

REVIEW

THE TIES THAT BIND: EXPLORING THE RELEVANCE OF NEOTRIBAL THEORY TO TOURISM

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In tourism studies/tourism management, traditional approaches to the segmentation of tourists have tended to focus upon the tangible aspects of why people travel, such as visitors' motivations, demographic characteristics, and values and behavior exhibited at specific destinations. This review article from Hardy and Robards takes a critical approach to challenge the governing assumption involved here, that marketing studies of "tourism" should routinely or necessarily focus on the individual and thus upon class-based characteristics such as income to define tourists. Rather, the authors argue that tourists may be fruitfully segmented by commonalities of intangible aspects, such as "a shared sense of sentiment," "tourist ritual," "collective bonding," and "belonging." Hardy and Robards thereby suggest that *neotribal approaches* indeed offer rich opportunities to do this by empowering the exploration of tourists' symbolic and behavioral characteristics. This review article consonantly proposes that by returning to Maffesoli's work, researchers in the twin fields of tourism studies/tourism management may make substantial critical contributions to unfolding understandings of and about "consumer tribes." Hence, Hardy and Robards suggest that subtribes exist within broader neotribes and that that sort of "membership" may not in fact be as fluid as many investigators have previously suggested. (Abstract by Reviews Editor)

Key words: Recreational vehicle users; Consumption; Maffesoli; Neotribes; Subtribes; Critical theory

Introduction

Recently it has been suggested a critical turn, or quiet revolution, has taken place, whereby the traditional contexts of tourism and their dominant

discourses are being challenged and reconceptualized (Ateljevic, Morgan, & Pritchard, 2007; Bianchi, 2009; Bramwell & Lane, 2014; Bronner, 2011). As part of this critical turn, we propose a consideration of Maffesoli's (1996) "neotribe" in order to better

understand recreational vehicle users (RVers) as a mobile, somewhat ephemeral, ritual-oriented group of tourists. The concept of the “neotribe” has been used to describe certain culturally defined groups and has focused on common aspects including lifestyles (Bennett, 2011), displays of rituals (Goulding & Shankar, 2011), common anchoring places or scenes (Bennett, 1999, 2000; Cova & Cova, 2002), and the symbolic and behavioral characteristics that identify single neotribes (Hardy, Hanson, & Gretzel, 2013). The neotribal lens offers a critical departure from traditional segmentation approaches, because rather than focusing on tangible aspects such as their common motivations, demographic characteristics, or travel behavior once at their destination, it focuses on the intangible aspects, which create a sense of belonging among tourists. In doing so it challenges the notion that socioeconomic status may define groups of travelers (e.g., see Counts & Counts 2004; Onyx & Leonard, 2005) by positing that the ties that bind diverse individuals from different backgrounds together center around fellowship, shared sentiment, and rituals of behavior.

In marketing, neotribes are referred to as consumer tribes, which are inspired but not dependant on the original work of Maffesoli (1996). O’Reilly (2012) argued for a need to return to the original concept in order to gain a deeper understanding of the social relationships between tribes and emotional bonds, social centrality, and proxemics. Using the case of RVers, we set out to do this by reviewing the literature surrounding the neotribe, and suggest the ways in which this theoretical framework may be applied to tourists. By using the case of RVers, we build upon the work of Maffesoli (1996) by reexploring the concept of membership. Second, we propose a more nuanced understanding of “subtribes” and their potential role in tourism.

Neotribalism

Tribes in the modern world have been described as “networks of heterogeneous persons . . . who are linked by a shared passion or emotion; a tribe is capable of collective action, its members are not simple consumers, they are also advocates” (Cova & Cova, 2002, p. 602). The strength of neotribal theory is its ability to study the groupings that occur

