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Mobile Homes: Class, Space and Race in Idealized Landscapes of Home

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MOBILE HOMES:
CLASS, SPACE AND RACE IN IDEALIZED LANDSCAPES OF HOME

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Geography & Anthropology

by
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
List of Figures and Tables	v
Abstract.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Research Questions.....	2
Idealized Landscapes of Home	3
Chapter 2: History and Literature Review.....	12
Mobile Homes in the United States: History and Distribution	12
Material and Public Cultures	21
Studies of Home.....	27
Space, Race, Anthropology and Geography: Whiteness	34
Social Production of Mobility.....	40
Chapter 3: Methodological Considerations and Project Methods	47
Preliminary Field Work	47
Project Methods	49
Defining Complex Terms	50
News Media Collection and Analysis.....	51
Setting the Local Site	54
Site Visits to Manufactured Housing Retailers and Manufactured Housing Communities	57
Surveys and Informal Interviews.....	61
Chapter 4: Mobile Home as Misnomer and the Connotation of Short-Term Residents	74
Terms: Trailer, Mobile Home, Manufactured Home.....	76
Home, Dwelling and Transience	78
Literal Attachment	81
Mobile Home Park versus Private Property	89
Owning versus Renting in a Mobile Home Park	92
Community/Metaphoric Attachment	95
Rules and Aesthetics	103
Displays of Nationalism.....	112
Chapter 5: Unstable Structures, Unstable People.....	118
Inferior Design and Materials	121
Structural Vulnerability to Storms	128
Financially Unstable People	132
Generally Unstable People in Mobile Home Parks	144
Chapter 6: Class, Race and Normative Space	156
The White Mobile Home Demographic: Public Perception and Census Data	160
White Trash and Trailer Trash.....	164
Mobile Homes as Public and Private Space	170
Undesirable Landscapes	176

Mobile Home versus Home	181
Chapter 7: Manufacturing the Other in Landscape	190
References Cited.....	198
Appendices	
Appendix A: Galeucia Sample Questions Informal Interviews.....	215
Appendix B: Galeucia Library Survey	217
Appendix C: Galeucia Project Flyer	220
Appendix D: Galeucia IRB Approval.....	221
Vita.....	222

List of Tables and Figures (by author unless otherwise stated)

Tables

Table 2.1 Review of Census-Reported Mobile Homes in Louisiana	19
Table 3.1 Approximate Demographic Breakdown of Library Survey Participants	67

Figures

Figure 2.1 Map of Mobile Homes in the Continental US	16
Figure 2.2 Percentage of Mobile Homes Reported by LA Parish 2015	18
Figure 2.3 Utilitarian Mobile/Manufactured Homes	22
Figure 2.4 Upscale Mobile/Manufactured Home	22
Figure 2.5 Upscale Mobile Home from Industry Promotional Material	23
Figure 2.6 Upscale Mobile Home from Industry Promotional Material	23
Figure 3.1 Manufactured Housing Community Site Visits and Public Library Survey Sites	59
Figure 3.2 Page One of Library Survey	68
Figure 3.3 Page Two of Library Survey	70
Figure 3.4 Page Three of Library Survey	71
Figure 3.5 Breakdown of Survey Page Two Circled Responses	72
Figure 4.1 Donald’s Survey Sheet	83
Figure 4.2 Aerial View of Mobile Homes, West Virginia, Library of Congress	85
Figure 4.3 Aerial View of Mobile Homes, West Virginia, Library of Congress	86
Figure 4.4 Mobile home on road, FEMA	86
Figure 4.5 Dorothy’s Survey Sheet	87
Figure 4.6 Brittany’s Survey Sheet	88
Figure 4.7 Gina’s Survey Sheet	88
Figure 4.8 Jo’s Survey Sheet	89
Figure 4.9 Sara’s Survey Sheet.....	90
Figure 4.10 Mobile Home, Source: Mike Roseberry.....	92
Figure 4.11 Empty Mobile Home Lot	94
Figure 4.12 Larry’s Survey Sheet Part One	95
Figure 4.13 Abandoned Mobile Home, Source: Keef59, Flickr.com	96
Figure 4.14 Abandoned Mobile Home, Source: Keef59, Flickr.com	96
Figure 4.15 Abandoned Mobile Home, Source: Keef59, Flickr.com	96
Figure 4.16 Mobile Home Park Sign	99
Figure 4.17 Mobile Home Community Sign	99
Figure 4.18 Interior Road of Mobile Home Part One.....	100
Figure 4.19 Interior Road of Mobile Home Part Two	100
Figure 4.20 Mobile Home Estates Brochure Page One	101
Figure 4.21 Mobile Home Estates Brochure Page Two	101
Figure 4.22 Large Corner Lot in Estates Mobile Home Park	102
Figure 4.23 Interior Road Village Mobile Home Park	103
Figure 4.24 Standard Mobile Home Skirting.....	104
Figure 4.25 Up-Close View of Mobile Home Skirting	105
Figure 4.26 Invasive Landscaping in a Mobile Home Park	107
Figure 4.27 Container Gardens in One Mobile Home Park Yard.	107
Figure 4.28 Carport and Patio Pavers	108
Figure 4.29 Potted Plants and Front End of Mobile Home	108
Figure 4.30 Potted Plants and Front End of Mobile Home	108
Figure 4.31 Mobile Home Park Lot Intricate Decorations	109

Figure 4.32 Mobile Home Park Lot Intricate Decorations	109
Figure 4.33 Elaborate Landscaping in Side Yard of Mobile Home Park Lot	110
Figure 4.34 Elaborate Landscaping in Side Yard of Mobile Home Park Lot	111
Figure 4.35 Elaborate Landscaping in Side Yard of Mobile Home Park Lot	111
Figure 4.36 American Flag Behind Trees.....	113
Figure 4.37 American Flag on Front Siding	113
Figure 4.38 American Flag near Ramp.....	114
Figure 4.39 American Flag on Deck.....	114
Figure 4.40 American Flag in Carport.....	115
Figure 4.41 Displays of Religion and National Affiliation Combined	115
Figure 5.1: Joseph’s Survey Sheet	121
Figure 5.2: Sam’s Survey Sheet	122
Figure 5.3: Simon’s Survey Sheet	122
Figure 5.4: Russell’s Survey Sheet	122
Figure 5.5: Dawn’s Survey Sheet	123
Figure 5.6: Rob’s Survey Sheet	123
Figure 5.7: Helena’s Survey Sheet	125
Figure 5.8: Ronnie’s Survey Sheet	126
Figure 5.9: Alexis’ Survey Sheet	126
Figure 5.10: Sylas’ Survey Sheet	127
Figure 5.11: Julia’s Survey Sheet	128
Figure 5.12: Emily’s Survey Sheet	129
Figure 5.13: Bea’s Survey Sheet	130
Figure 5.14: LMHA Video Traditional Home Exterior	137
Figure 5.15: LMHA Video Traditional Home Interior	138
Figure 5.16: Bert’s Survey Sheet	138
Figure 5.17: Bank Repossession Sign at Retailer	139
Figure 5.18: Bank Liquidation and Credit Score Signs at Retailer	140
Figure 5.19: Henry’s Survey Sheet	142
Figure 5.20: Dominique’s Survey Sheet Part One	143
Figure 5.21: Martin’s Survey Sheet	145
Figure 5.22: David’s Survey Sheet	148
Figure 5.23: Dominique’s Survey Sheet Part Two	149
Figure 5.24: Howard’s Survey Sheet	149
Figure 5.25: “He is Risen” Window Decoration	153
Figure 5.26: Mary Statuary at Side of House	153
Figure 6.1: Devin’s Survey Sheet	163
Figure 6.2: Becca’s Survey Sheet	165
Figure 6.3: Marcus’ Survey Sheet	167
Figure 6.4: Mary’s Survey Sheet	167
Figure 6.5: Trina’s Survey Sheet	167
Figure 6.6: Ethan’s Survey Sheet	168
Figure 6.7: Meghan’s Survey Sheet.....	168
Figure 6.8: Image of HUD Tag	171
Figure 6.9: Four Private Space Signs.....	172
Figure 6.10: Lattice Siding Used for Privacy	172
Figure 6.11: Sign: No Vehicles Put Here For Sale in Mobile Home Park	173
Figure 6.12: Garbage Dumping Sign in Mobile Home Park	173
Figure 6.13: Upscale Mobile Home Park Communal Space	175
Figure 6.14: Zero Amenities Mobile Home Park Communal Space	175

Figure 6.15: Playground in Mobile Home Park Communal Space176

Figure 6.16: Mobile Home Park on Side of Road177

Figure 6.17: Entrance to Mobile Home Park179

Figure 6.18: Long Exterior Driveway Entrance to Mobile Home Park179

Figure 6.19: Interior Drive of Estates Mobile Home Park180

Figure 6.20: Cari’s Survey Sheet184

Figure 6.21: Marianne’s Survey Sheet185

Figure 6.22: Jenny’s Survey Sheet185

Figure 6.23: Marvin’s Survey Sheet185

Figure 6.24: Martha’s Survey Sheet186

Figure 6.25: Carol’s Survey Sheet187

Figure 6.26: Laila’s Survey Sheet187

Figure 6.27: LMHA Website Home Page188

Figure 6.28: Larry’s Survey Sheet Part Two188

Abstract

This study explores the connections between public perceptions and regulation of mobile homes, and how this connection in turn represents and regulates the bodies residing within them.

Applying various qualitative methods in participant and media research, I explored the material and social/symbolic aspects of mobile homes in and around East Baton Rouge Parish, LA, as well as media (primarily news) discussing mobile homes across the United States. I sought to explore these in relation to the normative and ideal expressions and image of the American home and its relationship to idealized American landscapes. Dialectics of mobility/rootedness and physical and social stability/instability as they relate to manufactured houses lead to a more thorough understanding of the material and social components of normative American landscapes. Moreover, this project contributes to larger conversations about whiteness in terms of class, space and mobility. I argue that by looking at the interplay between whiteness and mobility I am able to explore representations and experiences of ideal and othered landscapes within the United States. In so doing, I highlight the ironic immobility of mobile home residents, both in terms of the label “mobile” as misnomer and in terms of social mobility for residents, and explore how whiteness complicates social exclusion via mobility and idealized homes.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This is a study about mobile homes: what they are, where they are, and how they are mediated and perceived. I engage the material aspects of mobile homes as a portal into a more nuanced understanding of community, culture and ideas associated with home in the United States.

Specifically, this study explores the connections between public perceptions and regulation of mobile homes, and how this connection in turn represents and regulates the bodies residing within them. For this project I explored the material and social/symbolic aspects of mobile homes in and around East Baton Rouge Parish, LA, as well as media (primarily news) discussing mobile homes across the United States, in relation to the normative and ideal expressions and image of the American home and its relationship to idealized American landscapes.

Dialectics of structural stability/human stability and structural instability/human instability as they relate to manufactured houses lead to a more thorough understanding of the material and social components of normative American landscapes. Additionally, this provides a window toward both symbolic and empirical implications of race and class in the American everyday. Moreover, this project contributes to larger conversations about whiteness in terms of class, space and mobility. In turn, I use this to further enhance nuanced explanations of home and race identity within the context of the “white paradigm” as suggested by Kobayashi and Peake (1994), Delaney (2002), and Anderson (2002), among others, and ultimately contribute to complicating the role of white space as normative space. Geographic study of mobile homes in the United States offers unique opportunities for mapping the spatial, symbolic and social aspects of mobility among whites in the United States. For the past 90 years mobile homes have occupied the American cultural landscape. Yet during that time, comparatively limited attention has been paid to them.

For this study I applied a multi-pronged approach to qualitative research in the form of (1) content analysis of 200 news media stories related to mobile homes, (2) participant field work via twenty-six in-depth interviews with mobile home residents and others connected to mobile home communities, including professionals related to mobile home zoning and finances, as well as 105 survey conversations with public library patrons from various backgrounds, (3) collection and analysis of dozens of images of mobile home exteriors and yards obtained either while in the field or via publically available resources such as the Library of Congress and Flickr's creative commons and public domain archives, (4) analysis of housing-related literature and promotional material from public planning and government agencies, nonprofit groups and housing advocates. Through this research I engaged the following research questions:

- What can the study of mobile homes in the United States teach us about idealized American landscapes of home?
- What do the spatial, social, material and symbolic elements of mobile homes and ideas relating to them demonstrate about the values permeating public perception of home ownership and community identity?
- What can the study of mobile homes' relationship to different forms of mobility teach us about class, race and normative ideals in the context of the American cultural landscape?

Building on research of geographers, anthropologists, landscape architects, sociologists, urban planners and media studies scholars, this multi-tiered approach to answering the aforementioned questions related to mobile homes can provide new opportunities for exploring American culture and the idealized landscapes of home that have profound social, symbolic and material effects on society.

Idealized Landscapes of Home

Much of the mythos of America, and the idealized landscapes connected to it, invoke the rule of property ownership as a foundational piece of success. Historian Nancy Isenberg (2016:xvii), in *White Trash: the 400 year untold history of class in America*, offers that when we consider class and ideal American experience, “it begins and ends with concepts of land and property ownership: class identity and the material and metaphoric meaning of land are closely interconnected.” Keeping this mind, Economist Wallace Peterson (1994) and others (Jillson 2004, Little 2012) have argued for the significance of home as a keystone to American identity and success. This can have important implications for the role of home as a part of identity in the United States.

Scholars often identify specific home aesthetics (the white picket fence, for example) or specific types of home ownership, with success (Jackson 1984, Peterson 1994, Mackin 2006). Similarly, scholars discussing American cultural ideals or American values discuss the spatial and material construction of homes as high priorities (Jakle and Wilson 1992, Dant 1999), and idealized images of American landscapes often include various forms of home, though rarely if ever mobile homes, as this dissertation discusses. Sociologists Katherine MacTavish and Sonya Salamon (2001: 488) suggest that purchasing mobile homes offers access to the dream of home-ownership, but caution that few studies have been initiated to determine the realities of residents’ quality of life as it relates to resources and a sense of community. Further, their study suggests that many residents of mobile homes, even if they own their domicile, do not consider it to be the type of home ownership idealized in the American cultural landscapes (MacTavish and Salamon 2001: 502). Often, they note, the public perception of mobile homes, combined with the lack of private space inside mobile home communities, leads residents to feel this way.

Richard Schein (2003: 203) suggests that cultural landscapes “reflect and are symbolic of individual activity and cultural ideals, as they simultaneously are central to the constitution and reinforcement of those ideals.” Through the course of the twentieth century the landscapes and ideals of U.S. culture have undergone dramatic adjustments, stemming from industrial and population booms in the early part of the century, the changing attitudes of urban and rural community amid the rapid rise of suburban landscapes, and increasing reflexivity and conversation regarding the social/symbolic and spatial tensions associated with adjustments. Ideas about home consistently emerge as primary elements to the changing landscape, as referents to the past, glimpses of the future, and portals to the changing ideals and tensions embedded in their foundations.

Consider Donald Meinig’s (1979) discussion of the idealized homes in the landscape. He identifies the New England village, Main Street of the Midwest, and Suburbia as the physical settings for white Anglo-Saxon Protestants from the middle-class (Meinig 1979b: 172). The image of a utilitarian mobile home or mobile home park does not fit within these idealized landscapes. They are not part of the New England village, Main Street or the suburban subdivision, though they were swiftly gaining popularity during the time period Meinig discusses and during the time that Meinig wrote this about symbolic landscapes. As John Wylie (2007: 2) notes in his review of landscape and its complexities, “landscape is precisely and inherently a set of tensions.” The tension between idealized landscapes and other landscapes is where this dissertation begins and ends. In the pages between, I use this tension to explore mobile homes as a piece of un-ideal landscape, yet a landscape which millions of people inhabit. Multiple tensions emerged during this study: between public perception, empirical data and lived experience of mobile homes; between industry promotional materials and realities of which homes populate the

landscapes I encountered; and broader tensions between what is constituted as normal and what is not.

This landscape discussion does not only refer to material structures; race and class, among other things, also play an important role. This idealized image of home and the people in these homes, according to Meinig, often omitted groups of people that did not fit into the racial, class or spatial category of the ideal description. Referring specifically to the discussion of the Main Street identity in the Midwest, Meinig (1979b: 178), notes that even as early as the late-nineteenth century these areas also contained “poor whites on the other side of the tracks, regarded as drifters and dregs who were illiterate, unskilled and unsuccessful through their own fault,” as well as various immigrant and African-American communities. Yet none of these communities were included in the idealized landscape.

Significantly, Meinig’s description of the ideal and the other, and the separation between affluent whites and whites with less money or non-Anglo-Saxon roots, underscores a vital point for the scope of this project. The poor whites omitted from discussions of the ideal landscape were not only separate, they were blamed for their own misfortune, presumably for failing to successfully engage this idealized landscape: “Such people and their habitations and facilities show up marginally, if at all in the symbolic landscape. They are not really welcome on Main Street, they certainly are not part of the idealized community which was considered representative of basic American virtues” (Meinig 1979b: 178.) Additionally, significantly, they were identified as drifters and dregs, mobile bodies disengaged from the landscape.

This underscores a few important points about the role of race and mobility in the idealized landscape. First, Meinig distinguishes the judgment placed upon poor whites apart from discussions about African-Americans, Latinx, Asians and other nonwhite groups. The color of

their skin indicates that poor whites had the opportunity to access desirable landscapes; they had material access to opportunity simply because of their skin tone. Newitz and Wray (1997:1) suggest that stereotypes of poor whites and specifically the white trash stereotype, “serves as a useful way of blaming the poor for being poor.” With this in mind, some could argue these whites simply weren’t trying hard enough to succeed or were otherwise deficient. Further, one could surmise that somewhere outside the idealized landscape of home there are unwanted landscapes containing unwanted representations of American values. Additionally, white people specifically were identified as mobile bodies shifting through the landscape, opting out or failing out of settled community. Many scholars (Anderson 1987, Delaney 2002, Liu 2000, Pulido 2000, Wilson 2002, Woods 1998, among others) discuss the relationship between African-Americans, Latinx, Asians and other nonwhite populations and specific neighborhoods or structures. Often, popular and news media relegate poor whites to mobile homes, and a few scholars (Irby 2000, MacTavish and Salamon 2006) provide data exploring this representation. Among these few scholars, geographers Lucy Jarosz and Victoria Lawson (2002) underscore the contemporary resilience of this perspective in their *Antipode* article “‘Sophisticated People’ Versus ‘Rednecks’: Economic Restructuring and Class Difference in the American West,” wherein they critique the use of terms such as redneck to perpetuate negative stereotypes about rural poor whites being “wild, empty, backward and sometimes threatening” due to bad choices they have made or their general ineptitude (2002: 8). Within this ineptitude, the image of the white transient either lingers just below the surface or is explicitly stated.

Although Meinig wrote in the late 1970s about the early and mid-twentieth centuries, contemporary geographers of race and landscape (Kobayashi and Peake 1994, Woods 1998, special issues of *Social and Cultural Geography* in 2000 and *The Professional Geographer* in

2002, Schein 2006) underscore that this idealized white, affluent landscape still persists today. What, then, does the landscape look like for those whites who are not part of the idealized landscape? In past and present public perceptions, one such landscape depicts mobile homes, either on individual plots of land or within compartmentalized communities. To date there has been comparatively little academic discussion about landscapes of whites who are not affluent or middle-class. Even rarer is extensive critical discussion about the role of mobile homes in idealized landscapes of home. This project aims to address these lacunae and highlight, via the lens of whiteness, class and mobility, the fact that dominant paradigms have negative repercussions on people from all backgrounds.

The study of material conditions offers important insight into political and moral aspects connected to them (Wright 2003: 173) and can lead to greater understanding of how things become prescriptive. Richard Schein offers a helpful definition of normative to frame the discussion: “at its simplest, the idea of ‘normative’ has to do with prescribing norms, of suggesting what *ought* to be” (Schein 2003: 201, italics in original.) Meinig’s discussion of idealized landscapes provides insight into what has become the normative standard for home by outlining the material, racial and socioeconomic rubrics for it. With this in mind, I turn to David Sibley’s (1995) call to explore geographies of exclusion in order to understand how power is expressed through the regulation and monopolization of space. Significantly, Sibley (1995: xv) reminds us that “a study of exclusion, however, is necessarily concerned with inclusion, with the ‘normal’ as much as the ‘deviant,’ the ‘same’ as well as the ‘other,’ and with the credentials required to gain entry to the dominant groups in society.” Sibley challenges us to understand the excluded by interrogating the accepted.

Following Sibley, I've chosen to focus in part on societies that, in some fashion, are seemingly normal or mainstream. In my work I focus on white people, specifically on white people who live in mobile homes. I do this not because I think a focus on white people is the best practice to illuminate more deeply the plight of the person who is not white (though I do believe it contributes.) I do this, rather, because I take as a point of embarkation the argument that if we want to dismantle paradigms of oppression and power, we need to construct an argument that is accessible to the audience in power. Thus, I discuss white people, and the othering of certain white people, through idealized landscapes of home.

Amid this, the emphasis on property and land ownership as intrinsic to ideal American landscapes omits a significant piece of white history: white people in the United States come from families of migrants, whether they were one-time immigrants who stayed where they landed, early frontiersmen who traversed the continent, or some combination of the two. Isenberg (2016: 13-14) invokes this memory as it relates to class identity, reminding us that early migrants to the US were often members of the lower economic class. Yet these stories of Euro-Anglo-White migration seem distant to the contemporary narratives of belonging that permeate normative identity in the contemporary United States, where racism is thinly veiled through anti-immigrant rhetoric and euphemisms about safe and unsafe neighborhoods that traverse race lines. Following Newitz and Wray (1997) in their quest to highlight inequality for all via the lens of highlighting negative impacts of power structures on whites, I offer that by studying the intersection of whiteness and class via mobile homes I can contribute to studies that aim to deconstruct whiteness as privilege and “foster anti-racist forms for white identity” (Newitz and Wray 1997: 3-4).

I submit that by exploring the role of mobile homes within the American cultural landscape researchers can highlight the reach of racist and classist practices within normative paradigms. The specific value of exploring manufactured housing within this purview is underscored by one key identifier for the housing type, used pervasively: the label “mobile.” While whiteness offers a significant amount of social mobility in the United States, the connection of some whites to mobile homes—and perceived physical mobility—complicates their access. Cresswell’s (2006) argument for the importance of exploring social production of mobility as it plays out in landscape, combined with Cresswell and Merriman’s (2013) assertion that public representations of the mobile figure at best reduce, and at worst oppress the mobile figure, are key elements to exploring the role of the mobile home in the American landscape.

Cresswell and Merriman (2013: 9-10) assert that (mobile) people are:

defined by representational schemes that lie beyond the scale of the individual. They have been constructed and represented in law, newspaper accounts, novels and films, but these subject positions are also inhabited, resisted, and manipulated through practice. Representations of particular subject positions frequently caricature such figures, stereotyping the manner in which people of different gender, class, ethnicity, wealth, age, sexuality or nationality are expected to occupy particular mobile subject positions, and erasing the differences of those same individuals.

This interplay between representation and lived experiences is at the core of this study. The public representation and subsequent perception of mobile homes and mobile home residents creates a classed, racialized disconnect from idealized landscapes. This occurs even when the representation of mobility does not reflect bodies that are truly physically mobile. That mobile homes and mobile home residents are significantly less mobile than representations suggest further complicates the role the house type and its residents play within the American cultural landscape. The representation of the mobility ironically, in many senses, situates and fixes individuals within one rigid social identity. Drawing from Cresswell’s (2006) argument that

mobility is a social product that itself contributes to the production of space, time and representation, I reflect on the ironic representations of mobility and the effect of perceived mobility on mobile home residents. Cresswell (2006: 1-2) identifies “mobility as progress, as freedom, as opportunity, and as modernity, sit side by side with mobility as shiftlessness, as deviance, as resistance.” This paradox about mobility mirrors Allan Wallis (1991) note that mobile homes exist as paradoxes within the American cultural landscape; they are simultaneously a product and symbol of American progress and freedom and symbols of unrealized dreams and undesirable landscapes. In subsequent chapters I trace the history of mobile homes, current experience of mobile homes, normative landscapes and different forms of mobility. But first, I briefly outline the trajectory of this dissertation.

Chapter 2 turns first to the history, current population statistics and important terms related to American mobile homes. Within this, I discuss mobile home statistics specific to East Baton Rouge Parish and surrounding areas, and how these do and do not reflect statistics for the United States as a whole. From there, I trace geographic and general academic discussion of mobile homes and the general themes that emerged in the literature. Chapter 3 explores methods and approaches I engaged in this study and provides an overview of the raw data collected from media, other public materials and participants.

Chapter 4 signals the shift into more in-depth discussion of the data and its relationship to my research questions and related literature, focusing on the idea of the “mobile” home, itself a misleading term, and the subsequent assumption that its inhabitants are themselves often transient and therefore uncommitted to the community at large.

Chapter 5 continues this discussion, drawing on the binary of stability/instability and residents’ socioeconomic mobility to discuss the materials comprising a mobile home and the

characteristics of the stereotypical mobile home resident. This chapter explores the public assumption that both the structure and the inhabitants are unsafe and/or unstable, and the broader implications and discussions about social mobility stemming from this assumption.

In Chapter 6, I delve specifically into race, class, space and what constitutes normal versus “other” in terms of home. In this chapter, I take a look at what the discussions from previous chapters contribute to understanding paradigms of normative space and the role that race and class play in mobile home landscapes. I look specifically at middle-class and affluent white normative space, and how this plays a role in idealized landscapes of home. I explore the interplay between public perception of mobile home resident demographics and public statistics from sources like the American Community Survey and the broader US Census.

Chapter 7 provides a capstone for previous chapters, outlining the interconnectedness between these binaries of attachment/transience, stability/instability, normative/other and how these reflect and yet complicate larger implicit conversations about mobility and what “type” of person is more likely to live within which landscapes. I revisit my research questions and recap the overarching answers to them as discussed in chapters 4-6.

Chapter 2: History and Literature Review

Mobile Homes in the United States: History and Distribution

As both physical shelters and social symbols, mobile homes present paradoxes in the American landscape. They were born of nineteenth century technological innovation and refined in the 1940s as a response to post World War II housing needs. Yet in the public sphere they are frequently represented as disconnected from mainstream American progress and ideals. They are both an outgrowth of, and an affront to, American identity. Allan Wallis (1991: 22-23), a public policy and environmental psychology scholar, discusses this:

The paradoxical place of the mobile home in American housing—as both necessity and pariah—may be found in conflicts within our most fundamental beliefs about home and community, conflicts between conformity and individuality, between the place-bound community and the expectation that individual freedom means freedom to move. It is also the conflict between the factory-built and the site-built: between the ideal of mass production/mass consumption.

Wallis' articulation of these contradictions offers much to discuss about normative space and idealized landscapes, and mirrors Cresswell's (2006) note about the inherent contradictions to mobility: mobility is bound to ideas of freedom and strength as well as instability, danger, other. The conflict between conformity/individuality and mobility as good/mobility as bad permeates discussions in chapters 4 and 5 related to physical attributes of mobile homes and social attributes of their residents. Chapter 4 highlights the contradictions between the idea that mobile homes are mobile and the reality that most are place-bound, as are the residents within them. Because of these conflicting ideas about what a mobile home is, it “may be shunned not because it fails to satisfy American housing ideals, but because it makes these contradictions between ideals apparent” (Wallis 1991: 22-23).

In this regard mobile homes act as reminders of competing ideals in American identity, and are as a result often relegated to the margins, both geographically and socially. This

conflicted relationship between the mobile home and the larger American context is intricately woven through the history of American mobile home development and the related human narratives projected onto these homes during different points in history.

Mobile homes of a variety of sorts were in existence prior to the twentieth century but were frequently defined as vehicles due to their chassis and wheels (Wallis 1991: 26). By the 1940s the “travel trailer” developed into the “house trailer” as the United States government increased factory production to create temporary houses for migrant industry workers supporting the war effort and veterans returning from the war (Bérubé 1997: 18, Jackson 1994, Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002: 5, Wallis 1991: 81). These post-war trailers were widely considered temporary solutions due to their comparatively inefficient construction. Despite this, assert Hart, Rhodes and Morgan, “from the start they were used as permanent residences by traveling salesmen, itinerant workers in construction and agriculture, and other mobile folk” (Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002: 9). Trailer parks, or mobile home communities, came about as a result of early complaints by landowners and homeowners that trailers parked by the side of roads left the area trampled and messy (Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002:8).¹ The U.S. government contributed to this idea that house trailers were not intended for permanent housing in one single community by donating its trailers to universities for married student temporary housing and passing laws regarding which areas of land were acceptable for trailer parks to inhabit, even permitting their placement on flood plains due to the popular idea that they could be towed quickly in case of an emergency (Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002: 14). This will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

¹ Wallis (1991: 35) notes that, ironically, the contemporary concept of poor white trailer trash actually has roots in affluent white travelers in the early twentieth century who parked their travel trailers on the side of the road and littered or trampled the area.

By the 1950s the use of house trailers for World War II veteran housing led to the spreading of the idea that trailers could be used as permanent housing. Trailers were upgraded in their material structure and relabeled “manufactured homes” or “mobile homes,” and were considered to be an inexpensive alternative to a typical family home (Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002: 5, Bérubé 1997: 18, Wallis 1991: 83). In 1963 debates between the necessity for a trailer to be mobile and the still-prominent trend of trailer inhabitants using the space as their fixed dwelling led to a split in the industry: one for recreational vehicles (RVs) and one for mobile homes (Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002: 17). Since then, mobile homes have grown wider, longer and more elaborate, resembling little of the first popular modes. In 1969 doublewide, or multi-sectional, mobile homes were introduced (Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002: 21).

As the twentieth century progressed, so too did the popular representations and demographics of mobile home residents. Although upscale models became increasingly common, publicity surrounding trailers for temporary disaster-related housing increased and older mobile homes were becoming more often connected with ideas of decomposition and disconnection with community. These themes emerged in contemporary media and participant data throughout this study. Additionally, images of recreational vehicles (as distant cousins to mobile homes) were often conflated with images of mobile home inhabitants.² In the early days of the mobile home and up through the 1980s, young families and retirees were the primary

² It is also important to note that despite the many negative connotations associated with the mobile and temporary aspects of mobile home life, some positive associations also contribute to the idea that mobile homes are disconnected from the American mainstream’s ideals of home and rootedness. Nostalgia for the travel trailers of the early twentieth century is one example, and in recent years recreational vehicles and the burgeoning “tiny house” movement have become more popular in public discussion. In Louisiana many people purchase travel trailers to follow sporting activities across the region. In other parts of the country people embrace the idea of what participants referred to as “life off the grid” by abandoning mortgages and hitting the highways in their retirement years.

purchasers of mobile homes. The 1990s provided evidence, however, of the changing demographics of mobile home owners. Hart, Rhodes and Morgan (2002: 25) note that “in 1994 half of all mobile home owners were aged between 30 and 49, half had household incomes of \$20,000 to \$40,000, and half of all new units were houselike multisectionals, or double-wides.”³ The rapid cultural shifts in uses and construction of mobile homes make them difficult to accurately track and quantify across the United States’ cultural landscape (Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002: 26). Starting in 1940, the U.S. Census went through a number of different survey approaches to adapt to changing trends in the housing market and best record manufactured houses, and by 2000 7.6% of the housing stock was identified as year-round occupied mobile homes (Historical Census of Housing Tables Units in Structure review).

Numerous researchers agree on some basic information about mobile homes. Hart, Rhodes and Morgan (2002: 27) note that “the best guess seems to be that slightly less than half of all mobile homes are clustered in parks...and slightly more than half are single-sited on separate parcels of land, most on owner’s private property, but some on property that belongs to someone else, usually a relative or friend.” It is also generally agreed that quality of mobile homes and mobile home parks reflects a broad range of individual contexts such as geography, socioeconomic class and other cultural factors. 2015 U.S. Census data suggests there are still at least 7.4 million undocumented mobile homes in the United States. Figure 2.1 shows the 2015 U.S. Census data for percentages of reported mobile homes in the United States. The state of Louisiana, with 233,353 mobile homes reported in the U.S. Census, ranks number ten among the states.

³ Note that although the three halves represented overlap, are not uniform. The lack of more specific data about this statistic break down of inhabitants is representative of the other difficulties many encounter when attempting to study mobile home inhabitant demographics.

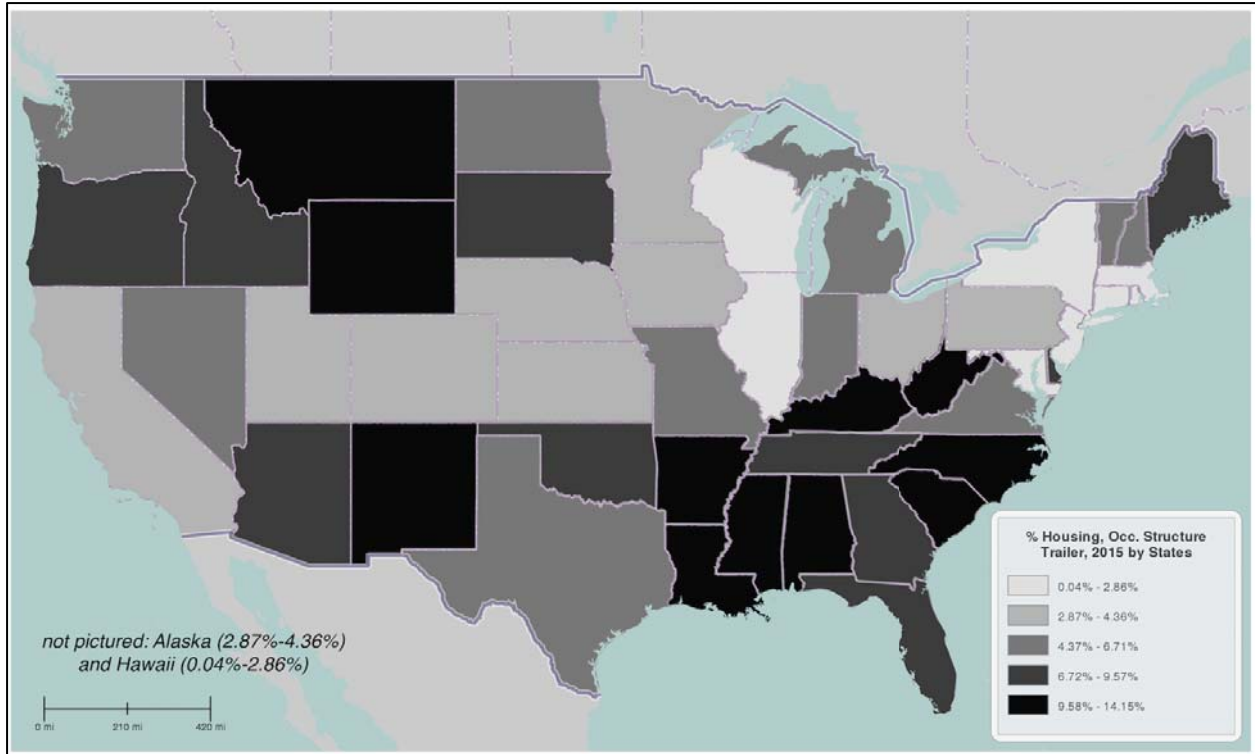


Figure 2.1: Map of Mobile Homes in the Continental US. Percent of mobile homes reported by state in 2015 census data, local quantiles. For this map, the US Census defines an “Occupied Structure: Trailer” as the following: Both occupied and vacant mobile homes to which no permanent rooms have been added are counted in this category. Mobile homes used only for business purposes or for extra sleeping space and mobile homes for sale on a dealer's lot, at the factory, or in storage are not counted. (U.S. Census Bureau Metadata). Map by author.

Figure 2.2 shows the breakdown in percentages for mobile homes in the state of Louisiana. East Baton Rouge Parish, the primary site for this study, has a conspicuously low percentage of mobile homes. This reflects the larger relative population inside the parish and the aforementioned challenges to accurate documenting of mobile homes in the census. In subsequent chapters I discuss the process of identifying mobile homes and mobile home communities in the field site, and the challenges associated with this process. East Baton Rouge ranks sixteen among sixty-four parishes for the number of mobile homes within the parish: 4,917. I also performed fieldwork in Livingston Parish, directly east of East Baton Rouge Parish. Livingston Parish, which hosts higher rural populations/lower population density than East Baton

Rouge, ranks among the highest percentages of mobile homes in the state and is number one in terms of the actual numbers of mobile homes: 12,440.⁴

Table 2.1 shows the most thorough statistical breakdown of mobile homes in Louisiana possible in light of the changes in reporting strategies the census implemented over the years. This map and table indicate that mobile homes as permanent domiciles are a major part of the vernacular landscape in the state, before one even takes into account the various types of and uses for mobile homes purchased here. Although the department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) works directly with the Manufactured Housing Institute (MHI) for the annual Manufactured Housing Survey, the data contained therein relates to new manufactured homes sales, sizes, materials and shipping rather than preexisting manufactured homes that are placed within the cultural landscape. The American Community Survey, however, provides more detail about mobile home types, sites and residents. Its data-filtering options are, however, bound by specific metropolitan sites (the closest to my study site is Houston, Texas) or by national trends across rural and urban spaces. So even though it is more detailed than HUD's Manufactured Housing Survey it still may not fully reflect the number of inhabited manufactured houses in the cultural landscape of southern Louisiana.

For the purposes of this study I focus on one type of mobile home, which is itself owned and used in many different capacities. It falls under one specific construction category, identified since 1974 by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development as “manufactured housing.” This differs from anything that could be referred to as a “recreational vehicle” or “camper” in that it is not constructed for portability, nor does it have its own engine or noncommercial trailer hitch. Additionally, while manufactured homes and the recently

⁴ Calcasieu Parish in southwestern Louisiana is a close second, with 12,265 reported mobile homes.

