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Trailer Park Residents: Are They Worthy Of Society's Respect

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TRAILER PARK RESIDENTS: ARE THEY WORTHY OF SOCIETY'S RESPECT?

By

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Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2015

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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For the Degree of

Master of Arts

May

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This thesis, submitted by Steven Thomas Anderson, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom this work has been done and is hereby approved.

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This thesis is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirement of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

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Title Trailer Park Residents: Are They Worthy of Society's Respect?

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Steven Thomas Anderson
April 24, 2017

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ABSTRACT

Existing research is limited in explaining the existence of and reasons for stereotypes held against trailer park residents. This study uses an experimental design to measure attitudes towards trailer park residents, specifically in terms of being considered worthy of society's respect. An Internet questionnaire was designed and administered to a sample of 559 introductory sociology students at a Midwestern university using semantic differentials to measure attitudes towards a fictitious couple. Participants were divided into a control and an experimental group. The groups were presented with two different vignettes, which were the same except for the experimental group where the vignette contained the term trailer park as a descriptor. The results indicated differences between the control group and the experimental group on several measures were significant. The results supported the hypothesis that those who live in trailer parks were deemed less worthy of society's respect by college students. In conclusion, the findings support the notion that people who live in trailer parks have been singled out in American culture for denigration.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Society is full of inequities. Whether reading the newspaper or watching the news, stories of racial conflicts and economic disparity and inequality abound. Simon (2016) suggests that conflict between groups produces a great deal of misery and frustration – particularly for those who belong to a marginalized or stigmatized group. America was founded on the principle that “all men are created equal” (Jefferson 1776), suggesting that all people are deserving of respect and fair treatment. Unfortunately, there is plenty of evidence suggesting that we don’t always treat those we deem inferior with respect.

Simon (2016) suggests that those undervalued by society are shunned, humiliated, shortchanged, and exploited. He concludes that they know they are being mistreated and resent it. In a recent qualitative study of mothers within a trailer park, one of the participants, a mother of three, described the stereotypes she believed others had about her and those like her when she said, “If you live in a trailer park, you’re on welfare, use drugs, and are a bad parent – automatically” (MacTavish 2007:74). To understand the motivation of this study, it is important to understand the example of this woman. She is a person who may be viewed as less worthy, less deserving, and looked down upon by society. At the same time, she understands that she bears no resemblance to these stereotypes (MacTavish 2007). The purpose of this study is to determine whether a predominantly negative attitude towards trailer park inhabitants exists using an experimental survey design.

One of the least understood and researched groups that are part of the underclass are trailer park residents. Approximately ten percent of the total housing stock in America is made up of trailer houses, and roughly half of those living in a trailer house also reside in a trailer park (National Consumer Law Center 2008). So far, little research has been done to quantify the level of prejudice that exists toward those who live in trailer parks. Media portrayals of trailer park residents in television shows like *Trailer Park Boys* and *COPS* often show them as a group of people who live on the fringes of society – engaged in illicit drug use and criminal activities, but social psychologists have done little research about trailer park residents. This thesis proposes to investigate whether prejudices and stereotypes held about trailer park residents exist among American young adults in the Midwest. One assumption of this thesis is that study participants' attitudes resemble the entirety of American society (Smith 2002) because, as stated by social judgement theory, attitudes are made up of stimuli from the environment.

Social judgement theory describes an individual's attitude and its potential for change as a judgement process (Chau et al. 2014). This explains how people determine their behavior towards each other based on interaction with a variety of individuals and groups. Normative descriptors of a specific social group are formed and passed on verbally and non-verbally (Hogg and Reid 2006). Social group members believe they are entitled to the values and positive emotions associated with their group. Included in this is the right to perceive themselves as superior to other social groups (Brown 2010).

Based on social judgement theory, this thesis theorizes that the term trailer park causes some sort of reaction from individuals. As such, this thesis employed an experimental survey design focusing on the key term trailer park. Survey participants were split into control and

experimental groups and asked to rate a fictitious couple. Two different scenarios were presented. Within the scenarios, all things were equal except where the term trailer park was used in the experimental group. This experimental survey design is meant to test the hypothesis that those living within trailer parks will be deemed less worthy of society's respect (MacTavish, Notter, and Shamah 2008).

A Brief History of Trailer Parks and Personal Background

Although the proper terms for a trailer park and trailer are manufactured home community and manufactured home, the derogatory terms trailer and trailer park still permeate society (Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013). For this study, the derogatory terms will be used because they are believed to be more recognizable by those participating in this study when considering the research question. This type of housing serves as the largest supply of unsubsidized affordable housing in the country (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau 2014). Over 22 million Americans call a trailer home – home. Many of those residing in trailer parks are senior citizens (Hoyt 1954).

The negative association between trailer parks and those on the lower strata of economic society began during the Great Depression (Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013). They symbolized the vagabond nature of the traveling society that moved from place to place looking for work at that time. During the 1940s and 1950s, the homes were still very mobile, but started to contain the features found in a site built home and became more permanent in nature. Today's trailer house is built of high quality materials that rival site built homes. At the same time, they are typically less mobile than their older counterparts. Less than one percent of the more modern

homes are relocated once transported to a site due to the high cost and specialized equipment needed to relocate a home (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau 2014).

