to their area either and this kind of data can be useful for these populations to assert their claim to the places in which they live in (Wakin, 2008, 321). In other research, Wakin (2005; 2008) explains how motorhome vehicles are used by otherwise homeless people as makeshift housing/survival solutions and as means of asserting a sense of privacy and legitimacy in the face of municipal ordinances that attempt to regulate and suppress sleeping in public (Wakin, 2005; Wakin, 2008). For example, the use of recreational vehicles as a place to sleep allows residents to avoid having to choose between sleeping outdoors, which municipal ordinances forbid, or having to live in shelters which usually impose strict behavioural regulations as a condition of stay. Some of these regulations include gender segregation that separates spouses from each other and mandatory religious service participation which, obviously, can infringe on residents' religious beliefs or non-belief (Wakin, 2008, 320, 324) (Wakin, 2005, 1013). Living in their own recreational vehicle, provides a space that is their own and that they have control over—a closed door—that frees them from the harassment encountered when living on the street or in a shelter (Wakin, 2008, 319).

Margarethe Kusenbach of the University of South Florida has studied mobile home communities and residents in Florida and, like many of the previous authors, conducts mainly ethnographic studies of them. An interesting focus of hers is the study of mobile home dwellers' vulnerability to natural disasters (significant because Florida is a hurricane-prone region) as well as factors that disadvantage their ability or willingness

to protect themselves from natural disasters (Kusenbach et al., 2010, 79).³ Such factors include the structural durability of their mobile homes, socio-economic and health factors (particularly age and disability) that affect dwellers ability to evacuate, and a lack of timely communication to dwellers in the event of the need to evacuate. Furthermore, mandatory hurricane evacuation of mobile homes is rarely enforced and this is combined with many dwellers having an overly optimistic sense of security and lack of awareness of shelters and evacuation routes in their area (Kusenbach et al., 2010, 89-91). But a theme that Kusenbach has uncovered in her work that is common to other authors is the role of social stigma⁴ in these people's lives. Notably, she looks at the emotional management strategies they use to salvage their "decency" and navigate the stigma that is put on them (Kusenbach, 2009, 399-400).

Of additional interest is the relationship between this stigma and negligence on the part of mobile home park owners/managers, insurance providers and some government agencies (Kusenbach, 2010, 86, 93). For example, Kusenbach's work on mobile home dwellers found that mobile home park owners and managers often failed to assist or adequately prepare or inform residents in anticipation of natural disasters, insurance providers were predatory in providing services and local governments often failed to provide structural safety information that was specific to mobile homes⁵ (Kusenbach, 2010, 86, 93). Kusenbach's research on mobile home dweller stigma further identifies popular culture and mass media as an abundant source of negative images of mobile home and trailer dwellers with such attitudes dating back even before World War II. Some examples of negative images of mobile home/trailer dwellers depict these homes as crowded, dirty, and unsafe places. These images may also include lawns littered with broken-down vehicles, indoor appliances, and general home debris with uncontrolled pet dogs roaming around. As for the people living there, they are frequently depicted as living there because of some personal or cultural deficiency. Often, they are portrayed as addicts (of alcohol, "crack", methamphetamines, etc.), drug dealers, prostitutes, wife beaters, sex offenders, or as mentally ill persons (Kusenbach, 2009, 400). These images further suggest that in mobile home/trailer parks women are

³ A consideration that will become more important given the severe weather events communities are seeing as a result of human-induced climate change.

⁴ Kusenbach's research draws heavily from Erving Goffman's 1963 study on social stigma.

⁵ Residents had to rely on recommendations ideal for suburban housing that were not applicable to them (Kusenbach, 2010, 92).

promiscuous, men are violent, and children are unattended and out of control. In addition to TV and print news media, Kusenbach's research lists various successful Hollywood motion pictures that portray and perpetuate these negative images (Kusenbach, 2009, 400-401).

Indeed, the very term "trailer trash" emerged during the 1950s in Florida because of a post-war housing shortage that kept many military personnel and defence industry workers from moving out of trailers that were built as a temporary wartime housing measure (Kusenbach, 2009, 400). The stigma of being a mobile home dweller differs from other types of stigmas (i.e., body, tribal, etc.) in that it is not always apparent to others nor, is it permanently capable of being hidden. Kusenbach describes individuals who go out of their way to curate their appearance to appear more affluent than they are and who carefully select the language they use to describe their homes to others. Kusenbach further explores how homes are symbols of one's identity and why their denigration represents a symbolic challenge to one's place in broader society (Kusenbach, 2009, 401).

Stigma helps to deplete mobile home residents' moral worth—particularly their worth as citizens or as members of the public. That said, I am not defining "worth" from overly-broad dictionary sources. When I refer to "worth" or "moral worth", I am referring to how persons and objects are evaluated according to some principle(s) that appeals to a common good. Often there is uncertainty or disagreement about how moral worth is defined and measured, and in any given situation there might be multiple conflicting frameworks, stemming, for example, from ideals about market economics, social justice, or spirituality about how to evaluate a person or thing (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 12-14). The literature on RV/vandwellers has yet to examine moral worth directly in the way I have described. Authors such as Wakin have come close with discussions of stigmas about the homeless and how some have used mobile homes to assert their moral worth (or "legitimacy" as the author puts it) as home-owning individuals (Wakin, 2005; Wakin, 2008). Indeed, this is an area that I think lets my research stand out from previous literature.

Community variety

My research also fills an empirical gap in the research on RV/vandwellers: there is little work on those living in tourist campgrounds as locals. Much of the literature covers those living in mobile home parks created specifically for the purpose of a fixed residential area (which happens to utilize manufactured/mobile homes instead of typical static dwellings of brick, mortar, wood, etc.) or motorhome dwellers that park their vehicles on streets. Those living in “campgrounds” and recreational vehicle (RV) parks, or sites originally intended for use as accommodations for tourists and those in transit, are noticeably absent in the North American literature. So far, campground motorhome dwellers appear mostly in research from Australia and New Zealand.⁶ Janice Newton from Federation University in Australia has written several works about campground RV/vandwellers in Melbourne and the State of Victoria. An article by Kearns, Collins, Bates and Serjeant (2019) focuses on cases in New Zealand (where campgrounds act as places for dwellers to access social services). In these parks, motorhome dwellers live permanently due to an inadequate supply of affordable housing—not unlike the situation of BC’s Lower Mainland. Many similar issues and methods present in North American research (social stigmas, ethnography, etc.) are present in writings by Newton (2006, 2014, 2015) and by Kearns *et al.* (2019). The subject of RV/van/mobile home dwellers is most often studied using ethnographic methods. However, I conducted this project as an exploratory, mixed-methods study with interview and documentary analysis components. The campgrounds studied in the Australian and New Zealander literature, moreover, all appear to be privately-owned parks. The private ownership aspect brings with it a consideration that moral worthiness is determined and justified via market values that prioritize economic profit and consumption (Fuller, 2013, 649, 651-653). For example, visitors to the private campsite are worthy of the right to stay and use the facilities primarily as the paying customers of the campsite’s owner(s) who provide this service to turn a profit on tourism. Visitors to a publicly-owned campsite, are entitled to stay and use facilities as a member of the public. Visitors paying to stay at a publicly-owned campsite can serve as the basis for creating profit or to cover facility operating expenses for the campsite. BC’s Lower Mainland has both privately-owned and public-owned tourist campgrounds. State/Crown/community/public ownership of such a park, or

⁶ Referred to as “caravan parks”.

anything else for that matter, theoretically comes with a different set of expectations ('civic' or equity values) (Fuller, 2013, 649) that affect operation and decision-making processes beyond simple market worth. These differences in campground ownership have potential for interesting comparisons of how people staying in the campground are viewed and treated (e.g., customers paying for a privilege or citizens exercising their right to common space)⁷. That said, the campgrounds that appear in my research are private ones. I will build on this literature by bringing an exploratory, mixed-method analysis of discourse along with critical attention to how ownership plays a role in these spaces.

⁷ A common/publicly-owned space does not necessarily mean using it is free of charge or 'gratis'. There may be upkeep costs or tolls that one must pay for at the point of service.

Chapter 3.

Theoretical lens of analysis

For the most part, the theoretical lens that I use in this project is a critique of neoliberalism. This is a well-trodden perspective that has been utilized by critical scholars such as Nicholas Blomley to examine economic and power relations and critique widening inequalities caused by prioritizing market growth and deregulation over citizenship and stable communities; often with a role played by the state to encourage the efficient functioning of this system (Blomley, 2011, 22-23) of the era of late capitalism. However, I also incorporate elements from another theoretical perspective, pragmatic sociology, into my analysis. Pragmatic sociology emerged in the mid-1980s as an alternative to the prevailing sociological theories that emphasized either structural/macro-level analyses or more situational/micro-level ones. Instead, pragmatic sociology attempts to bridge both of these analyses by looking at how these larger macro-sociological trends unfold on the micro-level (Barthe et al., 2013, 2-5). Some of the themes that I pull from the data can be viewed as representing or signalling the various forms of moral worthiness from a pragmatic sociology framework. To clarify, when I refer to moral worths, I am referring to a range of major frameworks identified by pragmatic sociology scholarship that exist within society. These moral worths manifest as unique vocabularies of public justification and critique with which actors appeal to a common good (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Using pragmatic sociology in conjunction with neoliberal critique allows me to discover what other kinds of values are present besides neoliberalism. Uncovering these other non-market values may be useful for creating starting points for people on various sides of an issue (in conflict or not) to find some common ground.

In sum, the primary framework of my analysis is a critique of neoliberalism but I also borrow some concepts provided by pragmatic sociology that let me look beyond just market moral worth. Other moral worths that I found relevant or helpful in my analysis were “inspired” moral worth, which involves the desire for happiness, asserting uniqueness, self-improvement, and individual liberation (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 160-162); “domestic” moral worth, which emphasizes the importance of tradition, family, and maintaining relationships with family and love-ones, and a disdain for instability and

precarity (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 164-177); “civic” moral worth, which places importance on community, solidarity, membership of a group, and human dignity (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 185-193); and, lastly, “industrial” moral worth, which stresses worthiness is to be measured according to productivity, performance, and functionality; emphasis on science, technology, and human potential for productive activity and efficiency (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 203-211). In comparing documents produced by the City of Surrey and transcripts of interviews with participants that live in RVs, certain overarching themes can be identified when comparing these two categories of data.

Chapter 4. Methodology

I conducted this project as an exploratory, mixed-methods study with interview and documentary analysis components. Initially, this project was going to focus in specifically on vanlifers living in campgrounds within the boundaries of Surrey, British Columbia. However, because of COVID, I ultimately interviewed just two vanlifers, one in Vancouver and one in Langley, BC—which would still address a theoretical gap in literature on these people. For the purpose of recognizing the variety of opinions and definitions of this phenomena held by researchers and by the participants themselves, I have decided to refer to the community I am studying as “RV/vandwellers” or “RV/vanlifers”. Using these specific terms serve a double purpose as they are a convenient short-hand way of referring to this community while still recognizing the variety and complexity within this community (or even community of communities) to the best of my ability. This description, of course, cannot begin to fully describe the totality of this group any more than the term “LGBTQ” (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) can fully describe the communities that it describes. But this is the short-hand term that I found most effective for myself to do this research and I encourage other researchers to agree upon a more effective term that is efficient and accurate but, most of all, respectful, empowering, and *actually* reflects how these people self identify.⁸

Documentary analysis & Public access

A key method I use in my project is documentary analysis of publicly available government documents and publications. The purpose of conducting research on publicly available government documents was to capture and analyze any sort of underlying values and ideas of moral worthiness (be these explicit or, especially, implicit) that are present in the process of municipal administration. Governments, municipal, provincial, and federal produce vast quantities of records and documents that are in the public record and the City of Surrey was no different in this regard. It was necessary to limit the scope of my search of these documents to a few key documents related

⁸ An example of the opposite is the term “Latinx” which has been opposed by and offends many in this large, diverse group themselves whom prefer “Hispanic”, “Latino”, “Latina” and other native terms as opposed to a term that appears externally-imposed and doesn’t account for linguistic differences between English and heavily-gendered Romance languages (Caputo & Rodriguez, 2021).

specifically recreational vehicles (or “Large Vehicles” as Surrey refers to them) and their regulation. The City of Surrey openly encourages the use of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests by the public and provides resources and other options for such requests on the municipal website under the city’s Corporate Services department. They do encourage people to try and contact the relevant departments that may have the information that one seeks. I also searched Surrey’s online archives for any documents or information potentially relevant to my research—particularly anything related to a particular corporate report. News coverage in December 2019 suggested that a report was being created by city staffers that would present options for Surrey City Council on how to resolve a two-tiered bylaw enforcement system that had emerged at the Dogwood Campground site (as per sources reported to CBC) (Zeidler, December 15, 2019).

That report as well as any documents and materials used in the process of creating the report were what I searched for in this study. However, Surrey staff did not appear to have anything like this and gave me what they had regarding the street parking bylaw and reports instead. My guess is that any such planned report was simply the result of speculation/incomplete information given by news media sources or had been put on hold or cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, staff told me that the materials that they had found were available on Surrey’s digital archive website but emphasized reassuringly that they were more familiar with the internal file system and search terms than I was (so it was not a surprise that there were some items that I could not find without assistance). As such, I re-oriented the focus of documents section of my project towards the street parking phenomenon instead of on campgrounds. There seemed to be a more substantial wealth of materials on this matter as well as a lot of overlap and fluidity between the different subcategories of RV dwellers (which I observed in the participant recruitment and interview process). The pragmatic sociological analysis that I had hoped to use to study campground RV dwellers exclusively can be applied easily to the study of street parking RV dwellers as well. As such, some interesting results were uncovered in the analysis of these documents regarding what ideas of moral worthiness these documents apply to RV/vandwellers who park on streets.

Recruitment & Interview analysis

This project was, by design, an *exploratory* project that sought to uncover new data that would form a thesis rather than the deductive academic strategy of proving a pre-formed thesis with uncovered data. For projects such as this, it is helpful to see yourself as an astronomer peering into the night sky with the newest cutting-edge telescope to see what no one has seen before. The purpose of conducting research on human subjects was to capture the real, human experience of vandwelling—something that would not be possible, or at least minimally possible, by analyzing city documents by themselves. Due to restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, these interviews were done using remote, electronic methods and not in-person—minimizing any health risk or potential viral transmission to either the participants or the researcher. Interviews with participants were done through a preferred electronic method of their choice as outlined and explained to them through the informed consent process. One participant chose to participate through the online teleconferencing platform Zoom and the other chose to participate via telephone (both mediums permitted recording interviews for later transcription and analysis).

Participants were recruited through the use of personal contacts I had with the RV/vanlifer community, social media postings on a web forum frequented by RV/vanlifers and by email/direct message. To respect participant's privacy, messages were only sent to those wishing to receive these messages or were public figures with public inboxes meant to receive such messages. I encouraged recipients and readers to forward my contact information to persons who they believed might be interested in participating, a key part of the snowball recruitment strategy. I structured my messages and posts to ensure that potential recruits could make their decision freely and fully informed. Persons of interest as potential interviews were RV/vanlifers and public servants or public figures (in government or involved non-profit/social groups; ideally those involved with RV/vanlifer affairs, advocacy or regulation). Despite the limited number of participants, some particularly interesting findings were uncovered in the interview process regarding the ideas of moral worthiness and values held mostly in common by RV/vanlifers themselves. A small pool of participants is not necessarily a weakness for this type of research as studies that conduct in-depth interviews of any number of participants are rarely able to meet statistical generalizability as a survey study would.