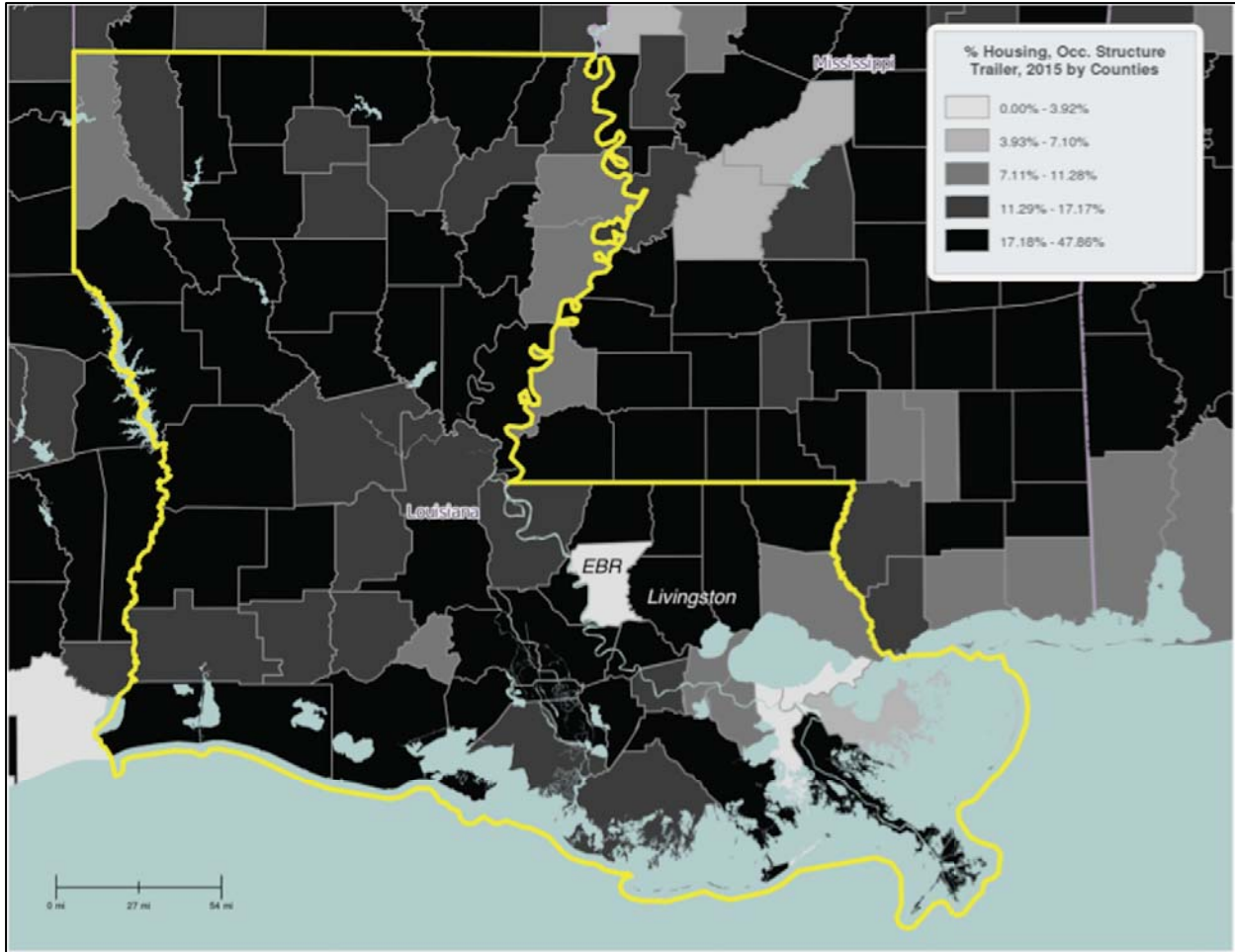


Figure 2.2: Percentage of Mobile Homes Reported by LA Parish 2015. Local quantiles. East Baton Rouge Parish is designated with “EBR.” Livingston Parish is situated due east. Map by author.

popular modular homes are both factory-built, industry participants and data from HUD and the MHI underscore the distinction between the two. Modular homes are built according to regulations determined state by state for site-built construction. Since 1976 (the year the 1974 HUD rules went into effect in manufacturing) manufactured homes have been subject to federal building standards set forth by HUD. These rules underwent further refinement over the past twenty-five years, and as of the writing of this project report included different zoning standards for wind (HUD) layered on top of other base construction standards for durability. Any manufactured house built since 1976 must be inspected by a local industry representative and

upon successfully passing HUD inspection, receives a HUD tag permanently affixed to the siding of the house.

Table 2.1: Review of Census-Reported Mobile Homes in Louisiana.

Year	# Mobile Homes Reported	% of Total Homes Reported	What was included in Report
1940	12,857	2.1	trailers, tourist cabins, and boats
1950	2,545	.3	Mobile homes only, but with part-time residents included
1960	9,445	1	Mobile homes only, but with part-time residents included
1970	38,305	3.3	Mobile home year-round residents only
1980	107,654	7	Mobile home year-round residents only
1990	196,236	11.4	Mobile home year-round residents only
2000	240,944	13	Mobile home year-round residents only

Within manufactured housing (commonly referred to as “mobile homes”) Hart, Rhodes and Morgan (2002) identify two types: the upscale, luxurious model, often comprised of multiple sections, and utilitarian, which tend to be approximately 16 by 48 feet and without extensive accessories, sophisticated materials or landscaping. Hart, Rhodes and Morgan (2002: 77-78) also assert, “utilitarian homes are everywhere, wherever low-income people need inexpensive (and quick) housing: on the fringes of cities and towns.” Herein lies a key concept to this project. Mobile homes are simultaneously everywhere and on the fringes of cities and towns. I argue that mobile homes exist not simply on the spatial fringes of cities and towns, but outside the perimeters for idealized landscapes of home as they are defined by Meinig and, as will be discussed shortly, multiple project participants and data sources for this project. Figure 2.3 demonstrates the uniform, simple rectangular shape of utilitarian mobile homes. Figure 2.4 presents a slightly upgraded model, a doublewide mobile home with custom roof pitch and

embellished door façade. Figures 2.5 and 2.6 represent the upscale versions of manufactured housing, which are also the most popular grade of manufactured housing represented in manufactured housing industry materials. I did not encounter any of these upscale manufactured homes during my fieldwork.

Throughout this study participants and related materials have used multiple terms to discuss manufactured housing. I discuss this in more detail in subsequent chapters, but it is important to note from the outset that what HUD identifies as “manufactured housing” is discussed with multiple terms in the vernacular, depending on the participant and the materials. Participants and materials associated with public policy, and especially with industry and sales, most often use the term “manufactured home.” Participants living in manufactured homes most often use the term “mobile home,” though “trailer” was also noted in conversations and surveys. News media often included “manufactured home” and “mobile home” interchangeably, and in subsequent chapters I will discuss implications for these different terms, as well as the term “trailer.” In this study I use the terms “manufactured home” and “mobile home” interchangeably and identify when participants and other data use specific words. In my closing sections I will discuss the implications of the relationship between the terms “manufactured home” and “home.”

Hart, Rhodes and Morgan (2002: 35) are also quick to note “many low income and poverty areas have high percentages of mobile homes, but not all counties with high percentages of mobile homes are associated with low income, because some people use them as affordable homes in recreation, resort, and retirement areas.” During my fieldwork most people, when asked, have heard of and can identify and discuss mobile homes; but the responses individuals give vary widely. Some people share stories of their retired relatives living in upscale mobile

home neighborhoods in Florida; others will excitedly recount stories of trash heaps and frequent police calls to trailer parks in the neighboring county. Within all of these conversations, however, people note a common popular perception, often communicated via media, that represents mobile homes and their residents as disconnected from mainstream ideals and/or as migratory. Although the U.S. Census continues to fine tune its quantitative measures of mobile homes in the United States, the frequently vague data surrounding mobile homes, coupled with the broad spectrum of personal and public ideas about mobile homes, underscores the need to study this type of housing across a broad base of American communities and via a multi-method qualitative approach emphasizing the relationship between manufactured homes as material culture, and the abstract cultural components they illuminate.

Material and Public Cultures

Folklorist Archie Green (2006: 35) traces the development of the term “material culture” through anthropological, museum and folklore studies, suggesting that even in contemporary scholarship studies of material culture could be construed by some as antiquarian or simply unenlightening. Despite this, Green argues, contemporary material studies in folklore, broader anthropological disciplines, cultural studies and geography are needed now more than ever because the material provides a window into the social, symbolic and cultural aspects of society.

Anthropologists such as Daniel Miller (2001a, 2001b, 2008, 2010, with Küchler 2005, with Horst 2005, 2006, 2012.), Sophie Woodward (2002, 2007, with Miller 2011), Heather Horst (2011, 2012) and Suzanne Küchler (2008, with Miller 2005), among others such as folklorist Henry Glassie (1968, 1975, 1999, 2000), have blazed a path of contemporary material culture studies ranging from interest in homes to clothing, mobile phones and digital technology, among other things and across international contexts.



Figure 2.3: Utilitarian Mobile/Manufactured Homes. On a sales lot in South Louisiana. Traditional rectangle with wide A-line roof pitch.



Figure 2.4: Upscale Mobile/Manufactured Home. Sometimes also referred to as a “double-wide,” on sales lot in South Louisiana. Notice the custom façade and roof pitch.

Similarly, geographers argue the importance of studying material culture to illuminate its ideological expressions. The relationship between the material elements of the world and humanity’s own development is the keystone to geographic exploration. In the late twentieth century geographic interest in material developed more specifically in correlation with increased focus on consumption and materialism (Harvey 1984, Mitchell 1995a), and in the early twenty-first century material culture studies in geography have become increasingly specified and theoretical in orientation (Cresswell 2002, P. Jackson 2000).

Ben Anderson and Divya Tolia-Kelly, in the 2004 special issue of *Geoforum* on material culture, outline the importance of multiple approaches in social science toward contemporary engagement with material culture. Geography’s relationship to material culture has longstanding trans-disciplinary roots, much of which intersects anthropology and folklore, among other fields, and studies of the material culture of homes have benefited from this greatly over the past century. Over the past ten years, in addition to increased feminist approaches to material and



Figure 2.5 Upscale Mobile Home from Industry Promotional Material. Mobile/manufactured home, sometimes also referred to as a “double-wide.” Notice the custom façade and roof pitch. Photo used with permission from Louisiana Manufactured Housing Association



Figure 2.6 Upscale Mobile Home from Industry Promotional Material. Photo used with permission from Louisiana Manufactured Housing Association

embodiment, as well as the burgeoning interest in non-representational theory, actor-network theory and materiality, geographers have argued for increased specificity with regard to materiality and its role in landscape (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004: 669).

Public culture scholars Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge (1988: 7) identify public culture as both reflective of the tensions between different forces in production of culture and also as a tool for exploring these tensions and the very factors by which public culture was constructed. Mobile homes in the American context act as both private residences and public representations of cultural ideas. News, entertainment and social media present and represent mobile homes as material sources for cultural values. Public spheres, public spaces and public culture overlap in what could best be described as a Venn diagram of representations, conversations and experiences of different people connected to mobile homes.

Many scholars interested in contemporary materialist critiques of society (Isenberg 1992, Mitchell 1995b, 2008 and Springer 2011) suggest that interrogating public culture can lead to greater understanding not only of the forces of production but also the forces of ideological control. It is in the context of competing and concurring representations of public and private space that Mitchell's (1995b) review of the distinction between public sphere and public space becomes particularly helpful. Addressing the political and spatial debates surrounding a public park in Berkeley, CA, Mitchell invokes sociologist Jürgen Habermas' theories to define the public sphere as "universal, abstract realm in which democracy occurs. The materiality of this sphere is, so to speak, immaterial to its functioning. Public space, meanwhile, is material. It constitutes a public site, a space, a ground, within and from which political activity flows" (Mitchell 1995b: 117). For the purposes of this project, the public sphere works through the sources representing mobile homes and participants' descriptions of public perceptions of mobile

homes. The public space is the physical ground that constitutes the mobile home's yard or sales lot, and when applicable, the mobile home park, which itself is filled with meaning as public, private or communal space, depending on the actions and invitations extended by mobile home residents and owners.

Material culture, in a variety of forms, provides vital opportunities for people to formulate and express their identity (Morgan 1998:5, Kraftl 2009, Meier 2009, Miller 2010), and the role of homes as both physical spaces for protection from the elements and socialized places cannot be understated. In the 1982 edited volume *Housing and Identity*, James Duncan (1982: 2), borrowing from Amos Rapaport (1969), asks “what environmental elements are used as indicators of identity?” As a partial answer to this John Adams (Adams 1984: 517), in his 1984 *Annals* essay “The Meaning of Housing in America,” reviews different concepts of house and home, underscoring the relationship between the material and the social in the American landscape. He notes:

First of all, housing satisfies the simple physical need for shelter, and shelter is a crucial element in material welfare and personal security. Housing satisfies important emotional wants and forms a key ingredient in psychic welfare. Housing also provides a social stage and social event in which competitive display forms a part. Housing carries social meanings. Housing choice and housing use are ways for renters and owners to communicate to society about where they feel they deserve to fit into the social fabric. The awareness of the status that accompanies their tenure reinforces those feelings. Housing is used to make social and cultural categories visible and stable, and zoning laws help to formalize the categories. Housing choices, like any deliberate or habitual consumptive acts, are social acts. So housing landscapes in neighborhoods, in cities, in suburbs, and beyond the metropolitan fringe become social documents for us to read and to study.

Adams' lengthy quote highlights numerous important components to this study. First, he acknowledges that housing addresses a basic human need for shelter. Beyond that, however, he articulates emotional and social/symbolic arenas where “competitive display” forms a part. The aesthetics and the overall shape of the structure tell a story about how the inhabitants fit or do not

fit into their community at various scales. One's housing might fit aesthetically and structurally within a mobile home park, but not within the broader neighborhood, city or parish/county. Adams also touches on the element of agency associated with housing. For some, the kind of house a person lives in reflects their resources and autonomy in selecting a house type. For others, the house type in which one lives reflects a distinct lack of agency that comes from a lack of resources with which to select housing. Adams further articulates that zoning and other regulations codify the social/symbolic aspects of culture and identity and ground them both to the landscape and to a mediated articulation of the landscape. As physical artifacts, houses mediate our identities.

This project focuses on these very aspects to explore parallels between perceptions of mobile homes and perceptions of their inhabitants by identifying and engaging the structure and mediation of mobile homes within the landscape. Living in a mobile home, like living in any other house type, is a social act. And according to Adams, it is also a competitive act. The data and participants I engaged for this study suggest that public perception dictates that if you live in a mobile home, you are losing.

Further, the role of media in the public sphere is important to consider in both the history and contemporary representations of home in the United States. A number of scholars (Green 1965, Sopher 1979, Goethals 1981, Guss 2000, Hoover 2006, Galeucia 2008) have discussed the specific role of media in reflecting and shaping concepts of the American dream, morality and cultural contribution. In the history of mobile homes, media as the public sphere has played a large part in situating mobile homes within the spectrum of American values, often relegating it to the less-favorable end where personal instability prevails and we rarely find the American dream achieved. I contend that while the public sphere cannot provide specific directions for

successfully acquiring a spot within desirable cultural landscapes, it can provide specific material goals. And these goals do not include residence in mobile homes.

Studies of Home

Studies in vernacular architecture over the past century represent much of groundwork for the way geographers think about and describe homes. Fred Kniffen's (1936) article "Louisiana House Types" stimulated structuralist approaches to cultural diffusion that are still prevalent over the past 70 years (Hubka 1984, Groth 1986, 2012, Edwards and Kariouk 2004). Henry Glassie's (1968, 1975, 1999, 2000) work underscores the everyday implications of house forms, adjustments to housing, as well as economic, cultural change and practical availability of materials. Building on this, scholars interested in material studies and home (Duncan and Ley 1993) developed approaches to home that engage contemporary elements such as postmodernism and hermeneutics.

Although these studies underscore the importance of the common person and his/her homes and material culture, over the past century little has been said about mobile homes and their role in the American cultural landscape (notable exceptions are Wallis 1991, Rockland 1980, Jackson 1984, 1994, Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002). The ubiquity of mobile homes across all regions of the United States suggests that students of vernacular architecture and cultural geography can learn much about how people use and value their houses by focusing more direct attention on mobile homes in public culture and private spheres.

In addition to studies of vernacular architecture many critical geographic studies of home can provide insight into potential approaches to addressing the aforementioned themes related to mobile homes. There is much to borrow, for example, from postcolonial geographies of home, identity and empire. In Alison Blunt's (2005: 510) review of cultural geography's engagement

with home, she underscores postcolonial geographies' emphasis on "the symbolic and material importance of home in shaping and reproducing the ideologies, everyday practices and material cultures of imperial power, nationalist sentiment, and diasporic resettlement." Much of the work on postcolonial geographies of home underscores the important political role of home as it relates to local, national and global power, specifically arguing these terms with regard to women (Tolia-Kelly 2004a, 2004b, Mack 2004, Llewellyn 2004a, 2004b, see also Mernissi 1995, Ring 2006 for examples from ethnography discussing home, women, public and private spheres and implications). In this study I had the opportunity to build on these assertions and approaches by applying this work to homes in the United States. This is significant because by applying frameworks from postcolonial studies of home to communities in the United States, particularly communities frequently comprised of white American citizens as well as American citizens of other races and ethnicities, I can illuminate the ideological factors at work within the U.S. domestic sphere.⁵

Wallis' (1991) *Wheel Estate* and Hart, Rhodes and Morgan's (2002) *The Unknown World of the Mobile Home* provide two of the most comprehensive historical and geographic reviews of mobile homes in the United States, and in this study I relied heavily on their work to explore the history and development of mobile homes in the United States. Wallis' historical analysis of popular travel magazines, newspapers and limited interviews with mobile home-related participants traces the development of the house type from a middle- and upper-class leisure vehicle to a working-class and low-income pariah in the American housing market and public

⁵ One query for potential future projects relates to diasporic settlement. Postcolonial geographies of home such as those engaged by Blunt and Tolia-Kelly, among others, explore diasporic populations across Africa, The United Kingdom, and the Asian sub-continent. What can a study of U.S. mobile homes teach us about smaller-scale migration, or the spreading-apart of families and communities within the US context?

sphere. Hart, Rhodes and Morgan (2002) engage the spatial distribution and development of mobile homes, exploring census data, historical housing documents and Wallis' research to paint a picture of mobile homes. Tracing mobile homes from the early twentieth century into the new millennium, the authors contend that despite the frequent dismissal of mobile homes as not worth investigating, and inconsistent data associated with the house type, it is a vital piece of the American cultural landscape.

In addition to these two pivotal mobile home monographs, the most popular foci in mobile homes hail from various disciplines concerning law, public planning, and health and safety. Law reviews periodically note the legal elements of zoning and property rights related to mobile home ownership (see Bair 1967, Rooney 1968, Vernon 1974), and health research frequently discusses potentially toxic materials in the structure itself (Liu, Huang, Hayward, Wesolowski and Sexton 1991), or the high likelihood of death by fire or natural disasters in mobile homes (Merrell, Simmons and Sutter 2005). Interestingly, one marketing study by Waylon Griffin and Frederick Sturdivant (1973) explored potential discrimination in the mobile home industry against African-Americans and Mexican-Americans. They posed three middle-class couples (one white, one African-American, one Mexican-American) as potential mobile home buyers at the same sample of mobile home retailers in the American southwest. Although their study did not uncover discriminatory practices, they suggest this may be due, in part, to the fact that the mobile home retailers they studied were not also mobile home park owners, and had no connection to the real estate on which the potential homes would be placed. As a result, they suggest, typical housing discrimination issues such as "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) were irrelevant.

Since the inception of mobile homes, one academic discipline emerges as a key discussant of the role of mobile homes in the United States, specifically as it relates to the construction standards, zoning and financing challenges, and general perceived acceptability. Researchers in urban planning have, over the past forty years, explored health and wellness issues related to a variety of topics, including property values, zoning and affordability of manufactured homes (Bair 1967, Bartke and Gage 1970, Nutt-Powell 1982, Flynn 1983, Nutt-Powell, Hoaglin and Layzer 1986). Others discuss manufactured homes as innovative solutions to housing issues and explore resident demographics (Mimura, Vanderford, George and Sweaney 2009) and attitudes toward their homes (Moore and Crocker 1991). And a few, in particular, have included discussion and analysis of the effect of perceptions of manufactured housing on their sales and placement (Holder and Coulter 1977, Day, Goss, Gruber, Hanna, Lentner and McCray 1991, Goss, Parrot and Engelen-Eigles 1992, Murphy 1993, Atilas 1995, Beamish and Goss 2000). Numerous studies focusing on NIMBY as it relates to manufactured housing have been offered by urban planning scholars (Atilas 1995, Stover, Cloud, Garner, Phillips and Strauss 1994), and this project uses this as an opportunity to bring a geographic voice into conversations about perceptions of manufactured housing and how they play a role in NIMBY and normative space.

In geography, Harrison and Popke's 2011 article "'Because You Got to Have Heat': The Networked Assemblage of Energy Poverty in Eastern North Carolina" explored the uniquely insufficient material construction of mobile homes (in addition to other structures) and the proliferation of energy poverty associated with them. The authors' approach to incorporating both lived realities from residents and statistics and advocacy reports from organizations

committed to ameliorating energy poverty can provide helpful insight into cross-referencing multiple approaches and advocating for increasingly fair access to space and resources.

Studies pertaining specifically to the individuals living in mobile homes, the communities surrounding them and the interplay between popular ideas and lived experiences, however, are significantly fewer and far between. Notable exceptions to these include historian Lee Irby's work on a trailer parks in Florida (2000), John Edwards, David Klemmack and Louis Hators Jr.'s (1973) sociological study comparing community engagement between mobile home park dwellers and single-family site-built home residents, and sociologist Katherine MacTavish's collaborative work with numerous colleagues (with Salamon 2001, 2006, with Notter and Shamah 2008) to explore quality of life, sense of community and resilience among mobile home park residents in rural Illinois.

Irby's (2001) "Taking out the Trailer Trash: The Battle over Mobile Homes in St. Petersburg, Florida," from *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, explores the history of one mobile home park and how the events there reflect the changing demographics and political makeup on Florida. Nodding to Duncan's discussion in *Housing and Identity* (1982: 12) of fear regarding strangers and their potential threat to the normative, Irby (2001: 183) suggests that mobile homes and mobile home parks fit into the category of "stranger" and critiques academia writ large for its broad sweep of mobile homes into this category without extensive academic attention. Engaging archive materials from local mobile home community bulletins, local town newspapers, and tax and census data, Irby underscores how community members opposed to mobile home development in the area identify traditional site-built homes as normative and grounded in the community, juxtaposing them with the "abnormal" mobile homes that reap the benefit of being labeled a mobile unit (according to 1950s tax law) while being ultimately

immobile, fixed to their park ground (Irby 2000: 196). This emphasis on mobility will be discussed shortly.

Irby's work is also significant because it connects the history of ideas about southern, lower-income whites with negative stereotypes and derogatory terms such as "white trash" and "trailer trash" (Irby 2000: 182). Irby notes that, ironically, in the mobile home parks he studied the managers actively discouraged African Americans from moving to the park in the hopes that keeping the park almost exclusively white would combat the trailer park stereotype (Irby 2000: 193). Within the scope of this proposal, I contend that the conflation of white trash and trailer trash extends beyond the U.S. south and transect the continental United States, if not farther.

Sociologists Katherine MacTavish and Sonya Salamon are among the few scholars performing contemporary studies of mobile homes. In their ethnographic study of one mobile home park in central Illinois they engaged residents to ascertain their sense of community and well-being in order to assess whether or not mobile homes were replacing traditional models of rural communities. Significantly, MacTavish and Salamon also connect mobile homes to lower-class whites, though unlike Irby they do not discuss the term "trailer trash." Instead, they offer statistical evidence at national and local levels for associations of mobile home parks with working-poor white communities (MacTavish and Salamon 2001: 488), although they do not discuss stereotypes or negotiation of public identity among the mobile home park's population.

Significant also for this project is the fact that MacTavish and Salamon apply a public policy and social development lens to the limitations of life in a mobile home community. Like sociologists French and Hadden (1968), MacTavish and Salamon (2006) discuss the potential ill effects of life in a mobile home park. Robert French and Jeffrey Hadden (1968) wrote about the social contexts of mobile homes. They underscored the importance of noting "the prospect that

[mobile homes] will eventually become the residences of lower-class people. In fact, the quality of construction and the market value of used units strongly suggest this is their inevitable destiny” (French and Hadden 1968: 224).

In 2006 MacTavish and Salamon, using less antagonistic language than French and Hadden, nonetheless suggested that mobile home parks are a detriment to youth development. Citing demographic statistics from the Manufactured Housing Institute (Meeks 1995), MacTavish and Salamon (2006: 163) note rural mobile home parks’ large concentration of “young, poor and less educated residents” to suggest that “the mobile home park has the potential to function as a rural version of an inner-city ghetto.” Further, they contend, “in the countryside, as in the urban ghetto, poor families and children have barriers that prevent access to social and educational resources important to successful development” (MacTavish and Salamon 2006: 164). Here, the comparison between an urban ghetto and a mobile home park is clear, particularly regarding both communities’ extreme challenges in providing a space for productive and ethical youth development that can lead to success in American culture. In short, even some academic studies suggest that mobile homes (and perhaps more specifically, mobile home parks and communities) operate as spaces wherein attaining and embodying American ideals is unlikely. While MacTavish and Salamon raise important issues related to resources for lower-income families, the relationship between the mobile home and the social issues they argue mobile homes perpetuate was not discussed.

The study of homes, and specifically mobile homes, as aforementioned scholars assert, can have profound implications on the way geographers engage and analyze larger society. Issues related to individual and social identity, race, class, gender, ability, privilege and even the idea of the American dream can be illuminated by studying place. David Harvey (1989: 234)

reminds us that people who have control over space often control the politics of surrounding place and, further, “it takes control of some place in order to command space in the first instance. The relative powers of working-class movements and the bourgeoisie to command space [have] long been an important constituent in the power relations between them.”

The agency of mobile home residents, as constituents in power relations, offers multiple levels of control and resistance. In this study, participants engaging mobile homes from the lobbying corner or industry often experience equal social and economic privilege as the legislators and bank representatives whom they challenge over zoning and financial rights of mobile homes. And as a result I had the opportunity to explore how that manifests in the dynamic between the people who control the space and the money and the people who are trying to acquire the space and the money. Perambulating simultaneously are the dynamics between mobile home owners and/or managers of mobile home properties, and mobile home residents that either own or rent. This, in turn, can provide additional support to burgeoning geographic literature dedicated to race, class and how ideas about mobility are connected to the two.

Space, Race, Anthropology and Geography: Whiteness

Early academic and nonacademic discussions surrounding race and class in the United States centered largely on arguments related to welfare and cultures of poverty among nonwhite populations. Anthropologist John Hartigan Jr. (1997a) traces the interconnectedness of whiteness and class issues to larger society back to the mid-twentieth century. He notes that during the 1960s and 1970s politicians and sociologists (see O. Lewis 1967) would often employ academic and nonacademic data about poor whites to support the argument that debates surrounding welfare reform were not about race (Hartigan 1997a: note 4, page 54).

Since the 1960s, three general trends in geographic studies of race have persisted: spatial distribution and interaction (such as racial segregation and racialized migration flows), economic and social debates (as in poverty and the ‘underclass’), and political participation (such as civil rights issues, affirmative action and electoral geographies) (Peake and Schein 2000: 135). These studies focused primarily on African-American communities and the changing landscape for African-Americans during the Civil Rights movement (Peake and Schein 2000: 134, see Morrill 1965, P.F. Lewis 1965 and Rose 1970 for examples). Specific emphasis on geographic studies of whiteness, however, came later.

As geographic studies engaging issues of racial difference begin to branch out and focus more specifically on differences *within* in addition to *between* racial categories, studies specific to whiteness have followed suit,⁶ engaging issues of class, representation and social dynamics. Similarly, anthropologists trace studies of whiteness along two lines: whiteness as normative, defined against the “other,” and different forms of whiteness contextualized by class, space and a slew of other social/symbolic identifiers (Gitlin and Hollander 1970, Howell 1973, Brodtkin 1998, 2001, Hartigan 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999, 2000 & 2005, Durlington 2009, Walton and Jaffe 2011, and for an example from sociology see Wray 2006). Geographers’ study of low-socioeconomic whites, their representations and their processes of negotiating identity owes much to the development of race studies in anthropology and sociology, among other disciplines.

Starting in the late 1980s, geographers and other scholars began to more publically critique the white normative standard within the geographic discipline itself (Glick 1983, Mitchell and Smith 1990, Livingstone 1993, Pulido 2002, more recently Peake 2011, Winders

⁶ This shift to explore differences within rather than simply between races mirrors the shift in gender studies and other critical studies that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century (Wray 2006: 4).

and Schein 2013, Kobayashi 2014). Similarly, Kobayashi and Peake (1994), Bonnet (1997), Anderson (2002) and Schein (2002) underscore the call for geographers to engage more specifically with race, class and gender construction within the discipline and society at large.⁷

Geographers writing about race, class and space in the late 1990s and early 2000s often folded their critiques of white normativity into larger discussions of spatial politics of public spheres (Mitchell 1995b), spatial politics of residential landscapes (Schein 1997, Duncan and Duncan 2001 & 2003) and collective memory and tourism (DeLyser 1999), among other things. All of these studies acknowledge the role of Anglo identity in formulating an overarching social identity and therefore, informing the material and cultural landscape. Ultimately, these scholars call for both academic and popular rejection of these normalized white spaces, and in so doing bring overdue attention to what had been a comparatively less-studied component of race and identity in geography. Geographers studying white privilege and racism as it is experienced through the lens of nonwhite populations had already been writing in the 1980s and 1990s (Anderson 1987, Woods 1998, see also Omi and Winant's 1994 social study of race and society, *Racial Formation* as a prominent source for geographers studying these issues) and new work

⁷ At the same time these critiques emerged within the discipline of geography about the majority-white demographic, influential works from other disciplines (Roediger 1991, 1994, Morrison 1992, Frankenberg 1993, Dyer 1997) caught the eye of geographers and their contemporaries. David Roediger (1991, 1994), a historian and African-American studies professor, contributed important cross-disciplinary work in the 1990s. In *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991) Roediger addresses construction of working-class white identity in terms of both Marxism and race, particularly as ideas of whiteness develop in juxtaposition to the development of the white working class. Sociologist Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) *White Women, Race Matters: the Social Construction of Whiteness* studied whiteness, class and identity among women, contributing not simply to race and class studies but also to emerging women's studies, and Toni Morrison's (1992) *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* brought ideas of white hegemony to the foreground from a literary studies perspective. Each of these works is still cited today as foundational to geographic studies of whiteness concerned with addressing white privilege and racism. Most recently, historian Nancy Isenberg's 2016 publication *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*, discusses poor whites through various regions in American history.

continued into the new millennium (Wilson 2002, Liu 2000, Gilmore 2002, Pulido 2000, HoSang, LeBennett and Pulido 2012).

While geographers focused on white privilege and racism, numerous studies in anthropology and other disciplines in the 1990s explored issues of poor and working-class whites applying the perspective of whiteness as “other” as opposed to whiteness as “privileged” (Weis and Fine 1996, Wray and Newitz 1997, Hartigan 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999, Brodtkin 1998). Anthropologist John Hartigan Jr., one of the most prolific writers on the study of whiteness and class (see Hartigan 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999, 2000, 2005), presents research associated with social and personal constructions of white identity in Detroit, Michigan, underscoring a variety of inter-white issues along both race and class continua, among others. Significantly, Hartigan explores the process of situating the white self in juxtaposition with the white other, distinguishing one’s identity as “poor white” (read: hardworking, trying to succeed and contribute to society) as opposed to “white trash” (read: social and economic drain on society). By engaging these nuanced articulations of identity within white culture Hartigan succeeds in complicating the idea of the monolithic white identity. By discussing normative whiteness in terms of middle-class and specific housing styles, I offer the opportunity to further complicate white identity by discussing “other” white spaces in the form of manufactured housing, itself outside the realm of idealized landscapes of home.

In the new millennium geographers began to engage full-force with a variety of issues surrounding whiteness, some specific to class and others not. Special issues from *Social and Cultural Geography* (2000) and *The Professional Geographer* (2002) focused specifically on issues of race and of whiteness within geography and as a subject of study. Additionally, geographers began to employ a number of different theoretical, regional and methodological

approaches to studies of whiteness. Some began to expand focus out from whiteness in the United States and engage global perspectives (Bonnett 1997, 2000, Hague, Giordano and Sebesta 2005, Saldanha 2007, Shaw 2007, Bérubé 2009a, 2009b, Houssay-Holzschuch & Teppo 2009 and Fair 2010). Others apprehended literary pieces to expand geographic understandings of race and space (Wilson 2002, Baldwin 2010, Pile 2010). A number of geographers sought to encounter issues of representation via media and/or archival research (Wilton 2002, Winders 2003, Hollander 2006, Lawson, Jarosz and Bonds 2008, Fair 2010, Pile 2010), and others engaged a variety of qualitative, ethnographically inspired methods (Nelson 2008, Inwood and Martin 2008, Housel 2009, Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2009, Gaither and Worthen 2010), or a combination of archives and ethnographic methods (Hoelscher 2003). Overwhelmingly, these recent geographic studies of whiteness tended to be qualitative (see Carter 2009 for an exception) and invested in critiquing white privilege and racism.

Despite this overwhelming emphasis on critiquing white privilege and white racism, there are some geographers studying impoverished whites in the United States. In her 2003 study on post-Civil War accounts of travel through the U.S. South, Winders (2003: 46) asserts, “One way to deconstruct this at times unwieldy connection between whiteness and privilege is to examine representations of impoverished whites, a group thought to be white but in all the wrong ways. White poverty, as I will show, challenges the myth of universal white privilege, revealing in no uncertain terms that connections between colour and class do not always hold.” As I discuss the public perceptions of race identity and the specific kind of whiteness that is associated with mobile homes, I also underscore that in a similar fashion it is possible to be a homeowner, but in all the wrong ways, if the home you own is a manufactured house.

Like Winders Lawson, Jarosz and Bonds (2008 and 2010) also emphasize the importance of engaging whites who are not affluent. In their 2008 study they engage news archives to explore how local political and business leaders use representations of poor people and poverty in general to develop and prioritize economic growth initiatives. They incorporate elements from material-based political economies and postcolonial-based concerns for discourse and representation to frame their structural analysis of relationships between working- and middle-class whites and between whites and Latinos in rural counties of the Northwest United States. Importantly, instead of focusing on the working-class and poor, Winders and Lawson, Jarosz and Bonds focus instead on the way those who are privileged represent the poor and ultimately how this leads to policies that perpetuate poverty issues.

Still other studies (Dwyer and Jones III 2000, Peake 2011) explored theoretical foundations of whiteness studies within geography, suggesting epistemological or ontological frameworks that parallel theoretical discussions in anthropology. Dwyer and Jones III, for example, suggest that by looking at whiteness via both the construction of it and the role it plays in categorizing space as public/private, neighborhood, and nation, etc. we are better equipped to engage otherwise nebulous concepts. Similarly, I offer that looking at whiteness through the lens of mobile homes and complex notions of physical and social mobility related to them, we obtain a deeper understanding of normative space.

Another important methodological consideration for exploring differences within whiteness is what some geographers (Kobayashi and Peake 2000, Anderson 2002, Delaney 2002, Schein 2003) refer to as “racialization.”⁸ In an effort to dissociate whiteness from normativity,

⁸ One interesting nongeographic study focusing on space, whiteness and racialization came from law professor Cheryl Harris (1993). Writing from the lens of property law, Harris argues that

and from the material ideals it co-opts and communicates, Kobayashi and Peake (2000: 392) discuss the 1999 Columbine high-school murders that occurred in Littleton, Colorado, to demonstrate that even predominantly white spaces are racialized. They assert that processes of racialization are present throughout landscapes that are seemingly free from racial tension or diversity, averring “this wider environment we refer to as one of ‘whiteness,’ which occurs as the normative, ordinary power to enjoy social privilege by controlling dominant values and institutions and, in particular, by *occupying space* within a segregated social landscape” (Kobayashi and Peake 2000: 393). I contend that normative spaces and material culture idealized in the public sphere is most often white affluent space, and for the purposes of this study, a site-built or modular home rather than a mobile home.

Social Production of Mobility

A key factor within this emerges when concepts of mobility are interjected into the analysis. In this section I introduced some foundational elements of mobility as I apply them in this study. In chapters 4, 5 and 6 I will continue to unpack these a bit further. Although mobilities as a deliberate focus in geography has only become an explicit field of study over the past twenty or so years, Cresswell and Merriman (2013: 2) point out that even in the 1960s geographers such as William Bunge called for specific attention to the act of moving. Peter Kabachnik (2009) further highlights that mobilities have long been a part of the conversation, such as in Doreen Massey’s (1993) call for an explicit and intentional focus on the politics of mobility as it relates to using cultural narratives to obtain and reconfigure access within mobilities. The emergence of key aspects of mobility (largely heralded by Cresswell 2006 and

whiteness as a social identity ultimately became whiteness as a form of property identification through a series of legal decisions revolving around property use and access.

Urry 2002, 2007) instigated the development of the journal *Mobilities* in 2006 and has since brought about foci in various aspects of mobility ranging from the physical to the social.

Kwan and Schwanen, in their 2016 (245) intro to a special *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* edition on mobilities, review the history and complicated construction of parameters for mobilities studies. They ask:

What if the lived and the abstract cannot be placed in dualistic opposition? What if the object-subject bifurcation of mobility into objective and subjective elements is suspended and resisted? What is movement, meaning, and practice are understood as truly entangled and mutually implicated in ways that language struggles to make graspable?

Kwan and Schwanen outline here that like many foci in geography that may seem disparate in concern, scholars researching literal movement and transportation, scholars researching meaning and practice and all the various permutations thereof, can build from and interact with each other to offer a more nuanced arena for exploring the role of both. Cresswell (2006: 25) in *On the Move: mobility in the Western World* suggests that we apply mobility as a root metaphor for contemporary understandings of the world of culture and society.

For the purposes of this study I focused on social production of mobility to explore how the perception that a person is mobile affects the social opportunities afforded them. Geographers and others (Cresswell 2006, Urry 2007, Kabachnik 2009, Jensen 2011, Cresswell & Merriman 2013) focusing on the social production of mobility build on foci in power, resistance, and the act of moving as a form of agency drawn from scholars such as Foucault (1980), Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and de Certeau (1984). Cresswell (2006: 220) offers the following discussion of the importance of mobility in society:

A fully social notion of mobilities, I have argued, is one that acknowledges the production of mobilities as an activity that occurs in the context of social and cultural difference within a systematically asymmetrical field of power. Mobility as a social and cultural resource gets distributed unevenly and in interconnected ways.

In short, mobility plays an important role not simply through the literal act of movement, but also in the way movement can be enacted as a form of acquiescence or resistance and—of particular importance in this study—through the social processes of discrimination that occur based on the perception that a group of people may be mobile. Cresswell, building on the work of anthropologist Liisa Malkki's (1992) sedentarist metaphysics, (or worldview) identifies competing values between elevating a sense of rootedness, of stationed social movement against nomadic metaphysics (or worldview).

