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Freedom To, From, and for Whom: Analyzing Freedom Discourse in Tiny House Blogs

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Freedom To, From, and for Whom: Analyzing

Freedom Discourse in Tiny House Blogs

by

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Abstract

The Tiny House movement, characterized by the primary dwelling it is named for, is an emerging field of academic study. The movement encompasses a diverse spectrum of simple living practices that typically serve participants' pursuit of self-defined freedom. Using framing methodologies to root the Tiny House movement as a specific articulation of Voluntary Simplicity, an intersectional approach to understand power and identity, and critical discourse analysis, this study analyzes freedom discourse in publicly available Tiny House blogs to discern positive descriptors of freedom (freedom to); negative descriptors of freedom (freedom from); applications of said freedom (freedom for whom) based on privileges and access to capitals, including financial, social, and human; as well as how freedom discourse relates to other simple living movements.

Acknowledgement

As a first-generation college student from a rural, working-class community never far outside the confines of survivalist mentality, this was a highly emotional process. At home, stuff is important, and there's both too much of the superfluous and not quite enough of the rest: food, medical attention, safe housing, and support for those on the farthest margins. Spending a number of years studying a relatively privileged movement that largely excludes places and people like those from which I come was necessarily challenging.

Thanks are in order to those who have pushed me from where I come: to my mother who tells me she isn't smart enough to read this (she is); to my father who can't; to the folks with and around whom I never quite fit back home but taught me resilience and the precarity of our interdependent independence; to Dr. Carol Cornelius who convinced me I was enough with only one sentence ("You are ready for graduate school"); to Dr. J.P. Leary, who helped me define learning as a human process in which who we are and what we bring to the table matters; and to Dr. Lisa Poupart, who brings so much generosity, humility, and progressive change to the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay: thank you for helping me heal, understand myself, and address my privileges.

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heels were dug in and I left claw marks in my wake; and especially to my partner, who just. gets.

it.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Tiny House[1] movement describes a geographically diffuse, grassroots movement characterized by a Tiny House, a very specifically defined architectural structure, typically less than 500 square feet in size, that is not a mobile home, recreational vehicle, or cabin, albeit can be used as such. Although the structures of Tiny are the focal point of defining the movement, Tiny Houses often serve as symbols of the freedoms they purportedly afford, including opportunities to minimize debt, enjoy more free time, live more sustainably, and avoid clutter, among others. Frequently, movement participants do not identify as a part of a movement for social change; rather, they identify as a part of a growing community of individuals and families who make a shift in consumption, lifestyle, and primary dwelling in pursuit of personal experiences of freedom and simplicity.

Due to geographic dispersion and the movement's operation as largely individual-level challenges to capitalist systems and culture (rather than, for example, through collective action), the internet serves as a primary means of creating/maintaining community and sharing information both amongst Tiny Housers and with the public at large. Weblogs, or blogs, in particular, are a common means by which Tiny House dwellers offer information about their homes, the movement, their lifestyles, and themselves. Embedded within these blogs is ubiquitous discourse of freedom as related to the Tiny House movement: freedom from, freedom to, and, although often less overtly, freedom for whom.

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[1]   Throughout this study, I use "Tiny House" to differentiate the specifically and exclusively defined structure/movement from other small housing options (tiny houses).

Guided by framing, critical discourse analysis, and intersectional methodologies, this study analyzes a sample of publicly available Tiny House blogs to consider: how freedom discourse emerges; how freedom can be defined positively and negatively (freedom to and freedom from); and for whom said freedoms are accessible to provide insight into applications and barriers to Tiny Houses as solutions to both personal grievances and social problems. Within this study, framing is the means by which the Tiny House movement, as a relatively newly proliferated movement and an emerging field of study, can be methodologically and conceptually grounded in similar, older movements, namely the Minimalist, Maker, Arts and Crafts, and Back to the Land movements, by utilizing the Voluntary Simplicity movement as a lens or template to define and understand simple living. Framing is also a key component in analyzing the ways in which freedom is articulated within Tiny House blogs, accomplished in this study through critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis is the examination of the role of power and the way it is reinforced, reproduced and/or challenged within discourse by considering: the discourse itself, the way it was produced or communicated, and the larger socio-cultural contexts within which discursive behavior occurs. Intersectional lenses offer additional tools to consider how complex matrices of power collide and intersect across a plethora of scales, types of studies, and research topics. Using these methodologies, this research seeks to meaningfully discern what descriptions or types of freedom(s) are associated with Tiny House living; how the freedoms of Tiny House living are related to other simple living movements; and, most importantly, for whom are these freedoms are/might be accessible. The specific research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are the social characteristics/identities of Tiny House bloggers? Do/how might these positions inform definitions of freedom?

2. What are the physical and fiscal realities of the Tiny Houses bloggers occupy?

3. How do bloggers frame Tiny House living?

4. In what ways do Tiny House bloggers describe freedom in relation to Tiny Houses and/or Tiny House living?

5. How do descriptions of freedom relate to other simple living movements more broadly?

6. To whom are the freedoms of Tiny House living likely accessible?

Chapter 2: Framing Voluntary Simplicity Practices and Movements

In effort to best understand discursive context of "freedom" in Tiny House blogs, especially regarding analyses of who has the necessary privileges and capitals required to access the purported freedoms of Tiny House living (freedom for whom), this study posits the Tiny House Movement as a more specifically defined modal of Voluntary Simplicity, a grassroots movement characterized by a range of simple living practices. While Voluntary Simplicity, its various practices, and the privileges and capitals generally required to access them are relatively well established in scholarship, few, if any, similar analyses of the Tiny House movement and its participants exists. Through and understanding of the relationship between Voluntary Simplicity and the Tiny House movement, deeper analysis of the ubiquity of "freedom" discussed within the latter is possible.

This chapter briefly reviews the history and characteristics of the Voluntary Simplicity movement, its participants, and its spectrum of practices; considers how Voluntary Simplicity is framed by scholars, movement participants, and critics; defines my application of the term "movement" to describe simple living for the purpose of this study; and constructs an argument for using Voluntary Simplicity as a master frame to understand and interpret the ethos of simple living as they manifest over time through interrelated movements such as the Back to the Land, Arts and Crafts, Maker, Minimalist, and Tiny House Movements.

Defining Voluntary Simplicity

Voluntary Simplicity describes a loosely organized, grassroots movement characterized by micro-level challenges to dominant, Western forms of (over)consumption. Grigsby (2004) describes, "the Voluntary Simplicity movement does not formally recruit new members, imposes

no strict guidelines or criteria for inclusion, has no officially sanctioned leaders, is not

centralized or hierarchically organized, and is not aimed primarily at changing public policy" (p.

8). Participants make conscious decisions to minimize monetary and time resource expenditure

within wage labor and consumer goods frameworks in exchange for the pursuit of personal

fulfillment, social responsibility, and environmentally sustainable living practices (Grigsby,

2004; Etzioni, 1998; Shaw & Moraes, 2009; Elgin, 1993). Though the modern movement in the

United States is frequently credited to have roots in Duane Elgin's *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward*

a Way of Life That is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich, first published in 1981, its ethos has long

historical presence in philosophy and several religious traditions. Voluntary Simplicity, Grigsby

(2004) notes, however relevant in its values to other movements or ideas, is distinct and

emergent in its combination of ethos and practice: it "offers ideology and techniques for arriving

at a personal definition of what is enough and promises a more fulfilling life to those who

consume in more sustainable ways, reduce clutter, and minimize activities they don't find

meaningful" (p. 2).

Simple living is practiced by primarily white, middle class, educated, heterosexual people

with access to capitals (Grigsby, 2004, p. 53). Due to the voluntary nature of Voluntary

Simplicity, it necessarily exists only within relatively wealthy societies and amongst those with a

certain amount of privilege; those living in poverty due to global socio-political, economic, and

institutional circumstances are simply poor, while

> Voluntary Simplicity refers to the choice out of free will, rather than by being coerced by
> poverty, government austerity programs, or being imprisoned, to limit expenditures on
> consumer goods and services and to cultivate non-materialist forms of satisfaction and
> meaning (Etzioni, 1998, p. 620).

Simple livers describe dominant consumer culture as a competitive, materialistic framework with no integrated concept of "enough." Instead, consumers are conditioned to accumulate and overconsume products, goods, and services that temporarily satiate manufactured "needs" in a never-ending race for improved social status that is detached from "real" measures of quality of life and the long-term global, social, and ecological consequences of such limitless consumptive behavior (Grigsby, 2004, p. 1). Simple living offers solutions to both the spiritual and moral detachments of consumer culture, as well its steep socio-environmental consequences, by "remaining in contact with the mainstream in some ways, such as through volunteer work, property ownership, investment, and buying goods and services from locally owned businesses," (Grigsby, 2004, p. 6) but rejecting other aspects, such as situating social status and fulfillment within waged labor and the consumption of material goods. Movement participants, in a variety of ways, choose to "opt out" without rejecting capitalism in its entirety.

Simple living is performed differently by each participant and exists on a continuum; though the core tenets of resistance to dominant forms of consumption/production, environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and personal fulfillment are relatively universally applicable across movement, the ways in which these values are operationalized and pursued vary by the individual priorities, values, and needs of the participants themselves. Etzioni (1998), for example, distinguishes three categories of simple living by the degree of commitment and consistency of practice of participants (in order of least to highest levels of commitment: downshifters, strong simplifiers, and holistic simplifiers). Librová (2008) describes, because of "a long social and cultural history of the word 'simplicity' with so many

connotations, it is now impossible to formulate a single definition of [simple living]," but suggests nine dimensions by which simplicity can be traced and understood (p. 1113). These dimensions notably include non-ownership and the freedom from caring for things; freedom from power-based relationships; freedom from behaving in accordance to the rules and rituals of consumer societies; freedom in living close to nature; and freedom from being bound to particular places or responsibilities (Librová, 2008).

Freedom features prominently in the Voluntary Simplicity movement, and, as in the dimensions Librová (2008) describes, includes negative signifiers, such as freedom from the alienation of capitalism and consumer culture, and positive signifiers, such as freedom to pursue personal goals. The practice of self-regulating one's consumption may appear as the antithesis of freedom, i.e. simplifiers are restricting themselves and negotiating difficult and conflicting feelings about buying goods or services. However, simple living and self-regulatory practices serve as vehicles by which simple livers choose to disengage, wholly or in degrees, from the imposition of what they describe as restricting social rules and norms of consumption, responsibility for (over-)caring for objects (such as repair and maintenance), and the time and energy restrictions inherent in wage labor, among others (Sandlin & Walther, 2009), and pursue, instead, goals or activities they find fulfilling and enjoyable (Grigsby, 2004). In some instances, "freedom" is not explicitly defined and is instead used synonymously with happiness and fulfillment among simple livers (Boujbel & D'Astous, 2012; Grigsby, 2004).

Framing Simple Living

Frames are interpretive schemata used to identify, label, find meaning in, and guide actions by individuals, groups, and societies (Buechler, 2011, p. 146). As a process, framing is

the social construction and interpretation of phenomena that guides understanding and responses

to those phenomena by individuals and groups (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 137). Framing is

neither novel nor discipline specific (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 136) and offers opportunities to

consider, among others: the ways in which movements and their participants understand and

organize themselves; the way they are understood by others, including scholars and society at

large; the way movements engender social change; and how movements are related to one

another. Within this study, framing has three major applications: analyzing the ways in which

Voluntary Simplicity/simple living is framed by participants; analyzing the way Voluntary

Simplicity is framed as a subculture/movement within scholarship; and tracing the tenets of

simple living across time and interrelated movements by conceptualizing Voluntary Simplicity

as a master frame.

   Framing by simple livers. As simple living does not operate through coordinated,

collective action and the majority of simple livers do not view themselves as members of a social

movement (Grigsby, 2004; Elgin, 1993, Etzioni, 1998), simple living is framed primarily

through the practice and articulation of its ethos. Although a full analysis of the ways the

Voluntary Simplicity movement is framed by simple livers is a study in its self, most notable for

the purposes of this research are the ways in which freedom discourse is used to frame simple

living, in terms of both the positive and negative definitions of freedom, i.e. simple living as

freedom to and freedom from, as well as freedom for whom. Grigsby (2004) quotes participants'

descriptions of Voluntary Simplicity:

> Live simply enough so that it takes vary little to actually earn where you are so you can spend your time doing things you like to do rather than the things that become the mandates that you do (p. 2); I think it is about reducing personal resource requirements as far as material possessions [so] you have time for yourself and hopefully time for others. I see simplicity benefiting the individual and society itself (p. 5).

Although there are innumerable examples, these brief excerpts demonstrate some of the ways that freedom is defined positively (freedom to do things one likes to do), negatively (freedom from obligations to work and possessions) and for whom (both the individual and society) by simple livers.

Framing and scales of analysis in scholarship. Three major frames emerge within Voluntary Simplicity scholarship. Each approach simple living by emphasizing a specific scale of analysis, and vary in their definition of Voluntary Simplicity as lifestyle, cultural movement, and/or social movement. The first and most distinct frame considers Voluntary Simplicity at the micro-level of analysis as a lifestyle that reflects the subjective values of each participant. The second frame describes Voluntary Simplicity as a loosely organized cultural movement and emphasizes the identity work of movement participants. The third frames Voluntary Simplicity as a social movement characterized by political action and applies macro-level analysis by considering simple living's ability to make institutional change.

Boujbel and D'Astous (2012) describe Voluntary Simplicity as "inspired by the way of life of several religious and spiritual leaders and is considered as a variant of the anti-consumption movement," (p. 487) and trace its values and practice from primarily spiritual at its beginnings to more contemporary focus on social responsibility and ecological awareness. Etzioni succinctly defines Voluntary Simplicity as: "the choice out of free will…to limit expenditures on consumer goods and services, and to cultivate nonmaterialistic resources of satisfaction and meaning" (1998, p. 620). Both definitions emphasize the micro- (individual)

level focus of Voluntary Simplicity as a lifestyle or personal choice of simple livers who primarily seek fulfillment rather than systems change.

The second frame within scholarship considers Voluntary Simplicity as a cultural movement steeped in moral identity work. Grigsby (2004) defines Voluntary Simplicity as a cultural movement consisting of "identity work aimed at remaking the self as a moral identity while simultaneously resisting the rationalization process and the forces of McDonaldization that increasingly characterize contemporary society globally" (p. 53). Identity work, as defined by Schwalbe, refers to anything one does by oneself or with others to "establish, change, or lay claim to meanings as particular kinds of persons" (as cited in Grigsby, 2004, p. 54). As a movement motivated by ethical values and visions, Voluntary Simplicity involves a significant degree of identity work by its participants. Grigsby (2004) notes,

> Part of the power of the movement rests with the way it resonates with the thoughts and feelings of its participants and helps them to make meaning of the conditions of their lives as white women and men possessing cultural capital that locates most of them in some significant ways as middle class…in a patriarchal/capitalist United States of America (p. 7).

Simple livers face two key challenges in identity work: living in an environment that is predicated on markets and unrestricted consumption while practicing limited consumption and seeking non-materialistic fulfillment (Boujbel & D'Astous, 2012, p. 487) and defining themselves as worthwhile and good people given their socio-economic privileges as primarily white, educated, middle class, and heterosexual (Grigsby, 2004, p. 53). In other words, they engage in "work to reshape themselves as moral agents and use their identities to resist the hegemony of consumerism" (Sandlin & Walther, 2009, p. 301). In addition, simple livers negotiate feelings of moral superiority to non-simplifiers (Sandlin & Walther, 2009, p. 308). However individualized, identity work does not exist in a vacuum: Sandlin and Walther (2009)

suggest researchers consider the theory of collective learning, or the interaction and development of individual and shared meanings, collective identity, and movement identity formed when groups are perceived by themselves and others as a force of social change, when analyzing the identity work of simple livers (p. 302). Individual moral identity work and collective identity are intimately tied, although, as Sandlin and Walther note, not always without some strain between them due to the difficulty of translating the individualized identities and subjective performances of simple living into a collective movement identity (2009, p. 305).

The final emergent frame in scholarship considers Voluntary Simplicity as political action that, through micro- and meso-level behaviors, macro-level change is intended and incrementally possible (Shaw & Moraes, 2009; Etzioni, 1998). Although many simple livers may not view themselves as members of a social movement, voluntary simplifiers are connected in some senses, such as through shared ethos, participation in community organizations like gardens or co-ops, engaging in online communities, and shared commitments to resisting dominant forms of consumption and production, however they are operationalized (Zamwel, Sasson-Levy, & Ben-Porat, 2014). Zamwel et al. (2014) caution separating the notions of consumption and political participation and note that although political consumption is difficult to establish in the population at large due to its less structured nature than conventional forms of political action, "consumption guided by moral reasoning should be considered a political act" (p. 204). Elgin (1993) describes that

> Although these may seem like inconsequential changes to the immense challenges facing our world, they are of great significance…because increasing numbers of people are experimenting with more ecological ways of living, there is a realistic possibility that we can build a sustainable future (p. 58).

Voluntary Simplicity, Etzioni (1998) agrees, "if constituted on a large scale, would significantly enhance society's ability to protect the environment" (p. 638) and the more that "voluntary simplicity is embraced as a lifestyle by a given population, the greater the potential for realization of a basic element of social justice, that of basic socio-economic equality" (p. 639).