My interest in trailer parks and their residents began in the mid-2000s, after I retired from a government job in California and moved to Utah to be closer to family. We had a certain amount of money saved and felt the best buy for us was a trailer home in a senior trailer park because we wanted a home that was ours with a little patch of earth to garden. At the time, the space rent was reasonable and utilities were included in the rent. It turned out to be one of the worst decisions my wife and I ever made. Our neighbors were great, and we still have close relationships with many of them, but space rents were constantly increasing and sometimes they happened as many as three times per year for fairly substantial amounts. The park owner also unilaterally altered the month-to-month rental agreement so he could sub-meter and charge the homeowners for water, sewer and garbage. Water meters were directly attached to the homeowner's home without their permission.

Utah law did not make any provisions protecting trailer park residents against such actions. Efforts to change the laws were met with fierce resistance from the finance, insurance, and real estate industries (often considered the most influential of lobbying interests). Additionally, the park owners' association contested that proposed laws designed to engage homeowners and park owners in a dialog over things such as space and other rents and fees, park rules, and facility maintenance a violation of their property rights. Meeting with the chairman of Utah's House of Representative's Rules Committee – I was told that I was considered the exception to the rule and that most trailer park residents did not have the capacity or desire to get involved in the political process. I finally said "enough" when we sold

our home and moved out of the park. We lost over \$30,000 because banks would not finance the resale of a trailer home located in a trailer park. These events convinced me that trailer park residents – in general – were held in very low esteem by society. Since then, I have made it my life's work to research and write about the problems facing trailer park residents, beginning with this first study regarding people's attitude towards this group of people.

In the next chapter, I will describe the theoretical perspective of social judgment theory and how it relates to this study. I will also explore the limited research that has been done regarding trailer parks and other studies that contain similarities to the issues facing trailer park residents. Chapters Three and Four cover the methods used and results obtained from this experiment on attitudes towards trailer park residents. The final chapter discusses the findings and conclusions of this study and makes suggestions for future projects.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter covers several areas including the theoretical perspective behind this thesis, existing attitudes and stereotypes, how trailer park residents are depicted in the media, and how these stereotypes reinforce stratification.

Theoretical Perspective

The basic premise of social judgment theory suggests that an individual's attitude and its potential change is a judgment process (Chau et al. 2014). It was formally introduced in the 1960s as a theory designed to study how people evaluate and change their behavior based on interactions with others. Group norms are defined as regularities in attitudes and behaviors and shape perceptions of a specific social group, including how groups may be different from other social groups (Hogg and Reid 2006).

Social judgment theory suggests that the human attitude spectrum consists of three latitudes: acceptance, indifference, and rejection (Siero and Doosje 1993). When a person receives a message, they respond in one of three ways. The first is a latitude of acceptance in which the message is one the person agrees with. Second is the latitude of non-commitment where the person neither agrees nor disagrees. The final latitude is that of rejection where the person disagrees with the message being expressed.

Social judgment theory is ecological because it is not encapsulated within an individual (Siero and Doosje 1993). It calls for attention to both internal and external environments that provide various stimuli that affect the decision-making process. For example, if a message is

consistent with a person's belief system, it is within their latitude of acceptance (Chau et al. 2014). A contrary message is within the individual's latitude of rejection and everything in between is in the latitude of non-commitment. Putting it in more simple terms, the more closely a message matches a person's belief system, the greater the possibility it will be accepted.

The bedrock principle of social judgment theory is that a person cannot possess absolute knowledge about their environment (Siero and Doosje 1993). Through both verbal and non-verbal communication methods, normative descriptors of a specific social group are both formed and passed on (Hogg and Reid 2006). Putting it more succinctly, when we learn something we pass it on to those within our sphere of influence (Covey 1992). Those we share things with pass that information to those within their sphere of influence until the message permeates society. From there a person develops a belief that they are part of a specific social group and are entitled to the values and positive emotions associated with that group (Hogg and Reid 2006). Included in this is the right to perceive themselves as superior to other social groups (Brown 2010).

This results in categorizing people based on the person's representation of a certain group that is outside their group in a context-dependent prototype (Hogg and Reid 2006). Group prototypes specify how people feel, think, and behave towards social groups different from their own. These prototypes are shared with those within the "in-group" to describe the characteristics of the "out-group." These prototypes may or may not be based on actualities, and usually contain degrees of inaccuracy.

The perceived “groupness” of a social category serves to facilitate stereotyping (Brown 2010). This is based on a perception that members of that social group are less worthy of respect than others and possess either a single attribute or a set of attributes, such as being on welfare or taking illicit drugs. This leads to a person’s judgment of another based-on stereotype – whether factual or mythic.

People make judgments of other people based on a variety of criteria, including respectability. Some judgments are accurate, while others are based on inaccuracies emanating from a variety of sources. The most common thing people do when judging others is look on the person they are judging in a more negative light (Wrightsmen 1992). These negative perceptions may be indicative of society’s definition of who and who doesn’t belong (MacTavish 2007).