But that does not mean that small sample sizes cannot still make meaningful contributions to academic research. (Small, 2009, 12-13). Indeed, even a single-case study, if well-executed, can uncover previously-unknown (emergent) knowledge of particular phenomena, tendencies, relationships, etc., that more generalist-oriented research would struggle to find (Small, 2009, 24). These findings on the micro-level can serve as foundations for macro-level studies (Small, 2009, 20) and can even better inform research or policy response designs in the future.⁹ Additionally, the limited number of participants in my study still served to illuminate distinct class differences within the RV/vanlifer community.

The first participant is a woman in her early 30s whom I will simply refer to as “K” as per our agreement reached in the informed consent process. K is a mother of two boys under 10 years of age (whom she cares for full time) and has a physically disabled spouse¹⁰ in a long term care facility. K has lived in a RV since August 2020 and lives in the South Fraser area (Langley and Surrey). The second participant is a man in his early-to-mid-40s whom I will refer to as “H” as per our agreement reached in the informed consent process. H, like K, is a parent of two children but is at a different stage in family life. His children, a son and a daughter, are older than K’s children and are either in or approaching their teenage years and are taken care of by H part-time. H is divorced from his spouse (who has shared custody of the children and cares for them the rest of the time). H has lived in an RV since about 2014 and lives in Vancouver.

⁹ For an example of where such emergent, micro-level data can be useful for better survey design, see Footnote 50.

¹⁰ At the time of the interview process. I learned that she has since officially divorced from her spouse—making legal what was already the effective situation on the ground.



Figure 1. View of K standing next to her home at the RV park. Tarp extended for additional shade with family sedan parked nearby. Trees add aesthetic quality and privacy.

Many potential participants (that is, those who are active on the internet—which already imposes limits on the participant pool) were hesitant or averse to participating in the study. This can be largely attributed to the fact that much of the RV/vanlifer community tends to be closed off from outsiders, especially unknown ones like myself. The rising fear and uncertainty that the pandemic brought undoubtedly exacerbated this situation as well. That being said, my two participants, though few in number, nonetheless provided incisive contrasts and rich details that illuminate some theoretically important aspects of the RV/vanlifer phenomenon. Overall, K represents a vandwelling perspective that is on the lower-income end of the vandwelling community. H represents a vandwelling perspective that is more on the higher-income end of the community. Income is only one aspect of the contrast between participants. Gender and family status differences, differences in age and lived experiences, and other non-income aspects of social class (such as property-ownership) are also major points of contrast between my participants. I will discuss this more later on when I get to important differences in themes. That said, there are common themes and shared values that are noticeable among the human participants in this study.

Being able to meet in person might have made the recruitment process easier—particularly in reaching out to older or more tech-averse RV/vandwellers. In the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, there very few online organizations or forums specific to the RV/vandweller community and thus it was necessary to widen my range of potential

participants to include RV/vandwellers who are not exclusively campground dwellers—I could not afford to be restricted to any specific subsection of participants. Consequently, the RV/vandweller participant pool was going to be limited to those who are comfortable with using the internet and digital communication methods. Typically, this factor may skew the participant pool towards a younger demographic¹¹ and may not be completely representative of the RV/vandweller community as a whole.

Initially the response to recruitment was negative: I was told by the group’s administrator that it violated the group’s rule forbidding journalists and news media from posting. I explained that I was neither a journalist nor a member of the media but an academic and that I am regulated under a much stricter set of standards (particularly concerning protection of participants’ privacy and confidentiality) than journalists and media members are.¹² Later in the day, I received notification from the group’s administrator who explained to me that the concern with my post was the specific phrase: *“I am obligated to inform you as well that liking or responding to this message may identify you as a potential participant and if this concerns you then please refrain from posting to or liking this message.”* This was an understandable concern for them to raise. I was required (both by the Research Ethics Board and by my own ethics) to include this statement in the post because of the inherently un-private nature of social media. The post was based on the social media direct message script I submitted to the SFU Research Ethics Board with only the greeting and ending edited to fit the posting format. The administrator later reconsidered and decided to lock the post instead of deleting it. Group members could still see it but were unable to post replies, “like” or share comments and those interested were able to contact me using the contact information I provided on the post. This really spoke to how both privacy and choice are valued in this community. Indeed, there were at least two other individuals who were initially interested in participating but eventually opted not to get involved for whatever reason. One individual I was referred to by one of my interview participants and another came via the recruitment post to the RV/vandweller group forum.

¹¹ As a general trend. More older folks are becoming savvy with digital technology in addition to being skilled with long-established pre-internet technologies like telephones. Digitally native researchers would be wise to account for and make adjustments based on these factors.

¹² No offense intended.

Regarding the recruitment of city staff, there were concerns that made the researcher reconsider involving them to the extent that vandwellers were included. The plan originally, was to reach out to city staff members who were involved specifically in addressing the RV/vandweller issue or in creating the reports to Surrey City Council. This would have been done via direct invitations to staffers that had made themselves publicly accessible and through snowballing efforts (all in all, similar to the methods I used to recruit RV/vandwellers). However, after some careful re-evaluations, I decided to re-focus my efforts specifically on RV/vandwellers themselves and official government responses instead of city staffers. I felt that interviewing city staff on this subject would be beyond the scope of this project. That said, Surrey city employees, officially and unofficially¹³ were very helpful and supportive of my research: providing clues and helpful tips of where to find what (or who) I was looking for. I did reach out to some current and former higher-level members of city government (councillors, mayors, etc.) to gauge their interest in this issue and provide me some of their insight.¹⁴

Email invitations were also sent out to Michael Musgrove of the Surrey Urban Vision society and Jill Atkey, CEO of the British Columbia Non-Profit Housing Association. Although they do not directly work for the city, they, as members of community and non-profit groups, work in partnership with the city and have potentially valuable insight into the RV/vandwelling phenomenon. Musgrove has criticized the timing of Surrey's new bylaw regulating RV/van street parkers given the severe shortage of affordable housing (new public housing projects have yet to be built) and when people, who may have exhausted all other options, are thinking creatively about how to adapt to this increasingly restrictive environment (Zeidler, October 20, 2019). He further stated: *"The idea that we can motivate people to go into housing by taking away their vehicles would make sense if there was housing available. In addition, I highly doubt that a person choosing to live in a camper over a home. We may need to address the nuisance issue and maybe we need a bylaw with some bite, but this is being sold as a motivator to get people housed."* (Reid, October 18, 2019).

¹³ You know who you are. Thank you so much for your help!

¹⁴ Invitations were politely declined or could not be received.

Chapter 5. Data Analysis Discussion

Overall, I identified five overarching themes from participant interviews and four themes from the documentary analysis. The way I came up with these themes was organic. Keeping my theoretical lens of neoliberal critique and pragmatic sociology, I read through the transcribed interviews and documents and made note of interesting passages that hinted at some underlying moral value or justification. I then interpreted and categorized these passages according to what might be an underlying motivation or trend. I categorized them further by adding what sort of moral worthiness, from pragmatic sociology, was applicable to each theme; sometimes more than one moral worth applied. I noted the commonalities between themes of participants and documents as well as contrasts (with participants and documents separately or between both of them).

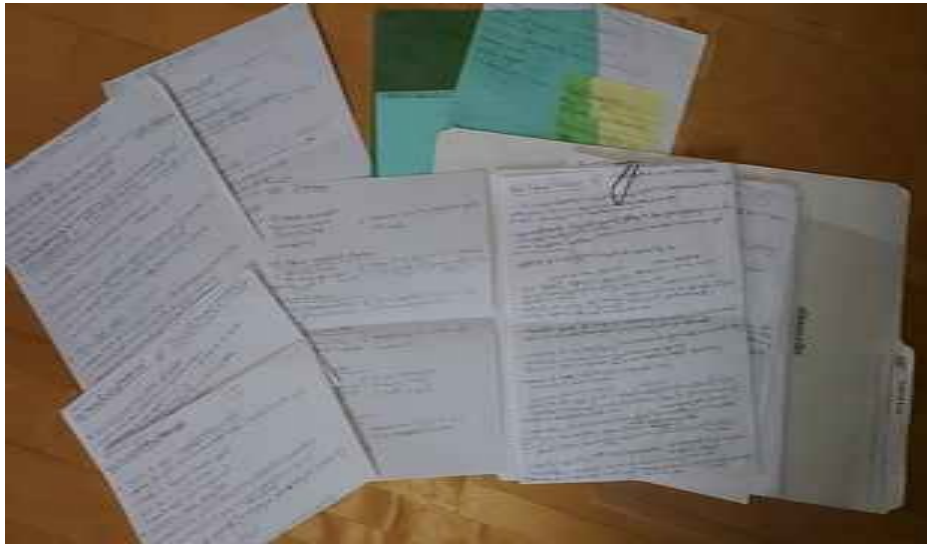


Figure 2. My notes from the coding and data analysis process. Quality has been compressed to reduce file size. All notes shown are de-identified versions.

Cost & Stability

A common theme and value shared by both participants was the desire to maintain or maximize their stability while cutting down on unnecessary costs. These two concepts are so intertwined with each other that it was necessary to group them together. For these RV/vanlifers, one cannot truly have stability without independence

(another theme taken up below) and vice versa. Living in an RV, according to participants, provides a sense of stability and independence that was not possible for them while living in static housing (particularly during an ongoing housing crisis). “Freedom” is a particular value that makes living in RVs more desirable than static housing. My participants elaborated on what this “freedom” entails and although they focused on benefits like privacy and leisure¹⁵, they also pointed to benefits that I interpret as relating to *stability*. When I refer to “stability”, I refer to both financial stability (affordable, consistent rental expenses) and a stable home life (such as being able to keep one’s kids in the same school until the end of their school year). According to my participants, the cost of renting is much less and varies according to the seasons. Participants stressed in their interviews the objective of minimizing expenses and saving money otherwise spent on paying rent. Living in an RV is a response to rental costs for static housing becoming too high for them to reasonably sustain themselves. Getting rid of some of the costs that come with living in static housing serves as a means to an end—to save money for use and security later on in life.

K, for instance, described how much her rent was while living in her RV. A “pad” is rented at the RV to park and hook up to utilities for a fixed period of a few months which is about \$800 per month. Back when she was living in a basement suite, K had been paying \$1200 per month. This may seem to be a small amount saved but when one factors in the cost of living, pre-Kindergarten childcare (still mostly not publicly subsidized in Canada as of this writing), and other expenses, such savings can add up significantly over the course of time. Rates for both types of rentals can and do fluctuate, but it is how they fluctuate that makes a difference. For RV parks, rental fees fluctuate seasonally, dropping as low as \$800 per month in the winter months (the tourism off-season) to as high as \$1400 in the summer months (tourism peak season). With an RV, K can temporarily locate to a cheaper, less desirable park in the summer and then spend the winter in a nicer one¹⁶. In K’s experience of living in static rental housing, the fluctuations seem arbitrary and unpredictable. The rental rate for an apartment or house may change if the property changes ownership and the new landlord desires to increase

¹⁵ K specifically refers to landlords and managers entering her living space and telling her what she can or can’t hang on her wall. She says her old landlords did this but the RV park managers tend not to. H, on the other hand, refers to retiring earlier and going travelling when he wants to.

¹⁶ The added benefit of closer neighbours and their experienced assistance is another benefit—reducing the financial blow from regular or surprise maintenance expenses.

the rate or use the property for something else than housing its current occupants (such as renovation or placing different people in it). K suggested that the current mechanisms meant to protect renters had failed her or appeared inadequate. K was fortunate, for a time, to have had a landlord who charged a consistent, affordable rate. But when the property was sold and new owners came in, K and her family were evicted and had to move to a place where the rent was much higher. The experience of being a renter varies from person to person and K's unique experience is not necessarily a universal one. K's story may resonate with some but not with others; this is just one story of many.

Although not giving too many specifics about how much he has paid, H described similar issues based on his experience of being a renter and then living in an RV during a year when he was doing construction on the property he owned. H described how he cut rent out of his life by living in an RV on another one of his properties, saving money for the future that he otherwise would have spent on rent. Since then, he switched from living in the house he built and returned to living in his RV while he collected rent from the aforementioned house on his land. Both participants further discussed with me, how much they each roughly spent on an RV and how much one can pay for a vehicle that is decent to live in and still relatively cheaper compared to similarly-sized static housing. H additionally pointed out that an RV still retains decent resale value—much more akin to the value of static housing than is the case with the typical vehicle used solely for transportation.

Both participants indicated their dissatisfaction with the amount they were paying in rent during their respective tenures as static housing renters. Not only was price of rent wholly unstable and subject to change due to either new ownership or the landlord decides to increase the price (with minimal accountability), there was also the sense that what they were paying more than what they were getting out of living in these places. K described to me her experience paying \$1200 per month to live with her children in a basement suite which was infested with mold, which she had told the landlord about so that they could fix it (which is their responsibility as the property owner). The landlord responded that the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing and that they would deal with it once it was over.¹⁷ K went to the tenancy board to file a complaint but it was of no use.

¹⁷ There are measures to conduct such work safely and the COVID-19 pandemic only ceased being a global public health emergency on May 5th, 2023 (Bendix, 2023).

Given how much rent is being charged for conditions that are hazardous, especially to children's health, it is not hard to understand why K would conclude that they were being ripped off while staying in static housing.

On a sheer cost-benefit analysis, participants concluded that such unaccountable, runaway rent was simply a waste of money. In a sense, this sentiment expressed by these RV/vanlifers echoes what we are witnessing across many workplaces across North America. This is particularly the case in the low wage service sector and hospitality jobs that were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many workers have opted not to return to these jobs after being laid off or quitting these. Even with cuts to unemployment benefits, the low wages offered in these sectors are not enough to entice workers to stay or go back, and many are opting to change careers—especially to ones that accommodate work-life balance and are more convenient or have better working conditions (Hsu, 2021; Horsley, 2021). As in the case of this growing class of dissatisfied workers, stability for RV/vanlifers is not just about money. There is also a desire for a sense of assured permanence of place and reducing the likelihood of being uprooted from one's life and community. K expressed particular stress about trying to secure a place to live long-term that would allow her kids to stay and finish their yearly studies in the same school.¹⁸ K stresses that this is an issue for both those in static rental housing and those living in RVs. Single parents with children are not always welcome in many types of residences. It is hard to argue against choosing the cheaper option if other aspects/concerns of life are still there. That said, for both the aforementioned workers and for RV/vanlifers, monetary (market moral) worth is not the only dimension of worth that drives these peoples' lives and decisions. Such non-monetary/market ideas of moral worth held by RV/vanlifers are the subject of the next category.

Independence, Privacy, & Convenience

Another group of themes that stood out were the importance that RV/vandwellers place on independence, dignity, and convenience. For participants, living in an RV

¹⁸ Anyone who has had to move and change schools as a child can understand how disruptive this is to one's studies and for social/behavioural development. It's tough having to keep making new friends all over again.

instead of a static rental dwelling, this offers better assurances of independence and having a sense that your place is your own. Closely related to that is the value placed on privacy (and the dignity that one's privacy protects) which according to participants was much more achievable with an RV than as a static renter. Likewise, the importance of convenience (and by that I mean whatever makes life easier and less complicated) was also a common theme with participants.