Critiques. Voluntary Simplicity is criticized as a privileged, benighted movement that has had little if any measurable success, is operationally dependent upon the circumstances it challenges (capitalism and consumption), and is incongruent in praxis and virtue, i.e. the most ecological and socially responsible choices are not necessarily "simple" (Grigsby 2004; Librová, 2008). Considering whether, as Etzoni (1998) describes, Voluntary Simplicity offers "the potential for realization of a basic element of social justice, that of basic socio-economic equality" (p. 639) is critical given the privileges inherent in simple living and benefiting simple livers by nature of their educations, whiteness, et cetera (regardless of whether they understand or identify themselves as privileged). The question of for whom the ethos of simple living can provide "a basic element of social justice" is a central theme of this study. However, measuring the success of Voluntary Simplicity only by its ability to dismantle capitalism ignores that Voluntary Simplicity does not posit itself a revolutionary (or even necessarily social) movement, rather, simply an alternative lifestyle for individuals seeking more socially responsible, ecologically sound, and/or spiritually fulfilling lives through more conscious and intentional participation within capitalist frameworks. It is, perhaps, a micro-level solution to capitalist exploitation amongst a privileged intersection of the global population, and while some simple livers articulate the benefits-by-proxy to society of their lifestyle choices, Voluntary Simplicity is certainly not a revolutionary movement for systems change. Finally, there is indeed rhetorical

tension inherent in claiming that simple living lifestyles are "simple:" living off-grid, growing one's own food, et cetera are necessarily less simple than grocery shopping or flushing a toilet and constitute significantly more physical labor. However, as simple livers describe, simple living is not defined as the path of least resistance or labor, rather, "simple" generally refers to the rejection of compulsory, fast-paced over-consumption. Growing a garden takes a lot of work, but, for some, arguably less so than the exploitative, alienating practices they consider inherent in shopping in a grocery store for items that are inhumanely and unsustainably grown and harvested. In addition to the varied physical labors of a simple life, simple livers describe the emotional and intellectual labors characteristic of choosing to forgo the prescribed Western template of fulfillment and success. As Gambrel and Cafaro (2010) describe, "living simply isn't necessarily simple. It requires a deliberation: thinking through our choices and acting on our best judgement, rather than following the herd or the blandishments of advertisers, or doing what we have always done, or what comes easiest" (p. 92).

   Defining voluntary simplicity as a movement. While many simple livers do not describe themselves or their lifestyles as part of a social movement, scholarship applies a variety of frames that define and critique Voluntary Simplicity as both a social and a cultural movement. Although deeper analysis of social movement theory, including defining social movements and how they operate, lays largely beyond the scope of analyzing freedom discourse in Tiny House blogs, it is important to clarify my meaning of "movement" in reference to Voluntary Simplicity and other related simple living models. Tracing the ways that participants and scholars variously define Voluntary Simplicity as a social or cultural movement is important to consider. However, taking a position on whether simple living necessarily constitutes a social movement is not

central to this study. I am interested in how simple living practices manifest over time through variously articulated models and, given the ways that simple living methods are defined by simple livers, how the benefits (freedoms) of simplifying are accessible across identities and social characteristics including race, class, gender, ability, and others. Thus, for the purposes of this study, I allow space for a variety of definitions of "movement" to operate and find that a variety of scales of analysis of simple living is methodologically useful in considering the meaning and applications of freedom discourse in Tiny House blogs. In doing so, framing methodologies, including master frames, which are typically associated with understanding cycles of protest and social movements, are particularly useful tools. As Oliver and Marwell (1992) write, "Of course, there are important differences between protest actions and voluntarism, but we should not permit these differences to obscure their similarities" (p. 251).

Voluntary Simplicity as a Master Frame. While perhaps limited in its potential for change beyond the micro-level, Voluntary Simplicity serves as an important tool for understanding the Tiny House and other related movements by offering itself as master frame for simple living. Given that the definitions and performances of simple living/Voluntary Simplicity are subjective and so broadly defined, other socio-cultural movements in which participants resist institutionalized forms of production and consumption in favor of more social, ecological, and spiritual responsibility/fulfillment and/or moral identities can be considered as more defined articulations of simple living within the larger framework of Voluntary Simplicity. In other words, Voluntary Simplicity serves as a master frame for these movements. Master frames, Buechler (2011) notes, "operate much like ordinary frames, but on a larger scale applicable to multiple movements…Earlier movements are likely to foster master frames that are then adopted

by later movements in the cycle" (p. 149). Notably, master frames are variable in scope, attribution, and potency (Buechler, 2011, p. 149), and this is evident in the fluctuating emphases of Voluntary Simplicity ethos within its interrelated socio-cultural movements. Although participants themselves do not necessarily articulate such connection, understanding other movements grounded in resistance to dominant forms of consumption and production as interrelated to Voluntary Simplicity is useful in tracing these attitudes and behaviors as they manifest over time, especially as movement titles vary in popularity. The Back to the Land, Arts and Crafts, Maker, Minimalist, and Tiny House movements provide examples of more specifically defined means to actualize the general ethos of resisting institutionalized forms of consumption and production and can be considered performances of simple living operating from more explicit definitions.

Simple Living Movements

Simple living is characterized by individuals' voluntary reduction, rejection, or change to the ways in which they participate in capitalism. "Simple" does not necessarily mean less emotional, intellectual, or physical labor, rather, signifies a change in the type or amount of labor and/or participation within capitalist consumption/systems. The Back to the Land, Maker, and Arts and Crafts movements, for example, are defined by a shift of individuals choosing to do more of their own labor rather than being paid to labor for someone else or paying someone to labor for them. In the Minimalist and Tiny House movements, individuals consider the value that material possessions, ideas, habits, and relationships, among others, bring to their life and make life changes accordingly in effort of feeling more fulfilled. The following sections briefly consider the Back to the Land, Arts and Crafts, Maker, Minimalist, and Tiny House movements

using Voluntary Simplicity as a master frame to trace the relationship between their shared ethos of freedom and simplicity across varied articulations and modals.

Back to the Land movement. The Back to the Land movement describes a voluntary migration to the countryside and the adoption of agricultural and/or horticultural practices as a significant shift in lifestyle (Wilbur, 2013, p. 149). The movement emerged in response to financial crisis at the end of the nineteenth century, with the first wave peaking just before World War I, and faded from public view after the war's conclusion (Brown, 2011, p. 5). The purpose of this return to the soil was to "enable one to defend oneself against depressions, panics, joblessness, high prices, and low wages" by self-sufficient homesteading and food production (Brown, 2011, p. 27). Back to the Land, sometimes referred to as homesteading, continues today as a loosely organized, non-hierarchized movement in which individuals or families practice small-scale agriculture and is motivated, in part, by the vogue of Do-It-Yourself culture and sustainable living, as well as concerns over the quality and sustainability of mass-produced foodstuffs in the industrial agricultural system in the United States.

Like Voluntary Simplicity, the Back to the Land movement varies in its performance style and intensity and thus its status as a movement is often challenged by scholars (Brown, 2011, p. 9). However, as Wilbur (2013) notes,

> Back-to-the-land migration is not a formula for working class revolution, collective seizure of the means of production, universal gender parity, or an end, in itself, to discrimination or inequality. What the phenomenon instead reveals is the gradual opening of imagined and realized possibilities, of preconceived and spontaneous action that chips away (however incrementally) at structures that support coercive and hierarchical relationships. This is performed through active disengagement from those structures, such as formal employment, and by the attempt to create alternatives (p. 157).

Like other simple livers, Back to the Landers significantly shift their engagement in

consumption, production, wage labor, and moral identity work to redefine themselves within

capitalist systems. Rather than revolutionize or dismantle dominant socio-economic processes,

Back to the Landers, like simple livers at large, make personally significant lifestyle and moral

changes within the system. "Self-sufficiency," Brown (2011) notes, "[is] not justice, but it [is]

'one way out'" (p. 30).

        Arts and Crafts movement. The Back to the Land movement has significant connection

to the Arts and Crafts movement in the United States, whose advocates "searched for a means of

restoring the dignity and value of labor" in their work during the early twentieth century (Brown,

2011, p. 33). Like Back to the Land and Voluntary Simplicity, the Arts and Crafts movement

seeks to inspire or create change through micro-level actions that disrupt the alienation of

individuals from themselves, each other, and their environments under capitalism and dominant

forms of consumption. The movement is motivated by three principle ideas: community building

through making art, creative satisfaction in ordinary work, and making objects by hand that are

superior to manufactured products (Krugh, 2014, p. 283). After 1920, the initial wave of the

movement fractured throughout the twentieth century, initially into progressive and conservative

tracts, and then further into other subcategories based on trade or material (Krugh, 2014, p. 288).

It continues today as a decentralized network of artists and crafters who, like most simple livers,

do not necessarily conceptualize themselves as members of a larger movement but often operate

in agreement with the movement's original principles, either consciously or unconsciously.

Additional motivations have emerged in the contemporary movement, including producing and

consuming goods that are responsibly sourced, both socially and ecologically (Krugh, 2014, p.

293). The most lasting contributions of the movement, Krugh (2014) notes, are the

"transformation of craft into a leisure activity and the linking of craft with unalienated labor in

opposition to mass production" (p. 282).

Maker movement. The Maker movement, also referred to as Maker culture, refers to an

extension of Do-It-Yourself culture and the Arts and Crafts movement whereby individuals

emphasize social and learning cultures through the creation of new devices, software,

electronics, arts, crafts, and goods from wood- and metalworking that emerged in the mid-2000s

(Hatch, 2014). Hatch describes,

> Easier access to knowledge, capital, and markets also help to push the revolution. A
> renewed focus on community and local resources and a desire for more authentic and
> quality things, along with a renewed interest in how to make things, also contribute to the
> movement…We have only begun to see an outline of [the movement's] eventual power
> to remake the United States and the world (2014, p. 5).

Through micro-level resistance to dominant forms of production and consumption, the Maker

movement, like other simple living movements, seeks to transform participants' experiences of

the alienating institutionalized processes of the market and empower them to live more

meaningful, fulfilling lives.

Minimalism. The modern Minimalist movement emerged in popular culture in the early

to mid-2010's as a response compulsory consumption and related behaviors, including addiction

to technologies like smart phones and televisions; working so much that one has no time to spend

with families, loved ones, or for themselves; the glorification of being busy; and defining one's

identity, worth, happiness, and level of success by what they own. Instead, Minimalism

encourages practitioners to consider what is essential and what adds value to their lives, and to

eliminate extraneous physical items, attitudes, behaviors, responsibilities, and relationships.

Minimalism is especially popular in the digital sphere; minimalist-themed blogs and podcasts are numerous.

Like other simple living movements, the ways in which Minimalism manifests amongst participants varies greatly by their circumstances, values, homes, family structures, and other lifestyle markers: some minimalists focus on having small or capsule wardrobes; others emphasize simplifying their diets and choose a vegan or whole-foods diet; others still focus on eliminating extraneous physical clutter from the homes, or, certainly, minimizing their dwellings themselves. Thus, much like Voluntary Simplicity more broadly, Minimalism is not explicitly anti-capitalist, as Rodriguez describes, but "represents an increasingly popular critical reflection on the ills of consumerism and an effort to forge new ways of resisting and living amidst capitalism in the United States" (2018, p. 287). The Minimalist movement emphasizes change, in some cases radical, to engagement in capitalist economies on an individual level through reductions in consumption, clutter, and debt, emphasizing financial independence, and rejecting the American Dream as the only template for success and happiness.

Although the specific scales, methods, and channels by which over consumption and alienating labor practices are interrogated differ within them, the Back to the Land, Arts and Crafts, Maker, and modern Minimalist movements all demonstrate the central ethos of simple living. Similarly, the Tiny House movement, currently burgeoning in mainstream popularity, demonstrates the ethos of simple living through negotiations of identity, resistance to institutionalized and dominant consumptive and productive practices, and the quest for freedom and personal fulfillment through a lifestyle centered around a tiny primary dwelling.

Tiny House movement. The Tiny House movement is a decentralized, geographically

diffuse, grassroots movement which posits a small home as the focal point of a cultural shift

toward more sustainable, socially responsible, and personally/spiritually fulfilling practices, and,

certainly, freedom in its many definitions. "Tiny House" describes a dwelling that is significantly

smaller than an average American home, typically ranging from 100-400 square feet (Mitchell,

2009). The movement, Anson (2017) outlines, "is a social and architectural trend that advocates

living simply in small spaces…In general, tiny house living is motivated by a yearning for

independence – desires for mobility and freedom from the toxicity of quantity-driven

consumerism" (p. 331). Mitchell (2009) notes,

> Tiny houses are the focal point in a broader system to address issues, concerns and
> problems of the current day…People are joining this movement for many reasons, but the
> most popular reasons include environmental concerns, financial concerns, and the desire
> for more time and freedom.

Kirkpatrick (2017) agrees, "Yes, you can define lines of square footage, and if it's a trailer or on

a foundation…but to me the movement is about lifestyle choices and being able to have the

freedom to have a better life" (p. 24).

Due to the subjective nature of defining "simple," Tiny House living, like Voluntary

Simplicity more broadly,[2] encompasses diverse examples of simple living. Tiny spaces range

from luxury homes that include modern appliances such as bathtubs, washing machines, and full-

size refrigerators, to structures with only sleeping space and a heat source (and do not, for

example, have bathroom or kitchen amenities within the structure). Some Tiny homes include

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[2] As outlined previously, although I apply the Voluntary Simplicity master frame to analyze and understand Tiny
House living, Tiny House movement participants themselves may not frame the movement, their experiences, or
their values this way.

new granite and drywall and others upcycled, recycled and/or salvaged building materials

(Mitchell, 2014). Beyond the politics of its material realities, Tiny House living also

encompasses an array of levels of social integration: Tiny homes exist in urban, rural and largely

unpopulated spaces; they are built on permanent foundations and mobile trailer beds; they exist

as single entities and within Tiny House communities, sometimes utilizing communal spaces;

dwellers integration into wage labor ranges from full-time employment to voluntary

unemployment or work refusal in a variety of fields; and the means by which dwellers procure

material goods, food, and services are equally as diverse.

Tiny House living undoubtedly constitutes a voluntarily simplified lifestyle: the

definitions of a Tiny House, both architecturally and as a vehicle of a movement advocating for

living with less material possessions, are predicated, at least to some degree, on privileged social

characteristics. Building Tiny homes requires financial, material, time, land, social, and skill

resources, including construction knowledge and physical ability to construct a home, as well as

knowledge about building codes and regulations, and access to a building and living space,

which, as the sample of this study suggests, can create significant barriers to would-be Tiny

dwellers (Heben, 2014). These practical realities, coupled with insight provided by using

Voluntary Simplicity as a master frame, suggest most Tiny House dwellers are likely white,

middle-class and/or educated, and able bodied.[3]

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[3]   To my knowledge, no current studies offer analysis of the social characteristics/identities of Tiny House
dwellers as a group. Although the present study will consider these social characteristics, such as race, class, gender,
age, ability, national origin, geographic location, and others, it cannot contribute to describing the intersectional
identity locations of Tiny House dwellers at large.

Privilege and the Tiny House movement. Social power positions are manifested through language, in terms of what is said, how it is said, who is saying it, and, undoubtedly, through considerations of what is not said and by whom. Considering the larger Voluntary Simplicity master frame, simple livers are largely white, educated, able bodied, heterosexual, and concerned with the ways in which they are oppressed by the processes of rationalization, "McDonalization,"[4] and consumer culture, often failing to analyze the ways in which their whiteness, genders, educations, able bodies, heterosexuality, and other identities/characteristics are privileged within social systems, including those they seek to escape. Congruently, the most visible faces of the Tiny House movement in print, on television, and in blogs are white, able-bodied, and middle-class, and the invisibility of those privileges appear to persist amongst those who benefit from them.[5]

In her highly controversial piece published at Medium entitled "Everyone is Welcome: The Façade of the Tiny House Movement," Lee Pera, self-described geographer, educator, organizer, and co-founder of the first Tiny House community in the United States, writes,

> Some in the tiny house community will explain that the movement is overwhelmingly white because it's mostly white people interested in tiny houses…Maybe where they live, but I can't buy that argument. I started my tiny house journey six years ago in Washington DC, years before all the tiny house TV shows existed, and some of the first people I met building tiny houses on wheels were women of color, two single moms. The only other people I knew interested in building a tiny house community were three black women who were planning a community in West Virginia. Over the past five years, while building a tiny house and founding the former Boneyard Studios community, I have hosted and participated in more than 100+ events around tiny houses, and none of these

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[4]   See Ritzer's *The McDonalization of Society* (1993) for further discussion.

[5]   This is a primary reason that this study posits Voluntary Simplicity as a master frame: to better understand the Tiny House movement, its ethos, and its participants when considering issues of access, power, and privilege.

events were all white. Yet whenever I go to national tiny house events they are overwhelmingly, if not all, white – both presenters and attendees (2017).

She continues to explain that she was shamed and her pending conference workshop was cancelled after suggesting to organizers of a national Tiny House event that they consider adding diverse speakers to an all-white, largely male line-up in 2017. Organizers scolded her for bringing up the "controversial topics" of diversity and racism (Pera, 2017).

> They were more interested in berating me for speaking up than they were about learning what they could do to diversify the event. During the course of that half-hour phone call, this is some of what they told me. "I will NOT add any speakers just for diversity's sake." "I need All Stars for the main line up. Everyone else thinks these speakers are All Stars. Don't you?" "You have caused us so much trouble this week." (Pera, 2017).

In an online forum regarding the incident, a commenter wrote, "It would be great to see people of color that have earned the right to speak at such a big event like all of [the headliners]" (Pera, 2017). Pera responded,

> I can think of several. Just because we don't "see" them in the main tiny house arena, doesn't mean they aren't out there doing their work…There are MANY, diverse groups of people who have made their careers doing "right-sized housing" and it's on us to include them in the movement and our events (2017).

Although at the time of writing no studies analyzing the social characteristics of Tiny Housers exist, even precursory familiarity with the Tiny House movement lends to the impression of overwhelming whiteness and economic privilege. As Pera (2017) suggests, this does not mean that diverse groups, including people of color, people with disabilities, and those living in poverty, are not participating in the movement; the relatively small sample selected for this study demonstrates that this is not the case. Indeed, there are many diverse groups of people "doing" right-sized housing at a global scale, but the privilege in which the Tiny House movement is enveloped excludes those whose "right-sized homes" are borne of economic

necessity rather than Voluntary Simplicity; i.e. Tiny Houses are on trailers but are not trailers, are mobile but are not mobile homes, and are often self-made from recycled or reclaimed materials but are not shanties, lean-tos, or favelas.