Stereotypes arise from the belief that most members of a group, such as trailer park residents, share common attributes (Brown 2010). Such stereotypes may arise from inferences that people make about the psychological attributes of the group being targeted. They may also be used as ideologies designed to maintain the status quo. Stereotypes act as mental shortcuts designed to speed up investigating the depth of each person we encounter (Brown 2010).

Being perceived as someone who doesn’t belong is bound to impact a person’s self-esteem. Self-esteem is a primary factor when it comes to performance (Boucher and Rydell 2010). The lower one’s self-esteem, the lower one performs. Self-esteem and performance are directly linked to stereotypes. Members of groups identified with negative stereotypes and deemed less worthy of society’s respect usually possess a lower self-esteem than those

identified with a more positive stereotyped group. At the same time, negative stereotypes are often used unfairly and create negative outcomes for those who are the subjects of these attitudes (Duguid and Thomas-Hunt 2015).

Prejudices are expressed as the subsequent behaviors based on the emotions of individuals towards a group of people (Smith 2002). They emanate from expressed and taught behavior, especially from childhood. As with racial prejudices, attitudes towards those who perceive themselves as superior are passed down from generation to generation, typically while children are very young (Brown 2010). Such passing down of perceptions of superiority is essential in forming a caste system in our society based on social status (Alexander 2012).

As applied to this study, trailer park residents are considered inferior to other groups by society (Harry 2006). Social judgment theory comes into play because the mere image of a trailer park sends a signal to the mind that trailer park residents are members of an “out group” due to learned patterns of thought passed from one generation to the next. These judgements are based on ideas related to home ownership. The purpose of this study is to determine the extent and degree stereotypes come into play when considering trailer park residents. Qualitative and quantitative studies of trailer park stereotypes have explored the subject from both the trailer house owner’s perspective and the general public’s perspective. All the studies reviewed suggest these attitudes exist (Bali and Davis 2008; Barthe, Leone, and Stitt 2014; Center 2015; Consumer Financial Protection Bureau 2014; Edwards, Klemmack, and Hatos Jr. 1973; Harry 2006; Hill 1999; Hoyt 1954; MacTavish 2007; MacTavish, Notter, and Shamah 2008).

Social Distinction and Home Ownership

A home is thought to be a marker of social distinction (Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013). This holds true for the traditional site built house. The larger the home, the more social distinction a person is believed to possess. In a typical trailer park, “social perceptions are engineered for the comfort of those whose economic limits prevent them from buying what middle class people call a “real home” (Hill 1999:225). The typical buyer of a trailer house is looking for social, not physical mobility. The industry itself promotes a dream of home ownership by offering amenities once thought available to only those who are perceived as attaining a higher social class at a more affordable price (Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013; Hill 1999). Despite containing many features and innovations that rival site built homes, these homes and those who occupy them are subjected to ridicule. When first introduced during The Great Depression, trailer parks were thought of as a temporary place to concentrate those wandering from place to place looking for work (Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013) and whose residents were unfit to be around “proper people.” The end of World War II brought about different perceptions of trailer homes, trailer parks, and those that lived within them, which was not necessarily an improvement.

Affordable Housing and Trailer Park Stereotypes

Trailer parks are considered part of the affordable housing equation by many affordable housing advocates because they are part of the solution for achieving the “American dream” for those with low to moderate incomes. These advocates often face significant opposition when it comes to affordable housing based on the perceived character of future residents (Tighe 2012). Residents living within non-poor areas are apt to protest any affordable housing

project, including trailer parks (Tighe 2012). The basic elements of the stereotypes against affordable housing projects consist of increased crime, a sense that affordable housing programs are giveaways, concern for decreased property values, and lack of aesthetic appeal (Belden and Russonello 2003).

Along with existing stereotypes towards affordable housing, additional stereotypes are directly associated with residents of trailer parks (Newitz and Wray 1997). The homes themselves have been categorized as magnets for tornados, poor white trash, and macaroni and cheese, which is symbolic of a lack of sophistication (Harry 2006). Trailer park residents are equated with unskilled labor when compared to skilled craftsmen (Kumar 2004). The terms “trailer trash” or “trailer park trash” are still prominent in society and are synonymous with the term “white trash” (Harry 2006). White trash consists of two components: white, which is based on race, and trash, something that needs to be discarded for whiteness to continue as the dominant race and culture (Newitz and Wray 1997). Stereotypes associated with trailer park residents and racial minorities contain many similarities.

The negative stereotypes associated with trailer park residents is reflective of linguistic intergroup bias, which becomes evident when expressed through different mediums. For example, the proper name for a trailer park is a manufactured home community. In many media depictions, it is still called a trailer park. This type of bias is often considered automatic and, despite any new information, is almost impossible to dispel. This is further illustrated by the example of former president Bill Clinton. Among his many public relations problems, he was routinely portrayed by his detractors as “trailer trash,” i.e. a person who is impulsive, shiftless, and lascivious with no moral self-restraint (Thompson and Tian 2008).