in an individualistic society bound by consumption patterns. It is a concept that recently emerged in youth culture research as part of a broader shift described as “postsubculture studies.” Prior to that subcultural theory dominated within youth cultural studies, with authors such as Hodkinson (2004a, 2004b) arguing that groupings such as goths and punks exhibited qualities of subcultures with their sense of shared identity, sets of practices and ideas, and a resistance to or marginalization from a conventional or mainstream society. However, in the early 2000s, a series of critical debates emerged over the validity of subculture. As a result, the alternative postsubcultural paradigm started to achieve currency. Originally coined by Redhead (1990), the term postsubculture was substantially developed and theorized by Muggleton (2000), who suggested that contemporary youth culture could no longer be regarded as a direct reflection of class background. Rather, Muggleton argued that contemporary youth identities are a product of individual choice and reflect the heightened reflexivity that is characteristic of late-modern, consumer-based societies (Chaney, 2004). This subculture/postsubculture debate has continued, giving rise to a series of critical positions on the continuing currency—or not—of subculture as a meaningful concept for understanding the cultural practices of contemporary young people (Bennett, 2011; Luckman, 2003; Robards & Bennett, 2011; St John, 2003).

In his postsubcultural work on youth and popular music, Bennett (1999, 2000) argued that the collective expressions of contemporary youth exhibited qualities more closely associated with Maffesoli’s (1996) neotribes. According to Maffesoli (1996), neotribes are “without the rigidity of the forms of organisation with which we are familiar, [tribe] refers more to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form” (p. 98). Neotribal conceptualizations are useful for understanding aspects of contemporary culture where more diverse groups of people come together. These groupings display less rigidity than classic subcultures, and members often have varying agendas that are not always highly political in nature, or concerned with challenging the dominant social order, when compared to subcultures (Haenfler,

2013). Thus, in the postsubcultural turn, a stronger emphasis is placed on what Polhemus (1998) describes as a “supermarket of style,” where scenes and neotribes cohere sometimes only briefly or around specific events, bringing together a range of styles, identity projects, and political agendas, drawn from a range of backgrounds (Bennett, 2005, 2011; Wang, 2005).

The application of the neotribal concept has recently been applied to research beyond the realm of youth studies. Taking a consumption perspective, Cova and Cova (2002) suggest that “today consumers are not only looking for products and services which enable them to be freer, but also products, services, employees and physical surroundings which can link them to others, to a tribe” (p. 7). Importantly, neotribal membership is fluid and ephemeral and based on a state of mind and a lifestyle, rather than long-standing involvement (Maffesoli, 1996; O’Reilly, 2012). This was conceptualized by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001), who argued that “they form, they disperse, they re-form as something else, reflecting the constant shifting identities of postmodern consumers” (p. 414).

A variety of characteristics of neotribes have been proposed. Goulding and Shankar (2011) propose five characteristics. First, neotribes are multiple and rarely dominate individuals’ lives, but rather they offer a temporary escape from daily life. One individual may be a member of multiple neotribes; second, the ability to be a member of multiple tribes means that neotribes are playful and often lacking in long-term moral responsibility; third, they are transient, emerging and disappearing; fourth, they are entrepreneurial; and fifth, they may be characterized as having rules of engagements, etiquette, and rituals. The work by Cova and Cova (2002) concurs with many of these points, arguing that tribes are evident both visibly and invisibly. Visible aspects include the gatherings/occasions, where people come together for rituals and physical meeting places and virtual spaces (institutions) where tribes convene. Invisible aspects include the day-to-day practice, including personal and shared experiences, and trends that sweep through society.

These aspects have synergies with Hardy, Wickham, and Gretzel’s (in press) work, which

proposes that neotribes can be identified by possessing two characteristics: symbolic and behavioral elements. Symbolic elements include a sense of community, sharing a lifestyle, and the social centrality of an aspect of life. These elements are difficult to identify given that neotribes are characterized by gatherings of emotionally bonded people (Cova & Cova, 2002). They may be played out through a shared desire for a certain “lifestyle” (Bennett, 1999), defined by Chaney (1996) as creative projects which involve choices of consumer goods and patterns of consumption. A communal ethic is an additional symbolic element, which has synergies with Turner’s (1974) conceptualization of “communitas,” whereby individualistic rank and status are replaced with a common sense communication and fellowship.

In addition to symbolic elements, neotribes may be characterized by behavioral elements (Hardy et al., 2013). These are based upon the work of Hughson (2007), who discussed Hetherington’s (1998) concept of social centrality, where the “expressive” and “alternative” identities of the neotribe are lived out, akin to what Heath (2004) defines as a physical sharing of space. Hughson (2007) argued that neotribes tend to gravitate towards a central point of assembly. The performance site is where the collective identity is publicly paraded and where the neotribes may express their identities and membership. These sites have been referred to as anchoring places (Cova & Cova, 2002) and scenes (Bennett, 2011) where individuals group together because of a shared taste.