Malkki's (1992: 25) exploration of how cultures conceptualize refugees amid increasingly global mobility illuminates the schematic of "taken-for-granted ways of thinking about identity and territory that are reflected in the ordinary language, in nationalist discourses, and in scholarly studies of nations, nationalism and refugees." Within this, she highlights the focus on roots (tree roots, explicitly) as metaphors for belonging in community, and of the very active ways that idealized sedentary foci are a part of national identity. Malkki (1992: 31) notes, "sedentarism is not inert. It actively territorializes our identities, whether cultural or national." Additionally, she adds, "it also directly enables a vision of territorial displacement a pathological." Although Malkki is looking specifically at refugees, a group of people she distinguishes from nomads, Cresswell builds on this idea and broadens it to nomadic identities. He argues, "even when mobility has been at the center of geographical attention it has been conceptualized through the lens of fixity as an ideal" (Cresswell 2006: 28). As such, anyone perceived as mobile, such as refugees, tramps, etc. are seen as a threat to the moral social order.

This occurs in direct distinction to what Cresswell terms "nomadic metaphysics." Building on work from Malkki and others, Cresswell (2006: 26) distinguishes between sedentarist and nomadic metaphysics:

[sedentarist metaphysics] sees mobility through the lens of place, rootedness, spatial order, and belonging. Mobility, in this formulation, is seen as morally and ideologically suspect, a by-product of a world arranged through place and spatial order. [Nomadic metaphysics] puts mobility first, has little time for notions of attachment to place, and revels in notions of flow, flux, and dynamism. Place is portrayed as stuck in the past, overly confining, and possibly reactionary.

Cresswell leverages de Certeau's (1984) discussion of the walking individual in society and how the individual, via their own deviance in movement, subverts power communicated via landscape. In nomadic worldviews, the nomad is the hero.

Cresswell takes care to point out that these play out in physical, social, symbolic and political realms, and highlights that these two perspectives exist on their own spectrum, rarely wholly occupying either end. This dissertation focuses heavily on how the perception of mobile homes tends to threaten sedentarist predilections while the actions and conversations from participants often idealize concepts of fixity, stability and rootedness.

Building on Zygmunt Bauman's (1991) concepts of the vagabond and the tourist, Cresswell distinguishes between the kinetic elite and kinetic underclass. For the kinetic elite, space is not a constraint. One can move through space and engage it at one's will. Urry's discussions of the tourist gaze and the power of looking (2002, 2007) reflects this kinetic elite and will be addressed in subsequent chapters. The kinetic underclass, however, often exist in a world they didn't actively choose, and are tied to the spaces that represent them. If they try to transcend that space it is a painful and challenging process (Cresswell 2006: 256). This challenge of the kinetic underclass will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, wherein I address challenges to social mobility that occur as a result of the perception of physical mobility.

Sociologist John Urry (2007) explores the mobility turn, and in *Mobilities* brings together theories, research and methods from multiple disciplines to begin to construct the "new mobilities paradigm." Within the paradigm, Urry outlines four initial senses of the term mobile,

or mobility: something that is capable of movement, wherein mobile is a property of things and people; the mobile mob that needs to be regulated and controlled; the sense of mobility that is part of culture, the social mobility; and mobility as longer-term migration. (2007: 7-9). The third sense of mobility—social mobility—proves helpful for the scope of this dissertation. Urry (2007:8) notes:

This is upward or downward *social* mobility. Mobility is here vertical. It is presumed that there is relatively clear-cut vertical hierarchy of positions and that individuals can be located by comparison with their parents' position or with their own starting position within such hierarchies. There is debate as to whether or not contemporary societies have increased the circulation of people up and down such hierarchies, making the modern world more or less mobile.

This vertical social mobility will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Urry also includes movement of images on multiple media, as well as virtual movement, and how the transporting of people and the communicating of messages, information and images may overlap, coincide and converge through digitized flows. Moving between places physically or virtually can be a source of status and power, an expression of the rights to movement either temporarily or permanently. And where movement is coerced it may generate social deprivation and exclusion.

Most of these types of movement play a role in this project. Mobile homes are, in fact, portable, particularly during the period where there are built and disseminated to plots. Less so after they are sited, for various reasons that relate to Urry's third sense of mobility: the social sense. Further, much of this becomes complicated when you consider the movement of ideas about mobile homes and mobile home inhabitants via various media. The actual portability of the home, the social mobility of the people, and the media communicating ideas about mobile homes and mobile home residents all intertwine within the American cultural landscape. Additionally, borrowing from Urry's (2007: 47) concept of imaginative travel resulting from representations of

places and people, we can further explore the role of media in developing the perceived mobile identity of home and resident.

These concepts of mobility become particularly helpful when considering the work done by anthropologists and geographies of exclusion and oppression (Sibley 1995, Valentine 2010), and politics of mobility (Doughty and Murray 2016). Of particular value for this project has been work focused on refugees and nomads. Over the past several years numerous studies (Malkki 1992, Sibley 1998, Gmelch 1986, Cresswell 1999, Blasco 2002, 2016, Gowans 2003, Holloway 2005, Drakakis-Smith 2007, Kabachnik 2009, Engebrigsten 2017) have explored the social acceptance and othering of Roma (articulated, at various points as Gypsies or travelers in different studies) In Alison Mountz's (2013) discussion of Refugees, for example, she discusses the role in territorial identity in regulating a person's mobility. In Mountz's study, this relates heavily to territories identified between nation-states, and how this informs refugees entering the United States from other countries. By linking people to location one is able to create boundaries protecting areas beyond that territory. In the case of mobile home residents, the territory regulating mobility is the public perception of the mobile home landscape and its residents. The mobility herein is less literal than the mobility of the refugee, but the effects are still lived and spatially and socially restrictive. (Mountz 2013: 256).

Drawing on the complicated definitions of home, location and settlement as they relate to middle-class white British women traveling between the UK and India during the first half of the 20th century, Gowans (2003: 428) builds from Rosemary Marangoly George's argument that "the notion of home is based around an organizing principle of inclusions and exclusions and is a way of establishing difference that is fundamental to imperialism." Although I write with a lens toward American landscape, conversations about control and power that emerge from

postcolonial research offer insight into the role of mobile homes within the American schema of housing. The categorization of mobile homes as less-than-desirable others both a piece of American landscape and a piece of American whiteness simultaneously, and highlights the promotion of categories and hierarchies in American identity. The parallel themes discussed in Roma literature will be explore in more detail in chapters 4, 5 and 6. In addition to confusion about whether or not mobile homes are actually mobile, as the common title for manufactured housing suggests, the role of home as a point of departure for a person has both symbolic and literal elements.

Malkki (1992: 37) reminds is that “identity is always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield, a fund of memories, et cetera.” This is important even when the representation of mobility does not reflect bodies that are truly physically mobile. The representation of the mobility, ironically, in many senses, situates and fixes individuals within one rigid social identity. In Chapter 3 I shift into a more detailed discussion of how I interpret and apply methodological considerations, and of the methods themselves.

Chapter 3: Methodological Considerations and Project Methods

Following contemporary discussions of methods in cultural geography (Shaw, DeLyser and Crang 2015), I determined that best strategies for this project were necessarily multi-method. I suggest that exploring nationally pervasive ideas about mobile homes contributes to understanding the social construction of normative identities and space. Mobile homes, in both their public and private sense, offer multiple layers upon which to build discussion of the idealized landscapes of home and the ideological forces informing it. Within all of these elements the issues of representation and perspective at national, local and—in the case of my own field work photos, personal—levels must be acknowledged, and in so doing it is possible to contribute to the de-centering of normative white, middle-class and affluent space. In this chapter I outline my approaches to the following project methods: news media analysis, photo analysis, and participant field work in the form of informal conversations, interviews and surveys.

Preliminary Field Work

My preliminary fieldwork with communities in and around East Baton Rouge Parish, LA, Berkshire County, MA, and Fairfax County, VA, offered substantial framing for the project. In the spring and summer months of 2012, I performed participant observation in mobile home communities and public housing communities, interviews with neighbors of mobile home communities, mobile home residents, and mobile home industry professionals and I performed archival analysis in public libraries. For my preliminary field work my interest was first to identify how much discussion people would have with me regarding class, whiteness and space and second, to identify a single field work site for the dissertation project.

I used census data from 2010 in conjunction with sociological studies on concentrated areas and critiques of race and ethnicity (Somers and Block, 2005, Smeeding 2006, Iceland,

2006, Slack 2010, Slack and Myers 2011) to identify preliminary research sites based on population numbers of non-Hispanic whites, median incomes of non-Hispanic whites, available housing resources and travel costs. I started with this because I wanted to engage predominantly white spaces and identify disparities in identity and identity negotiation among white populations as a springboard for my dissertation, and I wanted to engage locations across a broader spatial realm to test the hypothesis that these conversations about whiteness and difference are not bound by region. One additional benefit to choosing Fairfax County is that I was able to engage representatives from the Manufactured Housing Institute, located in Arlington, VA. This early research, combined with research on news media and gray literature, helped me narrow my dissertation fieldwork to one site: East Baton Rouge Parish and immediately surrounding areas.

As I shifted more deeply into my preliminary work, ideas of home—specifically mobile homes—emerged as part of a common narrative and acted as a grounding point from which additional conversations sprung. Participants would occasionally mention their residences as better than a mobile homes (e.g. “it could be worse; I don’t live in a mobile home.”) Thus, for this project I opted to focus my research questions on manufactured housing as a springboard to deeper conversations related to race and class. Alison Blunt (2009: 340-341) outlines multiple definitions of home in the *Dictionary of Human Geography*. She notes, “Although home might take the material form of a house or other shelter, it extends far beyond a material dwelling, the household and the domestic.” Further, she cautions that in studying home we should not consider it only as a structure and symbol separate from the public world.

Drawing from Blunt’s definition of home I focus heavily on the material home, in this case mobile homes. I do this to access those broader themes of belonging, of the sociocultural significance embedded within them and the conversations surrounding them. Further, following

the argument by Blunt and Dowling (2006: 27) that “home is neither public nor private but both,” I argue that the exterior of a home offers material representations of private senses of identity and connection while simultaneously existing within the view of the public. The exterior material of home one sees when looking at a mobile home from a private driveway or road is part of public space. This same premise applies to any other form of housing. What is visible to the public is part of public space. I discuss mobile homes as both public and private spaces in subsequent chapters, particularly chapter 6. Blunt and Dowling (2006: 2) tease out three overlapping components of critical geographies of home, exploring “home as simultaneously material and imaginative; the nexus between home, power and identity; and home as multi-scalar.” Building on these, I offer that this project is not meant to access a new theory of “home” but rather to use mobile homes in multiple ways to enhance discussions of social paradigms within the United States. During this project fieldwork, discussions of the material mobile home often alluded to imagined identities of residents, which in turn illuminated dynamics of identity and power in broader social realms. In order to access these multi-layered components I applied multiple methods and scales during this study.

Project Methods

Throughout this project I applied numerous qualitative research approaches from various angles related to manufactured housing. This multi-method approach allowed me to triangulate data from multiple sources: residents, neighbors/general public, industry workers and mobile home industry advocates, news media from across the United States, habitual visits to city and state-level public meetings, and other public media such as Flickr and public policy documents. This gave me the opportunity to identify redundancies in themes across these different points of view and scales, as well as to highlight important distinctions in perspective between people with

different connections to manufactured housing. What follows contributes to the collective spatial and qualitative understanding of manufactured housing in the United States. Although I did not embark on this project intentionally focusing on one specific kind of mobile home, as my work progressed I began to narrow my focus more toward utilitarian mobile homes. The work presented in this dissertation reflects this focus.

I drew on participant data, news media, promotional and gray literature to underscore the relationship between social and symbolic perceptions of mobile homes, the personal perspectives of participants connected to mobile homes, and the fiscal and spatial considerations of mobile home life as it connects to the American dream. Each of these approaches provided a valuable point of entry into ideas about mobile homes and the people connected to them: content analysis of news and public photo media served as primary source material for popular opinions about mobile homes across the United States and allowed me to focus my surveys and interviews more specifically on national themes; material from zoning documents, city planning meetings and reports and the history of the treatment of mobile homes by the Housing and Urban Development authorities underscore the legal and empirical ramifications of popular opinions about mobile homes at both the national and local levels; and participant data illuminated the everyday embodied, local and idealized understanding of mobile homes. Although each approach can independently offer rich data, my goal in incorporating all three was to access the multiple layers of representation and lived experiences that navigate the complex matrix of material, social, symbolic and ideological elements of mobile homes.

Defining Complex Terms

Engaging frequently mentioned, but highly subjective terms such as “trailer trash,” “white trash,” “working-class” and “poor white” presents a number of challenges. Because of

this, I borrow from work that explores the utility of often-contested terms rather than focusing on identifying definitions of them (see DeLyser 1999 for this approach with the term “authenticity.”) Youngstown State University’s Center for Working-Class Studies’ (CWCS), for example, addresses the term “working class”:

The term has multiple meanings and associations... Instead of focusing our energies on trying to pin down who belongs to the working class, the CWCS advocates for public and academic discussions that explore how class works in the lives of individuals, communities, and societies. (source: <http://cwcs.yzu.edu/studies/why-how>)

Following the CWCS model, in lieu of dedicating time toward outlining definitions of the terms poor white, white trash and trailer trash, I explore if, how and in what context, participants and primary source materials discuss them.⁹ I was less interested in establishing baseline definitions for these terms than I was in exploring how they are used in conversation to illuminate issues of space, representation and social identity. I explored if and when these terms emerged, in what capacity, and how they played a role in discussing home. In the next section I will discuss my news media research and the terms I applied with the goal of casting as wide a net as possible: manufactured house, trailer park, mobile home park.

News Media Collection and Analysis

For this portion of the project my focus was similar to Lawson, Jarosz and Bonds’ (2008, 2010) interest in exploring how people in control of news media represent those who do not have the privilege of mediating representations—in this case, mobile home residents. I reviewed Internet news media from national news sources and local news sources across the United States. All of the material I reviewed was in text format, some with photos. In a few cases I reviewed text transcripts from National Public Radio news segments, but the majority of the news sources

⁹ For more thorough review of the history of terms related to whiteness and class, see Goad 1998, Isenberg 2016.

were text stories from city and county daily publications. I opted not to focus on entertainment media for a few important reasons, perhaps most important of which is that entertainment media maintains artistic license to embellish or to elaborate motifs, themes and cultural identities in order to tell a story. It is not required to adhere to truth. Traditional news media emphasizing reporting, however, self-referentially prioritizes facts and rejects creative license.¹⁰ I applied traditional methods of content analysis (Busch et al 2012), reading and annotating each article line-by-line, coding for specific themes and perspectives.

My goal for this portion of the project was to establish nationally pervasive perspectives and opinions about mobile homes in the public sphere. I opted to engage Internet news sources for this leg of the project because it abled me to access a wide geographic perimeter without traveling. Over a five-year period (2010-2015) I collected and reviewed American news stories related to manufactured housing, which I collected via weekly Google search alerts in conjunction with the news media search tool Newsbank. I used the following search terms: trailer park, mobile home park, and manufactured home. This search led to 79,938 articles from across the United States and its associated territories (e.g. American Samoa.)

From there, I chose approximately 2000 news media articles for more thorough review, after removing letters to the editor, redundancies, video news stories and documentaries, news stories related to entertainment (the term “trailer park” emerges as a popular key term for entertainment film reviews, its own curious topic) and police blotter reports where only one sentence noting this kind of housing was included. The 2000 news media articles I explored more critically came from across the United States, excluding associated territories and Hawaii

¹⁰ It is not my goal in this dissertation to prove that news media is subjective and recent discussions of fake news running rampant further underscore that point. I offer this as common knowledge, and choose instead to incorporate news media in order to underscore its relationship to national public perceptions about mobile homes.

(although Hawaii publications had multiple stories about mobile homes, the location of the story was most often Washington state.)

In the final stages of this portion of the project I selected 200 news articles from the larger sample for more thorough analysis and coding. I included articles from every state in the United States (excepting Hawaii), and applied traditional coding methods (Saldana 2009: 8) as a heuristic tool providing an “initial step toward an even more rigorous and evocative analysis and interpretation.” For this project, that increased rigor and analysis emerged after I applied themes identified via news media coding toward my participant fieldwork. The sample of 200 is representative of the themes I identified through my informal collection of the larger sample. In a few cases, I included articles because the language and subject applied intentional contradistinction to those common themes, thus reinforcing common arguments. On the whole, the most useful aspect of this component of the research was in setting the tone for conversational and survey approaches in participant fieldwork.

As I previously mentioned, my news collection was itself a preliminary point of entry in exploring themes and concepts related to mobile homes. Of the 200 stories I chose and coded for this project, the five most common codes were dangerous people (70 occurrences: this includes violence, drug use, etc. at a mobile home park), structural safety (46 occurrences: this includes storm damage to mobile homes, fire issues in mobile homes, and similar stories), planning and development (43 occurrences: this includes stories related to new development happening in abandoned mobile home parks, current mobile home park residents being forced out of their lots due to new development in the area, and similar stories), predatory mobile home park owner (17 occurrences: this includes park owners and lot renters disputing responsibility about park upkeep and maintenance, and similar stories) and social drain (15 occurrences: this includes notes about

public utilities vehicles being dispatched frequently, individuals living in mobile home parks receiving government funds to help pay for their housing, and similar stories.) Although these codes and content within the articles coded as such contributed to the development of quantitative components of the project survey, informal interviews and conversations during preliminary fieldwork and project fieldwork indicated participants had these themes related to mobile homes in their minds prior to any prompting on my part.

Setting the Local Site

The themes and trends identified during preliminary fieldwork and news and other public media research established a broad national perspective on manufactured housing. My work in southern Louisiana connected the local and national perspectives, and offered additional data for me to analyze alongside the lived experiences of individuals related in various ways to manufactured housing. I chose East Baton Rouge Parish and surrounding areas for a few reasons. Of the three areas from my initial study (Louisiana, Virginia, Massachusetts), Louisiana ranked highest in the census regarding numbers of manufactured houses per capita and in manufactured housing industry data regarding numbers of manufactured houses sold. Additionally, I was living in Louisiana at the time and I was able to draw from my own professional networks to engage field study.

George Henderson's (2003: 195) essay in the edited volume *Everyday America* discusses how ethnography-inspired approaches are important to explore not only the materialized ideology of landscape, but also the everyday human agency in embracing or resisting the ideology. My goal in this project was not, ultimately, to engage and document any single group or mobile home community's lived experience. As Herbert (2000: 552) notes, "to engage a group's lived experience is to engage its full sensuality – the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and

tactile sensations that bring a way of life to life.” I was not looking to bring a way of life to life. My fieldwork goal was to compare representations of mobile homes and mobile home residents with interviews and anecdotal vignettes offered by residents and former residents.

What fieldwork in my current home town did allow me was the ability to perform participant observation at approximately half a dozen Baton Rouge Metro Council meetings related to planning and at three Louisiana Manufactured Housing Commission meetings, which allowed me to triangulate data gathered via planning documents against the ways it manifested in lived experiences of zoning and other regulations. What I learned through these meetings is that zoning and regulation of manufactured housing is distinct from site-built homes, and often times even people in positions of authority related to this housing type acknowledge that rules about manufactured housing are unnecessarily complex and subjectively enforced. This complicated process of regulation that I observed paralleled similar challenges other mobile and seemingly mobile populations, such as Roma, faced and still face in their respective cities. This will be discussed in more details in chapters 4 and 5. These meetings were also points of initial contact for project participants who met with me one-on-one.

In the spirit of poststructuralist approaches to research it is necessary to acknowledge, as James and Nancy Duncan (2001: 230) do, that “no perspective is thoroughly objective; all perspectives are partial in significant and interesting ways.” With that in mind, I acknowledge my own subjectivity and the societal markers that contribute to my identity. I am a cisgender white woman born and raised in the United States. I have advanced degrees and am well traveled. I grew up in a predominantly white region of the United States (western Massachusetts/upstate New York,) where significant economic disparity in the white population was the largest marker for demographic diversity. I come from the low end of the income

spectrum. I cycled on and off social assistance and split households between low-end apartments with my mother and a utilitarian mobile home in a mobile home community with my father. Thus I am, like many other researchers, bound to my research in a deeply personal way. At the same time, my opportunities and success in education separate me from my past in such a way that I can no longer claim a wholly comprehending, first-hand knowledge of the communities from which I came.

I was, however, able to draw from my personal experiences to identify certain social and spatial boundaries between me and mobile home residents in communities (i.e. understanding basic considerations of mobile home park life and etiquette for engagement), while also making no claims that I implicitly understood the experiences of my participants. Additionally, I was able to make use of my identity as an educated researcher to engage nonresidents of mobile homes for interviews and surveys. Urry's (2007) discussion of the interstices of place and performance also serves as a keen reminder of my own role as an agent throughout the fieldwork process, and how place, while being simultaneously a fixed thing, can come into being, based on different players within that place. Urry's (2007: 268-269) note that "places are economically, politically and culturally produced through the multiple mobilities of people, but also of capital, objects, signs and information moving at a rapid yet uneven speed across many borders, only contingently forming stable places of spectacle" is particularly helpful in articulating this study.

In this dissertation I have leveraged the identity of the tourist/visitor both as a researcher within landscape and via the lens of media representation and public opinion of mobile homes. I engaged the landscapes of mobile homes and their residents, and my role as viewer and documenter also impacted the production and apprehending of resident performance, representations and material structures.

Site Visits to Manufactured Housing Retailers and Manufactured Housing Communities

In an effort to establish a realistic understanding of mobile homes and mobile home communities in Baton Rouge and surrounding areas I began local research from a spatial perspective and drove through the area to confirm locations of mobile homes in the landscape. I visited several mobile home retailers in Acadia Parish, East Baton Rouge Parish, St. Tammany Parish and Livingston Parish. Visits with retailers were based on snowball participant outreach techniques, the Metro Council and Manufactured Housing Commission meetings previously mentioned and the participants' connections to Louisiana agencies based in Baton Rouge. I had originally hoped to further snowball outreach to mobile home residents that lived on private properties in subdivisions, but this proved challenging due to confidentiality concerns from retailers. I opted to focus on manufactured housing communities (mobile home parks) for site visits because of the multiple publically accessible approaches I could take to identify them.

I identified and visited twenty-eight manufactured housing communities, determined via drive-by sighting, Google map searches for "mobile home parks baton rouge" and the popular site mobilehome.net, linked via the Louisiana Manufactured Housing Association's homepage. During my visits to manufactured housing communities in and around East Baton Rouge Parish my goals were to 1) talk with as many participants as possible and 2) photograph as many homes as possible. Goal number one provided participants the opportunity to orally articulate how they felt mobile homes and mobile home residents are perceived and treated. Goal number two provided visual data reflecting what can be seen from the public eye of mobile home residents' lived experience of home. In some cases I was successful in engaging participants; in others, I left only with photos. For three I was unable to take photos, either because the address listed for the community was actually a residence of the presumed community owner, I was not certain

about permission and not comfortable taking photos, or there was simply no park at all despite it being listed on Google maps and/or mobilehome.net.

Although Louisiana laws surrounding public photography are vague, the general ethics associated with photographing homes led me to take fewer pictures than opportunities afforded. In general, I subscribed to the following rule: I sought residents by driving and walking through the area and knocking on doors that didn't have private property or no soliciting signs fixed. If I found residents I spoke with them and requested permission from them to take pictures. Frequently, I was given permission to photograph homes but residents declined conversation and interviews. If I could not find residents I sought park managers and they gave permission. If there were no signs posted about private drives and I was not able to locate a person, I took pictures of home exteriors from the street. Depending on my own personal level of comfort, some of those photos were taken from my car (in about five instances.) As with surveys and interviews, I removed identifying markers from these photos to protect the privacy of the residents. Figure 3.1 identifies the mobile home communities I visited as well as the public library survey sites I engaged.

John Wylie (2007: 7), in *Landscape*, underscores that “landscape is not only something we see, it is also a *way of seeing things*, a particular way of looking at and picturing the world around us. Landscapes are not just about *what* we see but *how we look*.” With this in mind, in addition to wanting to document the materiality of mobile homes in Louisiana I also had the responsibility of being aware of my own act of seeing and mediating. Drawing from Wylie's landscape themes, we can think about the landscape as veil, text, or gaze and explore the implications for social and cultural power and representation. Gillian Rose (2000: 555-556), discussing photos as social constructions, suggests “photographs should be seen in terms neither

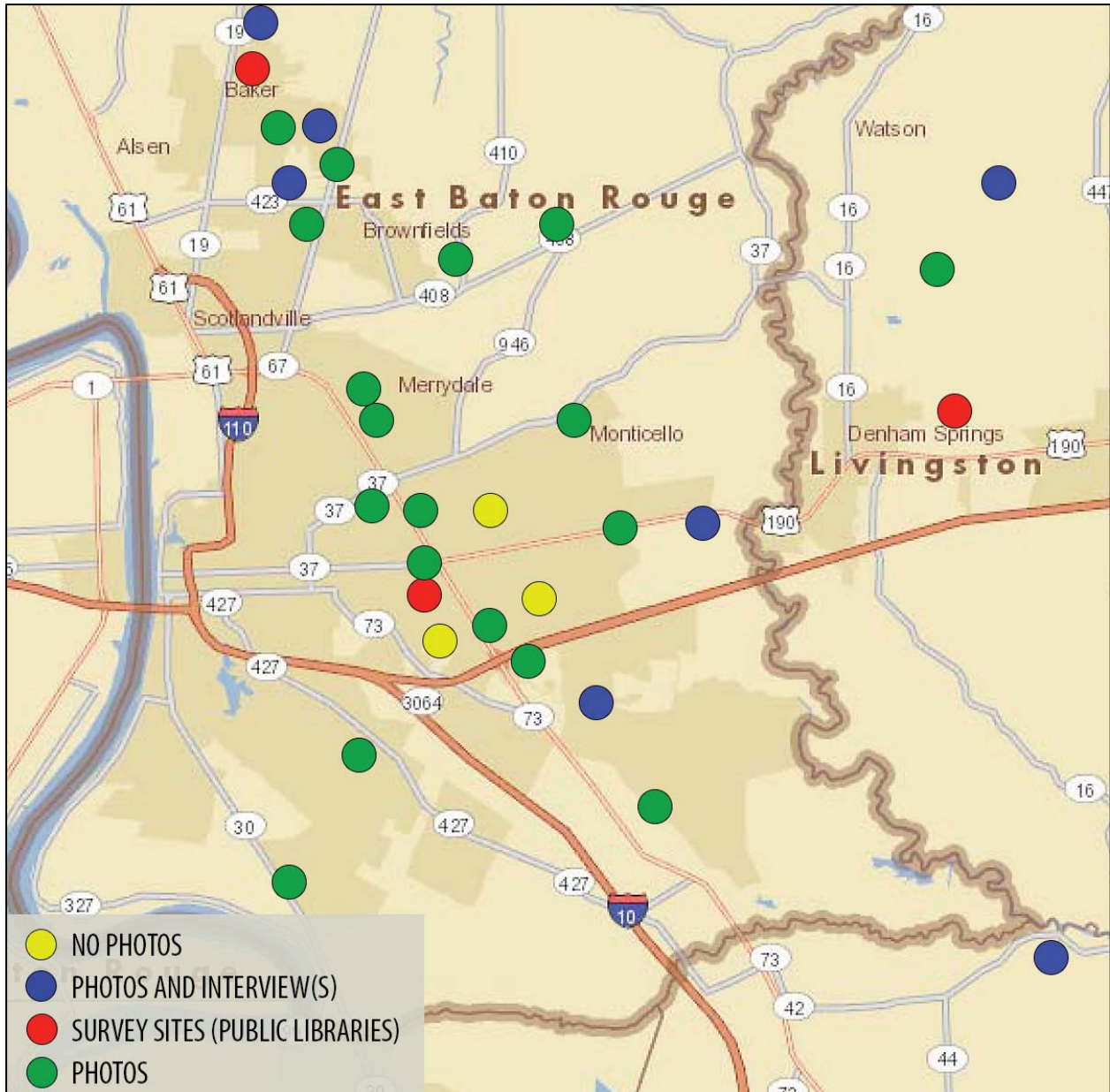


Figure 3.1 Manufactured Housing Community Site Visits and Public Library Survey Sites. Not pictured: manufactured housing retailers and individual meeting places for informal interview participants. Map by Jeremy Harper.

of scientific description nor of artistic aesthetics—although many critics have done and continue to do this—but as act as cultural documents offering evidence of historically, culturally and socially specific ways of seeing the world.”

With this in mind, my photos from these site visits are both documentation of the homes themselves and a reflection of my own presence as the researcher engaging the material. And as

such, depending on the site visit, the photos I took reflect the broad range of familiarity and comfort between me and the homes I photographed. Similarly to Watts' (2011) photographic studies of Washington D.C. protests, I was acutely aware of my own positionality at each site, and of what this means in terms of how we define public space. In some cases I was able to take close up photos or photos from angles that the resident offered explicit permission for me to take. In others, the vague boundaries between public and private space meant that nothing stopped me from entering a community (no "private drive" signs, gates or people,) but I was also unsuccessful at finding any person to engage and as a result took broader landscape photos so as not to intrude on someone's private lot. In those cases in particular, my privilege as a researcher and an outsider was especially self-evident as I captured and mediated representation via my photography.

Rose (2000: 557) notes that once photos are archived they are disconnected from their original meaning and assigned new cultural identity and become fixed in a disciplined space. Through my own photographs of manufactured houses for this project I captured, mediated and ultimately fixed a representation of those homes. In later chapters of this study I consider how this act reflects larger societal mediating and fixing of mobile homes as symbols embedded within American identity. Additionally, as supplements to aforementioned project methods I periodically explored other forms of public photography archives to access other people's photographic representations of mobile homes. The popular public photo site Flickr and its numerous photo sharing groups related to manufactured housing further contextualized the diverse public discussions associated with mobile homes.

Surveys and Informal Interviews

Performing participant fieldwork in local sites and engaging the material culture of mobile homes offered the opportunity to further contextualize the human experience as it is represented in the various other forms of research I engaged. This led to a more nuanced understanding of how mobile homes play a larger role in classed and racialized spatial paradigms at both the local and national levels.

From 2011 to 2016 I participated in more than 100 informal conversations related to manufactured housing, stereotypes surrounding it, and policies related to it. These conversations were sometimes as brief as five minutes, where someone would tell me the first thing they think of when they hear the term mobile home, or as long as thirty minutes, where someone would go into greater detail about their perspective and sometimes their own experiences of mobile homes. Studying a topic as nationally pervasive as manufactured housing, coupled with living long-term in the region I studied for this project, enabled me to engage in some forms of long-term exposure to the topic that ethnographies often afford. These conversation partners included retailers, my own colleagues working in planning, development and construction in various parishes in southern Louisiana, representatives from manufactured housing factories in Alabama, colleagues studying other forms of housing, or race, or the United States, friends of friends that heard about my dissertation project, people who found me on the internet via social network platforms like Twitter (where I occasionally posted about mobile homes) academia.edu, conference materials using key-term searches, and the general public that I encountered at various times and in various locations.

In addition to interviews from my preliminary fieldwork (10 interview participants), I conducted sixteen in-depth informal interviews that lasted 1-2 hours on average. Participants

included current and former manufactured housing residents (11) and individuals who are somehow professionally embedded in the manufactured housing industry as retailers, members of advocacy organizations such as the Louisiana Manufactured Housing Association, and/or public officials assigned to government activities related to manufactured housing (policy developers and enforcers) (12). Some participants identified in multiple categories. For example, a manufactured housing community park manager may have also been a resident, or someone working in the manufactured housing industry may have also been a resident. Only four individuals worked in a capacity related to manufactured housing but had never actually lived in a manufactured house. And only four individuals identified solely as residents. Almost all of the mobile home residents lived in a mobile home community (two industry participants had mobile homes on private property prior to the time of this study.) All but one informal interview participants self-identified as white; one participant (resident only) self-identified as African-American.

Completing informal interviews was the biggest challenge, as time constraints and ethnographic refusal led to fewer interviews than originally anticipated. The majority of participants declined when I asked if I could record them for my own note-taking purposes. The most hesitant group of participants was most often current mobile home residents. They often cited time constraints as their reason for not wanting to be interviewed or for not wanting to be recorded (of those interviewed, this was a frequent statement: “I don’t really have time for this, so I will just answer one-two questions”) but then went on to speak with me for anywhere from twenty-five minutes to two hours. From those that did speak with me, I learned that others who had declined to participate likely did not believe that I actually wanted to hear their story or did not believe that I was actually a student working on a research project but was perhaps working

on some other cause (this latter point was never explicitly clarified for me, except for at one park during my preliminary field work where the manager told me residents were concerned that I was somehow connected to immigration services. This was one of the only mobile home parks over the duration of the study that appeared to have a majority Spanish-speaking population, with numerous Mexico and El Salvador flags scattered throughout the park. Almost all of the parks I visited for preliminary and dissertation project fieldwork appeared to have mostly white and African-American residents.)

These sixteen interviews provided valuable information about the political workings of the manufactured housing industry, public policy and zoning practices (both exclusionary and not), and the cultural landscape of mobile homes in East Baton Rouge and surrounding parishes. They also offered vital insights into the lived experience of mobile homes residents. The participants shared deeply personal stories of hard work, success and failure; loved ones lost and born, and the banal moments of life that occur in between. These stories illuminated the connection between the home and broader society, whether via material culture elements or personal stories of navigating social networks and stereotypes of mobile home residents.

When conducting informal interviews and surveys I applied an adapted method of taking a housing career inventory as described by Blunt and Dowling (2006). I asked participants about their housing history and what they liked or didn't like about their different homes. I also asked questions about what felt like home, and why. Blunt and Dowling (2006: 39) offer that "through the quantitative and/or qualitative analysis of housing histories, this approach investigates residential mobility over the life course and can document the shifting experiences and meanings of home over both time and space." These types of questions pervaded all my informal interviews and survey conversations. Please refer to Appendix A for additional information on

the kinds of questions I asked.

As I considered the small numbers of participants engaging in informal interviews, I determined that a broader approach to eliciting information would be beneficial in contributing to the data on public ideas and personal experiences of manufactured housing. I determined that surveys were a beneficial route because they were a tool for quickly gathering additional data and because they would allow me to connect briefly with individuals and obtain anecdotal information from them without burdening them with a longer form interview or the need to provide me with their contact information and address.¹¹

I conducted 105 surveys and brief follow up conversations with members of the general public who patronized East Baton Rouge Parish Library Main Branch (51), Baker Branch (8) and Livingston Parish Library Denham Springs Branch (46). Refer to Appendix B for an example of the survey. I developed this survey with the following goals: increase my data related to general themes and stereotypes of mobile homes, but also take an opportunity to engage individuals in a brief informal question and answer period, where I asked open-ended follow up questions about anything else they wanted to add or elaborate on, or any feedback they had for me about the survey process. I chose public libraries because, as a frequent patron, my own first-hand experience indicated I would encounter a substantive cross-section of the local population and I was able to leverage my professional network to obtain permission to conduct the survey.

I varied my visit times to cover weekend afternoons and various weekday hours so as to access the broadest numbers of people possible. I set up my survey station at the main entrance of each library to any patrons entering or exiting passed by my table. The East Baton Rouge main library branch and the Denham Springs library branch are two of the most frequented

¹¹ The original IRB approval (obtained Spring 2012) for this project did not include surveys. In Fall 2014 I obtained additional approval for surveys under the IRB listed in Appendix D.

libraries in the local area and the volume of patrons in the space yielded high numbers of survey participants, and I was able to schedule survey visits at high-volume periods for the libraries. At the Baker Public Library my visits were exclusively on weekday evenings (a low-volume period for the library) and proved least successful in obtaining data. The relatively smaller area population, coupled with the holiday season in which I was collecting data (November-December), led to low numbers of library patrons in general and as a result I had very small numbers of participants.

For surveys, the only explicit demographic data I requested was a verbal confirmation that participants were 18 years of age or older, and whether or not participants had lived in mobile homes at some point in their lives. All other demographic data was recorded based on my visual observations and anecdotal information that emerged during our brief conversations. Considering time constraints and project focus I was more interested in having my participants discuss their opinions and identify stereotypes of mobile homes and their residents than I was in asking them to provide demographic data about themselves. I did, however, document in my field notes my visual observations and other self-reported data that participants shared with me.

In the 105 surveys collected there were no observable trends or themes wherein individuals of one race or perceived socioeconomic status discussed mobile homes and residents a specific way. Table 3.1 includes basic information about survey participants. I include this informal demographic breakdown to provide a broad picture of this aspect of fieldwork and do not use this information as prescriptive for the analysis and conclusions offered within this dissertation. Of the 105 survey participants the popular age ranges (almost all participants) were 20s-30s and 50s-60s. Approximately 65 were white, with the Denham Springs library having the highest concentration (38 people.) Approximately 31 were black and the East Baton Rouge main

library had the highest concentration (22 participants.) Other participants included individuals with South Asian heritage, multiracial or indiscernible/undisclosed heritage.

Of the 105 participants 41 had lived or were living in a mobile home. The Denham Springs library participants had the highest concentration of mobile home residents, at 31 people (about two-thirds of that library's participants.) This disproportionately high number of mobile home residents in Livingston Parish is due, in part, to significantly less restrictive zoning requirements than in East Baton Rouge Parish. This was confirmed through conversations with planning officials, members of the Louisiana Manufactured Housing Commission and mobile home retailers. Retailers and planning officials noted that landowners sometimes transition their private property into a mobile home park or subdivide their property to place a single mobile home on the land as a form of additional family housing.

In East Baton Rouge Parish, planners confirmed, zoning laws restrict how a person may subdivide their property. This means that it is harder to legally purchase and place a manufactured home on property where one did not already exist. Denham Springs library participants' responses to the question "how would you describe a mobile home" were, on average, slightly more positive. I suggest this is due, in part, to the fact that Denham Springs participants had a higher concentration of mobile home residents than the other survey sites. On the whole, however, survey data from all sites reinforced perception themes and trends that were represented in news media and informal interviews. Subsequent chapters to this dissertation discuss specific trends and responses in greater detail.

On page one of the survey (Figure 3.2) I asked participants about their ideas of mobile homes: to draw or describe a manufactured house, whether or not they'd previously lived or would live in one and why. In all but two cases the participants wrote their own responses and

discussed them with me. One participant asked me to write his answers for him as he held his newborn baby and spoke with me. Another participant did not have the ability to see (a recent physical ailment; he had full sight ability in previous years) and asked his granddaughter to write his responses, which he then discussed with me.

Table 3.1 Approximate Demographic Breakdown of Library Survey Participants. Survey data collected by author Fall 2014. Ethnicity/Race data was based on participant conversation and author observation. Residence in manufactured housing was self-reported by participants.