Those who are poor or of limited means are often depicted negatively by the media. News magazine photographs are often the only things viewed and remembered by readers who typically skim through a magazine and rarely read it cover to cover (Newitz and Wray 1997). The term “trailer trash,” emanates from an amalgam of visual images that reinforce commonly held perceptions. Trailer park residents have long been derided as the lowest form of life when it comes to social standing, possessing a series of negative cultural habits and interests (Harry 2006). Many poor whites are caricatured as “poor white trash,” “trailer trash,” “rednecks,” and “crackers” (Jones 2009). They are denied the socioeconomic benefits afforded to more prosperous whites. Although whiteness often suggests power and influence; “trailer trash” lose much of their “whiteness”, and share many of the same experiences associated with traditional minority groups, including African-Americans and Hispanic/Latinos populations (Jones 2009).

In a qualitative study of mothers and children who live in a trailer park one teenage resident described the stereotypes he often encountered, “Some parents think my parents must be doing drugs. My parents aren’t like that, but they know where I live” (MacTavish 2007:74). Trailer parks are often viewed as havens for poor urban whites (Desmond 2012). Yet, the clear majority of trailer parks are located within standard metropolitan statistical areas (French and Hadden 1965).

Indeed, negative perceptions don’t always match reality. For example, a 1996 study found that the average manufactured home buyer was between 40 and 49 and was a white-collar professional (Harry 2006). Another study by Barthe, Leone, and Stitt (2014) concluded that those living in a trailer park do not create significant crime problems. The authors contend that trailer home owners live near one another and feel the need to maintain the peace as their

housing options are limited, especially considering the insecurity that comes with trailer park residency (Aman and Yarnal 2010). This runs contrary to the myth that trailer parks are crime ridden (Harry 2006).

Resulting Stratification

Stereotypes, even if inaccurate, lead to stratification. Power, wealth and status are thought of as the primary dimensions of stratification (Bowles 2013). Put simply, these variations lead to significant differences in power resources between classes – favoring those with the greater degree of power resources, typically the well off (Dirlam and Jacobs 2016).

Stratification comes into play because many former welfare recipients are now working in low and moderate income jobs. They live in trailer homes as part of an effort to improve their social standing (Latimer and Woldoff 2010). They typically gain nothing in the process. Trailer park residents are vulnerable for a variety of reasons, including loss of value after purchase of their home. In addition, space rents have experienced continuous increases, despite the recent recession, and are consigning those of low and moderate incomes to financial ruin (Desmond 2012).

Stereotypes separate one group from another through use of specific characteristics that other individuals do not have (Judd and Park 1993). Evidence for this comes from lobbying efforts against affordable housing projects by community activists who claim the projects would lead to an increase in crime, drug use, and other negative outcomes (Tighe 2012). Katherine MacTavish (2007) studied how students from a town of 8,000 in Oregon bussed all the children from the community's five trailer parks to a school on the edge of town. She noted that the town concentrated all children from low and moderate income families into a single school.

MacTavish contended that such actions reinforce negative perceptions of trailer parks and their residents. Part of this includes attitudes that trailer parks are a drain on the community's limited resources. Such stratification suggests that trailer park children do not possess the same academic capacities as their more affluent counterparts and require "special help" (Brown, Lesane-Brown, and Tanner-Smith 2009).

Deeming a group less worthy of society's respect is one element of creating a caste, resulting in a measure of control towards trailer park residents that range from the non-existence of laws protecting trailer park residents from potential abuses to exclusionary laws and policies that favor the land owners with no reciprocal protections for the person who owns a trailer home residing on the land owner's property. In most states, trailer park residents are easily evicted and their homes taken from them with no remuneration (Center 2015). Such measures of control are designed to relegate trailer park residents to a low socio-economic status with no opportunity for societal advancement.

The precarious situation for those of low to moderate incomes comes into focus when considering how local governments use urban gentrification as a mode of exclusionary eminent domain (Dana 2009). This occurs in large cities with a mix of wealthy and poor neighborhoods in gentrified areas. The cities condemn large areas – basically forcing the poor to either concentrate in remaining poor areas or leave. State and local zoning laws enhance the ability of local governments to rezone trailer parks out of existence in cities and townships (Worden 1963). The end result is that many cities are using zoning regulations to put trailer parks out of business and there is little residents can do to stop the process (Latimer and Woldoff 2010). The result of the precarious nature of a trailer park resident is an uneven distribution of

resources that typically favor the well-off, leaving them with esteem issues (Boucher and Rydell 2010; Dirlam and Jacobs 2016).

The importance of this comes into play when considering trailer park home owners are denied basic constitutional rights in several states – including North Dakota (Center 2015). Additionally, although the cost to purchase a trailer home is less than the cost of a site-built home, banks charge interest rates that are four to five times higher than rates for a site built home for terms of 20 years or less (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau 2014). Efforts to change these policies have been met with substantial resistance, particularly when it comes to trailer park residents (Federal Housing Finance Agency 2016).