K explained to me how different the landlord-tenant relationship is between static dwellings and living in a campground RV. As a static renter, K experienced a power dynamic that has been very unbalanced and invasive. In her experience, the landlord has a lot more say in how you operate and arrange your living space. K described to me how her old landlord would continually lecture her on temperature controls and accuse her of having more people living with her than she acknowledged. According to K, there was often hypocrisy on the part of the landlords when they demanded minimal noise and guests on the part of K and her children while the landlords frequently threw loud parties with multiple guests. They also installed hidden cameras by her door. K made formal complaints to government authorities which, nonetheless, ruled in favour of the landlord. Switching to an RV in a campground, K, despite having fewer tenancy rights (which were already quite weak), has some more privacy and control over her living space. The rental agreement she signs merely allows her to rent the parking space ("pad"). The park managers don't enter her RV or dictate how she can decorate or arrange her space inside the vehicle. This noticeable improvement in basic privacy and independence comes at the cost of having to move more frequently and not having direct contact with the park's owner (only with the managers). Despite these sacrifices, these RV/vanlifers choose and enjoy the greater sense of privacy and owning one's own space in their RVs that they typically are not enjoying in a static rental unit. Indeed, H summarizes it this way: "Living in an RV is living in your own apartment"; K described it as a "condo on wheels". Perhaps official housing agencies would disagree with these assertions, but on the ground at the human-level it is more or less a correct understanding of what their home situation is and the dignity it provides.

Maintaining one's own dignity and independence is something else that participants found important and something that possibly informs their views on privacy and spatial ownership. H explained to me the personal reluctance he's developed when it comes to regularly offering his professional skills (mechanical and electrical) to other

members of the RV/vanlifer community—preferring to help on his own terms and being more like a teacher (making a long term difference) than a “go-to” repair guy. This desire to want to treat work as a choice and not be impersonally defined or used as a worker is completely understandable and speaks to how much value is placed on personal dignity and owning, controlling, and defining one’s self. Likewise, H’s own advice to first time RV/vanlifers stresses this, particularly in the type of mobile home to obtain and where to live if they don’t have land of their own to park on. H highlighted certain vehicle types that enable increased mobility and are less prone to mechanical issues: namely those that are gasoline powered (as opposed to diesels, especially the newer ones, which clog up and are only worth it for frequent, long overlanding trips), and are compact, mobile, and less noticeable enough to park in a neighbourhood street rather than in a campground.¹⁹ Live and work where you want and do so with as much privacy, anonymity, self-sufficiency as you can—that’s what I gathered from H’s suggestions to future RV/vanlifers.

Both participants emphasized the importance of de-cluttering and minimalism in their life and living space. According to H: “...*when you live in a house, then you buy a TV, you buy a sofa, then you buy a [audio distorted], then you buy a flower, then you buy a painting, then you buy, like, pots, and styles of pots and become a consumer and you work just to consume.*” Given that an RV provides a much more limited amount of space than the typical static dwelling, it is safe to assume that such ideas serve a functional, practical purpose as well as something more idealistic and transformative. Indeed, K talked quite a bit more about the lengths she went to downsize her household. By giving away or “re-homing” items, and by other means, K reduced her personal belongings and possessions down to only what is essential to have in her household and such items that are meaningful to her (what she described as her “statement pieces”). Anything one buys has to conform to this standard—even the RV itself! Such decisions on excess have to be made when you live as an RV/vanlifer but the reward is a far more simple and convenient living space.

¹⁹ H told me to avoid the diesel Mercedes-Benz Sprinter model in favour of the similar Ford gasoline model (the Transit series) of light commercial vehicle/commercial van. This author has received no paid or unpaid sponsorship from any automobile manufacturer and thus has no preference to any particular model or brand.

This tendency to sever oneself from non-stop consumerism may be worth further study by future researchers on this subject—particularly those interested in studying the context of a clash or pluralistic coexistence between certain ideas of moral worthiness (inspired, domestic, tradition, industrial, etc.) against market values of moral worthiness that tend to favour such consumerism and profit-oriented productivity. It may also be worth it to explore where and how environmental concerns fit into this matter.



Figure 3. (Left): Space is a premium in K's RV lifestyle and must be maximized. Only the most beloved toys and shoes are held onto while the rest are re-homed to others. (Right): Some of K's most valued personal possessions are kept in a single display area in living room. Souvenirs from her life overseas, potted plants, her best books and a nice painting.



Figure 4. A wide view of K's RV home kitchen area. With limited space, everything must be kept clean and clear. Most major types of appliances are included in RV's design.

Community & Family

Another key theme that was discovered was the importance and value put by my participants was on family and community—perhaps to an extent that is even greater than one typically sees in modern static home dwelling. There was an emphasis by participants on close-knit ties that one has towards neighbours and community, quality interactions with the people in your life (good friends, close neighbours), and, above all, great emphasis on the importance of quality time with family members. In my interview with K, she described the kind of relationship with neighbours that she experienced in living in a basement rental suite versus when she transitioned to living full-time in an RV. In a rental situation, K describes how thin connections with neighbours are even if you have lived alongside them for years. H and K's experience in the RV community is close-knit and knowing and growing relationships with your neighbours and other members of the neighbourhood is critical for newcomers. These close ties enable sharing knowledge and experience in living and maintaining an RV as well as more direct assistance from other RV/vanlifers. As mentioned earlier, H, despite his personal reservations about putting himself out publicly as a source of know-how, nevertheless contributes to the sense of neighbourliness²⁰ in RV/vanlifer community through the help he gives. In a

²⁰ Although not strictly limited to direct neighbours in a locality. It appears more limited to the general Metro Vancouver area.

sense, the RV/van lifestyle that my participants described to me seems to have been able to preserve the sense of community that many in static housing (rental or owner) seem to have lost in the age of neoliberal indifference and transience—if only out of the need for it in order to survive. Indeed, it's because of the friendships she has built that K has been able to secure pads for herself and her children. Similarly, H also emphasized in my interview with him about how any career or life decision he makes ultimately serves his desire to spend time with and develop his relationship with his children (whom sometimes stay with him in his RV) and others close to him (a few good friends). H worked hard, saved, and when given the choice as COVID-19 started, chose his family and retired early:

"I don't work anymore, I stopped working last year in April. I threw my tools down. [audio distortion]--I was making good money too. I was, I had a life-changing, uh, episode. Like I, living a good life, I've divorced from my first wife and I had two kids. Which I've shared custody. And then, when COVID hit, my ex messaged: "It was just not safe", my ex messaged me: "It's COVID, I'm not gonna send the kids." And honestly my life flashed in front of me. And I just went with this manic—I just became unstable and I'm like "I worked so hard, I accumulated this property, and I can't even see my kids?" And then I just said "F this" and threw my tools down, I have the cash flow coming in and I go "What do I need to work for?"

Certainly, the values on community and neighbours emphasized by RV/vanlifers like H and K are factors in their decisions. However, these values are by no means utopian. There is some friction and irritation that comes with such close living and contact with neighbours—specifically backbiting and small-minded gossip filtering back towards you. K asserts that such downsides do not bother her given the upsides. Similarly, H described to me an episode that resulted from him reaching out to help another RV/vanlifer which led him to break off contact with the person as they began to butt heads over the job they needed help with. It seems to me that a close-knit, community with strong ties can be as much of a curse as it is a blessing—interpersonal differences do not simply evaporate and there is still a need for setting boundaries (if not with walls but with rules and personal preferences). Based on my interviews with RV/vanlifers and from academic literature, stigmas against families and single parents with children are as present in RV/vanlifers as they are among static renters despite any official, public statements and representations to the contrary.

Navigation of Stigma

Another theme encountered in the analysis of RV/vanlifer interviews was the impact and prominence of navigating the legal and social stigmas that accompany living in an RV regardless of what type of RV/vandweller you are. As mentioned previously in the literature review, stigmas against RV/vandwellers and mobile/manufactured home dwellers in general are significant across various (neoliberal) contexts. Among my participants, there is an ongoing struggle to navigate this stigma around the RV/vandwelling lifestyle and the legal obstacles often encountered in the process of living and working while being an RV/vanlifer. Although I have grouped these two concepts together into a single theme, they do not always necessarily overlap with each other. Nevertheless, stigma and law tend to overlap in the lives my participants such as when it comes to tenancy rights.

H described to me his experiences—both first and second hand—of having to deal with the stigma of living in an RV. Although his family is supportive of him,²¹ some friends of H's brother expressed shock and disapproval at the sight of H's RV parked quite visibly in a lot in a very nice neighbourhood (not knowing that it belonged to H, the brother of their friend). Although H emphasized his self-assurance and will to resist such stigma, he nevertheless told me about the embarrassment his brother felt about H during this episode—highlighting how such stigma affects not only the target of stigma but also others in their social and family circle. H talked a bit more directly about the social stigma and its origins—which he aims directly at television and other representations of mobile homes in popular culture²² for creating a negative image of RV/vanlifers and mobile home dwellers (in zoned, static residential parks featuring manufactured housing) in general. He emphasizes that quite a lot of “normal”, clean-cut, working people with well-kept homes live in this manner—they are certainly not all drug addicts living in messy junked-out trailer homes.²³

²¹ It would have been interesting to hear out their perspectives as well as from family members and friends of other RV/vanlifers.

²² He specifically calls out a movie he called “Trailer Park Trash” but I don't know if he is referring to the mockumentary comedy series “Trailer Park Boys” or some other intellectual property.

²³ Not that there is anything inherently wrong with responsible drug use or messiness. Drug addiction is a health issue that should be approached with reason and compassion, not prejudice or criminality. Messiness is similarly subjective.

For K, the navigation of social stigma (discrimination, disapproval, and exclusion of a certain person or group) and law (government regulations and their enforcement) has been an ongoing struggle against uneven power dynamics from her days as a static renter to a fully-fledged RV/vanlifer. Although they are often considered separate concepts, in the context of RV/vanlife, they overlap in some parts of my participants' lived experiences. Like H, K expressed her pride in her home and her decision to live full-time in an RV and break free of the struggles encountered in static rental housing. As mentioned earlier, K has experienced stigma as a single parent of young children both when she was a static renter and when she became an RV/vanlifer. This stigma exists in combination with the lop-sided power dynamics that tenants (especially static rentals) face. K described to me how she, as a renter, felt being treated as if she was "subhuman" and not deserving of equal treatment compared to her landlords, particularly in the eyes of the province's privacy commissioner and tenancy board. There is certainly a broader discussion to be had about stigmas and what sort of moral worthiness is ascribed regarding who owns or doesn't own real estate/landed property—particularly when it comes to market (property/rental income) versus civic (citizen/human) ideas of the moral worth of a renter. It is ironic that such stigma may be reduced (albeit replaced by other stigmas) by abandoning rental tenancy for living in an RV. A RV/vanlifer on a campground quite literally has fewer to no tenancy rights under the law with certain exceptions to a very select few long-term tenants being exempted from 6 month occupancy limits by bylaw officials (which speaks to how much stronger, clearer, and re-balanced tenancy rights are needed in British Columbia and elsewhere). Even more ironic is how K describes her term as a static renter as feeling "homeless". There is certainly room for further study of the relationship the law has with RV/vanlifers. Especially interesting would be a study regarding the limits the law provides for the RV/van lifestyle and the permitted uses and characteristics the law proscribes for these types of wheeled homes. I will discuss more specifics on their legal encounters in the section on the differences between participants so as not to be repetitive. But suffice it to say, RV/vanlifers like H and K certainly have to perform a careful balancing act in order to maintain their lifestyle.

Additionally, K, like H, also expresses a willingness to resist the stigma around RV/van lifestyle with a narrative that she's developed on the matter. For K, in this

increasingly restrictive and expensive housing market, she claims she has an advantage living in her RV over other tenants and renters in the region:

“I’m not interested in living with anyone else. When people would speak to me about—cause I had spoke with people that I’m going to buy an RV, “This is what I’m going to do”, people felt that it was like a step down. That I was moving into a vehicle. I didn’t see it that way, I see it as my form of empowerment. So many people that I know are living with a roommate. And if their roommate bails on them with rent and they can’t make their rent, it’s such an unfortunate situation. So who has the upper hand? Me living in a vehicle, if you wanna call it that, it’s more like a condo on wheels, or the person living with their parents or the person living with their roommate or the person living with their spouse that they wanted to divorce but they can’t because of financial reasons? Who has the upper hand? I would say I do. I don’t consider it a vulnerability as much as I consider it an empowerment.”

That’s a bold statement to make—one that certainly challenges or runs counter to mainstream social and cultural views on the subject. K makes a strong case for this assessment based on her own experiences. It is not unthinkable to predict that similar narratives that flip or reverse the stigma might be playing out among other members of the RV/vanlifer community. That said, the advantages of living this way are mostly in the short term and participants made it clear to me that this is the case. Moreover, they are thinking and planning for much further into the future, whether it be for a more permanent living situation or something else that enhances their career and position in life.

Higher aspirations: safety, order, and hard work

As alluded to earlier, H discussed the stereotypical and negative media portrayal of some RV/vanlifers and mobile home dwellers generally. Certainly this assertion would not be out of line with what is portrayed in most media and narratives on these groups of people—typically associated with messy, dirty homes and delinquent or criminogenic lifestyles, addiction, and other symptoms of societal decay. These stigmas and negative attitudes are well known in academic research on these groups (see Literature Review). There are other, more romanticized narratives, particularly strong on social media, of the RV/vanlifer (#vanlife) phenomenon as an adventurous, fun, and free lifestyle embraced by many an outdoorsy millennial (Andrews, 2019) (Monroe, 2017). In a sense, this romantic #vanlife narrative seems like a 21st century echo of the idea of the hippie

backpacker. It might be an echo that may not necessarily be more truthful or helpful than the negative one and that does not necessarily allow for a deeper, more human understanding of RV/vanlifers and what they want from the world they live in. Probably the most fascinating theme that was uncovered from this analysis of RV/vandwellers featured the real and higher aspirations and life goals that they have that are not often discussed or considered when talking about these people. Moreover, these aspirations may not be completely foreign to static home dwellers and might overlap frequently with the desires and aspirations of the traditional homeowner as well.

Contrary to more negative narratives and assumptions about RV/vanlifers as well as to the nomadic assumptions of the #vanlife social media narrative, participants expressed the desire to live sedentarily, with their movable homes, in areas that are aesthetically pleasing and orderly. My participants shared with me negative attitudes and stigmas toward certain cities and neighbourhoods that wouldn't be disagreed with by many a static homeowner or static renter. Additionally, there exists among RV/vanlifers significant concerns and fears about crime and a desire for safe and secure places to live, not unlike those of many a traditional homeowner and renter. K expressed to me her disdain for living in Surrey²⁴ and told me she favoured suburban and rural areas like Chilliwack, Tsawwassen (Delta), and Hope. H expressed similar preferences about certain places, for him those closer to ocean scenery, like Spanish Banks and Jericho (both in Vancouver), Ladner (in Delta), Richmond, and Burnaby over Surrey and Surrey's eastern rural neighbour Langley. Even when it comes to a choice of RV parks, there are similar preferences to H that K shared with me. Parks with lots that are large with plenty of personal space between RVs and which have adequate tree cover (which adds to the aesthetic quality of the space) are preferred to overcrowded, gravel lots with little to make the space enjoyable. These are certainly standards that most people, regardless of the type of housing they live in, would find understandable and relatable. K further expressed to me a desire to eventually be in a position, essentially like H, to continue to live in her own RV but on land that she owns. Sure, she would get less of the immediate support that would be available to her from other RV/vanlifers but as a landowner and homeowner she would achieve a stable permanence in her living situation. Some examples of support K would get from other experienced RV/vanlifers

²⁴ In addition to enacting bylaws unfavourable to RV/vanlifers, Surrey has garnered an unfortunate reputation in Metro Vancouver as a site of crime and gang activity.

include help fixing her septic system, changing the kitchen stove's propane tank, starting the generator during power outages, and effectively insulating the RV for the winter months. H, meanwhile, has given some support struggling RV/vanlifers who ask for help on the local RV/vanlife forum²⁵ with broken or faulty electrical systems in their RVs. As mentioned previously, H prefers to give this help if it makes a long-term difference to the person he's helping. With K's own imagined patch of land, she would still be able to move elsewhere if she wanted to but she would have a settled home base. The desire for a more settled, practical existence does not fit into the more romantic narrative that emphasizes the nomadic aspect of RV/vanlife.