Behavioral characteristics of neotribes also include rituals (Hardy et al., in press). The function of these is to confirm a group’s view of itself (Maffesoli, 1996) and it is through this that a sense of community is illustrated and confirmed. Along with this, signifiers (also referred to as signs) are behavioral characteristics: these provide traces of identity to the tribe and express belonging (Cova & Cova, 2002). Signifiers, such as goods which may be consumed, allow tribal members to create an image or status that may have “been previously prohibited or unavailable” (Cooper, McLoughlin, & Keating, 2005, p. 332). Consequently, status is no longer predetermined, but rather may be freely purchased and displayed by an individual within a neotribe (Hardy et al., 2013).

Neotribes and Consumer Tribes

In marketing theory, the notion of tribal marketing has been widely accepted as a departure from seeing consumers who consume independently in order to self-define, to viewing them as acting within a broader societal context and consume in order to use *and* link them to things and people (Cova, 1999; Cova & Cova, 2002; Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007). The tribe is seen being made up of members who can not only consume, but may act as advocates for their chosen activity (Cova & Cova, 2002). Importantly, tribal members may be heterogeneous in their age, sex, and income. Their homogeneity lies in their passion and emotion. Significantly, the term “neotribes” is not commonly used to describe these groupings. Rather, the term “consumer tribes” is used, which arguably was “inspired” by the work of Maffesoli (1996) and used by Cova et al. (2007). Their new understanding of consumer tribes has strong synergies to neotribal theory because it “rejects an atomistic, information processor view of people as individuals who are to some extent sealed off and separated from their experiential worlds” (p. 5). Like Maffesoli (1996), Cova et al. (2007) argue that people may belong to multiple tribes and that tribes may experience conflicts within them. However, apart from this, O’Reilly (2012) argues that there are few theoretical connections between the two concepts and advocates a return to Maffesoli’s (1996) work in order to explore insights into connections between consumer tribes, spatial relationships, proxemics, influence, and a sense of belonging (“the affectual nebula”).

Neotribes and Tourism

The application of neotribes to explorations of tourists is uncommon. Typically, explorations of segments of tourists have been conducted from a rigid, class-based perspective, whereby tourists have been classified in terms of individualistic and tangible profiles, such as socioeconomic status, visitation behavior and movement within a destination, and push–pull motivations (Cha, McCleary, & Usyal, 1995; Dann, 1977, 1981; Dolnicar, 2004, 2010; Kozak, 2001). Members of segments such as these are generally regarded as consumers who are

homogenous in terms of their characteristics such as age and sex, but they are not capable of collective action (Cova & Cova, 2002). The intangible aspects of mobility, belonging, social centrality, interaction, and membership, which are key aspects of neotribalism (Weaver, 2011), have often been left out of discussions of how we may view different types of tourists. Failures to incorporate this have meant that significant oversights may have been made as to the elements that differentiate one group of tourists from another, and ultimately the reasons why tourists may choose to travel and congregate in certain places. The defining point that has relevance to tourism is that individuals can belong to more than one neotribe, which would have been impossible within subcultural theory (Shankar & Elliott, 1999). So a tourist who when at home may belong to a cycle club and be a member of that tribe, may also become a member of a bird watching tribe when they travel, participating in the associated congregations, rituals, and communications appropriate to that tribe.

To the knowledge of the authors (at the time of writing), neotribal theory has been applied only three times within an academic tourism research context. First in the context of cruise shipping (Weaver, 2011), second in the context of clubbing (Goulding & Shankar, 2011) and more recently in the context of RVers (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011). However, the problematic aspect of its application in tourism is that it has assumed that entire groups of tourists (i.e., cruise ship tourists, clubbers, and RVers) were members of a large homogeneous neotribe. In doing so the authors failed to account for subtribal groupings that may exist within a large neotribe. This tendency extends beyond the realm of tourism: neotribal research has tended to focus on the homogenous traits of members of neotribes, such as their collective affective desires, lifestyles, rituals, and consumption patterns. Exceptions to this are Cova and Cova (2002) who suggest that differences exist in memberships and that a spectrum exists in terms of *individuals’* roles within tribes. Recent research by Hardy et al. (2013) suggested that in addition to differing levels of membership, entire groups within neotribes displayed differences in symbolic and behavioral characteristics. These may be defined as subtribes, which may display some common behavioral and symbolic

characteristics of a broader neotribe, but differ in other aspects. This has synergies with O'Reilly's (2012) suggestion that further research is needed to explore the neotribal concepts such as affectual components, social relationships, and proxemics, and provided the impetus for our enquiry.