This research adds to the literature by quantitatively measuring the attitudes of people towards trailer park residents. Although the examples above illustrate their potential existence, this study seeks to verify and confirm this phenomenon. Bearing this in mind, the hypothesis of thesis is: college students will rate those living within trailer parks less worthy of society's respect compared to those living in other types of housing. The next chapter describes the methods used in this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The basic research question of this thesis is whether people view trailer park residents as less worthy of society's respect. To answer this question an experimental survey was used to measure the latitude of prevailing attitudes towards those who live in trailer parks (Siero and Doosje 1993). This was accomplished by surveying introductory sociology students at a Midwestern university in the Fall 2016 semester. Students completed an online questionnaire between September and October. The survey design called for participants to be split into two groups: a control and an experimental group. The control group was asked to rate a fictitious couple based on several criteria using a semantic differential scale after reading a vignette describing the attributes of the couple except their mode of housing. The experimental group had the same vignette except the term trailer park is used as the couple's housing choice. Additional information gathered in the survey included basic demographic information about respondents, such as race/ethnicity, gender, year of school, social class, life in the United States.

After conducting listwise deletion of missing data, the sample size is 559 undergraduate students out of a potential sample of 724 undergraduate students. The total response rate was 77 percent. Because the data were gathered from a convenience sample, the statistical outcomes are preliminary in nature.

Dependent Variables

In the case of this experiment, the text of the vignette was the same except for where the couple live. The first vignette has a couple living in a trailer park, while in the second vignette

the type of housing is unspecified. The remaining components of both vignettes are as follows:

“Bob and Mary are a married couple in their 20s with two children under 10 years old. Bob works as a customer service manager at a big box retailer and is currently taking one class at a community college to see if he likes it. Mary graduated from high school and works part-time at a convenience store when Bob is off work. Bob drives a pickup truck and likes to hunt and fish while Mary likes to play cards and visit with her friends. Bob and Mary live [in a trailer park] on the outskirts of Omaha.”

Survey respondents then rated their perceptions of Bob and Mary by answering several questions. Word combinations such as good vs bad are used to measure the respondent’s responsiveness to different word combinations for semantic differentials (Jenkins, Russell, and Suci 1958). These questions included:

1. How worthy are Bob and Mary of society’s respect? Unworthy = 0 vs Worthy = 100
2. How would you rate Bob and Mary when it comes to? Foolish = 0 vs Wise = 100
3. How would you rate Bob and Mary when it comes to? Dirty = 0 vs Clean = 100
4. How would you rate Bob and Mary when it comes to? Lazy = 0 vs Hard Working = 100
5. How would you rate Bob and Mary when it comes to? Dumb = 0 vs Smart = 100
6. How would you rate Bob and Mary when it comes to? Immoral = 0 vs Moral = 100
7. How would you rate Bob and Mary when it comes to? Drunk = 0 vs Sober = 100

To obtain as accurate a measurement as possible a semantic differential scale was employed to determine a value for these interval ratio variables. The survey itself had a sliding bar where respondents moved the bar between both words with the numeric value recorded but not visible to the participant. In previous studies, such a scale proved better than Likert versions in terms of model fit and uni-dimensionality when individual attitudes are being measured (Friborg, Martinussen, and Rosenvinge 2006). Ratings with 5-point scales are troubled by shared ranks and a low degree of differentiation between aspects on the individual level (Funke and Reips 2012). The ability to detect small differences creates far more possibilities for data analyses when using this type of rating scale.

The primary dependent variable used here is the question regarding Bob and Mary's worthiness of society's respect. All the other variables are illustrative variables that provide additional clarification by providing information about the various stereotypes associated with trailer park residents and how they relate to the question of worthiness of society's respect.

Independent Variable

The independent variable, group, represents the random assignment of survey participants to either the control or experimental group. An important aspect of this experiment was to ensure the experimental and control group was relatively evenly split and that it was done at random. This was accomplished with the survey software that assigned participants to the groups randomly into two groups; experimental = 0 and control = 1. The control group was assigned the vignette where Bob and Mary lived on the outskirts of Omaha. The experimental group involved the vignette where Bob and Mary lived in a trailer park on the outskirts of Omaha.

Control Variables

Since other sociodemographic characteristics may influence the likelihood of expressing stereotypes, I control for the following variables: gender, race and ethnicity, year in college, and length of time in the United States.

Gender was coded Male = 1 and Female = 2. Race/ethnicity was recoded as White = 1 and Non-White = 0. The length of time in the United States was coded (1) less than 5 years; (2) 5 to 10 years; (3) Over 10 years; and (4) All my life. The question, “What is your social class background?” was coded (1) lower class; (2) working class; (3) middle class; (4) upper middle class; and (5) upper class. Four answers (0.7 percent) were system missing. The year of college variable was coded as (1) Freshman; (2) Sophomore; (3) Junior; (4) Senior; and (5) Graduate Student. A total of six respondents (1.1 percent) were listed as system missing. “Other” responses were recoded as “system missing.” Missing data were not included in the data analysis.