In addition to the exclusivity inherent in the specificity of defining a Tiny House and the absence of diverse individuals at the "main stages," both physical and rhetorical, of the Tiny House movement, discourse about social privilege, diversity, oppression, and power related to Tiny Houses remain largely absent in bot discourse from within and outside the movement. Simple livers generally occupy privileged social locations and are generally focused on moral identity work, or, as Grigsby describes, work to "make meaning of the conditions of their lives as white women and men possessing cultural capital that locates most of them in some significant ways as middle class…in a patriarchal/capitalist United States of America (2004, p. 7), rather than socio-structural oppression or systems change. Thus, besides "Everyone is Welcome," Tiny House living is sometimes equally as fallaciously posited in the meritocratic terms of "if I can do it, anyone can." Social privileges afforded to Tiny Housers from belonging to dominant groups, such as being white, cisgender, educated, able-bodied, heterosexual, and/or a non-senior adult, may seem irrelevant to their stories of valuing time, freedom, and people over money, objects, and conventional markers of social status. Like simple livers more broadly, Tiny Housers may not be aware of or understand how their social privileges affect them, so discussions of privilege, power, and oppression are absent from their narratives. In others, they my actively avoid such "controversial" topics. As Halley, Eshleman, and Vijaya (2011) succinctly state, "White people are often not conscious of being white. Often whites simply perceive themselves as 'normal' or 'just human' and fail to notice their own race," (p. 4) and, sometimes, like in Pera's experience

described above, when confronted by the reality of the privileges afforded by their whiteness, whites lash out, deny, or victimize themselves out of discomfort and guilt.

Tiny House blogs. Tiny Houses are often isolated and widely dispersed, with notable exceptions in the Pacific Northwest and a small but growing number of established Tiny House communities/collectives across the nation. Consequently, the internet provides a means for participants and supporters of the Tiny House movement to foster information sharing and sustain community connection. Given Tiny Housers' relative isolation and that the movement does not operate by way of organized, collective action, this virtual space plays a key role in sustaining the movement and community. Blogs, in particular, are a common means by which networks of Tiny dwellers, builders, and supporters are established, connect, and share information.

Tiny House blogs manifest in several formats, including more traditional text, photo, and link-based content, as well as micro- and video blogs. Tiny House blogs are as diverse as their authors and the performances of simple living that they detail. It is common for Tiny House dwellers to create their blogs when they begin to plan for, build, or purchase their Tiny homes. Similarly, Tiny House enthusiasts, i.e. those who do not live in or have immediate plans to build/occupy a Tiny Home, often use micro- and/or text-based blogs to organize their thoughts and connect with the Tiny House community. Thus, the content of Tiny House blogs as a genre is widely variable, and frequently includes topics such as: explorations or information of Tiny homes themselves such as tours, discussions about appliances or building materials, and details about builds; personal anecdotes or stories related to Tiny houses; details about lifestyle, such as gardens, transportation options, and living arrangements; and discussions about the politics of

living Tiny, such as concerns or information about building codes or the cost of living Tiny in comparison to an average sized home, among others. Additionally, they often serve as spaces for self-reflexivity. Naturally, given the community building, information sharing, and reflective purposes they serve, the depth and variety of content contained within them, and their relative accessibility, Tiny House blogs are a significant source of research material.

Chapter 3: Methodological Tools for Qualitatively Analyzing Tiny House Blogs

Qualitative studies offer opportunities to analyze research questions within the totality of their contexts, including complex identities, geographic location, political structures, and social realities; unlike quantitative methods alone, qualitative data and analysis can account for the important nuances of lived experiences, stories, power dynamics, and the complex realities of subjects based on their social characteristics. "Scientific objectivity," Keegan (2009) notes, "may be an inappropriate benchmark for measuring the behavior, attitudes, needs and emotions of human beings because we are often contradictory, illogical and irrational in our thinking" (p. 11). Discounting qualitative methodologies for their subjective nature risks ignoring the importance of the contexts in which subjects exist and nuances of the human experience, and certainly ignores the reality that qualitative studies are not without equally as rigorous and appropriate structure as their quantitative counterparts, as well as the ongoing dispute regarding whether studies and researchers can ever be truly objective (see, among others, Keegan, 2009; Bonnell & Hunt, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Weblogs, or blogs, as they are more commonly known, are online space in which user generated content is shared, either publicly or within user created restrictions, using a variety of methods and for diverse purposes and offer significant contributions to qualitative data research. Blogs have been credited with

> Socially transformative capacity, conceptualized as a new genre of open-access, participatory journalism, as reinvigorating a flagging "public sphere," encouraging civic and political engagement, creating new forms of community and identity, and as a new medium for facilitating knowledge production within education (Hookway, 2008, p. 94).

Hookway defines a blog as a webpage that contains "a series of frequently updated, reverse chronologically ordered posts on a common web page, [often but not always] written by a single

author" (2008, p. 92). Content can include photos, text, podcasts or audio, links, and videos and is frequently based on a common theme or topic. Blogs often include comment sections within each post, offering opportunities for dialogue between the author(s) and readers. Popular users include individuals, universities, companies, educators, and social groups, and thus blog content varies widely and includes personal posts similar to diary entries, news media, online brand advertising, popular culture topics, art, photography, and more. Microblogging (a style of blogging comprised of short posts that are often, for example, simply a photo or quote; see Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011) and video blogging add to the diversity of blogging format and function. Blogs serve not simply as information sources, but as rhetorical spaces for a reflection on subjective behaviors, social relationships, and values (Lövheim, 2011, p. 340). They offer researchers the opportunity to access rich sources of information about their subjects that are not influenced by the research act itself (Hamill & Stein, 2011, p. 389), and provide information beyond bloggers as individuals (Hamill & Stein, 2011, p. 391).

Although most existing studies analyze blogs as phenomena or their relationship to how technology influences everyday life (Harricharan & Bhopal, 2014, p. 326), researchers have begun analyzing blogs as "nodes of discourse networks, with blogging generating specific discourse patterns" (Vicari, 2014, p. 998). Blogs offer opportunities to analyze changing and negotiating values and norms for self-expression and social relations (Lövheim, 2011, p. 339) and represent a complex interplay between the off- and online worlds, which are increasingly interconnected due to the embeddedness of the internet into everyday life (Harricharan & Bhopal, 2014, p. 325). "Real life," Harricharan and Bhopal note, "is collaboratively and reflexively transformed and continuously reinterpreted in the digital space" (2014, p. 325). Due

to their evolutionary and dynamic nature, Miller and Shepherd (2004) argue that blogs should be interpreted as negotiations of self-presentation, social validation, and developing relationships in the shifting boundaries between public and private experiences. Lövheim (2011) adds that blogs are collaborative performative spaces in which values are expanded, differentiated and negotiated, both implicitly and explicitly (p. 340). Lövheim (2011) examines the ways in which bloggers make their personal experiences and opinions into objects for reflection (p. 348) and create spaces on their blogs for collaborative negotiation by readers through invitations for responses, provoking discussions in blog posts, and by evoking intimacy and shared sense of identity through sharing personal experiences (p. 348-9). If blogs are thus considered as nodes of particular types of discourse and collaborative performance spaces for negotiating values, identity, and social relationships rather than spaces simply for information sharing or archiving alone, they become particularly useful for a variety of sociological analyses, including inquiries of power, discourse, and online communities (Vicari, 2014; Park, Yung, Holody, Yoon, Xie, & Lee, 2013; Hevern, 2004; Hamill & Stein, 2011; Lövheim, 2011).

Analyses of blogs and their content, discourse, and functions should include considerations of the complex socio-economic realities that exist in and beyond online spaces, including the influence of economic incentives on blog content. Blogs are susceptible to commodification: advertisers often purchase ad space on popular blogs and companies frequently sponsor bloggers and blog posts. Advertisers' interest in blogs is intimately tied with the number of people who read or subscribe to the blog. Bloggers seeking increased readership, whether in relation to the possibility of income generated through advertisements or otherwise, may shift or edit their blog content and opinions. In addition, blogging and internet accessibility

are not equal opportunity. Although many scholars have claimed that blogs are critical to digital democracy and public discourse, studies reveal significant gaps in participation in digital production along race and class lines (see, among others, Shradie, 2011; Shradie, 2012; Hindman, 2009; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010). Furthermore, as Harricharan and Bhopal aptly note, "it should not go unstated that writing and reflecting takes a lot of time. It is not easy to write a blog post" (2014, p. 337). Blogging constitutes labor that requires a combination of skills and resources. Identity matters in blogging both as in terms of the content produced and in the ways identity influences the practical realities of accessibility and opportunity.

Applying Intersectional Frameworks

Intersectional frameworks posit that "systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization" (Collins, 2000, p. 320) and emphasize that one's positionality within these frameworks affects one's experiences, opportunities, understandings, and access via systems of privilege and oppression. In social science research, [6] intersectionality provides a lens through which to understand how complex matrices of power collide and intersect across a plethora of scales, types of studies, and research topics (Crenshaw, 2017). Intersectional analyses exist in opposition to meritocracy, which understands personal achievement, access, and opportunity though meaningful attempt and hard work as distinct from power dynamics, privilege, and politics and makes invisible the

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[6] Feminist theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) postulated the concept of intersectionality to describe the ways in which institutionalized oppressions based on race, class, gender, and other identity locations are not mutually exclusive in the ways in which they were/are experienced by African American women. Although it is beyond the scope of this research, it is important to note that debate exists regarding the appropriateness and applicability of extending intersectionality to describe experiences of individuals who are not African American women.

challenges posed by socio-political, cultural, and economic structures for individuals accomplishing their goals. In other words, meritocracy posits that what one reaps is a direct result of how much effort they employ, or do not. As Crenshaw describes, "through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us" (1993, p. 1299). Additionally, intersectionality contrasts Marxist analyses, which singularly root all forms of oppression as effects of capitalist exploitation and do not account for/diminish the significance of different experiences of oppression amongst social identity locations such as race, gender, ability, sexuality, migrant status, nationality, and others. Within intersectional frameworks, oppressions and privileges are understood as complex relationships between social, political, and economic institutions, including capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy/institutionalized racism, among others, from micro- to macro-level scales and account for the ability for individuals to simultaneously be oppressed and participate in the oppression of others (Collins, 2000). Intersectionality adds an important layer of analysis to social processes, movements, participants, and their experiences.

Although the inherent privilege of simple livers in comparison to the global population at large is more or less obvious, due especially to the voluntary nature of Voluntary Simplicity, questions of oppression and access are still relevant. Similarly, in the study of online materials, accessibility across social characteristics/identities is a key consideration. Grigsby (2004) notes,

> People in the voluntary simplicity movement target quite specific pressures of jobism and status-driven consumption from the dominant culture and economy as key problems and tend to gloss over the significance of control over resources and how they are used, such as capital investment, accumulated wealth, and sex and racially and ethnically segregated employment that systematically subordinate women and racial and ethnic minorities. The movement does not claim to try to change racial and ethnic or gender inequality directly…but the ideology and practices of voluntary simplicity raise issues, more often

implicitly than explicitly, about power that can't be adequately analyzed sociologically if separated from consideration of class, race, and gender inequality and how people actually relate to each other and other groups (p. 120).

Most simple livers are middle-class, educated, white, and heterosexual, and the meanings they make of their lives and experiences is "influenced by their whiteness, as well as class and gender, in interconnected ways" (Grigsby, 2004, p. 121). Furthermore, "it is important to ask how simple livers as a group are located in terms of the dominant social hierarchy, how generally secure or insecure their locations are, and how much their move to simple living changes their location" (Grigsby, 2004, p. 122). Simple livers frequently view themselves as oppressed by rationalization and dominant consumer culture and fail to analyze their privilege(s) within capitalist patriarchal systems (Grigsby, 2004).[7] In addition, Shradie (2012) describes that despite the notion of "blogs as the poster child of digital democracy and an egalitarian public form," class differences and educational gaps persist in blogging (p. 555) and notes, "if elite voices dominate in the digital sphere, they will drown out more marginalized voices" (p. 556). Considerations of identity locations, their intersections, privilege, and power are key in meaningfully analyzing and understanding Voluntary Simplicity, online spaces at large, and, in the instance of this study, the realities surrounding Tiny House blogs.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse describes communication and the expression of ideas, social norms, and boundaries though speech, text, graphics, and symbolic forms of language, including both the methods of delivery and the content of said expressions (Blommaert, 2005). Discourse,

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[7]   For a full analysis, see Grigsby, 2004.

Blommaert (2005) affirms, "comprises all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural, and historical patterns and developments" (p. 3) and is what "transforms our environment into a socially and culturally meaningful one" (p. 4). Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary methodological tool used to examine the role of power and the way it is reinforced, reproduced and/or challenged within discourse by considering: the discourse itself, the way it was produced or communicated, and the larger socio-cultural contexts within which discursive behavior occurs. Critical discourse analysis posits sociolinguistics within sociocultural and economic realities and, when it emerged,[8] was "groundbreaking in establishing the legitimacy of a linguistically oriented discourse analysis firmly anchored in social reality and with a deep interest in actual problems and forms of inequality in societies" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 6).

No single methodology or theory guides critical discourse analysis. Weiss and Wodak (2003) note,

> On the whole, the theoretical framework of CDA [critical discourse analysis] seems eclectic and unsystematic. However, this can also be viewed as a positive phenomenon. The plurality of theory and methodology can be highlighted as a specific strength of CDA, to which this research discipline ultimately owes its dynamics (p. 6).

They continue, "The most important task of conceptual tools is to integrate sociological and linguistic positions…to mediate between text and institution, between communication and structure, and between discourse and society (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p. 9). In particular, the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jürgen Habermas, which respectively consider language as

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[8]   Discourse analysis emerged in the 1970's as a part of the "cultural turn," a revival of Weberian and Durkheimian cultural sociology that, in a break from positivist analysis, repositioned inquiries of meaning and culture to the center of sociological analysis and incorporated dimensions such as positionality and discourse, among others, into considerations of the social.

symbolic power and language as communicative action, are useful in developing conceptual

tools for critical discourse analysis within the framework of this study, which emphasizes socio-

cultural discursive contexts for meaningful analysis.

      Language as symbolic power. Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of relations,

identity, power, and the ways in which they are interpreted and intersect in language. Language,

Bourdieu (1991) asserts, is an instrument of not simply communication, but of power: linguistic

manifestations are anchored in power positionality and thus are representations of identity.

Social power positions are manifested through details such as who has the ability and perceived

authority to speak, as well as when and how one speaks (Bourdieu, 1991). Critiquing Marxist

analysis of power solely through class struggles, Bourdieu (1991) writes,

> The failings of the Marxist theory of class, above all its inability to explain the set of objectively observed differences, result from the fact that, by reducing the social world to the economic field alone, it is condemned to define social position with reference solely to the position within the relations of economic production. It thus ignores the positions occupied in the different fields and sub-fields, particularly in the relations of cultural production, as well as all those oppositions which structure the social field and which are not reducible to the opposition between the owners and non-owners of the means of economic production. Marxism imagines the social world as one dimensional (p. 244).

> Language, Bourdieu offers (1991), is symbolic of power, a method by which the power

relationships between social entities are actualized (p. 37), and

> What circulates on the linguistic market is not "language" as such, but rather discourses…in so far as each recipient helps to produce the message which he perceives and appreciates by bringing to it everything that makes up his singular and collective experience (p. 39).

Thus, language is representative of the power relations between the speaker and recipients, the

social, cultural, economic, and political climate in which they and the discourse exist, and the

ways in which discourse is interpreted based on the biographical realities and collective experiences of the participants.

      Communicative action theory. Jürgen Habermas proposes the theory of communicative action, a critical theory that grounds social science within language and discourse by positing that actors seek mutual understandings to promote networks of cooperation through language and reconstructs reason as an emancipatory, communicative act (McCarthy, 1981, p. 273). Habermas (1981a) describes that communicative action is a process of identity formation and achieving mutual understandings through the transmission and reproduction of cultural knowledge, and that power is a key consideration in discourse production and distribution. Communicative action, he writes, "presupposes language as the medium for a kind of reaching understanding, in the course of which participants, through relating to a world, reciprocally raise validity claims that can be accepted or contested" (Habermas, 1981a, p. 99). However, communicative action represents only "the mechanism for coordinating action; communicative action is not exhausted by the act of reaching understanding in an interpretive manner" (Habermas 1981a, p. 101). In other words, communicative action is not in itself a final action so much as a methodology by which mutual understanding is achieved and action can be planned

      Habermas is criticized for excluding questions of emancipatory political practice from his analysis and failing to specify any agents by which his theory could be put into practice, thus rendering the theory of communicative action, critics argue, too meta-theoretical to apply or operationalize (Held, 1980; McCarthy, 1981). However, as Habermas (1981b) notes, "[Communicative action theory] is intended as a framework within which interdisciplinary

research on the selective pattern of capitalist modernization can be taken up once again" (p. 397).

Parkin (1996) adds that Habermas offers a useful framework that

> Provide[s] the appropriate foundations and orientation for a wide-ranging empirical, interdisciplinary research program that will prove capable of explaining the causes and implications of the specific social crises and struggles that we are currently experiencing…. the theory of communicative action is designed to inform the empirical investigation of a number of diverse applied critical theories (p. 424-5).

Communicative action thus is not an end in its self, but a theoretical framework that can inform social science research across a variety of disciplines. Parkin suggests that subjects such as "new social movements, educational practice, the formation and implementation of public policy, consumer culture, mediation and conflict resolution, the political economy of informational capitalism, and the dynamics of patriarchy" (1996, p. 428) for applied critical research informed by communicative action theory.

This study utilizes critical discourse analysis as a means to analyze freedom discourse by prioritizing not only the language used to describe it, but considering: the method of delivery of the discourse (blogs); the purpose of the discursive behavior (to share knowledge and create community, which explored further in the next section); how power is reinforced, reproduced, and/or challenged within it (analyzed in Chapters 5 through 7); and who is (and is not) participating in the discourse (considering freedom for whom).