With regards to crime and safety, participants expressed concerns about crime and their desire to live in neighbourhoods that are safe to live in—certainly not the impression one would get from narratives that characterize RV/vanlifers and other inhabitants of manufactured homes as being associated with or tolerant of crime. K told me about her experiences of living in different RV parks as a child versus those she lives in as an adult. As a child, she saw first-hand parks that were bad places to be in, indeed, ones that matched the negative stereotypes. One in particular, called the Town & Country Motel Trailer Park, K described as being an “awful, awful cesspool” with drug-dealing, open prostitution, and other crime. She seemed quite relieved and satisfied to report that that place and the other bad parks she lived in have been completely demolished. As an adult, K has been able to choose safer and more secure parks for her and her kids to live in. Indeed, K told me that she was quite happy with the place where she lived at the time of our interview. She characterized it as having no issues with theft and crime, although she does have a security camera installed on her vehicle in case these issues do come up. This is understandable, given what she experienced growing up. H talked about crime and safety as well. He told me that RV/vanlifers and other drivers ought to be cautious in or completely avoid some parts of Downtown Vancouver because of the risk of being victims of break-ins and theft. H told me that he personally has not been broken into because of how many tools he keeps visible in his vehicle. This communicates to would-be thieves that he's a working person that's not worth stealing from. H didn't really talk about crime and safety issues as much as K did and I wish I had

²⁵ This forum is mostly restricted to RV/vanlifers already living in the Metro Vancouver area and who are comfortable using electronic communication. The forum may not necessarily be the only means that RV/vanlifers communicate or build relationships with each other but this is beyond the scope of my own research.

asked him more on that—particularly about threats to his RV (the vehicle with tools was his car for work) and anything he may have heard second-hand from other RV/vanlifers. Still, safety and crime seem to be a concern for him and not something that H appears to welcome.

One could argue that these concerns about crime and community safety are perhaps even more significant than those of residents of traditional static housing when you take into consideration the structural differences between static housing and RVs. The walls of RVs are not necessarily as thick and their doors not necessarily as sturdy as those of static housing. With a more limited number of possessions, RV/vanlifers have proportionally much more to lose and damage from theft by break-in or vandalism, never mind theft of the home itself.²⁶ That does not take into account the fact that some RV/vanlifers live in their homes with their families and children. Others may be older and less physically able to resist or protect themselves from criminality.²⁷ Indeed, it can be argued that RV/vanlifers have even more of an incentive for their living space to be crime-free and orderly than static housing dwellers—something that more negative narratives fail to take into consideration.

Additionally, there is a noticeable entrepreneurial streak (possibly related to the previous theme of the desire for independence) among participants that would run counter to certain stereotypes of RV/vandwellers—indeed to a level that would align these people with static housing dwellers and perhaps even with, to a certain extent, market values of moral worthiness that favour economic productivity. H, although recently retired to spend more time with his family, has had a career as a successful, productive tradesman and business owner. He talked at length with me about how he transitioned away from working for an employer to striking out on his own and starting his own firm to compete in the construction and renovation market, thereby becoming his own boss and building his own business. Even in retirement he is not idle as he still offers his services from time to time.²⁸ The last word one would choose to describe H is “unproductive”. Indeed, he seems to embody the very hard-working, entrepreneurial spirit that a market framework of moral worthiness demands. K, although much earlier in

²⁶ A vehicle is much easier to steal than a two-storey condominium.

²⁷ The closely-knit neighbourly ties between RV/vanlifers may serve as a security function.

²⁸ H didn't clarify if he offered his services for free or for payment.

her career than H, likewise embodies such an entrepreneurial spirit. K works part-time (due in part to having to care for her children) for her own small business and is currently taking online business courses to prepare and plan a strategy to start a more lucrative business venture—one that can allow her to be more sustainable on her own. Likewise, K has taken courses at the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) in law enforcement studies for a potential change to a law enforcement career, although she had to withdraw from the program in order to fulfill family and other work obligations. These are certainly stances that do not fit with the two main cultural and media narratives about RV/vanlifers. I would not say that what I found necessarily occupies a space between the stigmatized and romantic narratives, but it definitely is more grounded in actual human experience and desire and is worth further exploration in future research.

Participant Differences

Income, Class, Skill

There are some notable differences that I was able to discern from these interviews. As mentioned earlier, there are important class distinctions between the two participants. An example of how this class distinction manifests itself is in the ability to provide support and mutual aid to other members of the community. There are those who typically are the recipients of this assistance, by virtue of not being in a position to offer it to others, and those who are typically the providers of such assistance because they are in a position to do so.

H was able to retire relatively earlier in life and this could be due, in part, to his career as a professional tradesman in which he was able to use his acquired skills to earn a higher level of income. This income (combined with frugal decisions in his younger years such as driving a cheaper, reliable car rather than something more expensive and indicating higher status) provided him with the financial security that allowed him to enter the real estate market and to purchase his own landed property. Secure in his position and now free from having to pay rent to a landlord, H lives relatively comfortably and is able to offer other RV/vanlifers assistance and advice on motor vehicle repair and maintenance at his pleasure.

K, on the other hand, is still in the work force and earns a lower level of income than H previously did. She does not own any real estate or landed property, and does not expect to inherit any, coming from a family with few means. Throughout her adult life, K has had to pay rent or other fees to secure living accommodations for herself and her young family. She is still in the process of building and developing her professional skill set which, for now, limits her employment options. Yet her resourcefulness and careful long-term planning may yet bear future fruit. Nevertheless, K is on the receiving end of support from friends and neighbours, particularly from more seasoned veterans of RV/vanlife who provide her help and knowledge of maintaining, repair and other assistance she needs living in her RV. In a sense, K's current situation appears to mirror H's experience when he was younger (although numerous other factors are at play).

However, this class/income-based distinction is not the only factor that dictates the likelihood of whether one may offer support and mutual aid or receive it. Other observed factors include age-related experience (e.g. having lived as a vandweller for longer), knowledge (e.g. knows how to repair a vehicle), location (e.g. is a neighbour or is close by), and personality (e.g. is more private/closed-off to outsiders). Furthermore, this is a general distinction that is reliant on information that has been provided to me by participants.²⁹

Age and Family situation

Without getting too specific for obvious privacy reasons, there are some differences between participants in terms of age and family situation. K is an effectively single mother in her early 30s raising two small children (both boys under 10 years of age). She lives with her children in her RV where she cares for them full time as her spouse is unable to due to convalescence. Whereas, H is divorced, is older (mid-40s) and only cares for his children (whom are of opposite sex and are adolescents) part time because of shared custody with his ex-spouse.³⁰ These two participants, though both living in RVs, are separated by age and are in very different situations with regards to

²⁹ Anything more than that would require collecting personal information that would violate research ethics; also I am not an accountant.

³⁰ An important clarification that I wish to make is that despite the age difference between these two individuals, both have previous experience living in RVs before their current situation. For K, it was as a minor living with parents. For H, it was for temporary purposes due to housing construction.

family life. One, though still legally married³¹, cannot rely on spousal support and takes on the full load of care whereas the other is able to share this burden with his ex-spouse.

Furthermore, the age of children should also be taken into account. Although parenting and caring for adolescents is by no means easy (especially given emotional needs that accompany puberty and watching for behavioural warning signs), adolescents, compared to young children (10 years and under), are generally capable of independence for short amounts of time and for certain tasks assuming no developmental issues. Additionally, adolescents are often in the care of school systems for much of the day, week, and year, giving parents time to rest and work. Young children, less-developed, are a lot more care-intensive, and school systems only cover part of this age group (the rest of which remains to be covered by parents and guardians themselves; affordable and convenient daycare services are not always available). Specific family arrangements among RV/vandwellers can further multiply such advantages and/or disadvantages between them.

RV situation

Likewise, there are also important differences between participants in terms of how their RV is set up and situated. In K's case, her RV (a towed bunkhouse with several rooms) is located on a RV campground (fitting the initially desired category this study aimed to look at) where she lives with her children and to which they return after work and school are finished for the day. Although using the campground as her residence, she is not, technically-speaking, a "tenant" of the campground. Rather than a true tenancy agreement (which she has signed before when she was renting static homes), K signs a short term agreement to license a "pad" to park her RV and connect to utilities all for a monthly fee. As part of this agreement, she must vacate after a few months (in Surrey, no later than 6 months) and is not covered by any sort of protections against eviction that would be the case if she signed an actual tenancy agreement. To secure an RV pad, K has to vigorously advocate for herself and, if possible, have friends already living in the campground advocate on her behalf in order to get a spot. Having children presents further challenges as few RV parks are inclined or willing to let children stay. Meanwhile, H's RV is set-up in the back area of a property that he owns. The

³¹ At the time of interview. As mentioned in earlier footnote that status has since changed.

property contains a static residential house (that H himself built) that he rents out and receives utilities (eg. water, power, communications, etc.) from. Since H owns his own property, he is not at risk of eviction and any issues that he has to put up with are those presumably shared by other property owners and landlords (such as building maintenance, property taxes, zoning, etc.). Since his primary residence is still on the property that he rents out, H could hardly be described as a traditional absentee landlord.³² Nevertheless, compared to K and likely other RV/vandwellers, H's RV living situation is a fairly secure one.

Types of Legal Encounters

There are also some important differences between these two participants in terms what kind of encounters with the law (federal, provincial, municipal) that they have had in their respective situations. This is not to say that this is the entirety of what they encounter but these are the types of encounters they thought significant enough to share with me in my research. For H, the types of encounters and concerns that he shared with me are primarily in the realm of parking and zoning (land-use). Specifically, the encounters with government agencies that H has or has had in the past usually involve parking infractions and parking tickets³³ or actions, in the form of a written letter and setting up a time to view the site, taken by the city in response to complaints (typically via the justification of being against zoning regulations). Interestingly, H explains that in his experience the city closes the file if no one is living at the site at the time of viewing and will dismiss it as a “BS” complaint—giving, somewhat, the benefit of the doubt towards those accused of zoning infractions. This appears consistent with how cities in the Lower Mainland appear to behave because of the limits of what the city is allowed to do and how much hard enforcement and investigation is worth for such a minor alleged infraction.³⁴

Indeed, what H has shared with me intersects with ideas of the right of passage³⁵ as outlined by urban studies scholars such as Nicholas Blomley. Specifically, there is

³² He could be described as a “presentee landlord”

³³ Interestingly, he describes these tickets as being issued to the vehicle itself and not to the people in the vehicle.

³⁴ Unfortunately, H did not provide further details about his encounters.

³⁵ Not to be confused with Arnold van Gennep's “rite of passage”.

legal and administrative precedent (common law) for the blockage of passageways and thoroughfares as nuisances against public order, the state's economic regime, and public circulation (Blomley, 2011, 22-23; 118-119). Physical objects such as inappropriately parked motor vehicles could, therefore, be considered public nuisances. Cities and local governments have a duty to keep thoroughfares free from obstruction and could be liable for damages for breaching this duty (Blomley, 2011, 120-121).

K has faced different kinds of encounters with the legal system. Living in an RV has put her on the radar of housing and family authorities, specifically BC Housing—the provincial housing management authority in British Columbia³⁶. According to K, living in her RV with her two children comes with certain requirements in terms of rooming arrangements for families. Parents and children must have bedrooms separate from each other and from the central living space. Since her children are of the same sex, they are allowed to share a bedroom. I asked K how the situation would be if, instead of two sons, she had had one son and one daughter. She replied that she would need an additional bedroom because children of different sexes are not supposed to share a bedroom after a certain age³⁷. Prior to moving into her RV, K had to research what the legal stipulations were so that she could purchase an RV that complies with these regulations—leading her to select a bunkhouse-type RV with her bedroom at one end (with a door), her sons' on the other with the kitchen, bathrooms and front room in-between. Although K cites these requirements as set by BC Housing, they are ultimately derived from the National Occupation Standard (NOS) developed by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). Provincial housing agencies such as BC Housing were consulted with by CMHC during the 1980s prior to establishing these requirements. The specific stipulations that K refers to as being required would be:

*“Parents in a one-parent family, of any age, have a separate bedroom.”,
“Household members under 18 years old of the same sex share a bedroom
- except parents in a one-parent family and those living as part of a married
or common-law couple.”*

And:

³⁶ BC Housing regulates and enforces housing standards even if it does not provide the housing that one lives in. I was unable to find a precise date for their creation although it was likely during the 1980s when the National Occupation Standard (NOS) was developed in consultation with provincial authorities like BC Housing.

³⁷ Putting a time limit on how long a RV would be appropriate to use given the age of children.

“Household members under 5 years old of the opposite sex share a bedroom if doing so would reduce the number of required bedrooms. This situation would arise only in households with an odd number of males under 18, an odd number of females under 18, and at least one female and one male under the age of 5.” (Statistics Canada, 2021).³⁸



Figure 5. (Left): K’s two children share a room but sleep separately in different bunks. This maximizes space available for play and allows K to comply with housing regulations. Bedding neatly folded. (Right): View of hallway leading to K’s bedroom. It is separate from her children’s bedroom and central living space in compliance with housing regulations.

As demanding as these requirements are, they are the same stipulations, K says, that she had to meet when she was living in a basement suite apartment in static housing previously. It is a curious contradiction that, although K and other RV/vandwellers are recognized by BC Housing as needing to follow the same legal regulations as for static homes, they are not necessarily recognized as needing the same legal protections as applied (however inadequately and in need of significant

³⁸ Although these standards were created BC Housing and the CMHC, they are published via Statistics Canada’s website.

overhaul they may be) to tenants in static housing. There is an important difference between what is the *official* definition of housing or shelter (such as that stipulated by various codes and standards such as the aforementioned CMHC National Occupation Standards) and more colloquial or abstract ideas of what having a “home” is. That is, a “home” is not necessarily fixed in place, not necessarily made of brick and mortar, and not necessarily the same as having a “shelter”, “house” or “household” (Douglas, 1991, 289).

Visitors and social interactions

One last difference between these participants is in terms of visitors and social gatherings. K has no major issues with inviting visitors over and regularly has friends and family over to her RV. H, meanwhile, is more reserved with regards to having visitors over, stating, “it’s not really a place you kinda, like, invite people to hang out really. Right?”. This may be connected to social stigmas attached to RV/vandwelling and this is certainly an area where more research opportunities may lie.