Library Survey # Participants	White	Latinx	South Asian	Black	Undetermined/Multiracial	Lived in Mobile Home? YES	Lived in Mobile Home? NO
Goodwood	25	1	3	22	0	9	42
Denham Springs	38	1	0	4	3	31	15
Baker	2	0	0	5	1	1	7
Totals	65	2	3	31	4	41	64

On pages two and three (Figures 3.3 and 3.4) of the survey I asked participants to think about the stereotype of manufactured housing and circle words on the page that correspond. I added words to the survey that corresponded with common themes identified in the news media content analysis and preliminary fieldwork, as well as informal conversations (example: “bad investment”). I also included antonyms so as to offer participants a broader range of responses (example: “good investment”). Keeping in mind that this presented a potentially polarized response, I also asked a series of open-ended questions asking the participants whether or not they thought the stereotype is accurate, why, and if they’d like to share other thoughts they had on the matter. The goal in this structure was to allow for a rapid survey response for participants and the real strength to this approach, I found, was the follow-up discussion I had with participants after they filled out the survey. Many participants made the point to stay for a few minutes and inquire more deeply about my goals for the project, expressing that there are deeper dimensions at play than the survey noted. Others apologized for their responses, offering

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THIS SURVEY!

PLEASE NOTE: You **DO NOT** have to tell me your name or provide contact info. If YOU choose to share your name or contact info with me, I will not share it with anyone else and it will not appear in my project report. You will not receive any compensation for this survey. This survey takes approximately 5 minutes.

This survey asks you about your personal opinions AND about stereotypes.
For each question I identify whether the question is about YOUR opinion or about a STEREOTYPE that you may know.

This page asks you about YOUR picture/opinions of a mobile home.

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

I tend to picture a dwelling that could run the spectrum from shoddy and old to a new modern prefab version, an image that is relative to age.

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

temporary, depreciating, lower class

WOULD YOU CONSIDER MOBILE HOMES A POPULAR FORM OF AMERICAN HOUSING?

(PLEASE CIRCLE ONE) YES* NO *in some areas, many are restricted due to zoning*

DO YOU/HAVE YOU LIVED/LIVED IN A MOBILE HOME? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE) YES NO

IF YES: DO/DID YOU LIKE IT? WHY OR WHY NOT?

IF NO: WOULD YOU LIVE IN A MOBILE HOME? WHY OR WHY NOT?

some safety concerns, depreciation, insulation, not a permanent home. It is still seen as a dwelling for lower income people - stigma.

Figure 3.2 Page One of Library Survey

that they “know it’s not nice, or right, but it’s what I think about it” as they described negative stereotypes about manufactured houses.

Figure 3.5 indicates the number of people who circled each word listed on page two of the survey. Participants were free to circle as many or as few words as they desired. In a couple of cases, participants circled none. These numbers reflect collective data from the 105 individual surveys. Responses are listed from left to right in this graph; farthest left was the most popular word circled on page two of the survey. On the right side of the graph the number of times the word was circled appears in parentheses next to the word. The six most popular words/phrases to circle are as follows: Trailer, unsafe (the structure), tornado magnet, yard junk, poor construction, run-down. The six least popular words/phrases were as follows: new, large, nice, good investment, privacy, and community. In a few cases, people wrote in words like redneck and trailer trash to stereotypes list. A few people also wrote additional words about regions of the world they associated with mobile homes, noting if they had seen them in Canada at some point, or pointing out that the stereotype is mostly rural even if they circled rural and urban.

Following Kitchin & Tate (2000) and Watts (2011), I tended toward rapid, conversational-style interviews with survey participants. Similar to Watts’ (2011) fieldwork challenges with participant enthusiasm and mistrust, most of my participants were reticent to give contact information. In some cases, they identified time as an issue. Others said they were not comfortable sharing their names. Of the 105 surveys I collected, 29 people gave contact info and asked for a copy of the final project write up. Of those 29, six people indicated they would like to be contacted for a follow up meeting. When I made follow up calls to people who said yes to a follow up interview, no participants indicated they were available to meet.

This page asks you to talk about the STEREOTYPE of mobile homes.

STEP TWO: WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME STEREOTYPE" WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE?
 (WHAT YOU THINK SOCIETY, OR OTHER PEOPLE, THINK ABOUT MOBILE HOMES)

PLEASE CIRCLE ANY/ALL WORDS THAT REFLECT THE STEREOTYPE YOU KNOW RELATING TO MOBILE HOMES

short-term isolated family friendly dangerous (the neighborhood)
 long-term trailer upscale nice landscaping poor construction family filled
 good investment tornado magnet unsafe (the structure) bad investment community
 yard junk police old cars no privacy old run-down sex drugs small
 luxurious violence large run-down nice yard debris privacy new

Other Words? Please write them here: _____

WHEN YOU PICTURE THIS MOBILE HOME STEREOTYPE, DO YOU SEE IT... (please circle responses)

on public property? on private property? in a mobile home park? southern US
 midwest US northeast US northwest US rural urban southwest US
 all over US Somewhere else? Please write in: *I've seen them in Hawaii - they are popular in Alaska also.*
 In other countries? Please write in: _____

PLEASE CIRCLE THE WORDS/TERMS THAT BEST REFLECT THE DEMOGRAPHIC STEREOTYPE OF A MOBILE HOME RESIDENT

RACE/ETHNICITY	CLASS	WORK ETHIC	RELIGION	AGE	STATUS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> White	rich	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> lazy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> young	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> single
African-American	middle-class	hard worker	superstitious	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> middle-aged	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> married
African	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> poor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> average	immoral	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> elderly	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> couple, not married
East Asian (someone from China, Japan, areas near there)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> lower-class		amoral		widowed
South Asian (India, Pakistan, areas near there)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> middle income		spiritual		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> alone
Latin American (Central/South America)	upper-class				with family
Southwest Asian/Middle Eastern (Iran, Iraq, Israel, areas near there)					with friends

DO THINK THESE STEREOTYPES ARE ACCURATE? (please circle response)

YES NO

PLEASE EXPLAIN:

I've known nice people that have lived in trailers & some had very good paying jobs.

Figure 3.3 Page Two of Library Survey

STEP THREE: IS THERE ANYTHING I DIDN'T ASK, BUT THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE ABOUT MOBILE HOMES, EITHER YOUR IDEAS/EXPERIENCES, OR THE STEREOTYPES ABOUT THEM?

*I think the image is changing as these types of homes are improving - not like they were 30 or 40 years ago. Some are really nice if it's a good fit for your needs, friends have put them on their property for kids/parents.**

OPTIONAL: ARE YOU INTERESTED IN TALKING MORE ABOUT THIS TOPIC WITH ME? IF YES PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR CONTACT INFO AND I AM HAPPY AND GRATEFUL TO GET IN TOUCH SO WE CAN CHAT MORE!

PLEASE NOTE: I WILL NOT SHARE YOUR CONTACT INFO WITH ANYONE, AND YOUR NAME AND INFO WILL NOT APPEAR IN MY PROJECT WRITE-UP UNLESS YOU TELL ME IT IS OKAY AFTER WE MEET AND SIGN A SEPARATE CONSENT FORM.

NAME: [REDACTED] PHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED]

CITY: Baton Rouge STATE: LA

EMAIL: [REDACTED]

WOULD YOU LIKE A COPY OF MY PROJECT WRITE-UP? (PLEASE CIRCLE) YES NO

WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO CONTACT YOU FOR A FOLLOW-UP MEETING (PLEASE CIRCLE) YES NO

THANKS FOR TAKING THIS SURVEY!

** PS - I personally hate the use of the term "trailer trash". I've had friends/family live in these for short periods due to personal circumstances - it is such a hateful term. Low class people don't just live in trailers - some live in mansions. :)*

Figure 3.4 Page Three of Library Survey

Following Daniel Miller’s (2010: 72) paradoxical argument that the immaterial can only be expressed through the material, I argue that taking a look at materiality via media (photos, news) that is in many senses “without” material base provides the opportunity to triangulate interpretations of mobile homes through multiple lenses, both embodied and other.

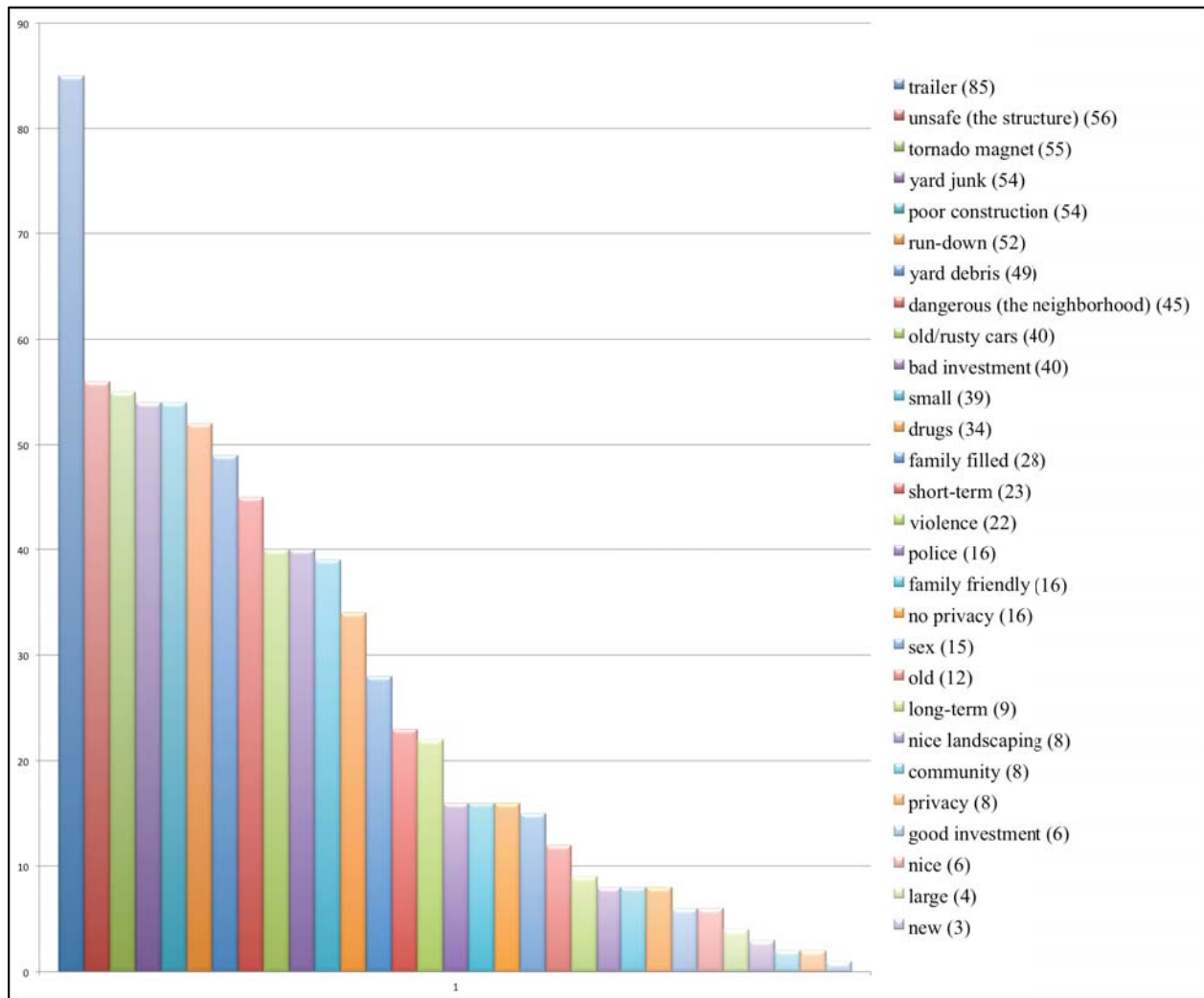


Figure 3.5 Breakdown of Survey Page Two Circled Responses

Further, in exploring the specifics of manufactured housing as material refractors of ideological paradigms, I hope what follows in subsequent chapters answers the call to “reach beyond our particular case studies to engage theoretical ideas that enable our empirical research to speak to scholars working in other settings” (DeLyser 2010: 25). In chapter 4 I begin to shift

into discussion about the public perception of manufactured houses as mobile, and what this implies about the characteristics of a mobile home resident. In all subsequent chapters I use unique pseudonyms for each project participant.

Chapter 4: Mobile Home as Misnomer and the Connotation of Short-Term Residents

Chapter 4 signals the shift into more in-depth discussion of the relationship between perceptions of mobile homes and ideas about mobile home residents. Herein, I focus on the idea of the “mobile” home as a misleading term, and the subsequent assumption that its inhabitants are often only temporary residents and therefore uncommitted to the surrounding community. I draw from ideas about mobility and, specifically, effects of perceived mobility in establishing separation between assumed mobile people and society writ large. I discuss participant and data use of terms such as “trailer,” “mobile home,” and “manufactured home,” and the connotations of these terms. From there, I transition to the binary of settlement/transience then shift into literal and metaphoric attachments to the home site and how home ownership and aesthetics play a role.

Cresswell (2006: 31), drawing from Edward Relph’s *Place and Placelessness* (1976), explores arguments for the importance of having roots in a place as a point of embarkation in society, and in establishing one’s perspective on the world. Further, he invokes one of the common themes of engaging landscape (see Wylie 2005 for a thorough review of others): the role of vision in accessing and experiencing landscape. Drawing from the importance of visual observation as a source of knowledge, Urry (2002, 2007) reminds us that the seeing eye, amid a variety of other affects, stills hold significant sway in how we apprehend and comprehend the world. With this in mind, visual consumption of mobile home representations in media confronts an individual’s own visual encounter with mobile homes, molding a perspective on mobile homes that is part embodied encounter and part visual processing of previous sources. The effects of this are demonstrated both through my own senses as a field worker and via the visual representations of mobile homes participants created for this study. In this section I explore the

public perception that mobile homes are actually mobile, which by default implies that the house and the residents fail to establish roots in the area (literally and figuratively.)

This perspective is heavily informed by public representations of mobile homes and of the seemingly un-rooted physical landscapes one encounters when visiting a mobile home park. Mobility, Cresswell (2006: 31) notes, implies an “absence of commitment and attachment to involvement—a lack of significance.” The very perception that mobile home dwellers are mobile leads to the assumption that they are also lacking commitment, rootedness and sense of place. This is not unlike the assumption that Roma/Gypsy communities in various parts of Europe are unfettered. Nomads, pastoralists, homeless people, gypsies and others are often marginalized because of their perceived lack of fixity within their societies (Cresswell 2006, Sibley 1995, 1998, Drakakis-Smith 2009, Engebrigsten 2017). Urry (2007: 21) draws from Simmel (1997) to provide an overview of different socio-spatial patterns of mobility: nomadism, wandering, a royal tour of the kingdom, diasporic travel, the Court’s travel, migration, and adventure and leisure travel. The life of the average mobile home/mobile home resident falls under none of these categories, and yet the perceived nomadism of mobile home residents frames the way policy makers and the general population consider (or fail to consider) mobile homes/residents within the fabric of the community.

Drakakis-Smith (2009: 465) asks, “is ‘nomadism’ a valid descriptor of the grouping or is it a term used to defer settlement and/or access to land and to mainstream society?” This is an important question to consider when exploring the representation and policies related to mobile homes and treatment of mobile home residents in the United States. Drakakis-Smith argues that the label ‘nomad’, for many Gypsies, is a misnomer. I argue the same for the term “mobile” as it relates to mobile homes and mobile homes residents. Further, she argues that because of this

gypsies are considered outsiders within the broader community despite governmental rhetoric of inclusion, which I argue parallels much of the treatment of mobile home residents. But first, I discuss the transition from trailer to manufactured home that occurred through the twentieth century.

Terms: Trailer, Mobile Home, Manufactured Home

Throughout the research period for this project various participants, news sources and colleagues have either noted with matter-of-factness that mobile homes are obviously moveable, or asked for clarification about whether or not they can be moved. The development of the language used for what today are called manufactured homes itself traces the changing perceptions and goals of this house type. The use of the term “travel trailer” in the 1920s and 1930s, then “house trailer” in the 1940s and 1950s reflected the shift in industry’s focus on the structure from a vehicle to a house (Wallis 1991). Later, when the terms “mobile home” and finally “manufactured home” moved to the forefront of industry conversation, it became clear that with more elaborate upscale models and changing target demographics came a shift away from the concept of temporary dwelling toward the concept of the permanently sited home. Despite the measures taken to connect mobile homes with ideas of home, permanence and establishment in community, the realities of everyday conversation still communicate the tensions between mobile homes as dwellings versus mobile homes as homes.

In my fieldwork, participants living in and near mobile homes often used the terms trailer and mobile home interchangeably. Industry participants most often used the terms manufactured home and mobile home, applying the former when speaking with me, and the latter when speaking with colleagues. This application of different terms to the same physical structure highlights the importance of localized, vernacular language in imbuing the house type and

community with meaning. Anthropologist Jane Hill (2008) suggests that language we use in our everyday lives, though seemingly innocuous, can either reflect discriminatory ideas or enact discriminatory practices. Often, she notes, this might be occurring without the user of that language knowing it.

Drakakis-Smith (2009) discusses how certain communities adopted the term “traveller” in an effort to be more culturally neutral, but the effect was also essentialize traveller identity and fix Gypsies more closely with mobility. She (2009: 470) notes, “by adopting this homogenising definition, officialdom has ‘united’ a plethora of groups under one term, linking them to a supposed ‘habit’ of mobility, with the caravan/vehicle as ‘ethnic marker’ (even if the caravan does not move).” Similarly, because of the lingering effects of the term “mobile” as it relates to manufactured housing, the assumption is that mobile home residents are transient in nature.

During fieldwork and data analysis for this project it became clear that different terms for the same kind of manufactured housing were used in different settings for different reasons. In some cases, industry participants intentionally applied or avoided words to conjure desirable images of mobile homes that are dissociated from negative stereotypes. I discuss this aspect here. In other cases, participants used broader language to distinguish between home in its iconic sense, and mobile homes as distinct from that. I discuss the latter case in chapter 6.

One participant in particular (Wendy) discussed her challenges with the term trailer, which she immediately mentioned in our first conversation on the grounds that she felt it connoted negative ideas about manufactured housing residents. Wendy has worked in the mobile home industry since 1973 and has lived in a variety of house types, including site-built and manufactured homes. During our numerous interviews and visits over two years of this study she lived in a site-built home and insisted she sees no special advantage to this over a mobile home.

Wendy works in the industry, she said, because of the personal connections she feels to the community surrounding it and because it is what she's known and who she's known. She shared that when people come in to inquire about the houses, she consistently (but gently, she took care to note) redirects their language away from the term trailer and toward the term manufactured home. When I asked Wendy to explain to me what the terms mobile homes/manufactured homes mean, she simply stated, "roots."

This statement demonstrates the importance, for Wendy, of thinking about mobile homes as structures that promise creating and perpetuating community in one location. During our first interview a retired mobile home retailer came in to discuss some of the homes and their pricing. While the pair spoke about models and mutual friends, they freely used the term mobile home; when they resumed our conversation they switched to the term manufactured home/house. For these participants, the complete separation between manufactured houses and their trailer predecessors, or even the term mobile home, was of great importance for communicating the role of this housing type and its inhabitants in the cultural landscape. My interactions with other participants for this project reflect that the terms mobile and trailer do indeed carry with them the connotations of temporary residents as opposed to committed, long-term community members. Out of 105 survey participants, 85 circled the term "trailer" when asked to identify stereotypes of mobile homes. Survey drawings and conversations highlighted concepts of portability and temporary living, emphasizing that mobile homes are not, in fact, popularly perceived as long-term homes.

Home, Dwelling and Transience

Building on work on mobile homes and American culture from scholars such as J.B. Jackson (1984, 1994), Allan Wallis (1991), and Hart, Rhodes and Morgan (2002), I argue that

this conflation between house terms and resident longevity occurs in large part due to what J.B. Jackson (1984: 91) describes as a dichotomy between “home” and “dwelling.”¹²

Specifically, I suggest that modern and contemporary Americans’ emphasis on “home” and its implications of long-term placement in community prioritize site-built homes over mobile homes because many people consider mobile homes to simply be temporary dwellings. Further, the perceived mobility of the home itself parallels the perceived lack of interest on the part of mobile home residents to engage with the surrounding community.

In his work on vernacular landscape, Jackson (1984: 91) argues that “home and dwelling are two separate things...this truth is obvious to all modern Americans.” He avers “to *dwell*, like the verb *to abide*, (from which we derive *abode*), simply means to pause, to stay put for a length of time; it implies we will eventually move on” (Jackson 1984: 91). Building on this, he challenges scholars of vernacular homes and landscape to delve into the issue of home versus dwelling and attempt to tease out the nuances of this binary. In this section I focus on home as attachment/connection and dwelling as portability/transience. The data collected for this project suggests that more often than not mobile homes are perceived as impermanent dwellings, regardless of the reality of the inhabitants’ experiences.

Jackson’s charge to explore more deeply ideas of home and dwelling proves poignant when one considers the role of mobile homes in the United States. Even though they comprise more than 7% of the reported houses in the United States (U.S. Census), they are rarely discussed in the same manner as other house types. During my fieldwork one participant

¹² I use this acknowledging that others have used the term “dwelling” in the same way that Jackson might use the word “home.” I use Jackson’s discussion of dwelling while acknowledging that others, including Gallent (2007) apply the term “dwelling” in direct opposition to Jackson’s use. For Gallent, “dwelling” suggests engagement and commitment to community. And Urry (2007: 256), for example, suggests that to dwell in a land is to engage its soil, be connected to it, to be rooted in some sense.

(Arthur), with training in vernacular architecture and a high-level position at a local museum, offered that it never seemed necessary to consider mobile homes since no one assumed they would last very long in the landscape. The emphasis on home (and its association with longevity and community) often leads to either a rejection or a stigmatization of things and places that can be associated with the idea of dwelling as it is used here (which implies instability, portability, and/or short-term engagement with people and place).

One survey participant (Colleen) distinguished between home versus dwelling when she shared, “[I think of] a dwelling that is prefabricated with cheaper materials and has wheels...Not Durable. Sometimes mobile homes are dwellings of necessity as related to recreation, like camps, work and work-related, military dwellings in overseas deployment.” In one quick comment Colleen underscores the implications of the concept of dwelling, of the temporary nature of the habitat and thus the lower standards of material structure one might expect for something not meant to be permanent. She also alluded to an important component of mobile home history: the role of mobile homes in providing housing for military members both home and abroad (Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002: 77). Mobile homes, given their history and popular ideas about their transportability, are by default often¹³ rejected, stigmatized or simply overlooked when people think about and discuss home and its long-term implications.

¹³ This dissertation does not suggest that mobile homes are always rejected, stigmatized or overlooked. The goal, instead, is to underscore that this is something that happens often. It is also important to note that despite the many negative connotations associated with the mobile and temporary aspects of mobile home life, some positive associations also contribute to the idea that mobile homes are disconnected from the American mainstream’s ideals of rootedness. Nostalgia for the travel trailers of the early twentieth century is one example (the travel elite, as noted by Cresswell 2006), and in recent years recreational vehicles have increased in sales and popularity. In Louisiana many people purchase travel trailers to follow sporting activities across the region. In other parts of the country people embrace the idea of a “life off the grid” by abandoning mortgages and hitting the highways in their retirement years, these ideas of travel trailers perpetuate the conflation between the recreational vehicle and manufactured home industries,

Literal Attachment

One interesting note that emerged from the survey experience is that despite the fact that I directed all participants to look at a photo of a utilitarian manufactured house on my poster and project flyer (see Appendix C), many of them focused on the mobile aspect of a mobile home and imagined RVs, citing a lack of interest in a mobile lifestyle or discussing the homes within the context of portability. The perception of mobile homes as a temporary structure developed over many decades and as a result of a variety of cultural shifts and local experiences. As chapter 5 discusses the visual consumption of mobile homes, specifically representations of mobile homes, it establishes a direct connection between what people see and how they imagine mobile homes and residents operating in society.

Today's manufactured home, as has previously been noted, has deep connections to the early twentieth-century travel trailer (Wallis 1991), which was marketed on the very mobile and temporary elements from which many current mobile home residents and industry personnel try to differentiate themselves. From this history of mobile homes a few basic perceptions emerged, most notably that the physical construction of the mobile home reflects its intended use as a temporary structure and as such it does not engage/permanently attach to the physical landscape on which it is placed, because it could be moved at any time. By default this suggests that the inhabitants of the mobile home cannot connect with the local community and establish long-term roots. In contemporary architecture's focus on reducing the environmental impact of housing on the physical landscape (Jackson 1984: 92), one might assume that mobile homes' minimal disruption of the ground would be ideal. Ironically, despite this trend in architecture, the very

which also perpetuates inaccurate representations. What these positive perceptions of travel trailers often fail to reflect is the lived reality of average mobile home residents. And partly because of this emphasis on disconnection from contemporary society and mobile lifestyle, mobile homes are most often perceived as temporary dwellings as opposed to homes.

fact that mobile homes are not embedded in the ground contributes negatively to public perceptions about them.

Hart, Rhodes and Morgan (2002: 77-78) note that even as the government began to take note of the mobile home industry and the industry began to separate itself from travel trailers, the portable aspects of the structure remained. In the 1950s the U.S. government began using mobile homes as temporary disaster-relief housing, and this trend continued, as experienced by many Louisianans who watched the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) ship mobile homes into the gulf coast in the wake of the hurricanes in the first decade of the new millennium. Figures 4.2 and 4.3 show mobile homes as temporary housing after storm damage in West Virginia in the early 1970s. Figure 4.4 shows a utilitarian mobile home used by FEMA for emergency housing relief in the early 2000s. In addition to photo archives of mobile home use in disaster recovery, most participants for this study mentioned the dissemination of mobile homes by FEMA. Donald's survey sheet (Figure 4.1) reflects numerous conversations with survey participants. Donald had first-hand experience of life in mobile homes and of their uses in natural disasters. He offered that the only thing he thinks mobile homes are good for is temporary living, whether it is as an RV or as a utilitarian mobile home. In his drawing of a mobile home, he simply wrote the word "nothing," explaining that after the storm where there used to be mobile homes now nothing is there. Expanding on this, Donald identified a mobile home as a recreational vehicle used to get out of the way of large-scale storms. "Nothing" is left of the mobile home after the storm, he noted, because it was moved someplace else.

While the history of the use of mobile homes for emergency management lingers closely in Louisiana's past, industry professionals are struggling to distance themselves from the stigma of temporary and sub-par domiciles. One participant (Donny) with more than a dozen years of

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? Please describe or draw it.

"Nothing"

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

RV to get out the way Katrina

Figure 4.1: Donald's Survey Sheet

experience affiliated with the Louisiana Manufactured Housing Association (LMHA) emphasized that LMHA does not track FEMA disaster housing or other government purchases of mobile homes for temporary purposes. The LMHA is a large collection of retailers, builders and other interested parties of the manufactured housing world and it serves as a professional connection organization and advocacy group for planning and regulations about manufactured housing. A significant portion of LMHA's work emphasizes the de-stigmatizing of manufactured housing as a part of home ownership in the United States and works in tandem with the national Manufactured Housing Institute (MHI) to develop and disseminate materials related to industry updates, sales and advocacy. When I asked about whether or not Louisiana's increase in sales over the past ten years reflected these temporary post-storm domiciles, Donny responded, "No – I know where you're going with that question and the answer is no, this is only from actual retailers and individuals buying mobile homes," emphasizing that LMHA focuses on individuals interested in buying homes and retailers that adhere to ethical sales practices. His quick response and redirect in our conversations indicates he frequently receives questions about the temporality and mobility of manufactured homes.

Another industry participant (Carl), connected for more than twenty years to the Louisiana Manufactured Housing Commission (LMHC), further clarified Donny's statement. The LMHC is appointed under the Louisiana State Fire Marshal's office and is responsible for addressing compliance issues for sales, zoning and coding, as well as emerging themes in retail and construction of manufactured houses. Carl advised that after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, people from other parts of the country came to the region and sold FEMA trailers to displaced residents, then left the area very quickly while residents suffered with substandard homes that further exacerbated financial and emotional loss. Because of this, Carl noted, current law dictates local retailers are required to follow very specific rules to prove they intend to deal only in Housing and Urban Development (HUD) approved manufactured houses and that their business is structured in such a way that it is permanently sited in the local area. Two LMHC rules in particular stand out when considering the issue of an outsider profiting from local residents; a retailer must apprentice under a local licensed retailer for at least a year, and in order to open a local retail site a person must provide a business land-line and a permanently affixed sign to the exterior of their retail store. These guidelines place a heavy emphasis on long-term settlement in the local area.

The manufactured housing industry, like other industries, took a hit after hurricanes Katrina and Rita and slowly recovered. The 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster also affected manufactured housing sales. Starting late 2011, shipment numbers of new mobile homes to Louisiana increased and leveled out back to their pre-storm sales rates. Speaking to this, Donny noted, "When the oil is pumping Bubba has money and buys a new home." Despite the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster, the return to oil drilling and increase in production is reflected in the increase in mobile home sales in the state, which are often purposed either as hunting and

fishing second homes or as new homes for young families working in the oil and related industries.



Figure 4.2 Aerial View of Mobile Homes, West Virginia, Library of Congress. Temporarily placed in West Virginia by the US government for victims of a tornado, 1974. Source: U.S. Library of Congress

Hart, Rhodes and Morgan (2002: 17) argue that the U.S. government's focus on mobile homes as disaster-relief housing in the 1950s and 1960s led to the establishment of mobile home parks in disaster-prone areas. As the government paid to place mobile homes in communities where post-war industry boomed, they picked sites in flood-prone areas on the assumption that mobile homes could be easily towed away in cases of emergencies. This did not happen; residents even in the 1950s were personalizing their spaces, building porches and planting

gardens, creating more permanent structures around these mobile homes (Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002: 17, see also Bair 1967: 288, Jackson 1994: 62), thereby significantly reducing

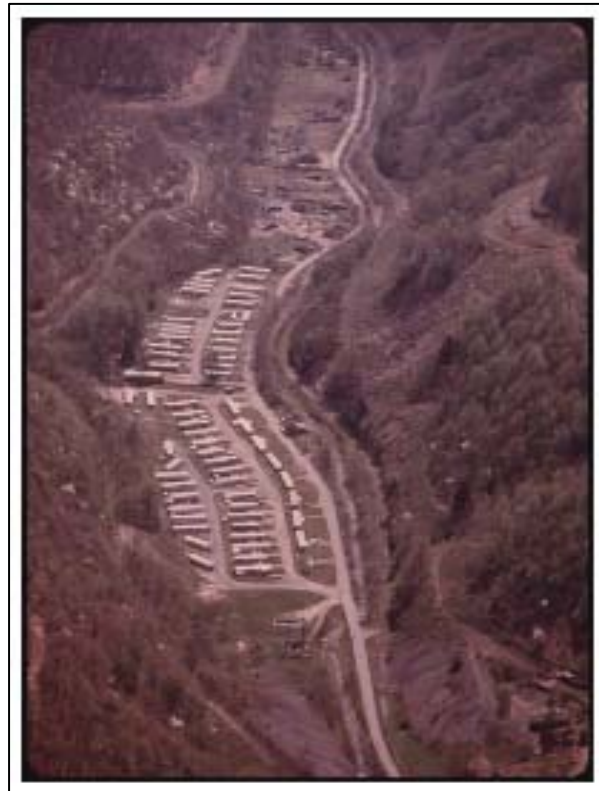
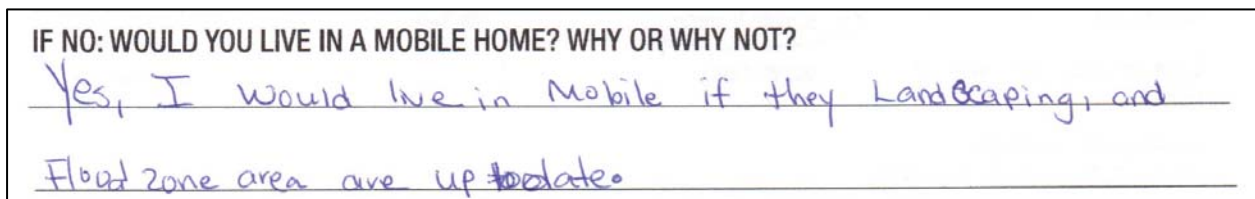


Figure 4.3 Aerial View of Mobile Homes, West Virginia, Library of Congress. Temporarily placed in West Virginia by the US government for victims of a tornado, 1974. Source: U.S. Library of Congress



Figure 4.4: Mobile Home on Road, FEMA. Mobile Home being driven to a disaster site to provide temporary housing to victims of a wildfire in California. 2007. Source: FEMA

their portability. This is the inherent irony of the mobile home: that despite its name, more often than not it is fixed to its location. Also significant here is that many older mobile home communities exist in flood-prone or otherwise undesirable areas because of the fact that the federal government placed them in areas meant to be temporary. This lingering perception of mobile home placement was evident in numerous participant conversations. One participant, for example, was very specific about flood zoning rules when asked whether or not she would live in a mobile home (Dorothy.)¹⁴



IF NO: WOULD YOU LIVE IN A MOBILE HOME? WHY OR WHY NOT?
Yes, I would live in Mobile if they Landscaping, and
Flood zone area are up to date.

Figure 4.5 Dorothy's Survey Sheet

Many survey participants, however, cited the perceived portability of mobile homes as a primary reason why they would not want to live in one. Brittany, a woman in her twenties, offered that she wouldn't live in a mobile home because, "I can't see myself getting used to a moveable house." This highlights a deeper meaning to the idea of having a permanent site for your home. When I asked why, for her, the house can't be moveable, she identified a deeper metaphoric connection with community as a high priority. Although she felt mobile homes could still be livable and maybe even comfortable, she was more interested in a sense of long-term housing within a community.

The portability of mobile homes is, in fact, one of the primary components most survey participants mentioned when asked about their own perceptions of mobile homes. And in the section of the survey asking about stereotypes, 23 people out of 105 circled "short-term." Dozens

¹⁴ Craig Colten (2016) succinctly noted after the historic 2016 flooding in Louisiana that to this day the rules and implementation of those rules about building and maintenance in flood areas have not kept up with the needs of the community.

When I think about a mobile home I think of a house on wheels, smaller but also still livable.

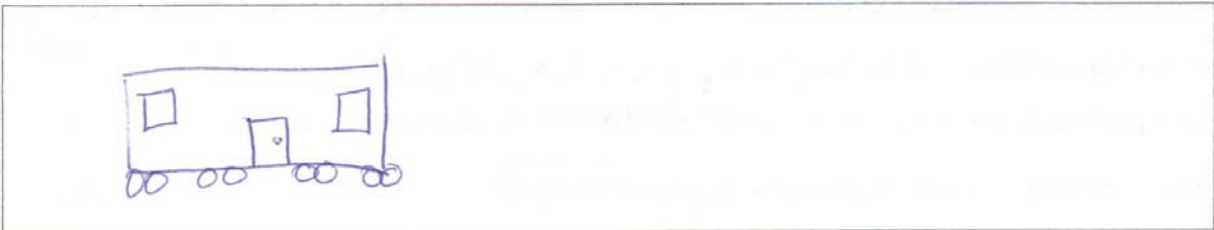
WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

moveable, portable, changeable

Figure 4.6 Brittany's Survey Sheet

of participants offered a similar description of mobile homes, that of “A box type home on wheels that is movable” (Charles), “house on wheels” (Gina), or small, rectangular, moveable” (Jo.) Some others identified the size of the home as a challenge to long-term living: one participant (Kevin) described mobile homes as “small, claustrophobic, temporary.”

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS “MOBILE HOME” WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.



WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

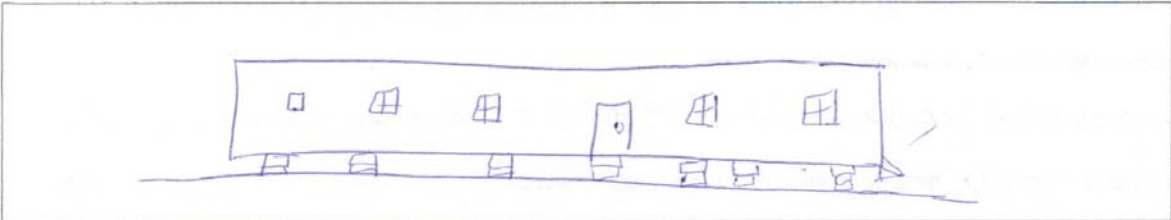
house on wheels

Figure 4.7 Gina's Survey Sheet

In a few instances participants considered the portability of mobile homes a good thing. A few survey participants shared that they purchased land and, while building a house on-site, they lived in the manufactured home. The idea that mobile homes are useful as temporary domiciles during construction of home also emerged during my preliminary fieldwork. In chapter 6 I will discuss the differentiation between mobile homes and homes (read homes: normative, site-built),

and a key element to that revolves around the perception of mobile homes as temporary dwellings.

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.



WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Small, Rectangular, movable

Figure 4.8 Jo's Survey Sheet

Mobile Home Park versus Private Property

One survey participant (Brian) shared that he would happily live in a mobile home. He offered, "They are a lot nicer than they used to be. I like that they can be put on my property." Brian's statement about placing the home on private property underscores an additional and important nuance in the conversation about mobile homes in the American cultural landscape: first, that updated mobile homes are higher quality in construction standards and amenities and second, that owning the land a home is affixed to is another component of literal attachment to community.

Similarly, Sara offered that she considers mobile homes to be temporary dwellings in preparation for a more permanent home. When I asked her why she would prefer not to live in a mobile home, Sara responded, "Some can be very nice but most are not—mobile home parks are mostly transient renters."

IF NO: WOULD YOU LIVE IN A MOBILE HOME? WHY OR WHY NOT?
Only if I were using it as temp housing
while ~~the~~ building a permanent residence

Figure 4.9 Sara's Survey Sheet

When discussing the concept of mobile homes, mobility and home ownership it's necessary to note the role that actual land ownership plays within it. Isenberg (2016) reminds us that historically, land and property ownership have been key ideals in the U.S. since early colonial periods. Throughout the news media and participant data collected for this project, a clear distinction emerged in the way people discuss mobile homes on private property and mobile homes in mobile home parks. The former suggests a longer-term investment in literal location and is accompanied by implications for long-term community engagement. The latter, as will be discussed in more detail in chapters 5 and 6, emphasizes a firmer literal and metaphoric barrier between mobile home residents in parks and the larger community. Many of these social barriers, as will be discussed, parallel social exclusions placed on Roma, communities historically associated with migration and rootlessness, in various cities in Europe.

In many cases, participants interested in mobile homes for their private property emphasize the affordability of the home, either as a starter home (as noted previously) or as an in-law apartment toward the back of a large property wherein a site-built house is also situated. Survey participants from East Baton Rouge Parish frequently cited the latter as a large draw for them and lamented that East Baton Rouge zoning standards have become more stringent in recent years, not allowing individuals to place mobile homes on their private property.