Chapter 4: Research Design

Using critical discourse analysis, framing, and intersectional methodologies, this study uses Voluntary Simplicity as a master frame to analyze freedom discourse that emerges within Tiny House blogs, interpret what freedom refers to in the context of Tiny Houses/Tiny House living, and consider how identity locations such as race, gender, class, national origin, sexuality, and disability status, among others, inform the accessibility of freedom and viability of Tiny House living as solutions to both personal grievances and social problems. The specific research questions of this study are as follows:

1. What are the social and identity locations of Tiny House bloggers? Do/how might these positions inform definitions of freedom?

2. What are the physical realities of the Tiny Houses bloggers occupy? Details such as whether Tiny Houses are built on foundations or trailers, their cost, and whether blog authors built them themselves may provide important cues to discursive context to help discern identifiers such as bloggers' class, ability, and access to capitals in cases where they may not be otherwise clearly stated.

3. How do bloggers frame Tiny House living?

4. In what ways do Tiny House bloggers describe freedom in relation to Tiny Houses and/or Tiny House living?

5. How do descriptions of freedom relate to other simple living movements?

6. To whom are the freedoms of Tiny House living accessible?

In this study, critical discourse analysis, guided by Bourdieu's theories of language as an instrument of power and Habermas' communicative action theory, was used to examine power

and the way it is reinforced, reproduced, challenged, and/or invisible in freedom discourse in Tiny House blogs. Using inclusion criteria and codes grounded in existing literature, including Librová's (2008) dimensions of simple living, and guided by framing methodologies to understand the Tiny House and related Minimalist movement as subsets of Voluntary Simplicity, I performed critical content analysis of personal blogs of Tiny House dwellers located in the United States to examine the dwellers' social locations, details about their Tiny House experiences, attitudes and beliefs as related to the tenets of simple living, and specific articulations of freedom discourse as it emerges to determine how freedom is described positively ("freedom to"), negatively ("freedom from") and for whom said freedom is accessible ("freedom for whom"). Discourse analysis was guided by the following questions:

1. In what ways do Tiny House bloggers describe freedom in relation to Tiny Houses and/or Tiny House living? Supplemental questions include: What are positive expressions of freedom ("freedom to")? What are negative expressions of freedom ("freedom from")? How do Tiny House blogs frame the accessibility of said freedom to society at large ("freedom for whom")?

2. What are the social and identity locations of Tiny House bloggers, and how do social and identity locations emerge in discourse about Tiny Houses/the Tiny House movement and freedom? This question collects information that allows for more robust, intersectional, and critical analysis; in other words, how details such as gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation, ability status, national origin, and other identifiers emerge, and don't, in discourse about freedom and Tiny Houses.

Ethics

All data accessed for this study were sourced from publicly available weblogs. Hookway (2008) notes, "Although there are varying degrees of online exposure with blogging, the practice fundamentally involves placing private content in the public domain" (p. 96). Miller and Shepherd (2004) add, "Even as they serve to clarify and validate the self, blogs are also intended to be read" (p. 10). Bloggers knowingly and freely publish content as public, and can, for the most part, clarify, edit, or delete posts and comments. Additionally, bloggers have numerous spaces in which to negotiate the tensions between the public and private in online spaces, including creating comment filters and screens, banning or blocking particular users from accessing their blogs, choosing privacy settings that limit whether the blog is publicly accessible (and is, for example, available only to the user or to friends of the user through passwords or registration), choosing what content (photos, text, etc.) is published and when, as well as, Eastham (2011) notes, "to manage the paradox of personal intimacy in a publicly available location, blog authors may choose to use a pseudonym and thereby retain some level of anonymity" (p. 354). Although one could argue that in some circumstances bloggers misunderstand or misinterpret the reach of their blogs, I contend that the nature of Tiny House blogs functioning as sites for community building and information sharing, versus, for example, content comparable to a personal diary, indicates that Tiny House bloggers publish blog content knowing and intending for it to be read by the public. Similarly, as Eastham (2011) states, "downloading, reading, and analyzing a blog does not serve as an intervention or an interaction with the blog author because there is no direct involvement or communication between the researcher and the blogger" (p. 358). Thus, unlike interview data, these blogs were treated as

publicly available data that does not require participant consent; bloggers already consented to sharing the data by knowingly and willingly making it publicly available. Finally, Eastham (2011) suggests that all studies utilizing blogs as a singular data source should evaluate elements of privacy, interaction, and human subjects within study designs to develop inclusion and exclusion criteria (p. 559); rigorous inclusion criteria for this study are detailed below. Although all blogs included in this study were publicly accessible at the time of the sample, in deference to United States Department of Health and Human Services standards for research blog titles, URLs, and the names of bloggers, cities, businesses, and schools included within the content analyzed are excluded from this study in effort to disguise bloggers' identities (Eastham, 2011, p. 358). However, direct quotations from sampled texts are used due to the importance of language in discourse analysis. Although including quotations may allow readers to identify the blogs included in this study, the public nature of the blogs and research questions of this study do not pose more than minimal risk to the bloggers, defined as "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests" (Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects of 1991, 2013).

Sample Selection

Sampling occurred December 2, 2015 through February 28, 2016. A directory of 250 public blogs curated by a well-known and active Tiny House movement participant was accessed

to determine a sample for this study.[9] All blogs within this directory were analyzed for inclusion. Inclusion criteria were developed in effort of emphasizing blogs with current or complete narrative arcs that described Tiny House living with enough detail to discern not only what freedom refers to, but the specific discursive context in which it exists, including, whenever possible: information about the blogger, their lifestyle, and their Tiny Houses, such as where it is located, it's size, cost, etc. Specific inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. Blogs must be publicly available, i.e. do not require registration or a password to access.

2. Blogs must emphasize, although not exclusively focus on, Tiny House living. In effort to garner enough narrative detail to discern what "freedom" means, Tiny House living must be the subject of, meaningfully incorporated into, or relevant to the subject of at least 60% of posts.[10]

3. Blogs must be written by dwellers who have either lived in Tiny structures as their primary dwelling for six months or have published ten or more blog posts that discuss life in a Tiny structure, or, if bloggers ultimately do not live in a Tiny structure, blogs must have significant content discussing the reasons the author wished to live/was building a Tiny House and the reasons they choose not to/ultimately could not live in a Tiny structure.

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[9] As noted previously, the Tiny House movement is an emerging field of study. Most literature regarding Tiny Houses and the Tiny House movement, in addition to news coverage, is created and distributed by movement participants themselves through websites, videos and documentaries, books, and, certainly, blogs. The only directories of Tiny House blogs I could identify were curated by participants; most included only a small list (approximately 10-20) of popular blogs and did not appear to be updated regularly. Thus, although only one directory is used to guide the sample selection of this study, it represents the most, and perhaps the only or one of few, inclusive and regularly updated public list of Tiny House blogs at the time of sample collection.

[10] Browsing blog posts and archives (when available) assisted in determining whether this criterion was met.

4. In effort to reduce analytical difficulties that arise due to significant socio-cultural differences, blogs must be written by authors participating in the Tiny House movement (as defined in the previous point) within the United States. For the same reasons, only blogs written in English were considered for this study.[11]

5. In effort to maintain sample consistency, only individual/personal weblogs were used for this study. Blogs that did not focus on the stories of a specific dweller or dwellers in a single Tiny structure were not included in this study.

6. Blogs must contain either two years' worth or fifty total blog posts.

7. The blog's most recent post was published within six months of the start of this study (December 1, 2015) or had a stated reason for the absence of posts or the blog's abandonment.

In effort to maintain analytical consistency and emphasis narrative arcs, I chose to sample only blogs written by a dweller/dwellers in a specific Tiny structure, as opposed to, for example, blogs written by groups of individuals publishing information in one digital location or blogs by Tiny House contractors or others selling goods or services related to Tiny Houses. Similarly, I developed approximate content ratios and timeline criteria to maintain narrative focus: I wanted to ensure I was choosing blogs whose narratives would be discernable and current and/or complete based on the type and amount of content published.

Due to the subjective nature of blogging and the variation in the amount and type of content of each blog, capturing enough but not too much relevant data to analyze freedom

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[11] It's worth noting that all blogs included in the directory I accessed were written in English.

discourse was a process. My target number of sampled blogs for this study was twenty-five. All

250 blogs listed in the accessed directory were analyzed for eligibility. After determining that

more than thirty blogs were eligible by meeting the above stated criteria, all considered blogs,

ninety-two in total, were assigned a number (one through ninety two) and a random number

generator was used to choose twenty-five numbers. The blogs assigned to the chosen numbers

were considered for inclusion in this study. At this stage, all posts, comments, and pages of the

selected blogs were read in their entirety. Due to the volume of netted data, I decided to sample

the first and last three posts included in each of the twenty-five selected blogs, and again using a

random number generator, randomly selected thirty additional posts to sample from each blog,

occurring from the beginning of the blog through its end, or, if the blog was still being updated,

from the blog's beginning through December 1, 2015. In total, I sampled thirty-six sampled posts

from each blog, or in instances where blogs had fewer than thirty-six posts, all posts were

included in the sample. To further narrow the sample, I randomly eliminated five of the twenty-

five blogs using a random number generator. Finally, all posts, including comments, of the

condensed sample that were part of the narrative of the final twenty blogs were compiled, thus

removing any posts strictly about the details of the Tiny House, such as which roofing materials

were used to construct it, or the logistics of living in a small space, such as how a composting

toilet works, and leaving only posts that "told the story" of the blogs. Except in cases to discern

the identity locations of bloggers in corroboration with blog text, only the text of blog posts and

comments was analyzed in this study; videos or links to outside content were excluded to

maintain uniformity in analysis methods. In total, twenty-five blogs and 2,774 blog posts were

accessed and read in their entirety for this sample; of those, twenty blogs and 703 posts comprise

the analyzed sample. Blogs included in the sample were published between March 1, 2009, and December 1, 2015.

Analysis

Engaging in critical discourse analysis of "freedom" in Tiny House blogs required an integrated perspective of bloggers' attitudes, behaviors, and social characteristics/identity locations. I developed and used a datasheet similar to a questionnaire used in an interview to collect information about the blog and its author(s) to reference throughout analysis. In addition to the social characteristics that help define power and privilege, previous studies were used to define aspects of freedom discourse within the Voluntary Simplicity movement and informed the data collected on the datasheet, including: the number of posts; when it began and, if relevant, when it ended; details about the Tiny House including size, cost, whether it was pre-made or built by the blogger, and whether it was mobile or on a foundation; the geo-location of the Tiny House; and social and identity information about bloggers/occupant(s) of the Tiny House, such as race, class, gender, education, ability, age, national origin, and sexual orientation. The datasheet is included in Appendix B. In effort to further ensure discourse analysis remained embedded in the context in which it appears, I wrote a memo after reading each blog that captured the essential story of the blog and noted freedom discourse that occurred within it for reference throughout the analysis process.

It is important to reiterate that user-generated content does not exist in a vacuum: it is probable that bloggers construct particular narratives and highlight specific content to garner reader approval, attract sponsors or advertisers, and/or create and reproduce their own branding in order to sell, for example, books, floor plans, or other goods make available in online spaces

(Chia, 2012). Chenail (2011) describes, "Bloggers not connected to a particular company can also extend their idiosyncratic brand out into the 'blogosphere' through their particular choices of content focus, word styling, emotional timber, and media enhancements" (p. 250). In effort to determine whether financial benefit to bloggers may affect freedom discourse, I determined whether bloggers were likely to generate income through their blogs by considering: whether bloggers offered any services, such as consultations or lectures, or goods, such as Tiny House plans, for sale; whether domain names were purchased or free[12] (.com vs. blogspot.com, for example); and whether bloggers' described their blog work as a part of what they do to make money. Hookway aptly notes, "Even if bloggers do not tell the 'truth', these 'fabrications' still tell us something about the manner in which specific social and cultural ideas such as morality are constructed" (2008, p. 97). Finally, although blog content is susceptible to being edited by the author based on intended outcomes such as access to advertising dollars or reader feedback, data procured through interview processes, research journals, and other qualitative methods are arguably just as vulnerable to being edited by research subjects. Hookway (2008) questions, "How do you know…if someone is being honest in an interview, and for that matter, how someone ticks boxes on a survey questionnaire?" (p. 97).

 I analyzed blog content to trace and interpret freedom discourse as it emerges in posts, comments, and responses to comments using both predetermined code categories consistent with language found in Voluntary Simplicity movement literature, especially in the sources utilized in the literature review in this study, and codes that emerged through the research process.

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[12] The presence of advertisements alone does not indicate that a blogger financially benefits; many free domains necessarily include advertisements on public blogs

Predetermined code categories for the expressions of freedom discourse, namely, "freedom,"

"Tiny House movement", and "identity," were developed and guided by the above stated

research questions. An additional code category that analyzed discourse regarding bloggers'

methods, attitudes, and participation in consumption and production was applied to the dataset

with the intention of imbedding freedom discourse, especially that regarding consumption, work,

and money/debt, within blog context. Ultimately this code was excluded from analysis due to the

breadth of data netted using "freedom," "Tiny House movement," and "identity" codes that more

directly related to the central research questions of this study. Codes were applied to content in

blog posts selected for this study and as well as post comments and author responses. After the

entire sample was coded, all coded data from each of the three code categories were manually

compiled into separate word documents and underwent a series of refinements to best describe

the existing data set. Finally, the emerging codes across all three original code categories were

condensed into central themes for final analysis, included in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Emergent Code Themes

Social characteristics and identity related:

- Race
- Class
- Gender
- Ability
- Urban, rural, and location
- Access, power, and privilege
- Connections

Simplicity related:

- Simplicity of simple living
- Minimalism
- Rugged individualism, regulation, and independence
- American Dream and conformity
- Social change and social movement(s)
- Tiny House movement ethos
- Living "tiny" without a Tiny House

Freedom specific:

- Freedom from conformity
- Freedom from maintaining stuff and space
- Freedom from debt
- Freedom from being tethered
- Freedom from stress/discontent
- Freedom from distraction
- Freedom of simplicity
- Freedom of ownership/pride
- Freedom to pursue relationships, service, responsibility
- Freedom to live values/explore identity
- Freedom of time and to pursue interests
- Freedom for whom

Relevance

      This research contributes to an emerging field of study (most existing Tiny House literature is published by non-scholarly sources, primarily movement participants themselves); links the Tiny House Movement with Voluntary Simplicity and simple living movements more broadly; and examines participant-produced literature to analyze one of the central tenets of the Tiny House movement: freedom. The latter is particularly useful given the ways in which "freedom" is often used by Tiny House dwellers without a clear description, either synonymously with happiness or fulfillment or evoking existing understandings of freedom within simple living at large. Additionally, whereas Tiny Houses are imagined as a solution to a variety of personal grievances and social problems (including, for example, discontent and alienation or homelessness and rising housing costs, respectively) deeper analyses of how and for whom Tiny House living is accessible given the financial, legal, and cultural obstacles presented when moving from the realms of envisioning to actualizing Tiny Houses, both at the individual level and as tools for social change, is important. Analysis of how "freedom for whom" emerges, and doesn't, in Tiny House blogs offers additional insight into Tiny Houses as solutions to grievances/problems, and whether/how Tiny House bloggers envision themselves as connected to social change work.

Limitations

      Due to the qualitative nature of this research, its restriction to content analysis of published blogs, and the reality of few existing studies of the Tiny House movement and its participants, a number of relevant research questions are beyond the scope of this study, including: (1) the number and geographic locations of Tiny House Movement participants; (2)

the biographical details/identity locations of Tiny House dwellers as a group; (3) analyses of applications of Tiny Houses as solutions to social problems through social change work; and (4) direct and clarifying responses to queries of what freedom means within the Tiny House movement and the social/identity characteristics of the authors of the sampled blogs (as would be possible through alternative qualitative methods, such as interviews), among others. Similarly, it is important to reiterate that the blogs selected for this study were sampled from a singular directory curated by an active movement participant, and that, although the demographic to whom blogging and internet accessibility are viable options based on intersectional social characteristics and access most likely mirror the population who is privileged to voluntarily simplify their lives, future research considering whether there are barriers to blogging amongst Tiny House dwellers would be beneficial in analyzing the representativeness of blogs in analyzing Tiny House movement discourse. Finally, this research analyzes personal weblogs that, although they theoretically could, don't include narratives of, for example, Tiny House communities or collectives, which may be reflected in definitions and applications of "freedom," especially "freedom for whom."[13]

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[13] Additional limitations of this study related to the implications of data and considerations for future research are included in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Data Characteristics

In total, 703 blog posts from twenty different Tiny House blogs published between March

1, 2009, and December 1, 2015, were analyzed in this study. Blog posts were accessed between

December 2, 2015, and February 28, 2016. Of the sampled bogs, I determined that six were a

significant source of income to the blogger(s). Considering how freedom discourse emerged,

there was no obviously discernible difference in how freedom was framed or described between

bloggers who financially profited from their endeavors and those who did not: with relatively

equal frequency, bloggers considered freedom to, from, and for whom.

All authors of the sampled blogs lived in the United States; half of them were located in

the Pacific Northwest, three in the South, three on the East Coast, and four in

undisclosed/indiscernible locations. Bloggers were relatively evenly split between living in rural

and urban settings (40% and 35% respectively, with 25% of locations unreported). Settings were

self-defined by bloggers or, whenever possible, deduced through context when not explicitly

stated; indicators for rural settings included descriptions of off-grid electric and water systems,

traveling to purchase necessities such as food, and descriptions of the setting using terms like

secluded or private. Indicators for urban settings included discussions of zoning, lots, and

parking. The majority (70%) of bloggers built their Tiny Homes themselves. The reported

estimated costs of bloggers' Tiny homes ranged from $500 to $75,000.

Bloggers were relatively evenly split between and men and women, 55% and 40%

respectively, with one blogger's gender indiscernible. Gender was rarely explicitly stated and

was deduced by pronouns and cues throughout blog texts.[14] Eight bloggers explicitly stated their ages; of them, seven were categorized as young adults (18-34) and one as an adult (35-64); these categories were differentiated by life milestones that typically occur within these age brackets, and the twelve bloggers with undisclosed ages are presumed to fall within the adult age range based on contextual information provided within blogs. Blog authors reported their race in two instances, with one identifying as white, the other as a person of color[15]. Three bloggers discussed having disabilities, including one temporary disability. Six blog authors reported having post-secondary degrees and one explicitly reported having no college education. No authors discussed their migrant status or sexual orientation.