City Documents

This section discusses my project’s findings from examining policy documents created by the City of Surrey. Although it is important to examine the real, human aspect of RV/vanlife, it is also important to examine the more abstract, governmental perspective contained within government-produced policy documents and reports. Much social science research studies “down” when examining societal issues. There is not enough studying “up” by looking into the operations of public institutions (e.g., city governments) that hold the authority to enact and enforce³⁹ policies (bylaws) that impact the lives and narratives of those “down” on the receiving end of these policies. “Studying down” or “studying up”, is a metaphorical distinction that potentially underscores the power imbalance between the researcher and the research subject. Too often when a researcher studies “down” that means their research focuses on people who lack some advantage that the researcher has (such as age, gender, class, race, etc) and being “hard to reach” or opting not to co-operate with researchers that are studying them may

³⁹ For Surrey, that would be the city’s Bylaw and Licensing Services department which issues tickets and other legal notices.

constitute a form of resistance or challenge to this power imbalance (Bowman, 2009, 5-6). Meanwhile, studying “up” means it’s the researcher who is more likely to be disadvantaged compared to the research subject (who, again, may have more power due to age, gender, class, race, the researcher being an outsider to the organization, etc.) (Bowman, 2009, 2-3).⁴⁰ By studying city documents that propose new bylaw amendments, I am “looking up” at and studying government. Government institutions (federal, provincial, municipal) have much more power than I, a private citizen, possess. Such government power includes the ability to draft, pass, and enforce bylaws and regulations which members of the public in general and RV/vanlifers in particular have to comply with.

In this section, I will proceed from studying the circumstances of those on the receiving end of government policy to the source of this policy to see what narratives of moral worthiness are occurring there. The type of government documents I was interested in were what are called “corporate reports”⁴¹, which are the final result of research done by city staff in order to provide municipal councils with the information and context needed to make informed policy decisions. Typically, these reports also include draft proposals (which are to be voted on) for new bylaws and/or amendments to existing bylaws. The documents I received through a Freedom of Information Act (FOI) request to the City of Surrey, are two corporate reports presented to Surrey Council in the fall of 2019. The authorship of these reports is not completely clear. Although they are credited to and presented to council by the city’s general managers (in this case, Rob Costanzo of Corporate Services and Scott Neuman of Engineering), this does not mean that the managers alone were responsible for researching and creating these reports—they supervise and direct the department staff that do this work but also “sign-off” and take responsibility for the finished product.⁴²

The first document, titled “*Corporate Report: Amendments to the Highway and Traffic Bylaw, 1997, No. 13007. (No. R198)*”, was completed on October 17th and

⁴⁰ There are other directions of study such as “sideways” which involves the researcher looking at themselves or their peers (Bowman, 2009, 7) or “through” which looks more at how power creates webs and relations between actors, institutions, discourses (Bowman, 2009, 8).

⁴¹ This is a common naming practice used by municipalities across Metro Vancouver.

⁴² Not unlike how TV and film credit the producers and directors first. But their success depends on the writers, actors, and crew they lead.

presented to Council on the 21st that same month, suggested amendments be made to Surrey's *Highway and Traffic Bylaw* along with information surrounding the rationale for such bylaw changes. These amendments would prohibit "Large Vehicles" from being occupied while parked on municipal roads between the hours of 10:00 pm and 6:00 am. The term "Large Vehicles" was explicitly stated in the report to include recreational vehicles and campers where previously it was used to describe commercial vehicles (such as container trucks). Furthermore, such Large Vehicles would be prohibited from being parked adjacent to public parks, schools, churches (and other places of worship presumably) or residences beyond 3 hours between 6:00 am and 10:00 pm, and that they be prohibited from being occupied while parked during that time. Previously, the bylaw permitted some Large Vehicles to park on City roads for up to 72 hours continuously with no restrictions on overnight parking (except those with a gross vehicle weight of 5000 kilograms which are prohibited completely from parking on residential streets and between 7:00 pm to 7:00 am on any other street) (City of Surrey, October 2019).

The second report, dated October 31st and titled "*Corporate Report: Amendments to the Highway and Traffic By-law, 1997, No. 13007 and Surrey Bylaw Notice Enforcement Bylaw, 2016, No. 18691. (No. R209)*", was presented to Surrey Council on November 4th, 2019. This report was created after the first report led to increased scrutiny by local news media and criticism from housing and poverty advocates such as Mike Musgrove (whose objections I mentioned earlier) of the Surrey Urban Mission. According to Musgrove, the proposal was ill-timed because new public housing projects, which would relieve some pressure on the housing crisis and absorb some of these displaced people, hadn't started construction yet. This was in stark contrast to the city of Squamish, a city facing much higher incidences of people living in vehicles, whose district council was quickly reviewing plans to create and set aside new areas for people to park and camp rather than banning them outright (Zeidler, October 20, 2019). Indeed, even members of Surrey Council raised objections to the new bylaw with Councillor Brenda Locke raising the point that the phenomenon was connected to a larger housing shortage and Councillor Linda Annis stating that Council shouldn't be amending bylaws that puts the city's most vulnerable people at risk. Two other

councillors, Hundial and Pettigrew, voted against the measure also (Wood, 2019).⁴³ This report was much longer and contained several additional sections in the “Discussion” portion of the report regarding public complaints received about Large Vehicles, potential impacts to Surrey’s homeless population, potential impacts to Surrey’s tourism industry and recreational vehicle owners. The report included some proposed amendments to the *Bylaw Notice Enforcement Bylaw* that would enable tickets to be issued for violations of the *Highway and Traffic Bylaw* amendments, which had not been included in the first report (City of Surrey, November 2019). The amendments, despite the concerns raised by community advocates and some members of city government, were passed by Surrey City Council in a 5-4 margin (Wood, 2019).

With such technical, legalistic language and a much smaller amount of material, the examination of these municipal documents produced something that feels a lot thinner and less vibrant compared to the participant interviews. This is not to say there aren’t connections that can be drawn between interviews and government documents, but rather to note that these are formatted differently despite being responses to the same phenomena. Nevertheless, I made some interesting observations while examining these formally written materials—which have such impact and power over human lives. Indeed, some themes emerged that were common to both documents. Notably, the documents prioritize certain values and uses of public infrastructure and automobiles. Additionally, the documents stress the importance that compliance with these regulations is voluntary and with enforcement that uses minimal force or coercion:

“Consistent with all Bylaw service interactions, staff provides the owner/occupant of the Large Vehicle with information related to the parking of Large Vehicles and works to gain voluntary compliance. Bylaw enforcement and ticketing in this regard is entirely discretionary and not used unless absolutely necessary.” (City of Surrey, November 2019);

“The City's response to unlawfully parked Large Vehicles will continue to vary depending on the occupant's individual circumstances. Issuance of tickets, towing and impounding Large Vehicles will be considered only after efforts at voluntary compliance have failed. This response is consistent with

⁴³ For historical and personal context respectively, this was around a month and a half before the first known cases of COVID-19 were discovered in Wuhan, China (mid-to-late December 2019) and around 2 months before RV/vanlifers really caught my attention as a focus of my project after watching a news story about RV park evictions in CTV News (around late January or early February 2020). Things change quickly don’t they?

the enforcement practices of other Lower Mainland municipalities.” (City of Surrey, October 2019)

The authors of these documents seem to be trying to prevent a potentially oppressive situation by making obedience to the new bylaws a choice rather than an order. At the same time, there was a noticeable difference in the content of these documents as the very framework of how they respond to the issue changes. The language and discussion in the first report is more exclusionary about who is a member of the “public”. The first report describes people living in Large Vehicles as “occupants” meanwhile those living in static housing as “residents” (City of Surrey, October 2019). Meanwhile, the second report’s language and discussion attempts to be more inclusive by addressing potential impacts of these bylaw amendments on the homeless, Large Vehicle owners, and tourist sectors of the city. Indeed, the second report starts referring to those living in Large Vehicles as “individuals” or “homeless residents” instead of simply “occupants” (City of Surrey, November 2019). I suspect that this linguistic change may be linked to the public/media scrutiny that followed the first report.

Common themes within city documents:

Certain uses and values are prioritized

Within both of these documents, it is clear that the drafters of these reports prioritize and focus only on very specific uses of public infrastructure (roads, thoroughfares, etc.) and automobiles they classify as “Large Vehicles”. This emphasis is often presented more through action and practical effect rather than explicit justification—that is, they don’t just say outright that a use is preferred because of “x” reason of morality, they simply set the rules using technocratic and legal language:

“Large Vehicles excludes vehicles designed primarily for the conveyance of passengers that have a seating capacity not exceeding 9 people, an overall height not exceeding 2.2 m and an overall length not exceeding 6.4 m.” (City of Surrey, October 2019)

Such language, however, may be an indicator of underlying ideas of value and moral worthiness (such as industrial worth) permitting only certain uses (such as transportation, asset storage, and other commercial activity that does not disrupt or damage the efficient flow of the government’s infrastructure system) and any underlying

idea of moral worth can be deduced by the result and by knowing what sort of responsibilities these departments have that would make them have this emphasis.

For instance, the first report describes in its discussion section some exceptions that would apply to the proposed bylaw amendments. Large Vehicles⁴⁴ (LVs) not exceeding a certain size⁴⁵ that are parked on roads next to premises used for business, public parks, schools, churches or residences, and engaged in public service calls such as maintenance service or as part of construction sites are exempt from LV parking restrictions.⁴⁶ By its own stated exemptions, the bylaw places value on Large Vehicles involved in maintaining city infrastructure (as it should) but also on Large Vehicles that are engaged in economic/business activity. These exceptions fit well with a municipality's responsibility to maintain circulation by preventing nuisances that disrupt this free flow of traffic and supporting the state/Crown's economic regime (Blomley, 22-23; 118-119). But this does mean that there is no value attached to Large Vehicles that are not engaged in some type of business activity if they are not part of the city's own LV fleet or those of its contractors—thus excluding Large Vehicles used for residence. City streets are for temporary use only by Large Vehicles and any exceptions must be of a particular category of use of the vehicle.

Additionally, the wording of report suggests a very particular value that is assigned to a Large Vehicles based on how they are used. A Large Vehicle, though still allowed to be parked even with the new bylaw restrictions, is prohibited from being occupied while being parked. As such, the Large Vehicle, when parked is valued not as a potential living space but specifically as a stored asset only—presumably while the owner/operator is off attending to some other business. Most notably, the amendments further prohibit Large Vehicles from parking between the hours of 10 pm and 6 am without exceptions. Although, this could be explained as a measure to prevent traffic incidents caused by blocked roads at night, these are also the hours of the day when humans normally sleep—typically in their main domicile. No doubt this prohibition also serves to put pressure on LV owners (if they do use their vehicle as a place to sleep) to move in order to avoid a particularly rude awakening (by bylaw enforcement officials).

⁴⁴ This is the specific term used by the city.

⁴⁵ Not exceeding a licensed gross vehicle weight of 5000 kilograms and an overall length of 6.4 metres.

⁴⁶ No parking for more than 3 hours between 6 am and 10 pm.

This evaluation is, however, specific to LVs parked on city streets. When parked elsewhere the wording of the reports is not always inflexible—which leads me to the next part that covers LVs parked in tourist facilities.

It must be made clear, that these reports do *not* say that Large Vehicles such as recreational vehicles and camper vans (except those used for business or public service) have no value or moral worth beyond the matter of where they are *not* allowed to be or exist in the city. The second report provides some clear suggestions as to where Large Vehicles belong when they are not performing their conventional, expected use. For either housing or tourism purposes and both long- and short-term stays, the city report states that RV facilities and campgrounds both in Surrey and other parts of the Lower Mainland are the appropriate place for these vehicles to be rather than on city streets. It is interesting to note that the report encourages the use of privately-owned facilities and campgrounds without mentioning (the albeit rather few) publicly/municipally-owned facilities such as Surrey's own Dogwood Campground. This suggestion might reflect that there are more private facilities available to absorb LV's than public ones. All that being said, the city places a certain moral worth on Large Vehicles—even those occupied by RV/vanlifers. Primarily, Large Vehicles' worth is tied to customers and contributors to the local recreational vehicle and tourism industry rather than as a source of housing or as a temporary measure in maintaining social stability while more housing is built.

Choice, compliance and minimal force

Another feature that appears frequently throughout the documents is the assumption of choice—that is, there is an emphasis in the documents on encouraging voluntary compliance with regulations and using the minimal force necessary to enforce these regulations. The documents, in their language, appear to treat the phenomenon of RV/vandwelling as a choice⁴⁷ with little discussion (particularly in the first report, which faced media scrutiny) on larger societal issues that are driving people to pursue or see this lifestyle as appealing. Indeed, the first report makes the statement:

⁴⁷ Not to get too philosophical, but nearly everything is a choice—it's context that determines what makes it easy, hard, logical, frivolous, etc.

“[H]owever, these proposed amendments are an effort to provide greater motivation to the occupants of Large Vehicles to move to suitable housing.” (City of Surrey, October 2019).

There is little discussion of what the motivations of living in vehicles or in static housing might be and why these options exist in the current state of affairs. The question of why people are not living in what the report calls “suitable housing” is not asked. What remains is the assumption that this lifestyle is borne of free choice.

Additionally, the reports discuss how dwellers of Large Vehicles have the means to own, insure, and operate these vehicles without much thought or imagination of additional context beyond this assumption of means:

“...These individuals are not representative of homeless residents that staff typically encounter, the key difference being the type of shelter used and the fact that, in most cases, these individuals have the means to own, insure, and operate a licensed Large Vehicle in functional operational condition....” (City of Surrey, November 2019).

Such vehicles are not as forbidding cost-wise when one compares them to buying or leasing static housing—something that participants I interviewed have discussed already. As for insurance, British Columbia, among few North American jurisdictions, has a public automobile insurance and licensing regime administered through the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC). Indeed, provinces that have a public automobile insurance regime (British Columbia, Quebec, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan) typically have cheaper (though still high) automobile insurance premiums than jurisdictions that rely solely on private insurance (Deloitte, 2015)—an outside consideration that the report does not appear to consider. Indeed, the RV/vandwelling lifestyle (and the insurance needed for it) is somewhat financially accessible for people with more modest means and not just those who can afford to live in static housing but choose not to.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the reports issued by the city do go to some length to recommend some flexibility in the enforcement of these bylaw changes and propose some stipulations to preempt blanket enforcement that might be seen as oppressive. Specifically, the report emphasizes officials’ discretionary powers and allows for them to

⁴⁸ There are some parallels that can be drawn with the similar phenomenon of “tenting” and the rise/re-emergence of “tent cities” in parks and other public spaces in many North American cities. Similar discussions about what’s “acceptable housing” are not solely restricted to the RV/vandwelling phenomenon.

be mindful of the specific circumstances of these situations (essentially on a case-by-case basis). Furthermore, the reports emphasize that full enforcement measures should be used as a last resort when the city is unable to obtain voluntary compliance from vehicle occupants. Indeed, the second report highlighted that in the few previous cases of bylaw enforcement on these matters, voluntarily compliance was achieved (including in all cases of people living in Large Vehicles) and the need for full enforcement was rare. Both reports also emphasize the availability of social assistance and welfare programs oriented towards aiding those with difficulty in finding static housing and the need to connect these people to these programs. That suggestion is certainly a positive one and is consistent with the drafters' attempts to mitigate any negative outcomes that may result from the bylaw amendments. However, it still relies on questionable choice-based assumptions that assume that such social programs are adequately available and funded to address housing needs. Nor does it acknowledge any macro-level or ground/human-level disincentives to account for why persons might avoid accessing these services or not consider themselves to be "homeless". Likewise, the reports do not acknowledge the wider issues and trends, such as the affordability crisis in British Columbia's Lower Mainland, that lead people to choose this lifestyle and move to an area to live that way. Despite its limitations, Surrey still has some policy options to ameliorate the situation such as changing zoning and height regulations to allow for more medium density housing or implementing measures to discourage concentration of property ownership. Furthermore, the second report mentions that other urban municipalities have implemented such restrictions in response to increases in Large Vehicle dwellers parking on streets and that such increases are anticipated to occur in Surrey as well. However, there was no reflection on the possibility that implementing these types of restrictive bylaws may cumulatively contribute to the increase in Large Vehicle dwellers on city streets in as yet unregulated spaces—i.e., when one municipality bans van dwellers from parking on public spaces, they move to where no such bans exist and so on.