Reliability and Validity of Data

The survey was coded so that the same IP address was unable to take the survey more than once, helping to prevent identical answers and multiple attempts. The two instructors of these classes offered their students extra credit for participating in the survey. Each record was assigned a unique identifier.

Pre-Testing

A pre-test was performed in May 2015 using an interval scale to measure the social standing of the fictitious couple in both vignettes. The sample indicated the possibility of a contrast between the two vignettes; however, it was not significant enough to determine this

empirically. It was determined after the pre-test that a scale of 0 to 100 would be a more effective measurement standard (Creswell 2014).

A second pre-test was performed in August 2016. This test employed the sliding scale. The initial data appeared to show significant differences between the two vignettes. It also suggested that housing choice was a significant factor shaping respondent's answers to the initial question. As part of the pre-test, respondents were interviewed after taking the survey for their feedback. Names were not recorded and the respondents were selected at random during lunch time at the University's Memorial Union. Some of the comments include the following:

- I rated them as thrifty because they lived in a trailer-park and carefree for the same reason.
- Education should be finished before a couple decides to have a child.
- Living in a trailer-park is harder on kids because they have to work harder than other kids to get a good education.
- The lifestyle in a trailer-park is very aggressive where kids grow up to be their parents.
- The couple seem like a normal-average American family.
- He is in a routine and taking a college class suggests he is trying to change it.
- I tried to fight through my own prejudices.
- I tried to imagine myself in their condition.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data were downloaded from the university's server to the researcher's personal computer, which is double-password protected. The data were analyzed using the university's

shared license of the SPSS statistical software program. The initial analysis was comprised of a series of *t* tests, based on seven dependent variables. A baseline ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was performed to determine the strength of the group variable's relationship to the primary dependent variable – worthiness of society's respect. A second OLS regression was performed using all independent variables (group, gender, race/ethnicity, life in the U.S., year in school, and social class background) to determine if the group variable remained significant after controlling for these factors.

Ethical Considerations

Once the dataset was downloaded, the survey was closed and not accessible to anyone except the researcher and advisor. The exclusion and deletion of IP addresses promoted the anonymity of survey participants. The unique record identifier randomly assigned to each record has nothing to do with an individual's identity. Any other potential information that may be used to identify study participants was deleted. The next chapter covers the results of this thesis.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

When examining and interpreting the results, the main thing to remember is that this is an experiment involving college student's judgment of people in which the only difference between the experimental and control group is the use of the term "trailer park" in one of the vignettes. As shown in Table 1, the division between the experimental and control group is relatively even with 49.73 percent of respondents in the experimental group and 50.27 percent in the control group. To better understand this experiment, it is important to have a basic understanding of the survey participants by reviewing descriptive statistics regarding them.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n (%)</i>
Group	Experimental 278 (49.7)
	Control 281 (50.3)
Life in the US	Less than 5 years 15 (2.7)
	5 to 10 years 6 (1.1)
	Over 10 years 33 (5.9)
	All my life 499 (89.3)
College Year	Freshman 351 (62.8)
	Sophomore 113 (20.2)
	Junior 61 (10.9)
	Senior 25 (4.5)
	Grad Student 3 (0.5)
Gender	Male 204 (36.5)
	Female 348 (62.3)
Social Class	Lower Class 8 (1.4)
	Working Class 62 (11.1)
	Middle Class 250 (44.7)
	Upper Middle Class 210 (37.6)
	Upper Class 25 (4.5)
Race	Non-White 70 (12.5)
	White 489 (87.5)

In this study, 82 percent of the participants indicated they came from either a middle-class or upper-middle-class background. The clear majority of study participants – roughly 95 percent – were either lifelong or more than ten year residents of the United States. Approximately 83 percent of respondents were either in their freshman or sophomore year of college. This is desirable because of the earlier contention made that students in their first or second year of college are likely to maintain the values and attitudes that existed in their home environment (Smith 2002). About 88 percent of the respondent referred to their racial/ethnic background as white. Sixty-two percent of the sample was female.

Table 2 t test Results

	Total Sample – N = 559			Experimental Group – N = 278		Control Group – N = 281		t test Comparison of Means	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Difference	Std. Error
Worthiness of Society's Respect	61.91	27.68	100	57.71	27.68	66.07	27.01	8.354	2.32***
Foolish vs. Wise	48.15	24.23	100	44.16	24.23	52.10	24.89	7.935	2.02***
Dirty vs. Clean	49.37	29.05	100	44.14	29.05	54.54	30.27	10.400	2.42***
Lazy vs. Hard Working	53.75	30.34	100	50.21	30.34	57.26	29.77	7.055	2.55**
Dumb vs. Smart	46.56	26.34	100	42.68	26.34	50.40	27.34	7.723	2.21**
Immoral vs. Moral	68.33	24.19	100	72.67	24.19	64.04	27.86	-8.636	2.02***
Drunk vs. Sober	59.93	31.50	100	56.85	31.45	62.97	31.65	6.125	2.66*

Note: $p < .05^*$; $p < .01^{**}$; $p < .001^{***}$

Respondents were given one of two scenarios, one where Bob and Mary live on the outskirts of Omaha and the other where Bob and Mary live in a trailer park on the outskirts of Omaha. Means and standard deviations were computed for both control and experimental groups and *t* tests were conducted to compare the means. Mean differences between the control and experimental groups on the dependent variables were statistically significant at the alpha level of $p \leq .05$.