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[14]   No bloggers specifically identified themselves as men, women, etc. Given the role that gender ultimately played in blog discourse overall, the politics of pronouns and gender identity, while important, are beyond the scope of this research.

[15]   This blogger identified their race specifically, but it is withheld from reporting to help protect their privacy because so few Tiny House bloggers are of color.

Table 5.1 Blog Author Data

Blog Author	Location by U.S. Region	Location by Setting	Age within Range	Race	Gender	Ability Status	National Origin	Sexual Orientation	Post-High School Education
A	Pacific Northwest	Urban	18-34		(Woman)	Temporarily disabled			Yes
B		Rural	35-60		(Man)				
C		Rural	(Adult)		(Woman)				
D	East Coast	Rural	18-34		(Woman)				
E	Pacific Northwest	Rural	18-34		(Woman)				
F	East Coast		(Adult)		(Man)				
G	Pacific Northwest	Urban	(Adult)		(Man)				
H	South	Urban	(Adult)		(Woman)				
I	Pacific Northwest		18-34		(Woman)	Legally disabled			Yes
J	East Coast	Urban	18-34		(Man)				Yes
K	Pacific Northwest	Rural	18-34		(Woman)	Disability affects function			
L	Pacific Northwest		18-34	White	(Man)				No
M		(Rural)	(Adult)		(Woman)				
N	Pacific Northwest	Rural	(Adult)	Of Color	(Man)				
O	Pacific Northwest	Rural	(Adult)		(Man)				
P			(Adult)						
Q	South		(Adult)		(Woman)				
R	Pacific Northwest	Urban	(Adult)		(Woman)				Yes
S	Pacific Northwest	Urban	(Adult)		(Woman)				Yes
T	South	(Urban)	(Adult)		(Woman)				

All data points in parenthesis were not explicitly stated and deduced using other information available within blog text.

Table 5.2: Aggregate Blog Author Data

Region	Pacific Northwest	10
	South	3
	East Coast	3
	Unspecified	4
Setting	Rural	8
	Urban	7
	Unspecified	5
Age	18-34 (Young Adult)	7
	35-60 (Adult)	1
	Unspecified	12
Race	Of Color	1
	White	1
	Unspecified	18
Gender	Woman	11
	Man	8
	Undiscernible	1
Ability Status	Disability Status Discussed	3
	Unspecified	17
Migrant Status	Unspecified	20
Sexual Orientation	Unspecified	20
Post-High School Education	Yes	6
	No	1
	Unspecified	13

Table 5.3: Tiny House Data

House built or purchased by owners	Built	14
	Purchased	5
	Not Applicable[16]	1
Estimated cost of house	Less than $15,000	4
	$15,000 - $29,999	4
	More than $30,000	3
	Unspecified	9
House type	Foundation	2
	Mobile	17
	Other	1

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[16]   In this instance, the blog author ultimately did not build or purchase a Tiny House.

The relative, and in some instances absolute, absences of declaring and/or discussing bloggers' social identity characteristics, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and age, are important to consider. Whereas details about the Tiny Houses, such as their cost, locations, sizes, and type were almost always mentioned, details about the bloggers themselves were less discernable. These identity markers may be absent because bloggers did not consider them relevant, perhaps due to the focus of blog content and/or the invisibility of social privilege. In terms of the former, the central discourse of blogs was diverse, ranging from impersonal discussions that centered the logistics of designing, building, and living in a Tiny House to extremely personal stories of existential crises and identity imbedded in discussions about Tiny House living or aspirations. In circumstances where blogs were impersonal and centered discourse about Tiny Houses rather than the blogger themself, it is relatively clear why discussions of bloggers' race, gender, sexual orientation and age may be absent. Most blogs, however, included discourse about the blog author with enough detail to discern their general story, such as what prompted them to consider Tiny House living, how Tiny House living impacted their lives and perspectives, and to varying degrees, their personal values. In these instances, the invisibility of social privilege, both within and beyond the Tiny House movement, may explain the absence of mentions of specific social characteristics such as race, gender,[17] age, education level, sexuality, and national origin. Considering the existing forms of capital and

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[17]   I was surprised to find that gender did not emerge in blog discourse, both regarding freedom specifically and more generally. Although this may be due, at least to some degree, to privileges associated with being cisgender and/or men, the absence of gender in sampled blog discourse begs the questions: What role does gender play in simple living discourse more broadly? Do Tiny House bloggers/simple livers consider gender to affect their experiences of living/simple living?

privilege required to access simple living, Tiny House living, and blogging through the lens of how social privilege and power affects language, I presume most of the bloggers sampled who did not explicitly mention otherwise are white, American, non-senior adults and do not experience disability.[18] As stated previously, social characteristics/identity matters when considering who has access to the Tiny House movement and the thus the freedoms associated with it within movement discourse.

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[18] Like gender, no sampled bloggers declared their sexual orientation; unlike gender, sexual orientation was more difficult to discern. Using Voluntary Simplicity as master frame and considering how privilege, power and language intersect, it is possible that most sampled bloggers are heterosexual. However, for the purposes of this study, analyses regarding sexual orientation as an identity marker have been excluded.

Chapter 6: Freedom Discourse in Tiny House Blogs

Discourse within the sampled texts of this study echoed discourse that emerges in Voluntary Simplicity and other simple living movements: Tiny House bloggers describe a rhetorical tension in describing their simplified lives as "simple," and how living in a Tiny House allows them, as Grigsby (2004) writes, "ideology and techniques for arriving at a personal definition of what is enough and promises a more fulfilling life to those who consume in more sustainable ways, reduce clutter, and minimize activities they don't find meaningful" (p. 2). Tiny House bloggers described the ways in which they are able to "opt out" without rejecting capitalism in its entirety: they continue to benefit from capitalist economies with the freedom to elect in which parts and/or how much they participate, including where, for whom, and how often they work, as well as what they purchase and from whom. Additionally, they discussed negotiating identities regarding their experiences living in Tiny Homes, including how self-sufficiency and accomplishing goals changed how they understood themselves, their relationships with others, and what they truly valued.

Echoing Librová's (2008) dimensions of simplicity, Tiny House bloggers frequently described how their lifestyle allowed them, among other things, freedom to pursue their interests; freedom from caring for and owning things; freedom from power-based relationships, including and especially in terms of employment; freedom from conforming to the behaviors and social rules of consumer society, especially the social expectations ascribed to the American Dream; and freedom from being tethered to particular physical spaces and responsibilities. Frequently, bloggers simply offered that Tiny House living affords them freedom, with no explanation included, although, perhaps, implied based on the evocation of existing connotations of the

benefits of simple living practices. When accompanied by descriptors, freedom discourse largely

emerged in the sampled texts in two major ways, often intertwined and cyclically: freedom to

(do, be, have, choose, etc.), described in more detail below as positive liberties, and freedom

from (doing, being, having, choosing, etc.), considered below as negative liberties. A third

category, contemplations regarding to whom these freedoms are accessible, emerged much less

frequently and often through implication rather than direct considerations. This chapter considers

how Tiny House bloggers frame Tiny House living and traces freedom discourse in Tiny House

blogs through two major emergent themes, freedom to and freedom from, by connecting them to

existing discourse in simple living movement literature. It concludes by analyzing freedom

discourse using an intersectional understanding of privilege, the social characteristics of simple

livers at large in combination with the social identity locations of the sampled texts' authors

specifically,[19] and bloggers' considerations of what it means to "live tiny" to consider to whom

freedoms afforded by Tiny House living are accessible.

Conceptualizing Simplicity

Like many simpler livers, Tiny Housers identify a rhetorical tension in describing their

simplified lives as simple. Regarding the emotional and intellectual labor of minimizing, one

blogger writes,

> The joy of living in a tiny house has given me the freedom to experiment with voluntary
> simplicity. Ironically, voluntary simplicity isn't as simple as it sounds. The challenge of

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[19] Interestingly, gender and setting (urban vs. rural) seemed to have little to no impact on freedom discourse in the sampled blogs, thus are not included in the analysis that follows; class, however, was discussed with some frequency, especially regarding freedom for whom, and is accordingly analyzed in the section entitled "Class, Commodities, and Niche Markets."

reducing possessions and becoming more aware of how your everyday choices align with your values is fun, but it's also a lot of work (G).

Another describes,

> The tiny house, like much I am attracted to, is a unification of opposites- it is small, but allows a larger, more full life; it is an intimately personal choice but has great impact for public, academic and private selves; and while the tiny house seems simple, it complicates many things, theoretical and practical; it is always a recursive lesson in self-awareness. Like any good pun. (S)

In a serendipitous consideration of freedom to, from, and for whom in the Tiny House

movement, a blogger writes,

> Perhaps I have given you a bad impression. So far I've only outlined some of the obstacles we've had to overcome, or will have to overcome. I want to be honest about living in a tiny house for those of you who are considering it, so I won't say everything is perfect, that I've never been happier, or that rainbows shoot out of the faucets. Truthfully, it can be inconvenient, and at times feel small, but for the most part I don't think about it, and when I do, it's usually to admire what we have made. I'll admit, sometimes I feel insanely proud. Our main reason for building the tiny house was a desire for freedom. Not only did we want to be able to move our house (and hopefully we can) but we didn't want to live in debt. One thing we should have planned more was what to do when we were finished. RV parks can cost as much as renting an apartment, and I don't mean to sound like a hoity-toity jerk, but trailer parks are scary. So unless you buy your own land or get lucky enough to have a generous family (Thanks Kylee and Paul!) you are S.O.L. So my advice is this: Plan ahead you schmuck! That's what I would have told myself if I could go back in time. But I would've still built the house anyway, time machine or no, because even though we may have some challenges before we get to where we want to be, the fact is this: we own a home, and it's paid off. (T).

In the broadest sense, Tiny House living is anything but simple: in addition to the physical,

emotional, and intellectual labors characteristic of living simply, Tiny House living requires

significant amounts of privilege and capital (human, social, and financial) to access, and even

then, the gray spaces in policy, zoning, and law that Tiny Houses frequently occupy create

further complications.[20] "Simple" is subjective, but it rarely means an absence of conflict, complexity, or labor. Tiny House living is not simple, but is, for some, simpler.

> Tiny doesn't necessarily mean simple. Though I do live in my tiny house, just that fact alone does not make my life simpler. Just because I can't fit as many tshirts in my closet doesn't make my life simple or distraction free. Leading a simple life takes effort- it takes conscious mindfulness. It takes being a superhero (F).

Freedom To: Positive Liberties

Blog authors discussed numerous ways in which Tiny House living and the Tiny House movement affords/could afford positive liberties, including freedom to: pursue their varied interests, create meaningful relationships and connections, serve others or the environment, live more simply, and explore and live in line with their values. Discussions of how tiny houses allow for freedom to pursue interests were often intertwined with the concept of Tiny Houses allowing for more free time more generally. One blogger describes,

> If I'm lucky, I can get everything I have to get done for the day done in the morning. Living in a tiny house has so reduced my monthly expenses that I find that I don't have to push myself to work long hours every single day. This was one of the biggest draws to the tiny house lifestyle for me. My afternoon adventure could mean any number of things, depending on the season (F).

Similar sentiments were expressed across sampled blogs: Tiny Houses cost less/lower living expenses, allowing the opportunity to work fewer hours, or even sustain one's self through self-employment, and have more time and energy to pursue interests outside of what is typically allowed in a full-time work week. In some instances, this increased freedom allowed for bloggers to more deeply explore their values to determine a new line of work that would best suit them.

> In other, other news, after a very long period of thought and deliberation, I have left my corporate travel job. The tiny house and the smart choices we have made with our

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[20]   Discussed later in this chapter, specifically in "Barriers, Accessibility, and Applications."

financial habits has allowed me to make such a decision. I was no longer hamstrung by the fact that we needed a certain amount of money every month just to maintain. Paying off my car and [credit cards] was huge. Now that our monthly living costs are much lower, I have more freedom to explore other options and seek out something that genuinely fulfills me. I'm not sure what that is yet, I've spent the last week just trying to get back in touch with who I am...was...or would like to be again. I have been cooking, painting, playing music, writing, photographing and feeling more alive by the day. I've also had serious [bouts] of worry, fear, uncertainty, but I knew that would come as part of the package. I was getting very comfortable and attached to the security of the job I had, but I also saw, what I considered the best and most interesting parts of me, slowly fading as all my energy each day went into work or just persevering the awful side effects of that work (D).

As another blogger succinctly notes,

The saying is something like, 'if you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life.' Well, if you can't even quit the rat race for a week how are you going to be able to find out what you love and figure out a way to make money at it? (A)

Beyond work, discourse regarding Tiny houses as a conduit to exploring/living one's identity or values more broadly was prevalent in sampled texts. Due to the diversity of values and lifestyles that exist amongst Tiny Housers, even though they may be a relatively homogenous group in terms of social characteristics such as race and class, the specifics of how living these values or exploring/developing identity occurs is quite varied. What Tiny Houses allow for is, as one blogger describes, "lifestyle design;" by lowering one's cost of living while maintaining or improving earning potential, a Tiny Houser has more opportunity, time, fiscal ability, and energy to identify, develop, and pursue interests and values. One blogger who quit their white-collar job to live alone off-grid explains,

Out here, alone, I am the source of all my problems, but I am also the solution to all my problems. At least, I have to be, if I don't want to get stuck. In the city, things that stress people out are the things they can't control. Whether it's their job, the cable company, the plumber or mechanic, or their noisy neighbors, peoples' lives are so deeply intertwined with –and dependent on– others that they often have little control over the problems they face. Out here, nobody causes any of my problems, but I also can't expect anyone else to solve my problems for me either. Sometimes it feels overwhelming, but at the end of the day, I overcome those challenges and feel better for it (N).

Similar feelings of empowerment stemming from building and/or living in a Tiny House were discussed by several bloggers. In some instances, building and/or living in a Tiny House became an important aspect of bloggers' identities, changing the way they understood themselves and what they are capable of regarding how they provide for themselves. A blogger describes,

> There is something about living small and striving for simplicity that has changed my perspective and given me a sense of empowerment. Experts call this improved "self-efficacy", which means, you have greater confidence in your ability to understand problems. When I run into a problem now I try simplify it and make it easier to understand the parts that make up the whole. Recently I have noticed that many tiny house dwellers share a similar do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos (G).

An archetype of rugged individualism emerged with relative frequency and to varying degrees within Tiny House blogs, most often and most clearly articulated within blogs whose authors lived in rural and/or off-grid locations. Much like the spirit of the Back to the Land and Maker movements, bloggers described how living in a Tiny House afforded them the freedom to explore their resiliency and ability to provide for themselves, practice self-sufficiency, and prove their capabilities to themselves. One blogger describes Tiny Housers, many of whom build their own homes or live off-grid with little or no prior experience, as "DIY Warriors" (B). Another wondered whether they were crazy for building their house alone in an isolated location without any prior knowledge of carpentry, construction, or architecture, but concluded the consideration of the sanity of their self-imposed exile by stating, "Out here, alone, I am the source of all my problems, but I am also the solution to all my problems." (N).

Conversely, discourse regarding how the freedom of time and energy, including physical and emotional energies afforded by living in a Tiny House, allow for dwellers to cultivate new and deeper relationships with their families, friends, neighbors, and communities was plentiful

within sampled texts. Bloggers described how Tiny House living afforded them the means to

connect more deeply with and better parent their children; form stronger connections and ways

of communicating with their partners; and utilize and support resources available to them in their

communities, such as libraries, coffee shops, and parks.

> Often times I found myself not going out for drinks with friends, not trying out the new restaurant, not going to the big cool event because I simply didn't have the money for it (within my comfort level), it was going to my mortgage, my utilities (I had utility payments one winter month of nearly $600 for gas and electrical in my big house! That is beyond insane to me now!). Without those bills piling up you can afford to try out the new food place around the corner, or see some live music (and tip them!). It is not only good for you and your social life, it's great for your community! (A)

Some bloggers further discussed not only how Tiny House living afforded these freedoms but

magnified how important creating and sustaining connections with others truly is to the human

experience. One blogger writes, "In our search for self sufficiency and independence, we

discovered how desperately interdependent we all are; no Tiny House is an Island (L)." Another

describes, "We value self-sufficiency, but community is also important. It's one of the things I

value about the small house movement: although we tend to be very self-sufficient, we also tend

to be more socially connected to those around us" (C).

> Similarly, discourse frequently emerged regarding how Tiny House living offers bloggers the freedom to serve or better serve the environment.

> So… on a personal level… I am pretty confident I have embarked on a lifestyle that will enable me to pay down my personal debts, as well as pay down my personal ecological debt to any children [my partner] and I may or may not have one day. Either way, aren't all the kids our kids? Do we have the right to borrow against their economic and ecological future? (L)

Tiny Houses are often posited as having smaller ecological footprints than other housing options,

thus are understood by some bloggers to lighten their burden upon the earth and, as the above

quote explains, the debts they pass along to future generations. Bloggers again turn to freedom of

time, and how it affords them the ability to spend more energy growing their own food, repairing

or repurposing items that may otherwise have been garbage, being stewards of the land, and

enjoying more time in nature.

> My simple and smaller living philosophy doesn't mean I have to grow every bit of food
> or repair every tool that breaks. It means I enjoy living deliberately. By becoming smarter
> about my ignorance I can help others and obtain more meaning from my contributions to
> my community. In this way I can worry less about my personal value being tied to my
> financial spending power. I believe my greatest contribution to society is not the money
> that I spend but how I spend my time (G).