Shifting frameworks of response/differences between documents

These two corporate reports do, however, show an interesting quality that I had not expected to find when I first started out this research and analysis. Despite

discussing the same subject matter (bylaw, facts, data, etc.), there is a noticeable change or shift in the language of the reports before and after a proposed bylaw drew the scrutiny of the news media and the public. Prior to media scrutiny, the language of the first corporate report was more exclusionary about who constituted the “public” or the “community”. People living in Large Vehicles were described as “occupants” rather than as “residents” and the report identified complaints regarding Large Vehicles as coming primarily from “residents” as well as businesses. Additionally, some of the specific issues described in the complaints bear some resemblance to terminology found in “broken windows” criminology discourses⁴⁹—particularly concerns about “unsightly or wrecked vehicles” alongside utility safety concerns like improper electrical connections and waste disposal. But after the first report received some media scrutiny, there was a shift in language in the second report that saw this exclusionary position become somewhat less overt although it was not quite a complete reversal.

The second report added consideration of the potential impact of these proposed bylaw amendments upon the homeless population of the city (as well as on the tourism industry and LV owners generally). Compared to the first report, it was somewhat more inclusive but still emphasized that the population living in Large Vehicles represented a very small fraction of the homeless population overall.⁵⁰ Likewise, the second report appears to have largely deleted any language hinting at “broken windows” ideas and to have re-emphasized and elaborated on welfare responses to the issue—pointing to social service/assistance options to alleviate any lack of housing opportunities. The report also highlighted the lack of public infrastructure (i.e., water, power, sewage, other waste) needed to accommodate Large Vehicles (resident or tourist) in Surrey city streets and added that the city lacks the resources needed to maintain public facilities for this

⁴⁹ “Broken windows” suggests that minor infractions in a neighbourhood such as loitering, vandalism, littering, graffiti, etc. creates an environment conducive to serious crime and deterioration (Griffiths, 2013, 228; 234).

⁵⁰ There are some problems with the city’s methodology of determining who is homeless. The report was limited by its reliance on people self-reporting as “homeless” and, given what I heard with participant interviews, there are different definitions of “home” present in this issue. So it is not surprising that very few LV dwellers (and possibly those living in tents and other unconventional housing) would see themselves as “homeless” because they have a “home”. As such, the report is still exclusive but in a different way. Research project designers should take note of this difference.

purpose.⁵¹ The second report was also somewhat more reflective of the current situation, acknowledging that there is a large, ongoing affordability and housing crisis in the region. However, it still failed to ask what may be contributing to this crisis or to reflect upon whether the proposed bylaws may be contributing to this crisis. As legislators, city council members need to weigh this possibility before they commit to a decision.

Comparing participants and documents

Indeed, the most notable difference between the documents and RV/vanlifers' accounts is that city documents emphasize market moral worths whereas RV/vanlifers emphasize domestic and inspirational moral worths instead. Furthermore, it can be said that market moral worth form a continuous presence in the background of all the worthiness ideals discussed within the documents but less so among RV/vanlifers. Ideas of moral worth among the RV/vanlifers I interviewed emphasize a desire for self-improvement and independence (which often go hand-in-hand), and developing meaningful relationships with family, friends, and neighbours. For the RV/vanlifers I interviewed, anything (from professional skills to physical objects) that could be measured according to a market idea of moral worth is simply a means to an end—an end measured by different conceptions of moral worth. Meanwhile for the city documents, the bylaw amendments on Large Vehicles emphasize the moral worth of these vehicles for business and market purposes. This emphasis showed when I examined the *exceptions* that the amendments make for these vehicles and their intended purposes. For example, although Large Vehicles are generally restricted from parking on roads for more than 3 hours between 6 AM and 10 PM, Large Vehicles parked for business purposes or parked on premises owned or leased by the owner (or anyone who works for them) are exempt from the bylaw's restrictions. The exception also applies for Large Vehicles parked by a property that is a construction site (City of Surrey, October 2019, 2). Additionally, the second document specifically addresses concerns that the city's proposed bylaws would have on the tourism sector. It tries to clarify that the bylaw is *not* attempting to discourage tourist use of Large Vehicles but

⁵¹ That would require financial and technical assistance from the provincial and/or federal governments or a radical municipal program involving increasing tax revenue and spending.

merely addressing logistical and utilities issues about them—conveniently encouraging the use of privately-owned RV tourist facilities (City of Surrey, November 2019, 3).

Regardless of any market morals operating in the background, the city and such government bodies assess, informed by their responsibilities to maintain circulation (Blomley, 2011, 22-23), the worth of objects, such as static buildings, vehicles, and the spaces they occupy, using such vocabularies from the industrial moral worth of functions and precise measurement (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 207-209). These differing frames of moral worthiness manifest themselves regarding whether RVs are “proper housing” or not as well as different interpretations as to the nature of choice. Indeed, this disagreement over what constitutes “proper housing” is as much technical (whether or not conforming to certain governmental standards) as well as philosophical: a “home” is not necessarily interchangeable with “housing” since the idea of a “home” is not necessarily defined by its survival and care functions (Douglas, 1991, 288-289).

Indeed, from the perspective of RV/vanlifers, these concepts are one and the same. The vocabulary they apply to their living spaces, themselves, and their lifestyles ultimately resemble “inspired” moral worth—worth that cannot be easily measured and which requires a human understanding. That is, their decision to live where they do is borne of their inherent duty (or right) to shake off what prevents them from liberating themselves, from achieving their own dignity, and from building authentic relationships with other fellow humans (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 161-162).

In K’s case, living in an RV is a liberating experience compared to her previous ones in static apartments and basement suites in which she’s lived for much of her life. According to her, she’s always lived in situations where she eventually has to move. This disruptive impermanence is still a big factor for K in living in the RV. As she told me, how she had been trying to negotiate her RV park tenancy to be longer in order for her child to be able to finish off their Kindergarten and start Grade 1 in the same school. Likewise, complaints about children’s noise occur in RV park living just as in static rentals. But there is a critical difference that the RV park has over apartments and basement suites. In addition to cutting down on the monthly cost of rent, K feels as if the space enclosed by the RV is truly her own. Whereas in a basement suite, with landlord-tenant power dynamics bringing unwanted restrictions and invasions of privacy, K felt “homeless” and not really in control of her living space and her own social interactions. K further

emphasizes that she has an upper hand over static renters whom, for financial reasons, may have to tolerate taking on roommates, moving in with parents, or staying with a partner that they want to leave. Owning her RV, K is able to preserve her own dignity and privacy while building relationships with the people she actually wants to build with such as her children and any friends, neighbours, and family she allows to visit.

Speaking of neighbours, K told me she had more interactions with them in an RV situation than as a static renter. Although this may seem at odds with maintaining privacy, it is understandable when she explained that in her experience close neighbours in static homes may have limited interactions despite living next to each other for years and years. K clarified, however, that ultimately it is not the places that are the problem or solution but the people that manage them and their mentality. She did not feel as if her privacy, personal freedom and dignity were respected sufficiently during many of her renting experiences but were so when she transitioned to living in an RV and park. For now, K appears to have struck a balance that works just a little bit better than what she had before. Similarly for H, the financial savings of living in an RV in his youth and subsequently for the past several years has granted him a much freer, more independent existence in his middle age. More financially secure, H has re-focused his life from working to retiring early so he can spend more time with his kids, family, and friends.⁵² For H, being able to build these relationships is what life is all about and, if downsizing to and enduring any stigmas attached to RV living contributes to strengthening family and friendship ties, it's worth it for him.

According to participants, this liberation and balance has grown more and more difficult to accomplish in the current state of housing. In a sense, this disagreement represents what, in pragmatic sociology, is a "radical critique" that, from the perspective of RV/vanlifers (being on the receiving end of these new regulations and relegated as rare abnormalities), proposes an alternative reality of living in a city that offers few other choices that provide one dignity (Blokker, 2011, 255-256).

Despite this conflict, there are some ideas of moral worthiness found in both RV/vanlifers and municipal policies and documents that don't necessarily speak to a conflict borne of neoliberal inequities. Domestic/traditional moral worth are present in

⁵² H has also taken this financial independence to travel more.

both the city documents and RV/vanlifers to a degree⁵³. These manifest themselves in the value of following and properly navigating the law, the aesthetic qualities that make a “good” neighbourhood, and a desire to foster harmonious relationships between people (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 164-178). Domestic moral worth, although somewhat present in the municipal documents, is far more pronounced in the interviews. Industrial moral worth, which features values based on technological and scientific types of value such as efficiency, function, operation, and the like (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 203-206), are also present in both sides of this analysis. One side, however, has a dedicated engineering department that can assert the city’s interpretation of industrial efficiency and RV/vanlifers don’t have this kind of muscle. Additionally, values coinciding with civic moral worth are held by both and this manifests as the value of providing support and mutual aid⁵⁴ to others and a general value of that which is community-oriented. (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 185-193). Ideas of choice are also shared by the two sides. However, how choice is valued reflects very different perspectives. For RV/vanlifers, the value of choice comes more from a place of asserting one’s own dignity and agency, therefore, fitting more closely, if not perfectly, with “inspired” moral worth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, 159-161). In the documents, it comes from a more punitive perspective that discounts outside factors that affect individual choices. What type of moral worth the documents are using is more difficult to discern given the structural limitations of legal-technical language but it could safely be assumed that market worth has some background influence on these municipally-produced documents. That is not to say that these shared ideas of moral worth are emphasized equally by both parties. There are differences (as one sees with the example of choice) as to how and to what degree that RV/vanlifers and the city share certain ideas of moral worth as well as differences in the ability of either side to express and perpetuate their interpretation of this idea of moral worthiness.

⁵³ There is far less of an emphasis on hierarchical relationships in my analysis of the RV/vanlifer community than the domestic/traditional worthiness system described by Boltanski and Thévenot. Interpersonal harmony, respect, and disdain for certain undesirable behaviours (from gossip to crime) is shared but not necessarily hierarchy. The same applies to the documents but it is likely due to the constraints of language and the overlap of civic worth due to their municipal/public origin.

⁵⁴ Boltanski and Thévenot do not use the term “mutual aid” but it is an example of basic collective action.

Chapter 6. Future Considerations

Without a doubt, flexibility in terms of methods and scope⁵⁵ will be necessary as global stability becomes more fragile due to the impacts of climate change, economic unrest, war, and other factors. Without going into too much detail, some of my fellow graduate students have had to make major changes to their research projects as a result of pandemic border closures and geopolitical unrest in the places they wished to do field work. But rapid changes can be a blessing as well as a curse. Some of my colleagues were inundated with new options for gathering data as subjects that were less prominent or even niche before COVID-19 took on a new, greater significance.⁵⁶ Certainly, my own research subject of RV/vandwellers was impacted similarly. The intense heat waves and floods that occurred in British Columbia during the preparation of this thesis are examples of the climate change-related situations that may impact research. As communities rally to support one another in these disasters, RV/vandwellers (new and old) haven't been forgotten either as the Mission Raceway Park—a motorsports and racing facility in Mission, BC—opened its gates temporarily to displaced people in RVs seeking to escape recent floods (Mills, 2021). If I could extend this project further, I would be interested in conducting interviews with more kinds of RV/vanlifers. I would be particularly interested in speaking with: those who have had to face severe climate-related disasters; more older and elderly vanlifers; those living in more rural areas of the Pacific Northwest (such as Northern and Interior BC, Eastern Washington State, Vancouver Island, and BC's Sunshine Coast); students (foreign and local); as well as vanlifers who may be Indigenous or LGBTQ.

Further research on this topic will require flexibility but, most importantly, respect and compassion. Thus, researchers might want to extend such studies to people living in houseboats as well. In discussions with K about how to reach out and build some level of trust with other RV/vanlifers, she advised me to mention or utilize my own brief experience of living on a houseboat—a lifestyle that has some parallels to RV/vanliving in terms of technology, mobility, and being an alternative to static land dwellings

⁵⁵ That is, changing methods of how to collect and interpret research data and adjusting the focus of research more widely or narrowly depending on the circumstances of a research project. It may be necessary for the project to fundamentally change if it is to continue.

⁵⁶ Meanwhile those involved in studying refugees and immigration have been similarly impacted by recent developments in Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Ethiopia.

(especially as climate change impacts the availability of land in some regions in addition to the neoliberal housing crisis). Indeed, even with H, there was interest expressed with the houseboating lifestyle and how some self-sufficiency strategies needed for RV/vanliving are easily translatable to houseboating as well. Outside of this project, there are already connections being made between these two different lifestyles. A good number of boat dwellers are sympathetic to the struggles of RV/vanlifers as they too have been pushed out of the static housing market by runaway prices and other similar factors (Lin, 2018).

Chapter 7. Concluding thoughts

Throughout this exploratory research project, I attempted to find connections and shared ideas of moral worthiness between RV/vanlifers and City officials in order to identify “common ground” between these two sides. In addition to simply identifying a conflict and critique, I proposed starting points for their resolution and/or a new plurality of ideas as well as going deeper into the fundamental differences of moral worth that lead to such critiques and conflicts to form. Indeed, I uncovered some common themes expressed by RV/vanlifer participants (as well as certain differences between them) such as placing importance on independence and stability, the need for controlling costs and convenience, the importance of building ties with family and community, navigating social stigmas around the RV/vanlife lifestyle, and higher aspirations for themselves and their community (cleanliness, safe neighbourhoods, productive activity, and self-improvement). By examining municipal government documents, I uncovered emphases on promoting free choice and compliance, concerns over crime and social welfare, and prioritization of certain uses of vehicles over others (commerce, efficiency, and civic service over living space). The amendments proposed by the documents were eventually passed but not without some changes to their discussion framework as a result of scrutiny by media and social advocates. Although there are differences between themes uncovered from interviews with participants versus studying city documents, there is space for shared concerns and starting points between them. Going forward, the City of Surrey and other local governments facing similar issues would be wise to consult directly with RV/vanlifers and work collaboratively with them towards an arrangement that meaningfully addresses all parties’ concerns.

Overall, I built on previous literature on RV/vanlifers by adding an exploratory mixed-methods study using interviews and documentary analysis components. Further, I critically examined the role that ownership (of RV, van, campground, road, apartment, etc.) plays in the motivation to switch to the RV/van lifestyle. During this process, I experimented by using ideas from pragmatic sociology in conjunction with an overall analysis based in a critique of neoliberalism and used this as a guide in interpreting and collecting my data (which wouldn’t necessarily have been accomplished had I applied a critical analysis alone). In particular, I observed how some of the language and vocabularies used by RV/vanlifers and city documents could be interpreted as fitting into

certain frameworks of moral worthiness, which is a focus of pragmatic sociology, as well as acknowledging where major conflicts between them impose some limits to their ability to find common ground despite some shared values. By “rubbing” a neoliberal critique with ideas from pragmatic sociology, I learned that these other ideas of moral worth can challenge neoliberal market worth by offering alternative means of evaluating lifestyles—some of which may have popular appeal or bring bad press coverage if challenged; no one wants to say family is less important than market value. Additionally, I made changes to the scope of my research project as a response to outside factors (the COVID-19 pandemic, the resulting societal instability, etc.) that were out of my control and that of participants and the City. The subject of this study, RV/vanlifers and their relationship with cities, is an evolving situation and future developments will require future studies. The project did not go as I had originally envisioned but what I found can hopefully help guide future investigations into the subject of RV/vanlifers and their relationship with the city.