Other participants noted that owning land is a higher priority than the size and style of home on the property. Brian noted that despite his wife's preference for a large, site-built house, "I would like [a mobile home]. For the same price as my current house I could buy five acres in

the country with a trailer.” So although an element of permanent placement is present, the permanence is more deeply connected with the attainment of land. Land is the idealized standard, the house on the land is negotiable and secondary.

In other cases, participants appreciated that mobile homes appear to be made of low-grade materials. In Louisiana utilitarian-style mobile homes are often purchased for placement on hunting and fishing camps, providing a part-time getaway from work and other responsibilities. Industry and survey participants noted that hunting and fishing camps are historically among the most common purposes for utilitarian mobile home purchases in Louisiana. Most camps are not year-round residences, either because the owner of the camp maintains a permanent home somewhere else or because there are regulations for the amount of time a person can stay on the land (this varies by parish and proximity to public/private lands and wildlife and fisheries.) This makes the utilitarian mobile home a perfect structure for a regular time-out from the rest of the world. It has all the amenities of a site-built house at significantly lower cost, and since it is only a short-term residence for these vacationers they do not need to have the most sophisticated aesthetics or high-end appliances and fixtures that one might value in a year-round residence.

Further, if flooding, wind or storms damage the utilitarian mobile home the financial loss is significantly smaller than that for a site-built house, and the owner can purchase a new mobile home in future seasons. The elevation and wind support posts flanking the mobile home are dictated by FEMA coastal and wind zoning requirements. Figure 4.10 shows a mobile home in at a hunting/fishing camp in Louisiana.



Figure 4.10 Mobile Home, Source: Mike Rosebery. 2007.
Used with permission via Flickr.com.

Although purchases for hunting and fishing camps have certainly helped the Louisiana manufactured housing market over the past thirty years, research participants working in the LA manufactured housing industry have taken considerable steps to upgrade and publicize potential for mobile homes as year-round residences. And in East Baton Rouge Parish and Livingston Parish, the residents with whom I spoke were and the mobile home parks I visited contained year-round residents. The bulk of my fieldwork ultimately centered on discussions of mobile home parks and the ideas about home and residents within them.

Owning versus Renting in a Mobile Home Park

There is a growing trend in the United States of mobile home park residents collaboratively purchasing the park lots and their own spaces within them (Appleton 2010, Atkinson 2010, Miller 2013), but landowners inhabited none of the mobile home parks I visited. Most of the parks I visited were either a combination of mobile home owners and renters or were strictly mobile home owners. Regardless of ownership of the mobile home, residents rented the land itself. During my survey period, however, only a handful of library participants owned their

mobile homes and the lots on which they lived. One survey participant (Laila) highlighted the difference she perceives between her own mobile home park and others. Laila indicated she is very happy with her current home situation, sharing, “I live where everyone owns their property and trailers. I would feel different about an old trailer park where most units are rentals. Here is where the negative stereotype kicks in. People don’t take care of rental property like homeowners do.” For her and other mobile home owners, the rental component of either the home itself or the lot space implies that residents expect to be passing through and thus will not focus on upkeep in the home and landscape. This mirrors arguments made by non-Roma that their Roma neighbors fail to maintain their homes and the properties on which their caravans are parked (Gmelch 1986, Sibley 1998, Blasco 2002, 2016, Kabachnik 2009).

Figure 4.11 shows an empty lot in one of the mobile home parks I visited. The driveway, walkway and a small patio are permanently etched into the landscape. To the right of the small patio the land has no grass as a result of a previous mobile home’s placement on the area, and at the far end of the grassless patch hookups for utilities stick up from the ground. These elements provide a drag-and-drop blueprint to place a mobile home. In every park I visited I identified a similar blueprint laid out for each home on the collective lot. The intentional structure of placement in mobile home lots, combined with the uniformity of these placements, emphasizes the easy portability of a new mobile home that is being delivered to a site. It also emphasizes the disconnect between the home itself and the land on which it is placed. This in turn suggests how easy it may be for a resident to disconnect from the lot and the community.

Jackson (1984: 49) notes that dwellings, as impermanent, are therefore considered expendable compared with the natural landscape. With that in mind, it is not uncommon to see photos of abandoned mobile homes in print and Internet media. Over one thousand photos of



Figure 4.11 Empty Mobile Home Lot

mobile homes in various states appear on the popular website Flickr.com, and abandoned mobile homes are a frequent topic. For the Flickr groups dedicated to photographing abandoned mobile homes (of which there are many), most often these are associated (either by speculation, citing local history, or personal history) with loss of jobs in the area or an increase in finances for the mobile home owner, who then purchases a new site-built home and leaves the mobile home on the rental property. Figures 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8 represent the content of photos shared via various Flickr pages dedicated to mobile homes.

One survey participant (Larry) described this in the section where I asked him to tell me what he pictures when he sees the words mobile home. He wrote, “abandoned lot, old rusty building, or overstuffed lot full of delapidated (sic) trailers.” Larry’s words, juxtaposed with hundreds of other photos on Flickr, highlight that in some situations it is indeed the case that some residents of mobile homes leave their houses and let them fall into deep layers of the palimpsest that comprise the cultural landscape.

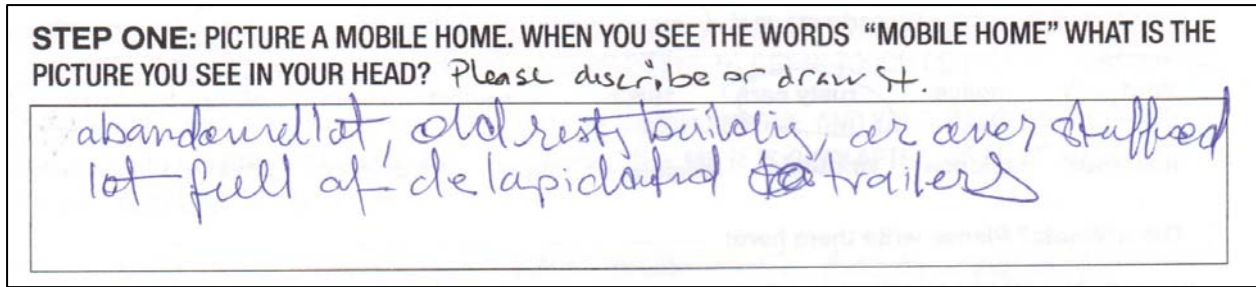


Figure 4.12 Larry's Survey Sheet Part One

Community/Metaphoric Attachment

When considering that most mobile homes do not move from the site on which they are first placed for inhabitants, it could be argued that the "mobile" in "mobile home" reflects not the house type but the type of resident it accommodates. Participant surveys and informal conversations highlight the common assumption that most mobile home residents are transient in nature. Most of the residents with whom I spoke, however, have lived in the same manufactured home (or mobile park, if not the same house) for several years which, once again, mirrors many Roma experiences of place and settlement (Blasco 2002.) Shifting away from the mobile home itself, this section focuses on the genealogy, language and aesthetics surrounding mobile homes that emphasize the role of residents as long-term, community-oriented people.

Although it is indeed the case that some mobile home parks see heavy turnover in residents, in at least two different mobile home communities I visited there were clear genealogical trends in residents. Nancy, the owner of one mobile home park, shared with me that when she purchased the park twelve years ago, many of her current residents already lived there and had been doing so for a number of years. She further noted that for many of these homes, even if the original individual living there is now gone, family members have taken their place. In this regard, the park had a genealogical component; the house that was once Jose's is now his



Figure 4.13 Abandoned Mobile Home, Source: Keef59, Flickr.com
Used with permission.



Figure 4.14. Abandoned Mobile Home, Source: Keef59, Flickr.com
Used with permission.



Figure 4.15. Abandoned Mobile Home, Source: Keef59, Flickr.com
Used with permission.

brother Eduardo's, so even though Jose is in Texas on a job his family remains in the same house in the mobile home park in Baton Rouge.¹⁵ The owner's month-to-month rental policy allows for quick turnover for some residents, she acknowledges, but most of the residents know each other and have established long-term relationships with each other. This suggests that although there may be periodic turnover in residents in the park there is still a palpable sense of connection and long-term community that is reinforced through personal touches to yards and social clusters I observed.

In a different mobile home park, residents were able to trace family histories by lot. One resident of that park (Miranda), for example, shared that her current mobile home was the second she owned in the park. The first house, immediately across the yard, she inherited from her grandmother. When Miranda and her husband had a second child they sold the house she inherited from her grandmother and bought a larger mobile home to place in the same park. In this regard, the popular idea of mobile homes as temporary is both debunked and reinforced. First, the park had at least two generations of people from the same family living within it, albeit across two separate houses. Second, although Miranda ultimately sold the home she inherited from her grandmother, it remained situated within the same park. As such, both the people and the home remained in the same community.

Residents, retailers and mobile home park managers with whom I connected all shared the same focus: making it clear to me that residents of mobile homes are good people looking to connect with their communities. There are multiple material artifacts, ranging from mobile home

¹⁵ This was also one of the very few parks that had a visibly high population of Spanish-as-first language people. This park in particular was split mostly between people presenting as Latino and people presenting as non-Latino white. Most other parks I visited had a visibly high population of white people, though many had people who presented from multiple racial and ethnic heritages.

park signs and promotional materials to residents' own yard aesthetics, communicating this message. Take, for example, one mobile home park I visited for this project. Figures 4.16 and 4.17 are from the same mobile home community and are about 15 feet away from each other at the entrance to the park. The sign closer to the street identifies "[Name] Mobile Home Park", whereas the sign directly in front of the property as one drives directly into the space reads "[Name] Mobile Home Community." The difference in material standards are clear: the former is small, unassuming, easily moved when you pull the stakes from the ground. The latter is large, solid, and the structural components give the impression that the community is a permanent fixture in the cultural landscape. This dichotomy was underscored by the community's manager, Peggy, as we discussed the perceptions of mobile home residents and of the park she's lived in for several years. She doesn't want people to just think of it as a park. Peggy wants people to understand that the park is a community. To her, the term community indicates a higher class of people and longer-term engagement with each other in the park space, and she feels the more elaborate signage with the word community communicates that ideal. Figures 4.18 and 4.19 are of the interior of the park space, wherein mobile homes from the 1970s are placed next to mobile homes from the 2000s, the yards are uniform and close-knit, and the road is curved in a tight horseshoe.

In contrast to the previous mobile home park with the park/community signs, another mobile home park I visited approximately two miles down the road from the first applied language in a way that differentiated itself socially and symbolically. This mobile home park, entitled "[name redacted] Estates," brands itself as a long-term community with higher quality and long-term residents. Marsha, the manager, is herself a resident of the park and spoke at length about the structure, aesthetics and amenities as being pivotal to keeping long-term

residents on their lots. Figures 4.20 and 4.21 show the Estates brochure for prospective residents, highlighting the natural landscape elements and community pool.



Figure 4.16 Mobile Home Park Sign



Figure 4.17 Mobile Home Community Sign



Figure 4.18 Interior Road of Mobile Home Part One



4.19 Interior Road of Mobile Home Part Two. Pictures of the interior of the mobile home park that has two different roadside signs.



Figure 4.20 Mobile Home Estates Brochure Page One



Figure 4.21 Mobile Home Estates Brochure Page Two

Figure 4.22 shows the general landscaping of the Estates mobile home park. Compared to the Park/Community space previously discussed, this park has larger lots, wider roads and numerous community areas, all underscoring the possibilities for a potential resident to settle permanently in the space. Marsha was very proud to differentiate this space from other “trailer parks,” arguing that this park is designed more like a traditional subdivision and carries with it a different, more community-oriented kind of people. When comparing my participant experiences between the two parks, however, the first park residents were more likely to respond to my request for interviews and I observed more interaction between the first park’s residents than the second. Independent of each other, each park manager estimated their lot turnaround to be about the same: “very few.” In the first park, Peggy did admit that the number of turnarounds has increased since 2008, when a new owner took over the park and began to allow renter-occupied units.



Figure 4.22. Large Corner Lot in Estates Mobile Home Park. This is a corner lot and thus exceptionally large, but in general the lot spaces were larger than in other communities, as demonstrated by the homes in the background.

A third mobile home park, situated in a separate part of the parish than the first two, had the title “Village” in its name. This park, a combination of owner- and renter-occupied units, had mobile homes as old as the 1950s and as recent as the 1990s, and the manager reported a heavy turnaround rate associated with migrant workers in construction cycling in and out of Baton Rouge for odd jobs. Figure 4.23 shows the general landscape of the Village mobile home park. The large trees provide heavy coverage for the houses, indicating that although they are technically mobile most of them haven’t been moved in several years and likely are stuck in place due to the landscape growing around them. But as I drove through the horseshoe-shaped park, I noticed license plates from all over the United States, most notable the Southeast, South-Central and Southwest parts of the country.



Figure 4.23 Interior Road Village Mobile Home Park

Rules and Aesthetics

Mobile homes in mobile home parks are uniquely bound by individual park rules and city/parish zoning rules to avoid extensive invasive landscape and building additions. I say

uniquely because although there are hundreds of idiosyncratic rules related to residential codes and zoning, mobile home parks in particular emphasize rules about invasive land adjustments while simultaneously requiring hyper-specific baseline rules for aesthetics. In addition to park-level rules regarding aesthetics and lot usage, there are specific rules for mobile home parks set forth by city and parish councils. In both East Baton Rouge and Livingston Parishes, planning documents require that mobile homes have skirting underneath them to hide the chassis. The Livingston Parish code requires, for example, the following:

(12) All mobile homes shall be required to have on all sides at the base of the unit a skirting or a rigid type material specific to trailers (Livingston Parish Division II of code of ordinance Section Sec. 13-66.2. - Mobile home parks.)

Figures 4.24 and 4.25 show the standard skirting one will find on a mobile home situated in a mobile home park. Sometimes owners are able to customize the color to match the house.



Figure 4.24 Standard Mobile Home Skirting

Throughout the survey and interview experience, another common theme that emerged in discussions related to personalized aesthetics within individual parks. What was also clear in even the most low-maintenance, utilitarian mobile home park is that personalization occurs



Figure 4.25 Up-Close View of Mobile Home Skirting

regardless of whether it is custom construction at the factory or in someone's yard. In the mobile home parks I visited, participants added personal touches and customized elements to their homes and yards in a variety of ways. Porches, yard tables, plants and gardens adorned most of the hundreds of mobile homes I observed, ranging in size and style according to the residents. In one park, many of the homes were rented directly from the mobile home park owner while others were owner-occupied.

Nancy, a park owner who lived offsite, discussed rules regarding porches, gardens and other custom adjustments residents make to the space. The only rule she has is that when building porches or placing lawn furniture the residents either keep to the space of their own rented lot or work it out with their neighbors. There is not much space for a full garden, Nancy noted, but as I walked through the park I noted garden boxes and in-ground gardens throughout the area. Although many of the garden accessories were not permanently fixed to the ground and

could be moved anywhere at any time, many of the gardens themselves were rooted directly into the ground and their growth indicated that they were permanently embedded over a substantial period of time. This suggests that despite the seeming portability and short-term nature of a mobile home, residents in this park have been and/or intend to be there for many years. This was also the case in many of the other parks I visited.

In another park, Peggy, a resident and the manager, explained the rules about yards and aesthetics.

Peggy: The rules are reasonable. Keep non-operational cars out. People keep trying to put their cars in here that don't run. No pit bulls. Make sure the place is safe. I try to keep kids out of the street, but don't get enough support. They have to cut their grass. If they don't cut, I cut it, and charge ten dollars. No storing things under their porch. I don't like the clutter. Because it looks cleaner. What attracts good people? A clean place. You don't want to live in a dirty place.

When I asked about gardens and other additions, Peggy shared that porches and sheds are okay, but they must be portable in construction—no digging or permanently affixing anything to the ground. Peggy also explained rules about gardens and plants.

Peggy: I allow where no one else can see—I don't want people to see someone else's and start planting, make a big mess. If you hide it that's okay. Now, I do have a problem with satellite dishes. The renters get satellites, then they leave, the company doesn't come get them, others think they can have them, and then I have to go tell people they can't have them.

These rules outlined by Peggy echo the rules and regulations set forth by other parks I visited, either in conversations with managers and owners or via the rental agreements I procured for the properties. Embedded within these types of rules is the assumption (or experience) that the resident must not be committed to staying long term. The result is that even though many lessees of mobile home park lots will be there for several years they are not given the latitude to embed their yard aesthetics into the actual ground. As such, they are not permitted, literally, to establish rootedness in the space. This does not, however, prohibit them from personalizing that space.

Figure 4.26 demonstrates one of the few examples of invasive landscaping I identified during my site visits. Figures 4.27-4.30 each demonstrate noninvasive methods of personalization. Some residents, while technically following rules regarding noninvasive decorations, intricately detailed their lot areas in such a way that removing the decorations would require extensive labor (Figures 4.31 and 4.32).



Figure 4.26 Invasive Landscaping in a Mobile Home Park



Figure 4.27 Container Gardens in One Mobile Home Park Yard



Figure 4.28 Carport and Patio Pavers



Figure 4.29 Potted Plants and Front End of Mobile Home



Figure 4.30 Potted Plants and Front End of Mobile Home



Figure 4.31 Mobile Home Park Lot Intricate Decorations.
Personal touches to this home involved elaborate rock formations and a deck.



Figure 4.32 Mobile Home Park Lot Intricate Decorations.
Personal touches to this home include a slab patio, plants and furniture.

Peggy discussed the role her yard plays in her everyday. She lost her grown son and, after a year of depression, turned to yard work as a form of therapy. She offered, “This garden is my therapy from when I lost my son. Before I lost him I didn’t plant anything.” Now, she spends hours a week laying pavers, clearing weeds and shaping/reshaping the potted plants around her house. She has been there for thirty years, but it has only been since around 2013 that she has done work in the yard. For this participant, the act of engaging and cultivating the landscape provides a sense of connection to her lost son and the family that is still living.



Figure 4.33 Elaborate Landscaping in Side Yard of Mobile Home Park Lot. This community allows for a combination of mobile homes and recreational vehicles.



Figure 4.34 Elaborate Landscaping in Side Yard of Mobile Home Park Lot



Figure 4.35 Elaborate Landscaping in Side Yard of Mobile Home Park Lot

Displays of Nationalism

Urry (2007: 188) invokes Zygmunt Bauman's (1991) argument to remind us that "citizenship went hand in hand with settlement," suggesting that in today's mobilized society the concept of citizenship has become complicated. Embedded within these conversations of metaphoric attachment to place and community, the sense of national identity is also evident in the aesthetics presented in the parks I visited. Daniel Miller (2010: 79) reminds us that housing as a piece of material culture operates on a much grander scale than clothing or other smaller material items. Housing highlights personal relationships, identity and power at a broader public scale. In the case of mobile homes chapter 5 will discuss where the structural elements of the home fall short of ideal conditions for home ownership. In discussing decorations and aesthetics during this chapter, I've highlighted the ways individuals can transcend the limits of their home structure by adorning the exterior of their homes with intentional identity and affiliation markers. These occur at an aesthetic or intimate level, as was the case with potted plants, carports and Peggy's therapeutic garden. They also occur at broader social levels, as is the case with material culture displaying nationalism.

There were numerous homes that—like in any other housing structure or neighborhood—prominently displayed their patriotism via placement of the American flag somewhere on their lots. In some cases, the flag was embedded within elaborate decorating of the entire lots. In others, the flag was a single focal piece. In each of these, however, the material presence of the American flag implies national pride, serving as a calling-card for commitment to national identity and values despite, perhaps, not being affixed to a home that reflects the ideal material conditions. Figures 4.36, 4.37, 4.38, 4.39 and 4.40 demonstrate the use of flags as identity

markers on the home and surrounding lot. Figure 4.41 in reflects not only patriotism, but also religious affiliation as a part of our American national identity.



Figure 4.36: American Flag behind trees



Figure 4.37 American Flag on Front Siding

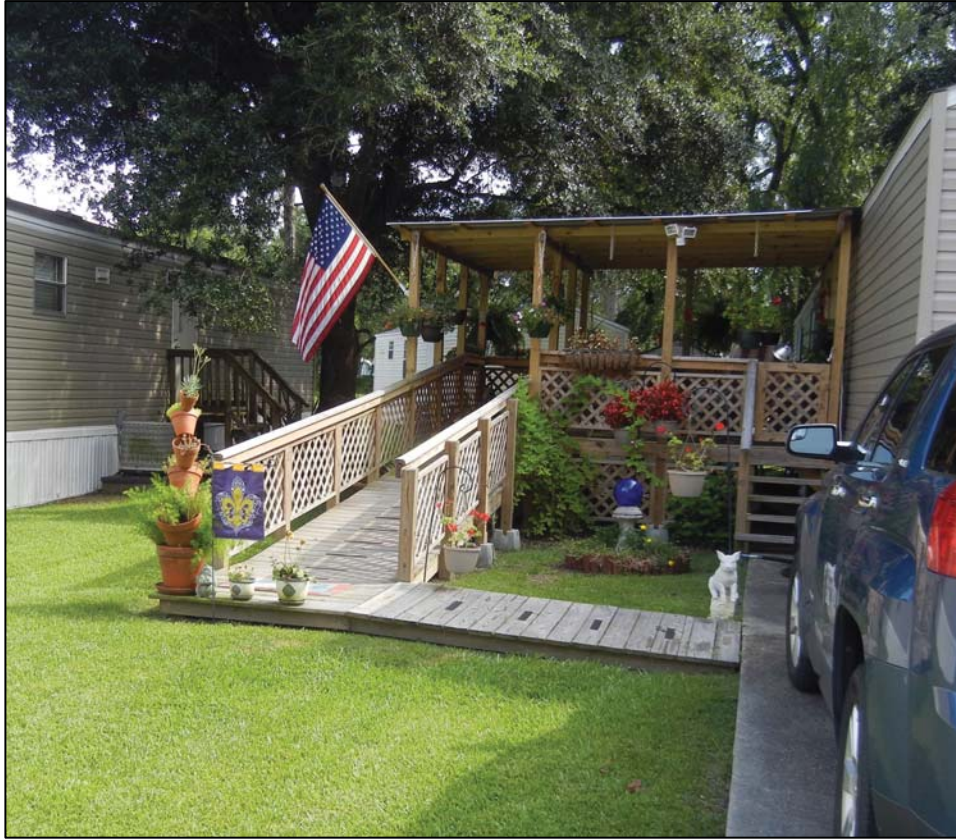


Figure 4.38 American Flag near Ramp



Figure 4.39 American Flag on Deck



Figure 4.40 American Flag in Carport



Figure 4.41 Displays of Religion and National Affiliation Combined

In this chapter I reviewed the history and contemporary perceptions of mobile homes and their residents as it relates to perception of mobile home portability and related assumptions about mobile home residents' commitment to developing community in one place. Through

these conversations it becomes clear that descriptions of the home often parallel assumptions of the inhabitants. Further, although the early history of manufactured housing was couched in theories of portability, the historical development of mobile home placement, and of the people living within mobile homes, demonstrates that the concept of “mobile” in mobile home is a misnomer, and the commitment of inhabitants to mobile homes is no greater or less than inhabitants of other domiciles.

Within this, I demonstrated the challenges mobile home residents and owners have in carving their own space within the landscape, working around rules about aesthetics and frequently updated coding requirements. This is not unlike the challenges faced by post-WWII Budapest Roma who lived in poor districts, in self-built settlements and remnants of rural housing at peripheries to urban fringe (Sibley 1998: 375). Similarly, mobile homes are often tucked in hiding within busy streets or relegated to the periphery, in undesirable landscapes. But for Roma, argues Sibley, these self-made domiciles were a form of resistance to assimilation, a source of pride in the Roma ability to cleverly carve their space. For mobile home residents the making of the domicile is not as much an act of agency. Mobile home residents move into domiciles built by someone else and plotted, often, in locations that are regulated by the government or by a cavalier landowner.

With this in mind, I argue that mobile home landscapes simultaneously are shaped by human agents and also shape options for spatial and social mobility of their inhabitants. This occurs through popular forms of representation seen in media and acted upon in local public policy. Cresswell and Merriman (2013:9-10) discuss the effects of such representations, noting that the subjects of those representations are often caught inhabiting, resisting or manipulating those representations through their practice. Cresswell and Merriman (2013: 10) note, “the

individual experiences of those inhabiting such subject positions frequently get overlooked and erased, but it is also evident that individuals practice and inhabit these subject-positions in many different ways – challenging and reworking conventional caricatures and stereotypes...moving differently” (ellipses in original).

In chapter 5 I continue to build on the tensions associated with temporary versus long-term housing and discuss the popular perceptions about the structural components of mobile homes as a metaphor for the characteristics of mobile home residents, shifting from concepts of physical mobility into questions of social mobility.

Chapter 5: Unstable Structures, Unstable People

Building on chapter 4's discussion of dichotomies between mobility and attachment, chapter 5 further expands on this discussion, drawing on binaries of stability and instability to discuss the materials comprising a mobile home and the stereotypical characteristics of a mobile home resident. This chapter builds on chapter 4's discussion of the perceived and actual physical mobility of mobile homes/mobile home residents by folding in discussion related to the socially produced aspects of mobility. I explore the parallel between popular ideas that mobile homes are insufficiently constructed to withstand aging and dangerous weather and the popular idea that mobile home inhabitants are themselves unstable, less-affluent people who bring drugs, violence and drains on social support systems into the community.

Speaking to reception of mobility within general society, Cresswell (2006: 30) notes that "place, in its ideal form, is seen as a moral world, an insurer of authentic existence, and as a center of meaning for people. Mobility is often the assumed threat to rooted, moral, authentic existence of place...mostly we learn of mobility through insinuation and implication." This is a significant point for what follows in this chapter because the sense of stability that perceived mobility also parlays into social mobility for the individuals involved. In this section the discussion of mobile homes as unstable within landscape translates into arguments that the people within the landscape—stereotypically mobile, if not actually migrant—are somehow moral drains to the integrity of place.

By focusing on mobility, argues Cresswell (2006: 47), we can highlight senses of flux, flow and dynamism to "emphasize the importance of becoming at the expense of the already achieved—the stable and static." Cresswell deems this a key part of the nomadic perspective, a process of becoming as one moves. In this chapter I suggest that the process of becoming is

stagnated by social circumstance or regulated by public policy, which in turn establishes barrier to social mobility for the majority of my participants. This further reinforces the paradoxical role of mobile homes in landscape. They reflect ideals neither of sedentary or nomadic perspectives of becoming. Mobility as a physical thing is often seen as threatening, according to Cresswell (2006.) But in society mobility as a social thing is often seen as good. To be socially mobile, upwardly mobile, is to be on the right track to success. Cresswell (2006: 213) discusses mobility becoming human agency, specifically within the context of de Certeau's (1984) walking in a space as resistance, emphasizing the physically mobile aspects of an agent in space. But mobility of the socially produced kind affords another form of agency: control over one's opportunities and representation.

Within this, Cresswell's differentiation between the kinetic elite and the kinetic underclass becomes helpful. According to Cresswell (2006: 256), "the kinetic elite are voluntarily mobile. They take pleasure in their mobility and experience mobility as freedom, while the kinetic underclass—the vagabonds—are confined or forced to move out of necessity and experience mobility as survival." I would argue that in the case of mobile home residents, this comment offers a sort of catch-22. People with upward social mobility, progressive capital, are mobile. They choose houses that reflect their mobility but in ironic ways—ways that connote stability and connectedness to community, either via site-built homes with a vacation RV or tiny houses that are lauded for the environmentally friendly construction. For mobile home residents the public connotation is often that they are unstable, transient, occupying mobile homes out of necessity as material symbols of their kinetic underclass. But their role as kinetic underclass fixes them, ironically, within a social position from which escape seems almost impossible. As will be discussed shortly, this is not the case with every participant. But the public

representations of mobile homes, combined with personal stories shared about them, reinforce this.

Further, Urry (2007: 25) identifies flux as a key element to explore, arguing that it necessarily involves struggle and tensions between technology and social life, what he terms “the complex intersections of immobilities and mobilities.” Speaking to the challenges of being labeled nomadic, Kabachnik (2009: 468) notes that “both the common meaning of the term [nomadism], as mobile and placeless, and the pejorative connotation, as inferior or deficient, ‘sticks’ to individuals labeled as nomadic. It then becomes difficult to escape the taint of nomadism.” For mobile home residents it doesn’t matter that they are not, indeed, actually nomadic. The negative connotation, as Kabachnik notes, sticks to them regardless.

Like research about the gypsy/traveller identity (Drakakis-Smith 2009) reveals, mobile home residents are not a monolithic subculture with limited identifiers, anchors and habitus. Drakakis-Smith, in her study of Gypsy/Traveller culture, also highlights (2009: 464) the role of media in forming limited understandings of a complex group of people, noting that the media in particular feeds the fuel for labels such as “deserving” and “undeserving” of resources and acceptance. She argues that these representations have the effect of informing a person’s own sense of identity, and in turn their engagement with the world writ large.

Chapter 5 will take us through the confluences of perceived mobility, its representations via media and participant visualization, and its lived results via participant stories. I start by exploring common assumptions about mobile homes themselves and then expand the discussion into stereotypical ideas about the socially and morally threatening characteristics of mobile home residents, both as they are represented and as they are experienced by mobile home residents.

Inferior Design and Materials

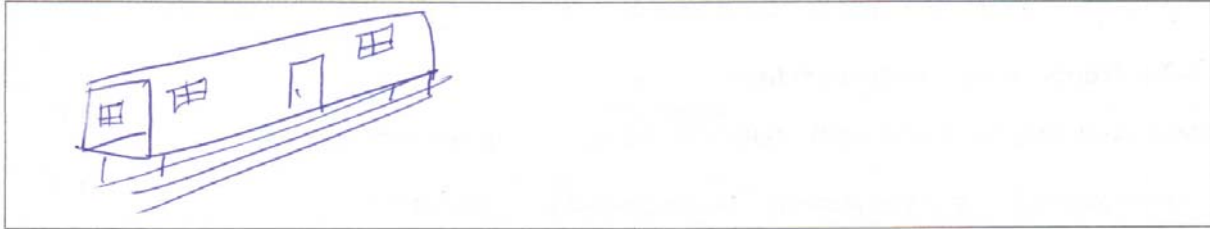
One of the most common themes to emerge from this study revolved around the materials used to construct mobile homes; namely, the argument that they are inferior to construction materials for site-built homes. This critique ran the gamut of size and comfort to long-term durability. Of the 200 news media pieces I analyzed for this project, concerns about the structural safety of mobile homes played a role in 46 (about one-fourth). Of the 105 survey participants, about half identified various negative stereotypes related to the material home: 56 circled “unsafe (the structure),” 54 circled “poor construction” and 52 circled “run-down.”

During surveys and interviews, one single picture emerged in the description of mobile homes: the rectangular shape. Survey Sheets from multiple participants (Joseph, Sam, Simon, Russell, Dawn and Rob) underscore how pervasive this public image of a mobile home is, and of what many participants referred to as the cookie-cutter aspect of factory-built housing. This shape has itself become a symbol of manufactured housing, to the point where industry professionals with whom I spoke have pointed out it has become a detriment to public perception of mobile homes and sales.



Figure 5.1 Joseph's Survey Sheet

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

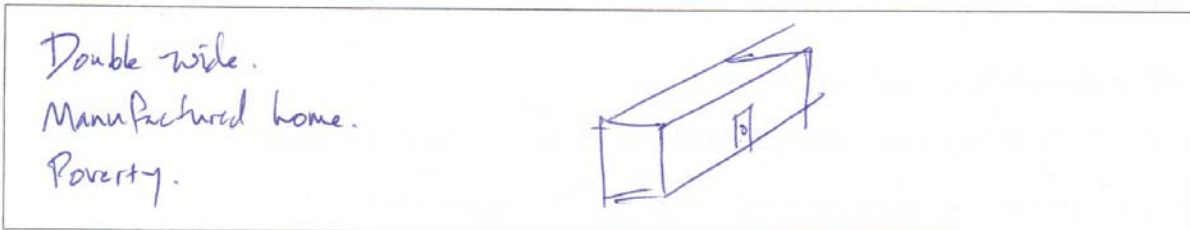


WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Cheap, effective, temporary

Figure 5.2 Sam's Survey Sheet

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

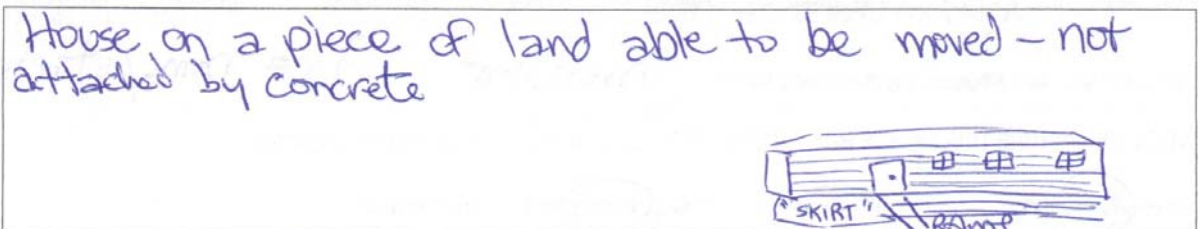


WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Manufactured, Temporary, Insecure.

Figure 5.3 Simon's Survey Sheet

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.




WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

manufactured / cut (cookie cut) / rummage "old shabby"

Figure 5.4 Russell's Survey Sheet

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? Please describe or draw it.

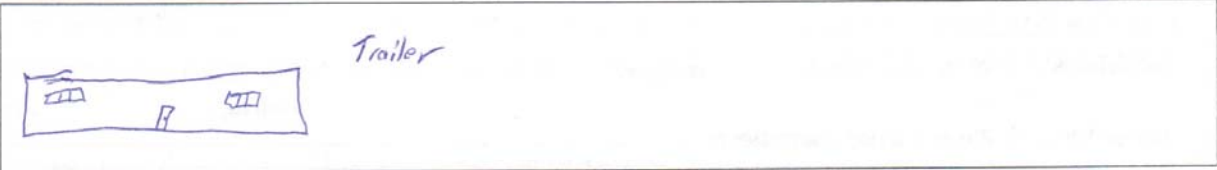


WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

~~new permanent~~ temporary (in some cases), simple, less expensive

Figure 5.5 Dawn's Survey Sheet

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? Please describe or draw it.



WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Trailer, Affordable home, Mobile

Figure 5.6 Rob's Survey Sheet

It also parallels some elements of cultural erasure that Sibley (1998: 374) discusses relating to the restricting of Roma, wherein social deviants were placed in spaces where there was little to no latitude to personal expression. Social homogeneity is elevated as an ideal, and deviance is relegated to homogeneous, undesirable space in efforts by the state to control them. The manufacturing standards and policies concerning mobile homes carry their own restrictive effects. Ideal social homogeneity—here, discussed as normative landscapes—involves site-built homes. The common images of mobile homes carry with them multiple negative connotations regarding the quality of the construction materials and long-term durability of the product. Carl, who has worked for the manufactured housing industry since the early 1980s, discussed at length

the public perceptions of manufactured housing as unstable in construction, and the underlying implications of such arguments. After more than thirty years selling homes, insuring homes and participating in lobbying, regulation and compliance organizations such as the Louisiana Manufactured Housing Commission (LMHC) and Louisiana Manufactured Housing Association (LMHA), Carl carries an institutional memory of rules and interactions related to mobile homes. Carl offered, when there are “debates about a person putting a home in a particular place, the first thing that’s going to come out of a person’s mouth is that mobile homes depreciate and they depreciate the value of the homes around them...It’s no different than if you have a mobile home park, the idea that it attracts tornadoes.” I will discuss public perceptions specifically related to mobile homes and storms in the next section. First, I unpack components of why many people believe mobile homes will depreciate over the years. For most of the people with whom I spoke, it related to the structural durability of the home.

The common perception of manufactured homes waning in value over the years emerged in numerous conversations with survey participants. Forty survey participants circled the words “bad investment” when asked about the stereotype of mobile homes. For most, this related to the actual materials used in building the home, and the idea that those materials are not as durable as the ones used in site-built houses. Some participants referred to them as unstable (Devin, Nicole) while others (Ashley) explicitly identified mobile homes as having “cheap construction.” One participant (Trina), who had lived in a mobile home for many years, shared that she didn’t like living in it. She said she didn’t like it “because was cheap, i.e. paneling, flooring, walls.” Another participant (Helena), who identified a positive experience in her mobile home growing up, nevertheless echoed others’ sentiments about the construction standards.

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? Please describe or draw it.

I see the mobile home we lived in when my parents moved back to BR from North Louisiana... Our home, neat, clean, unlike anyone else's.

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

move-in ready, neat, not as durable as a brick home

WOULD YOU CONSIDER MOBILE HOMES A POPULAR FORM OF AMERICAN HOUSING? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE) YES NO

DO YOU/HAVE YOU LIVED/LIVED IN A MOBILE HOME? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE) YES NO

IF YES: DO/DID YOU LIKE IT? WHY OR WHY NOT?

Yes. I was a kid. It was our home.

Figure 5.7 Helena’s Survey Sheet

Even though she had positive memories of the mobile home she grew up in, Helena still noted in our conversation that she did not think mobile homes are durable as site-built homes, specifically brick homes. Other participants offered they felt the home’s lack of anchoring was a safety issue (Ronnie) or that the materials themselves were less fire-resistant than those of a site-built home (Alexis.)

Sylas, who had never lived in a mobile home, argued that, “although they are inexpensive, I feel that they do not hold value as long as traditional housing and are a bad investment. In my experience they do not hold up as long as traditional housing and need repair sooner/more often.” Although Sylas noted that there is a broad spectrum of mobile homes available, he expressed concerns specific to potential depreciation of the house value. Julia, when asked about her perception of mobile homes, wrote the word “Rundown” and offered that even

though the newer models appear nice and new, the construction materials themselves are of a lower quality and often times, the residents don't perform effective upkeep.

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

a Home That Has mobility
P.S Do NOT Park on steep Hill

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Big cozy ^{FLAMMABLE} RECTANGLE

Figure 5.8 Ronnie's Survey Sheet

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

a run down aluminum box - a fire hazard

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Not box, trashy, cheap

Figure 5.9 Alexis' Survey Sheet

This connection between materials and desirability was a popular theme among industry participants for this study. Carl draws clear connections between factory designs and negative stereotypes about the types of people that live in them.

Carl: I think people are just scared, you know, I think they draw conclusions about the type of people that buy this product. But if you saw the people that came in this office and purchased these homes, you would see doctors and lawyers and teachers. You would see construction workers, people from all walks of life. It's just not, oh, he can't afford a house so he's buying a mobile home. It doesn't work like that. Doesn't have anything to do with that. And that's part of our problem, our fault, too. That over the years the

exterior appearance of the homes just haven't changed. They are still a rectangle box. There is no aesthetic look to the exterior or the home.