A Scenario Examined

The theoretical lens of neotribal literature has been found to be useful for exploring RVer's mobile and social nature, similar lifestyles, and their desire to escape the routines of daily life (Hardy et al., 2013). Symbolically, RVing is an activity with transition at its core (Hardy et al., in press; White & White, 2004) as it gives travelers the opportunity to leave the routines of daily life and self-fulfill by achieving their lifelong travel ambitions. Behaviorally, the RVing neotribe may be recognized through their travel jargon, rituals of behavior, and the use of the campground as a scene (Hardy et al., in press). Although RVers are highly mobile, their RV provides continuity and it is continuity of the "home on wheels" that ties the RVing neotribe together. The subcultural lens provided by Mattingly (2005) previously to conceptualize the RVing lifestyles is no longer current: RVing is now a mainstream travel activity with 8.6 million families in the US owning one (Curtin, 2011). Moreover, the mobility and transience that is inherent in our post-20th century lifestyles and is promoted through popular media is no longer politically resistant or counter-cultural. Indeed, the notion of RVing, being on the open road, and the notion of the gap year (for young people, families, and as grey nomads/snowbirds) is now an accepted part of our cultural milieu.

Numerous research projects have concentrated on RVers as a sector of tourism and have highlighted the similarities of participants within it. For example, there are now a variety of articles that focus on the retiree segment of RVers, called snowbirds in Europe and North America and grey nomads in Australia (Counts & Counts, 2004; Holloway, 2007; Onyx & Leonard, 2005; Viallon, 2012). Synergies in their behavior have been documented as a sense of fellowship through sharing a similar lifestyle; strong social networks; the importance of RVing as an activity that facilitates friendships and leaves status behind; high levels

of connectedness and sophisticated use of technology; and the importance of the activity in allowing for self-actualization and a transformative journey (Counts & Counts, 2004; Gretzel, Formica, & Fesenmaier, 2005; Hardy & Gretzel, 2011; Hardy et al., in press; Onyx & Leonard, 2005; White & White, 2004). However, the sheer size of the industry suggests that homogeneity would be unlikely. Early work by Onyx and Leonard (2005) claimed that "the motivations and needs of older travellers are likely to differ from those of younger travellers. Furthermore, not all older travellers seek the same experience in travel" (p. 62). Moreover, RVers may change their style of travel on a regular basis, some traveling independently but at other times traveling with family groups or clubs. They may only use their rig on weekends, but then change to become full-time RVers at some point in their lives. This has synergies with Bennett's (1999) proposition that neotribal associations and gatherings are fluid in their character and that individuals are not necessarily bound into one particular community. The heterogeneity in the RVing market has been explored by Hardy, et al. (2013) and Mattingly (2005). However, what is lacking is an understanding of how subtribes may be defined and the relevance of this to our broader understanding of the neotribe.

Our Research Approach

Our approach was designed to offer a critical departure from positivist research approaches that have long dominated tourism research (Bianchi, 2009). As such a qualitative approach was taken, which Greenacre, Freeman, and Donald (2013) argued is more suited to explorations of neotribal and community behaviors, as they allow for in-depth insights into the elements that are critical in identifying a neotribe. This is supported by Hughson (2007) who argued that we need to understand how tribes are constituted and what makes "them tick" (p. 28), thus necessitating the need for ethnographic research. Given these arguments and our desire to understand the behavior and symbolic characteristics of the subtribe we conducted our research using an ethnomethodological research approach. This sought to interpret how RVers "do" social life, including how they construct and maintain their

everyday lives, their motivations, and reasoning for doing things in a noncritical manner (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). Semistructured questions were used, which included questions about their choice of vehicle, preference for campsites and proximity to other RVers, involvement with RV clubs, and how they would describe their style of RVing. We also included closed-ended questions to record aspects such as their vehicle type and length and the length of time that respondents had been RVing. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic coding via NVIVO.