The hypothesis predicted that the experimental group would hold trailer park residents less worthy of society's respect than the control group where no form of housing is mentioned.

The thesis hypothesis is supported by the analysis. The worthiness of society's respect variable shows $M=57.71(SD=24.194)$ for the experimental group and $M=66.07(SD=27.860)$ for the control group. The t test results showed this mean difference was statistically significant. Of the seven dependent variables, six are considered different components of the stereotypes held against trailer park residents. All the dependent variables, except immoral versus moral, had a mean value that was less for the experimental compared to the control group. For the experimental group, $M=72.67(SD=24.194)$ and the control group $M=64.04(SD=27.860)$.

Regression Analysis

To test the robustness of these findings, two separate Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analyses were performed. The first model tested the effect of the independent variable (group) on the dependent variable (worthiness of society's respect). The second model included all control variables (group, life in the US, gender, race/ethnicity, year of college, and social class background). This was done to see if the relationship between the primary independent and dependent variables remained the same after controlling for the demographic characteristics of respondents.

Table 3 Regression Results – Worthiness of Society’s Respect

	Model 1 - Base Model	Model 2 - Full Model
Group	8.354*** (2.317)	8.336*** (2.330)
Lived in the US		1.830 (2.290)
Year of College		1.495 (1.352)
Gender		3.796 (2.507)
Social Class		1.467 (1.503)
Race/Ethnicity		0.730 (3.896)
R-Square	0.023	0.035
N	559	549

Note: Unstandardized Coefficients shown. Standard error in parentheses.
 $p < .001$ ***, $p < .01$ ** , $p < .05$ *

In the full model, all independent and control variables were included. The group variable was the only variable that was statistically significant ($B = 8.336$, $p \leq .001$) in the full model and statistically significant ($B = 8.354$, $p \leq .001$) in the baseline model. In the full model, the R square score was 0.035. Adding the other independent variables to the equation only resulted in a 0.012 increase in the R square score, which is a small increase in the amount variance explained.

Summary

The major findings of this research project were discussed in this chapter. The analysis supported the hypothesis that trailer park residents would be considered less worthy of society’s respect by a group consisting primarily of freshmen and sophomore college students. It also demonstrated that all but one of the attributes associated with trailer park residents are consistent with the thesis hypothesis. The OLS regression showed that the attribution to either the control or experimental group and their exposure to the term “trailer park” were predictors

of attitudes. The control variables failed to demonstrate a significant relationship to the dependent variable.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A long recognized paradox of the American creed is that while we hold as true the belief that all men and women are created equal, alongside this belief is the stubborn fact that some Americans are thought to be more equal than others. From the perspective of the dominant culture, some Americans are of lesser value and worth than others. When it comes to trailer park residents, the results of this thesis indicate that amongst this sample of college students they are not considered as worthy of society's respect.

Social judgement theory aids in understanding how attitudes are formed and are based on various stimuli. Stimuli emanate from a variety of sources including family, media, school, and peer pressure (Hogg and Reid 2006). Social judgement theory supports the notion that study participants received stimuli from sources prior to their coming to college that formed their attitudes towards trailer park residents. Media depictions of trailer parks are typically less than positive and difficult to ignore (Harry 2006). Along with this are stories and legends passed down from generation to generation that depict trailer park residents as "trailer park trash." Culture provides individuals with the resources (prejudices, stereotypes, etc.) they may take up and use to demean and denigrate others and in so doing attempt to elevate themselves. This is one mechanism by which social stratification is accomplished. The worthiness measure used in this study was believed to be indicative of the stereotypes held towards trailer park residents by the overall society. One conclusion that could be made, based on the experiment's results, is that irrespective of typical demographics, such as race/ethnicity, social class background, and education level; young adults hold more negative attitudes towards trailer park residents,

which may reflect the attitudes of their families. Where people live (“wrong side of the tracks”) and their type of housing (“renting vs. owning”) have been recognized as markers of value and worth. These findings suggest that trailer park residents have been singled out in American culture for denigration and devaluing.

Sociologists have exhaustively studied social stratification in American society, and along any number of dimensions, including the one studied here, respectability and worth. Negative stereotypes are often used unfairly and create negative outcomes for those who are the subjects of these attitudes (Duguid and Thomas-Hunt 2015). Social closure based on housing prevents a person from moving to a place in the stratification system that is commensurate with their true abilities (Adkins and Vaisey 2009), reinforcing inequalities in key resources such as wealth, political decision making, and social capital.