Retailers and industry workers emphasize upgrades to materials and construction, in juxtaposition with increased options for customization, in an effort to build public perception that mobile homes can be purchased for permanent, long-term housing. Additionally, participants emphasize that new developments in mobile homes transcend the uniformity of mobile home parks and make mobile homes a viable and affordable option for placing on private property as the primary, year-round residence. The Louisiana Manufactured Housing Association (LMHA) demonstrates this in its promotional video.

“Planning Vibrant Communities” LMHA Promotional Video, circa 2011:

Have you seen a new manufactured home lately? If so, you might have noticed some changes. Today's homes are built with attention to detail. Roof pitches, beautiful exteriors, and lots of porch space makes them look the same as site-built homes. Inside you will see custom cabinets, large rooms, fireplaces, and attractive baths. It's no wonder that today's manufactured home provide the most for your money.

By emphasizing the customized, yet affordable, aspects of mobile homes, the LMHA seeks to shift the public perception of mobile homes away from the standardized, uniform idea of utilitarian mobile homes lined up in rows in parks and toward more elaborate, personalized private property in the community.

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

I tend to picture a dwelling that could run the spectrum from shoddy and old to a new modern prefab version, an image that is relative to age.

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Temporary, depreciating, lower class

Figure 5.10 Syllas' Survey Sheet

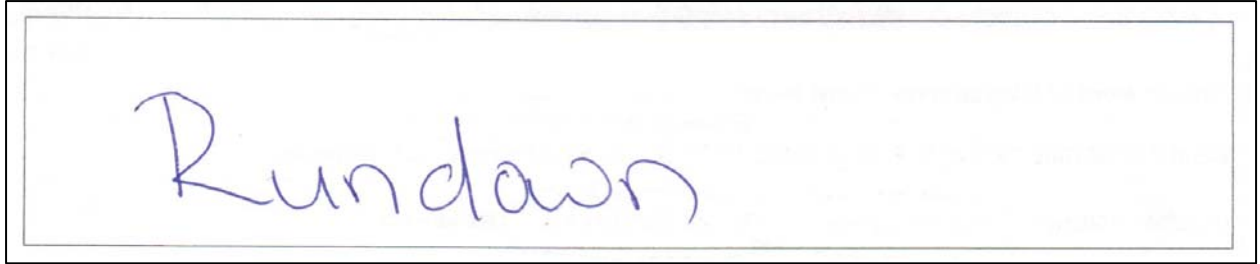


Figure 5.11 Julia's Survey Sheet.

Structural Vulnerability to Storms

In chapter 4 I discussed the U.S. government's history of placing mobile homes in traditionally flood-prone areas with the understanding that they could be moved quickly, and how despite this understanding many mobile home parks never left their areas of initial placement (Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002: 14). The belief that mobile homes were best used as temporary housing, and that they could be placed in disaster-prone areas for temporary communities, suggests that mobile homes themselves are structurally unsound and expendable. But the deeper effect we see here is also the contemporary popular juxtaposition between mobile homes and natural disasters like floods, hurricanes and tornadoes. The 1950s misconception about portability of mobile homes has led to decades-long associations between mobile homes and disastrous weather. Popular opinion associating mobile homes and bad weather today, however, doesn't include the history of why it is that mobile homes were ever permitted in unsafe areas in the first place.

In many of the news media stories I collected, mobile homes were the casualties in flood issues, tornadoes and other storms (Romano 2013, Kringen 2015, Simon 2015). In my informal interviews and surveys the fear of storms emerged as an important issue for many people. Julia shared, when asked if she'd live in a mobile home, "truthfully, no because I'd be scared of some sort of natural disaster tearing it up." Another participant (Emily) offered the following

description of mobile homes from her own perspective and reported that no, she would not ever live in a mobile home because “I feel they are unsafe due to storms.”

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS “MOBILE HOME” WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

*Newly updated double wide not the old time. Most fashionable ones.
updated version*

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Beautiful, unsafe

Figure 5.12 Emily’s Survey Sheet. “New updated double-wide not the old time. Most fashionable ones. Updated version.” “Beautiful, unsafe”

I highlight her response here because it reflects the underlying contradictions of manufactured housing; the understanding that mobile homes are much nicer, in fact, than popular opinion would suggest while at the same time still bound by the stereotype that they are unsafe. Another participant (Betty) simply responded “NO-STORMS” when I asked if she would ever live in one. In another case, a participant (Bea) drew scribbles and added the words “After the tornado” when I asked her to draw her idea of a mobile home. When I asked for clarification, she explained that she simply doesn’t think mobile homes can withstand any kind of severe weather. Unlike other participants, however, Bea identified this as a positive reason she would consider living in one. She offered that they are cheap and “I’m old.” The implication to this is that she wanted her house to expire within a short time frame from her own death, which is itself more a comment about her mirth. Bea did note, however, that if she had bought a mobile home when she bought her current, site-built house it would have been paid off by now. She felt that even though

they are less safe, and even if she lost a mobile home to a storm, she would be able to buy another one and start over without experiencing tremendous financial duress.

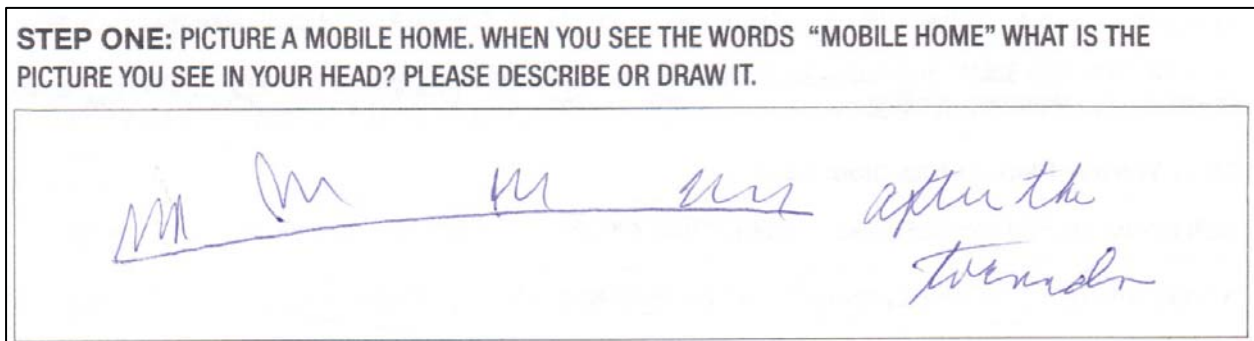


Figure 5.13 Bea’s Survey Sheet: “after the tornado”

Of the 105 survey participants, 55 identified the term “tornado magnet” as a popular stereotype associated with mobile homes. In follow up conversations with participants, the issue of wind resilience emerged, a particularly relevant topic for Louisiana given its history with hurricanes. Dawn shared, “If I could avoid living in a mobile home, I would because of hurricanes here in LA. I would not be safe and would have to evacuate if one came here.” Similarly, another participant (Ada) stated, “I live in Louisiana and mobile homes are not a safe form of housing due to the strong winds of hurricanes.” Residents and former residents of mobile homes shared similar sentiments. One interview participant, when asked about safety concerns for her neighborhood, immediately responded by introducing concerns about weather and durability.

Annemarie: Are you ever concerned about safety here?

Kenesha: I think about that all the time, once storm season comes, the weather. Oh my god, just wind damage, you know?

Kenesha’s concern with wind damage was shared throughout other conversations and survey data. Manufacturers, retailers and long-time industry workers all note that the increased rigor with which construction standards are addressed makes newer homes safer. Yet the stigma

remains, for a few important reasons. I asked Carl, one of my industry participants, if he thought the stigma would go away.

Carl: If it does, it won't be during my lifetime. I think people will always feel this way. I think it's the way the product was built in the past and the problems it had with wind and storms and hurricanes and fires. All that. But all that's changed today with the construction and the manufacturing of it. Recently the insurance industry did a test on manufactured house versus stick-built. They took a zone 3 manufactured house and wind fans. They got the wind speed up to 100mph. the manufactured house was there. They ran the 100mph test for ten minutes and the only thing that happened was that some shingles blew off. Same test, site built house, got up to 95 and the whole top blew off the house. Was on Good Morning America a few weeks ago. This was done by the insurance people, not the manufactured housing industry people.

The wind test he referred to was discussed on NBC's *Today Show* on July 23, 2014 and was performed by the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS.) The test determined that contemporary, HUD-approved mobile homes are resilient to high-storm winds upwards of 100 miles per hour when they are affixed flatly to a site. It also uncovered that additions, such as carports, when not properly anchored and attached, can have severe damaging effects on the homes to which they are attached. Many mobile homes are not sited on a cement patio. So the results from this study, however positive, discuss ideal siting and code adherence that may not reflect the realities of all mobile homes.

This study echoes similar results from a study presented in 2009 by Hebert and Levitan at the Americas Conference on Wind Engineering. Hebert and Levitan (2009: 1) studied the durability of HUD-code manufactured homes during hurricanes Katrina and Rita. They determined that mobile homes built after the 1994 HUD requirements upgrade to increase wind standards "performed well structurally and in regard to wind anchorage." Although industry representatives quickly cite this initial assessment, Hebert and Levitan (2009: 11) also highlight that post-1994 siding is potentially more vulnerable to moisture issues than older siding, and also

note that the performance reviews of mobile homes affected by Katrina and Rita came largely from homes that were properly anchored.

This is important to note because at the time of this study there are still compliance issues habitually brought forth via Louisiana Manufactured Housing Commission meetings. My own observations at LMHC meetings, coupled with conversations from various industry representatives, determined that HUD relies on local inspectors to confirm construction year and proper siting of mobile homes. Often times, local inspectors pass homes that are either not properly sited or are close, but not within, the 1994 rules for weather upgrades.

Participants, one of which (Caroline) discussed at length her challenges in buying a manufactured house, brought up this issue. After living in her house for only two years Caroline noticed various structural issues and appliance issues that were supposed to be under warranty. When she confronted the retailer, she was bounced to the manufacturer, who directed her back to the retailer. She wondered if her house is truly the age she was told it was when she bought it and is in the process of negotiating with the retailer. Carl reported this happens sometimes because of the subjectivity in enforcing rules and regulations when contracted inspectors are sent out to investigate manufactured houses on retail lots. This is another reason, he offered, that there are specific rules over several years that potential retailers have to follow in order to become licensed. Those rules for retailers, however, cannot mitigate issues from previously lax rules about purchasing and inspection.

Financially Unstable People

Discussions with project participants about the instability of manufactured housing almost invariably led to discussions about the character traits of mobile home residents. One way is via the mobile home industry's tendency to use terms such as "manufactured home" in lieu of

“mobile home” and “trailer” to reflect their emphasis on specific demographics of mobile home owners in recent years. The emphasis on place attachment and stability that industry representatives communicate accesses specific middle-class values for bankers and local legislators and reinforces Cresswell’s notes that a kinetic underclass, a deviance associated with mobility, has empirical implications. Concerns about the socioeconomic class of mobile home dwellers have been at the forefront of mobile home debates since their popularization in the 1920s and 1930s, though ironically the earliest dwellers in travel trailers were middle-class or affluent whites (Wallis 1991: 25).

Donny, who has worked in fields related to mobile homes for more than fifteen years, shared that what hinders the growth of the mobile home industry is the public perception of the buyers of mobile homes, specifically the market perception of the buyer. The Louisiana Manufactured Housing Association (LMHA), in its informational video to bankers and legislators, seeks to address and then dispel this negative public perception.

“Planning Vibrant Communities” LMHA Promotional Video ca. 2011:
For too long manufactured housing has been viewed as a problem rather than a benefit for local communities. Planning and zoning officials, council members, and citizens have been apprehensive when the manufactured housing question has been raised. Thoughts of run-down, dilapidated trailers littering the countryside have dominated the discourse. This negative perception has caused many families to miss out on the American Dream: that of home ownership.

These thoughts of “run-down, dilapidated trailers littering the countryside” have negative effects on lending and legislative opportunities for potential mobile home buyers. The image of the poorly maintained mobile home implies low-class residents with little concern for their dwellings or any idea of long-term homes and social productivity. Donny shared that since he started working in the industry, he has seen accepted discrimination practices against mobile homes based on the cultural implications of the run-down trailer image. He argues that it’s “accepted,

allowed, to put unconstitutional requirements on folks.” Donny expands on this, discussing zoning requirements for mobile homes in residential neighborhoods that he argues have no constitutional basis and yet are supported in court when they are challenged. This was so elaborate, Donny noted, that 10-15 years ago it was not uncommon for a mobile home owner to have to petition potential neighbors if he/she wanted to put a mobile home on nearby property, even if the mobile home was to be placed on the owner’s own private land. Wallis (1991: 19) also makes extensive note of discriminatory zoning practices in his study of mobile homes. Wallis (1991) and project participants note that with new HUD standards of construction and material innovations within the manufactured housing industry, some residents are able to successfully make the case for mobile homes on their private property. But this opportunity typically applies to second-home or upscale mobile homes.

Some of the park residents were working to make improvements on their homes during their time out of work, but despite permits, improvements, and approval from appropriate inspectors, they were unable to complete these upgrades. One mobile home resident (Marco) spoke with me about being unable to get his electricity turned back on due to some new requirements he was presented with after addressing a long list of other items the government had presented him in order to make the house sufficiently inhabitable. After speaking with the resident I asked the park owner (Nancy) to help me understand why the electricity wouldn’t be turned on, and she noted that it seems like every time people try to make new improvements there are new rules to follow that often times aren’t very clearly communicated. From this exchange, it seems that despite the progress being made with regard to mitigating exclusionary legislative practices, residents of older models situated in mobile home parks are still facing significant challenges. These challenges mirror many faced by Roma in various parts of Europe.

Kabachnik (2009: 470) discusses this at length, highlighting that despite the fact that many Roma seek legal permits to update or adapt property that rightfully belongs to them, public policies frequently change and thus when Roma seek permits they are denied because specifications they used had become outdated. These policies, argues Kabachnik, operate in constant flux partly in an effort to regulate the Roma themselves, in order to keep them socially excluded and fixed within a deviant social status.

The “credit-worthiness” of certain buyers is another major theme in the changing demographics, perceptions and development of mobile homes in the United States. Mobile home buyers, notes one participant, have had historically limited options when it comes to deciding what kind of house to buy. Carl offered that if a person doesn’t have the best credit score they may not be able to get the best loan rates, which means they will have to purchase a mobile home instead of a site-built home. But, he noted, as the quality and amenities of mobile homes increase and prices are still lower than for site-built homes, mobile homes are becoming the first choice for more people who have higher credit scores. Retailers from across the state corroborated this note from the industry representative. And with higher “credit-worthiness” comes a higher likelihood that a person will become less mobile because of fiscal responsibilities connecting them with their home, which ultimately establishes a more solid relationship between a person and his/her domicile by virtue of the financial anchor associated with increased credit debt and cycles of payment.

Although industry representatives are making concerted efforts toward changing the perception of the contemporary mobile home buyer, this does not change the perceptions about people owning and inhabiting older models. Nor does it change the realities of living in older mobile homes. Jade, a participant who has worked in law enforcement for many years, shared:

“When you ask I see a park with poorly kept yards. Low-priced housing... When you have low rent situations it doesn’t attract the best kind of people. I say this from my experience as a cop. But I have seen multi-million dollar trailers out in California.” For Jade, there was a clear correlation between the amount of money a person spends on a domicile and the safety, upkeep and security of the space. Although upscale models are becoming increasingly popular, and industrial materials are trying to communicate this, there remain large numbers of people with lingering stereotypes about low-cost and older mobile homes. Hart, Rhodes and Morgan (2002: 130-131) discuss this. They argue that even though there are increasing numbers of multi-sectional mobile homes being sold in the United States, “the continuing success of mobile homes hinges in large measure not just on retaining low-income homebuyers but on attracting those of middle income.” Within this they note, however, that the price of newer mobile homes, even utilitarian homes, is often outside the affordable price range for low-income and first-time homebuyers. This, in turn, means that for this demographic the option for mobile home purchasing is still likely a used, older mobile home (Hart, Rhodes and Morgan 2002: 130-131). Hart, Rhodes and Morgan identified the average national price of a utilitarian mobile home as \$71,000 in the late 1990s/early 2000s.

In Louisiana I was able to obtain quotes for new utilitarian mobile homes as low as \$47,000, which is still a significant sum of money for a single-income family of 2-4 people. The mobile home parks that I visited for this project consisted largely of families with multiple children and a single income; the second-largest demographic consisted of retirees living on fixed incomes. The homes I photographed were built as early as the 1970s and as recently as 2008, and despite the images from industry promotional materials discussing contemporary manufactured housing, the homes I saw were more utilitarian in appearance. Figures 5.14 and

5.15 are screen stills from the Louisiana Manufactured Housing Association website (www.lmha.com.) These stills, identified as examples from “traditional” manufactured homes, highlight high-end fixtures and molding on the interior and elaborate roof pitches and window frame aesthetics on the exterior. But like any other sales arena, and like the studies discussing storm resilience, these photos represent the idealized aesthetics of manufactured housing. In the mobile home parks I visited most houses were less elaborately decorated, with simpler aesthetics.

These idealized aesthetics, while effective for overall marketing, were not the reasons participants for this study bought mobile homes. Almost all of the resident participants with whom I spoke saw purchasing a mobile home as an opportunity to engage with a fresh start. Jackson (1994: 62) highlights the financial challenges of many blue-collar workers, citing long hours for lower wages as a key factor in determining what kind of house they can afford. Financially, Jackson notes, mobile homes are the best option they have for home ownership.



Figure 5.14 LMHA Video Traditional Home Exterior



Figure 5.15 LMHA Video Traditional Home Interior

Some participants share this sentiment. Speaking on the class identity of many mobile home residents one survey participant (Bert) shared, “most mobile home residents are hard working blue collar types. Who just don’t make enough money to obtain the American dream.”

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS “MOBILE HOME” WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

A TEMPERY PLACE to STAY while you look for a home. ARE A PLACE to start A life if you are in the lower are middle CLASS

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

~~TEMPERY~~ COZY, COUNTRY, some times SUN DOWN

Figure 5.16 Bert’s Survey Sheet

For many mobile home residents purchasing a mobile home was an effective way to branch out on their own financially and, for many, the first time independently of their families. For others,

it was an opportunity to own something even if finances and credit card scores prohibited the purchase of a site-built home. Signs seen in Figures 5.17 and 5.18 were common at various retail sites I visited. Retailers and residents alike discussed the financial value of the manufactured home as starter home on the way to something that is more stable. Popular public sentiments identify the long-term instability of mobile homes and often participants agreed. The difference, however, is that some cited the instability as being unimportant to them since this was either their first home or their retirement home, and in neither case did the participants need the house to last very long.



Figure 5.17 Bank Repossession Sign at Retailer

One participant (Ashlyn) identified her experiences living in a mobile home as “peaceful,” saying that “I see it as an option to own a home for your family. Somewhere to stay, better than having nothing at all. It’s better than renting and owning nothing at all. It’s my first home because issues deprive me from getting or buying a home of our own and it’s a start without throwing away our finances or income.” When I asked Ashlyn to elaborate on “issues” she demurred, noting that there are other factors in her life that she needs to address. This quote underscores a few things: first, it highlights that for a lot of people the decision to live in or buy a

mobile home is actually rooted in long-term financial planning. Second, even though this participant owns her mobile home, she still differentiates between a mobile home and “home of our own,” further underscoring the linguistic nuances that undercut the legitimacy of manufactured housing as “home” in idealized landscapes of home. I will revisit this distinction between mobile home and home in chapter 6.



Figure 5.18 Bank Liquidation and Credit Score Signs at Retailer

Other participants also shared that their mobile home was their first opportunity to branch out on their own. Dan had been living in his mobile home for more than thirty years, and recounted how it came to be he was there so long. He shared, “I was still living with my parents when I was 22. This was my first place that I bought, really, that I wasn’t renting except for the lot. Just to get out on my own. Never thought I’d stay here that long, I just ended up staying.” Similarly, the manager of the same park (Peggy) recounted how she and her husband ended up at the park, and why they stayed.

Peggy: I chose this house because it made good financial sense. But we didn’t plan on staying for 30 years.

Annemarie: What was plan?

Peggy: We were hoping one day things would get better, but they didn't. They actually got worse.

Annemarie: Worse how?

Peggy: The work situation got worse. My husband now works at Home Depot, not in construction. For 20 years we've been rent-free because I've been managing the property. Normal rent is 220 [Summer 2014]. 30 years ago it was 100. Everything goes up but the wages.

Peggy's note about everything going up but the wages reflects the overall economic draw of mobile homes and the cycle of payment that many residents are pulled into. This is not unique to mobile home buyers, but as was the case in the early 2000s when subprime lending opened the door for people to take on larger loans than they can handle, often times mobile home buyers rely on high interest rates that accompany the kinds of loans available to them due to credit score issues and/or bank/lender requirements that do not allow buyers to secure a traditional home mortgage. Peggy's experience of lot rent increases also reflects another important component of home in terms of financial stability and having a sense of home ownership.

Many mobile home owners do not own the property on which their home is sited. In Louisiana, if a person wants to purchase a mobile home they do not apply for a traditional mortgage; there are multiple variables at play for funding. Buying a mobile home to place on private property, buying a mobile home and property together, and buying a mobile home to place in a rented lot in a mobile home park all dictate different funding opportunities and challenges. Factors such as the age and size of the mobile home further complicate loan options. Historically, loans for purchasing mobile homes fell under vehicle property loans (Wallis 1991: 216), but since HUD codified manufactured housing standards in the 1970s—and as mobile home construction continues to evolve—additional options have opened up. There are various government programs (such as the Federal Housing Agency, Veterans Administration, Rural

Housing Services) and various private programs (such as direct loans from retailer to buyer and private bank loans) from which the buyer can choose. But these options are dependent on individual homes a buyer desires and can afford.

For many of the survey participants who had never lived in a mobile home before, the idea of having a mobile home was, in simple terms, better than being homeless. This serves to relegate mobile homes to social status slightly higher than the kinetic underclass (tramps, vagabonds) but still less valuable than a site-built home within the context of a sedentary worldview. Multiple participants noted that if necessary they would live in a mobile home, but in any case where they had another option, they would choose to avoid it. Henry shared that he felt mobile homes were really just temporary structures for people having hard times in their lives. He offered, “If I had to live in a mobile, I would be grateful for the shelter but if I had a choice I would not choose it.”

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

small, metal, inexpensive housing option, temporary

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Figure 5.19 Henry's Survey Sheet

During her survey, Dominique added her own embellishment to the survey response options to emphasize her aversion to living in a mobile home. In the survey where I asked, “Do you/have you lived in a mobile home?” she adjusted the survey response to read “Hell no.” When I asked

for more information about her perspective, Dominique said she would live in one “if it was the only place I had to live and it was free.”

WOULD YOU CONSIDER MOBILE HOMES A POPULAR FORM OF AMERICAN HOUSING?
(PLEASE CIRCLE ONE) YES NO
HELL

DO YOU/HAVE YOU LIVED/LIVED IN A MOBILE HOME? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE) YES NO
HELL

Figure 5.20 Dominique’s Survey Sheet Part One

The material durability critique related to mobile homes is largely connected to negative perceptions about mobile home parks. In Louisiana, East Baton Rouge Parish and Livingston Parish zoning requirements grow more stringent each year, making it more difficult to buy and place year-round domicile mobile homes on private property. Carl discussed at length how industry marketing strategies do not usually apply to purchases of homes for mobile home parks in Louisiana.

Carl: That’s a downfall in our area. In other states like Georgia, California, they have these fantastic manufactured home communities that you wouldn’t think twice about living in. We have trailer parks. Okay. And unfortunately, it’s not the most desirable people that are living in these parks. And they haven’t been upgraded since they were established. And you get a lot of police going in and out of them for certain reasons. Parents are scared to be there because there’s drug trafficking going on and they fear for their children...If you pass through [mobile home parks], you see all the older type mobile homes. But it would be nice if we had a nice community that we could put our product in. I think something like that would go over pretty well. The problem is to jump through all the hoops you have to go through with the parish to comply to their regulations. It’s not profitable for somebody to invest in doing it.

Although there are certainly exceptions to this participant’s commentary on the quality of mobile home parks in Louisiana, his perspective reflects a larger stigma surrounding mobile home parks and their inhabitants. And his response illuminates two important themes that emerged during this study. The first highlights the power of language and labels when discussing mobile homes. We do not, he notes, have manufactured home communities in Louisiana. We have trailer parks.

The implicit message he shares is that the marketing materials, with their upscale customized aesthetics and materials, are not the homes that are sold for mobile home parks in Louisiana (private property, yes, sometimes.) The industry markets manufactured homes; it does not market trailers for trailer parks. This linguistic distinction creates a separation between the nicer and lesser-quality homes. The second point he makes highlights the parallel distinctions made between the buyer of the upscale home and the inhabitant of the less-quality trailer. Further, the type of blending in commentary between home and inhabitant that this participant displays was a common theme among most participants for this project. The blending occurs here: “It’s not the most desirable people that are living in these parks. And they haven’t been upgraded since they were established.” Although he means to refer to upgrades for the mobile home and mobile home park, his discussion of the material and the person intersect, suggesting that the inherent characteristics of the trailer park inhabitant mirror the subpar construction and maintenance of the home itself.

Generally Unstable People in Mobile Home Parks

What these conversations surrounding the structural durability and financial security of mobile home residents hint at is a deeper level of commentary on the overall stability of the “types” of people who live in mobile homes—specifically the kind of people who live in mobile home parks. Urry (2007: 265) discusses various examples of desirable and undesirable mobility. While visits to iconic beaches and monuments, for example, fall into the desirable category, travel predicated on habitually migrant work, or service workers traveling from rural areas to cities for better wages, fall into the realm of undesirable work. In the mobile home communities I visited some residents were part of these two demographics, but not in overwhelming numbers. Nevertheless, the connotation of undesirable travel, coupled with the juxtaposed connotations of

lower wages and transience, spreads into broad representations of people who live in mobile homes.

One participant (Sam) offered, “Mobile homes can be practical and economical. It’s not necessarily a negative thing, but certain ‘parks’ do give a bad vibe.” Another participant (Martha) shared, “unfortunately the stereotype of mobile home owners tends to be trashy people but the homes are a great way for a family to own a home.” Reading between the lines here, one can argue for the correlation between affordability (or lack thereof) and perceptions about the stability of the residents themselves.

Martin’s three words describing a mobile home were “A death trap.” He further articulated this, stating, “I see poverty, low income, not very well kept up...[I] don’t see mobile homes as a sturdy structure, I think of them as an area of higher crime than a subdivision.” Like Carl, Martin’s statements demonstrate the conflation between the perceived lack of structural durability and the perceived instability of the residents.

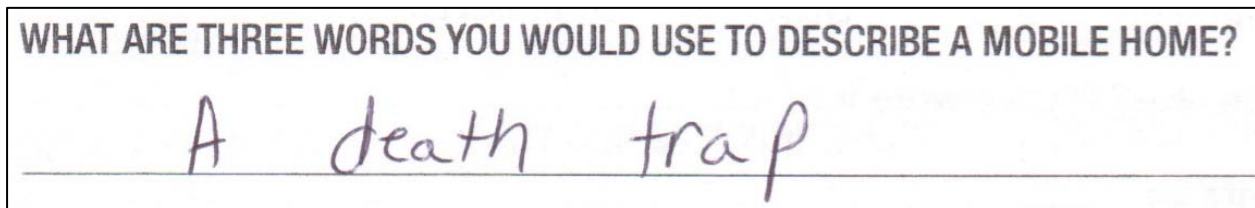


Figure 5.21 Martin’s Survey Sheet

Carl also freely discussed the stereotype of trailer trash, highlighting the hidden messages he sees when people come to him to complain about inferior construction of mobile homes.

Carl: I love to go before these council people and listen, they say our product is this and that and doesn’t hold up. It gets to the point where it’s more a stigma of the people that live in it than the actual product. They associate trailer trash. You hear the words ‘trailer trash.’ You single out a person, because they live in a manufactured home, as being inferior.

I quote at length about the topic of trash from this particular industry participant because he was the only among them who spoke freely about it. Others (Donny, Wendy) only identified the stereotype by subtly asserting the high quality of manufactured houses and their buyers. One mobile home resident (Miranda) spoke at length about the one-dimensional television image of mobile home residents and how this failed to represent the complexities of any lived experience. In this discussion, she hesitated in communicating the greater allusions of these television images.

Miranda: They make [mobile home residents] look bad. Every one that you see is either dealing with drugs, or they're sex houses. To them, on every movie, they're horrible. And what they make it look like is basically what they're making it sound like. But it's not like that. You're going to find some, but not everyone is like that. That's just like strippers. All strippers aren't bad strippers. Some do what they have to do to put themselves through school. They do what they have to do and then they go home to their children. And then you have some...but they are all characterized under one thing because that's what everyone makes them out to be. I think people look at people different because they do live in mobile homes. But I'm not one of the people that really care what other people think. I don't think like that."

Annemarie: Why would somebody look at someone different?

Miranda: I guess because all the stuff you hear on TV. They talk about trailer park trash, or they downgrade them. I guess because they think they're less fortunate than everybody else. I don't know what to say about that one. [laughs] People are always downgrading people in trailers. Because they're, I don't know how to put it...some people are just ignorant about why that matters in American culture. You really don't know what goes through people's head. Some people are just ignorant. Just being truthful here.

When pressed about how this plays a role in American culture, Miranda shrugged and noted she wasn't sure how to explain it. Her critique of the television representation, and her difficulty in explaining it, reflects the subtle influence the use of terms like trailer trash have in everyday life. This participant struggled to articulate what she felt was obvious in the way others think and speak about mobile homes. Miranda's struggle in this is not unique. Multiple survey participants were hesitant to describe the stereotype, and frequently apologized when they did. For Miranda,

however, resistance to articulating it reflected a larger resistance to acknowledging it at all. If the idea remained abstract and separate from her own experience and discussion, she was by default further removed from the stereotype.

Many of the survey participants for this project were also at a loss to discuss stereotypes. Courtney, a former mobile home resident who reported positive memories of the experience, steered clear of explicitly discussing negative stereotypes. Instead, she spoke at length about how mobile home residents' identities mirror those of any other house type residents.

Courtney: Family, children and grandparents living their life. It doesn't matter if it's on a slab or wheels. People are grateful for a place to live. People/family is what makes it a home, not whether it's on a slab or wheels...just because someone lives in a trailer does not make them poor or trashy. Mobile homes nowadays are very nice.

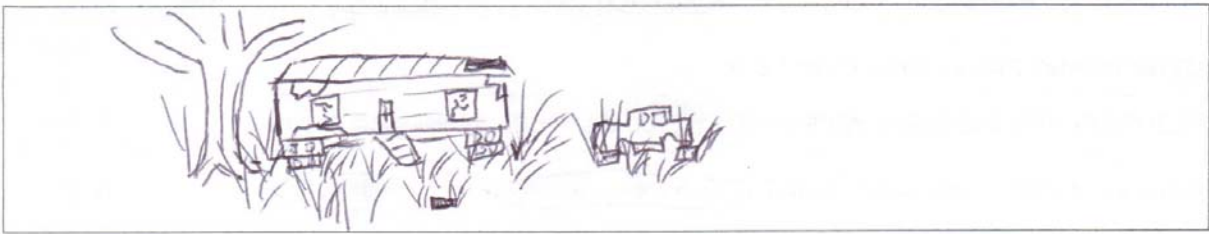
For Courtney the stereotype was evident, but she didn't want to discuss the specifics of it. She, like most other participants, circled various words like "run-down," "trailer," and "tornado magnet," when asked to identify the stereotype. But like industry partners and other mobile home residents, Courtney's responses created a distance between her identity as a mobile home resident and the prevailing stereotype of trailer parks with low-class people.

Other participants openly identified negative ideas about mobile home residents. When asked to describe a mobile home, one participant (Sue) wrote the following: "A trailer, lots of junk around (i.e. kids' toys, cars broken or otherwise,) gravel driveway, unappealing color, cigarettes butts on the ground, crying babies around, stray animals." Her three words were "cheap, temporary, undesirable," adding, "They seem unsafe and unsanitary. They carry a stigma I would not want to be associated with. Living in hurricane country they would not be my choice of housing." And yet, despite her own perception, Sue felt the need to share that she has "known people who have lived in very nice mobile homes and who are very hard working," underscoring the disjointedness between her own perceptions and resulting preferences and the reality she

understands from observing others. Another participant, Maggie, wouldn't live in a mobile home because she didn't want to be subjected to the stereotype. Maggie said she wouldn't live in a mobile home "because people who live in mobile homes are usually categorized as shady and uneducated."

David had experience living in a mobile home briefly as a child. His illustration was inspired by his memory of it. He drew an overgrown lawn and broken car in it, as well as a run down porch and broken windows. He chose the words "cheap, trashy, broken down," and shared that when he was growing up the mobile home he lived in briefly was infested with cockroaches. He also offered that although his experience and the stereotype match, "this is just the general idea of the stereotype. It could be that this is the majority but there is so much variation in each individual's life so it's inaccurate to generalize."

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.



WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

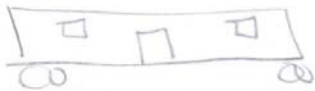
Cheap, trashy, broken down.

Figure 5.22 David's Survey Sheet

For some participants the stereotype and their perception matched, though they had never lived in a mobile home. Dominique chose "dirty, poor people, stank" for her three descriptive words. This is the same participant who said "Hell no" when I asked her if she'd lived in a mobile home. Similarly Howard, who had never lived in a mobile home or spent time in one, offered that his primary image of a mobile home involves overgrown grass and broken

machinery in the yard. When asked if he would ever live in one Howard said, “Yes, if only as an alternative to vagrancy.” Yet another participant (Dorothy) discussed the “shady area” in which she imagines most mobile homes are situated.

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS “MOBILE HOME” WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.



WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Dirty, poor people, stank

Figure 5.23 Dominique’s Survey Sheet Part Two

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS “MOBILE HOME” WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

I see a rather ramshackle dwelling with overgrown grass - perhaps with an assortment of broken machinery strewn across the yard. In the event the grass is not overgrown, it is non-existent.

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

poor, dilapidated, cheap

Figure 5.24 Howard’s Survey Sheet

What some of these images have in common is that even though I asked about the mobile home itself, many participants discussed the lot surrounding the mobile home, and the level of maintenance a resident might perform on it. This further illuminates the conflation between the home itself and the characteristics of the inhabitant. The picture paints a certain content of character. The home is lower quality and the inhabitant does not have discipline or interest in

upkeep. And in some parks I did encounter the live version of these images. But like any other neighborhood there was a broad spectrum of landscaping and upkeep. And resident characteristics varied accordingly as well.

Peggy, manages the manufactured housing community she's lived in for almost thirty years. In 2008 the park changed owners. The new owner changed the park policy to allow a combination of mobile home renters and owners inside the community. This, Peggy and a few of her residents note, has led to negative changes in the community. Since the transition from owner-occupied to a mix of owner- and renter-occupied homes, the park has undergone what she considers a dramatic transition.

Peggy: It's gone down since then. Since we started having rental trailers coming in. The community, the neighborhood's gone down. We are attracting, how do I put it? We are attracting a different group of people than what we used to. We used to attract some good, clean, pay-on-time people. Now it's unclean, I-don't-care what-my-kids-do kind of attitude. Just a different group of people. I don't care if they go to school here kind of people.

Annemarie: What did the old park look like?

Peggy: The road was cleaner, yards were cleaner. It's harder to manage people now. One reason is because I don't get support I used to have. The previous owner was very supportive and when I spoke people listened. Now it's different...In the first years that I managed the property [pre-owner transition, when only owner-occupied units were allowed] there were about 15 evictions. Which is not bad. The owner allowed me to control the place. It was getting filled with good people. Business owners. They started businesses and did well enough that they could leave. A lot of retirees. We still have a lot in here. They really can't afford to move now. We have a hoarder, but he's a good-hearted man. When a person got evicted they just moved out with their own home. Since 2008 [park owner transition], the turnaround is big because of the rentals. If they don't pay they get out. That's the only way they get out. We don't even evict them when they don't obey the lease. We only evict when they don't pay. As long as they pay they can do whatever they want.

Peggy's recounting of this park's transition reflects the interconnectedness of the themes explored in this study. Mobility and impermanence are construed in both positive (business owners moving up and out into other homes) and negative lights in her telling. Renters who are

transient and care nothing about property upkeep or neighbors threaten to undo what Cresswell (2006: 32) terms the “moral character” of place. Stability associated with home-ownership and responsibility is juxtaposed with instability associated with renters. Peggy identifies her more recent residents as unconcerned about the value of their children’s education (the area this park is located in has some of the lowest public education scores in the parish), unworried about taking care of property and uninterested in displaying consideration for fellow neighbors.

Dan, now in his fifties, is a thirty-five-year resident of the same mobile home park. He agreed that the park’s stability deteriorated after the park owner transition, but didn’t feel the shift was as severe as the Peggy suggested. He recounted a situation where a neighbor, a mentally unstable, violent drug addict, tormented various neighbors for no apparent reason. After multiple aggressive incidents this bad neighbor was eventually evicted.

Dan: That was the worst thing that ever happened to me was him living here. They had a guy that used to live right next to this spot. And a young couple with the dog next to it. [The husband in the couple] had a car with an alarm on it, and every time he would get out it would make the whoop-whoop noise. One day he was driving and [bad neighbor] followed him. He pulled over and [bad neighbor] was cussing him out over that alarm. But the guy got in his car and left [the park]. I think that’s why they finally evicted [bad neighbor]. That was the one last thing and he was gone. The police told me I should move away from him. And I told them I was here before him! They said just ignore him, he’s not supposed to have a gun, but he’s liable to shoot you. That’s what they told me. You really need to move away from him. I said I’m not going nowhere, he’s the one causing all the trouble. So I just ignored him. And I carried my pistol and had that with me. I slept with it, loaded.

Annemarie: Because of the bad neighbor?

Dan: Yeah, in case he ever came after me. I was going to protect myself.

Dan’s retelling of his interactions with the police and his decision to carry a gun to protect himself underscores the frequent disconnect between legal authorities and resident protection. This disconnect is not unique to mobile home parks or to specific neighborhoods or East Baton Rouge writ large. It reflects, however, the larger assumption that the inhabitants of some spaces,

like mobile home parks, operate within a different framework of accountability that is often associated with violence.