Bloggers almost universally described their experience or dream of Tiny House living in

terms of simplicity and/or minimalism. Some bloggers specifically identified themselves as

Minimalists or what they were doing as Minimalism; others used phrases like right-sized, living

within one's means, or simplifying to describe their lives with less. Many described how creating

clear spatial limitations in their dwelling allowed them the freedom to/more easily live with less

and thus enjoy more of what they love and be burdened less by what they do not value: because

their dwellings are so condensed, they are more aware of excess and clutter, both physical and

emotional. Thus, they can more easily maintain a life that only includes things they derive value

from because they are more aware, by the simplicity of proximity, to the "stuff" they bring into

their spaces.

> Perhaps one of the most obvious side effects of moving into a tiny house is reducing the
> amount of belongings you own. There simply isn't all that much room in a tiny house, so
> you're forced to get rid of the clutter and keep only the items that you need or love. For
> many people, this forced minimalism and simplification is a big part of the appeal. (F)

Even in cases where living in such a small space was considered limiting,[21] all bloggers

underscored the value that living with less added or that they perceived would add to their lives.

> Before minimalism, I felt limited by my circumstances in status, inexperience, and wealth but practicing minimalism has helped me think more creatively about what is possible. For example, I currently live in a 128 sq ft tiny cabin. My choice of shelter may seem extreme to some but I have everything I need to foster health and comfort. I've minimized my housing expenses to "enough" so now I can focus on actively contributing to my community and savoring the things that I enjoy (G).

> A funny thing happens when you start to live within your means: money and time free up, relationships benefit, health improves, stress decreases, joy goes way up, energy for exercise and self care increases. We now own our home outright and have no housing payments. We make wise purchasing decisions. We are smart about how we spend our time. We prioritize joy and health. We are reaping the benefits of some very good decisions we made four years ago. Life is better than ever! (B)

Freedom From: Negative Liberties

Discourse of negatives liberties afforded by Tiny House living included freedom from

distraction; maintaining stuff and space; being tethered, both physically and figuratively;

unhappiness/discontent; stress; jobs; work; debt; and conformity to others' expectations,

including compulsory consumption, accumulation, and the American Dream as a formula for

success. To reiterate, these descriptions emerged in discourse deeply intertwined with

discussions of positive liberties: freedom from affords freedom to and vice-versa.

Relating to the previous discussion of the freedoms afforded by Minimalism, blog

discourse frequently described the ways in which Tiny Houses offered concrete opportunities to

live free from distractions, especially related to "stuff," and the cost, time, mental energy, and

physical work it takes to maintain it. One person submitted to a community-created post about

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[21]   Discussed further in "Barriers, Accessibility, and Applications."

what Tiny Houses mean to them: "A tiny house to me means living a clean, uncluttered, simplistic, focused life, mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally" (B). Another describes,

> I can't even remember now what else I used to have keys to, but at this point I'm glad that it's one less thing to think about. This is one of my favorite aspects of minimalism. Not just less *stuff* but less stuff to think about (and lose!) (R).

Considering how freedom from offers freedom to, another blogger writes,

> Decluttering by removing excess material stuff is the basic practice of minimalism. Minimalism liberates me from the costs of superfluous possessions (i.e. time, money and emotional stress), and thus fosters happiness by increasing time and money spent on friendships and experiences that create joy (G).

> Discourse regarding how Tiny Houses offer freedom from being tethered emerged in

terms of both physical clutter and physical locations: more stuff requires more space which in turn requires higher wages/income levels[22] in order to pay for the space for the stuff:

> Everyone thinks they need a home with two or more bedrooms, a kitchen, a living room, a dining room, a den, a foyer, etc. Then they move into that space and realize it looks bare and empty. Our living space reflects heavily upon our feelings and outlook. People don't like to feel bare and empty. So they go out and buy crap to put in those spaces because it "looks nice". So your dumping money into stuff that you just...look at? And only when you happen to walk past that room or space? Then there's the opposite scenario. Some people buy bigger houses simply because they don't have enough room for their stuff. Are you kidding me?! So you're willing to take on a bigger loan, pay more to heat that space, pay more to cool that space, pay more to insure that space, pay more to repair any damage that may occur to that space- all for your stuff*?* (D)

Like Minimalist movement discourse more broadly, many sampled bloggers deeply considered the non-monetary value of stuff: did what they own serve a concrete purpose or bring them happiness and, if not, why own it? Again, freedom from and freedom to are tightly intertwined:

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[22]   Deeper discussion regarding freedom and jobs continues below.

freedom from the distraction, maintenance, and labor of "stuff" offers freedom to focus on what

bloggers deemed valuable, including their loved ones, passions, and interests. Amongst Tiny

House bloggers who lived in homes built on trailers rather than foundations, the mobility their

Tiny House offered was described as a freedom from being tethered to a particular location in the

way they might be in a more traditional foundation house not only in terms of the physical

mobility their houses themselves offer, but also in terms of the financial flexibility they gain(ed)

by living Tiny, i.e. they could afford to travel with or without their Tiny House.

> So though the decision to build on a trailer is not always a voluntary choice, and comes with added expense and a few design constraints, it provides one the opportunity to move his or her home—rooms, belongings, and all—from place to place, destination to destination. And though hauling a tiny home isn't the easiest of tasks (even moving an empty trailer requires a hefty Uhaul and a bit of courage on the road), it's certainly less of a hassle than selling a home and finding a new one and hiring movers and packing belongings and loading boxes and unloading boxes and unpacking belongings and starting life, at least spatially, totally anew (J).

> I'm 26 and I work in theatre. This means that having mobility is important so I can work at whatever theatre I want. I could move and rent apartments but that is a lot of my money going to just trying to get by on a theatre salary. I want to live self sufficiently so I can have fewer bills and save more of my money to travel the world like I want to (F).

Sentiments regarding mobility and freedom from consumption and all that comes with

physical and mental "stuff" emerged in a larger discursive theme of Tiny Houses offering

freedom from conformity to dominant methods, assumptions, and expectations regarding

defining and finding success, happiness, and a good life. For many bloggers in the sample, Tiny

Houses were a catalyst for breaking free from what they perceived to be a prescribed templates

of success, happiness, and freedom to instead explore, identify, and ultimately live in alignment

with what they valued in relation to their time, energy, thoughts, and physical realities, including

where they lived and what with, or, more often than not, without. One blogger describes,

Living tiny is the opportunity to break away from the mold that society in general has established. Learning to live without things that weigh us down and force us to spend our lives just to fit within that mold. Living tiny is learning to live the life you choose, be happy with the ones you love, and spend your life focusing on what really matters (B).

Commenting on a post about criticism a blogger received about their lifestyle/choices, a reader wrote in encouragement,

You're breaking through all of the assumptions we carry about what is "necessary" and what it looks like to be successful…You're redefining life in terms that work for you and your family based on the hand you were dealt rather than going along with what culture tells you that you need and should want. (M)

In the same vein, bloggers frequently described how Tiny House living affords freedom from conventional types of and full-time work, including freedom from feeling stuck in a job or industry that is unfulfilling or while one is burnt out due to financial obligations such as mortgage and rent payments, other living expenses, and debt. In other words, bloggers described Tiny House living as providing freedom from sacrificing their time, happiness, fulfillment, values, and overall wellbeing for what was described by one blogger as "the almighty dollar." In another Tiny Houser's words, "I was staying at a job I didn't particularly enjoy and certainly didn't personally interest me, and for what? I couldn't live with myself if I just stayed sitting at that desk because it was the "safe" or "smart" thing to do (D)." Another describes,

Tiny houses are a great way for folks to live in dignity and to gain freedom from the system that keeps us trapped in debt and consumption. I think more and more people are rethinking what home means, designing a home to meet personal needs, and not trying to fit into a home that was mass-produced. (M).

In some instances, living in a Tiny House with lower monthly bills allowed bloggers to aggressively pay down existing debts and obtain a higher quality of living. For others, Tiny House living offered an escape from spending significant portions of their lives indebted by

mortgage payments while still owning their own home. Instead of becoming further indebted by a home, a Tiny House can afford the opportunity to purchase an asset. As one blogger writes,

> So of course, that was the main selling point for me. Instead of putting the same amount toward just a down payment on a condo or a townhome, why not buy a whole house outright and not have any mortgage or rent payment?? (H)

Discourse that emerged in this sample of Tiny House blogs demonstrates a tension regarding homeownership and the American Dream. Homeownership, specifically a detached, single-family home, serves as an important symbol of status in America's social landscape and, arguably, a central tenet of the American Dream (Vail, 2016, p. 360). As the size of one's home correlates to the inferred level of success of the homeowner, the size of the average American family home, unsurprisingly, continues to grow, expanding from 1,100 square feet in 1949 to 2,500 in 2008 (Vail, 2016, p. 357). Of course, this increase in size correlates to an increase in price. For some bloggers, as described previously, a Tiny House is a means to achieve the, as Vail (2016) writes, "revered goal of property ownership" either in a more financially feasible way or one that better aligns with the buyer's values (p. 357). Homeownership provides freedom to "opt in," in this case. For others, a Tiny House and its accompanying simplified lifestyle are a means of "opting out" of the attitudes and behaviors commonly associated with the American Dream without disregarding property ownership entirely; Tiny Houses provide freedom from, or a means to forgo, for example, debt, discontent, and compulsory consumption while maintaining other, more beneficial aspects of homeownership. Describing the story of another Tiny Houser they admire, one blogger details how this shift away from convention can occur:

> Years ago, she was employed at an investment firm and become tired of the stressful commute, long hours in the office and rising debt from living beyond their means – the typical American drea…Ehm…story :p Once she realized that downsizing would improve their over-all well-being she and her husband…started taking steps to simplify their lives. They got rid of their car (eventually both of them) and started riding their

bikes everywhere, shopping at local farmer's markets and using less living space. They have made HUGE changes in their lives and are all the HAPPIER for it! They are currently living on a ranch in Northern California in their Tiny House where she works from home as a writer, teacher & creator (L).

A comment on another blog considers the tension between Tiny Houses and the American Dream, describing through implication both the freedom to and freedom from aspects of Tiny Houses and the American Dream, and considers their accessibility (freedom for whom):

In the meantime, I enjoy reading your freedom from "things"! I have long been put off by conspicuous consumption, and especially the excess displayed by million/billionaires. At a friend's house, the TV was on a show about a couple building their dream house, and I was simply disgusted. I sometimes go through horse/wine country near here, past what a friend called "starter castles." I prefer the disdainful "McMansions," as those are as far as most of those people will ever get! Still, it goes against what [name] said: Live simply that others may simply live. I tried telling my stepkids how incredibly privileged they are, and that there's no way the entire world could live like Americans. Although the way you are living is much closer to achievable, and gentler on the earth (A).

Another blogger tackles the subjects of freedom to, from, and for whom regarding Tiny Houses and the American Dream more directly:

People are giving up on the "American Dream" of having a large house, family, etc. for many reasons…..firstly; there are too many people in this country who are still uneducated and have NO chance of moving up and sustaining "even lower middle class living". Secondly…..even if someone is well educated…jobs other than the semiconductor sector, have NOT increased cost of living wages since 1976 effectively. Thirdly,…we still have a country with over 40,000,000 uninsured people who can't afford insurance due to being underpaid and/or over educated. Now, we're penalized with our taxed if we don't buy it! Our modern American medical system is broken,…doesn't do us any good and needs a change anyway to sustainable health without medications for everyone! TinyHousing is one way to "even the playing field" for single's, couples, retired folks, and even a 3-household family now. Many, many people are seeing that they do NOT want to work 3-4 full time jobs…so that they can play for one day during the week…and sometimes not even then…because of weekend work. Life is NOT about making money for large corporations and rich stock holders. This is why working a nice little 40-hour week can be sustainable for the poor and middle class again…and even for some eccentric "well-off" economically well heeled individuals, that choose to do so (B).

In many ways, Tiny Houses are a means by which individuals negotiate their participation in the

American Dream and capitalist accumulation. For some, Tiny Houses provide an actual or

potential access to the fruits of American Dream, namely homeownership, that they may

otherwise be unable to attain due to their socio-economic status: they simply negotiate the size of

their home as a means to "opt in." For individuals with higher earning potential due to their

social characteristics and identities, Tiny Houses are the way in which they negotiate their values

of owning their own home and wanting to have the freedom of time and energy to live a better

life outside the confines of a full-time job that might otherwise be required due to mortgage debt.

In other instances, Tiny Houses are the means by which individuals negotiate their own

relationship with consumption: by having a Tiny home, they are spatially unable to accumulate

in the same way they would be in an average-sized space. For some, this is the means by which

they reject the American Dream, or at least part of it. Much as in Voluntary Simplicity more

largely, these negotiations, especially regarding cost, demonstrate another paradox that exists

within the Tiny House movement: Tiny Houses offer a potential solution to the accessibility

issues inherent in the politics of contemporary homeownership, but only to those for whom

homeownership is already accessible based on preexisting capital and privileges afforded by

their social positions. As Anson (2014), who lived in a Tiny House herself, describes,

> Discourse among tiny house enthusiasts often centers on claims of the freedom that
> mobility offers—namely economic mobility—but that promise is a bit more troubled than
> it initially seems …While bills for upkeep, water and electricity are lower for tiny house
> dwellers, it takes substantial capital for most people to get into a tiny house. Tiny houses
> have yet to be incorporated into urban planning, as bureaucratic institutions are unsure
> whether to define them as mobile homes, motor homes, or accessory dwelling units. The
> resulting liminality makes insurance, structural regulations, and zoning difficult. These
> definitional difficulties seem to be why most, if not all, banks refuse construction loans
> for tiny house projects. Thus, someone wanting to "go tiny" would first need the capital
> to do so. In my own experience, I was only able to finance my build by redirecting school

loans and complete it with the help of over 30 different friends and family. Whether it be through such "re-purposed" monies, existing savings, friend or family loans, assuming a would be "tiny houser" had access to funding, they would still need tools, workspace, and time. Claims of economic mobility available through tiny house living unfortunately depend on some level of preexisting economic mobility…Though more networks of free materials, public tool libraries, and work shares are emerging, the tiny house movement would do well to acknowledge – and perhaps find ways to mitigate – the tremendous privilege it takes to enter the tiny house community" (p. 293-4).

Freedom for Whom

Discussions regarding for whom the purported freedoms offered by the Tiny House movement are accessible emerged relatively infrequently and often indirectly within discourse from the sampled blogs. The relative absence of analytical or applied considerations of "freedom for whom" in the sampled is no mystery: bloggers typically come from privileged social positions, operate at the micro-level of scale, and tend to be more concerned with how they are personal affected by capitalist consumption, work, debt, et cetera than they are with how social experiences and opportunities may differ based on identifiers like race, class, gender, ability status, national origin, and others. Their privileges, and their effects, are invisible to them. The "for whom" discourse that did emerge largely falls into three categories. In the first, Tiny Houses were conceptualized as commodities and their applications across different economic, social, and market niches were considered, such as student, professional, and caretaker housing. In the second, bloggers discussed barriers to and application of Tiny House living on an individual basis, for example, considering for whom Tiny House living might be beneficial or detailing the reasons why Tiny House living ultimately did not work for them personally. This category in particular presents contradictory ideas about for whom Tiny Houses and their purported freedoms are accessible, largely based on access to preexisting privileges and forms of capital or lack thereof. Lastly, and least frequently, bloggers considered how they or their Tiny Houses

were embedded in social conditions and change more broadly and considered how they and/or

Tiny Houses can benefit social change, such as Tiny Houses as a solution to homelessness and/or

affordable housing.[23] In each of the following sections, analysis of blog discourse is

supplemented, where applicable, with discourse from existing Tiny House scholarship to provide

more robust perspective of these emergent themes.

      Class, commodities, and niche markets. Although Tiny Houses are often touted as

long-term solutions and catalysts for change, they frequently serve more fixed-term purposes

(Anson, 2014, p. 294), thus could be considered commodities that serve as the means to an end.

Anson describes,

> Tiny structures might be seen as yet another form of accumulation: people saving for a
> "real house," desiring supplementary space in the form of mother-in-law structures, or
> those using the tiny houses as a sources of rental income are all modes of tiny house
> living that may find the lifestyle freeing but temporary" (2014, p. 294).

To this point, one Tiny Houser from the sample described how she was living Tiny while saving

money for a "'real' house that would actually fit a family and then when I [move in], I can park

[the Tiny House] in the hills and call it a 'family cabin'" (A). Similarly, two bloggers identified

as students who lived in Tiny Houses during their studies to help curtail debt and spending with

intention to leave the Tiny Houses after their studies concluded. Tiny Houses can also serve as

applied solutions for professional housing: Arizona's Vail Unified School District, for example,

is planning to build a Tiny House community to house teachers in a city where the median price

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[23] These categories speak to Anson's (2017) descriptions of the major ways in which Tiny Houses
function/manifest as a) Neo-liberal rebellion to dominant templates of production and consumption/falling into
Thoreau's "natural me" stereotype in which Tiny Housers participate in escapism into nature in pursuit of a more
authentic version of themselves; b) commodities that are a means of accumulation and/or serve a specific, temporary
purpose, such as temporary housing while a "real" house is built or during college study; and c) a means for radical
social change or justice, such as creating Tiny House communities to address homelessness.

for homes is upwards of $250,000 (Stoltzfus, 2018, p. 20). In addition, a sampled blogger

describes a growing market for caretaking quarters and the potential for Tiny Houses to fill this

niche:

> Our tiny home is one of a growing number of such dwellings that have been designed for mobility, durability, aesthetics, and customized for the habits, needs, and lifestyle of the occupants. The Modular housing model will indeed be making an economic impact in the near future across a wide demographic range. The next decade promises a growing population who will need end-of-life care, and as we are confronted with the cost of this endeavor, simple dwellings will step into this economic niche in a variety of ways. A spare bedroom can be quickly set up to provide a non-intrusive nurses unit; especially in Alzheimer and Dementia cases where removing a patient from familiar surroundings promotes acceleration of symptoms. Caretakers can live on-site and quickly earn enough money to buy their own tiny home. Many people will choose to provide care to their parents directly, and a tiny house can provide an "instant in-law-unit" (L).