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Appendix A. Interview Questions

Where do you live?

How long have you lived this way?

What have you learned since you started?

What are things you enjoy about living in a motorhome/campground? Why?

What are things you find challenging? Why?

What has stayed the same since you started motorhome living? Why?

Where else have you lived in the past? Either before or after you started motorhome living?

Which, would you say, are the best places to park and live? Why?

Is there a difference between these places? Why?

What would you change about the place you live in now? Why?

What would you change about places you've lived in before? Why?

What would you NOT change about these places? Why?

What is it like raising a family in a motorhome? Why?

What are some common things you hear about the way you live?

From family? From friends? Co-workers? Others in general?

Why do you think that they think that?

What is your reaction to them? What is your response?

Does it matter who the owners are? Why?

Does it matter how the place is managed? Why?

Has there ever been any issues with the park?

With owners? Management? Other residents? Visitors?

What would they recommend to a first time motorhome dweller? Why?

Appendix B. Participant Recruitment Scripts

Scripts submitted to Research Ethics Board regarding recruitment process:

Script for emails:

Researcher:

"Hi,

My name is Victor Yao and I am a Masters student at Simon Fraser University. I am writing you because I was hoping you might be interested in become a participant in my Masters research project.

My project aims to understand the experiences of motorhome dwellers living on campgrounds as well as what sort of relationship do motorhome dwellers have with the city and its bylaws.

It will involve a 1 hour interview over the phone or online teleconference.

Participation is voluntary but it may be a fun or self-affirming exercise for you.

I can provide you contact information if you have further questions or if you know someone that might be interested in this project.

I look forward to discussing with you further. You can reach me by email at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Victor Yao,

Simon Fraser University, Department of Sociology & Anthropology"

Script for social media direct messages:

Researcher:

“Hi,

My name is Victor Yao and I am a Masters student at Simon Fraser University. I am writing you because I was hoping you might be interested in become a participant in my Masters research project.

My project aims to understand the experiences of motorhome dwellers living on campgrounds as well as what sort of relationship do motorhome dwellers have with the city and its bylaws.

It will involve a 1 hour interview over the phone or online teleconference. Participation is voluntary but it may be a fun or self-affirming exercise for you.

I am obligated to inform you as well that liking or responding to this message may identify you as a potential participant and if this concerns you then please refrain from posting to or liking this message.

I can provide you contact information if you have further questions or if you know someone that might be interested in this project.

I look forward to discussing with you further. You can reach me by email at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Victor Yao,

Simon Fraser University, Department of Sociology & Anthropology”

Script used in recruitment post in social media (adapted from templates submitted to Research Ethics Board):

Hi folks!

My name's Victor Yao and I am a Masters student at Simon Fraser University. I am writing you because I was hoping you might be interested in become a participant in my Masters research project.

My project aims to understand the experiences of motorhome, van, and RV lifers living on campgrounds as well as what sort of relationship do you all have with the city and its bylaws.

It will involve a 1 hour interview over the phone or online teleconference. Participation is voluntary but it may be a fun or self-affirming exercise for you.

I am obligated to inform you as well that liking or responding to this message may identify you as a potential participant and if this concerns you then please refrain from posting to or liking this message.

I can provide you contact information if you have further questions or if you know someone that might be interested in this project.

I look forward to discussing with you further. You can reach me by email at [REDACTED]

Appendix C. Informed Consent Form

Application number: 2020s0315

Consent Form:

You have been invited to participate in a study that will form part of the academic research thesis of Victor Yao, graduate student in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Simon Fraser University.

The working title of the project is: *Vandwellers and city-owned campgrounds: residents, visitors and the public interest*

Purpose of this Study:

This project aims to understand the experiences of motorhome dwellers living on private and city-owned campgrounds and the experiences of public servants and advocates involved in issues regarding motorhome dwellers. This project also seeks to understand what sort of relationship do motorhome dwellers have with the city and its bylaws from the perspective of motorhome dwellers and from the perspective of public servants and social advocates.

Participation Method:

This research will involve a 1 hour interview between you and the researcher over electronic means (telephone, VoIP, Zoom, Skype, etc.) which, **with your permission and is optional**, an **audio or video recording of the interview** will be made for transcribing and data analysis to form the basis of a research study. The researcher will also take hand-written notes during the interview. **If you do not wish to be recorded, the researcher will only take hand-written notes.** The researcher reserves the right to cancel any interview or exclude potential participants if participant does not have access to their own personal phones or other electronic and internet-connected devices. The researcher wants participants to be in a private place for their interview.

You can request to review the interview once the transcription is completed and request any revisions you desire. Only de-identified data will be sent or uploaded to transcription software/service if such software/service is used. The researcher will copy materials to a USB drive or printed paper and send to you via postal services. If you request that they be sent via email, please be aware of that there are potential privacy risks involved in using email (see “Privacy Protection and Confidentiality”). Please discuss with the researcher if there are any issues with these arrangements.

Participants should **not** feel pressured to participate in this study because of an existing relationship with the research team.

Use of participant data:

The data collected by this project will be used for analysis and improving data collection by the researcher in order to fulfill the requirements of a Masters’ thesis. It may be shared only with the researcher’s supervisor for the purpose of evaluation where appropriate (but will not include any personally-identifiable information). Data containing personally-identifiable information will be stored on a separate external hard-drive in the researcher’s possession.

Data containing personally-identifiable information will be destroyed after 2 years.

Research Risks and Benefits:

Risks are:

If you are motorhome dweller, conversations of this kind might touch on personal and sensitive issues in your life.

If you are a public servant or advocate involved in issues regarding motorhome dwellers, conversations of this kind might touch on sensitive issues in your job or profession.

Benefits are:

Recognition and respect for you life experience, choices and career path. This may be a fun and/or self-affirming experience.

Privacy Protection and Confidentiality:

Please tell the researcher if you do not want your real name used or want a pseudonym.

Should you choose to have and agree on a pseudonym, it shall be:

_____.

Please be aware that when using US-based platforms like Zoom, Skype, cloud server-based email, etc., that any recording is subjected to the US PATRIOT and CLOUD Acts. Likewise, if transcription software that requires uploading data (even de-identified data) to a US-based company is used, it is also subjected to the US PATRIOT and CLOUD Acts. These laws allow government authorities to access the records of host services and internet service providers. By choosing to participate, you understand that your participation in this study may become known to US federal agencies. Keep in mind that no means of communication (including physical mail, telephone, email, VoIP and other electronic means) or other electronic tools are absolutely secure and it is beyond the capacity of any researcher or communications provider to guarantee complete confidentiality.

IMPORTANT:

Unlawful situations revealed by participants to the researcher may be reported

The researcher will take the utmost effort to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of participants in this study except where legally mandatory reporting requirements apply (i.e.: possible child abuse/neglect or other offences that require report to proper authorities).

Acceptance of this Form:

Your acceptance of this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research participant. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Data Retention

I understand that only the researcher, Victor Yao, and his research supervisor will see the signed informed consent form, unless I authorize either of them, in writing, to share it with any other party (such my lawyer or legal representative). **I understand that any personally identifiable data (such as recordings) will be retained in Victor Yao’s possession for 2 years. After that time, personally identifiable data and any back-ups made of such data will be securely erased and destroyed.**

Questions and/or Complaints:

I understand I can raise any questions or complaints about this research project or the conduct of the researcher by contacting Simon Fraser University’s Director of Research Ethics, Jeff Toward at [REDACTED]

I agree that data **not** containing personally-identifiable information or where such information has been obscured or removed may be archived in an academic repository (such as Canada’s Federated Research Data Repository or FRDR) for future academic use.

I am over 19 years of age or authorize as Legal Guardian/Caregiver,

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT/LEGAL GUARDIAN/CAREGIVER

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

DATE

Appendix D. Interview Excerpts

Interview Transcript Excerpts—Participant H

Legend:

V-Researcher

H-Participant

Note: Best attempt made to transcribe accurately and understandably. Text in [] are edits and interpretations by the interviewer to account for redaction, errors, audio distortions, and clarification.

*** indicates topical boundaries of selected passages. “...” indicates gaps of removed material within spoken passages. “Re:” means that quote is in relation to a question but is not the first part of the answer.

V: ...So what have you learned since you started living this way?

H: Well, it's cheap right? It's a really cheap way to live. I literally had bought the RV, had rented it out to somebody. It was good because a good cash flow for what it cost. And...then...I had some life changes to my lifestyle and stuff and rents were going up pretty high. And then I thought: “Why do I need to live in a house?” When you live in a house you end up buying more stuff you don't need. So, uh, that you don't need. I rented out the house and now I live for free in the RV. All the utility, everything's paid and I got cash in my pocket.

H: Oh yeah, and I'd lived in an RV once before about....uh...I'd say about 17 years ago I lived for about a year. And....that's kind of still in my mind.

V: Alright. And feel free to include experiences from your current situation as well as from when you had to do this before.

H: Yeah so the reason I did this before was the house where my RV is now, in 2003, [audio distortion] had built a new house there. So the build on takes about a year. I didn't want to think about moving somewhere because then I gotta pay someone rent and I'm like I don't wanna pay somebody rent, I... cut the rent my whole life. So then I bought an RV, parked it at another one of my rental properties, lived there for the year for free while I built my house.

V: Okay, what else have you learned since you started? This is a general open-ended question, what have you learned since you started doing this?

H: Well, you know, Number One. You....[audio interference], I'm just trying to stay...[audio distorted] I went through....[audio distorted]. The main thing is you realize how little you need. Uh, when you live in a house, then you buy a TV, you buy a sofa, then you buy a [audio distorted], then you buy a flower, then you buy a painting, then you buy, like, pots, and styles of pots and become a consumer and you work just to consume. Where you should be working to save money [audio distorted] and there's a social stigma attached to it like, uh, uh, I remember one time my brother's, uh, a couple of his buddies stayed, lived by my house, they, they were pretty well off and, but one of his buddies lives in my neighbourhood, he's pretty well off, and he's going for a walk with his buddy who came to come visit him and they had a walk past my house. And then he says to my brother, so and he goes: "Fuck! Look at this guy!" Sorry, excuse my language, "Look at this guy! He lives in such a great-looking neighbourhood and he's got an RV parked there." And then my brother's trying, he didn't say anything, but after he told my mother he was like, kinda felt embarrassed for you [audio distorted] brother [audio distorted; almost sounds like connection created a delay because next few words sound off as others are still going] very nice neighbourhood, and then an RV parked there. And I don't wanna say to my friend, that's my buddy's brother. But there's like a stigma attached to it. But if you can fight the stigma, make—your just more financially well-off. Anybody in Vancouver now the way the

rents are even like the rancher rents so what like...[audio distorted]...just talk about Richmond, for Richmond for example [audio distorted] rancher, older one, reasonably rent [audio distorted] beat down will rent for two grand [\$2000/month] or you renovate it usually you can get like three grand, thirty-three hundred [\$3000/month to \$3300/month] and why wouldn't you just park an RV there, you buy 'em for five grand, get free utilities from the tenant, and you live there, and you collecting like three grand something from the house.

V: For sure, yeah. I mean, no brainer.

H: [audio distorted] —my house is worth, like, over two million dollars. I've got other properties too, I got probably about ten million dollars worth of properties. I'm not like the stooge, stingy guy but I'm just like "Why do I care what people think?" Now I have financial freedom, I don't work, I travel. I just actually landed last night from Miami.

V: Alright, so what's your job?

H: I don't work anymore, I stopped working last year in April. I drew my tools down. [audio distortion]—I was making good money too. I was, I had a life-changing, uh, episode. Like I, living a good life, I've divorced from my first wife and I had two kids. Which I've shared custody. And then, when COVID hit, my ex messaged: "It was just not safe", my ex messaged me: "It's COVID, I'm not gonna send the kids." And honestly my life flashed in front of me. And I just went with this manic—I just became unstable and I'm like "I worked so hard, I accumulated this property, and I can't even see my kids?" And then I just said "F this" and threw my tools down, I have the cash flow coming in and I go "What do I need to work for?". Right? I was making, I was usually making a thousand bucks a day but, what do I need the money for? And now I'm [distorted] sat around all day. I'm gonna sit around for the whole week til I decide where I wanna go next week.

V: Alright, what was your job?

H: I was doing electrical and plumbing, I had my own business.

H: Yeah, when you go on your own, you go on your own, that's where the money is. Now, if you work for somebody, yeah, it's slow and steady, you get a steady paycheque, it works out. [audio distorted].....but if you have your own gig, people pay you a hundred fifty dollars service call. Why you wanna go work for somebody?

H: Like, [audio distorted], he's gonna charge you a hundred fifty service call. Why would you wanna go work for somebody for fifty bucks or thirty bucks an hour or start your own company?

V: For sure, yeah, I mean yeah. Definitely independence is something that seems to be very valuable. For sure.

H: I think everybody in Vancouver, like I've helped a lot of youth become financially stable, I think it's very, very easy to do. The problem is people have very poor financial knowledge, they don't know how to save, they don't look at what they spend. And, uh, the other half are just not motivated. I gave an opportunity to help people about a few things we [audio distorted] reaching up. They didn't grasp—I was, I was astonished.

V: ...So what are some things you enjoy about living in a van?

H: You know, it's really convenient. There's less there, less to break down. There's less maintenance. Because I was an electrician and a plumber, the last thing I wanna do is come home and fix stuff. It's very low maintenance, and, uh, you read online, like about people—I'm on some group, some stuff about van life, and they're like “[distorted] all the repairs, they always cost so much money.” This, that. Well no they don't, because you have absolutely no mechanical

knowledge. When you go to a mechanic, they're there to get out as much money as they can.

V: But it looks like you enjoy helping others, am I correct?

H: Uh, I'll help somebody if I feel like it or somebody asks me to help 'em I won't. Because I know when people ask me to help them, once they see what I'm capable of then I'm always their go-to person and I don't like to be used.

V: Yeah, for sure.

H: Also, that's happened, so [distorted], somebody, if I do something it's out of my good will. I just felt bad for her. I realized she's not going to listen to me, she's in this downward spiral of [uncomfortable laugh] getting ripped off by different mechanics, and eventually she ended up changing her battery, and then she posted again, she changed the battery, it's working now, and now my other batteries aren't charging. And then she found a fuse that had burnt out while they were changing the battery, whoever the guy was [distorted], like what I said at the beginning. I'm pretty confident when I say something. And I gave her [distorted] advice, she didn't want to listen to me.

V: ...So, um, you've kind of answered this question but, uh, I might as well ask it. So where else have you lived in the past? You've lived in a van but you've lived in a normal—static home?

H: Yeah, I've had like—I've lived in, like, ten thousand dollar home. Well, not ten thousand, ten thousand square feet home too. I've lived in, like, the best of the best and the worst of the worst.

V: Alright, I mean, based on your experience and, perhaps, what you've maybe heard from others, what are some of the best places to park or live with a van?

H: Uhm, the best places?

V: Yeah.