In contradistinction to this many residents chose to highlight their moral stability, either via their material culture or conversations about their religious activities. Figures 5.25 and 5.27 represent some of the many religious pieces on mobile home lots in the parks I visited. Figure 5.25 shows public display of religious affiliation via the “He is Risen” sign in the front windows. Figure 5.26 shows a Mary statuary situated among potted plants and other patio items. Some of the residents with whom I spoke discussed their decorations as it related to their everyday lives. Others made no mention of decorations during our discussions. One thing is certain: none of these religious decorations is a standard feature on the mobile home lot, which means that someone living in or connected to these homes made the choice to display religious affiliation. During my 28 site visits and dozens of encounters with mobile home residents the quantity of these kinds of religious items was no higher than my anecdotal experience visiting other kinds of neighborhoods indicated. I do argue, however, that mobile home residents have a tendency to identify and dissociate themselves from the common stereotypes of manufactured housing in such a way that I haven’t encountered in my conversations with residents of other house types, specifically site-built homes and apartments.

People affix value to places that are positive: places to visit, monuments to see. They also affix value to the monumentally awful: historic death sites like ground zero and Auschwitz, for example (Urry 2007: 267-268.) Mobile homes and mobile home parks are neither positive nor monumental; they are vernacular landscapes at worst imbued with the stereotypes of transience, socioeconomic instability, and moral flaws and at best casually noted as mass-produced and forgettable.



Figures 5.25 “He is Risen” Window Decoration



Figure 5.26 Mary Statuary at Side of House

Cresswell (2006:50) invokes the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and de Certeau (1984) to identify nomads as nonconformist, resistant to the state and normalizing powers. But mobile homes residents from this study largely don't fit this mold. They are trying to make their way within the flow, when considering not to the migratory nature, but to the socially mobile

nature, of mobile home living. Miranda, for example, has plans to move out of the mobile home and into a site-built home: in this way, she is mobile even though the home is not. What many participants for this project demonstrated, however, is that even if they had plans to leave the space often times it didn't work out.

Sibley (1998: 382) also notes the role of forced relocation in informing Roma identity. Often considered a “problem” minority, Roma are subject to state policies that force them to disperse at given periods. This emerged in large scale during the early post-communist years where nations were forming and reforming, having no interest in folding Roma into the fabric. This parallels, in some ways, the increasing tight zoning restrictions that cities like Baton Rouge place on mobile home communities. In some cases, mobile homes are forced out due to rezoning and development. In others, mobile home residents are boxed in and trapped by coding updates that create standards they can never meet. Marco, who we met earlier in this chapter, noted that he'd been unable to fix part of his mobile home because every time he saved up to fix it there would be a new code he had to update in his house before he could make the change. These stories were common among the few participants who owned their own homes. Loans for home upgrades are notoriously hard to get for mobile home residents due to insurance and mortgage classifications. Thus, the cycle of saving for repairs and addressing frequent coding updates can leave a resident at a loss. Many eventually decide to make repairs illegally or not make the repairs at all, which in turn may affect the appearance or durability of the home, contributing to the stereotype of mobile homes as blight punctuating the cultural landscape.

In chapter 6 I build on the ideas of mobility and deviance presented in chapters 4 and 5 to discuss the process of identifying mobile home landscapes and their residents as other within the

normative paradigm. There, I discuss more specifically the stereotypical white, working-class resident associated with mobile homes.

Chapter 6: Class, Race and Normative Space

Chapters 4 and 5 introduced the challenge of perceived mobility and how it informs social mobility. In this chapter I examine how concepts and tensions between stereotypes and experience for both mobile homes and mobile home residents contribute to illuminating paradigms of white normative space, specifically that of middle-class and affluent white normative space, and how these play a role in idealized landscapes of home. The study of mobile homes in the United States illuminates the “othering” of certain white spaces that occurs despite the prevailing narrative of collective white identity in the United States. Thinking specifically about how mobile home parks are regulated and structured, Cresswell’s (2006: 42) note about the pervasiveness of mobility as a challenge to social production provides helpful context:

In the widely diverse contexts of colonial Libya under Italian rule, Depression era California, and postwar Britain we see strongly similar reactions to mobile people. Their mobility is seen as a threat, and the thinking that goes into planning for them emphasizes legibility and order. The material sites provided for them are virtually interchangeable—plans of order, hygiene, and sedentary values.

These issues of mobility and regulation occur across geographic and cultural boundaries and have been occurring for long periods of time. Anthropologist Ada Engebriksen (2017: 43) notes that identifying people or things as nomadic, as mobile, is part of a process to justify othering and exclusion. Similarly, Drakakis-Smith (2009: 472) asks and answers her own question: why define groups anyway? For a simple purpose: to delineate insiders from outsiders. Those who settled in site-built homes were given more insider status, those who did not were deemed outsiders. As a result, what Drakakis-Smith (2009: 476) calls the evaluative “gaze of authority” fell on those who were deemed outsiders. As such, any dominant group or culture in a setting references a group as its “other” in order to formulate and codify boundaries (Sibley 1998: 382.)

Scholars such as Sibley, Engebrigsten and Drakakis-Smith, among others, discuss this within the context of the Roma.

When considering the production of landscapes and mobility, Kabachnik's (2009: 463) note about the importance of looking at these discourses and how they affect Gypsies is informative framing, wherein "who belongs, who is legal, what is the dominant landscape aesthetic, who is transgressing, and so on," are themes that are also reflected within the larger context of American landscapes, homes and belonging. Paloma Gay y Blasco (2002: 173) discusses Roma/Gypsy diasporas and different self-identifications within the cultural group:

[There are] wide differences in historical development, life-style, world-views and modes of interaction with the dominant population that characterise Gypsies in different areas of the world, and given the fact that different Gypsy groups very often do not recognise each other as belonging to the same social and moral community.

Despite this, she notes, they are indeed one collective ethnic group. Mobile home residents, though not members of the same ethnic group, are frequently accorded similarly discrimination as ethnic minority groups—in a few specific senses related to popular opinion and representation as well as planning and zoning laws. As will be discussed shortly, most stereotypes and demographic data suggest that white people comprise a majority of mobile home residents.

Sibley (1998: 381) invokes anthropologist Iris Young's discussion of cultural imperialism, which "renders a group 'invisible at the same time that it is marked out and stereotyped.'" While I do not suggest that mobile home residents bear the same heavy weight of historic oppression that ethnic groups such as the Roma do, I do suggest that a similar othering takes place. Mobile homes and their residents are represented and then called out as being undesirable, juxtaposed against the structurally sound, grounded site-built house and the moral and socially responsible inhabitants therein.

Kabachnik (2009) calls into question the concepts of “culture of choice” and “culture of nature,” highlighting the discrimination that occurs when non-gypsies discriminate against gypsies simultaneously as a result of their choice (perceived or actual) to remain nomadic and their (perceived) innate inability to stop being nomadic. This contradictory judgment can also be seen in many of the comments about mobile home residents, particularly within the context of race. In one sense, a poor white person might be judged for their poor choices that led them to having a mobile home when other factors (their whiteness as privilege) indicates they should clearly be living in more desirable homes. Or perhaps they simply have bad taste, and don’t understand that site-built homes are better. Meinig invokes this in his discussion of idealized landscapes, and it is reflected in some of my participants’ comments. Even more frequently, however, resident and nonresident participants for this study noted in their discussion of stereotypical mobile home residents that there was some innate impediment to being successful and living somewhere better. This could be linked to moral and ethical standards or intellect, among other things.

Salecl (1993) presents binaries frequently used in racist discourse: clean/dirty, white/black, law-abiding/criminal, among others. During my research, in public representations of mobile homes/residents and early conversations with participants these types of binaries consistently emerged. What complicates the issue with mobile homes as it relates to discrimination is that most often participants identified white people as the residents. This is significant because it carves out a space in whiteness for someone to be othered. It reinforces the common assumption that negative whiteness is white trailer trash identity. Positive whiteness is affluent, stable, and resides in site-built homes.

Here, conversations about intersectionality become important. Sociologist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and numerous others in geography, anthropology and related fields since have discussed the role that multiple social, ability-related, gendered and economic conditions, among others, play a role in the challenges and successes of a person's life. I also draw upon this as a reminder that through these fleeting juxtapositions of black/white, rich/poor, clean/dirty, moral/immoral, etc. we learn a significant amount about the group that performs the othering. White people in mobile homes are not being othered on the basis of their skin tone, but by the stereotypical characteristics someone in their housing might possess. What have we learned from those that idealize landscapes of site-built homes and financially stable people? In part, we've learned that race is not a tie that binds them. Whites who live in site-built homes, who may be more affluent than whites who live in mobile homes, will participate in identifying members of their own race/ethnic group as other. This, of course, is not earth-shattering news. But when we explore discourse about housing within the framework of classism, race and identity, we can consider the role of publically sanctioned discrimination as a tangible, material issue.

Within this context, Wray and Newitz's 1998 edited volume *White Trash* is useful. Wray and Newitz argue that the specific term "white trash" is both a racialized and a classed term, highlighting the intersections of race and class in the U.S. The confluence of white trash and trailer trash that I will discuss shortly adds a further dimension: how these intersect within landscapes of home. Before delving into that, however, I quote at length from Newitz and Wray to unpack exactly how the term white trash is both racialized and classed, and how this complicates paradigms of power:

White trash becomes a term which names the unnamable: a race (white) which is used to code "wealth" is coupled with an insult (trash) which means, in this instance, economic waste. Race is therefore used to "explain" class, but class stands out as the principle term here, precisely because whiteness is so rarely connected to poverty in the U.S. Yet,

importantly, it also creates a separation between race and class, for with white trash we are made aware that class actually cuts across class lines—stereotypically “well off” whites are also poor. (Newitz and Wray 1997: 8)

White mobile home residents feel the discrimination that comes with being racialized via their identity as mobile home residents, and yet they are themselves sometimes racist, reminding us that the process of identifying other has multiple dimensions. If whites in mobile homes can advance socially, they can distance themselves from others who are not able to transcend the systemic prejudice they encounter. By virtue of their whiteness white people are, purportedly and often realistically, socially mobile. Whites living in mobile homes, however, experience limited social mobility compared to whites who live in site-built homes. This occurs for various reasons, including perceived mobility as a negative characteristic that—among other things—includes lack of moral character, as well as real or imagined financial instability. This reflects Meinig’s argument that poor whites were frequently blamed for their relegation to landscapes outside of the ideal, and brings to the forefront Cresswell’s discussion of the moral foundation of a sedentarist worldview and mobility’s threat to that.

The White Mobile Home Demographic: Public Perception and Census Data

The data collected for this study suggests the prevailing stereotype of mobile homes is predominantly white inhabitants. 98 of 105 survey participants circled “white” when asked to identify the race associated with stereotypes of mobile home residents. One participant (Meghan) wrote in the words “white trailer trash.” White was the most popular race identified; Black/African-American was the second most popular race (47 participants circled). Twenty-two people circled “Latin American.”¹⁶ Eighty of 105 participants circled “poor” when asked to

¹⁶ Survey participants were allowed to circle none, some or all of the options provided on the survey. Some participants left this section entirely blank.

identify the socioeconomic status of stereotypical residents. Sixty-six circled “lower class.” The terms “rich” and “upper-class” were only circled by one person and two people, respectively. “Middle-Class” (28 participants circled) and “middle-income” (23 participants circled) were also significantly less popular. This data, in conjunction with news media review and informal interviews and conversations, supports the argument that the most common stereotype of mobile home residents is that they are white and lower-class/poor. Of the 105 participants 14 said they thought the stereotype was accurate, 32 said it was not, and 59 people left the response area blank.

Census data collected via the American Housing Survey suggests that the racial composition indicated by the prevailing stereotype is accurate. The American Housing Survey reported in 2013 that of the 115,852,000 houses documented in the 2010 Census, 6,917,000 (6%) were manufactured houses.¹⁷ Of those 6,917,000 manufactured homes, 6,149,000 (89%) were white-alone households and 535,000 (8%) were black-alone households. These percentages differ slightly from overall home demographics: white-alone households make up 80% (93,284,000) of total U.S housing and black-alone households make up 13% (15,015,000.) This paints an interesting picture because using this data suggests that a higher rate of white-alone households live in manufactured housing than in other forms of housing.

It is significantly more difficult to track the assessed value of currently inhabited manufactured homes, however, because of numerous factors. First: the age of, and amenities inside, currently inhabited manufactured homes is not consistently or broadly tracked. Second:

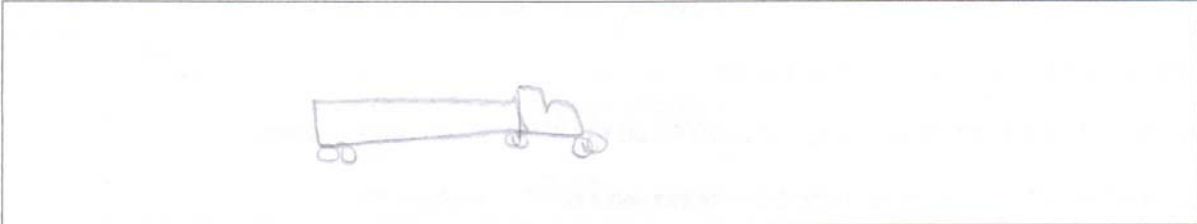
¹⁷ These statistics are based on calculable data from the U.S. Census and do not reflect the undocumented manufactured houses discussed by Hart, Rhodes and Morgan (2002). Hart, Rhodes and Morgan as well as the US Census estimate that considering manufactured houses that are not official documented in the Census it is more likely that manufactured houses comprise closer to 7% of the housing numbers in the United States.

resale of older manufactured homes is not included in U.S. Census tracking of mobile homes. 2016 U.S. Census tracking of newly shipped manufactured homes (new manufactured homes) cost an average of \$69,800, but this number only reflects what is reportedly shipped from factories. Thus, tracking the estimated value of mobile homes is much more difficult, particularly when you take into account personalization and landscaping that occurs for each person, mobile home park and private property on which a mobile home is sited. For this project I observed mobile homes that I would identify as from the 1960s based on their exterior walls, colors, shape and size. I also observed mobile homes that I would identify as built in the early 2000s based on their exteriors, colors, shape and size.

During my surveys and interviews the concept of race and class emerged fluidly in many conversations. In some surveys participants specifically noted race and class in their descriptions before I even asked for demographic information related to stereotypes. In various informal interviews and conversations these concepts also emerged. Chapter 5 introduced discussion of social mobility, and what follows herein highlights more explicit discussions of othering and race as it intersects class. When asked to describe her mental image of a mobile home, one participant (Devin) offered the words “ugly,” “white people” and “gross.” Devin disclosed she is eighteen, African-American and a college student. Devin’s candor was funny to fellow survey participants, but it also highlights important aspects about race, class and normative standards. During our conversation Devin clarified that she didn’t think white people are ugly and gross. But the context of the white people within her picture of ugly and gross homes underscores the stereotype of a mobile home resident and the role of white mobile home residents as one of the

few commonly race-intentional pictures of a white person.¹⁸ It is also significant that the people she was near when she discussed the survey mostly presented as white. That Devin’s responses were humorous to the white people around her underscores the security of white privilege in the United States. Even among whites of lower socioeconomic status that I interviewed in the preliminary stages of this project, popular jokes and stereotypes of white people along the class spectrum were seen as an accepted part of the fabric. One participant (Adam), a self-disclosed white man in his thirties who works in restaurants and comes from a low socioeconomic background, noted: “It’s easy to laugh off those [white trash/white people] jokes and insults, because at the end of the day I know I’ve still got it better than my [Mexican] dishwashers.”¹⁹

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS “MOBILE HOME” WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.



WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

ugly, white people, gross

Figure 6.1 Devin’s Survey Sheet

¹⁸ See Walton and Jaffe (2011) for an example of racialized white identity in the study of the popular website “Stuff White People Like” and how this simultaneously reinforces race privilege and racializes a specific kind of white identity.

¹⁹ During the 2016 presidential campaign multiple news sources have highlighted the plight of the working-class white male and the positive attention Donald Trump’s campaign received from that demographic as a result of his political platform. Additionally, numerous publications have emerged over the years highlighting the historical challenges poor whites have faced in the United States (see Goad 1998, Isenberg 2016, among others), but within the context of this project I argue those works are contributing to the racialization of whiteness within the paradigm and therefore reinforce the argument that white privilege as it operates in normative space exists.

In some cases, mobile home residents discussed the changing racial composition of their mobile home parks, or their overall neighborhoods, wherein after more than 20 years living somewhere there was an increased number of non-white people in those areas. One participant (Dan), the same person who shared the story in chapter 5 about the bad neighbor who was eventually evicted, noted that race composition was a noticeable change in his mobile home park since the park changed from owner-occupied only into owner- and renter-occupied.

Annemarie: How did this community change over time?

Dan: One of the biggest is that there are a lot more black people living here. They got good black people and they got bad ones, same way as with white people... I never had any problems with anybody—except for that one neighbor [bad neighbor] and he was white.

Dan lives in a part of Baton Rouge that underwent a significant demographic shift after Hurricane Katrina, and I argue that the increase in the African-American population in the mobile home park he inhabits has less to do with the transition to rental units than it does with the migration that occurred as a result of black families having to leave the Greater New Orleans area and settle in East Baton Rouge Parish. Taking into account the other heavily renter-occupied units I visited throughout this study there was no pattern suggesting that renter-occupied units tend to house non-white residents. Most of the mobile home residents I encountered and observed presented and/or self-disclosed as white.

White Trash and Trailer Trash

Another prevailing theme that emerged during this study was that participants consistently wanted me to confirm for them that when I asked for the stereotype I did indeed want them to offer what they saw as a common public perspective rather than their own opinions. Aubrey, one survey participant, checked repeatedly with me: “I know these aren’t accurate, but you want me to put the stereotype, right?” Similarly, many of the retailers and

advocates that I spoke with were very careful about avoiding the use of terms like trailer, trash and low-class. Donny, one of the industry partners mentioned in earlier chapters, noted “I know what you’re trying to get me to say, and I’m not going to say it. Because it undercuts what we’re going for.” Donny’s own personal reticence to use derogatory terms about the stereotypical resident mirrored the more programmatic distancing of the mobile home industry from the image of low socioeconomic status whites. In a similar vein, a survey participant (Becca) noted, apologetically, that the first thing she pictures is a “very poor white person.”

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS “MOBILE HOME” WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? Please describe or draw it.

I hate admit this, but the very first image is of a very poor white person.

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Unsafe, cheap and trashy

Figure 6.2 Becca’s Survey Sheet

Peggy, a mobile home resident and park manager mentioned in earlier chapters, self-disclosed as white. She discussed at length the negative treatment she feels she receives from others because she lives in a mobile home.

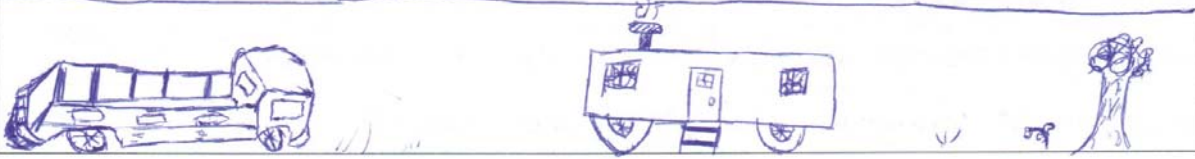
Peggy: People have no respect for people who live in parks. People who have money and they live higher up, they think they’re more valuable than a person who lives in a mobile home or a park. Which is stupidity, I think. If you live in a mobile home park the popular perception is that you’re poor and you must not have any education because you’re poor. Therefore, you do not get respect. I had one man tell me the other day—well, this man knows blah blah. I said what are you acting like a hotshot for? You used to live in that park over there in [neighborhood]? People come out and say it. So even in church. When we were in church, we were not highly respected. And I had just as much education as anybody else in the church. We had a fairly decent income coming in. People just look down on you. They treat you different, they really do. I don’t care how clean your park is. That’s how society is.

Her experience highlights the common ideas surrounding white trash. Her visible identity as a white woman did not diminish her experience that others considered her financially, morally and intellectually inferior. Within her comment she also speaks to the frequent distancing that can occur when discussing mobile homes. In this case, the distancing occurred between the man Peggy discussed as pretending to be superior. Her story indicates that he wanted to be seen as different and better than her, as a part of the majority, in-group rather than as a mobile outsider. She rejects this claim on the premise that the man has lived in the same neighborhood as her in his own mobile home at some point. According to Peggy, the man considers her as “other” instead of as “peer.” Other participants reflected a specifically racialized concept of a lower-class white person living in mobile homes. Russell offered, “To be totally honest, people living [in mobile homes] are thought to be white trash,” he said. “They are stereotyped in a way that really diminishes them.” Similarly, Marcus described in elaborate detail his mental image of a mobile home, focusing heavily on a description of the person he imagines living in a home rather than describing the home itself. Marcus stated that he wouldn’t want to live in a mobile home because “It does not seem very secure or a wholesome environment...When I think of mobile homes, I see children running around with no shoes, in their diapers. Undereducated & unemployed; in other words commonly referred to as ‘trailer park trash’” [T.P.T. in his drawing]. Others, in their drawings and conversation, leave the term “trailer park” to appear self-evident (Mary & Trina) or simply wrote “rednecks” and declined to comment further (Ralph).

Some participants more openly discussed the connotations of the term trailer park, specifically as it related to class and resources. One participant (Ethan) who self-disclosed as white and as a previous mobile home resident, offered that he didn’t like it because it “was in a very bad neighborhood,” adding that his mental image of a mobile home led him to think first of

“white trash.” Another survey participant (Ian) identified the stereotype as “white trailer trash” and argued the reality is that the building materials used for mobile homes are subpar. Hence, Ian suggested, “They are like a cheap car—you get what you pay for and it doesn’t last.” Here, Ian conflates the material of the house (cheap) and the character of the person who inhabits it (trashy).

Transical living / Low economic individuals T.P.T.



WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Temporary, Affordable, Inconvenient

Figure 6.3 Marcus' Survey Sheet

Trailer park

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Small, Shaky, cheap

Figure 6.4 Mary's Survey Sheet

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS “MOBILE HOME” WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

Trailer Park

Figure 6.5 Trina's Survey Sheet

Of the 14 survey participants that said the stereotype was accurate, only one participant (Liz), who self-disclosed as white, said that she thought it was accurate because she herself contributed to the stereotype. Declining to comment further, she simply offered: “I know it’s true because I’ve lived it.” Meghan struggled to narrow her picture of a mobile home, choosing instead to write a series of words that included “trailer,” “cracker,” “white trash” and the word “poor” in two separate places. Meghan lives in a mobile home herself and what is particularly interesting about her responses is that her own ideas of mobile homes don’t match her own experience of living in one. Despite her own lived reality the first images that come to mind for her mirror the stereotype.

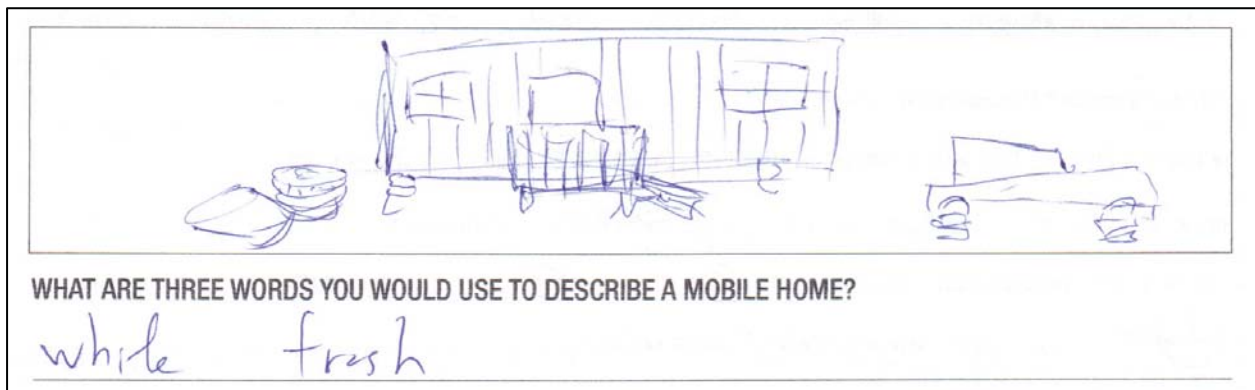


Figure 6.6 Ethan’s Survey Sheet

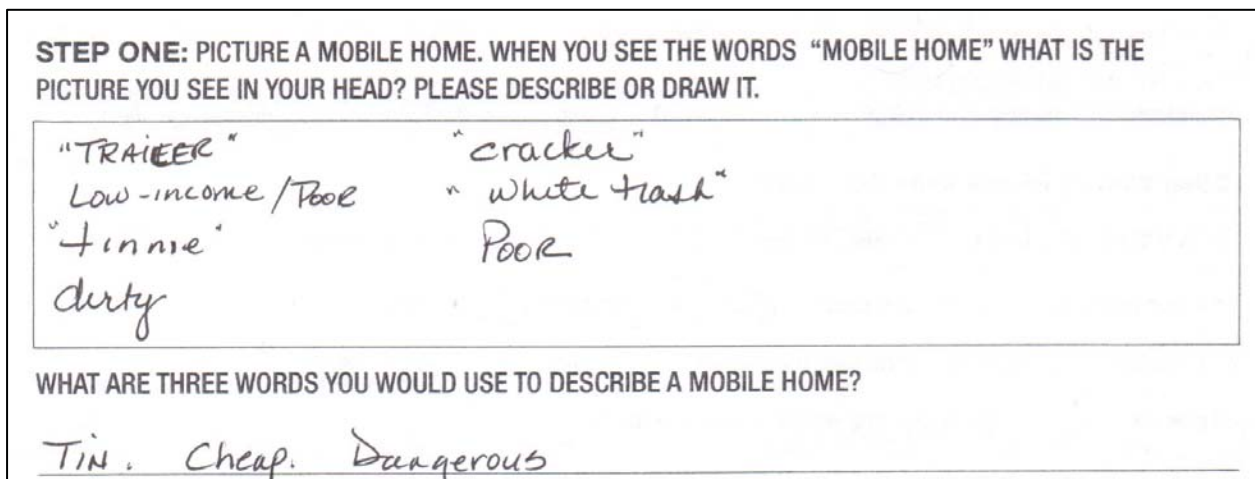


Figure 6.7 Meghan’s Survey Sheet

Colleen, who had previously lived in a mobile home, discussed mobile homes in relation to larger spatial siting rather than the mobile home itself.

Colleen: I liked it but I often felt judged for living in a mobile home...In some cases people living in mobile homes are of lower income and live in older, run down homes. But that's not always the case. I view mobile homes as an affordable way of living. I feel that the location of the mobile home depicts the individuals that live in mobile homes. If a person lives in a low-income community the mobile home is most likely going to be older but that doesn't make a person less because of where they live.

In her statement, Colleen sidesteps questions of structural quality and instead focuses on the location of the mobile home as a root for stereotypes about them. In this, there is a defense of the house type while still providing a note about how a house type might earn a bad reputation because of the surrounding environment. Similarly, another survey participant (Reggie) spoke at length about what he sees as the broad spectrum of individuals living in mobile homes. He was very adamant about how he felt the stereotypes were not accurate.

Reggie: I've know[n] nice people that have lived in trailers and some had very good-paying jobs. I think this image is changing, as these types of homes are improving—not like they were 30 or 40 years ago. Some are really nice if it's a good fit for your needs. Friends have put them on their property for kids/parents. I personally hate the use of the term "trailer trash." I've had friends/family live in these short periods due to personal circumstances. It is such a hateful term, low class people don't just live in trailers. Some live in mansions.

These participants' commentaries underscore how, for some, it's important to dissociate the domicile from the character. Like Peggy's commentary, these responses underscore that the stereotype of the mobile home resident is an identity fixed outside of the normative ideal. The call to reject that stereotype has the simultaneous effect of reinforcing that such normative spaces exist, however unarticulated. Through these conversations the highlight of white trash and trailer trash as other reinforces idealized space as normal. Further, in the proceeding sections I shift away from explicit discussion of race to highlight the framing of mobile home as non-normative in the cultural landscape. Taking into account the racialization of the inhabitant as a white person

of low socioeconomic status coupled with the larger scaling of mobile home parks as non-normative in the landscape, the comprehensive racialization of mobile home parks as white, non-normative space becomes clearer.

Mobile Homes as Public and Private Space

The consideration of mobile home space brings larger issues of public and private space into the discussion. The data collected for this project supports the idea that mobile homes act as both public and private spaces. Following the feminist geography argument by Blunt and Dowling (2006: 27) that “home is neither public nor private but both,” I argue that the exterior of a home offers material representations of private senses of identity while simultaneously contributing to the public sphere. They are private for obvious reasons; they are personal domiciles in which people play out their personal lives. But mobile homes in particular are also public because of the role they play in public sphere. Mobile home parks are that public space wherein private and communal activity occurs, but within a framework of public identity. Further, unlike other kinds of homes, mobile home parks as public space appear to be mediated less by residents than they are by industry partners and the general public and media. The dozens of formal participants, coupled with dozens of informal participants for this project offering their perspective about and experiences with mobile homes, highlight the public role mobile homes as a specific house type play. As will be discussed shortly, most often the conversation revolves around mobile homes versus home; the space wherein “where I live” shifts into “what I live in.”

This can occur explicitly on the exterior of a mobile home (any mobile home, not just in a park) during the legally required assessing and labeling of a mobile home purchased after 1976. Housing and Urban Development requires that all mobile homes keep HUD tags easily visible on the exterior of the home. Figure 6.8 is an example of such a HUD tag. This required public

legitimizing of the mobile home exists so that an outsider (compliance officer, insurance assessor, park owner, etc.) visiting the home can confirm that a HUD authority has inspected and approved the house. Although site-built and modular homes are also subjected to coding and siting approval by local authorities, the public display of approval required for mobile homes underscores the popular assumption that the default status of mobile homes is that they are unsafe or otherwise subpar in siting or capacity.



Figure 6.8 Image of HUD Tag

In direct contradistinction to this, some mobile home owners take it upon themselves to highlight “Private Property” signs and create barriers around their outdoor space to increase the element of privacy (Figures 6.9 and 6.10.) In figure 6.9 there are multiple no trespassing signs communicating private space. But like any private property sign, these are placed in areas visually accessible for the public. During my field visits I frequently saw private property/no trespassing signs, more so than in my anecdotal counts collected in neighborhoods with other house types. I suggest this is because of two things: the close proximity of mobile homes in parks made it easier for me to identify private property signs; but also that the conflation between

private and public, or shared space is greater in mobile home parks than in other kinds of neighborhoods.



Figure 6.9 Four Private Space Signs. Keep out, two Private Property signs, No Parking sign. Lattice siding used for privacy.



Figure 6.10 Lattice Siding Used for Privacy.

In addition to the challenge of identifying and maintaining private space in the individual lot, numerous mobile home park managers struggle to keep outsiders from using mobile home park space for public trash dumping (Figure 6.11) or parking vehicles and other items for public sale (figure 6.12.) The issues of trash dumping and using mobile home park space for the sale of

items is particularly poignant, as Allan Wallis (1991: 73) traces public misuse of space by outsiders as a primary reason why mobile home residents have a negative stigma of dirtiness and unkemptness around them.



Figure 6.11 Sign: No Vehicles Put Here For Sale in Mobile Home Park



Figure 6.12 Garbage Dumping Sign in Mobile Home Park. Sign reads “Garbage around the curve in field due to non-resident dumping at night.”

Within this struggle for private space, however, concerns about lack of community space were also common among participants. One survey participant (Bob) shared, “family areas like parks or playgrounds would be nice in the mobile home parks.” Miranda, an interview participant discussed in previous chapters, bought her first mobile home eight years prior to our meeting and had since bought a second home in the same mobile home park. Her experiences are representative of the arguments for mobile home purchases as good starter homes. I asked her why she bought a mobile home and whether or not she planned to stay.

Miranda: To be honest, it was close by my mama...Me and my mama were really really close. And when I first came in here, the owners that had it before, it was nice. I didn't have any kids so I wasn't looking for any real space. I was pregnant but my baby wasn't going around playing on swing sets yet. It was just me and his daddy. So I really wasn't looking for a playground or anything like that at first. That really didn't interest me right then and there. And we were young, we were trying to find somewhere so we could get out of mama's house, we were about to have a baby. So we had to find something quick. And it was already in here, the trailer. The price was right, it was close to mama, first time, let's get it, we got it. You gotta start somewhere and that was our starter.

Annemarie: Will you stay here?

Miranda: No.

Miranda cited the changing ownership of the park, the undesirable school district and the lack of space for her family as the reasons she wanted to move. In the eight years since moving in she'd had a total of three children and purchased a larger mobile home in the lot next to her first house. Before the park changed owners there were community spaces with a swing set and a basketball court. Since 2008, when park ownership transitioned, those items had been removed. When Miranda asked why, she was advised they were an insurance liability for the owner. Participants living in other mobile home parks mirrored her desire for community spaces, and in many of the parks I visited there was communal space, with varying degrees of maintenance and amenities.

Figures 6.13, 6.14 and 6.15 all show different community spaces I encountered inside mobile home parks.



Figure 6.13 Upscale Mobile Home Park Communal Space



Figure 6.14 Zero Amenities Mobile Home Park Communal Space



Figure 6.15 Playground in Mobile Home Park Communal Space

Undesirable Landscapes

Amid these tensions between public, private and communal spaces, something ironic emerges. Despite their role in public space, mobile home parks are often actively ignored spaces, spaces regulated and publicly perceived as symbols of the “other” against site-built, normative home spaces. Cresswell (2006) discusses the role of the state in controlling space and mobility. Drawing again from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Cresswell (2006: 49) offers, “it is not that the state opposed mobility, but that it wishes to control flows—to make them run through conduits.” Mobile homes, and mobile home parks in particular, get regulated in such ways that they are built into the landscape, apart from the landscape, so as not to disrupt normative flow.

Of the 28 site visits I performed for this project, almost all were within urban spaces of East Baton Rouge Parish. This is significant because amid idealized landscapes of site built homes and seemingly stable neighborhoods, mobile home parks occupy space that for many blends in as passing scenery as they move through their daily lives. Figure 6.16, for example, reflects much of the stereotype of a mobile home park; what you can see of the space is dirty,

unkempt. The landscape is utilitarian, offering no aesthetics to represent a neighborhood identity or values.

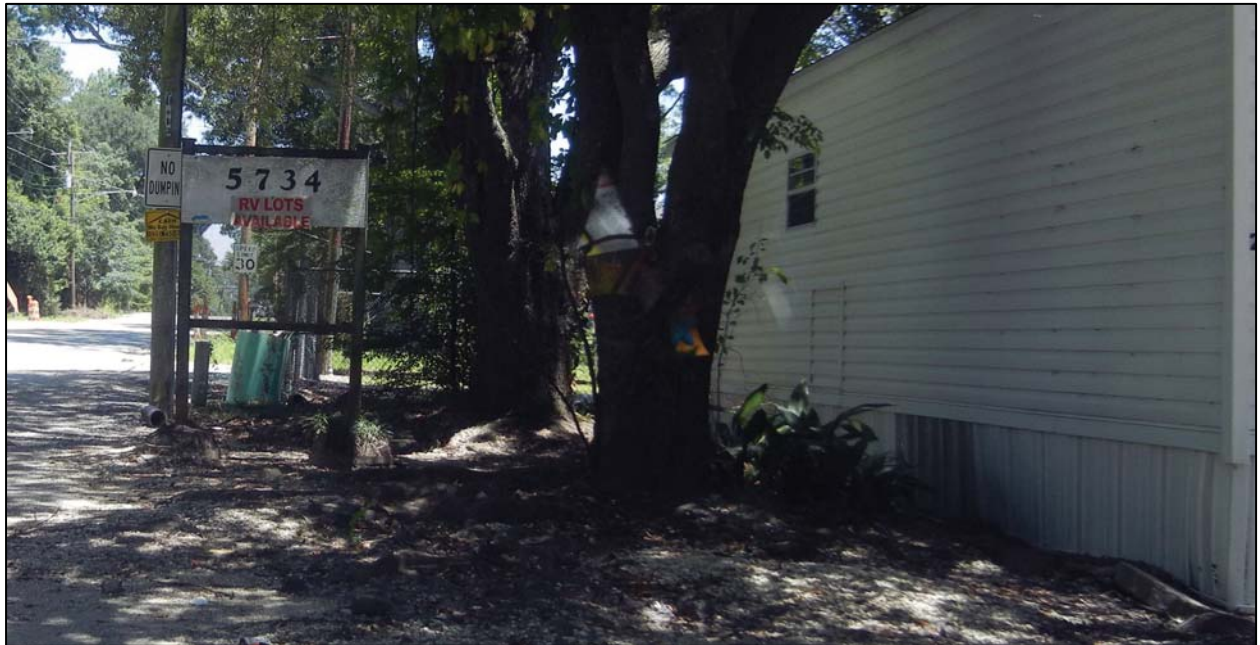


Figure 6.16 Mobile Home Park on Side of Road

On the left of the figure is a small sign that reads “RV lots available.” When I checked with the manager the lots available are for both mobile homes and recreational vehicles. The sign itself is utilitarian, as is the sign near it admonishing that “no dumping” is allowed in that area. This reflects the previously noted challenge of existing as a public and private space. But more than that these types of signs, one can argue, exist for people who already know to be looking for them. They are small and utilitarian, blended into the surrounding cultural landscape. They are simultaneously visible and invisible—invisible for those who do not wish to see them.

The sign in Figure 6.16 is on the side of a popular road in East Baton Rouge Parish and is passed by thousands of cars every day. I argue, however, that like so many other aspects of mobile homes in the United States, it exists to *not* be seen. It has no place in the idealized landscapes of home. And it is a sign that marks a space for a mobile person who is not part of the dominant cultural landscape. This occurs in part because of the spatial regulations applied to

mobile home parks. For many counties, including East Baton Rouge Parish and Livingston Parish, the code of ordinances requires that mobile home communities separate themselves from the surrounding landscape. Livingston Parish, for example, requires the following:

(Division II, Sec. 13-66.2 Mobile Home Parks. Sections c.4-c.5)

Access to each mobile home site shall be provided by twenty-four-foot wide private drives located within private servitudes of access having a minimum width of fifty (50) feet. Minimum improvement requirements for private drives within the mobile home park shall be thirty (30) feet roadway with an eight and one-half-inch base as specified by the Livingston Parish Council and a twenty-four-foot wide, two-inch thick hot asphaltic concrete surface.

(5) Where only one (1) drive is to be provided, each mobile home park shall include an adequate circular turnaround at the rear of the property with a minimum inside pavement radius of thirty-five (35) feet for garbage trucks and other vehicles.

Driving through East Baton Rouge, Livingston and surrounding parishes underscores that mobile home communities really are a piece of the landscape—and as such, may blend or become landmarks, often because of the specifically isolating rules parks must follow in their siting. You may never know they are there unless you stumble upon them, have specific occasion to encounter them, or their existence is embedded in your personal narrative of that landscape.

Figures 6.17 and 6.8 are entrances to two different mobile home parks I visited. These photos underscore the effects of documented spaces in our recorded history. Geographers and others have written about the invisibility of slaves in southern plantation tours (Alderman and Modlin 2008.) I do not argue that inhabitants of mobile home parks are as willfully erased from public memory as African-Americans and their spaces in plantations. I do argue that the effect of an unconsidered landscape in mobile home parks presents a stark reminder of the paradigm of white, often middle- or higher-class dominance, in considerations of the public sphere and, most importantly, how those even exclude other white people. Although many of the sites I visited were indeed located on mobilehome.net or Google maps, the number of manufactured housing

communities unmarked in those representative spaces was so high it was not possible for me to successfully document them all in a three-year period.



Figure 6.17 Entrance to Mobile Home Park



Figure 6.18 Long Exterior Driveway Entrance to Mobile Home Park

The subdivision pictured in Figure 6.19, with its wide-open spaces and planted trees, appears more like the idealized cultural landscape discussed by project participants. This mobile home community follows lots sizes and zoning standards more in line with traditional subdivisions for East Baton Rouge Parish than mobile home park zoning rules. Its wide streets and large lots reflect the traditionally idealized cultural landscape of a home, offering a different kind of landscape. Although this community rents its lots the same as other mobile home parks, the size and aesthetics give the impression of the average neighborhood, making the mobile homes themselves less visible. These mobile homes are less noticeable as “other” not because they are buried in a cul de sac as part of the urban landscape, but because they are buried within a yard aesthetic that connotes a higher class of people: more stable in habits and finances, more socially mobile, reflecting Isenberg’s (2016) argument that settling and owning pieces of landscape are key ideals in American identity.



Figure 6.19 Interior Drive of Estates Mobile Home Park

Another important consideration for the mobile home and mobile home park as an undesirable landscape is the argument that mobile homes were not made to last. Jackson

(1984:92), drawing on Brunskill's ideas of vernacular zones of survival for vernacular architecture, underscores that most often it is not the houses of the common people that survive through numerous centuries. Mobile homes, it seems, are often preemptively overlooked due to what some people consider will be their inevitable decline from the United States' physical and cultural landscape.

Jackson (1984: 150) further notes that "mobility and change are the key to the vernacular landscape, but of an involuntary, reluctant sort; not the expression of restlessness and search for improvement but an unending patient adjustment to circumstances." It is somewhat ironic to consider change and mobility keys to vernacular landscape when one considers the frequent overlooking of mobile homes within it. The mobile home itself represents change and mobility, but of the sort that Cresswell and others have defined as undesirable among ideally stable landscapes.

It is only as the mobile home becomes more associated with roots and longevity does it find its way into the purview of the mainstream home ideals. As the material elements of mobile homes become more sophisticated, and arguably more resilient to time and weather, many argue it is the stable, long-term, rooted "home" that current American ideals reflect. The slow shift of perceptions about mobile homes from dwelling to home (as discussed in chapter 4) relies heavily on new construction tools and materials in conjunction with intentional and diligent marketing from industry representatives and retailers.

Mobile Home versus Home

The adjustments to construction standards and aesthetics invoke another important dichotomy that emerged during this study: manufactured homes labeled and defined in contrast to other house types, specifically site-built homes. Jane Hill (2008) discusses the implicit power

of labels in American society. Hill (2008: 177) argues, for example, that words like “American,” while on the surface may seem general enough to be inclusive, often invoke a specific image: a white person from the United States. Nonwhite Americans are subjected to terms like African-American, Asian-American, and Mexican-American, indicating that they are a modification of the standard. Hill’s discussion of white racist language is particularly valuable as I consider the role of language in creating difference among house inhabitants. Hill (2008:177) argues, “white racist language has its subtle side, much of which is not subtle at all, and is not underground. Instead, it is posed in the spotlight and wrapped in red, white and blue.” I argue here that the term home carries with it specific images: site-built homes. Hill’s point about ideals and subsequent othering that occur in language can also be applied to homes.

I argue that by using the word home in contradistinction to the terms mobile home, manufactured home and trailer, home is normal, ideal. And they are site-built. In this framework mobile homes are white spaces, but they are not normative spaces. They exist outside the normative paradigm of home despite the fact that mobile home residents often occupy, in some fashion, paradigms of white public space. This is where the opportunity arises to discuss white spaces that are not normative within idealized cultural landscapes (white people in site-built single-family homes.)

Participant conversations, industry materials and news media suggest a “normal” house is a site-built house. If someone lives in a manufactured house they are not living in the idealized landscape of home. They are not living in a normal home. Manufactured houses, situated outside of normative space, more often than not are subjected to modifiers like “mobile” or “manufactured” instead of simply being discussed as “homes.” The identification of the house type and the inhabitant as mobile relegates them to a role in society that is set apart from

standard, since the designation “mobile” de-emphasizes the likelihood that the person or the house type will remain, long-term, in that specific area.

I revisit the discussion of terminology here to underscore the inherent normativity embedded in the way participants and media used the term “home” as a piece of the cultural landscape. Similar to Hill’s discussion of language, Schein (2006) and others have noted that how we define white space is often by the lack of modifiers. A historically white university (example Louisiana State University) is not labeled historically white; it is simply called a university. Similarly, a site-built home, when discussed in public settings by the general population (and even among mobile home residents) is simply referred to as a “home,” or in some cases, a “regular home” or “traditional home.” The manufactured housing industry in Louisiana explicitly leverages the stereotype of mobile homes against the homes they are selling, highlighting that “the truth is, a factory built module or manufactured home is not a trailer, like you’ve see FEMA bringing in, nor is it the one you’re used to seeing when you were growing up.” (LMHA video, circa 2006-2008, “Not Your Grandfather’s Trailer.”)

This distinction was present in almost all of the conversations I had for this study. One participant (Cole), invoking a combination of negative images and experiences of mobile homes, offered why he does not want to live in one. He chose the words “cheap, trashy, temporary” for his descriptors of a mobile home.

Cole: [I picture] A white or beige FEMA trailer, usually in a poor neighborhood. (image of a trailer park). Actually, I did like [living in a mobile home] although my experience was somewhat different—we received a supplementary FEMA trailer after Hurricane Katrina (and I only lived there off and on). I would not live in one —it is too small for me, and I feel they are associated with dangerous people...the movie by Eminem (8 mile, I think) really shaped my image. Katrina also shaped my views a lot (there was a huge FEMA trailer park by University of New Orleans’ lake front campus).

Similarly, other participants identify mobile homes as necessary domiciles while fixing or saving for a home. One participant (Larry), when asked to describe his mental image of a mobile home, identified mobile homes as means to getting toward a dream house. I asked Larry to explain what he imagines when he hears the word mobile home.

Larry: I usually think of poverty, or low-income people first. I also see intelligent hard-working people who are not afraid of what others think. Example: mobile home living while saving for the ‘Dream House’”

Gina had a similar interpretation of mobile homes. As a mobile home resident, she enjoyed living in the space but also saw it as a stepping-stone to something better.

Gina: I do [like living in a mobile home] because it’s affordable for me being a single mom. I don’t [like living in a mobile home] because I’d rather have a house with a foundation to be more safe. I believe that manufactured homes are for single parents to middle aged adults who want more in life but aren’t quite there yet.

Cari, who had never lived in a mobile home asked, candidly, if a mobile home will look like a house.

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

Unsteady and not safe. Will it look like a house? Is it cheap enough & be worth it to live in for a short period of time. Not a dependable place to live. No privacy bc you can hear everything.

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Not ~~at all~~ very safe

Figure 6.20 Cari’s Survey Sheet

Similarly, Jordan shared, “I would live in a mobile home to see how different it is from a regular home or apartment.” Here is the crux of the issue: not only are mobile homes outside idealized landscapes, they are often considered to be outside normative landscapes. They are not a part of

the conversation about what constitutes home space. Survey sheets from Marianne, Jenny and Marvin further underscore the distinction between mobile homes and homes.

IF NO: WOULD YOU LIVE IN A MOBILE HOME? WHY OR WHY NOT?

No, mobile home are not that attractive to me and they dont seem to have ^{enough} space as to real homes.

Figure 6.21 Marianne's Survey Sheet: Mobile Homes as Distinct from Real Homes

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? Please describe or draw it.

Mobile homes seem to be less safe than ^{regular} ~~regular~~ homes; Also, it seems like a lot of people in mobile homes make less money than people who own rent/buy homes.

Figure 6.22 Jenny's Survey Sheet: Mobile Homes versus Regular Homes

IF NO: WOULD YOU LIVE IN A MOBILE HOME? WHY OR WHY NOT?

yes, I would. We would like to buy land, and a mobile home is an affordable housing option after buying land. Plus, you can get more options/amenities for the money in a mobile, rather than a brick & mortar home.

Figure 6.23 Marvin's Survey Sheet: One of the few examples of survey participants that identified mobile homes versus brick and mortar homes (instead of mobile homes versus regular homes)

Some participants who had positive experiences with manufactured houses still distinguished between mobile homes and homes. One participant (Martha), for example, enjoyed living in a mobile home because, "It was home. I actually miss it because I always felt safe there. I wouldn't mind living in another one." She added, "I've found from my experience that you can

feel secure and safe in one just as much as in a regular home.” Here it is clear that even those who are content with their home space sometimes distinguish between mobile homes and a “regular” home. Even when people are happy and fulfilled and want to live in them, there remains a separation between a regular house and a mobile home.

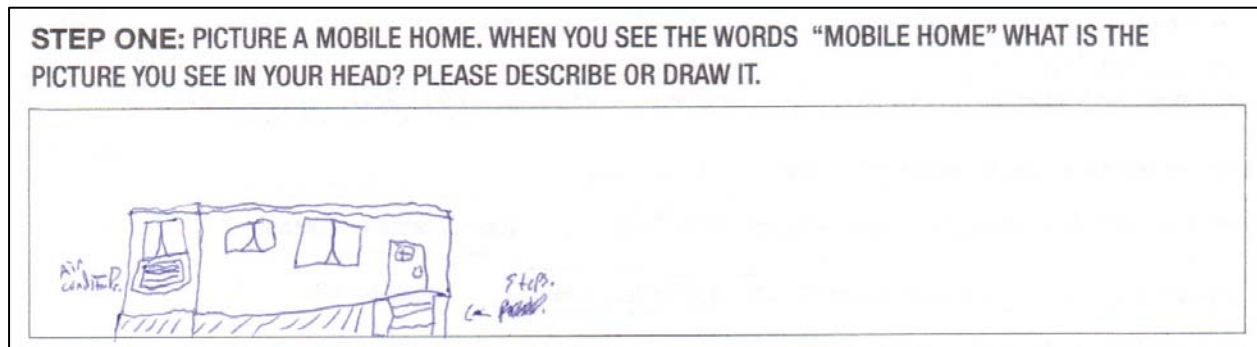


Figure 6.24 Martha’s Survey Sheet

In a few cases participants identified manufactured houses as the ideal experience of home. Carol owned her mobile home in a subdivision outside one of the most populated areas of Baton Rouge. Prior to her mobile home, she lived in the central part of Baton Rouge and prefers her current living situations with her mobile home. “It’s better than Baton Rouge. I wake up hearing birds instead of sirens.” Carol’s only complaint was that she’d like more storage. Another participant (Laila) wrote, in simple terms, “my home” on her description of a mobile home. Which contained mature landscaping and a carport for shade in the yard.

Meghan, in her survey sheet, wrote at length about her experience living in a mobile home, following up with me afterward to discuss her experiences. Her experiences were somewhat unique in that her own mental image of mobile homes consisted of negative stereotypes of white people and dirty, cheap spaces. Yet she herself is a mobile home resident and did not identify as a poor white in a dirty or unstable neighborhood.

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.

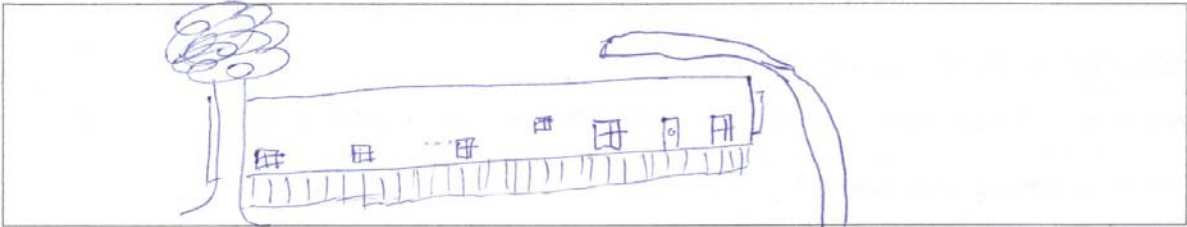
white with black shutters, covered porch -
flower beds, benches & trees.

WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

Inexpensive, Compact, Comfortable

Figure 6.25 Carol's Survey Sheet

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.



WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

My Home

Figure 6.26 Laila's Survey Sheet

Despite how happy Meghan was with her home, she was keenly aware of the conversations people she knew had about her house being different from a regular home.

Meghan: While I would prefer a standard house, I'm very happy with my 'manufactured home.' It's beautiful inside. I love my kitchen. I do like [living in a manufactured home] because after Katrina, when housing was scarce and expensive, we were able to get the amenities in our home for 1/3 the cost of the traditional home. My home is sheet-rocked inside and guaranteed [hurricane category four resilient]. I wish my neighbors—I only have two, with *identical* [her emphasis] French Chateau style homes—did not project a certain din of superiority when they see me. And they do. I grew up in an upper middle class area in the Midwest. I am here now and my mother lives in Florida. Appearances were and still are very important. My mother, bless her, would never tell her Florida friends that her daughter lives in a 'mo-bile' and it took her forever to even want to come visit my home.

Further, these distinctions between mobile and regular homes underscore the journey of the average citizen looking for the typical idea of home and stability. The American dream of home ownership is a common concept invoked in industry materials and discussed by participants for this project. Figure 6.27 is a screenshot from the LMHA website, highlighting how manufactured houses are a piece of the American dream. But for many participants, mobile homes still fall short of “regular” homes in that category (Larry).

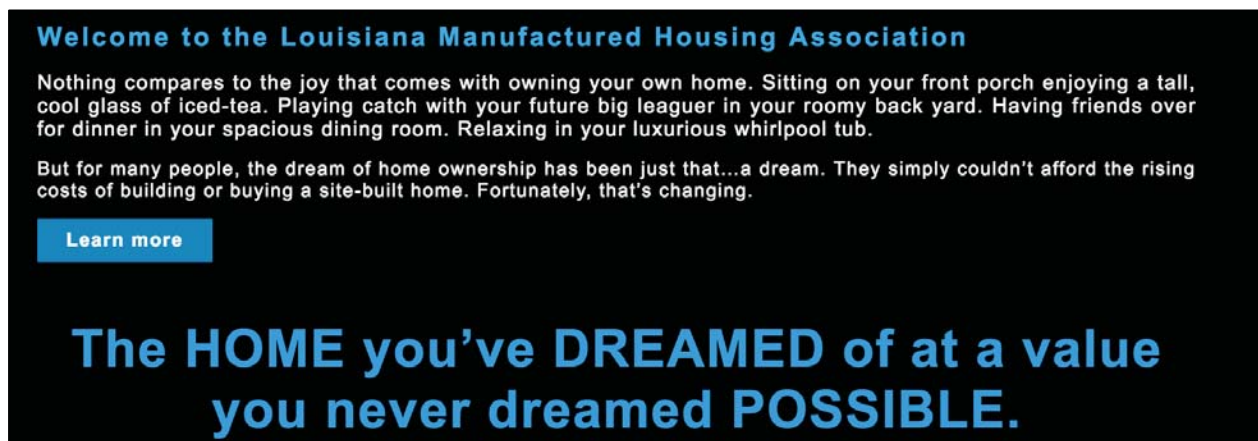


Figure 6.27 LMHA Website Home Page

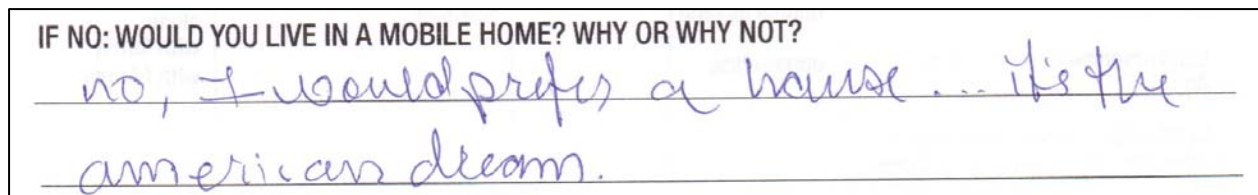


Figure 6.28 Larry's Survey Sheet Part Two

Other participants candidly rejected mobile homes as fitting any idealized landscape of home.

Dan considers whether or not mobile homes fall within the ideal housing standard in the United States.

Dan: No. My uncle calls them a matchbox. He says he wouldn't live in a trailer, he calls them a matchbox. It's not like a house, no. I'd much rather have a house. I need more space and the quality of a *home* (emphasis author) is just a lot better. If the roof leaks and you have particle board floors, then you're going to have a hole in the floor.

Participant discussion differentiating between mobile homes and homes hints at deeper issues related to normative landscapes and the ideal people living within them. By highlighting conversations where the role of the white person living in a home is set apart from the normative concept of home, I initiate the process of othering mobile home space—predominantly white space—and further tease out pieces of the paradigm of whiteness in the American cultural landscape. Until we begin to expand definitions of normal space, our systemic hierarchies will extend to racial, ethnic and class-based groups accordingly. In the concluding pages for this project I revisit my research questions, offer summarizing responses to them, and suggest further avenues toward dismantling paradigms of dominance in the United States.

Chapter 7: Manufacturing the Other in Landscape

Throughout this project I've outlined the interconnectedness of various public perceptions of mobile homes and parallel stereotypes of the people who live in them. By exploring issues related to perceived portability of mobile homes and perceived transience of mobile home residents I highlighted common misperceptions that residents were temporarily passing through areas and therefore unconcerned with longer-term engagement in their community. This led to a deeper discussion of the common idea that mobile homes are less structurally stable than site-built homes and the accompanying popular arguments that the people living within them tend to be unstable, unsavory or uninterested in taking care of their belongings. From there, I discussed the restriction of social mobility that occurs as a result of perceived physical mobility of mobile home residents. I then explored a broader discussion of normative labels and normative space. Labels like "American" versus "African-American" define nonwhite U.S. citizens as outside the normative. Labels associated with site-built homes ("homes") relegate mobile homes outside the normative paradigm via juxtaposition with terms such as "mobile home, manufactured home, trailer." This in turn situates mobile homes and their residents within landscapes that directly contrast idealized notions of home, as outlined by Meinig and project participants, which chisels away at paradigms of white space and site-built homes as normative.

The use of the labels white trash and trailer trash simultaneously racialize some forms of white space while continuing to reify the justification for the settled, site-built home, which reflects the cultural ideal of property and land ownership laid out by Isenberg (2016.) The material elements of mobile homes, their surrounding aesthetics and the character of their inhabitants do not, however, reflect American identities so dramatically different from people living in other forms of housing. Here, I return to my original research questions.

- What can the study of mobile homes in the United States teach us about idealized American landscapes of home?
- What do the spatial, social, material and symbolic elements of mobile homes and ideas relating to them demonstrate about the values permeating public perception of home ownership and community identity?
- What can the study of mobile homes' relationship to different forms of mobility teach us about class, race and normative ideals in the context of the American cultural landscape?

The data collected and research discussed for this project reinforces common suggestions that owning a home and the land on it are a primary component to idealized landscapes. Further, the ideal does not traditionally include the purchase of a utilitarian mobile home and/or the placement of that home in a rented lot mobile home community. Mobile homes and the accompanying correlation in public perception between mobile homes and white mobile home residents demonstrate that some white spaces exist outside of normative white landscapes. Mobile home residents occupy the role of “other” in both class and, to a lesser extent, race (in that they become specifically labeled white in a derogatory manner), and have done so for many years. Isenberg (2016: 315) notes that mobile home dwellers, along with people dwelling in shacks, shanties and other makeshift domiciles, “lack the civic markers of stability, productivity, economic value, and human worth.” By illuminating how this perspective permeates the public sphere, a few key benefits emerge: we can further illuminate the realities of “normal” space as white, affluent, fixed in location. While it is irrefutable that a white person maintains a position of privilege in broader public spaces, white mobile home residents occupy either ignored or ill-favored landscapes within the public eye.

Blunt and Dowling (2006: 10) note the feminist discussions of home that suggest for some (largely women) the home is more of a prison than a comfort, more of a constraint than an opportunity. Similarly, the mobile home stereotype is a restricting force for many people, binding their opportunities to specific spaces and cultural landscapes. By virtue of the stereotype of mobile home residents and what Bauman (1991) and later Cresswell (2006) discuss as the kinetic underclass, mobile home residents' socioeconomic and spatial mobility in their lived experience becomes significantly restricted. For many residents, this plays out in small-scale irritations, such as judgmental statements by others. For other residents, this impacts the spaces they have to raise their children and the materials and rights they have to update their properties. This comes in the form of restrictive zoning delineating where they can place their mobile homes. Isenberg (2016: 317) reminds us that the physical location of the home dictates our access to schools, hospitals, and infrastructural maintenance. Other impacts include the frequent and contradictory public coding updates for home improvement, limited home improvement loans and little to no home equity, as well as stringent insurance programs that do not offer support for manufactured housing. Residents who rent or buy mobile homes in the hopes of saving for their future are often caught in cycles of poverty, many of which are related to the aforementioned financial rules related to mobile homes.

For all the participants of this study, the designation "mobile home resident" was a key label to individual identities, and subsequently impacted how mobile home residents navigated public identity. Further, despite the perceived threat of mobile homes to a sedentary worldview, most mobile home residents from this study indicated a desire for stability, fixity and security within a community rather than espousing nomadic ideals.

Cresswell (2006) and others have offered that structural access to resources and opportunities tend to favor socioeconomic hierarchies, wherein the material infrastructure melds with the social and symbolic structures of society to create barriers to access in broader terms. Mobility is central to what it is to be modern—but it has also been the subject of fear and suspicion because it undercuts modern ordering and structure (Cresswell 2006: 20). As such, mobile bodies operating within society symbolize challenges to order and idealized landscapes. Blasco (2016) reminds us how this is enacted. She notes that when you formulate ideas and language to make segregation seem commonsensical it becomes difficult to dismantle segregationist practices. This can occur regardless of lived experience. Even participants who did not reside in mobile homes reflected this as they discussed their perspective of mobile homes. Many knew that mobile homes and/or residents weren't any different from them, but they could not let go of the negative perception of mobile homes and mobile home residents that society perpetuates.

For mobile home residents, the power of the public idea of home and its connotations also have important implications. Gowans (2003: 437) offers the following note when considering the role of home, separation, and imagined geographies:

At the scale of the nation, home is (largely) an imaginary construction based around an imagined community, collective identity and shared history and geography. Located away from the homeland, populations such as diasporic and transnational groups are able to sustain imagined geographies of home precisely because of that distance (critical to definitions and understandings of home), and their successful perpetuation is coupled with the myth of return.

Gowans' note about the myth of return is informative here, and revisiting Meinig's mention of poor whites as ostracized for living in othered landscapes, one can suggest that white mobile home residents experiencing a lack of social mobility and an abundance of economic instability might perpetuate their own judgments about nonwhite neighbors because they do, in fact, believe

that they as white people will “return” in some sense to normative society. I suggest that white mobile home residents feel this sense of separation from their imagined communities by virtue of their status as other via representation and regulation of mobile homes/stereotyped identities.

This paradox of identity within representation and regulation reflects the depth and span of normative paradigms. Unpacking the mobile home highlights how ideological control of idealized home relates to paradigms of whiteness. White mobile home residents, by virtue of their social identities, simultaneously bear the brunt of negative representation in mobile home stereotypes while also being taught via normative values that they can, eventually, step over the threshold into their imagined community. What’s more: in some ways this is true. In mitigating socioeconomic factors, white residents can see a place for themselves in the idealized landscape; this, perhaps, makes their current conditions and subsequent social challenges that much more upsetting to them.

In demonstrating that white people connected to certain forms of housing can be othered, and by subsequently discussing their experiences, I have sought to support the argument that stereotypes and negative connotations have repercussions in lived experience. And by doing this within the paradigm of whiteness, I have tried to provide further data for those who are focused on articulating that there are systems and policies predicated on prejudice that can be tracked on the landscape and which have significant negative impacts on us all.

Cresswell (2006: 58) argues that ways of thinking about mobility are informed by a desire to fix what is unfixable in order to make it knowable in a clear spatial framework. We try to fix what is potentially too abstract or deviant to understand. Further, we order these mobilities by juxtaposing them against each other, presenting one that is ideologically sound and one that is suspect. “Even when mobility has been at the center of geographical attention it has been

conceptualized through the lens of fixity as an ideal” (Cresswell 2006: 28). This is significant for this study because regardless of whether or not mobile home residents are actually physically mobile, they are perceived as such and therefore looked down upon, which impacts their social mobility.

The Louisiana Manufactured Housing Association, in a 2012 video discussing myths and misconceptions about zoning and construction standards for mobile homes, states, “Remember, at no time ever would LMHA advocate for locating homes in neighborhoods where they do not complement the fabric of the community.” Considering this one could ask: what constitutes the fabric of a community, and a complement to it? Is it the material landscape or the character of the people within it? This project underscores that people often conflate the two. It follows, then, that if the mobile home is commonly perceived to be less-than-ideal in the American cultural landscape, the picture painted of its inhabitants mirrors that. When the ideal landscape is identified as site-built homes the mobile home is relegated outside the paradigm. And white working-class people, despite their skin privilege in society writ large, are also relegated to outsider status; they are abject citizens. They embody a white identity that undermines the white paradigm of dominance.

Donald Meinig (1979: 42) reminds readers of the multiple ways of seeing the landscape. One such perspective, landscape as wealth, “is of course strongly-rooted in American ideology and reflective of our cultural values. It represents our general acceptance of the idea that land is primarily a form of capital and only secondarily home or familial inheritance; that all land, all resources, are for sale at any time if the price is right; that speculation in land is a time-honored way to wealth.” Mobile homes as material, cultural and symbolic elements of the American landscape are not immune to this perspective. Similarly, Wallis (1991) argued that mobile homes

symbolized both the potential and the potential failings of American capitalism. They have occupied a unique space in the American cultural landscape since their inception and popularization. I agree with Wallis and use Cresswell's arguments for the role of the mobile agent as other in society. One of our greatest opportunities as scholars is to work toward helping individuals maneuvering non-normative space carve out their own pieces in the cultural narrative and landscape.

Meinig (1979: 42) also discusses seeing landscape as ideology, "a symbol of values, the governing ideas, the underlying philosophies of culture." In geography, mobile homes are significantly under-studied in American housing. My goal in engaging mixed methods and a broad spectrum of individuals connected to mobile homes was to access this material element of ideological implications for the American cultural landscape. Photos and interviews with industry representatives and lobbyists, owners and managers, and residents of mobile homes provided an interconnected and diverse perspective on the material, ideological and personal elements of mobile homes.

Meinig (1979: 42) insists "if we want to change the landscape in important ways we shall have to change the ideas that have created and sustained what we see." In geographic studies of race, scholars have begun the arduous task of unpacking and reframing landscape. An important component to that is the increasing awareness of whiteness as a race. Exploring mobile homes in the American landscape via multiple perspectives (landscape as wealth, landscape as ideology, landscape as material, landscape as culture), both illuminates and challenges ideas that created and sustain popular ways of seeing mobile homes in the American cultural landscape.

This project illustrates idealized landscapes often fail to communicate the lived experiences of millions of people living in the United States. Within this, one specific element

consistently emerged during discussions of discrimination. The ease with which so many participants discussed negative impacts on humans because of negative stereotypes of material culture (mobile homes) underscores the importance of studying the interconnectedness of the material, spatial realm and human experience. Participants who reside in mobile homes, as well as participants who do not and never have, believe discrimination against mobile home residents exists. This raises a broader question: if one can identify systemic discriminatory practices against residents of mobile homes, why is it then so difficult to accept the historically tracked argument that racism is systemic oppression buried in euphemism? It can be argued that just as non-mobile home residents discuss the material construction of mobile homes as a metaphor for the people residing within them, so too does social discourse (often white/western) use the language of environmental determinism to mask inter-subjective assessments about people with the façade of empirical support, confusing spatial correlation with causality and heredity with hierarchy.

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Appendix A: Galeucia Sample Questions Informal Interviews and Conversations

Interview Targets

Anyone willing to talk about mobile homes, but specifically mobile home residents, managers/owners of mobile home parks, retailers, and representatives from local mobile home advocacy groups, manufacturers, or individuals otherwise intimately connected with mobile homes

Note: The topics raised and questions asked in all interviews varied and the interviewer adapted to the language, interests, and knowledge of the participants. All participants were asked basic demographic questions. The following questions are provided to indicate the kinds of questions that were raised; this list is not exhaustive.

Demographic Questions

- How old are you?
- What sex/gender do you identify as?
- Where do you live?
- Do you identify with a race or races? Which one(s)?
- How would you describe yourself in terms of class?

Interviews

Personal Ideas about Home

1. Can you tell me the story of how you came to live here?
 - a. Are you from this area?
 - b. Who connected you with your home?
 - c. What made you decide to move into a mobile home?/Would you ever live in a mobile home? Why/why not?
 - d. Do you own your mobile home?/Do you own your home?
 - e. (if resident) What were the major factors that led you to a mobile home? (financial, geographic, lifestyle, etc.)
2. What do you use this home for? (primary home, camp home, etc.)
3. How long have you lived here?
4. Where did you live before? What kind of house/apartment/etc?
5. How long do you expect to live here?
6. When you think of your ideal home, what it is like? (what does it look like, where is it, how big is it, what kind of structure is it?, etc.)

Public and Personal Ideas about Mobile Homes

1. Is home important? Why yes or no?
2. What do you think the general public (including media) think or say about mobile homes?
3. How do you think the rest of your community (your town/city, surrounding areas) sees your mobile home (and mobile home park, if applicable)

4. Do you think there are stereotypes associated with mobile homes and people who live in them?
 - a. What are some of these stereotypes?
 - b. What kind of people do these stereotypes show in mobile homes?
5. Why do you think people think these things about mobile homes?
6. (if resident) Before you moved into a mobile home, what did you think of mobile homes?
 - a. Now that you live in a mobile home, what do you think of mobile homes? Is it what you expected?
7. How would you identify yourself (and if applicable, your neighborhood/mobile home community) in terms of class and social status in your community?
8. How would you define the American dream?
 - a. Does home play a part in the American dream?
 - b. How does your home fit with your idea of the American dream?

Everyday Life in the Home

1. How much time do you spend at home?
2. How many people live here?
 - a. How are the people here related? (friends, family, etc.)
3. How do you spend your time at home?
 - a. How do you furnish and decorate your inside, and why?
4. How much privacy do you feel you have in your home?
5. How much time do you spend outside?
 - a. How do you furnish and decorate your outside area, and why?
6. When you are outside, do you interact with your neighbors or other people coming by?
7. Do you think of your yard as your own private space?
8. When you look around your home (inside and out), is there anything that you think stands out as showing others who you are?
9. What do you want people to think about you or your home when they drive/walk/move by it?

Appendix B: Galeucia Library Survey

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THIS SURVEY!

PLEASE NOTE: You **DO NOT** have to tell me your name or provide contact info. If YOU choose to share your name or contact info with me, I will not share it with anyone else and it will not appear in my project report. You will not receive any compensation for this survey. This survey takes approximately 5 minutes.

This survey asks you about your personal opinions AND about stereotypes.
For each question I identify whether the question is about YOUR opinion or about a STEREOTYPE that you may know.

This page asks you about YOUR picture/opinions of a mobile home.

STEP ONE: PICTURE A MOBILE HOME. WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME" WHAT IS THE PICTURE YOU SEE IN YOUR HEAD? PLEASE DESCRIBE OR DRAW IT.



WHAT ARE THREE WORDS YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE A MOBILE HOME?

WOULD YOU CONSIDER MOBILE HOMES A POPULAR FORM OF AMERICAN HOUSING?
(PLEASE CIRCLE ONE) YES NO

DO YOU/HAVE YOU LIVED/LIVED IN A MOBILE HOME? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE) YES NO

IF YES: DO/DID YOU LIKE IT? WHY OR WHY NOT?

IF NO: WOULD YOU LIVE IN A MOBILE HOME? WHY OR WHY NOT?

This page asks you to talk about the STEREOTYPE of mobile homes.

**STEP TWO: WHEN YOU SEE THE WORDS "MOBILE HOME STEREOTYPE" WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE?
(WHAT YOU THINK SOCIETY, OR OTHER PEOPLE, THINK ABOUT MOBILE HOMES)**

PLEASE CIRCLE ANY/ALL WORDS THAT REFLECT THE STEREOTYPE YOU KNOW RELATING TO MOBILE HOMES

short-term	isolated	family friendly	dangerous (the neighborhood)					
long-term	trailer	uspcale	nice landscaping	poor construction	family filled			
good investment	tornado magnet	unsafe (the structure)	bad investment	community				
yard junk	police	old cars	no privacy	old	run-down	sex	drugs	small
luxurious	violence	large	run-down	nice	yard debris	privacy	new	

Other Words? Please write them here: _____

WHEN YOU PICTURE THIS MOBILE HOME STEREOTYPE, DO YOU SEE IT... (please circle responses)

on public property?	on private property?	in a mobile home park?	southern US		
midwest US	northeast US	northwest US	rural	urban	southwest US
all over US	Somehwere else? Please write in: _____				
In other countries? Please write in: _____					

PLEASE CIRCLE THE WORDS/TERMS THAT BEST REFLECT THE DEMOGRAPHIC STEREOTYPE OF A MOBILE HOME RESIDENT

RACE/ETHNICITY	CLASS	WORK ETHIC	RELIGION	AGE	STATUS
White	rich	lazy	religious	young	single
African-American	middle-class	hard worker	superstitious	middle-aged	married
African	poor	average	immoral	elderly	couple, not married
East Asian (someone from China, Japan, areas near there)	lower-class		amoral		widowed
South Asian (India, Pakistan, areas near there)	middle income		spiritual		alone
Latin American (Central/South America)	upper-class				with family
Southwest Asian/Middle Eastern (Iran, Iraq, Israel, areas near there)					with friends

DO THINK THESE STEREOTYPES ARE ACCURATE? (please circle response) YES NO
PLEASE EXPLAIN:

STEP THREE: IS THERE ANYTHING I DIDN'T ASK, BUT THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE ABOUT MOBILE HOMES, EITHER YOUR IDEAS/EXPERIENCES, OR THE STEREOTYPES ABOUT THEM?

OPTIONAL: ARE YOU INTERESTED IN TALKING MORE ABOUT THIS TOPIC WITH ME? IF YES PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR CONTACT INFO AND I AM HAPPY AND GRATEFUL TO GET IN TOUCH SO WE CAN CHAT MORE!

PLEASE NOTE: I WILL NOT SHARE YOUR CONTACT INFO WITH ANYONE, AND YOUR NAME AND INFO WILL NOT APPEAR IN MY PROJECT WRITE-UP UNLESS YOU TELL ME IT IS OKAY AFTER WE MEET AND SIGN A SEPARATE CONSENT FORM.

NAME: _____ PHONE NUMBER: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____

EMAIL: _____

WOULD YOU LIKE A COPY OF MY PROJECT WRITE-UP? (PLEASE CIRCLE) YES NO

WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO CONTACT YOU FOR A FOLLOW-UP MEETING (PLEASE CIRCLE) YES NO

THANKS FOR TAKING THIS SURVEY!

Appendix C: Galeucia Project Flyer

American Stories: Mobile Homes/ Manufactured Homes in the United States

Since their development, manufactured houses have become an important part of the American landscape. This project seeks to share some of the stories and experiences of people related to them. I am a graduate student in the department of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University. In the summer and fall of 2014 I am working on a project to measure, document and describe the public perceptions about and personal experiences of mobile homes in the United States.

Anyone who has personal or professional experience with mobile homes, or ideas about them, is invited to participate in this project, and I am grateful for your time.

This is a university approved project. For additional information regarding my *dedication to respecting and protecting the rights and privacy of project participants*, please feel free to contact LSU's Internal Review Board at 225-578-8692, or visit www.lsu.edu/irb. My project number is E5923. The official title for this project is "Public Perceptions and Private Spaces: Mobile Homes in the United States."



Photo Credit: Matthew Brown/Morven

DO YOU...

...Live in a mobile home/manufactured house?

...Do work related to the manufactured housing industry?

...Live near mobile homes/manufactured houses?


If YES, please tell me your story!

If you would like more information about the project or would like to participate, please contact me:

Annemarie Galeucia
413-281-7470
agaleu1@tigers.lsu.edu

Appendix D: Galeucia IRB Approval

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight



Institutional Review Board
 Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
 131 David Boyd Hall
 Baton Rouge, LA 70803
 P: 225.578.8692
 F: 225.578.6792
 irb@lsu.edu
 lsu.edu/irb

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

- Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at <http://research.lsu.edu/CompliancePoliciesProcedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard/1428IRB%29/item24737.html>
- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
 - (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of part B thru E.
 - (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
 - (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
 *If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
 - (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
 - (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<https://php.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>)
 - (F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<http://research.lsu.edu/files/item26774.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator: Rank:
 Dept: Ph: E-mail:

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each
 *If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

IRB# E-5923 LSU Proposal # _____
 Complete Application
 Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title:

Study Exempted By:
 Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
 Institutional Review Board
 Louisiana State University
 203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
 225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
 Exemption Expires: 3/20/2015

4) Proposal? (yes or no) If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if YES, either
 This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
 OR
 More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students)
 *Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature Date (no per signatures)

**** I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.**

Screening Committee Action: Exempted Not Exempted Category/Paragraph 2

Reviewer Mathews Signature [Signature] Date 3/21/12

Vita

Annemarie Galeucia has several years of experience working in the food and beverage industry and holds a certificate in advanced bartending from the San Francisco School of Bartending.

Annemarie earned her B.A. in English Literature from Wagner College, her M.A. in Religious Studies (US public culture and media) from the University of Colorado at Boulder and anticipates receiving her Ph.D. in Geography and Anthropology from Louisiana State University in May 2017. In addition to her disciplinary research, Annemarie specializes in pedagogy development, mentoring and interdisciplinary experiential learning activities. In 2016 the AAC&U named Annemarie a K. Patricia Cross Fellow, identifying her as a future leader in higher education. She currently serves as the Student and Faculty Development Coordinator for LSU's Communication across the Curriculum.

Like Stephen Wright, Annemarie believes that everywhere is walking distance if you have time.