This study adds to the research in social stratification, particularly that which is concerned with cultural understandings of worth and value. The study’s findings make a case that stereotypes towards trailer park residents are predominant, despite the more egalitarian attitude that exists on many college campuses. While we suspect that there is a culture-wide prejudice against those who live in or who are associated with trailer parks, the existence of a prejudice against such people has not been studied by sociologists. It is understood that characteristics associated with trailer park residents include dangerous and excessive sexuality, incestuous relationships, uneducated or simple mindedness, impoverished because of their own actions, and products of misguided social policies (Newitz and Wray 1997). This study argues that these stereotypes exist among college students and may apply to the public as well (Smith 2002).

The point of this study was to make an initial effort to document the existence of this prejudice, using a convenience sample of American college students in a survey-experiment design. The results of the study strongly confirmed the existence of such a prejudice among these college students, leading one to hypothesize that a follow-up study on a representative sample of Americans would find the same. Although a convenience sample of college students may not accurately reflect the country's population. The study's findings that the normal demographics collected with most studies are not significantly related to the maintenance of stereotypes towards trailer park residents among college students. It suggests that this study could be repeated on any college campus in America with the same or similar results.

In some states, trailer park residents are denied basic civil rights and access to the financial marketplace (National Consumer Law Center 2008). In many trailer parks, there is an implied sense of fear amongst the residents about being evicted for a minor rule violation. It is my argument that nothing will change until the stereotypes towards trailer park residents no longer exists. Such a change in stereotypes and stratification should lead to a more equitable balance of power between communities, trailer park residents, and park owners.

There are some limitations of this thesis. The first is that the immoral vs moral identifier scored lower for the control group than the experimental group, which does not support the study hypothesis. One potential explanation is that the vignette said Bob and Mary were married. This may have influenced survey participants, whereas no mention of Bob and Mary's marital status may have led to more negative evaluations of their morality. The second limitation comes from the R square score on both regression models, which were both low. This suggests that "group" is only one small factor in people's ranking of the couple in question.

The third limitation comes from the fact that the thesis is based on a convenience survey of undergraduate students.

The assumption of this study is that student attitudes will reflect that of their parents (Smith 2002). Nonetheless, this study needs to be replicated with a representative sample of the entire country. It is hypothesized that such a replication would produce similar results and demonstrate the nationwide presence of negative attitudes towards trailer park residents. Future studies should also identify existing community capitals within trailer parks. Another should focus on potential political, cultural, and social solutions that empower trailer park residents to help level the playing field between them and the trailer park owners. Other research could report the benefits and drawbacks of resident owned communities versus investor owned trailer parks.

In conclusion, this study accomplished its purpose of determining whether negative attitudes exist towards trailer park residents. The factors behind these attitudes are unclear and should be researched further by social psychologists. There is limited research about trailer parks and trailer park residents, making it a ripe topic for future research.

Appendix A – Informed Consent Document

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA Institutional Review Board Informed Consent Statement

Title of Project: Social Worthiness of Respect Study
Principal Investigator: Steve Anderson, 701-777-2187, steven.t.anderson@und.edu
Advisor: Clifford Staples, 701-777-4417, clifford.staples@und.edu
Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this research study is to determine the social worthiness of a fictitious couple based on two different scenarios where the only difference between the scenarios is their residence.

Procedures to be followed:

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be given series of 14 questions that are either related to the fictitious couple or are gathering basic demographic information.

Risks:

There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

Benefits:

There is no promise that you will receive any benefit from taking part in this study.

Duration:

This survey should take no longer than five minutes to answer all 14 questions.

Statement of Confidentiality:

Survey data will be kept as anonymous as possible and will not be released without your consent except as required by law. Your identity will not be recorded. If the results of this study are written in a scientific journal or presented at a scientific meeting, your name will not be used. The data will be downloaded from the University of North Dakota's and stored in a password protected computer where analysis of the composite data will take place. All references to identity will be removed from this data. On other computer systems used to generate data for this survey, the data will be stored until the study is complete – at which time all records on the support systems will be destroyed.

All survey responses that we receive will be treated confidentially and stored on a secure server. However, given that the surveys can be completed from any computer (e.g., personal, work, school), we are unable to guarantee the security of the computer on which you choose to enter your responses. As a participant in our study, we want you to be aware that certain "key logging" software programs exist that can be used to track or capture data that you enter and/or websites that you visit.

Right to Ask Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Steve Anderson. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact either Steve Anderson at 701-777-2187 or Clifford Staples at 701-777-4417 during the day.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279. You may also call this number with problems, complaints, or concerns about the research. Please call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is an informed individual who is independent of the research team.

General information about being a research subject can be found on the Institutional Review Board website "Information for Research Participants" <http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.cfm>

Compensation:

You will not receive compensation for your participation. Participant may receive up to 3 extra credit points for their introductory sociology course

You may withdraw from the study at any time without losing the course points assigned by your instructor. If you choose not to participate, please consult your course instructor on other methods to earn course points.

Voluntary Participation:

You do not have to participate in this research. You can stop your participation at any time. You may refuse to participate or choose to discontinue participation at any time without losing any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age older to participate in this research study.

Completion and return of the survey implies that you have read the information in this form and consent to participate in the research.

Please keep this form for your records or future reference.

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this research project.

Yes No

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