Considering another application, they continue,

> Businesses are downsizing their offices, and small business owners need affordable office space; separating business from home-life is important… imagine how easy that could be (and how much gas money you would save) if the driveway is your "business zone." Artists, writers, artisans, and hobbyists alike already benefit from their tiny backyard sanctuaries (L).

These examples provide a lens to understand how Tiny Houses are a means to economic gains:

saving money on care costs by creating "instant in-law-units right in your backyard," creating an

opportunity for supplemental income through rentals, and a means to spend less in rent while

saving for a more long-term housing solution with the added benefit of, perhaps, owning a small

home that could, after you move into the "real house," provide supplemental income.

Furthermore, the Tiny House lifestyle itself has arguably become a commodity, aided by the

proliferation of Tiny House "reality" television shows that depict potential buyers searching for,

purchasing, and/or building their dream, often luxury, Tiny House, often with the accompanying

luxury-sized price-tag. These programs often posit the Tiny House as a cure-all solution for

happiness, fulfillment, and freedom, available at often exorbitant cost.

Clear class distinctions between Tiny Houses and other mobile housing options, such as

trailer homes, campers, and recreational vehicles, emerge in Tiny House literature and blog

discourse. One Tiny Houser describes,

> A tiny home on wheels is not a travel trailer or a camper that will only last 10 or 15 years. It's built like a regular home, just on a portable foundation, and it can be handed down from one generation to the next" (Fischbach, 2017, p. C22).

 Another sampled blogger carefully makes a similar distinction:

> First of all, a tiny house is exactly what it sounds like... a little, *tiny* house. They look a lot like regular houses, just shrunk down to about a tenth of the size. They're not trailers or mobile homes, although they are usually built on a flat-bed trailer (H).

 However, Anson explains,

> The reality is tiny houses are only aesthetically more desirable than older, 'less attractive' forbearers, like a trailer park or a dense apartment complex. In that aesthetic difference, and its underlying accumulative motivations, an element of the tiny house movement subtly but substantially differentiates itself based on class associations (2014, p. 294).

Indeed, unlike trailer homes, recreational vehicles/campers, and many apartments, which could

also serve to fill most or all of the niche markets Tiny Housers identified, Tiny Houses and their

purported benefits of freedom require significantly more capital to access, but they are free of the

often negative working-class associations that other options conjure.

Barriers, accessibility, and applications. As described throughout this study, accessing

Tiny House Living requires certain existing privileges, including access to financial capital,

certainly, but also: social capital in the form of friends, relatives, neighbors and/or community

members who are willing to support your chosen lifestyle by helping you access resources such

as tools, space to build and/or live in your home, and participation in, perhaps, addressing local

housing and building codes that may create barriers to you living Tiny; and human capital, including your own knowledge, skills, and ability to know how to finance, build, purchase, and live in a Tiny Home. To be expected, Tiny House living, though often heralded as simple, is, for some, anything but. Barriers to Tiny House living articulated in the sampled blogs include three primary forms of capital: financial capital, human capital, and social capital, or more specifically, funding, disability and illness, local housing and building codes, and lack of knowledge/ability or access to others with knowledge/ability to build or design Tiny Houses that are safe to inhabit. Interestingly, in a number of cases, circumstances such as disability, building codes (or lack thereof), and the cost of Tiny Houses were seen as barriers by some bloggers and as creating more accessible ways of living by others depending on their social positions, needs, and experiences. Thus, similarly to how descriptions of freedom from and to emerged in the sample, and how discourse emerges in simple living in general, discourse regarding the accessibility and applicability of Tiny House living is often deeply embedded in social positions, access to capitals, and privileges.

Numerous bloggers identified the cost of Tiny Houses as a significant barrier to accessing Tiny House living.

> Part of the appeal of tiny house living is being able to avoid spending your whole life paying off a huge mortgage. Many people in the tiny house community are also minimalists who endeavor to live simply and debt-free. But, while building or buying a tiny house does cost way less than building or buying a regular house, it still doesn't come cheap (F).

Agreeing, another blogger writes more succinctly:

> The whole point of the tiny house movement is that there is very little to pay for once you have it, right? A home free from rent and debt. That is assuming you can find a free place to put it (A).

A third blogger concludes, "Tiny living isn't really a new form of affordable housing, but

a different type of affordable housing. It's for those who have the means to save, indeed" (J).

Again, accessing the benefits of the American Dream and the Tiny House movement require

preexisting forms of capital and privilege, of which financial capital is a cornerstone. For those

with said capital and/or privileges, who are quoted most in the "from" and "to" sections of this

chapter, the relatively low cost of Tiny Houses in comparison to their more traditional

counterparts offer freedom to access homeownership, minimize debt, and live in accordance with

their values.

Although infrequent, discourse regarding disability status created a notable dichotomy

within sampled texts: bloggers with disabilities described Tiny Houses both as an

insurmountable barrier and a solution to living a fulfilling life within their means. The

differences were based on their needs, in this case, primarily spatial in nature. One sampled

blogger experienced significant barriers to finishing the remodel of and ultimately living in her

Tiny House as a result of critical illnesses and physical disabilities. She described,

> As far as the micro house, I don't think we will ever be able to live in it. It is an amazing idea and could work for, I think, most people, but it presents some issues with us. I think I made it seem as though the laws were the biggest problem, which they are an issue, but if you talk with the city or county, many people are able to work something out. A bigger issue is that we have medical equipment. My wheelchair cannot fit in the house and our electricity system cannot sustain one CPAP, let alone two. If [my child] needs more assistive devices, I'm not sure what we could accommodate in the micro house. So it is a beautiful dream, but like many dreams that illness has taken from us, this too will be taken (I).

Numerous instances in which disabled commenters implored bloggers/readers whether there

existed Tiny Houses that could meet their needs occurred within the sample. Commenters

wondered whether they could use a wheelchair in a Tiny Home, whether there existed reasonable

Tiny House floorplans without lofts and ladders, and whether ramps could be installed on the

front doors of Tiny Houses on wheels. Conversely, others described how living in a Tiny House

benefited them because of their disability/ies. For example, a commenter writes,

> I have an autoimmune disorder, and some days I can't walk any further than about ten feet without assistance because of pain. Other days I'm so exhausted I can't walk further than ten feet. A bigger house would be absolutely impossible for me to even get to the bathroom in, much less keep clean (A).

> Another blogger describes how her disability intersected with her lack of human capital

to inform her Tiny House experience:

> Since I am dealing with adrenal fatigue right now and can't do anything that requires any amount of exertion and don't currently have a husband, father, brother or other random male relative that might want to help me build a house, I decided to go the route of a tiny home builder (H).

Although she had the financial capital required to hire a Tiny House builder, her lack of know-

how[24] and a broader lack of regulation of the Tiny House industry created opportunities for the

contactor to cut corners. Ultimately, she purchased a house that was unsafe to inhabit due to

numerous electric, plumbing, and mechanical issues. Although the problem was ultimately

resolved, and her money refunded, she never did get to live in the Tiny Home. A commenter on

the blog summarizes the larger issues involved:

> As a former building contractor and Tiny House enthusiast, unfortunately, one of the big draws of building a tiny home on a trailer frame is that it doesn't require a permit or inspections. It saves time and money during the build, but it also makes shady contractors able to cut corners and not get caught. Your situation was pretty extreme and I don't see how the builder thought he was going to get away with it. Bad contractors use the homeowners lack of building knowledge to their advantage. I know, half of my construction projects involved fixing work that a shady contractor had done (H).

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[24] It's also interesting to note her employment of sexist stereotypes, especially considering how gender neutral most language regarding building, off-grid living, and self-sufficiency is within Tiny House movement discourse.

Fischbach (2017) describes other instances in which cutting costs, either on the part of a contractor or a DIY Tiny Houser, lends to potential disasters, including emergencies like electric shock and fires, as well as those more rooted in finance, such as the need to strip a fully constructed house back down to studs to rewire it safely and properly after shoddy workmanship (p. C20). Hiring electricians can sometimes be cost-prohibitive, so DIYers will often forgo the professionals and learn to wire their homes themselves. Given the tendencies for Tiny Houses to be described a catalyst for discovering one's potential, self-sufficiency, and learning new skills, and saving money for the things one values most, this is unsurprising. However, as the commenter above aptly reports, because there typically are no or fewer building and code requirements for Tiny Homes, unlike in more conventional foundation homes, inspections are not necessarily required. This is of course, is both a draw and a drawback: Tiny Houses aren't required to adhere to building codes, allowing them to be customized and built relatively cheaply. On the other hand, Tiny Houses aren't required to adhere to adhere to building codes, allowing opportunity for builders to cut corners and thus creates a risk. Regardless of whether they hire a professional or wire their homes themselves, for those without prior knowledge of building standards, access to someone they trust with said knowledge, or a licensed inspector to provide oversight, Tiny Houses are much more liable to be unsafe to inhabit. In other words, for those lacking the appropriate human, social, and/or financial capital, lack of building codes can present as more of a barrier than an opportunity regarding Tiny Houses.

In a similar vein, local zoning codes often prohibit individuals from living full-time in Tiny Houses. Despite the clear distinction between them that exists in some Tiny Housers'

minds, Tiny Houses on trailers are often registered through the Department of Motor Vehicles as

recreational vehicles (RVs) or travel trailers. As one blogger summarizes,

> Most states and municipalities have outlawed homes smaller than a certain size. Tiny
> homes, which average about 130 square feet, fall fairly universally into this prohibited
> size category. In order to circumvent such burdensome rules, most tiny homes are built
> on utility trailers, thereby disqualifying those structures from being considered houses
> and consequently freeing tiny home builders from the accompanying coding and zoning
> and sizing requirements of the state (J).

Although building requirements are often circumvented by building a Tiny House on a mobile

trailer rather than a foundation, city zoning regulations may still apply, which often prohibit

living in RVs and campers, even on private property. Regarding an encounter with their local

zoning department, one blogger explains,

> Code Enforcement ultimately agreed that our house was not an illegal dwelling unit, but
> was indeed a travel trailer (but it was against city ordinances to actually live in it.) Turns
> out that living a more sustainable lifestyle is against the law (L).

Although a Tiny House itself may not be illegal, living in it sometimes proves to be. Another

blogger who purchased a parcel of land with an existing Tiny structure in an unincorporated area

to be free of zoning codes reported significant hardship: in addition to damages that rendered the

structure virtually uninhabitable, albeit legally still inhabitable in their area, the lack of zoning

and local government oversight left them without recourse to address issues such as neighbors

who burned/dumped pollutants such as tires, plastic, furniture, electrical writing, and used

diapers and frequently hunted non-game farm animals. Conversely, another blogger living in an

unincorporated area without enforced zoning laws described their hardships in homesteading and

living in relative isolation as "fun experiments" in which to practice their self-sufficiency and

discover their potential. It's important to note the probable socio-economic class distinctions that

exist between these two bloggers: the former who struggled through their hardships also

described difficulty finding and maintaining employment, while the latter who enjoyed the "experiment" of isolation previously worked for two large technology corporations.

Bloggers frequently identified Tiny Houses as a solution for people who are looking to change their lives. Bloggers described how Tiny Houses, much like Minimalism, DIY culture, homesteading, etc., can serve as a catalyst for radical personal change. Almost universally, sampled blog discourse described how they thought, or at least hoped, Tiny Houses offered a way to more fulfillment and or/a pivot in their lifestyle. Some bloggers were value-motivated and going Tiny meant a declaration against the prescribed American Dream, "Keeping up with the Jonses," and valuing material possessions more than their time and relationships. For others, Tiny Houses were a practical way to create stability in highly-mobile lives of travel. For some, Tiny Houses were a way to maintain autonomy when their life circumstances changed, especially regarding income or illness. For most sampled bloggers, especially those motivated by values or practical solutions to mobility, their hopes and intentions for living Tiny panned out. For bloggers who described their Tiny life as necessitated by a change in life circumstances, this was less often the case. Two bloggers' pursuit of Tiny house living intersected with their own terminal illnesses; for one, Tiny House living never came to fruition due to financial and physical/health constraints; for the other, existing financial hurdles made Tiny House living less the idyllic life of freedom and more an alternative option for affordable housing. In comparing bloggers' stated motivations for living in a Tiny House and their social identities/positions (whenever available/discernable), a relatively clear class divide exists: Bloggers with access to preexisting capitals and privileges tended to report Tiny House living as fulfilling and meeting their expectations, although, of course, not always free of hardship related to laws, regulation,

and social expectations/conformity. Amongst bloggers who come from less privileged social locations and/or who lack necessary social, human, and financial capitals, Tiny House living was more challenging, and with much more frequency, untenable.

      Social change. The relatively infrequent discussions amongst bloggers in the sample regarding Tiny House living/the Tiny House movement and social change was to be expected given that the sample included only personal weblogs and simple livers' general micro-(individual) level focus of change. However, while most bloggers in the sample considered how Tiny Houses could benefit individuals in their search for meaning and freedom, occasionally blog authors considered, primarily intellectually, how Tiny Houses can be a catalyst for social change.[25] With two notable exceptions, discourse regarding Tiny Houses and social change did not propose organizing, solutions, or plans to act, rather, occurred primarily as brief commentary.

      Bloggers generally described how Tiny Housers' individual choices help to propel a wave of social change through micro-level pressures to existing structures such as banks and local governments. One blogger addressed financial and cultural obstacles to Tiny House living, including building codes and financing opportunities.

> Creating a legal infrastructure for these things is going to be difficult because it is so new and the local governments have been working with builders and financiers for decades and are entrenched in system that stands only to be taken down a notch by wide spread self provisioning and refusal to take on debt. This is opening the door not only to a new types of housing, but new types of civic organizations, and new types of thinking about addressing root causes social problems (L).

On a post detailing eight benefits of Tiny House living, a commenter describes,

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[25]   For perspective of frequency, discourse regarding Tiny Houses and social change emerged in approximately one fourth of the blogs sampled, and typically in only one or two sampled posts while discourse regarding how Tiny Houses offered freedom to and from on an individual level occurred in nearly all of the blogs surveyed, and often in at least half of the sampled posts.

This is a pivotal article for turning the Tiny House phenomenon into a social movement. Each of the eight benefits contains seeds of a revolution because it allows everybody to change their life now, influence others as they take on these challenges and integrate the principles of minimalist low impact living into every corner of our oversized existence in every creative way possible. By making these changes now we keep the tiny house dream inside our heads alive and participate in a sea change (D).

Regarding Tiny Houses as a solution or homelessness, a blogger explains,

Do I think it is THE answer to get rid of homelessness? No, that is a very complex issue without ONE magic answer, but I think it is a solid part of it and I do think that it WILL change the lives of many. I also have come to realize these projects are not only faced with exactly the same set of issues all of the rest of the tiny house realm are but they are faced with even more (involving government programs), and I would not want to touch that with a ten foot pole so I am even more impressed with the magnitude of these tiny developments… In a nutshell, do I think tiny houses are the right path to take to address homelessness, I am not qualified to answer that nor do I think there is a one size fits all answer, I divert to trusting the people working in that area, they have a lot more knowhow than me. (A).

Another blogger interviewed the CEO of a Tiny House manufacturing company who does not

live in a Tiny House themself but described, albeit vaguely, how their work seeks to make

positive social change:

We are trying to ruffle as many feathers as possible with local and regional counties right now in Colorado, Texas and Michigan, which were our launching points. I mentioned earlier that I don't have a crystal ball; however, I would be willing to make a prediction that Colorado Springs is going to be the heart and hub of the tiny house movement in the coming months and years. There are already two major tiny house companies here, a new farming/tiny housing community taking shape (more on that soon), and the local government actively moving towards tiny house legalization (with prodding from me of course). There is so much interest in tiny house living here right now that it really is the talk of the town. My bold goal is to be able to say that Colorado Springs is the tiny house capital of the Nation in short order (B).

While these comments are more applied than most discourse regarding barriers to Tiny House

living by posturing Tiny Houses not as a mere solution for individuals but as a catalyst for social

change, they arguably lay firmly within the realm of consideration. In general, they lack a sense

of urgency, motivation to participate in change, and clear descriptions of how change may occur, and instead simply note how it is possible and/or assuming it is happening through diffused individual level action. In all sampled texts, there was only one instance in which a blog participant, a commenter, described concrete steps to enacting social change regarding Tiny Houses:

> I feel the way do about the conditions under which most of us are under. Enslaved to a high cost of living (either by renting or owning a place). Tiny Homes, tiny lifestyles are a wonderful answer for that. If we are to succeed, I think it is important for us generate public support. Perhaps we need to look at other movements who have been successful at making change. When we could affect both gov. and neighbor pocket books negatively (i,e. loss of tax income, or loss of property values for them) we have a challenging road ahead. Perhaps it will be helpful if we continue getting successful, environmentally and neighbor friendly tiny house stories in the press/documentaries, short new stories etc. It is to our advantage to be gracious when we come into contact with gov. agencies etc. and anyone who opposes the Tiny House movement (even though we have lots of frustration, anger and we have compassion for everyone who is suffering without affordable housing). People are more likely to respond to a "kinder" approach, then to and "angry" approach. It's safe to vent here…though. We are all ears. And most of us feel the same way you do! (B)

Freedom Beyond Tiny Houses

The simplicity and purported freedoms that Tiny Houses offer are enticing: having the freedom to pursue one's interests, create meaningful relationships, explore one's values, and serve one's community and freedom from stress, work, debt, distraction, being tethered, and stewarding material possessions and space sounds utopian, indeed. Even amongst those for whom Tiny House living is untenable or undesirable, accessing these benefits, some bloggers report, is still possible: living "tiny" does not necessarily require a Tiny House. One blogger describes,

> It's a shame when someone wants to live in a tiny house but can't either at all or just in the immediate future. But that doesn't mean they have to give up on their dream entirely.

> There are plenty of ways to get the benefits of tiny house living without actually living in a tiny house (F).

Another states, "I have realized that living tiny is not just a physical change but it is change of

mindset" (D). A third,

> I think we need to be careful when talking about tiny, though. It's not so much about how many square feet we have, and having the tiniest house, but how we use and live in the space. It's about right-sizing our homes, and living comfortably within our means (M).