Our interviews were conducted in RV campsites in January and February 2012, mostly around 5pm, which is widely regarded as “happy hour” when RVers gather at the end of the day to drink and discuss issues of interest. We undertook 50 in-depth interviews and the response was high with only three RVers declining to be interviewed. The decision was made to cease interviewing at 50 when we adjudged that theoretical saturation had indeed been reached (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Interviews were conducted at three RVing destinations on the East Coast of Tasmania, the island state of Australia. We selected disparate camping grounds to reflect the variety of RV destinations. The first was the Freycinet National Park camping ground managed by Parks Tasmania. This is a highly popular, fee paying, government run campsite and access to during summer may be gained only through a lottery system. Facilities at the campsite include powered sites with grey water disposal, potable water, and an amenities block. Each site is approximately 7×4 m in size. The second site was Mayfields, maintained by Parks Tasmania and provides free camping opportunities. Facilities are limited; there is no power, access is difficult for larger vehicles, and there is a pit toilet only. Sites range in size from small to larger sites that can cater to family groups. The third interview location was the Sorell Council overnight camping area. Located adjacent to a sports field in the center of the Sorell township, this large field has toilet facilities and a “sanidump” only. A small fee is charged and patrons are asked to pay at the Sorell Council chambers which are located in the township. The site caters only for self-contained vehicles able to carry their own grey, black, and potable water.

Critical Findings

Our exploration of the RVing neotribe revealed clearly disparate groups at the different RVing campgrounds. Initially it was visibly apparent that different locations attracted a different type of RVer, in terms of their vehicle choice. Life-stage differences were also apparent, as RVers appeared to be made up of families or empty nesters or retirees.

However, the interviews revealed these differences went further than vehicle choice or demographics, and there appeared to be three subtribes who differed in terms of their symbolic and behavioral characteristics. These characteristics emerged from the NVIVO analysis and while related to vehicle choice and life stage, were not dependant on it. Rather they centered around RVers behavioral characteristics, their sense of belonging, and their tendency to socialize.

The Lifestylers

Demographic Characteristics. Aesthetically this group was clearly visible in their larger motor homes or caravans. They tended to consist of empty nesters and retirees.

Behavioral Characteristics of Lifestylers. We named this group lifestylers because of their high levels of commitment to the RVing lifestyle. One third of this group were full timers who had sold all their possessions to live full time in their RV. We also found that the remaining members of this subtribe traveled for longer periods of time: many were away from home for longer than 60 days with far fewer going away for 14 days or less. All participants that we interviewed were traveling in adult groups without children and most often they were retirees.

Lifestylers were the dominant group in the low-cost campground location at Sorell. The Sorell campground was an open field with very little shrubbery, minimal privacy, and was situated close to a residential area. Many of the “rigs” were self-contained, and this was reflected in lifestylers’ lack of desire for sophisticated facilities. Their priority was to be able to access water, followed by toilets, with even less requiring dump stations at their overnight stops. The larger RVs acted as a limiting factor for overnight site selection and as

such maneuvering into smaller campsites is very difficult, especially if they are not “pull throughs,” which are campsites that may be driven through in a straight line, so that the RV does not have to be reversed when exiting the campsite. As a consequence, lifestylers primary emphasis was on finding level ground and easily accessible sites: “As long as there’s a bit of grass and it’s reasonably level.” Their priority for aspects such as views, protection from the wind and sun, and access to facilities was much lower than other subtribes. Privacy was less valued among this group. When asked for the factors that they look for when choosing an overnight stop, privacy did not emerge, although we did note in our observations that some travelers had made efforts to create privacy by doing things such as orientating their vehicle in certain directions. When asked what distance they preferred to have between themselves and other people, lifestylers were often not bothered, so long as they could get their awnings out. Overall they appeared less stressed about finding “the perfect spot” (as opposed to other subtribes, described below). If they didn’t like a site, or it became noisy due to rowdy neighbors, they would simply get up and move. “We generally park side by side no problem. If you have a rowdy family who is fighting you ask them to move on. If not we move along.”

Lifestylers’ extended travel time in their larger self-contained vehicles was the reason why many expressed a desire to stay in free or low-cost camp sites such as those owned by local councils. Many stated that they tried to do it as much as possible as it saved money and allowed them to use their rigs to their full capacity:

We pull up at 7pm, and you’re gone by 8 the next day. We’re still parking in truck stops, or just a gravel dump on the side of the road. Because we’ve got everything we need.

There’s only been an odd place where we’ve had to go into camping grounds. We can spend money on other things—that is cruises, going over to Hobart, and going through the historic sites. We can do things like that being pensioners we’d be struggling to do otherwise.

When asked why they chose the RV that they drive, lifestylers explained that they chose a vehicle

that would allow them to be comfortable while traveling for long periods of time.

We knew we were going to be living in it full time, and we wanted plenty of room. But we also wanted a shower and toilet and everything so we’re all set up for stopping wherever we want.

Aesthetics and ambience also played a role. Lifestylers only emphasized that they wanted a home-like feel.

We are going around Australia for 4–5 years. We rented our house, and we wanted an RV with separate en suite, an oven, big fridge, queen size bed, and Ray wanted an off-road one, fuel tanks, solar panel.

So this looked the prettiest in the magazine, and [we chose it] because it’s our home for a very long time.

The desire to make an RV a home for a long period of time further supports the evidence that members of this subtribe do *not* have high levels of fluidity of memberships. Rather they displayed high levels of commitment to the RVing life by purchasing large, comfortable, and expensive rigs. Further evidence of their commitment to the lifestyle was shown through their membership within clubs—half of those interviewed were members of clubs. In addition, this subgroup of RVers had been so for many years. Many had begun their “RV travel careers” with tents, progress to camper trailers, and sometimes on to larger caravans or motor homes. Following this, some will downsize when their agility and mobility decreases in later life. As stated by one lifestyler: “We had a slide on before that, and I found it too difficult getting up into the bed, as the bed was over the cab. We decided to buy one of these.” These factors support the suggestion by Hardy et al. (2013) that spectrums of fluidity of membership may exist within neotribes.

Symbolic Characteristics of Lifestylers. Symbolically, lifestylers had a stronger sense of fellowship than other subtribes. Indeed a sense of fellowship and the opportunity to make friends was a major driver for lifestylers in this subtribe. Once on the road, lifestylers felt like they were a mobile community of likeminded people, looking out for each other, communicating with each other either via the web, UHF radio, or in person at happy hour.

The lifestyle's sense of solidarity was also evident through the physical boundaries when choosing where to park their vehicles in campgrounds. As mentioned earlier, this subtribe did not value privacy as much as other subtribes. The Sorell lifestyle also illustrated their solidarity through their descriptions of their style of RVing. More so than other groups, they described it as being about meeting people and making new friends. Indeed for some, the RVing experience was where their relationships started: "Friendship: you meet so many other people. This is where we've met."

When asked to describe their style of RVing, lifestyle described it as being about freedom. "Free and easy is me." "We are not influenced by anyone else, who we are and what we want to do." "Hate regulation, love freedom," and "independence on wheels"; "when I feel my freedom is encroached upon I don't enjoy it." Freedom of choice was also significant for this group in terms of where to go, how long they stay, and also the desire to tour without schedules and at one's own pace. One RVer described their style of RVing as "casual touring, I don't like structure and abhor hard agendas." Lifestyle also place great emphasis on style of travel involving education. Many commented on their interest in learning about the surrounding environment, including the history, local people's lifestyles, and general sightseeing.

The Escapists

Demographic Characteristics. Aesthetically this group was clearly visible in their tent trailers or off-road campers. They tended to consist of empty nesters or retirees.

Behavioral Characteristics of Escapists. Escapists were a small but highly differentiated group among our participants who displayed similar characteristics to the highly independent RVers identified by Hardy and Gretzel (2011) in North America. This subtribe consisted of only five RVers, and tended to prefer National Park campsites such as Freycinet National Park or Mayfields.

Escapists described their style of RVing as visiting undeveloped places, which were off the beaten track. "We like bush settings to get away from

commercial and national parks." Their style of RVing was all about simplicity and the simple life: "Down to earth, pretty rough, homely." Unlike lifestyle, making friends was not a motivating factor for these travelers. Their motivations were centered around experiencing the "real Australia" and to get off the beaten track. As a result, escapists tended to travel in campers, as they allowed them to access off-road locations. Aspects such as off-road capabilities and independent suspension were important to this subtribe of traveler. This, combined with their preference to get off the beaten track, was reflected in their preferences for overnight stopovers, facilities, and decisions on how to orientate their vehicle. Privacy and bush/tree buffers were priorities for these respondents. Unlike lifestyle who were not bothered by privacy when choosing an overnight stopover, escapists all stated that their ideal distance from another RVer was as far away as possible. Following this, level sites and orientation to minimize afternoon sun and exposure to the wind were preferences for these travelers when choosing a campsite.

Escapists engaged in the ritual such as happy hour, but the performance of this tribe was characterized by far greater use of bushman-style objects: the billy and the camp stove allowed these RVers to act out the more rugged style of camping that they sought.

The smaller off-road campers, or off-road caravans used by these travelers meant that their rigs tended not to be self-contained; therefore, when asked what facilities they need in a National park, respondents all prioritized toilets, followed by power and showers. These travelers tended to be polarized in their travel behavior. Some were away for shorter periods of time than lifestyle, while others were away for up to 1 year.

Symbolic Characteristics of Escapists. The constant for this group was their desire to escape and capture the spirit of Australia, referred to by Onyx and Leonard (2005) as the desire to recreate the "Australian icon of the self reliant bushman" (p. 67). Not surprisingly, given their lack of motivation for fellowship, these highly independent travelers were not members of RV clubs. Despite this, they could be regarded as a subtribe because they were clearly similar in their collective desire to get

off the beaten track and travel independently. But the sense of collectively and fellowship, which is clearly inherent in the other subtribes, was clearly not evident among this group.

Base Campers

Demographic Characteristics. This group was recognizable in their camper trailers or caravans and, to a lesser degree, small motor homes. They were clearly recognizable as they were predominantly made up of family groups.

Behavioral Characteristics of Base Campers. Base campers were often beginning their RVing career, having previously camped in tents. This has synergies with the suggestion that an RV lifecycle may exist where some RVers begin tent camping, move to camper trailers when they have children, then to caravans for longer holidays once their children move out of home, then downsize in the latter part of the RVing lifecycle (Hardy, 2006; Hardy & Gretzel, 2011). For base campers, their move from tent camping to “glamping” in a camper trailer was often a convenience-based decision. Their choice of RV was driven by a desire to keep the “camping and tent-like feel,” but at the same time, make life easier given the addition of children to the family unit.

Basically we had a lot of camping gear, and we've been camping a bit. But we got sick of the tents and the children.

We went for a camper trailer as we liked the feeling of tents, as we felt campervans and camping trailers feel very boxed in. You can pull the windows open and it feels very open, and sort of tent-ish. It also compacts down to a very small size, with less drag.

Base campers displayed a unique ritual that set them apart from the other subtribes: many went to the same site every year with friends/family. This activity is not only about family bonding and the creation of family rituals, but was also to take the stress and uncertainly out of the RVing experience, and this was particularly important for families with young children.

Base campers would stay in a variety of places, ranging from caravan parks to National Parks and

free camps. However, they place great importance on privacy and many responded that they like as much privacy as they can get and that an ideal site was one where you could not hear or see neighboring RVs. They were often uncomfortable with the Mayfields and Freycinet RV sites because RVers were forced to park in close proximity to one another. Interestingly, despite a strong desire to have privacy, the distances these RVers gave were commonly between 2 and 5 m, which was actually less than lifestylers who appeared to be less concerned with privacy. The reason for this was that the base campers often mentioned their willingness to substitute distance for privacy through the use of shrubbery.

Base campers' tendency to take far shorter trips and their inexperience in RVing meant that this neotribe may be characterized by highly fluid levels in their RVing membership. Unlike lifestylers who live and breathe RVing, base campers are new to the experience and make a major transition from their daily life and identify as an RVer for only a short period of time. In this sense, the base campers epitomize Maffesoli's (1996) original conceptualization of the neotribe as ephemeral and fleeting. Not surprisingly then, base campers were not generally members of clubs.

Symbolic Characteristics of Base Campers. Base campers differed markedly in their symbolic characteristics. When asked to describe their style of RVing, their descriptions were centered on the creation of the experience. To base campers, the process of setting up the RV and creating a safe base from which they could relax or sightsee was paramount. Much thought, angst, and planning goes into the setting up process and the site's attractiveness could make or break an RV trip and/or destination.

Part of our experience has been the process of setting up. Creating your environment, for the period of time. . . . But I have to say up until now it's been part of the fun.

Base campers' style of RVing was one that placed great emphasis on spending time with the family and recharging their batteries, focused on “relaxing, [the] seaside, and downtime.” Mobility, making friends, and educational experiences and a sense of freedom were not dominant descriptors used by this group

when describing their style of RVing. The reasons for base campers' RVing style is likely related to their life stage, which in turn affected their time away from home, locations that they travel to, and choice of RV. Base campers were mostly made up of family groups and were far less mobile in their RV behavior. They would tend to go to one location, set up, and stay there for 3–7 or 7–14 days. This was reflected in the detail that they put into choosing their overnight RV site and orientating their rig. To this subtribe, finding the “best spot” with views (especially from the inside of the camper), privacy, and an orientation that minimized afternoon sun and exposure from the wind were priorities. Access to level sites, amenities, and recreational facilities were also important, albeit less so than the other factors.

Conceptual Findings

The value of this research is that it moves beyond Maffesoli's (1996) singular neotribal approach by demonstrating that within a broader neotribe, subtribes differ in terms of their symbolic and behavioral characteristics. In the case of RVers, symbolic differences may include motivations and desires; and behavioral differences include rituals, travel behavior, and preferences for rigs, amenities, and specific campsites.

Our research challenged Maffesoli's (1996) original work on a further level: within the lifestyle subtribe we found high levels of commitment to the RV lifestyle and lengthy vacation time; indeed some had even become “full time RVers.” This contradicts propositions that neotribes are inherently unstable, ephemeral, highly fluid, and that members constantly move back and forth between the tribe and normal life (Cova & Cova, 2002; Maffesoli, 1996). Interestingly, this notion of fluidity of membership has been questioned by Robards and Bennett (2011), who identified concrete and stable relationships among users of social network sites like MySpace and Facebook. Our findings concur with this when looking at this subtribe of RVers. On the other end of the spectrum we identified a subtribe of fluid base campers, who “created” their RVing identity only a few times per year and were new to the activity. Together, these findings suggest that spectrums of fluidity of membership exist and should be examined, thus moving beyond Maffesoli's (1996) one size fits all approach.

Further, our exploration of RVers via a neotribal lens has demonstrated the value in a critical departure from traditional segmentation approaches that rely on divisions such as socioeconomic status and expenditure. Its emphasis on the importance of understanding multiple world views and cultural differences have allowed the elements that bind the subtribes together to emerge. In the case of RVers, these core elements differed between subtribes. As such, this critical approach challenged a long-standing, business-centered, positivist analytical framework, which has dominated approaches to tourism (Bianchi, 2009). In doing so it has challenged industry-based assumptions regarding RVers—that they are a homogenous tourist segment (Lebski, 2009).

Finally, this research also demonstrated the synergies that neotribal theory has with tourism and the importance of returning to Maffesoli's (1996) original work. In the case of RVers, although the point of tribal coherence centers around an object, namely the RV, the central theme of their travel experience is mobility. For other tourists, such as backpackers, the neotribe is formed around a common activity and means of travel, rendering neotribal theory a more applicable construct than consumer tribes, who give far more focus on the consumed object.

To conclude, O'Reilly (2012) argued that in Maffesoli's (1996) recent contribution to Cova and Cova's (2002) book on consumer tribes there was little development from his original development of the concept of neotribalism. This research has been able to address this by explaining the exploring and advancing Maffesoli's conceptualization in two ways: 1) it has uncovered the diversity that exists within neotribes, which may be conceptualized as subtribes; and 2) it has questioned Maffesoli's notion of fluidity of membership, revealing that spectrums of fluidity exist, confirming the suggestion by Robards and Bennett (2011) that this may be the case.

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