H: Well, obviously, the ideal places would be, like, around the ocean, Spanish Banks, Jericho, nice neighbourhoods like that. But anywhere besides Surrey, or Langley, right? All over, Ladner, Richmond, Vancouver, Burnaby, lots of really nice places everywhere.

V: Right. Those are good places you said or not so?

H: Yeah, they're very good places. Lot of break-ins in Downtown, so you kinda wanna be careful in Downtown. But then, like, I used to be, like I said I was a plumber, and I never had my car broken into, [distorted] they could see wide and clear how many tools I had in my car, right?

V: Okay.

H: So, uhm, I, you know, some people just get broken into.

V: ... what would you change about the place you're living in right now? Like, your van or your property, what would be something you would change?

H: Nothing really. I really like it. ...

H: [distorted], what it is, it's because it's rent—also it's rent, it's so expensive. Living in an RV is living in your own apartment.

V: Oh!

H: It's just a social stigma that people think that living in a mobile home, like, you're just trash, like meant out of society. Like, yes, there is a lot of that, particularly when you drive around, say, all the Home Depots you see those junked-out mobile homes of the drug addicts living there right? But there's

actually quite a lot of normal people, like, you could say, clean-cut, normal people, who are well-kept, that live in those type of lifestyles because they save money, and have their own house.

V: Mm-hmm, for sure.

H: For example, my friend in the Class A, he's—like where he parks, I think he pays like six, seven fifty. And he's got a big Class A, [distorted], it's his own. Whereas, for that amount, he'd have a roommate.

V: Okay. Maybe, in your opinion, where do you think these stigmas come from, you think?

H: Uhm, I think, like, from TV, like trailer parks, like that movie 'Trailer Park Trash', so, it's, like, society, the same thing, like driving a, uh, Honda or driving a Mercedes, right?

H: Well, I don't care, like, what people think, right? So, a lot of these guys wanna drive nice cars because they wanna show, like, that they're bigger than what they really are. And it's really their inner self-esteem that's lacking. Right? I'm confident in who I am, I don't really give two effs about what people think. Right? All the people around me, they know what I'm capable of.

V: Alright. So what would you change about the places you lived in before? Like, either when you were living in—for a year, [audio distorted] or when you were living in a house?

H: Well, the one where I lived in from two-thousand two and three [2002-2003], that one was, like, a different property, that property's older and kinda run down. Right? So, like, there's still a nice neighbourhood, but it's older, junk property. [distorted]...aesthetically please [it appears he's saying that it's not aesthetically

pleasing] whereas now I live in, like, a really nice neighbourhood. So that's kinda nice. Nice, like, you can go for a walk, it's not a busy road, right? Close to amenities.

*** [Re: changing priorities; working focus to family focus]

H: ...I've been meaning to make—just get away, go on like a year long, like, I worked very hard my whole life, and when I didn't in April of last year, when my ex said "You can't see your son", my whole life flashed in front of me. And I thought "What do I have, if I have assets but I don't have my kids?" And money has been the root of all evil for me and all my problems. If I didn't have money, I wouldn't have been divorced from my first wife. All it did was cause problems, so now I'm never gonna work again in my life. I made it quite clear, uhm, I just, I'm [mid-40s], I only have like 30 summers and 30 Christmases to go, right? ...

V: Alright cool. Back to the topic of living in a van. So what are some common things you hear about the way you live? Like from family, from friends or from your co-workers?

H: Oh people laugh. Yeah, people laugh, right? But it doesn't bother me because you know what they'll laugh and make fun of you in your face. But behind the scenes they're all—they know that they're upset that they can't—that they're not willing to live the same lifestyles, save the kind of money I've saved. Because the money you've saved may not be too much every year, but now, I'm like [mid-40s], over 20 years it was huge! Right? It allowed me to buy, another property.

*** [Re: what others think about lifestyle]

V: Alright, uh, I mean, in your opinion, why do they think that?

H: Well, it's just like when you're chasing girls right? Like what do girls want? They want you to have a flashy drive, like, in general. I mean girls aren't money hungry but they want someone that shows they're financially stable. Right?

[Others' opinions, continued]

H: Uh, it's about keeping up with the Joneses, right? But you can fight that. And think like, I don't care what anybody thinks, like as long as my close family, my close friends, they're, like, supporting, "Yeah, this is so smart". That's all that matters.

[Others' opinions, continued]

H: Yeah? Like when I was in the dating scene I was, going out with, like, I was driving, like, a beat up car, but I was dating, like, the hottest of the hottest girls. Right? I was dating like the richest of the rich girls. Because at the end, they go, you know, "Yeah, this guy's smart, he's got property, this is just the lifestyle he wishes to live."

V: For sure. So a bit of a transition over. Regarding the way you live, have you ever had any issues with neighbours or with the city, city management or anything such as that?

[I re-clarify my planned privacy protection practices with H before we continue with answering this question]

H: Well, um, yeah, like, people complain, but the city, um, as long as you're not home when they come and see that someone's living there, you're fine, they close the file.

*** [Bylaw enforcement continued]

H: So what happens is, somebody complains, the city will write a letter, and then they'll set up a time to view your place.

V: Okay.

H: But if nobody's living there at that time of viewing. They close the file. And they just say, "Oh, somebody's making a BS complaint."

V: Oh, do you get that a lot or anything?

H: Uh, it's happened over the years. Not a lot but it's happened probably a couple times over, like, twenty years. Three times maybe.

V:...Like friends, when you invite them over, is there anything they ever say that strikes you as interesting at all?

H: No, I don't really have people over. Like, my first wife, she lived with me in the RV when we were first married, when we were building that first house. Right, where I live now. And, uh, yeah, it's not really like, uh, it's not really a place you kinda, like, invite people to hang out really. Right?

V: Alright.

H: You can, but I don't have a large, like, social circle. Like, I can't, I'm not the kind of person that can keep a lot of, like social, friends. If I have, like, a friend it's either a good friend, like a really good person that I trust. Not casual friends.

*** [Re: the cost of RV]

H: You know, you can, like, buy an RV, a half decent RV, you can buy one for like five to eight grand. That's it. And you're done.

V: Oh yeah.

H: But you don't need to go buy a forty-fifty thousand dollar RV at all. Like the ones that cost seven, eight grand, they—yes, there's just a little dated in their colours, but they're just as good.

V: Really?

H: Right? The rest is just marketing.

V: Well, do you want to talk a bit more about that maybe?

H: Yeah, like the one that I have now, I bought it for like five grand. And, I dunno, it [distorted] long time ago, I think it was an [Year] model or [Year] model or something. And I can probably still sell it for like the same amount. It's not like, even at the low end I could sell it for like three...[Audio distortion]

V:...So what would you recommend to a first-time motorhome, van, or trailer dweller? And why?

H: Um, if I—because I have a place to park mine, so it's not a concern. But if I was gonna do it again, say I didn't have a place, then I'd have to be mobile. My goal would be to not have to go to a campground to be self-sufficient. Then what I would—and if I had the money I would definitely not buy the Sprinter vans because they're diesel. Uh. The new diesels, unless you're hitting the highway every other day, the diesel engines they crash, the emissions clog up. Uh. It's a total failure. Like a lot of the, even companies that make overlanding vehicles that travel the world, they're moving away from diesel, going to gasoline. Uh. Huge, huge problem, so I'd buy, like, the Ford. Ford makes one, like a Ford van that's kind of like the Sprinter. I forget what it's called. I'd buy that. You know, it's kind of not too noticeable, you can park it in neighbourhoods. And, uh, that's what if I'd live—if I didn't have a place to park. And then, you can also, like, use it to drive around and get stuff, or like if you wanna go work and be able to live somewhere else, right?

V:...Um, is there anything more you want to say about how the RV makers' marketing or any thoughts or complaints or even things you find attractive about that, if at all?

H: Nothing really, I think they all make good. [Audio distorted] People just need to stop complaining about how expensive they are to maintain. I guess people—they just really get ripped off by repairmen. That's all it is.

Interview Transcript Excerpts—Participant K

Legend:

V-Researcher

K-Participant

Note: Best attempt made to transcribe accurately and understandably. Text in [] are edits and interpretations by the interviewer to account for redaction, errors, audio distortions, and clarification.

... indicates gaps of removed material within spoken passages. Re: means that quote is in relation to a question but is not the first part of the answer.

V: Alright, so what have you learned since you started?

K: ... Living in the RV community I've discovered it's quite close-knit. I've had people teach me how to operate everything from my septic system, winterization, insulating my RV. Um, I've learnt a lot in that way, and I've seen that it's a much more close-knit community than living in a basement suite where you can see your neighbour. And you: "Hi, neighbour!", "Bye, neighbour!" and that might be the extent of your interactions even if you've lived there for three years. Living in the RV community you have daily contact with your neighbours, you have people to call if there's a power outage and you need help with your generator, you need help to get your propane running say. ...

K: ... It doesn't really bother me so much but that has been the subversive part so in the one sense you have neighbours who are close, and you are thankful for that sense of community but then on the other there is some backbiting and some small-minded gossipy people that are around.

V: Okay, so what are some things you enjoy about living in a motorhome at a campground and why?

K: ... If you look at some apartments and some basement suites, they're not much bigger. And there's somebody else who's owning the home and you feel that you are homeless. That's how I felt. I felt homeless when I lived in people's basements and I paid an exorbitant amount of rent. ...

K: ... When I downsized to live in the RV, I downsized considerably. And I found that a freeing process. Things take up a lot of your space and a lot of your time. When you live in an RV everything has to have a purpose and be functional or it's not here. So you're constantly going to be pulling through stuff like your clothes. And you're gonna downsize. And you're gonna keep those statement pieces. I actually have quite a bit of storage here for me and my kids. We've got quite a bit of clothes that we use. And same with dishes. Before I moved into the RV, I had overkill with cookware and dishes. And I re-homed those. Gave them away to people that would use them. And I kept what I needed. And that made me happy. I don't have an excess of stuff. I'm happy and here with my space.

K: ... I'm happy because it's mine. I'm happy because I don't feel that somebody else can come in here and tell me this is their home, don't light a candle, don't put a nail on the wall for your painting, I'm very happy because it's mine and I can customize it. I can make it my own. ... I feel that it's given me my own authority, my own property, and it's given me the ability to save money. I own the RV, I don't owe money on the RV and I worked pretty hard to be able to get the RV and that was an empowering move for myself after being a renter in a basement suite. ...

K: ... I'm in here to save money. I'm in here to have my own home. I'm here to make sure I don't owe debt. Later I would like to have land and not live in an RV park. I'm living in an RV park because it's convenient and because I would rather live in an RV park and rent a pad and be free to move than rent a basement suite and feel homeless and pay a lot more in rent and feel an uneven power dynamic

between the landlord complaining about the noise of children, complaining if I have a visitor, complaining about the usage of power. I couldn't live with that. I found that far more nerveing and I find this far more empowering.

V: For sure, yeah. You mentioned before that you did a lot of research about what requirements for having your kids in there. Could you speak a little bit more on that?

K: ... So living in an RV, is about the same as living in a suite in the sense that your kids need their own bedroom. If there are two kids of the same gender they can share a bedroom. So my sons share a bedroom. It is separate from our living space and is separate from my bedroom. I have a separate bedroom as well. So there are two bedrooms in the RV [holds up two fingers], that makes it legal. [holds up only one finger] If I didn't have a bedroom, if I had an RV with one living space and one bedroom I couldn't legally live in the RV with my two children. Because the two children need a bedroom to themselves away from my bedroom and my living space. And that is what I learnt before I bought the RV and that made me buy a bunkhouse, which has the two bedrooms, the living space that is separate from those bedrooms and it's like a small suite, it's like a small apartment. It's quite comfortable.

Re: V: ... So what are some things you find challenging and why about living the way you do?

K: ... this is the burden of living in an RV, is it means you're not somewhere permanent unless you own the land. You do have to move. So me, I've tried to negotiate my tenancy to stay longer because I have a son who is in kindergarten and I want him to be able to finish off his kindergarten year, and so they've agreed to let me stay until May. I pay my rent. I'm not a problem. I don't see why I

shouldn't be able to stay further. But I'm continuing to look. So that's the problem about living in an RV. You're going to have to move unless you own your land.

K: ... So what's to say the next place there won't be people complaining about my kids. And then the next management might ask me to move. So that's the burden, that's the burden, but that's *my* burden as someone with kids. If you don't have kids, you're not going to have that burden. You'll have something else to deal with. ... And again this was a burden that I had when I lived in the basement suites too. So it's not really a new burden, it's just different.

Re: V: ... Where else have you lived in the past? Before or after you started living in a motorhome.

K: ...So I lived in about three different basement suites with my dad and I also lived in an RV. And at that time I was much younger, I lived in RV campgrounds, I lived in one called King George Motel Trailer Park—it's gone, thankfully. It was a very bad place, it was much, much, much worse than here, say, here's very calm, very quiet, very peaceful. And there's no open crime. Where I grew up as a child, the first RV park I lived in was Town & Country Motel Trailer Park, there was open prostitution and drug-dealing, and it was an awful, awful cesspool. ... and then after that, we lived in another place called Horseshoe Trailer Park. It wasn't as bad but it certainly wasn't desirable either. Both places are since demolished. And there's new buildings there now. ...

Re: V: Yeah, so, uh, this sense of community, you say, is something you haven't felt when you were living as a conventional tenant?

K: ...I don't smoke, I don't drink, I don't party, my kids are in bed at seven thirty and I was living like that. I felt angry, I felt hurt, I felt that I was paying too much for what I was getting. And so that's why I just—I had enough of it. It's—for

example, let's relate it to governments. People, there's a saying, they don't vote a government in, they vote a government out. I got rid of basement suite landlords. I got out. As a mum with kids, people don't like you very much. In a basement suite. They're gonna complain about your kids. They're gonna complain every single time they can. Maybe not all of them, but that was my experience. ...

K: I'm not interested in living with anyone else. When people would speak to me about—cause I had spoke with people that I'm going to buy an RV, "This is what I'm going to do", people felt that it was like a step down. That I was moving into a vehicle. I didn't see it that way, I see it as my form of empowerment. So many people that I know are living with a roommate. And if their roommate bails on them with rent and they can't make their rent, it's such an unfortunate situation. So who has the upper hand? Me living in a vehicle, if you wanna call it that, it's more like a condo on wheels, or the person living with their parents or the person living with their roommate or the person living with their spouse that they wanted to divorce but they can't because of financial reasons? Who has the upper hand? I would say I do. I don't consider it a vulnerability as much as I consider it an empowerment.

V: So considering where you are now, so, is there anything you would change about the place where you live now? Or anything you would change about the places you lived before?

K: ... The places weren't the problem, it was the people and the mentality of the person who managed the property. The place wasn't the problem. It was the mentality of the people who managed the place that was disagreeable to my own self. That's what I found was the problem. ...

K: ... So I would say that the problem was not the place so much as the people managing it and how they treated you as a person living there. Like, for example right now I'm living here in an RV park, it's got a manager. The manager, they've

gotta deal with their complaints. If someone's gonna complain about my kids, they're gonna want me to move because they feel lots of people complaining about me so I must be eliminated because I'm the one that's causing them to complain. But the manager isn't gonna come in here and look at my RV and tell me what I can and can't put on my wall. So, it's different. I feel I have my privacy living in my RV. And privacy and freedom are very costly. You pay a lot to be able to get your privacy and your freedom because it's certainly not free. So, that's what I've discovered living in different situations for rentals. And, yes, renting an RV pad is still a rental situation but it's different and you definitely have more privacy to yourself when you're in your own space.