> The ethos of Tiny House living, according to the sampled bloggers, broadly include

living with intention regarding what one consumes and the space(s) one occupies and only

purchasing, taking, using, and owning what fulfills self-defined needs and wants. In this way, a

Tiny House is not necessarily required to "live tiny." One blogger describes, "Living tiny means

we live fully in our space and use it to it's fullest capacity. It doesn't mean you have to live in

168 sq. ft." (M). According to a sampled blogger, owning less stuff; minimizing one's overall

cost of living by finding ways to lower one's bills and housing costs; spending less time on

housework by having less stuff and/or occupying smaller space; minimizing one's impact on the

environment by choosing sustainable consumption, transportation and living methods; learning

to be self-sufficient in ways that make sense for the individual, such as growing some or all of

your own food or harvesting rainwater; traveling lightly; renting rather than owning a home to

increase mobility; and using one's spaces efficiently and intentionally offer methods to garner

the benefits of Tiny House living outside of living in a Tiny House (F). These methods can

translate to a variety of lifestyles and living spaces, including nomadic backpackers, apartment

dwellers, college students, home-owners, elders, families, single adults, and others.

Chapter 7: Discussion

While the positive and negative descriptors of freedom in Tiny House blogs are relatively

straightforward, in combination with deeper considerations of "for whom," they are suggestive

of several considerations of the relationships between Tiny Houses, simple living movements,

and social change. This chapter illustrates and explores the discursive relationship between

Voluntary Simplicity and the Tiny House movement and considers how freedom discourse:

reflects privilege in the Tiny House movement that may affect its viability for both solutions to

individual grievances and social problems; creates space to imagine how redefining "Tiny

House" may allow more opportunities for collective action; raises questions about how Tiny

Housers who pursue Tiny House living as a solution to personal grievances conceive of social

change; and, through these considerations, concludes by revisiting the limitations and

implications of this study.

Discursive Relationships Between Voluntary Simplicity, Minimalism,
and Tiny House Blogs

Blog authors provide a wealth of narratives that describe the ways in which Tiny Houses

both offer freedoms and present barriers to freedoms , and the descriptors of freedom to, from,

and for whom offered throughout these narratives resonate with discourse found in Voluntary

Simplicity and simple living more broadly, reinforcing the appropriateness of using Voluntary

Simplicity as a master frame to understand and analyze simple living practices and movements.

Regarding movement discourse/definitions, like Voluntary Simplicity, Tiny House living

encompasses a range of simple living practices, including off-gridding and self-sufficiency and

Tiny Houses as a solution for professional housing. Grigsby's (2004) description that Voluntary

Simplicity "offers ideology and techniques for arriving at a personal definition of what is enough

and promises a more fulfilling life to those who consume in more sustainable ways, reduce

clutter, and minimize activities they don't find meaningful" (p. 2) also describes the Tiny House

movement. Grigsby's (2004) description of the social realities of Voluntary Simplicity are

equally as applicable: "the [movement] does not formally recruit new members, imposes no strict

guidelines or criteria for inclusion, has no officially sanctioned leaders, is not centralized or

hierarchically organized, and is not aimed primarily at changing public policy" (p. 8). Regarding

freedom discourse more specifically, Librová's (2008) dimensions of simple living (non-

ownership and the freedom from caring for things; freedom from power-based relationships;

freedom from behaving in accordance to the rules and rituals of consumer societies; freedom in

living close to nature; and freedom from being bound to particular places or responsibilities) are

almost identical to freedom discourse embedded in the Tiny House blogs sampled for this study,

as discussed in detail in the previous chapter. The descriptions of freedom offered in Tiny House

blog discourse align to a significant degree with those described by Minimalists: letting go of

superfluous "stuff," ideas, people, commitments, and responsibilities offers space to contribute

more time and energy to the people, causes, communities, things, and ideas that matter most.

Although Tiny Houses are not universally accessible for a variety of spatial, legal, and financial

reasons, among others, living "tiny," when reconceptualized outside the specific structure of a

Tiny House, presents far more tenable opportunities to access freedoms to and from for a larger

swath of "whoms."As one of the sampled bloggers describes, amongst those to whom, for

whatever reason, Tiny House living is untenable, minimalism offers the same or similar benefits

to Tiny House living beyond the specificity of the narrowly defined and largely privileged Tiny

House. In fact, minimalism can be considered the least specifically defined modern iteration of

Voluntary Simplicity; there is no specific operational modal to "doing" Minimalism: no

particular structure, lifestyle, or craft defines it, rather, it is, as one blogger describes, the shift in

mindset and choice to be intentional in how one uses their time, money, energy, and the space(s)

they occupy to live a life that better fits their needs, values, and desires. Considered this way,

Tiny House living is not dissimilar to minimalism, perhaps differentiated only by the focal point

of a Tiny House and that it is, given the narrow definition of "Tiny," arguably far less accessible

than Minimalism.

Privilege

The discernible social characteristics of Tiny House bloggers and the narrative arcs (both

present and absent) regarding "freedom for whom" of the sample imply that, like simple livers

more generally, Tiny House bloggers are probably primarily white, middle class, educated

people with access to capitals who, "[remain] in contact with the mainstream in some ways, such

as through volunteer work, property ownership, investment, and buying goods and services from

locally owned businesses" but seek alternative, more intentional, spiritually fulfilling, and

"simple" ways of living (Grigsby, 2004, p. 6). Like simple livers, Tiny House bloggers described

dominant consumer culture as a competitive, materialistic framework with no integrated concept

of "enough," and provide detailed ways and degrees by which they choose to "opt out" by

consciously negotiating their participation in capitalist economies. However, while Tiny House

bloggers in the sample frequently describe their personal grievances with capitalism and

consumer culture and can often identify the social problems that arise as a result, like simple

livers, they rarely consider whether and how their experiences or conduits of "freedom" provide

accessible, actionable solutions for others. Additionally, a few made sure to differentiate a Tiny

House from a tiny house, clearly stating the distinction(s) between a trailer home and a Tiny

home built on a trailer, seemingly to distances themselves from the negative class associations of

the former.

Social Change and Mobilization

As a social movement, by which I refer to the pursuit of solutions for social problems

rather than only individual grievances, I believe Tiny Houses hold radical potential. OM Village,

a Tiny House village in Madison, Wisconsin, borne out of activism in the Occupy Movement in

2011, is an example of how collectives can apply Tiny Houses as solutions for social problems

(in this case, homelessness). However, the Tiny House movement, as a social movement, is

encumbered in several ways, including, among others: the narrow definition of "Tiny House;" a

breadth of legal barriers such as zoning and building codes; and whether and how current Tiny

House participants who are seeking personal fulfillment can be mobilized to participate in

collective action. Regarding the first point, if Tiny Houses were reconceptualized to include

more broadly defined models of small or "right-sized" housing, including apartments, trailer

homes, recreational vehicles, and others, the greater the opportunity to: mobilize larger numbers

of people from diverse social characteristics with a stake in the issue of Tiny Houses/tiny houses;

challenge the inherent privileges in the way simple living is defined and operates in the Tiny

House movement to create more inclusive dialogue/pathways to finding fulfillment beyond

compulsory consumption; and create a larger pool of capital networks and resources needed to

make measurable change, such as challenges to local building and zoning codes and pathways

for raising consciousness and gathering resources to address issues related to safe and affordable

housing more broadly. Although some local groups, like OM Village, have had measurable

success in challenging local policy and/or creating Tiny House communities to address homelessness and other housing issues, these models constitute only a fraction of the population of Tiny Housers, most of whom operate independently and seem to approach Tiny House living as a solution to their personal grievances rather than for broader social change. Mobilizing this population, who already have skills and knowledge related to tangible experiences of Tiny House living, could provide advantageous resources to efforts for social change.

Although Tiny Houses as solutions for social change is relatively undeveloped concept amongst the sample, numerous bloggers described how their experiences of Tiny House living amplified their understanding of how critical social integration is to their happiness, fulfillment, and, in some cases, survival. Many described how they had significantly more time and energy to engage in what they find meaningful, including relationship building and service. Some ruminated on how to access the benefits of Tiny House living beyond a Tiny House. It is worth considering why such sentiments do not seem to encourage Tiny Housers to engage in social change work: if they understand how the benefits of Tiny House living can transcend the narrow definition of "Tiny House," and have more time, energy, and an heightened sense of purpose in engaging in their communities, what is preventing them from creating the same opportunities for others? Does blogging, or sharing their stories, information, and advice, fulfill their sense of duty? Do they consider spending more time patronizing libraries, visiting parks, supporting local businesses, and the self-satisfaction they get from doing so to be service enough? Does their privilege remain intact so that these revelations about transformation and fulfillment do not expand beyond the boundaries of their own experiences? Although I believe Tiny Houses hold radical potential for social change, considering the clear differentiation that exists between Tiny

House and tiny house and the lack of consideration of "freedom for whom" amongst Tiny House bloggers, I am skeptical that the experience of Tiny House living holds the potential to radicalize those with significant privilege/access to capital networks, who instead appear to simply understand their choice to live in a Tiny House as a "radical" solution to their own grievances.

Implications, Limitations, and Considerations for Future Research

This study implies Tiny House bloggers primarily come from privileged social positions and while they conceive that social change is possible, tend to approach Tiny Houses as a solution for their personal grievances rather than social problems. Additionally, despite their sometimes-transformative experiences living in Tiny Houses, bloggers do not appear to be mobilized to engage in social change work. Furthermore, in addition to legal barriers regarding zoning, there appears to be significant barriers to Tiny House living that are deeply related to existing access to privilege and capital networks: amongst bloggers with preexisting privileges/capital networks, Tiny Houses were often described as fun experiments or a means to a specific end and generally worked out with relatively few barriers. Amongst bloggers without access to the privileges and capital networks to make Tiny House living tenable long-term, they described their foray into Tiny House living as a solution based on their needs and circumstances, such as facing increased medical costs, loss of income, etc. This research provides insight into the limitations of claiming that Tiny Houses can be a solution for anyone seeking fulfillment or a pivot in lifestyle as long as they are willing to "do the work" of minimizing, researching, and committing to living "Tiny," and demonstrates that Tiny Houses exist across a spectrum of change practices that include, among others, seeking personal fulfillment, more optimal professional housing, and, less frequently, solutions to social problems.

The definitions of Tiny Houses as solutions, much like the freedoms they offer, are flexible and more or less tenable depending on access to the privileges and capitals needed to navigate the social, legal, and spatial barriers that impede them.

While this study provides insight into what "freedom" means in Tiny House blogs in regard to freedom to, freedom from, and freedom for whom, and analyzes "freedom" in the larger discursive context of how race, class, gender, ability, and other social characteristics, including access to capital networks, inform experiences of power, privilege, and oppression, empirical evidence of Tiny Housers' social characteristics as a group is beyond the scope of this research, although it would greatly benefit understandings of freedom discourse. It is also important to reiterate that I was intentional about capturing blogs with narrative arcs viable for analyzing both "freedom" and its discursive context; in doing so, I sampled blogs published only by individuals from a particular dwelling, i.e., although it theoretically could have based on inclusion criteria, my sample did not include bloggers' whose experiences involved living in a Tiny House community or collective. To that end, my data may be less likely to capture the complexity of how Tiny Housers whose pursuit of living Tiny is affected by their relationship to social change work define or understand "freedom." Additionally, while this study utilizes several frames and scales of analysis to understand the Tiny House movement as both a cultural phenomenon and a social movement, explicitly defining whether or how the Tiny House movement operates as a social movement is beyond the scope of my research, which primarily focuses, based on the nature of my sample, on Tiny House bloggers who approach Tiny Houses a solution to personal grievances. However, considering the proliferation and penetration of social media into so many aspects of everyday reality, the ways in which individuals perform activism,

individual and collective, are necessarily shifting, and it is worth investigating whether Tiny

House bloggers' general disassociation of their Tiny House lifestyle from a social movement is

predicated on a more generic definition of what a social movement looks like, in other words,

one that does not include social media as a focal point of its methodology. It is interesting to

consider whether Tiny House bloggers perceive blogging as a method of movement (social or

otherwise) participation. Assessing freedom discourse with clearer understandings of how Tiny

Housers conceive of social change work and whether and how they see themselves participating

or benefiting it may provide deeper insights into the applications of freedom, or, in other words

"freedom for whom."

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Discourse in the Tiny House blogs included in the sample provide numerous examples and descriptions of Tiny Houses offering freedom to pursue one's varied interests; create meaningful relationships and connections; serve others or the environment; live more simply; and explore and live in accordance with one's values. With relatively equal frequency, sampled discourse describes Tiny Houses in terms of freedom from: distraction; maintaining stuff and space; being tethered, both physically and figuratively; unhappiness/discontent; stress; jobs, work, and debt; and conformity to others' expectations, including compulsory consumption, accumulation, and the hackneyed American Dream as a moniker for success. These descriptions of freedom are almost identical to those of other simple living movements, such as the Voluntary Simplicity, Back to the Land, Arts and Crafts, Maker, and Minimalist movements and describe negotiations of "opting in" or out of various processes and social norms bloggers have grievances with. However, in these considerations of freedom to and from, much like in Voluntary Simplicity more broadly, sampled Tiny House blog discourse largely failed to consider for whom these freedoms are accessible. In most considerations of "freedom for whom," the discourse largely considered what types of individuals for whom Tiny House living is most beneficial based on lifestyle choice (sedentary vs relatively mobile, for example) and interests (including self-sufficiency, sustainability, etc.) and overlooked or discounted how preexisting social privileges based on identities and characteristics such as race, class, ability status, national origin, and others, and capitals, including social, financial, cultural, and human, affect the accessibility of Tiny House living.

Congruent to simple living movements in general, discourse in the sample infrequently considers Tiny Houses as a movement for social change, rather, Tiny House living is posited as escapism for individuals who choose to live a more simple life that, when done correctly and/or by larger numbers of participants, may lead to change at the individual (micro) and community (meso) level via, for example, a pivot away from compulsory consumption and challenges to local zoning and/or building codes, respectively. To that end, most bloggers in the sample occupy privileged social locations, and amongst those with discernable/declared existing privileges and capitals, Tiny House living was considered an experiment in self-sufficiency and/or a means to an end, such as offering a housing solution while a more permanent structure was built or financed. In contrast, for those without access to preexisting privileges or capitals, Tiny House living was conceptualized as a solution for their various circumstances/greivances but was far less tenable or viable long-term. Additionally, only a few bloggers/commenters in the sample explicitly considered themselves part of a social movement or seeking social change, and of those, only one considered how to actively engage as a change agent and affect change for people other than themself.

Tiny Houses exist in discursive plurality: they are a barrier to and solution for affordable housing; they create barriers to and accessible housing for people with disabilities; they offer a break from and negotiation of the American Dream and consumerism while ideologically relying on them for self-definition; and they offer numerous freedoms to and from to those for whom those freedoms are accessible regardless of whether or not they live in a Tiny House. Tiny Houses offer a focal point for intentional living practices that can translate to freedoms from and to based on one's individual values, needs, and interests, but they are not the conduit for these

freedoms. In fact, for individuals seeking solutions to personal grievances, the purported

freedoms offered by Tiny House living are arguably far more accessible outside the Tiny House

itself considering the significance of the financial, legal, and spatial obstacles presented by the

narrow, privileged definition of a Tiny House, which is not a trailer, shanty, or small apartment

and requires more capital, knowledge, and resources to access.

The Tiny House movement operates, in many ways, as a class- and privilege-based

commodity of intentional living practices that is isolated by a Tiny structure which is but an

accessory to intentional or simple living: if a simple life is one's goal, a Tiny House can be both

unnecessary and unnecessarily complicated in pursuit of simplicity and its associated freedoms.

While Tiny Houses can offer viable solutions to social problems, including homelessness, Tiny

Houses as a solution for social change appears to be an underdeveloped idea amongst Tiny

House bloggers in the sample. To paraphrase what Brown wrote of the Back to the Land

movement, Tiny Houses in general don't appear to offer justice, but they are a way out, or,

perhaps, in, depending upon what one is seeking and their degree of privilege and access to

capitals (2011, p. 30).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Inclusion Criteria

1. Blogs must be publicly available, i.e. do not require registration or a password to access.

2. Blogs must emphasize, although not exclusively focus on, Tiny House living. Tiny House living must be the subject of, meaningfully incorporated into, or relevant to the subject of at least 60% of posts.

3. Blogs must be written by dwellers who have either lived in Tiny structures as their primary dwelling for six months or have published ten or more blog posts that discuss life in a Tiny structure OR, if bloggers ultimately do not choose to live in a Tiny structure, blogs must have significant content discussing the reasons the author wished to live/was building a Tiny House and the reasons they choose not to/ultimately could not live in a Tiny structure.

4. In effort to reduce analytical difficulties that arise due to significant socio-cultural differences, blogs must be written by authors participating in the Tiny House movement (as defined in the previous point) within the United States and Canada. For the same reasons, only blogs written in English were considered for this study.

5. In effort to maintain sample consistency, only individual/personal weblogs were used for this study. Blogs that do not focus on the stories of a particular dweller or dwellers in a single Tiny structure were not included in this study.

6. Blogs must contain either two years' worth or fifty total blog posts.

7. Blogs most recent post have been published within six months of the start of this study (December 2, 2015), or have a stated reason for the absence of posts or the abandonment of the blog.

Appendix B: Analysis Datasheet

Assigned identifier:

Blog name & URL:

Dweller's name(s):

Age(s):

Gender(s):

Race(s):

Ability status(es):

(Im)Migrant status(es):

Occupation(s), pre- and during/post-Tiny living:

Blog start date:

Blog end date (if applicable):

Reason for ending blog:

Number of entries:

Blog generates income?

Time lived in Tiny House:

Geo-location of structure:

Description of Structure (foundation vs. mobile, on-grid vs. off-grid):

Square footage/size of the structure:

Built or purchased?

Total cost of Tiny structure:

Loan status:

Number of dwellers in the structure:

Reason/goals for living Tiny:

Expressions of "freedom" related to Tiny living:

Expressed Challenges of Tiny living: