

Architectures of Resistance: Women's
Tiny Houses as Spaces of Agency

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Abstract

This thesis examines the experience of women who build and live in tiny houses. Whilst a growing scholarly literature on tiny houses exists, the specific motivations and experiences of women has not yet been adequately explored. Consequently, this thesis set out to answer three research questions: How are women using tiny houses to reconfigure their relationship with and experience of capitalism and patriarchy? What do women say about how their experience of designing and building their own homes impacted them? Finally, (How) are women's lives different before versus after living in a tiny home?

Using qualitative data collected via Zoom and email with 33 different women, this thesis uses the tripartite theoretical framework of heterotopia, dweller control, and the slender body to provide a novel analysis of women's experiences building and living in their tiny houses.

The findings show that women gain a unique and powerful sense of agency through the process of controlling the design and build of their tiny houses. Women also describe an enhanced sense of agency over their consumption habits. This thesis argues that tiny house living modulates the power of work under capitalist patriarchy, including an attenuation of the negative impacts of both paid and unpaid labour in these women's lives. Taken together, the thesis shows that tiny house living enhances women's ability to choose under an otherwise constricting structure of capitalism and patriarchy.

This thesis shows that tiny houses are understood by these women as a living critique of mortgage encumbrance, and as a way to provide an alternative to the pervasive intersection of debt and power.

The significance of this thesis is foregrounded in how it enhances our understanding of how women seek to reclaim agency and different ways of doing gender through the use of self-build tiny houses.

Authors declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Some original material in the thesis has been presented for publication and can be found here:
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 What are Tiny Houses?

In the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008, tiny houses emerged as an increasingly popular and innovative response to the triple burden of the affordable housing crisis, ecological destruction, and cost of living crisis (Anson, 2018; Crawford and Stephan, 2020; Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017). Offering a way for their residents to become homeowners at a fraction of the price of conventional dwellings, tiny houses include converted vans, shipping containers, horseboxes, log cabins, and trailer-based, road-towable trailers (Shearer and Burton, 2019). Tiny houses are often made of wood and use recycled and reclaimed materials; they are commonly off-grid structures and are not usually built into permanent foundations (Alexander et al., 2019; Carlin, 2014). Because of their off-grid nature, tiny houses frequently use renewable energy sources like solar panels, wind turbines, and energy generators powered by fuel (ibid). They also frequently feature dry composting toilets and rainwater harvesting capabilities to meet the needs of their inhabitants (ibid).

Many tiny houses are classified as road towable vehicles rather than residential structures (Shearer, 2018; Shearer and Burton, 2019; 2021). The tiny house on wheels model (THOW) is a classic example of this. THOWs are built on top of a trailer chassis, as this allows them to circumnavigate many of the planning laws and building regulations that would forbid their presence in towns and cities around the world (Fowler, 2018; Shearer and Burton, 2019; 2021; Weetman, 2018). Tiny house varieties, including converted shipping containers and cabins or sheds, are regularly classified as temporary structures rather than residential

buildings for the same reason (Boeckermann, Kaczynski, and King, 2019; Carlin, 2014). Tiny houses range in size from the truly microscopic 10m² to the fairly spacious 50m². They can be built with the absolute bare minimum or can be made as luxury homes with premium fixtures and facilities. Because of the great variety of types of tiny houses, the average cost of a tiny home varies accordingly; however, an indicative average cost for a 25m² trailer-based tiny house on wheels is £30,000 (Santaeularia, 2022). At the time of writing, this makes an average tiny house almost ten times cheaper than the average house price in England, where, as of January 2022, average prices rose to an all-time high of £292,000 (Lewis, 2022).

The affordable housing crisis is a global human rights crisis which is especially pronounced in countries underpinned by a conservative, neoliberal policy and cultural agenda (Arundel and Doling, 2017; Beswick, Imilan, and Olivera, 2019; Lund, 2019). Such countries include the UK, Ireland, Australia, and the USA, where the affordable housing crisis is notably acute (Beswick, Imilan, and Olivera, 2019; Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Minton, 2017; Shaw, 2018). Evidence shows that housing quality and security play a pivotal role in modulating quality of life, including mental and physical health (García-Mira et al., 2017; Streimikiene, 2015; Suglia, Duarte and Sandel, 2011). The home has also emerged as a powerful site of doing and un- or re-doing gender and social status (Galinsky, Aumann, and Bond, 2013; Mallett, 2004). The home is also implicated in consumerism and its economic and environmental ramifications (Meissner, 2019; Saunders and Williams, 1988; Woodward, 2003). These factors highlight the relevance of considering tiny houses as an emergent approach to housing, mainly in countries where the affordable housing crisis is particularly severe. This thesis considers the specific experience of 33 women from the UK, South Africa, Europe, the USA, and South Africa who live in or intend to live in tiny houses, with a particular focus on those women who have been involved in designing and building their own

homes. Existing literature on tiny houses examines motivations for and outcomes of living tiny; however, the gendered experience of women has not yet been considered in depth (Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017; Shearer. and Burton, 2021; Willoughby, Mangold, and Zschau, 2020). The following section provides a rationale for considering the particular experience of women who design and build their own tiny houses.

1.2 Why Women?

Firstly, women continue to be penalised, oppressed, and disadvantaged by a suite of social processes. In this thesis, I will consider three main manifestations of this sexist subjugation.

Firstly, under patriarchy, women are socially constructed as passive, weak, and incapable (Bordo, 2003; Eriksson, and Lagerström, 2012; Johnson, 2001). This false conception of female-ness casts women as incapable of skills socially labelled as male or masculine, including design and construction, the use of tools, and manual labour (Johnson, 2001). Such pervasive and lifelong conditioning leaves many women feeling unable to participate in construction projects, like building a house, despite the well-documented positive effects that building and physical creation can have on self-esteem and self-image (Baba et al., 2017; Khan and Kumar, 2014).

Secondly, women are especially disadvantaged by the global affordable housing crisis.

Housing is considered affordable if it consumes one-third or less of a person's median income (Barton, 2022). Using this measure and taking England as an illustrative example, every area of the country can offer affordable housing to men on median earnings except London and the South East (Reis, 2019). In comparison, no area of England can offer affordable housing to women on median earnings (Reis, 2019). Likewise, whilst the average male earner requires

eight times his income to buy a house in the UK, the average female earner requires twelve times her salary to purchase a house, making her more of a risk in the eyes of mortgage lenders and therefore, significantly less likely to qualify for a mortgage loan (Reis, 2019). The gender pay gap partly explains this disparity. In the UK and the USA, women are paid on average 20% less than men; in Australia and The Netherlands, women are paid on average 14% less than men; and in Canada, women are paid approximately 11% less than men (Atria, 2021; Howard, 2017; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2022).

The underpaying of women is explained by three social processes. First, the patriarchal undervaluing of women means that they are less likely to be promoted and given pay increases (Atria, 2021; Howard, 2021; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2022). Second, patriarchal undervaluing of skills and industries deemed to be feminine leads to caring and service jobs being both predominantly undertaken by women and being poorly paid (Johnson, 2001). Third, women undertake the lion's share of unpaid labour and childcare, meaning they are more likely to be in part-time paid workforces or not included in the paid workforce at all (Oxfam International, 2020). The disparity between women's and men's pay is present in every country that participants in this thesis lived in, making it a relevant factor in considering why women are living in tiny houses and what they are gaining from doing so. Women also make up the majority of homeless people in the UK (66%) and represent the fastest-growing demographic of people experiencing homelessness in the USA (Reis, 2018; 2019; Welch-Lazoritz, Whitbeck, and Armenta, 2015). The combination of women's relative poverty and the ongoing pandemic of male violence against women are likely to be the leading causes of this (Goodman, Fels, and Glenn, 2006; Housing All Australians, 2020; Sánchez et al., 2020).

The third factor in deciding to focus this thesis on women's experience in tiny homes is that the home continues to be a dangerous and difficult place for women worldwide. Women are more likely to be assaulted, sexually abused, and murdered in their homes than in any other location (Sánchez et al., 2020; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018).

Worldwide, one woman is murdered every ten minutes by an intimate male partner or male family member (ibid). Even where women's lives are not directly at risk, the home can be a place fraught with tension and difficulty as a result of patriarchal values that position women as natural caretakers and homemakers (Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2012; Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007; Office for National Statistics, 2016). Globally, women perform between two and ten times the amount of unpaid care work and domestic labour that men do; the estimated value of this unwaged labour is at least \$10.8 trillion, a number three times greater than the entire global tech sector (Oxfam International, 2020). The extent of this disparity varies from country to country, but on average means that women work 18 hours more per week than men, the equivalent of having an additional unpaid part-time job (Charmes, 2019).

1.3 Why Tiny Houses?

Tiny houses are a growing sector of the housing industry, which was predicted to increase in market share by 7% between 2018 and 2022 (Business Wire, 2018). Following the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-21, there has been a measured increase in people moving out of more densely populated metropolitan areas and into less densely populated, 'greener' areas (Marsh, 2020; Rowe et al., 2022). Data suggests that the main influences underpinning this trend are a combined desire for cheaper property and more contact with nature (ibid).

Likewise, existing literature shows that the main impetus for transitioning from conventional

living to tiny house living is also a desire for a lower cost of living and more contact with nature (Boeckermann, Kaczynski and King, 2019; Shearer, 2018; Shearer and Burton, 2021). Consequently, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that there may be an even greater uptake of tiny living than initially forecasted in 2018 (Business Wire) due to the intensification of a desire for a reduced cost of living and access to nature wrought by the devastating economic and social impacts of the COVID19 pandemic.

Further, intensifying awareness of the urgent need for lower carbon lifestyles is likely informing the growing desire to live tiny (Crawford and Stephan, 2020; Shearer and Burton, 2019). Pickerill defines eco-homes as being purpose built specifically to “reduce waste – in its construction, occupation and demolition” (Pickerill, 2016, p.17). Whilst tiny houses cannot be defined as eco-homes per se since many are not built with this precise goal in mind, they are nevertheless significantly less resource intensive in their build, lifetime, and demolition than conventional brick and concrete dwellings and may therefore be growing in popularity thanks to their eco-credentials (Colombini, 2019; Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017).

Taken together, the original empirical data presented in this thesis aims to address the ‘scholarly blind spot’ that exists at the nexus of political movements and lifestyle movements, where the former is deemed to occupy the public sphere and the latter the private sphere (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones, 2012, p. 2). This is because tiny houses dualistically encompass the political and the private as literature has recorded both collective and individual motivations for living in a tiny house (Carras, 2019; Willoughby and Collins, 2018).

1.4 Research Questions

Tiny houses, then, potentially offer a more achievable way for women to live alone and, therefore, to circumnavigate some of the harmful effects of patriarchal domesticity. In addition to this, the significant decrease in the cost of living incurred in a tiny house compared to a conventional dwelling opens up opportunities for women to work less or work differently in the paid labour force, which in turn presents an opportunity to ameliorate some of the harmful effects of sexist and capitalist exploitation for women as proletarian labourers. Taken together, the impacts of patriarchal capitalism on women's lives make the female experience of designing, building, and living in an affordable, sustainable home of their own a phenomenon of particular import and significance. Subsequently, this thesis aimed to address three key research questions.

- 1) How are women using tiny houses to reconfigure their relationship with and experience of capitalism and patriarchy?
- 2) What do women say about how their experience of designing and building their own homes impacted them?
- 3) (How) are women's lives different before versus after living in a tiny home?

1.5 Theoretical framing

This thesis adopts a novel tripartite theoretical formulation of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984), dweller control (Ward, 1976), and the slender body (Bordo, 2003). The theory of heterotopia has an established basis as a useful analytical tool for the interrogation of space and its social functions (Dehaene and De Caeter, 2008; Foucault, 1984; Wilks and Quinn, 2016). In this instance, tiny houses are examined through the conceptual lens of heterotopia as a ‘world within a world’ and a place where the taken-for-granted status quo of the everyday can be inverted, adjusted, and distorted (Faubion, 2008; Hetherington, 1997; Shane, 2008). The thesis also mobilises Colin Ward’s (1985; 1990) theoretical framework on self-help and anarchism in approaches to self-build housing, particularly emphasising the concept of dweller control. According to Ward (1976), the primary concern of housing is not its physical characteristics but its impact on residents. Ward argues that the type of housing that individuals actually want is much more adaptable to their evolving needs and preferences than the commercially available housing, particularly for those with limited financial resources. Linked to this, Ward (1990) shows that self-built houses are often a much more cost-efficient option for construction and upkeep - an argument which has obvious relevance when considering tiny houses. Ward maintains that the agency of the inhabitants should be the primary concern of all housing, regardless of tenure type or ownership status.

Bordo’s (2003; 2018) feminist materialist theorising on gendered self-discipline and the ubiquitous pressure to achieve the ‘slender’ feminine ideal is a valuable component of the novel theoretical approach used in this thesis. Whilst it does not directly address women’s experience of their bodies per se, my research does consider women’s embodied experiences, using their bodies to sketch up drawings, hammer nails, shift lumber, and move through their completed tiny homes. Further, it acknowledges that all human experiences definitionally

implicate the body since all thoughts, feelings, and experiences are done with and through the body. Using Bordo's (2003) theory of the slender body allows the simultaneous consideration of the underpinnings of gender ideology and the material implications of capitalist patriarchy on women's everyday lives. In combination with heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) and dweller control (Ward, 1976), this thesis interrogates women's efforts to disrupt or recalibrate the impacts of patriarchal and capitalist forces in their lives by creating a heterotopic site of contestation in their tiny houses.

1.6 Overview of the Data

The research draws on semi-structured interviews conducted over Zoom, telephone, and email between March 2020 and September 2021 with 33 women from several countries (see participant matrix in appendix). Two of the interviews could not be used in the final thesis as the audio recording app that I used to capture our phone calls was faulty, these interviews have not been included in the thesis and are not listed in the appendix. The women ranged in age from twenty-three to seventy-seven, and their annual income ranged equally as widely from £5,000 to more than £70,000 per annum. Two women were of black African descent, one was Asian and one Phillipino. Most women did not have children, but a significant minority did live in their tiny houses with their children. 13 were single, six were in a relationship but not living with their partner, and 14 were in a relationship and cohabiting. Most women identified as heterosexual, but a significant minority were queer; four out of 33 participants identified with non-heterosexual identities; this is higher than expected in a representative sample of the population where the average sits at roughly 3-7% depending on location (Sharfman and Cobb, 2021; Gallup, 2021).

Whilst most women were living in a tiny house at the time of our conversation, a small minority were still in the planning stage and had not yet moved into a tiny house. These women were included in the thesis since they offered valuable insight into the expectations and rationale for tiny living for those who had not yet experienced it first-hand. A majority of women (20) lived in a tiny house on wheels. The next most popular tiny house was a converted van or lorry (9). The cost of the tiny houses ranged from £5,000 to £72,000. Over forty hours of interview data was recorded and transcribed between March 2020 and September 2021 which was then thematically coded and analysed. The data collected were used to answer the three research questions that structure this thesis.

1.7 Thesis Summary

The thesis is laid out as follows. Chapter two presents a review of the literature which locates the phenomenon of tiny houses within understandings of the housing crisis, the cost of living crisis, and ongoing responses to this which seek to centre dweller control (Ward, 1990). An examination of how heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) has been understood and deployed in previous academic enquiry is provided, highlighting the novel application offered by this thesis in using it to examine tiny houses. The theory of the slender body (Bordo, 2003) is more fully articulated and a rationale for its usefulness in examining women's experiences of tiny houses is given. The literature review also considers the significance of making, building, and design in human culture to provide a rationale for the relevance of considering tiny houses as a unique and emergent expression of human creativity in the built environment. Interwoven with these core themes is an analysis of the environmental impacts of consumer capitalism and the neoliberal cult of work implicated in this political economy.

Chapter three presents the methodological approach of this thesis, establishing the legitimacy of a qualitative investigation and giving an overview of the core underpinning of intersectional feminist ethics throughout this thesis. Following this, the specific activities of data collection, sampling, thematic coding and analysis are explored and justified. Chapter four offers the first of three empirical findings chapters. Each of the three findings chapters addresses different components of the three research questions; that is, there is not one chapter to address each research question individually. Instead, I offer an integrated approach wherein particular components of the three thesis questions are addressed in each of the three findings chapters.

Chapter four deals with the findings around women and the design of their homes and their lives, and how their experiences of having control over the design of their homes impacted their sense of self and their lives more broadly. Chapter five presents an analysis of the data on women and consumption. This chapter discusses how women formulate their identity through changed consumption patterns before and after living in a tiny house and how these changes impact their experience of capitalism and patriarchy in their lives. Chapter six presents the last of the empirical findings. This chapter deals with the data around women and work and how tiny house living modulates the power of work under capitalist patriarchy, including a consideration of both paid and unpaid labour. Chapter seven presents the conclusion of the thesis. In this chapter, the findings are reiterated and summarised in the context of the established literature, and a case is made for the novel contribution that this thesis has made. The strengths and limitations of the thesis are scrutinised, and avenues for further research are considered.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review chapter outlines and justifies the aims of this thesis, specifically a nuanced understanding of the gendered experience of women building tiny houses, analysed through the tripartite theoretical formulation of dweller control (Ward, 1976), heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) and the slender body (Bordo, 2003). I justify the significance of this research by presenting a critical overview of the literature related to self-build tiny houses and the gendered experience of the home, including the affordable housing crisis, and an examination of the role of making or building in reported self-image. I use the term self-build following Pickerill's definition that self-build refers to "when a resident has built all or part of the home in which they live, but they may have worked with, or employed others during the build." (Pickerill, 2016, p. 4). Throughout this chapter, the implications of gender, patriarchy, and neoliberal capitalism are foregrounded to demonstrate the links between broader social processes and individual experiences, such as the tessellation between the affordable housing crisis and women's experiences as gendered labourers in both the paid and unpaid workforce.

2.1.1 Heterotopia

Foucault considered space to be the defining problematic of our epoch. In his 1984 essay, Foucault laid out the defining qualities that he believed make up a heterotopia, including, among others, the assertion that every society creates heterotopias, that they invert and

suspect the normative worlds around them and that certain permissions must be granted for entry into them (Foucault, 1984). Various descriptions include “worlds within worlds” (Johnson, 2012, p. 1), or as a site “that represents incompatible spaces and reveals paradoxes” (Sudradjat, 2012, p. 29), or even as “countervailing imagistic and rhetorical currents” (Faubion, 2008, p. 32), heterotopias are above all spaces of pluriformity and possibility.

A solid base of literature spanning over forty years recognises the value of heterotopia as an analytical and conceptual tool. Saldanha (2008), drawing from Hetherington (1997), elucidates how heterotopias can induce alternative social orderings. Likewise, Wilks and Quinn (2016) use two examples of music festivals to analyse how heterotopias can suspect and invert the mundane or taken-for-granted social order of the world outside. The lens of heterotopia has been used to draw out an analysis of the body (Harvey, 2000), as well as facets of human behaviour and how these are modified by the built environment (Sudradjat, 2012). The application of heterotopia as a mode of problematising the urban environment has been perhaps the most widespread use of the theory (see Dehaene and Cauter, 2008). This thesis intends to offer a synergy of these approaches by considering how female-led tiny house builds can be considered heterotopias and what the embodied repercussions of this might be for the women who design and build their own heterotopic tiny houses.

Engaging the lens of heterotopia to consider the case of women-built tiny houses allows a simultaneous interrogation of the interconnections between people, space, and culture. Wilks and Quinn (2016) write on how the approach of considering social and cultural capital alongside heterotopia enables a “deeper understanding of the nature of celebration” (2016, p. 23). This thesis aims to discover whether a deeper understanding of the nature of self-build tiny houses can be achieved by examining them through the lens of heterotopia. However, in a similarly Foucauldian tradition, this research takes the position that there are no fundamental qualities to social and relational phenomena; in this sense, the aims of the thesis

are not to find out what tiny houses ‘really are’, but rather to find out what they can do, how they are being used, and to what effect.

Wilks and Quinn include a section on festivals as “other spaces” (2016, p. 24) and point out how one of the principal functions of heterotopia is to subvert the spaces around them, specifically, the relational modes normalised in the non-heterotopic sites. The tiny house fits well here because, on the one hand, they can be assessed as a space representing the normalised imaginings of the home as a discrete four-walled dwelling, compartmentalised by how inhabitants use each area, e.g. sleeping, cooking, and washing. In other words, tiny houses might tend to reflect the dominant ideal of a free-standing owner-occupied home surrounded by a garden. At the same time, tiny houses contest hegemonic beliefs about what a home is and could be. Their diminutive size casts aspirations on how much space a person needs to live in and be comfortable and fulfilled. Their relative inexpensiveness inverts the typical self-build story and questions the ‘Grand Designs’ white middle-class ownership of the self-build narrative (Benson and Hamiduddin, 2017). Their affordability and ease of construction suggest that in comparison to traditional routes to home ownership, tiny houses may provide a more democratic option, opening up the possibility of home ownership to more people. In this way, tiny houses might be positioned as offering liberatory potential in the broader context of the global north's exclusionary and oppressive housing market.

Foucault’s (1984) heterotopia has a long history of being employed in the analysis of physical places and their sociological functions (see, for example, Hetherington, 1997; Sacco et al., 2019; Saldanha, 2008). However, heterotopia has been criticised by feminist scholars who argue that gender differences are neglected in Foucault’s theorising and that the absence of a

materially embodied social actor is detrimental to the emancipatory struggle of women and other marginalised groups (Heynen, 2008). In this regard, I hope to contribute to addressing the deficit of considering processes of doing gender in heterotopic spaces. Further, the introduction of Bordo's (2003) work on the interface between patriarchal gendering of bodies and the broader trends of encouraging feminine people to embrace the shrinking, diminishing, and diluting of their claims to space and power is useful to bring an appreciation of gender into a consideration of tiny houses as heterotopic places. Bordo's (2003) work will be covered under section 2.1.3 in this chapter.

2.1.2 Dweller Control

This thesis is also framed by Colin Ward's (1976; 1990) work on self-help and anarchism in the realm of housing, taking a specific focus on the approach of dweller control. According to Ward, what matters most about housing is not what it *is* but what it *does* for the people living there. In addition, he contends that the house people genuinely desire is vastly more adaptive to their changing requirements and demands than the housing that is now on the market.

Ward contends that self-build homes are often better suited to low-income households because they are also more cost-effective to create and maintain (Ward, 1990). Throughout his work on dweller control, Ward supports the notion that the inhabitant's sense of control should be the first rule of any housing, whether it is owned or rented. John Turner, an anarchist architect with experience in the UK and the US, is cited favourably by Ward:

‘When dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contribution to the design, construction or management of their housing, both the process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social wellbeing. When people have no

control over, nor responsibility for, key decisions in the housing process, on the other hand, dwelling environments may instead become a barrier to personal fulfilment and a burden on the economy.” (Fichter, 1972, p. 241).

The passage above emphasises that what is most important is not ownership but control. This principle is referred to as the ‘first fundamental’ of housing by Ward (1990). Invoking Fichter's prior research from 1972, he makes the case that homes produced by people with a sense of control are both better quality and more affordable than those developed through government initiatives or private commercial investment. Ward supports homeowner participation in important choices that impact the planning, building, and continuing maintenance of their houses. Ward's analysis emphasises that although dweller control means independence from an "exploitative or inattentive landlord", ownership of the house or the land it is constructed on is not a prerequisite (Ward 1990, p. 13). However, in a highly privatised and financialised consumer capitalist society, ownership has become the de facto metric for control; if you own it, you control it.

In the landscape of a global and decades-long affordable housing shortage and, more latterly, an acute cost of living crisis, the extent to which the average person feels in control of their life is increasingly dubious (Hoolachan et al., 2017; Pattillo, 2013; Saunders, 2017). To compound this, the coronavirus pandemic saw thousands of people lose their jobs and, since the eviction moratorium was lifted, their homes (Ksinan, 2022). To re-emphasise the value of considering these phenomena from a gendered lens, it is worth observing that women constituted 57% of employees in industries subsequently shut down by the pandemic, making them disproportionately affected (Francis-Devine, 2021). At the same time as mass job loss and associated financial insecurity, a concurrent pandemic of male violence against women

was a severe but underreported outcome of COVID-19 (United Nations Women's Data Hub, 2022; UN Women, 2021). With this context in mind, any experience of enhanced personal agency that women might be accessing through and in their tiny houses becomes of heightened significance.

Acknowledging the multiple burdens that women experience also highlights how tiny houses can be usefully analysed as spaces in which gendered dweller control might be taking place. However, to the best of my knowledge, very little analysis of the presence and effect of dweller control in tiny houses has yet been advanced, which is one way in which this thesis hopes to make a novel contribution (for an example of an analysis of dweller control in the tiny house movement, see Wilson and Wadham, 2023). Whilst there is a robust oeuvre of scholarly work using dweller control to understand and highlight how individual agency over living spaces impacts the quality of life as well as the quality of build (see, for example, Burgess, 1978; Fichter, 1972; Nyakuwa, 2010), there is insufficient analysis of the gendered component of dweller control. To this end, Bordo (2003) is used as a complementary and enriching analytical lens.

2.1.3 The Slender Body

In Bordo's (2003) work on the slender body, she explains the complex and conflicting internal experiences people are forced to have under consumer capitalism. Sociologists have long studied consumption for its tactical use in communicating likeness and difference and its strategic employment in impression management and identity formation (Woodward, 2003). Consumption practices are closely linked to the communication of social status and political alignment, and, as such, are imbued with significant explanatory power when seeking to gain

insight into what social actors are trying to achieve when they consume (ibid.) Bordo explains how, in order to fulfil their daily work obligations, citizens must first sublimate and suppress their want for instant gratification rather than giving in to their urge to sleep, relax, or engage in any other activity that is not productive labour. The same individuals, however, are also required to fulfil their duty as consumers by consistently showing discontent with what they already own, as well as showing a desire for indulgence and enjoyment in consuming new products, services, and experiences. Due to these two opposing forces, controlling the desire to consume becomes one of the centrifugal forces of daily life. It presents an intractable problem for society because people are forced to endure an endless barrage of advertisements encouraging them to consume while also being aware that overindulgence and excess are socially unacceptable (Bordo, 2003).

Bordo observes that people who are excluded from consumer culture due to a lack of finances confront a distinct problem, one that revolves around how to deal with being "teased and frustrated" by the society in which they reside (Bordo, 2003, p. 199). Advertisements and popular culture more broadly oscillate between the two poles of the consumption paradox, extolling the virtues of owning the newest phone, dress, car, or condo one moment and praising the pro-environmental, pro-social exploits of minimalists and declutterers the next. The fundamental message of this pervasive social marketing is that, if they try hard enough, consumers can 'have it all'. Bordo contends that this proposition is both a core teaching of consumer capitalism and also a falsehood (Bordo, 2018). In her theorising, Bordo reveals how, despite the difficulties of modern culture, the slim figure conveys the alluring ideal of a well-managed person in which everything is 'in order.' Hypothesising that the present obsession with slenderness operates inside a modern 'normalising' mechanism of social power, Bordo clarifies that its primary role is to reproduce gender relations (Bordo, 2018).

Similarly, Bordo (2018) contends that because consumers are trained to respond with desire when confronted with the concept of 'new things,' and because satisfying this desire is what perpetuates the economy, people must construct strong defences against succumbing to these desires so that they can avoid facing ruin. Under this interpretation, tiny houses might be seen as an example of these defences against the relentless drive to consume. That is, tiny houses may be to consumption what the slender body is to the patriarchally defined ideal woman, a management strategy used to discipline the self into conformity. However, whilst investigation into the relationship between tiny houses and personal beliefs about consumption practices has been conducted (e.g. Carlin, 2014; Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017; Harris, 2018; Willoughby and Collins, 2018), researchers have not explored the gendered aspect of consumption vis-a-vis women in tiny houses with much detail. Therefore, this thesis's importance is justified by paying close attention to how tiny housing is linked to women's agency, specifically concerning their ability to engage, or not, with patriarchal domesticity, paid labour, and practises of making and consuming.

Now that a thorough introduction to the tripartite theoretical framework of this thesis has been offered, this chapter will now present relevant literature on themes around the home, homeownership, gender in the home, cultures of work, and cultures of consumption. Taken together, this discussion provides a basis for considering women-led tiny house builds as a valuable and unique area of scholarly investigation, drawing attention to how this thesis contributes to gaps in the existing academic literature.

2.2 What a Home Is

At its most basic level, the home is the place where we are likely to spend the majority of our lives. In part because of this, the home has long been established in sociological scholarship as a significant site of decision-making and identity formation informed by economic constraints, social norms, cultural aspirations, and environmental attitudes (Gibson et al., 2011; Perkins, Thorns, & Winstanley, 2008; Ronald, 2008). Self-build tiny houses, in particular, highlight that whilst economic rationalities remain an important factor in decisions relating to the home, the significance of the embodied experience of building and living in a home extends much further into affective, emotional, and meaning-making encounters in the lives of their inhabitants (Harris, 2018; Mangold and Zschau, 2019).

Acknowledging the home as a socio-spatial domain in which significant identity work is done allows an understanding of citizens' daily lives and choices as a legitimate site of struggle and contested power relations (Craig, 2016). The home, then, can be “explored as a mode of embodiment and as such capable of configuring (and not merely accommodating) gender, sexual and cultural difference.” (Smith, 2006, p. 192). The value of this analytical approach is brought into sharp relief when considering how women use tiny houses to respond to environmental, social, and political inequality. Of particular interest to this thesis is how women may be using tiny houses as a heterotopic technology, that is, as a way to invert, recreate, or undermine the hegemonic arrangements of society, including their gender (Dehaene and De Cauter, 2008; Sacco, et al., 2019). This thesis follows Benson and Hamiduddin’s (2017, p. 269) call to continue using the sociological imagination to keep interrogating “what people want from housing” and how they are working towards achieving that through self-build projects.

Because of the deeply ingrained privatisation model of life under capitalism, the home is “probably almost the only place where you can impose something of your own individual environment” (Boys, et al., 1984, p. 1), albeit this, of course, depends on whether you own the building, and how much time, money and help you have access to. Nevertheless, because the home is one of the few places that possess even the latent potential for such self-direction and expression, it is also a site that we value highly and yearn to enjoy (ibid). Writing on the importance of understanding home not as a bounded spatial arena but as an amorphous set of events comprised of social encounters, Friedmann suggests of the home that “the place must be small, inhabited, and come to be cherished or valued by its resident population for all that it represents or means to them.” (Friedmann, 2010, p. 154). Friedmann conceived of an enthusiastic refocusing on the local, the minutiae, and the qualitative components of meaningful spaces as existing on a ‘pedestrian scale’ as opposed to a corporate or national scale. On the same pedestrian scale, this thesis aims to approach an enhanced understanding of women’s self-build tiny houses, specifically to understand “all that it represents or means to them.” (ibid.)

2.2.1 Homeownership

Homeownership is culturally constructed as preferable to renting in the UK, the USA, and other highly neoliberalised nations (Elsinga & Hoekstra, 2005; Ronald, 2008; Saunders, 1990). The British, American, and Australian championing of home ownership is symptomatic of the neoliberal preference for self-sufficient individuals, who, in this case, do not rely on the state to provide affordable social housing. Under the neoliberal mentality of rule, the machinations of the free market and the ‘invisible hand’ which autonomously balances the forces of supply and demand are deemed to be the optimal method for

distributing housing, as well as other commodities and services (Solimano, 2014; Zsolnai, 2017).

The cultural celebration of private home ownership in these ex-British colonies offers a contrast to other European countries where a lifetime of renting is considered more usual, and a robust supply of social housing is available (Arundel & Doling, 2017; De Graaff, Van Leuvensteijn & Van Ewijk, 2009; Lennartz, Arundel & Ronald, 2016). In this context, tiny houses can be rendered as rhetorically resisting the trend of financialising housing and instead refocusing on the use value of a home rather than the exchange value of a home (Anson, 2018; Slater, 2013). However, tiny houses can also be interpreted as reinforcing the ideal of owner-occupation and can be seen simply as offering a more affordable route into financialised housing (Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017; Shearer and Burton, 2021). It is partially in exploring the disquieting liminality between confirming and refuting the neoliberal ideal of homeownership that this thesis hopes to make an original contribution to advancing scholarly understanding of tiny housing as an emergent response to the housing crisis.

Expanding on the testament quoted in Shearer and Burton (2018) that it is the *ability* that tiny houses confer on their residents to experience enhanced levels of agency in their own lives, it is apparent that tiny houses may be offering a lifeline to their residents in the context of an acute housing and cost of living crisis, where more and more people are locked out of traditional home ownership and the types of security which can accompany this (Hoolachan, et al. 2017). Studies consistently demonstrate that a reluctance to participate in mortgage debt and its associated risks and constraints underpins much of the appetite for tiny housing (Boeckermann, Kaczynski, and King, 2019; Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017; Mangold and

Zschau, 2019). Consequently, given that “Function is, after all, what the building seeks to realize...” (Benjamin 2000, p. 74), this thesis aims to interrogate what functions women seek to realise by remaking, building and living in their own tiny houses.

2.2.2 Home Makers

When considering the case of building a home, engaging with the embodied task of doing the building itself becomes a formative act of meaning-making, interwoven with narratives of personal and group identity (Ingold, 2013). The materiality of doing building work can provide as much utility to the builder as the finished house can to the resident (ibid). Indeed, Gorz suggested that a telltale sign of truly autonomous activity is when the actions that move you towards achieving a goal may confer as much personal satisfaction as actually attaining it (Gorz, 2011, p. 165). Several scholars have reinforced this point, elucidating that during pleasurable making, “finishing is never finished” (Brand, 1995, p. 64) and that the completion of a building is but a “legal fiction” (Ingold, 2013, p. 69).

Linked to the connection between the material and the semantic, it has also been argued that tiny homes can be read as a “public symbol of private life” (Columbini, 2019, p. 15).

Columbini’s arguments allow tiny housing to emerge as both a public symbol and as a set of practical techniques mobilised in dismantling oppressive types of organisation, such as patriarchy or capitalism, and re-making these relational modes to include the possibility of a more self-governed life. A key aspect of this dismantling is the rebuilding of the tiny home's physical structure and the remaking of the norms that govern activity within the home. In other words, tiny houses might be analysed as disassembling what a home is normatively conceived to be, following from the deconstructivist mentality of architects like Tschumi,

who observed that “The game of architecture is an intricate play with rules that you may break or accept.” (Smith, 2006, p. 186). The analysis of this thesis builds on existing literature to consider the example that tiny houses present of simultaneous obedience and rebellion towards the rules of architecture, homeownership, labour, and gender. In this light, tiny houses emerge again as potentially heterotopic sites which may be used to reimagine and reformulate assumptions about how architecture, homeownership, labour, and gender can be done.

Of particular interest is the extent to which women may be using tiny houses to live alone, specifically to avoid cohabiting with men and the domesticated patriarchy that this can entail. Traditional heteropatriarchal households are less common now in the global north than ever before, and their numbers continue to decline (Kern, 2020, p. 82). It is possible that the increase in alternative household structures may include a concurrent increase in the number of women living alone. Kern argues, "There is something radical and therefore frightening about women in particular finding ways to opt-out of institutions such as marriage and even heterosexual monogamy itself." (Kern, 2020, p. 84). In this argument, Kern emphasises that there is a particular element of challenging the centrality of the nuclear family which relies on spatial forms of rejection, resistance, and reimagining. However, it is not yet adequately understood if and to what extent women may be looking to the spatial and material opportunities afforded by tiny houses as a strategic way to invalidate the power of heteropatriarchal domesticity and remake different relational patterns.

Kim TallBear (2011) points out that refocusing on alternative forms of relating outside of patriarchal nuclear family structures radically destabilises settler-colonial power structures predicated on aggressive hierarchies and narrowly defined ideas about what an appropriate

life should include. Relatedly, Kern (2020) observes that in efforts to build a feminist city, a compelling marker for success is how able women are to move through the city alone, uninterrupted and unharassed. Violations of women's personal space by physical proximity, noise, and other people's mess for which she is assumed responsible are tolerated in the home to such an extent that they become invisible as a routine, intuitive, or unavoidable part of life (Kerns, 2020; Oakley, 2019). A truly private space for women to be both alone and safe in the city is a gift to be "jealously guarded" (Kerns, 2020, p. 90). Likewise, at home women are "always in demand." (Kerns, 2020, p. 97) due to their roles as caregivers, domestic labourers, and emotional support providers. In this context, one of the attractions of tiny houses for women could be the opportunity they provide for independent living away from these demands and expectations. However, the extent to which women are turning to tiny houses to generate experiences of enhanced solitude or agency is not yet well understood. In this regard, this thesis hopes to make a unique and valuable contribution.

In a thorough overview of different theoretical approaches to understanding the home, Mallet (2004) observes that rigid ideas about the design of a good home have remained consistent over the past century in the Anglo-American imagination, despite the diversity of needs and preferences for what a home is and does at the level of the individual. Drawing from this critique, tiny houses might be argued to conform to the enduring homogeneity that Mallet (2004) discusses; despite their ability to offer a more bespoke living arrangement than buying a house might allow, tiny houses nevertheless frequently remain detached free-standing dwellings, usually surrounded by a garden, and most often inhabited by a single family (Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017; Shearer and Burton, 2021). A freestanding, single-family home design conforms to the standard ideal of a white, middle-class, cis-hetero 'good life', which points to the impact of cultural ideas about what makes a "desirable, appropriate and

acceptable living space.” (Mallett, 2004, p. 68).

What is considered desirable and appropriate in a home is further complicated by remaining cognizant of the highly gendered experiences of home. Not only is the home a feminised jurisdiction, semantically parsed as being in opposition to the masculinised sphere of the public ‘working’ world, but the home is also historically linked to beliefs about the ideal woman and is, therefore, an active site of gender construction (Mallett, 2004). It has long been established that ideas about gender are derived from the home, and vice-versa; “The ideology of domesticity, which describes how things *ought* to be and *ought* to look, will always affect what we do even when we are reacting against it.” (Boys, et al., 1984, p.1, italics in original). That normative ideas about patriarchal domesticity are invoked and revealed even when people are ‘reacting against’ them is demonstrated in the case of women building and living in their own tiny houses. As is pointed out in Boys et al. (1984), I am also cautious to acknowledge that whilst women might have more power within their self-built tiny homes than they do in their workplace or communities, this is not a legitimisation that their natural place is indeed within the home (ibid).

Despite remaining imbued with ideological expressions of what a home *ought* to be, tiny houses also open up the opportunity for highly bespoke personal alterations to the living space, including the ability to design the entire dwelling from the ground up. In most Anglo-American nations, self-build homes are the preserve of the wealthy and white (Benson and Hamiduddin, 2017). Indicatively, the average cost of a self-build home in the UK is in the region of £350,000 (Benson and Hamiduddin, 2017). Such a figure far outstrips the average cost of buying a home in the UK and is as much as one hundred times more than an average tiny house costs. Because of this, tiny houses present a unique opportunity to have complete

architectural and aesthetic control over the development of a home for a fraction of the price. As a consequence, tiny houses may function to democratise access to high-quality dwellings; self-build homes are noted to offer both a higher overall quality of build and to elicit a significantly higher self-reported satisfaction score from their residents (Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2016; Lloyd, Peel and Janssen-Jansen, 2015). The social justice implications of the affordability of tiny houses may have far-reaching consequences, particularly when considering how economic and cultural oppression doubly subjugates women from being financially and socially enabled to design and build their own homes.

The affordability benefits of tiny houses may be further compounded by the intimate personal relationship that the builder of a tiny house has with their home, in comparison with the dwelling that architects and developers create for anonymous off-the-shelf purchasers. The personal builder-owner-occupier status is a marked departure from the traditional corporate or state creation of living spaces since “The process of training student architects does not normally bring them into contact with building users.” (Boys et al., 1984, p. 12). In a departure from this norm, tiny house residents have frequently had at least cursory input in the design and building of their own home, even if this is simply in consultation with professional tiny house builders, giving residents a greatly enhanced experience of having control over their living space (Ford, and Gomez-Lanier, 2017; Shearer and Burton, 2021; Weetman, 2018).

It has long been established that the more control a resident has over their living space, the higher their self-reported satisfaction with the space and the more effort residents expend in maintaining and caring for the space (Benson and Hamiduddin, 2017; Sullivan and Ward, 2012; Ward, 1990). Again, in the context of the home, it is of sociological interest to consider

how gender modulates the experience of agency and dweller control, particularly in the case of self-build, which invokes “a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places” (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, p. 2, quoted in Benson and Hamiduddin, 2017, p. 268). As such, this thesis examines whether women experience changed levels of control over their living space in a tiny house and what ramifications this has. In this way, the thesis hopes to build on existing scholarship about the significance and impact of dweller control (Ward, 1990) by enriching it with a focused consideration of women as gendered home builders as well as homemakers.

2.3 Tiny houses: Contraction and Expansion

Recent studies have positioned tiny houses as creating “politically autonomous zones” (Weetman, 2019, p. 238) where residents can reclaim agency over their lives as labourers by reducing their need to engage with the paid workforce, and as consumers by reducing their complicity in perpetuating the cycles of hyperconsumerism. In writing on the philosophy of architecture, Benjamin attests that material space “is at its most effective when its architectural imperative is lost, and its political and social considerations are allowed centrality.” (Benjamin, 2000, p. 160, quoted in Smith, 2006, p. 189). Thinking through the built environment in this way reaffirms that the size of a tiny house is not its defining quality but rather what political and social considerations are being manifested by the people who build and live in it. Specifically, what has not yet been analysed in depth are the particular experiences of women in the tiny house movement and what manifestations of expanding personal sovereignty may be facilitated for women through the actions of building and living in a tiny house. By considering the place-making experiences of women building tiny houses,

simultaneous analysis of how women are themselves “‘placed’ as women in a man-made environment” (Boys, et al., 1984, p. viii) and how women are remaking these gendered placements will be facilitated.

Although the size of a tiny house is not its defining quality, it is worth noting that tiny houses really are small. There is significant variation in the overall floor plan, but they are generally no larger than 37m² (Shearer, 2019). To contextualise the extent of this shrinkage, the average floor space for UK owner-occupiers is 109m², the USA average floor plan is 210m², and in Australia, it is 186m² (Architecture & Design, 2022; Statista, 2022a; 2022b). Further, the diminished size of a tiny house floor plan implies other shrinkages: smaller appliances such as refrigerators, fewer items of furniture, and restrictions in storage space that may, in turn, restrict buying habits.

Nevertheless, these shrinkages may also imply other expansions. Several investigations into tiny house residents note the reported sense of expanded agency or control, often citing a lifestyle that is more aligned with the residents' values than before (Shearer and Burton, 2021; Mangold and Zschau, 2019; Willoughby, Mangold, and Zschau, 2020). In writing on the functions of restraint, Deleuze (1991) describes how a masochist might restrain the body in a certain way so that it can be used to achieve particular ends. When considering the unique pleasures of constraint for the masochist, being physically limited is transformed from a limitation into a new kind of freedom (ibid.). Such an understanding can be fruitfully applied to analyses of a tiny house's constrained and limited living space. Whilst a 37m² home may seem unduly, even inhumanely restricted to some, it is also necessary to consider what particular ends or unique pleasures the inhabitants of this restricted space may also be experiencing.

Within the constrictions that Deleuze (1991) explores, certain normative perspectives are suspended so that alternative notions can come into operation; the usual movement of the body is restrained so that new forms of expression are foregrounded. In this way, experiences of bondage can be construed as heterotopic in that they invert and toy with normatively imposed beliefs about what the body should do and how it ought to be used. Expanding on this analysis, Smith writes that such constraints can be considered an identity practice that “imply fictions of coherence and self-sufficiency” (Smith, 2006, p. 193). This analysis is valuable when interrogating the function of tiny houses when so much rhetoric surrounding tiny homes is invested in a rubric of self-sufficiency (Colombini, 2019). As Smith (2006) highlights, whilst the experience of strategic restraint may give rise to fictitious experiences of self-sufficiency, the fiction still gives rise to the flow of thoughts, feelings, and ideas. In this way, the alternative notions that come into operation through the experience of living in a constricted type of dwelling like a tiny house may be significant in that they could open up an expanded relational space of considering alternatives to the status quo. These notions may include ideas about alterity and feelings of self-sufficiency, even when these feelings may be divorced from an objective or measurable change in ‘actual’ agency.

2.4 Tiny Houses and the Gendered Cost of Living Crisis

Tiny houses have been noted as a growing phenomenon, especially in the UK, Australia, and the USA (Mangold and Zschau, 2019). One of the more salient features that link these geographically disparate settings is a neoliberal regime, an acute affordable housing shortage, and stagnating wages for the working and middle classes (Carlin, 2014; Minton, 2017).

Perhaps in response to this, in the UK, 67% of 16-35-year-olds would like to live in a

socialist political-economic system (Institute of Economic Affairs, 2022). The increasing popularity of tiny houses, then, is occurring within a revival of broader criticisms of capitalism. The rise of public conversation about tiny houses as an alternative to conventional dwellings is also occurring amid the fallout of ongoing ‘austerity’ cuts to social services and welfare provisions following the 2008 financial crisis, which has been shown to disproportionately affect women (Reis, 2018), further highlighting the relevance of examining women's experiences in tiny houses.

Alongside the specific damages of the housing crisis, the cost of living crisis more broadly is harming the lives of the working and middle classes, particularly women (Living Wage Foundation, 2022). Inflation and the ongoing cost of living crisis are felt more keenly by women since “Women more commonly spend more of their income on non-durable household goods, for example, food and cleaning products, which are typically more susceptible to inflation-induced volatility.” (Living Wage Foundation, 2022). At the same time as the growing unaffordability of necessities like food and fuel, women who live with men continue to do approximately twice as much unpaid domestic labour (McGinnity and Russell, 2008; Sayer, 2010). The effects of this added burden mean that for women who do both paid and unpaid work, “tiredness, ill health and depression are routine.” (Holmes, 2007, p. 10). How access, or lack thereof, to money, housing, and agency intersect with gendered experiences of violence and control are summarised concisely by Holmes (2007, p. 10):

“Women’s lack of financial independence makes them vulnerable to the demands of their husbands, or other men with authority over them. When women have to rely on men to get what they need to survive they often do not have the luxury of saying no. In many nations, including wealthy ones, women lacking job skills and experience may be heavily reliant on

men's financial support. This may be a key reason why women feel unable to leave violent partners (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). Women's poverty connects not only to sex and violence but is highly likely to constrain their choices about everything from the quality of their housing to what they eat."

It is in this context that this thesis examines the potential of tiny houses to interrupt harmful cycles related to women's (in)ability to control resources in their lives, such as their money, time, and energy. Specifically, this thesis aims to interrogate what might change in women's lives once they are in a position whereby they are more likely to "have the luxury of saying no" to certain aspects of the gendered affordable housing and cost of living crisis as well as components of patriarchal domesticity (Holmes, 2007, p. 10). It is in considering questions around particular material spaces in which women may experience heightened control in tandem with heightened constraint that a tessellated theoretical lens of dweller control (Ward, 1990) and heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) emerges as being particularly useful in combination with the gender-sensitive work of the slender body (Bordo, 2003).

2.5 The Relationship Between Tiny Houses and Consumption

The dominant neoliberal economic imperative encourages the ideal consumer-citizen to treat their home as an enclave away from the world, replete with one of everything they might conceivably need; for instance, a wide-screen television as a personal cinema, a home gym, full laundry capabilities, and so on (Ivanova, 2011; Schudson, 2006). In contrast to this, tiny house residents often report centring alternative values like time freedom, connection to nature, and a reduction in their carbon footprint (Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017; Willoughby, Mangold, and Zschau, 2020; Wilson and Wadham, 2023). In so doing, tiny house residents

can be seen as mobilising their homes to achieve alternative aims and symbolically represent different ideals (Carlin, 2014; Mangold and Zschau, 2019). Several scholars in this area have noted that moving away from consumerism is commonly reported as a self-identified personal goal of tiny house residents (Carlin, 2014; Mangold & Zschau, 2019; Willoughby & Collins, 2018).

Within tiny house populations, a decrease in active participation in the consumer market seems to be wrought by two distinct processes. In some instances, tiny house residents articulate that their desire to spend and consume less predated their desire to live in a tiny house (Mangold and Zschau, 2019; Shearer and Burton, 2021). That is, in looking for ways to live a life more closely aligned with a desire to consume less, tiny houses emerged as a coherent strategy to enable this lifestyle choice. In other instances, a decrease in the buying and owning of ‘stuff’ was simply more difficult in a tiny house because there was less space to store possessions. For this group of residents, it appears that living in a tiny house was a choice they made to achieve other aims, such as reducing their cost of living, being more physically mobile, and reducing their carbon footprint. Reducing the number of consumer possessions they owned flowed from these choices rather than prompting them (Engberg and Engberg, 2017; Heavener, 2019; Naveed & Davidson, 2015).

It is not just consumption within the home that deserves consideration. A house itself is an evocative example of conspicuous consumption and takes on increased relevance when home ownership is seen as a political act. Critical theorists note that world-shaping choices can be made as both a voter and a consumer (Gitlin and Todd, 1978; Schudson, 2006). It is argued that, in choosing, either by payment or ballot, the chooser is tacitly approving of the supplier of the choice and reifying the system which limits their ability to choose, whether buying

goods which legitimise the market or voting which legitimises a political system (Gitlin and Todd, 1978; Schudson, 2006). In this context, tiny houses present a fraught example of conspicuous consumption, which can be seen as representing multiple and conflicting values and eliding consumer choice with political choice.

Chatterton (2018) illustrates the elision of consumer choice with political choice by considering the example of the market choice between one brand of petrol-dependent car over another. He goes on to say that the widespread and normalised availability of such a choice may function to repress the mass development and expansion of public transport powered by renewable energy (Chatterton, 2018). In the context of tiny houses, it has been argued that living in a tiny home is at odds with, and consequently somewhat circumnavigates, the private property market and the culture of real estate, which positions a house as first an asset and only secondarily as fulfilling the human need for shelter (Weetman, 2018). Several examinations of tiny house dwellers stated reasons for living tiny include expressions of a desire to protest the inequity and unfairness of the existing models for procuring shelter (Anson, 2018; Fowler, 2018; Willoughby, Mangold, and Zschau, 2020). By refusing to become complicit in the particular logics of capitalism emblemised by the housing market, tiny house residents may be highlighting alternative ways of engaging in the pursuit of not only shelter but also in other ways of relating and coexisting which decentre the machinations of market transactions, the financialisation of housing, hyperconsumption, and the individualism that accompanies it.

However, the relationship between tiny housing and critiquing dominant models of consumption is not straightforward. Whilst it is true that tiny houses do not per se reinforce existing paradigms of real estate speculation because they are not classified as appreciating

assets and do not generally come attached to a plot of land, tiny houses do, nevertheless, represent an ideal of private ownership (Boeckermann, Kaczynski, and King, 2019; Foreman, 2019).

A great number of tiny houses are individual projects undertaken by a single person or a couple rather than as politically motivated collective action projects. Politically motivated collective communities do, of course, exist, and there are a growing number of politically motivated tiny house communities which seek to serve populations such as those experiencing homelessness (Fowler, 2018; Greene, 2019; Heben, 2014). Nevertheless, the majority of cases presented in the literature and the majority of examples explored in popular entertainment, such as Netflix's 'Tiny House Nation' or George Clarke's 'Amazing Spaces' are private projects rather than collective ones (Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017; Shearer and Burton, 2021).

Due to the strong presence of an individualised approach to building and living in a tiny house, it may be useful to compare lifestyle movements like the tiny house movement with other personal consumer-based lifestyle movements such as veganism, which despite being expressed as a personal preference against certain types of consumption is nevertheless located in a political agenda to protect animals and the environment (Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones, 2012; Kennedy, Krahn, and Krogman, 2013; Meissner, 2019). Likewise, whilst tiny house residents do not uniformly federate around a shared boycott of certain consumer products or practices, existing literature suggests that there is nevertheless a strong affinity for reducing consumption overall and a desire to both work and purchase less (Carlin, 2014; Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017; Harris, 2018; Willoughby and Collins, 2018). Even disparate,

individual articulations of a desire to work and spend less can be placed within the resurging collective critique of capitalism and its harms (Frayne, 2015; 2016).

Colombini (2019) supports the view that alternative lifestyles such as tiny living place themselves deliberately outside of mainstream norms, serving as a living and a rhetorical critique of dominant paradigms. Such a rhetorical and strategic alignment can be seen in other lifestyle movements like veganism or punk, which both rely on specific buying habits, the cultivation of a coherent dissenting identity, and a disparate peer support network (Harris, 2018; Micheletti and Stolle, 2015). Veganism, the tiny house movement, and other lifestyle movements demonstrate important differences with political and social movements 'proper'. For example, the women's suffrage movement utilised branches of hierarchically organised teams and embodied a change-focused orientation. Unlike the tiny house movement, the women's liberation movement sought to achieve its goals through organised collective action explicitly aimed at the state and other structures of authority (McAdam and Snow, 1997).

One persuasive theory on lifestyle movements such as tiny living is the 'multi-institutional politics' conceptualisation (Armstrong and Bernstein, 2008). A multi-institutional approach suggests that rather than just targeting the state, movements challenge multifarious sources of authority and are routinely engaged in pursuing both symbolic and material changes within and beyond established institutions such as universities, local councils, or marriages (ibid.). A nuanced definition is useful here because the tiny house movement appears to straddle direct political action in terms of lobbying for updated planning policy and minimum space regulations whilst simultaneously aligning with communities of meaning through the politicisation of their own identities and their mundane daily choices about what to (not) buy

and how much to (not) work (Cohen, 1985; Colombini, 2019; Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones, 2012). Here again, Colombini (2019) emphasises that in targeting cultural norms, whilst tiny housers might focus on their individual choice and ability to live in a tiny house, this choice is often understood as contributing to a diffuse but nonetheless collective challenge to the status quo.

When trying to critically analyse what tiny houses do in the philosophical, social, and material sense, it must be acknowledged that any attempt to counter the omnipresence of consumer culture is obliged to deal with the nexus of selfhood and market. Beggs (2018) described this confluence as a nuanced site of identity and behaviour resulting from a conflation between the autonomous self and market forces. It has been intimated that this conflation results in the late modern Western 'self' being, first and foremost, a consumer (Harris, 2018). As a consequence, it is argued that the primacy of the self as consumer makes it impossible to imagine countercultural modes of self-expression that do not relate to being economically productive, either as a worker or as a purchaser, but usually as both (Harris, 2018; Lauster, 2016; Schor and White, 2010).

Inquiry into the consumption habits of tiny house residents has revealed that the entanglement of self and market is frequently identified as an unwanted part of their lives (Carlin, 2014; Harris, 2018; Shearer and Burton, 2021). This realisation has been cited as a catalyst for joining the tiny house movement in that it represents an effort to forge an identity that is further detached from market forces (Harris, 2018; Mangold and Zschau, 2019). A desire to reduce consumption can be achieved in various ways, and a tiny house is not required to succeed in this regard. This is useful to note because it forces a questioning of what is being accomplished in terms of the reflexive project of the self, which cannot be

accomplished by simply moving into a small flat, moving to a cheaper city, or buying fewer possessions (Giddens, 1984). By considering what else and what more women can experience with and through their tiny houses, a novel contribution to existing scholarship on the sociology of the home will be offered. What women can do with their time, and how this interacts with their paid and unpaid labour responsibilities is fundamental to understanding what tiny houses might allow women to do differently. Gaining a deeper appreciation of how women's identities might be interlinked with market relations will allow a clarified understanding of how this entanglement might change after they move into their tiny houses.

2.6 Gendered Work and Time

The following section reviews the relevant literature on women's experiences of work as paid and unpaid labourers. An examination of work is intricately enmeshed with a consideration of how women experience time and how living in a tiny house might catalyse changes in how women experience both labour and time. Again, reference to augmented encounters with self-governance and the importance of the sense of being able to choose what kind of work to do, when, and for whom is revisited throughout this section. Insights in this area are inflected in ongoing evaluations of how time is experienced and used in order to set up a context in which a 'before and after living in a tiny house' analysis can be pursued in the following empirical findings chapters.

Existing research on tiny house communities in the USA and Australia shows that one of the key motivations to live tiny is a desire to step away from being so complicit in the logics of capitalism, specifically unrewarding and overwhelming work (Shearer and Burton 2021; Wilson and Boehland, 2008). Lending support to the critique of contemporary capitalist

working cultures, Graeber (2019) points out that it has become the accepted cultural procedure to act as if any person who does not work hard at jobs that they do not particularly enjoy is unworthy of compassion, love, and approval. Critical scholars have likewise problematised the pedestal upon which work is placed in late industrialised societies, arguing against the dogma that work is good by default, and refuting the enduring ideological positioning of employment as being more valuable than any other type of social contribution (Frayne, 2016; Schor and White, 2010; Weeks, 2016). Here, again, new insights may be drawn out by examining how women are using tiny houses as a heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) inducing tool which allows them to centre and amplify their sense of agency (Ward, 1974) through shrinking their living space, working hours, or buying habits (Bordo, 2003).

People living in the global north report feeling more rushed than ever before (Giurge, Whillans, and West, 2020). Time scarcity and the sense of being overwhelmed associated with feeling that there is too much to do in too little time are increasingly linked to high levels of stress, absence from work, and a suite of mental and physical health struggles (Giurge, Whillans, and West, 2020). Further nuances can be drawn out when considering women's experiences at the intersection of labour and time. For instance, where the division of time spent inside and outside of the home used to be historically stratified by gender, this division is becoming less and less rigid with more women entering and remaining in the paid workforce (Dicaprio, 2018; Hart, 2007; Rosen, 1989). However, the increasing prominence of women in the labour market has not been accompanied by an equivalent prevalence of men taking part in unpaid domestic labour (Besen-Cassino, 2019; Marcal, 2016; McGinnity & Russell, 2008; Sayer, 2010). Downstream of this combination of factors is a large demographic of comparatively poorly paid and over-busy women with less money and less leisure time than their male counterparts. The contemporary expectations of how women

should spend their time have been summarised by feminist economist Katrine Marcal as follows:

“Be more assertive at work, reduce your work hours, find the right partner, make better to-do lists, simplify your life, declutter your handbag, do more yoga, and keep your eye on the clock.” (Marcal, 2016, p. 64).

The fundamental characteristics of this list invoke notions of the scarcity of time, the centrality of paid work, and a compunction to be constantly productive and self-improving (Giddens, 1984; Zhao and Biesta, 2012); three key phenomena which may be modulated by tiny house living. With this in mind, it might be observed that tiny house living potentially offers an emancipatory opportunity for women who find their time is more constrained due to the triple shift responsibilities of paid work, housework, and emotional labour (Smith, 2020; Mattingly & Sayer, 2006; McGinnity & Russell, 2008). Current theorising on the long-term impact of tiny house living on women’s subjective experiences of time, work, and self-identity remains in its infancy but highlights an area in which this thesis makes an original contribution.

The way employees experience their time whilst at work is significant because of just how much time performing paid labour takes. The UK and the USA have average working hours of 36.5 and 34.4 hours per week respectively, with the European average sitting at 36.4 hours (Europa, 2022). Self-reported levels of job satisfaction in the global north have not altered significantly since the 1950s (Frayne, 2015; Graeber, 2019). Indicatively, 37% of British workers think their job is meaningless, one in nine employees is now insecurely employed, and the mental health crisis caused by work-related stress has been called a growing epidemic

by the Trades Union Congress (Trades Union Congress, 2018; Dahlgreen, 2015). Likewise, 50% of American Millennial and Gen-Z labourers feel that their job is not making a meaningful impact on the world (Ballard, 2021). A report from Canada also states that 71% of Canadian workers would rather have a meaningful job than a pay rise (Wells, 2022). Women and mothers are especially penalised by modern working cultures as they are overwhelmingly still expected to perform unpaid emotional labour and care work whilst continuing to be active in the waged labour market for lower wages, on aggregate, than their male peers (Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2012; Oakley, 2019).

Evidence from the field of behavioural economics shows that people are highly sensitive to feeling like they are wasting their time and that this has significant implications for their satisfaction, self-esteem, and well-being (Ariely & Jones, 2008). The cascade of negative impacts that flow from spending time in ways that a person feels are ‘pointless’ is evidenced by scholarship from sociology, economics, and critical theory (Frayne, 2015; Graeber, 2019; Raworth, 2017; Schor, 1998). In the empirical chapters of this thesis, I will explore how tiny houses may emerge as a potential way for women to reconfigure how much time they spend both in paid employment and in the unpaid upkeep of the home, as well as in pleasurable leisure activities which need not be definitionally linked to market transactions. In this regard, a tiny house’s functionality as a heterotopic (Foucault, 1984) space which subverts the norms that govern experience in the ‘outside’ world can be interrogated, specifically as it relates to the experience of expanded control (Ward, 1990) and gendered self-discipline through shrinkages (Bordo, 2003).

Several studies into the tiny house movement cite a paradigm shift away from the prioritisation of money and purchasing power as informing the decision to live tiny since it is

through reduced living costs that tiny housers are enabled to de-prioritise money in their lives and to re-centre the value of time (Boeckermann, Kaczynski & King, 2019; Mangold and Zschau, 2019; Shearer & Burton, 2021). The implications for potentially greater free time are particularly relevant for women, who are shown to have less leisure time than men (Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2012). Nevertheless, this trade-off also demands significant shrinkages in the lives of tiny house residents. Whilst they may no longer have to work to spend, they may also not be able to cook comfortably in their tiny kitchen or relax in their tiny homes, knowing that at any moment, they may have the police called on them for living illegally in their vehicle. Striving towards an ideal different future through disciplining the self, the home, and consumption habits down to a minimised, streamlined version highlights the usefulness of using Bordo's theory of the slender body (2003) as an analytical tool in illuminating how women make sense of their own decisions to shrink, downsize, and reduce their homes.

This reprioritisation away from earning and towards time freedom has been described as 'downshifting' (Kennedy, Krahn & Krogman, 2013; Schor, 1998, p. 142). Such literature circles back again to the emancipatory promise of sharing and cooperation, as well as endorsing downshifting as one component of relegating economic productivity in the hierarchy of social goals (D'Alisa, Demaria, & Kallis, 2014; Frayne, 2015; Raworth, 2017; Schor, 1998). However, it must also be observed that a certain level of material wealth must be present in the first place for someone to be able to 'downshift' away from excessive consumption practices. It has been suggested that the notion of downshifting is exclusionary and speaks predominantly to white middle-class interests, and for this reason is not a radical or emancipatory practice (Lindsay, Lane, and Humphery, 2020). Further, it has been proposed that downshifting hours spent working does not imply a straightforward reduction

in consumerism if a pre-existing ideological commitment to lessening consumption is not present (ibid). Throughout the three findings chapters of this thesis, I will explore the tensions inherent in downshifting's intersecting privileges and uncomfortable tractions. Building from these valuable insights, it must be noted that a specific account of the ways in which these forces inform women's choices has yet to be provided. Through the palimpsest of oppositional values and wished for alternative futures being rendered possible through the tiny house, the theoretical framework of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) makes a compelling case for its usefulness as an analytical tool.

2.7 Tiny Houses as Contradictions

The corollary of stable cultural ideals regarding what constitutes a good home is that urban designers and housing developers (among others) exert forces on the choices available to buyers, renters, and residents (Mallett, 2018). The continual building of conventional brick-and-mortar houses reinforces the notion that other forms of housing are inferior or undesirable, thereby limiting consumers' freedom to engage in meaningful choices. This is manifest, for example, in that a common criticism of tiny homes is that they are too similar to travelling community caravans (Colombini, 2019; Shearer, 2019). Their perceived similarity to travellers' caravans has caused neighbourhoods to oppose the development of tiny house communities in their areas, citing the dangers of drug use and concerns about negative impacts on the value of their traditional homes (Chapman et al., 2019; Mangold, & Zschau, 2019). Such criticisms reveal that living in a caravan/van/lorry/trailer-based home is deemed to be inappropriate; caravan inhabitants are stigmatised as deviant, and their choices are subsequently disparaged. Nonetheless, a second common criticism levied at tiny houses is that they are 'bourgeoise caravans', implying that tiny homes are being used as a new form of

gentrification which perpetuates the existing status quo and unfair distribution of resources and power (Plthomasedd, 2018). The fact that tiny houses are interpreted both as being emblematic of social deprivation, stigmatised communities, and behaviours associated with poverty whilst also being representative of material excess and cultural power highlights interesting philosophical questions about how tiny houses are both materially and imaginatively constituted.

Urban sociologists have analysed how material settings sustain human societies both imaginatively and physically (Paddison, et al., 2002). In a text examining the geographies of resistance, a nuanced interrogation of the differences between the power to dominate and the power to resist highlights the need for scholars to embrace more chaotic understandings than a binarised approach proposes (Campbell & Heyman, 2007; Paddison et al., 2002). By pointing to how small or seemingly trivial acts of resistance can empower social actors even whilst they may identify as being in an oppressed or disempowered group, more subtle shades of understanding can be advanced. Consider, for example, an astute sixty-five-year-old who has been living illegally in her tiny house for two years, who then claims frailty and old age have ensured her ignorance of planning legislation when served with a notice from the council. Such forms of subterfuge have been helpfully referred to as ‘slantwise’ resistance to designate these acts as politicised but non-direct forms of political action against perceived injustice or illegitimate authority (Campbell and Heyman, 2007). Though the example above is illustrative, it also highlights how the lived experience of dweller control, of experiencing oneself as agentic and empowered, can occur even whilst the same social actor is oppressed and subjugated. The complexities that the theory of dweller control (Ward, 1976) permits makes it a capacious and useful theoretical model to analyse the experience of women tiny

housers', who may likewise experience themselves as simultaneously empowered and repressed.

Relatedly, a novel designation to indicate the 'slantwise' nature of tiny houses themselves has been produced in recent scholarly work from Australia; Weetman employs the acronym 'ITH' where the 'I' represents a roster of categories such as "interstitial, illegitimate or informal" (Weetman, 2018, p. 233). ITH usefully acknowledges the in-between state that tiny houses and their occupants frequently exist in, often balancing on the precipice of (il)legality, occupying liminal grey zones of planning, land use, and building regulation status. A review of the literature shows that a common approach is to build the home first and deal with any legal implications if and when they arise (Bares, 2017; Shearer, 2018; Weetman, 2018). This frequently leaves residents living in a muted and stressful psychological space because they do not have the security of right of abode as a tenant or conventional owner-occupier would do (Milkman, 2016; Pattillo, 2013). Complexities and contradictions are evident here as even whilst residents might be actualising a sense of dweller control through building and living in their tiny house, at the same time, some components of their agency have been removed because they no longer have the rights and protections that conventionally housed people do. It might also be said that in this example, tiny house residents have shrunk or downgraded some of their rights (tenancy rights) in exchange for being able to achieve an expansion in some of their other values (freedom of movement, carbon reduction, reduction in work hours).

Remaining cognizant of the contradictions and discomforts inherent in residents' experiences of tiny house dwelling is important in order to counterbalance the romanticism that can too often be applied to the tiny house movement. There is a temptation, more generally, for

theorising on the concept of ‘home’ to be infiltrated by nostalgia and idealism, and this danger can be readily observed in the discussion of tiny houses (Mallett, 2004, p. 69; Milkman, 2016; Plthomasedd, 2018). In the popular media, tiny houses are routinely described as ‘cute’ and ‘adorable’ and are often rhetorically constructed as being an intuitive component of a good, wholesome, simplified and ethically superior life often spent in a rural location (Crow, 2019; Waldman, 2014; Sullivan, 2021). At the same time, a majority of tiny house residents explain that the principal reason for living this way is that other housing options are prohibitively expensive (Carlin, 2014; Foreman, 2019; Hebden, 2014).

Resisting the domination of economic constraint and unequal resource distribution by living in a tiny house can then sustain a human imagination of freedom within structures that cannot immediately be overhauled, such as the housing market and waged labour. Slantwise resistance to the oppressive infrastructures of bloated housing prices and diminishing income take innumerable forms, with tiny houses representing an increasingly popular option (Arrigoitia, West, and Peace, 2018; Colombini, 2019; Paddison, et al., 2002). This analysis also allows tiny houses to represent the two oppositional notions of both freedom and constraint at the same time, therein highlighting the usefulness of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) as an analytical tool.

By positioning tiny houses at an intersection of both freedom and constraint, it can be observed that they share much in common with existing sociological analyses of home since they “..may evoke security in one context and seem confining in another.” (Jackson, 2000, p. 123). Further tensions embodied by tiny houses include the ways in which they offer a socio-spatial setting which encompasses both personal fantasies and cultural expectations which can be in opposition to each other, as well as providing a conceptual meeting place between

memory of the past and longing for the future (Perkins, Thorns, and Winstanley, 2008; Rapport and Dawson, 1998). Several studies highlight that tiny house residents discuss their homes as being a strategically implemented tool that allows them to move toward their fantasies of an ideal future life, which may include reducing financial stress or an increase in their ability to travel (Anderson-Dargatz, 2019; Engberg and Engberg, 2017; Mangold and Zschau, 2019).

2.8 Summary

To summarise, this chapter has presented tiny houses as an emergent aspect of contemporary self-build. An overview of what constitutes a tiny house has been provided, and an examination of the context in which they are proliferating has also been interrogated. The defining social structures of the affordable housing crisis and the cost of living crisis have been presented as the most salient features in the growing popularity of tiny houses. The literature review has highlighted that existing scholarship on motivations for adopting tiny houses has not adequately addressed the role of patriarchal social structures in the adoption of tiny houses, nor does existing literature sufficiently explore women's experiences of tiny house living.

Data has, however, been marshalled that highlights why there is a need for greater understanding in this area. The literature review demonstrated the particular constraints experienced by women: being underpaid in the workforce, being time-poor due to an overburden of unpaid care work, and the pervasive threat and reality of male violence. This literature review chapter has explored the inconsistencies and fertile tensions inherent in considering tiny houses. The chapter has revealed how, on the one hand, tiny houses can be

seen to reinforce neoliberal ideals about individualism and self-reliance, whilst on the other, they can be taken to represent a way to step back from compulsory consumption and are described as a material rejection of the housing crisis and wage stagnation (Boeckermann, Kaczynski, and King, 2019; Carlin, 2014; Shearer and Burton, 2021).

This chapter has explored how part of a tiny house's ability to disrupt normative understandings of the appropriate way to live lies in their ability to trouble the dominance of heterosexual coupling by offering a more achievable way for single women to live independently, and for women in relationships to persist in living alone if they prefer. Literature has been presented that demonstrates that accessible single-person living is of especial importance to older divorced women who are more likely to have spent their working lives engaged in unpaid domestic and caring labour, to have missed earning time due to maternity leave, and to have been paid less overall than their male counterparts even in equivalent professional positions, leaving them especially vulnerable to poverty and insecure housing in older age.

The following methods chapter will provide a thorough exposition of the ontological and epistemological approach of the thesis, justifying the use of qualitative semi-structured interviewing as the data collection technique. The approach and utility of thematic analysis is introduced and critically appraised. An in-depth analysis of intersectional feminist ethics is presented, with particular focus being paid to the usefulness of including excerpts from my personal field notes journal alongside the presentation of empirical data solicited from the semi-structured interviews. My unique situatedness as a queer, first-generation, white, working-class woman is interrogated and my particular biases are acknowledged.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the methods used in this thesis and provide a rationale for their selection. The overarching aim of this research was to engage with female tiny house residents and understand if and how their experiences could be analysed using the sociological concepts of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984), dweller control (Ward, 1976), and the slender body (Bordo, 2003). The literature review in the previous chapter provided a thorough exploration of how and why I generated this trifold as the theoretical framework to examine female experiences of building and living in a tiny house. Significant consideration is given in this chapter to conducting feminist research; what it means, why it is important, and how I have done it. I will now present a detailed examination of the methodological choices made in this thesis.

3.1.2 Ontology and Epistemology

This work is undertaken from a critical realist perspective; an orientation which simultaneously recognises the importance and impact of both material conditions and of subjective interpretations (Bhaskar, 2016; Danermark, et al., 2005). Critical realism compliments the feminist approach of the thesis. Feminism acknowledges that “Gender is a difference that makes a difference.” (Letherby, 2003, p. 135), and that opportunity, resources, and power are differentially available to people based on their gender (Comack, 2017; Gunew, 2013). As evidenced in the literature review, the housing crisis exemplifies the way

in which women are disproportionately disadvantaged by the expense of housing. However, existing literature which examines residents' experiences of the housing crisis and subsequent uptake of tiny home residence also highlights the way in which interpretations of economic constraint and living conditions vary (Shearer, 2019; Waldman, 2014; Weetman, 2018). The tessellation of the effects of both external impacts and internal interpretations in the lives of female tiny house residents makes critical realism a fitting ontological choice.

Critical realism accepts material reality as a decisive factor in social outcomes, whilst simultaneously crediting an individual's unique interpretations of these material limits with the ability to influence their lived experience (Bhaskar, 2016; Danermark et al., 2005). Because of this, critical realism offers a flexible compromise between the approach of naïve realism (Langsam, 2017) and interpretivism (Peck and Mummery, 2018). Acknowledging the existence of material reality is a vital aspect of feminist work, since it is via processes of material deprivation, poverty, and physical violence that the global subjugation of women is perpetuated. However, it is also true that what these women believe about their ability and right to seek help, legal action, or workers' rights, for example, will inform the extent to which they act and experience.

3.1.3 Gendered Research

Much feminist theory takes experience and embodied subjectivity as a valid place from which to theorise and generate knowledge, in contrast to inherited paradigms that position the body and subjectivity as irrelevant or even non-existent (Millen, 1997; Letherby, 2003). The academic tradition of avoiding the first-person register is an artefact of the pretence of

disembodied analytical objectivity which researchers are expected to enact if they want their work to be taken seriously. By contrast, as argued by Maynard (1994, p. 14) “A focus on experience has been seen as a way of challenging women’s previous silence about their own condition and in doing so confronting the ‘experts’ and dominant males with the limitations of their knowledge and comprehension.” Feminist ontologies recognise that knowledge making is an inherently political act since any research will always be conducted in some way by a human being beset with values, preferences, and biases (Letherby, 2003).

Traditional measures of objectivity have been criticised as being weak because they do not acknowledge the positionality of the researcher, by contrast, feminist approaches recognise that all knowledge claims are socially situated and the effects of this are incorporated into the research methods and analyses (Harding and Norberg, 2005).

3.1.4 White Feminism

White feminism refers to the enduring presence of whiteness as an unexamined ideology within the feminist movement (Ortega, 2006; Zakaria, 2021). Specifically, the term highlights the ways in which women are unwilling to examine the role that white privilege has played in the formation and agenda setting of the feminist movement both historically and contemporaneously (Zakaria, 2021). Because much of the second wave feminist movement in the west was conducted as if whiteness in feminism did not have to be questioned and examined, white feminist concerns such as those around economic equality have been universalised as being the concerns of all women and all feminists (Daniels, 2015; Zakaria, 2021). This is an extension of white supremacy.

Modern formations of racism are insidious as well as overt. The formulation of academia as an institution and academic norms such as linguistic register and modes of doing knowledge work has grown from a history of white supremacy and racism, as well as misogyny and patriarchy (Brunsma, Embrick, & Shin, 2017; Patton, 2004). This thesis acknowledges that white women continue to have power due to their whiteness even whilst they are oppressed by patriarchy. Throughout this thesis, I refer to ‘feminist’ works, even though feminism is not a single movement with a single voice. I agree that too often, racial issues are elided to make a coherent narrative about ‘The Feminist Movement’ despite the well-documented insistence from black and brown women that they are not women first and black or brown afterwards (Patton, 2004; Zakaria, 2021).

As a result of my socialisation and my skin colour, I interact with the world through a white gaze. I do not want to endorse or extend the white feminist saviour complex or perpetuate racialised violence through my work. The extent to which I have been successful in this regard can be judged only by my readers. I use the term black and brown rather than POC or people of colour as a result of readings I have done in this area which argue that referring to black and brown people as being ‘of colour’ perpetuates the positioning of whiteness as a neutral and universal standard, as if whiteness is not itself a colour (Nolte, 2007; Solomona, et al., 2005).

3.2 Qualitative Methodologies

Qualitative methodologies enable a form of flexible social inquiry that is ideal for exploring the nuanced tensions between structure and agency in the lives of female tiny house residents. Further, qualitative methods are well suited to the feminist research ethics of care-taking,

mutual sharing, and power distribution (Letherby, 2003; Stanley, 1999; Wilkinson and Kitinger, 1996). This thesis endorses the position that all knowledge is in some way ideological and must definitionally pass through a filter of social construction since knowledge is always handled by human, and therefore social, beings (Merry, 2016). It is particularly important to acknowledge this where social ‘facts’ are generated through quantitative data collection, such as census data and other official statistics. Consider, for example, that French census data allows an analysis of how many people live in high-rise flats, while English census data did not include this information until 2008 (English Housing Survey, 2010). The census example illustrates how quantitative data collection can distort rather than reflect individuals’ experiences, meanings, and lives (Merry, 2016). In contrast, qualitative data collection foregrounds the communication of respondent’s views and options as they are expressed with less emphasis on curtailing the responses to fit a narrowly defined range of data. Nonetheless, qualitative data is no more ‘real’ than its quantitative counterpart. All data represents a constructed form of knowledge developed by subjective human beings who are continually positioning themselves in the social world.

Despite the many benefits of qualitative research methods, there are several drawbacks. In 1949, Weber acknowledged that since so much of our behaviour is the outcome of entrenched routines, it is folly for qualitative researchers to claim that observation or interview conveys the ‘point of view’ or ‘perspective’ behind every decision or statement (Silverman, 2013, p. 130). A story might ‘belong’ to an individual but also to overarching cultural discourses that are just being repeated in the interview. Illustratively, Charmaz et al. (2012, pp. 21-2) describe how closely narratives given by people who had experienced substance abuse correlated with narratives propagated by self-help and recovery groups such as AA & NA, which, it transpired, many of the participants had attended. Likewise, it is possible that in

discussing their lives and experiences of living in a tiny house, the women I spoke with may have been similarly recounting dominant cultural narratives rather than revealing anything intrinsic about themselves. I argue that either assessment still produces valuable knowledge, whether about the individuals or broader cultural modes of understanding.

Several authors argue that conducting autoethnography alongside other qualitative data collection methods can increase the trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Letherby, 2003; Spry, 2001). It is suggested that the triumvirate of ‘personal, political, and professional’ that each researcher occupies in their lives and in their role as an academic can be interrogated and situated by conducting autoethnography alongside, say, interviewing or surveying (ibid). In this way, autoethnography can be employed as a triangulation technique that critiques the interaction of the researcher’s ‘self’ with the research subject’s ‘otherness’ (Lietz et al, 2006; Spry, 2001). The core value that autoethnography facilitates is a deliberate form of reflexivity, defined as active consideration of how the researcher’s beliefs and behaviours will inevitably affect the phenomena under investigation (Horsburgh, 2003; Lietz et al, 2006). In light of this, I kept a memo document throughout the various research phases of this thesis. The memo document included field notes on what aspects of the literature were capturing my attention, what the process of recruitment and interviewing was like, and informal observations on the themes arising from latent coding and analysis. An extract of this document is included below. These interim summaries were used both to track the emergence of patterns and to keep a record of my reflexive experience as the researcher.

3.2.1 Autoethnographic Reflections

Excerpt of field notes, dated July 5th 2020

Reading about image production and how images are closely linked to politics. What should X be? What should it look like? What powers should it have? I can see so clearly how this links to female-ness and the creation and control of women, and it seems to apply to homes too. This is maybe partly why women tiny house builders are doubly interesting; they defy archetypal images of what a woman is / should be by engaging in heavy lifting and construction work, and in so doing, also disrupt dominant ideas of what a home is and what it should be by creating a tiny house rather than a conventional one. This creates different channels for power to flow through (Foucault). Need to work out how to bring this into interview conversations without it being leading. Spoke to G [participant] today and really enjoyed it. She described living in her artists studio sort of illegally. Definitely illegally. She used the word 'technically' a lot. We spoke about the difference between law and ethics, that at one time it was legal to enslave people and to disbar women from getting an education or owning property, but this never made it ethical. Likewise, rentier capitalism that monopolises access to resources like land, money, housing; it is legal, but G and I are not convinced that it is ethical. She wants to convert a school bus and park it outside in the field where the studio is. She doesn't have the money and she can't save it with what she earns, even as she sleeps on a mattress, illegally, under the desk in her studio.

As part of my ongoing commitment to acknowledging that my PhD and all of the opportunities it affords me is funded by taxpayers, I have maintained a regular blog and social media presence featuring insights into the research process and my findings. It is important as part of my feminist identity and working-class origins that as much of the work I

produce through this thesis is free to access as possible. Accordingly, soon after I recorded the field notes above, I wrote a [blog piece](#), a Twitter thread, and made an Instagram post on the same topic (see figure 1 below).

A Look Inside My Field Notes Journal



Figure 1: A tweet and instagram post sharing my latest blog post and research insights with the public.

As a result of maintaining an ongoing social media relationship with several of the women involved in this research, I often get to enjoy further engagement with and comment on my work through my social media presence. In this instance, I was sharing about the struggles I was encountering in how to moderate my obligation to be critical and my obligation to be fair and humane in my dealings with participants. One of my participants offered a detailed and insightful comment on the field note excerpt shared above and my reflections on this in the blog post (see figure 2). The comment that she left on my Instagram post is so detailed that it

doesn't fit into a single screenshot, therefore I have provided a transcript of her comment below figure 2.

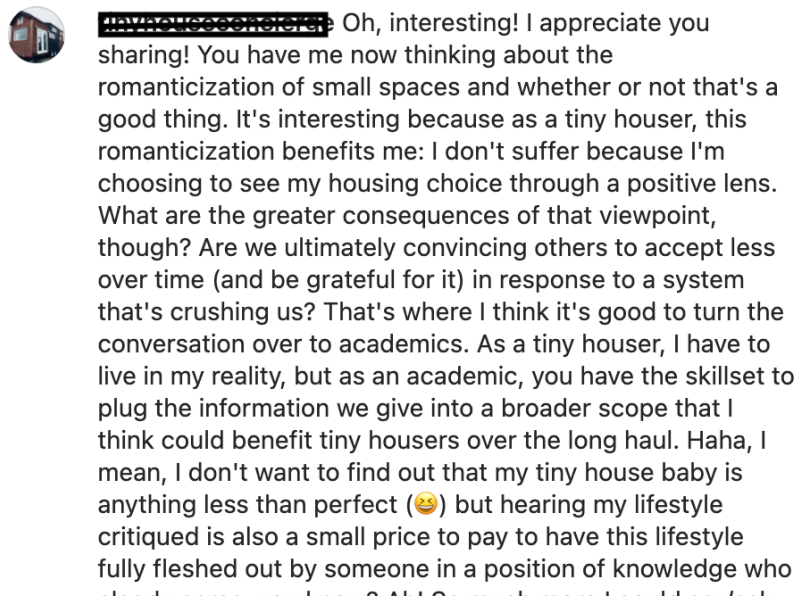


Figure 2: a screenshot of a comment left by a participant on an Instagram post shared from my research account @tiny_house_research_uk

The full comment reads:

“Oh, interesting! I appreciate you sharing! You have me now thinking about the romanticization of small spaces and whether or not that's a good thing. It's interesting because as a tiny houser, this romanticization benefits me: I don't suffer because I'm choosing to see my housing choice through a positive lens. What are the greater consequences of that viewpoint, though? Are we ultimately convincing others to accept less over time (and be grateful for it) in response to a system that's crushing us? That's where I think it's good to turn the conversation over to academics. As a tiny houser, I have to live in my reality, but as an academic, you have the skillset to plug the information we give into a

broader scope that I think could benefit tiny housers over the long haul. Haha, I mean, I don't want to find out that my tiny house baby is anything less than perfect (😊) but hearing my lifestyle critiqued is also a small price to pay to have this lifestyle fully fleshed out by someone in a position of knowledge who clearly cares, you know? Ah! So much more I could say/ask, but as this is the comments section of an Instagram, I'll stop there! Thanks again for sharing; that was super interesting, and I'm so happy to know that this Ph.D. is in the works! 🙌🏻”

This was not only interesting from an analytical perspective but was also extremely reassuring on a human level. I was grateful that Amy had taken the time to comment so thoughtfully on the field notes I had shared, and was emboldened by her feedback that, for her personally, having her lifestyle critiqued was, at worst, a reasonable price to pay and, at best, might even bring more extensive benefits to the tiny house community as a whole.

Examples like this illustrate the multifarious benefits that can be found in sharing academic work in a variety of formats for people with different accessibility preferences and abilities, and also demonstrates the fertility of the autoethnographic method. Despite the difficulties associated with attempting to conduct non-extractive, feminist research, and in conducting research among groups that I relate to myself, and for further complication among people with whom I cultivated an ongoing friendship, this particular moment reminded me of the value of sharing and community building as a legitimate component of the PhD process.

3.3 Academic Activism and the Role of the Researcher

As outlined previously in this chapter, several academics have emphasised that experience does not definitionally equal ‘truth’ (Brah, 2017; Silverman, 2013). Therefore, qualitative research into women’s experiences of building and living in their tiny houses will not necessarily reveal the truth or reality of their tiny house experience. What the research can do is use women’s experience as a lens through which to examine similarities and differences and, from there, theorise about how these might be understood as a group. Drawing further from Brah (2017), experience can be useful to interrogate as a practice of making sense of the world, as a narrative recounting of material and symbolic struggle. Experiences of struggle are useful to examine as both individual and collective stories because they help us to understand how groups are socially and structurally positioned and what this might indicate about the status quo; this, in turn, can be used to inform policy and practice change to move towards a better fairer world. Here, then, is where academics and activism can productively elide into one another. As Scott (1998, p. 1) argues, “...a fundamental link remains between listening to what people have to say about their lives and identifying patterns and relationships which expose the operations of power and oppression.”

For many feminist scholars, feminist research is feminist theory put into action (Letherby, 2003, p. 62). Focussing research attention on the lives of women can challenge mainstream and malestream assumptions about the world and work to redress power imbalances. The scholarly process of analysing the experiences of women contains the latent potential for social change, which is a core goal of any branch of feminism. In this way, conducting feminist research becomes a practice of feminist activism and can contribute to the political aims of creating fairer, more equal societies. Simply, “the aim is to understand the world and

change it” (Letherby, 2003, p. 62). This thesis is situated in the long tradition of feminist activist scholarship, and its activist components are acknowledged as a deliberate contribution to the liberatory ethics of feminism (Antony, 2018; McLaren, 2019; Naples and McGary, 2010; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996).

The goal of this thesis has been, as outlined by Letherby (2003, p. 73, italics in original), for the “research to *mean* something” and to be used by women themselves in the gradual transformation of the worlds they inhabit. One component of generating research that means something can involve using my privileged position as a researcher affiliated with a Russell Group University to advocate on behalf of my research subjects, who might not otherwise be granted the authority to be considered as legitimate and authoritative witnesses to their own experience.

There is a long history and continuing presence of women being denied authority over their own experiences (Hennessy, 1993; Kelly, Burton, and Regan, 1994). By strategically aligning myself with the inherited authority of academia, I am imbued with some power to, for example, draft policy documents that seek to legalise tiny homes, apply for funding to deliver a project that showcases the economic and social outcomes of living in a tiny home. I can deliver talks and publish papers that broadcast the stories of the women I have spoken to in a way that might make them more commanding than they may otherwise be on their own. It is in this way that power imbalances between myself as the researcher and my participants might be somewhat addressed because the outcomes of this thesis aim to benefit multiple stakeholders.

Like many other feminist researchers, I agree that identifying emotional labour as part of academic labour is useful for locating research processes within a specific mode of knowledge production (Letherby, 2003; Lietz, Langer and Furman, 2006; Spry, 2001). Where possible, I hoped that interactions with interviewees could be a kind of exchange. It is clear that I am trying to get something from them, in the sense that I need data to analyse in the hope of attaining my doctorate, publications, and career advancement. If I could be helpful, I tried to be. For example, I introduced respondents to each other (with their permission) and to tiny house community groups so that they could expand their network and be around others who 'get it'. I pointed respondents toward legislature and information on planning rules and building codes to help them understand what actions they could take to legally live in their tiny home. Drawing on the pioneering work of Oakley (2019), I tried to help the women who were helping me. Despite this, as observed by Brannen (1988), a desire to help may in fact originate in a more ambivalent place than it may first appear. A researcher's need to experience themselves as 'helping' their research participants might be motivated by the researcher's desire to feel good about the research and themselves, rather than being sincerely motivated by the needs of the participants (Letherby, 2003). Nevertheless, as is explored in greater detail in this chapter, overall the interviews were unproblematic and feedback was received from several participants that they had enjoyed and benefited from the experience.

As a feminist researcher looking at the lives of women, I was careful to visually present myself in as informal a way as possible whilst remaining polite; I would not conduct an interview in my pyjamas with unkempt hair, but I was keen to avoid and even subvert any conventional notions of the authority of the researcher versus the researched. This was particularly important as a white British researcher who does not speak any other language to a high enough level that I could interview in it. When speaking with a particular respondent, I

noted that she had tattoos and showed her some of my own on my forearm. This was a way for us to enjoy genuine commonality and build rapport and trust for the sake of the interview. Likewise, when personal relationships came up in some conversations, it occasionally felt relevant and appropriate to disclose that I am not heterosexual because this was another way of connecting over a shared marginalised experience with the respondents, who are, first and foremost, people with real lives.

3.4 Interviews and Letter Writing

In a big data society where knowledge or insight makes up a significant portion of global currency and market activity, Kundera observes that it is not the secret police that citizens are answerable to, but the interviewer (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). Silverman goes as far as to refer to the global north as ‘the interview society’ (2013, p. 134). Drawing further from Silverman (2013) allows an identification of three core elements of the interview society. Firstly, a successful interview requires that people believe themselves to be discrete and unified individuals with a coherent and linear narrative of the self that can be adequately conveyed through speech (ibid). Secondly, an interview presupposes subjects who consent to sharing their truthful and private interior thoughts and feelings with the designated professional. Thirdly, Silverman attests that the interview society demands a mass media which offers fresh takes on the age-old tension between public and private (ibid). For instance, the use of Twitter and Instagram has been argued to merge and contest the routine and the noteworthy, resulting in a collectively upheld myth that private experiences can be in some way validated by being shared on a public platform. This process reinforces our cultural belief in the value of sharing and reifies the position of the interviewee as legitimate.

Despite the power discrepancy inherent in Silverman's (2013) assessment of the interview, feminist scholar Anne Oakley (2019) relayed her view that the practice of non-hierarchical interviewing between women could not only ameliorate many of the imbalances typically associated with researcher-researched relations but could even lead to friendship. I agree, and this has been my experience. As an example, one woman came forward to me via Instagram and expressed a wish to participate in the research. She explained that she would rather communicate via email, so we began a series of exchanges that continued throughout the thesis research. She introduced herself as Penny, a 75-year-old Australian woman and a full-time carer for her chronically ill husband. I include here an excerpt from one of the first emails I received from Penny:

"Why do I want to live in a THOW? [Tiny House on Wheels]

CERTAINTY!

I know I will outlive my chronically ill husband and I want to know my next home is exactly to my needs. Providing, of course, that I can still get up the stairs.

DOWNSIZE!

We have had a lot of fun on our five acres over the last thirty years. We self-build our house and lots of sheds for our various activities and had a very prolific vegie patch.

I don't want to bother with all the upkeep when I am on my own.

DECLUTTER!

As ardent DIYers and recycling obsessives, we have collected a lot of tools and craft items.

I want to find a good home for them all so the kids don't have to deal with them when we are gone.

INDEPENDENT LIVING!

As a woman, I have had to answer to parents, husbands, and children all my life and I wouldn't have had it any other way, but, I would like some time solely for me.!

Not only was this email full of energy and valuable insights, but it was also an act of generosity. Penny explained that she had already typed up three pages of thoughts to send to me but could not work out how to get the text from the word document into an email. She expressed some apologies or regret that her age meant she was not very confident with using a computer. She told me how she had typed up this email again from scratch, copying out word-for-word what she had already prepared in a different document.

"I wrote three pages for you but can't get them out of documents to email so I am retyping the beginning for you."

It is not the case that my positionality as a feminist researcher has implications for the rest of my life and how I conduct myself, but rather that it is my positionality as a feminist that impacts my research as just one arena in which I conduct myself as a woman and a feminist. I recognised and was grateful for the significant effort that Penny had gone to for my benefit, and I was eager to offer something of equivalent value to her. I shared information about the tiny house that I had been building and told her some things about myself. During our correspondence, she disclosed that her daughter is also terminally ill.

“Sorry I have been too busy to get back to you. Eric’s healthcare is an ongoing thing and it has been a hectic year. I will have to tell you why I have stopped building. My beautiful daughter Lynda has been battling multiple brain tumours for the last 18 months and I have been going to Sydney to help out as much as I could before Corona. I don’t trust myself with power tools at the moment because of the stress. Queensland borders have finally been opened to Sydney and we are going down next week before she slips into the last stage of her battle. I almost gave up on the Tiny House but decided I would finish it in her honour, and hope it can stay in the family.”

I found this an incredibly moving letter to receive and I am still affected by it when I read it now. I responded with my sincere condolences and expressed my desire to offer her any kind of comfort or kindness that I could. In my email I explained that my sister and I would be making Christmas cards soon and offered to send her one in the post if she would like. Penny accepted this offer with some enthusiasm which began our postal correspondence as well as our email conversations. I sent Penny the homemade Christmas card along with a book that I hoped she would like. We still write to each other. This experience anecdotally confirms Oakley’s (2019) assertion that non-hierarchical interviewing between women can lead to mutually rewarding friendships. It also allowed me to learn about myself as a researcher; through this exchange, I realised that I would prioritise what I believe is decent and compassionate behaviour over and above what might typically be considered professional behaviour.

3.5 Interview Guide

For the data collection that took place via Zoom or on the phone, an interview guide was created to improve the chances that similar topics were discussed between all participants to allow for greater ease of comparing responses and contrasting experiences. The interview guide also acted as a safety net, which gave me comfort and confidence during the conversations, making it less likely that I would omit anything important or forget what I wanted to ask. This confidence made for a smoother and more professional exchange, which I hope made participants feel relaxed and well taken care of. Since the interviews were semi-structured, the interview guide provided broad suggestions of themes to cover and was not prescriptive. Inevitably, this means some data that I have collected from some of the women I have not collected from others, making precise comparisons difficult. For example, in some conversations, I did not ask how much money the women were earning at the time, as other topics took precedence, often guided by the interviewees themselves. I acknowledge this as a limitation of the thesis that I am content to concede in service of my higher overall aim of enjoying natural and interesting conversations with the women who volunteered their time to speak with me. The conversations were recorded on Zoom in a cloud storage facility. These files were encrypted, and password protected. The interview guide is included in the appendix.

3.5.1 Speaking To and Speaking For Women

Tensions arise in relaying the findings of this thesis since in aiming to represent the speech and lives of other women, the research can contribute to the othering of those women. By including black and brown women, for example, the thesis cannot avoid speaking ‘for’ black

and brown women. As a white woman, I am in a dominant group relative to black and brown women, and so in claiming to represent them in any way in this research, I am reinscribing the ethnically based otherness of this group vis-à-vis whiteness. This difficulty has led some researchers to argue that we should not aim to speak for others but only to “speak for ourselves” as researchers (Letherby, 2003, p. 134).

Defining who I am in order to clarify who I am speaking for when I speak for myself runs the risk of creating disparate, siloed categories of women and undermining the power of commonality and shared experience. Am I conducting research as a white woman, or a white woman from a working-class background who is a first-generation university graduate, or as a queer white working class first generation researcher, and so on. Instead of being helpful, this process can be reductionist and can serve to erase the significant commonalities between people. Furthermore, if researchers only spoke for themselves, this would result in a proliferation of research on already privileged groups. I believe that privileged persons have an ethical obligation to share power, and that this can be done by amplifying the voices of people with less influence than themselves.

An attendant danger of ill-thought-through standpoint theory is the layering of different oppressions in such a way that suggests a hierarchy; for instance, a black woman is more oppressed than a white woman, and a black lesbian is more oppressed still, and so on. Identities are not additive; a person is not a woman first and black afterwards. Race and gender, for example, are co-constructed and are experienced simultaneously. Letherby (2003) warns that not taking an intersectional view can encourage siloed thinking and practice and can further undermine the aims of feminism, which is equality between all persons. It is a

mistake to homogenise any group of people, such as women or black and brown folks, particularly where qualitative data collection occurs since these methods give primacy to nuance and detail. This thesis considers the home and its significance for women; much second-wave feminism focussed on the home as a locus of oppression for women, whereas black feminist writers have described how the home can act as a site of collective solidarity against racism (hooks, 1982). In later writings, hooks (1986) goes on to argue that feminism is a viable political standpoint not because women share the same characteristics but because it is possible to federate around a collective resistance to oppression in all its forms. Acts of othering can come in the form of misrepresenting respondents by exaggerating the valiant or unfortunate aspects of their lives, particularly the lives of disempowered people (Letherby, 2003; Oakley, 2019). In assessing this thesis, the reader is invited to consider Wilkinson and Kissinger's (1996) observation that accounts of others are liable to tell you as much or more about the author as about the subjects being discussed.

Despite much careful thinking throughout the research process, as argued by Letherby (2003), partial objectification of the researched is unavoidable, as are power imbalances between the researcher and the researched since the ultimate decision on what data to include lies with the researcher. In other words, power imbalance in this research is inevitable, and it is my ethical duty to highlight where this occurs and make each instance as visible as possible in order that the reader can adequately scrutinise my findings. This methodological approach is what Stanley (1999) refers to as the pursuit of 'accountable knowledge', a commitment to accuracy and rigour that results in good and useful knowledge without the naivete of objective and universalising truth claims that typify white malestream sociology.

3.6 Data Collection

As discussed in this chapter, to appropriately answer this thesis's research questions, a qualitative data collection strategy was deemed the most suitable. Privileging the participants' subjective experience and linking this to their motivations, beliefs, and visions for the future lent itself to qualitative interview data solicitation and thematic data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Data collection mainly took the form of semi-structured interviews via Zoom between June 2020 and September 2021. I deemed semi-structured interviews to provide the best balance of continuity between conversations and flexibility within conversations (Charmaz, et al., 2012). Some respondents indicated that writing was their preferred method of communication and that they would not like to speak on the phone or Zoom. In some ways, exchanging emails and messages felt more intimate than the Zoom conversations. As Letherby (2003) notes, the progression in register during her own research from 'Dear Ms. Mundy' to 'Dear Pam' indicated a growing trust and closeness that cannot be noted in the same way over a Zoom call.

The act of writing yields very different information than conversing; the writer has more time to reflect on what they want to say and how they want to say it. Moreover, writing can be a highly political and empowering act for women. As Chester and Nielson expand (2012, p.17): "Learning to organise thoughts on paper, to express feelings, to respond to others is an enormous extension of women's power." Several feminist researchers note the prevalence of using multiple methods in feminist research because this allows a flexible approach to each

person involved in the research project, from conversing to writing to using the situation at hand – whatever that may be (Chester and Nielsen, 2012; Kelly, Burton, and Regan, 1994; Merry, 2016). Since this thesis aims to better understand women’s lives, the flexibility afforded by semi-structured interviews conducted variously over Zoom, telephone or email is beneficial (Letherby, 2003).

3.7 Sampling and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was utilised to gain access to those who self-identified as having an interest in tiny houses through membership to social media groups such as Tiny House UK or Tiny Living Community UK on Facebook. To recruit initial participants, I created a flyer (see figure 3), which I posted to social media groups on Facebook and Reddit.



Figure 3: Flyer that I created to build interest in the research project and invite participation.

The engagement and contribution in the comments sections associated with each post were an interesting and unexpected result of posting this flyer. The comments section itself could constitute a rich data source where a range of opinions were shared, particularly regarding the perceived barriers to living in a tiny house (see figure 4 for an example). This thesis focuses on the nuances of women's tiny house stories, but the insights gained from the variety of comments left on the flyer posts presented a useful way to compare the rich data gathered from more extended interviews with the shorter text-based themes that were apparent in the comments.

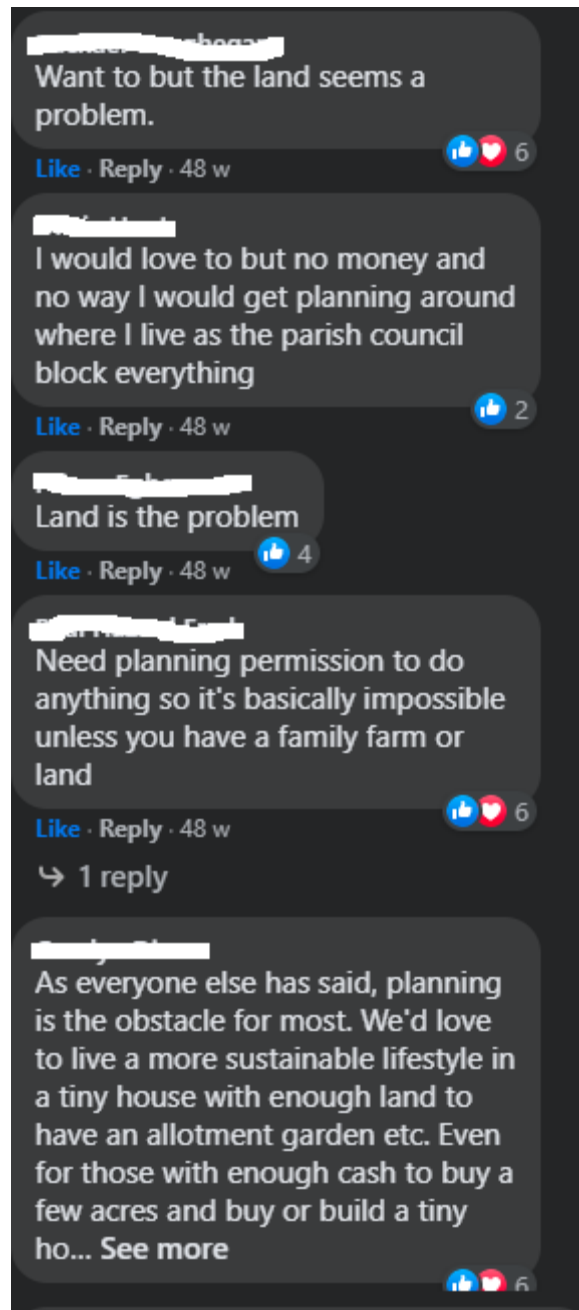


Figure 4: Screenshot section on a post I left Facebook group. The being expressed is the lack of access to land.

showing comments in a tiny house common concern

I also created a research-focused [Instagram account](#) through which I found participants by following tiny house accounts and using hashtags to search for related content. I advertised my research through my personal Twitter account, and tiny house accounts or research-related accounts sometimes retweeted my calls for participation. I was also contacted first by

several women who were interested in my research and in taking part. I left posts on various relevant pages explaining the research aims and inviting interested parties to contact me. In response to this, several declarations of interest were received. After I had conducted several of the initial rounds of interviewing, some of my participants autonomously platformed my research and helped me to recruit additional participants (see figure 5).



Figure 5: Screenshot of participant generated social media post advocating my research and calling for others to get in touch with me to participate.

3.8 Preliminary Conversations

Due to Coronavirus restrictions in 2020-2021, including almost a full year of lockdown, all conversations took place virtually. We spoke on the phone, via Zoom, or via email. Phone

and Zoom conversations tended to last between forty-five and ninety minutes. The interviews were conducted in two phases. Phase one took place between June and August of 2020 whilst I was writing the literature review chapter. This initial phase of data collection included five participants, both men and women. The following section in this chapter will explain my rationale for narrowing down the focus of the thesis on women. The sample data gathered during this preliminary stage of data collection has not been included in the final thesis as I had not yet clarified the exact approach of the thesis nor the research questions. Having conversations with tiny house residents at the same time as researching and writing the literature chapter allowed me to check whether the key themes emerging from the literature were also arising from the perspectives of tiny house residents themselves. I could also sense-check in the other direction by asking individuals what they think of the academic arguments that I had encountered in the literature review.

For example, during this phase I was considering what kind of living spaces to include under the definition of a tiny house. The literature I consulted tended towards a consensus that, whilst there was no definitive set of criteria that defined a tiny house, there was general agreement within the tiny house community and the academic community that studied them that a tiny house was any living space below 50m², as long as it was not a flat or a single room in a shared house (Boeckermann, Kaczynski, and King, 2019; Shearer and Burton, 2019). During my preliminary conversation with self-identified tiny house residents, I was able to confirm that, whilst the sample was small, all participants agreed with this definition when I presented it to them. Nobody who came forward to be interviewed for this thesis considered a flat or single room to be a tiny house, however, the range of dwellings that participants reported living in was diverse. Residential accommodation included a woodshed, an artist's studio, a horsebox, a van, a garage, a narrowboat, and a shipping container. The

majority of interviewees lived in what would be considered a more traditional tiny house; a timber framed dwelling built to look like a conventional detached home sitting on top of a wheeled trailer base (see figure 6).



Figure 6: An image taken by one of my participants. This style of tiny home is a classic example of a timber framed tiny on wheels, or THOW.

3.9 Developing a Focus on Women

As the literature review progressed and the theoretical framing of this research began to solidify, my focus narrowed from the broader ‘Why do people live in tiny houses, and how

do their lives change as a result of this?', to the more specific 'Why do women live in tiny houses, and how do their lives change as a result of this?' As a result of this, the second round of interviewing looked to recruit women tiny house residents. The calls for participation made clear that the term woman referred to anyone who identified in this way.

The second round of interviews took place between January and September of 2021 and included 35 further interviews. Two were unusable due to recording malfunctions, so overall, 33 interviews were carried out successfully. All interviews were conducted remotely due to the restrictions of lockdown. What this restriction did allow, however, was an expansion of the geographical areas in which participants lived. It would not have been possible to collect face-to-face data with Avery in Florida; however, it became eminently doable over Zoom.

Such a geographically dispersed sample has important implications, specifically the local and differing contexts from which the women speak. Different local planning and building regulations, differing availability and access to land, different functioning of municipalities, and so on. However, as I have argued, the similarities they shared as women who exist within patriarchal capitalism were the most important and interesting factors for this thesis. Whilst geographical differences are acknowledged, they are not considered a limitation. These women ranged in age from twenty-three to mid seventies and were based in the UK, Europe, South Africa, Australia, and the USA. Of all the women that came forward, two were black and two were brown or of mixed ethnicity. For more detailed demographic information please see the appendix.

As I have stated, throughout the two phases of interviewing, I was working from home under lockdown conditions. I lived in a shared house with three other people and had no home office. This meant that I could only conduct interviews in privacy in my bedroom, where I had no desk. As a result, participants saw me sitting on the edge of my bed and could see into my room. As an indication, figure 7 shows a screenshot from my camera from a Zoom interview I conducted in January 2021.



Figure 7: A Zoom screen shot giving an example of what participants were able to see during our conversations.

The implications of this informal setting are manifold. It is possible that some participants were discouraged by the unconventional setting in which the interviews were taking place. Many were discussing personal and sensitive information such as their financial status, relationship breakdown, and the illegality of their living situation, which made it of paramount importance that they felt this research was legitimate and that I was trustworthy. The absence of an office and even of a desk, and instead the presence of a bed and a wall

collage could have suggested an unprofessional environment and may have resulted in participants withholding information or feeling uncomfortable. Conversely, the personal insight into my private life may have been advantageous in redressing the power imbalance often inherent in researcher-informant interactions. The informal setting of my bedroom could have put some participants at ease and encouraged them to share more than they might otherwise have done.

On more than one occasion, somebody commented on the plants that are visible in the background, which led to conversations about our mutual love of botany and a discussion of how this relates to values that they prioritise in their tiny houses or design decisions that they made in order to maximise the presence of plants in their home or of nature more broadly in their lives. Ultimately, since this research took place during the global Coronavirus pandemic, participants were understanding and empathetic about my lack of home office since many of them were in comparable situations themselves.

3.10 Ethics

Central to the ethical underpinnings of this thesis is the role of a feminist ethic of care. The focus on care-taking and respect was fundamental in guiding the design, implementation, and interpretation of this thesis. Recognising that ethical considerations should not be confined to a separate aspect of the research process, principles of care, empathy, and attentiveness to power dynamics informed every aspect of the project, from participant recruitment to data analysis and dissemination of findings. This thesis highlights the significance of an ethic of

care as a core part of undertaking feminist work, with the ultimate aim of contributing to the transformative potential of the research and its capacity to effect meaningful social change.

Overall, the risk of harm to participants was deemed low since all were voluntarily taking part and maintained the agency to share only the information they chose, whilst being protected by pseudonyms. Interviewees were given the right to withdraw and were anonymised. Anonymity was especially important for several participants due to the risky nature of their unofficial residence status. Interviews were recorded on a password-protected smartphone voice-recording app or Zoom and subsequently transferred onto a cloud-based password-protected file storage platform. All participants signed consent forms. The research was approved by the University of York Economics Law Management Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee.

The ethical steps taken in this research demonstrate a solid commitment to protecting the well-being and agency of participants, adhering to fundamental ethical principles such as respect for persons, beneficence, and protection from harm. By ensuring participants' voluntary involvement and providing them with the ability to share information at their discretion, the research upholds the principle of respect for persons, acknowledging their personal sovereignty and self-determination. Furthermore, anonymity and the use of pseudonyms safeguard participants' privacy, especially crucial given the vulnerable nature of some participants' residence status. The right to withdraw from the study without any repercussions further emphasises the importance of voluntary participation, and my adherence to the principle of beneficence, minimising potential harm to participants. No participant chose to withdraw from the study. By obtaining signed consent forms from all

participants and discussing the content of the forms with them each in person, I did my utmost to ensure that informed consent was given, and that participants were fully aware of the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks.

A feminist ethic of care, which emphasises the interconnectedness of human relationships, empathy, and attentiveness to the needs of others, underpins the entire research project, infusing every aspect of the study with ethical considerations. Rather than treating ethics as a siloed consideration, I embraced an ethic of care as a core part of undertaking this thesis, which I view as feminist work. This approach acknowledges the importance of addressing power imbalances and fostering an environment of trust, mutual respect, and understanding between myself and the women who helped me to create this thesis by providing me with the vital data without which the entire project would have been impossible. I kept in mind the potential impact of the research on individuals, communities, and broader societal structures. As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, incorporating an ethic of care as a guiding principle meant that ethical considerations were foundational to how conversations were had and decisions were made in this thesis. This approach is evident in the research design, participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis, as well as in the dissemination of findings.

My commitment to an ethic of care also extends to the interpretation and presentation of the findings, ensuring that the research respects participants' voices, experiences, and perspectives. This approach not only enhances the validity and credibility of the research but also contributes to the transformative potential of feminist scholarship by challenging existing power structures, amplifying marginalised voices, and advocating for social change. In this thesis, ethics are not merely a peripheral concern addressed in the methodology

chapter but are woven into the fabric of the study, reflecting a deep commitment to the principles of feminist ethics and an ethic of care.

3.11 Data Analysis

3.11.1 Zoom Interviews and Transcription

30 conversations took place over Zoom. These conversations lasted between half an hour and ninety minutes. I used transcription software to transcribe the interviews, which I then edited line by line for accuracy.

3.11.2 Email Interviews

Three conversations took place via email at the request of the participants. All of these women were over fifty years old; one in Australia, one in the Netherlands, and one in the UK. Conversing over email added an interesting dimension of variety to the data corpus. The women I interviewed via email could also curate and present information in a much more considered manner than the women who were reacting intuitively at the pace of a normal conversation. I was able to enjoy the presentation of themes under specific headings that Penny, who we heard from earlier, had arranged her thoughts under:

“LOCATION!

If I end up in a location I don't feel comfortable in being on wheels means I can move.

LESS CLEANING!

I would rather spend my time with my craft and crafty friends. I will have plenty of storage for my craft supplies.

A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING AND EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE!

I'm sick of searching for items all over the property. In my Tiny I won't ever be more than three metres away from everything I need.

WHY AM I BUILDING MYSELF?

Many reasons. A challenge, for economy, to use up some of our timber hoard, for a diversion as my husband can no longer travel. But mostly, I am in sole charge and the responsibility is all mine. If I change my mind I don't have to explain to anyone else. It will take longer, but I get a sense of accomplishment and a kick out of surprising everyone that I can design and build what I want.

END RESULT!

Satisfaction in living in a home I have built for myself. I don't want to live in a generic home for seniors where I may lose my connection to the ground.”

Greta also arranged her email under headings but formulated each heading as a question, some of which I had asked her in my email and some of which she had generated on her own:

“What are the main benefits to living in a tiny house?”

You value the stuff you have more. You are more aware of everything and yourself. You know what your house is made of. You live more outside. More connected to nature. Less energy

consumption. More connected to people around you. Less cleaning and maintenance. More coziness.

What is important to you in deciding how to live?

I think I described it above already. Quite idealistic. I also don't feel comfortable living in a big house, whilst knowing that on the other side of the world people had to flee from war and live in a tent to survive.

What were the main challenges of living in a yurt?

It was actually the community life which was the most challenging, but also the most rewarding actually. We were sharing a sanitary building with two toilets, two showers and a washing machine, together with 15 people.”

3.11.3 Phone Interviews

Two conversations were carried out over the phone, but unfortunately, the technology I used to record these conversations was faulty, and all of the audio files were corrupted. All of these conversations took place within a short period of time and it was only when I had completed them that I attempted to download the audio files, so only then did I discover that all of the files were unusable. None of these four conversations have been included in the final thesis. The conversations were nevertheless useful in informing my analytical thinking at the time, as this was during the earlier stages of my data collection.

3.12 Thematic Analysis

The goal of this thesis is to understand the broader concepts and beliefs expressed by female tiny house residents, and these can be adequately captured by light transcription (Koelsch, 2012). The transcripts were then latently coded and analysed. The process of latent coding and thematic analysis will be covered later in this chapter.

3.12.1 Analog Analysis

Despite the availability of qualitative data analytics technology such as Nvivo, I preferred to undertake the thematic analysis in a more analog fashion. I began by printing off all of the transcripts and email exchanges. I then read through the entire data corpus without making notes or highlights as I wanted to familiarise myself with the data without being tempted to begin interpreting preemptively. This was a valuable if time-consuming step, as the data collection had yielded over three hundred pages of transcripts. Once the first pass had been completed, I began a second read-through of the data, this time allowing myself to annotate the transcripts and highlight emergent themes. Once I had completed this second stage, I went back through the transcripts and cut out excerpts that I had highlighted as potentially speaking to similar themes. This, again, was time-consuming and messy. I do not have an office at home or even a bedroom of my own. Due to the space-consuming quality of the kind of physical data analysis I was doing, my work took over the living room floor in our shared house of four people for several weeks. I was fortunate to benefit from the compassion of the people I live with in this regard as the living room became functionally unusable to anybody else. I created huge paper canvases by taping four A4 sheets of paper together and used this as a background on which to stick the interview excerpt using blu tack so that I could swap them around (see figure 8)



Figure 8: I cut out excerpts of the printed transcripts and arranged them into themes.

Whilst acknowledging the criticisms that thematic analysis is variously accused of, such as being imprecise or ill-defined, I argue that much qualitative analysis takes as its starting point a thematic analysis, given that any academic scrutiny requires the recognition of themes, and associations of similarities and differences with prior literature (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Pearson 2008; Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas, 2013). Notwithstanding, this thesis intends to orient itself away from the shortcomings of incoherence or inconsistency and instead towards a thorough and rigorous explication of the precise steps taken in conducting the

analysis (Holloway and Todres, 2003; 2007). In recognising the impact of my subjective position as the researcher in interpreting the data, this analysis concedes that no themes are "waiting around to be discovered" (Taylor and Ussher, 2001, p. 310). Consequently, designating specific excerpts of the data as belonging to 'themes' becomes a challenging and contested pursuit in itself (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

As the focus of this thesis is to encounter a range of perspectives and underlying motivations regarding tiny houses, the interpretation of data went beyond a semantic reading into a latent coding and analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process is pertinent to mention insofar as the ultimate codes decided upon were themselves theoretically informed and were subject to an interpretive procedure, which differs from semantic coding whereby organising lexical items into frequency hierarchies can be used as an analytical technique (Hayes, 2000; Yaghi, 2018). Accordingly, appreciable attendance to a range of literature had been involved before engagement with the data corpus to facilitate a theoretical framing from the early stages of research design (Creswell, 2003). Critics of this approach argue that a schema of pre-defined conclusions may develop for the researcher, arbitrarily heightening the risk that important findings may be disregarded if they do not conform with theoretical paradigms established in the literature (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012; Glaser, 1992). I recognise this observation as a potential weakness of the forthcoming analyses. Nevertheless, the subjective positionality of the researcher underscores all scholarly work and must be considered as an influential factor in the assessment of all academic output, and so does not indicate a flaw in the design of my thesis (Etherington, 2004; Holliday, 2007).

Preliminary codes were attached to excerpts from the data corpus that articulated meaningful or important notions. Codes were subsequently aggregated into themes. Multiple re-readings of the data corpus aided by continual reference to literature led eventually to an appraisal that a consensus between themes and content had been satisfactorily reached, and no further themes could usefully be applied to illuminate any new observations (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Rowlands, Waddell, and McKenna, 2016).

Attention was paid to ensuring equal consideration was given to all data sets, guarding against the exclusion of contradictions and inconsistencies that became apparent throughout the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Yaghi, 2018). Whilst endorsing this as a worthy goal, particularly since it is often from the inconsistencies that the most revealing conclusions are drawn, it must also be conceded that the tendency towards forming a coherent linear narrative out of arbitrary, disparate information can be challenging to guard against (Fuchs and de Jaegher, 2009; de Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007; de Jesus, 2018).

I include several examples in the table below to demonstrate how various extracts from the data corpus were tagged with a multitude of codes, which were afterwards distilled into a core theme. See table 1 below.

Excerpt	Codes
Gem: We had so much stuff, so much junk ... it was really stressing me out	The role of ‘stuff’, Possessions as stressful

<p>Anne: The amount of clothes and crap that everybody has that you really don't need</p>	<p>The role of 'stuff', Move away from consumerism</p>
<p>Melodie: It's the lifestyle, I don't want all the stuff and the latest this that and the other</p>	
<p>Julia: We had done a couple of camper vans before, so we were used to the idea of putting less stuff into smaller spaces</p>	<p>The role of 'stuff'</p>
<p>Ansley: I want to build something beautiful that is sustainable, that would add to the community and care for the environment</p>	<p>Familiarity with less 'stuff' and less space, Sustainability and environment as priorities</p>

Table 1: Showing how data was arranged by code and theme.

These codes were attributed in continual reference to the literature and reflect the established understanding of minimalism and a collective paradigm shift away from consumerism that is often found as a stated motivator in tiny housers' commitment to this lifestyle (Engberg and Engberg, 2017; Harris, 2018; Naveed and Davidson, 2015). In the example provided, a theme of 'women and consumption' was applied as this was deemed to encompass sufficient diverse factors in responses related not only to incentives for individuals to transition to tiny houses ("the amount of clothes and crap that everybody has..."), but also reflected an overarching orientation towards reducing consumption for the well-being of the planetary ecosystem ("...that is sustainable, that would...care for the environment").

3.13 Overview and Summary

The following findings chapters are presented in three sections based on the core themes that were decided on from the interview data. These empirical chapters focus first on design, second on consumption, and finally on work and labour. During the initial phases of data analysis I included a findings section on gender and on cost of living, but later decided that these two topics were continual undercurrents in the discussion of all other areas. For example, in design - architecture is predominantly a masculinised industry, and the women I interviewed report encountering all manner of sexist microaggressions in the DIY store based on a pervasive gendered mistrust of their abilities. Throughout the themes of consumption and cost of living, gender is inflected because women are trained to consume in ways that co-create their gender; by buying clothes and shoes and make-up, nesting materials, and so on. There is significant pressure to have an impractically diverse wardrobe and a stigma attached to wearing the same thing multiple times. The cost of living is gendered because women are, on average, paid less than men, making their lives more expensive (Smith, 2020). This, in turn, is linked to work, where women are paid less than their male colleagues, are expected to take on more unpaid pastoral, administrative and nurturing roles, and take on the lion's share of unpaid domestic labour and emotional work like organising who does the cleaning and cooking and caring work in the home (UN Women, 2021; ONS, 2016).

Both gender and budget informed the decisions made and opinions expressed about design, work, and consumption. Because of this, I finally decided to integrate observations and analysis regarding both gender and cost of living into the three core findings sections which could not be reduced down themselves any further. I have included excerpts from my auto-ethnographic field note journal throughout this thesis, where I regularly recorded my thoughts and feelings about what was happening with the research at the time. These are included to

demonstrate my reflexive approach to the work of the thesis, and provide an ongoing insight into the decisions I made along the way. The inclusion of field notes data reflects the continuing struggle of doing research and acknowledges that methodological decisions are made continuously throughout a thesis, not just during the writing of the methods chapter.

Chapter 4: Women and Design

4.1 Introduction

The first analytical chapter of this thesis speaks predominantly to research question two, centring on women's stories about the significance of design in their tiny house experiences. In considering design, I was particularly interested in women's stories about the materiality of planning and building a home, as well as decisions about how it looks inside and what values, beliefs, and hopes were entangled with this process. Women spoke animatedly about the design of their tiny homes; several were moved to tears in retelling the importance of this part of the experience. Their stories about design were closely linked to expressions of the value of agency; how exerting themselves in the material world to make a home instilled feelings of power and capability that they had not encountered elsewhere. Women expressed their desire to participate in my PhD research partly because they wanted their example to dispel the myth that women cannot or should not build their own homes. In telling their stories around design, significant identity work was being done and undone to reformulate their ideas about what a woman can be and what a home can be.

The literature review explored existing understandings of heterotopia and analysed the areas in which this concept has been usefully applied, such as scholarship on the body, music festivals, and gated communities (Faubion, 2008; Harvey, 2000; Wilks & Quinn, 2016). The literature review chapter also delineated the evidence which points to the normative world that women broadly exist in, focusing on key structural issues such as women's global experiences of poverty, male violence, and unpaid labour in the home (Merry, 2016; Oakley,

2019; UN Women, 2021; 2021a). Establishing what life is generally like for women was important in order to lay the foundation for comparing tiny houses to this usual world, since this facilitates an analysis of how dweller control (Ward, 1976), heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) and the slender body (Bordo, 2003) can enrich scholarly understandings of women's experiences with and in tiny houses as an 'other' space.

This chapter on women's narratives about designing and building the physical tiny house allows a deep consideration of the extent to which tiny houses provided these women with an alternative universe, or a world within a world (Foucault, 1984). Empirical data is explored to consider how much women's tiny houses facilitate access to an inversion of the norms surrounding them in the 'outside' world. The findings presented in this chapter confirm that a significant factor in how hostile the normative world can be for women lies in how precarious and unaffordable housing is, and how little agency they experience in many settings. The tiny house is thus presented as a critical place in which a reformulation of their identities as agentic, capable, and skilled people is done.

Conversations around design and space centred around two key themes: finding larger spaces stressful and relishing control over the home. Finding larger houses stressful was reported in terms of feeling bad about wasted space or space that was not deemed to be used sufficiently to warrant its being there, which in turn caused feelings of guilt or shame. Larger homes were also described as being stressful in relation to the amount of cleaning and maintenance they required as well as the implied costs of larger spaces. Enjoying control over the home was raised in the context of how much women enjoyed designing their tiny house, either in partnership with a professional designer or as they managed this task independently. For example, being able to make a home meet exact personal needs included considerations of

accessibility for wheelchair users or being designed to include a medically necessary infrared sauna.

On a practical level, women reported intense feelings of satisfaction and pleasure around being able to decide exactly where the cabinets would go, how big the window would be, where exactly a sofa would be put and indeed if there would even be a sofa at all. As noted above, several women became very emotional in describing the level of agency and power that they experienced in the designing and building of their own home. This powerful emotional response was true for women who built their tiny house by hand and for women who employed professionals to complete the build, so it does not appear that directly hammering nails is the catalyst for this feeling of empowerment, but more the ability to decide on and direct the activities related to the construction of the house. This chapter will begin with an in-depth exploration of the first core theme: finding larger spaces stressful.

4.2 Part I: Finding Larger Spaces Stressful - Designing for Peace

Finding larger living spaces stressful or unmanageable was a common point of analysis made by the women I spoke to. Della, 41, lived in Ontario, Canada, in a trailer-based tiny house that she bought for \$96,000 from a women-owned tiny house builder in Alberta. Della describes her feelings about a large home she shared with her ex-husband. In this excerpt, she explored her feelings of being overwhelmed by what she felt was an excess of space in the conventional home she shared with her then-husband.

“We had come across a dream home. It was a 5,000 square foot (465 sq m) house on an acre lot surrounded by a hundred acres, so we got that and we lived there for eight years and

honestly it became really stressful. (she laughs) First world problems. I had trouble using all the space. I felt like I was wasting space you know, I'd wake up and I'd have breakfast in the solarium and then I'd have my lunch in the kitchen, and then have my afternoon coffee in the living room, and then dinner in the dining room. And then like tv in the tv room, like there's a million rooms you know. Uh, a painting room, I had an exercise room, I had all these rooms and I just felt like if I wasn't using them then it was a waste of space. So I kind of became a little obsessive with making sure that I was using the house and I just thought why is this causing so much stress, I clearly am not someone who enjoys having a lot of space. I prefer smaller spaces. So, when our marriage didn't work out I bought a tiny house.” (Della, 41, Ontario).

Della demonstrated an awareness that feeling stressed by having too much space was a privileged problem to have; a “*first world problem*”, as she describes it. However, this acknowledgement did not ameliorate the genuine distress that the excessively large home caused her. The simultaneous acknowledgement of both privilege and discontent links to a broader interrogation of the contrary tensions that tiny houses embody, being indicative of both a level of material wealth as well as other kinds of deprivation (Colombini, 2019; Shearer, 2019). Della went on to describe how this experience led her to reexamine her own priorities and arrive at the conclusion that she was not somebody who likes a lot of living space and that in fact, contrary to what she had been taught to believe, she prefers smaller spaces. In the context of examining how women might be using tiny houses to augment their lived experience of capitalism and patriarchy, I found it particularly interesting to note that it was in tandem with the dissolution of her marriage to her then-husband that Della made the decision to move into a tiny home.

Like Della, Sally, 31, who lived in a trailer-based tiny house with her husband and two children in South Africa, also describes how she did not like the wasted space in the home she and her family lived in before transitioning into a tiny house. Here she was describing how she first came across tiny houses when she was watching a tiny house building programme and what aspects attracted her to the idea of tiny houses in the first place.

“I remember being like ‘whoa’, somebody is describing exactly what I believe in. As he was talking about the house, he was talking about the design of the house and he was saying, look, we put this thing over here because that’s where we use the space, you know. Then we noticed that we always live between the kitchen and the lounge, and you know so we realised oh there’s all this extra space that we’re not using, so let’s throw it away because we don’t need it. And let’s build something that’s really functional so that the design of it meets our actual needs, and not what we think we need or what society is telling us what we need or whatever. And, yeah, so I remember thinking this is very beautiful and this is also very functional.” (Sally, 31, South Africa).

Sally touches on similar aspects to Della in recognising that they were paying for and maintaining “*extra space that we’re not using*”. Sally also evokes the notion that she and her family had been taught a particular line of reasoning, “*what society is telling us what we need*” i.e. a consumer capitalist belief that they should want, strive for, and enjoy a large home, but in fact on reflection this did not fulfil them and actually led to a reduced sense of well being. In contrast to the traditional home that they were living in at the time, Sally described her impression of tiny houses as being both beautiful and functional, each being qualities that were achieved through thoughtful design.

Both of these women's examples support the assertion that people enjoy their homes more when they have a say in their appearance and how they are used. Their stories illustrate that tiny houses may be fruitfully considered as an emergent contemporary illustration of an enduring principle - that dweller control is correlated with higher satisfaction (Ward, 1976). There is also something significant in both narratives about the importance and value of unlearning what consumer capitalism has taught them, i.e. that they should want and enjoy big homes and instead relearning what they actually prefer, even when this contradicts dominant social messaging.

Excerpt of field notes, dated December 7th 2020

I keep thinking about when Della said they had come across their 'Dream' home, and then finding out that once it was no longer a dream but a reality, she didn't like it. Wondering how much this enticement of the 'Dream' version of stuff which is sold to us by patriarchal capitalism is foundational to keeping the status quo intact. Thinking about 'Dream' jobs for example as a way to romanticise waged labour in general; even your dream job is labour which takes up your time and energy and is ultimately still a job which definitionally means you are being exploited for profit. Is this truly anyone's 'dream'? What about the dream wedding or the dream outfit/nose job/whatever. Rhetorical sleight of hand to keep us all yearning for something which can never actually materialise because it is always couched in a dream-state alternative reality. This is a perfect way to sustain hegemony because then we never stop trying to make our unequal and exploitative job or marriage or accommodation structure work, we just need to self-optimize that little bit more and purchase the right things, the greener things, or in this case, the smaller things. In this context, is any form of heterotopic escape even possible, or does heterotopia itself occupy the same 'dream' state?

Like Della and Sally, Diwata, 32, who lived in a trailer-based tiny house in Texas with her husband and four children, explained that she felt having ‘too much’ space was one of the causes of her and her family experiencing stress. Diwata linked her feelings of stress to financial concerns, explaining that the larger the space they lived in, the more money went into filling that space with ‘stuff’, which she found stressful:

“We realised that the more space we had, the more money went into it trying to fill up. You know, our kitchen was literally as big as our house that we live in right now, so it's like man, do we really need this much space? We had a breakfast area, we had a dining area, and we didn't even use the breakfast area. And don't even get me started with the huge garage! That thing was huge.” (Diwata, 32, Texas).

Feeling compelled to use all of the space she was in, Diwata identified an ingrained compunction that arises from not entirely using all of the available space in a home for storing and displaying consumer possessions. Diwata’s narrative about finding larger spaces stressful invokes a sense that she experienced a moral imperative to spend money to fill up the rooms, which in turn raises questions about how spaces are designed to evoke and compel specific behaviours. Modern capitalism requires constant expansion to perpetuate itself, which in turn relies on generating a perpetual feeling of lack in its citizens. Diwata’s story reveals one way in which this feeling of lack can be manufactured through the message that space should be filled with possessions, and the bigger a house is, the better. In this way, an ongoing anxiety about space is rendered visible through Diwata’s telling of how she experienced her normative, traditionally designed home as stress-provoking through its unfillably large size.

During the conversations presented here, I began to get a sense of the conflict these women were experiencing. I argue that the tension they report arises in part because an unfilled space in the home indicates a failing in the consumer-citizen; however, a space overfilled, a space cluttered, also indicates a failing. In this way, a constant anxiety is fostered around whether we have too much or too little. The same anxiety about appropriate or optimal quantities also translates into other behaviours - whether we do too much and put ourselves at risk of burnout or whether we are lazy and are not sufficiently proactive and productive (Balkeran, 2020; Gilbert, 2013). I can also see how this applies to feelings of conflict around gender; whether women are weakly capitulating to the feminine urge to be thin and pretty, or whether women are fat and irresponsible and unworthy of dignity and kind treatment (Bordo, 2018; Jovanovski, 2017). Indeed, it is this state of cultural bulimia that Bordo (2003) argues serves as a powerful distraction and a drain on resources that might otherwise be diverted to collective organising and political agitation. In this context, tiny houses might be understood as a strategically employed tool designed to minimise the noise and disturbance of these overwhelming questions, instead creating a heterotopic space in which the impact of the anxiety-provoking cultural bulimia outlined above could be stultified (Foucault, 1984).

Tina, 38, lived in a flat in London when we spoke but was in the process of moving back to Ireland to undertake a van conversion. Tina did not share the experience of being overwhelmed by an excessively large living space like Della and Diwata described, but still spoke strongly in admiration of what she called “*space being used in a perfect way*”. We spoke for a while about food and her vegan diet; in the excerpt below Tina shared about her long-standing admiration of minimal design and space-saving technology and how this links to her overall belief in the value of consuming fewer resources and taking up less space.

Alice: "To what extent does your interest in veganism and the sustainability and ethics around that overlap? Is it related at all to the tiny house movement?"

Tina: "Yeah I think very much so. I think it gave me more awareness about how much we're consuming in relation to like electricity, water, even just having things around us that we don't need, like being more minimal, being more, um, economical. All of that stuff came into it. And not only that, I love looking at Japanese spaces and space-saving furniture and folding furniture and all that kind of stuff, like it kind of makes me really happy when a space has been utilised in this kind of perfect way that there's no space wasted, so I think it all kind of comes together in that way." (Tina, 38, London).

All four women position larger spaces within a rubric of 'excess' or 'waste', suggesting that they are operating with counter cultural schemas of consumption since the home is most often conceived of as 'the bigger the better' (Hogg, Banister, & Stephenson, 2009; Witt, 2010). It is interesting that Della initially described the large house as a "*dream home*", and only by living in it did she come to realise that what she had been taught was a dream home did not in fact work for her. Whilst it may have been the dominant cultural dream, it was not her own. Similarly, Sally described learning about what her actual priorities were around space, in opposition to what she believed they had been taught to want from a home and. Likewise, Diwata discussed the process of beginning to question "*do we really need this much space?*", and starting to link the larger living area with stresses related to expense rather than any sense of luxury or comfort. Tina also described how she feels "*really happy*" when a space is perfectly designed and "*there's no space wasted*".

These narratives support the alternative hedonism theory which outlines how traditional consumption practices are increasingly being associated with stress, waste, and pollution, especially by relatively affluent consumers (Soper, 2008). Tiny houses, then, function to synergise both the aims and outcomes of alternative hedonism by designing a smaller living space which simultaneously acts as a symbolic rejection of consumer culture and as a practical way to reduce traditional consumption habits. By moving away from her ‘McMansion’ home (Bellet, 2019), Della perceived that she had reduced both her personal waste and her stress levels by living in a smaller space. Likewise, Sally saw that tiny houses offered a functional alternative to what “*society is telling us we need*” by prioritising well designed space that reduced waste and unnecessary expense. Diwata too went through the process of asking “*Do we really need this much space?*”, and came to the conclusion that not only did they not need that much space, but in fact the large home was detrimental to their overall wellbeing. Tina linked the waste and harm associated with non-vegan diets with the similar magnitude of waste that is normalised in regards to electricity, water, and living space in traditional Western societies, extolling the virtues of tiny house design because “*there's no space wasted.*”

For all of these women, tiny houses were positioned as offering something that moving into a smaller conventionally built house or flat could not. It is here that heterotopia can emerge as a useful theoretical lens through which to view the decision to live in a tiny house, since it cannot be the absolute size per se which attracted these women, since very small flats are also available which would meet a need to live in a small space. I argue that it is the meaning that Della, Sally, Diwata, and Tina attributed to their tiny houses that emerges as the most significant factor. Because complete disengagement from capitalism and the associated ecocide, waste, excess, and feelings of guilt and shame that this may engender is not

ultimately possible, the idea of slantwise resistance, considered in the introduction, again emerges as a useful perspective to take in understanding the stories presented here (Arrigoitia, West, and Peace, 2018; Paddison, et al., 2002). The narratives shared here re-centre women's ability to choose, albeit under conditions of uncertainty and constraint. Rejecting traditional, larger housing in favour of small, bespoke dwellings which have “come to be cherished or valued by its resident population for all that it represents or means to them.” (Friedman, 2010, p. 154) is a small gesture in the grand scheme of global capitalism, but a significant one in the trajectories of the individual women.

The interview data presented so far speaks to a questioning of the logic of accumulation and scepticism towards hegemonic messaging around what ‘dream’ homes should look like. Instead of finding larger homes luxurious and enjoyable, these women found them to be stressful and overwhelming. As the research progressed, I began to get the feeling that there was a particular line of reasoning being employed by the women I was speaking to which went further than merely questioning the logic of accumulation mandated by consumer capitalism, since this unease could theoretically be assuaged by living in a small flat and buying less. Melodie was still building her tiny house in Missouri when we spoke. She described how her scepticism around large houses began at a young age when she was cleaning other people's homes for some extra money whilst she was at college. Like several other interviewees, Melodie demonstrated an awareness of the historical trend of increasing average home size in America over the last fifty years, and critiqued this trend as being illogical or unnecessary.

“Houses here in the United States have only gotten bigger and bigger since the 70’s. I cleaned houses in college to make some money on the side, and this one house I cleaned, it

was just two grandparents and their granddaughter. They had a completely finished basement with multiple bathrooms and bedrooms and a kitchen, and then their main floor which was like their kitchen and everything, and then two other floors where they had another living room upstairs. And I'm like, there's just three of you. And the fact that this all requires cleaning because you all live here. I was like, this is insane. Who needs this many square feet for just a family of three? Also, you're at work all the time which is why I'm cleaning your house. It just didn't logically make sense.” (Melodie, 28, Missouri).

Appealing to an alternative logic surrounding space and the desirability of larger versus smaller homes often appeared in the interviews. It was common that the women I spoke to positioned themselves as going against or in some way subverting the logic of accumulation extolled by contemporary capitalism and referred instead to a logic of sufficiency, a schema based on how much of a resource a person needs rather than how much they want. These findings further link to work on alternative hedonism, supporting the idea that a growing number of consumers are dissatisfied with the ramifications of consumer culture and are revising their idea of what constitutes a ‘good life’ in closer alignment with planetary boundaries and ideas around social justice (Pickerill, 2016; Soper, 2014). In the case of tiny houses, the traditional narrative that bigger is better where homes are concerned is being treated with scepticism and even scorn (Bellet, 2019).

Melissa was in her late fifties when we spoke and lived on a narrowboat in the South of England. Here, she discussed the boat's design specifically in terms of its space optimisation. Melissa celebrated how the clever design of space in the boat ensured that nothing was ‘wasted’ as it used to be when they lived in a cottage. In the excerpt below, she touches on several of the key concepts that many other interviewees did concerning their tiny house on

wheels or their vans, like recognising that they were previously living in a house with spaces they did not use and making conscious decisions about what they need to be able to do in their home.

“We had so much wasted space in the cottage, and when I think about it we only really lived in our kitchen and the rest were just rooms we passed through once the kids moved out. When we looked at narrow boats after selling the wide beam we took so much into consideration about how we'd use every bit of available space. We were so lucky to find this one as it has a huge amount of storage everywhere, we even have some spare. Seating was a big issue as I wanted to be able to have enough room for visitors and I also wanted to be able to cook a meal and sit with family round a table. My kitchen is small but so much more functional on the boat. We don't have any wasted space from front to back, it's the best design I've seen and optimises every foot. I can't imagine ever trading this life for my old one, it's as if you've been given the keys to a magical secret world on water and every day I am so grateful that I happened upon it as each day feels as if you're on holiday.” (Melissa, 50's, South England).

When Melissa referred to the unused space that they had in their cottage, it was defined as being “*wasted space*”. In contrast, the unused space they now have in their narrowboat is described as being “*spare*”. The difference seems to be because the unused space in the cottage was living space, rooms and furniture that remained unused because the children moved out, whereas the ‘spare’ areas in the narrowboat are storage areas and small cupboards or shelves rather than entire rooms. The relief Melissa reported now that she lives in her narrowboat is palpable from the quote above. Her description evokes strong images of the heterotopic power of her life now compared to before; she does not just live in a

comparatively small houseboat, she lives in a “*magical secret world on water...and each day feels as if you’re on holiday.*”

Heterotopia teaches that inverting the usual expected rules and regulations can provide a rare and sought-after reprieve from the pressure to conform. The pervasive messaging of industrialised white educated Western nations is that more is better, bigger is better, and that this is especially true in the ultimate cultural talisman of successful symbolic consumption - the home (Arundel and Dolin, 2017; Weetman, 2017). The women quoted above demonstrate that they have found their way through a lifetime of conditioning to forge instead their own counter-cultural understanding that bigger is not better; it can even be worse. According to these interviewees, bigger is more stressful, bigger is wasteful, and bigger is time-consuming.

Although the women I have spoken to for this thesis speak from their individual positions and their individual tiny homes, I argue that taken together, they can be seen to comprise ‘autonomous geographies’ in that their tiny houses are: “spaces where there is a desire to constitute non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity and citizenship. These are created through a combination of resistance and creation, and a questioning and challenging of dominant laws and social norms.” (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006, p.1). As an ‘other space’ (Foucault, 1984) where women’s agency is centred through principles of dweller control (Ward, 1976), I argue that these women are using their tiny houses as tools to move towards more autonomous geographies (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006), specifically through the combined processes of resisting aspects of the status quo and creating new and different ways of living and relating. Drawing from Pickerill and Chatterton (2006), I argue that tiny houses are one example of the “workable micro-examples” of how people are building

environments which foster their autonomy within and against macro-forces of capitalism and patriarchy (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006, p.2).

In direct juxtaposition to McMansion culture, tiny houses extol the virtues of smallness (Zeiger, 2009). Della, Sally, Diwata, Tina, Melissa and Melodie advocate for the benefits of tiny houses by explaining how bigger houses contributed to a net loss rather than a net gain in their well-being. In contrast to the guilt caused by the wasted space of a bigger home, women reported feelings of pleasure and pride in the smart design and responsible use of resources that they believe their tiny house demonstrates. Despite this, tension remains evident. Whilst tiny houses can symbolise some antithetical values to traditional financialised housing, they can nevertheless be seen as yet another example of commodified housing. Further, though tiny houses cost a fraction of an average house in the UK, Europe, the USA, or Australia, they do still cost, on average, several tens of thousands of pounds, putting them out of reach for huge numbers of people.

4.2.2 Small is Cosy

Smaller spaces were often also positioned as being cosy and safe compared to larger, more unwieldy living spaces. Fiona, 25, lived in a van with her partner. The couple converted the van into a living space together over several months in 2020. Originally from Dublin, they described how even finding somewhere to rent in the city was impossibly expensive. They originally bought the van to visit friends and have somewhere to sleep for the night but quickly discovered that they enjoyed being in the van more than being in their flats or bedrooms. Here, Fiona described how comforting they found living in their van.

“I don't know what it is, I've never lived in a massive house or anything but I just think the van is my little space. I don't know, it's just much cosier or something, like when you're sitting in the van you have all the wooden cladding and it's always surrounding you. It's just such a cosy little place.” (Fiona, 25, Ireland).

Although this passage is short, it is evocative. I could clearly imagine the “*little space*”, and really got a sense of the importance to Fiona of it being hers (“*my little space*”), unlike rented accommodation. There is something in well-appointed small spaces that evokes a sense of being held and made safe, in contrast to the overwhelming and sometimes hostile outside world of the affordable housing crisis, post-pandemic insecurity, and massive consumer inflation. These words do not perhaps adequately express how these factors are legitimate threats to human survival. John Ruskin argued that whilst we do want buildings to provide us with shelter, we also want them to “speak to us - to speak to us of whatever we find important and need to be reminded of.” (de Botton, 2007, p. 62). Perhaps in this instance, the van reminded Fiona that despite an affordable housing crisis so severe in Dublin that she could find nowhere to live, her “*little space*” could speak to her of comfort, protection and cosiness. In this way, her tiny house provided both physical and psychological shelter from the outside world.

Della also spoke affectionately of how snug she feels, especially on her sofa in her tiny house:

“If you wanted to curl up and watch a movie or read a book, which is more of my style, um you just go on the couch and you just kind of like curl up and have a cosy little space and that's all that it is, um it's just when I'm in here it's that cosy time.” (Della, 41, Ontario).

Like Fiona, Della also invoked imagery of peace and tranquillity; a place where she can “*curl up*” and enjoy the simplicity of a place to enjoy serene “*cosy time*”. This narrative is positioned in sharp relief to Della’s previous lifestyle, where she was working several jobs at well over 40 hours per week, taking care of the household and the bills and her husband. In comparison, her current tiny house is revealed as a place of calm and comfort away from the franticness of the outside world. Likewise, Bryanna explained how her aesthetic appreciation of natural materials and small spaces differs from the large and bright modern design trends that she sees today:

“Most people like that large open space white interior, well I can't handle the colour white because I have night blindness, okay, so I have that cosy cabin thing going on with the wood, I love wood.” (Bryanna, 60, Oregon).

In Bryanna’s story, the design choices of the materials used in her home are foregrounded not only as a way for her to mitigate the effect of her night blindness but also as a source of pleasure and enjoyment; “*I love wood.*” Again, the word “*cosy*” appears as an affectionate and endearing descriptor of the small space that Bryanna, like so many of the other women, has come to cherish.

There are similarities between what Friedmann (2010) argues about cherished places needing to be small and intimate, and what the women in this thesis express about the place-making they have engaged in while shifting from a conventional home into a tiny one. All of the women described a process of reconciliation that what they had been taught to want and aspire to, like long working hours and a large traditional home, did not bring them the

meaning they were looking for. In fact, it was by inverting the conventional social messaging about what the appropriate aspirational modes of living are that they were able to improve their quality of life and come to treasure the place that they had made. It is this process of interrupting and subsequently inverting the prevailing social messaging about what a home should look like that aligns tiny house residents' experiences with a theoretical model of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984).

4.2.3 Pain and Conflict in Heterotopia

However, not all women reported an easy and intuitive transition from a conventional to a tiny house. Avery, 25, lived in a trailer-based tiny house in Florida with her two-year-old daughter. Avery described how, after she first moved into her tiny house following the death of her mother, she thought she had made a huge mistake.

“It took me a very long time to get to a place where I was okay living a simpler life, because beforehand I thought I had failed in the first year. I worried that I had jumped on the fad in my grief state. On instagram it looks super fun right? It's all cute, everyone's travelling, they're all happy. But the first year was awful. I thought I made a huge mistake, I could not adjust to the small space.” (Avery, 25, Florida)

The idea of tiny house living as something to be achieved or to be successful at is foregrounded when Avery recounts that she thought she had “*failed in the first year.*” Her story suggests that she was referring to Instagram accounts to form her understanding of what it should look like to successfully live in a tiny house, even though she acknowledges that tiny house living may be considered a “*fad*”. Far from embodying the social media ideal that

she had internalised, Avery “*could not adjust to the small space*” and found her first year as a tiny house resident “*awful*”. Avery went on to explain that she thought that part of her inability to adjust at first was due to the extra stress of cohabiting with a partner; she suggested that part of her ability to begin enjoying her new home and lifestyle was when she “*got rid of one whole man.*” She explains:

“I had like a grown-ass man living with me too and I couldn't adjust. It was too much; minimalism, cutting back, just being confined and not being able to go anywhere, I couldn't handle it. And then the dust everywhere oh my god really it was awful at one point. It was right after I had my daughter and everybody was telling me that I would not have enough space, I shouldn't do it, I should just sell it and get an apartment and all this stuff, and I almost did it. But I'm really glad I didn't because now I am so happy that I just listened to myself. Number one: I got rid of one whole man.” (Avery, 25, Florida)

Here, Avery recounts the pressure and judgement she perceived from her social circle. She goes on to explain that coming from an immigrant family placed more pressure on her because tiny houses were so removed from her immigrant parents' vision of what their children's lives should be like in America. Here, too, the heterotopic qualities of the tiny house are illuminated by Avery's family's rejection because it is the tiny house's usurping and inverting of dominant social rules that strikes her family as unacceptable. I was interested to hear Avery say that the number-one reason she eventually felt at home in her tiny house was that she “*got rid of one whole man*”. In the context of my interest in how women might be using tiny houses to change their experience of capitalism and patriarchy, Avery presenting her decision to end a relationship with a man as the catalyst for enjoying her home struck me as significant. One of the drawbacks of transcribed speech is that it cannot capture

the tone and energy of a conversation, but Avery was proud and full of vitality when she told me that she ended this relationship.

Avery recounted a broader context of judgement and a lack of support from others:

“Everybody was telling me that I would not have enough space, I shouldn't do it, I should just sell it”, but despite this, she emerged serene and grateful that she was able to stay connected to her own sense of agency rather than being unduly influenced by others: *“Now I am so happy that I just listened to myself.”* Avery has a younger sister, Ansley, who also lives in a tiny house.

“My family on both sides are immigrants, so my dad's from Nigeria and my mom's from Guyana, so not American. So they all think that me and my sister are absolutely batshit crazy, um they refused to come to my house.” (Avery, 25, Florida).

A combination of factors including the emotional upheaval of losing her mother, the difficulties of cohabiting with an unsuitable partner, and the external pressure from disapproving friends and family made Avery's adjustment to the design of a smaller space difficult. Ultimately, once the relational aspects of this challenging situation were ameliorated, Avery was able to enjoy her new home and lifestyle. The passage of time made the pain of losing her mother less invasive, the unsuitable relationship was ended, and her extended family accepted that whilst they would not choose to live in a tiny house, Avery and her daughter are living in one, and will continue to do so.

Another woman from an immigrant family also experienced tension between herself and her family regarding their differing beliefs about material possessions and the appropriate amount

of space to inhabit. Diwata, 32, lives in Texas but is originally from the Philippines. She lives in a 420 square foot (39 square metre) tiny house with her husband and four children.

“In the American Dream everyone has two story houses and everyone has their own room, and you know like in the Philippines we didn't have our own room. We had no toilet, there was no shower, it was like a third world country. We didn't have air conditioning, you know.”

(Diwata, 32, Texas)

Diwata introduced this part of our conversation by juxtaposing the expectations of the American Dream with the reality of her heritage and lived experience growing up in the global South. Diwata then goes on to explore how she tried to introduce her grandmother to the same benefits that she herself had found from ‘minimalism’ as she calls it, and the tiny house movement more broadly, but found that their cultural beliefs were too different for this to work.

“And my grandmother's a hoarder, a real hoarder, and we tried to help her out by showing her the minimalist lifestyle. But since she's so much older and she comes from the Philippines where she grew up so poor, and she had very little and grew up in a tiny home, then coming to America she has a two-story home, she has all this stuff, and she doesn't want to get rid of it because of where she came from. So she keeps everything, her closet looks like a mall, full of clothes that still have tags on. We tried helping her to get rid of it and she got heartbroken.” (Diwata, 32, Texas)

It was interesting that Diwata described the dwelling that her grandmother grew up in back in the Philippines as a “*tiny home*” whilst clearly meaning something very different from the

tiny house that she and her family called home in Texas. By describing her grandmother as a “*hoarder*”, rather than as ‘a collector’, or as someone who finds comfort in her possessions, Diwata revealed that she finds her grandmother's level of consumption problematic. This is reinforced when Diwata explains that she tried “*helping her to get rid of it,*” just as she and her family got rid of many of their possessions and found comfort and freedom from this exercise.

Despite these efforts, much like Avery’s extended family, Diwata’s grandmother could not understand and did not agree with the minimalist way of life because it conflicted so much with the values she brought from her own life experience. The cultural differences here meant that Diwata found it stressful to live in a large space and have what she considered too many possessions, whilst her grandmother found it stressful to live in too small a space and have too few possessions. In other words, Diwata’s grandmother may have accessed a sense of plenty and safety by achieving the traditional markers of material abundance after having come from a context of such extreme material deprivation. In contrast, Diwata attained an equivalent sense of plenty and safety by rejecting this type of material and spatial abundance and creating a heterotopic space and life instead.

Hoarding and minimalism are often portrayed as opposites; however, they can also be viewed as mutually constituting forces within a neoliberal consumer capitalist system, which places consumer citizens in a perpetually fraught state of feeling that they should simultaneously want both more and fewer goods (Bordo, 2003; Ivanova, 2011). The inbuilt obsolescence of most consumer products evidences one aspect of this perpetual growth model; the dominant economic model in the global North thrives from consumption practises that reward both purchasing and discarding of goods since this perpetuates the constant need for new and

different products (ibid; Ryle, 2008). Concisely, homes should be kept tidy so that we can have space to fill them with more products (Meissner, 2019; Woodward, 2003). Under this model, the home becomes a warehouse for temporary goods like clothes, kitchen appliances, art, and soft furnishings to pass through for a brief time until they no longer fulfil their function in terms of their practical use or in terms of their ability to communicate our identity, at which point they are discarded and replaced. Both Diwata and Avery recounted stories of their struggles and reconciliations with the tension inherent in the neoliberal consumer messaging and the tiny house community messaging since both rely on identity being constituted through consumption (Harris, 2018; Ivanova, 2011). This theme will be returned to in-depth in Chapter five on women and consumption.

4.2.4 The Ethics of Home Size

Several women presented their discomfort with living in a large space in the context of an awareness of global inequality and their perceived ethical obligation not to take up more than their fair share. Greta was in her late forties when we spoke and had lived for many years in a yurt in Australia, although she is originally from The Netherlands. When we spoke, she no longer lived in a tiny house and had moved to Europe. Here, she summarises her feelings about the ethics of living in a big home:

“I also don't feel comfortable living in a big house whilst knowing that on the other side of the world people have to flee from war and live in a tent to survive.” (Greta, 40's, The Netherlands)

The size and design of Greta's home reveal a great deal of political and ethical significance. In this vein, de Botton argues that homes continue to be "conceived as stage sets for actors in an idealised drama about contemporary existence." (de Botton, 2007, p. 63). Indeed, mirroring this language, Greta explained that she is aware that her beliefs about how a person should live are quite idealistic but that they stem from a sincere belief that individualism is harmful and that a more community-focused approach to life yields vital benefits. She described how a small space relieved her of both practical and psychological burdens, revealing how a smaller home leads her to a sense of an expanded inner life.

"What also attracted me was that because it is small, it's easier to oversee. We are living in quite an overwhelming world, and it is good to have a safe place in it. If it is too big it doesn't feel safe anymore. And it has been a dream to build my own house, but I never thought I would be able to. But by making it small, it's easier to oversee the problems. Not sure if you get it, but it's a bit of a feeling that small makes it possible to let my inner self grow more. And also of course it's that with a smaller house you are paying less. Having a lower mortgage, having lower fixed costs for energy, lower maintenance. So you don't need to work just to get your bills paid, but you can spend your time on the things you actually value and care about." (Greta, 40's, The Netherlands)

Here, Greta explained how living in a large house would be incongruent with her values. In her telling, design is revealed as a strategy for living a decent, ethical life. Greta's explanation draws out what Pickerill (2016) described as new ethics around land and human relation to it, an ethical conscientiousness that opposes the expansionist imperative for privatisation and domination. Greta associated small living spaces with manageability and a sense of having agency to "oversee the problems" as well as providing a mechanism for letting her "inner self

grow more.” She further acknowledged that living in a small space means that she is “*paying less*” and goes on to link this to being able to extricate herself from normative working cycles and market entrenchment, emphasising that working less means spending “*time on the things you actually value and care about.*” In this way, designing a small living space is emplotted as a synergising technique for creating a “*safe place*”, aligned with her ethics, and coherent with her desire for an expanded inner life.

Sally, who lives in a trailer-based tiny house in South Africa with her husband and two children, also demonstrated a critical reflexive awareness of global inequality caused by both historical and ongoing colonialism. Sally was particularly cautious to point out that as a white person living in South Africa, she was awarded multiple unearned privileges as a direct result of racism and white supremacy. Here, she was discussing how she has rationalised living in a much smaller space than her white colleagues and peers by cultivating an awareness that for most black and brown folks in South Africa, and more broadly in the global South, living in small spaces is the norm.

“I think sometimes on rainy days when all of us have to be inside the house, we just think maybe we're crazy. But then I think about, you know, right over my fence, our neighbours, who live with eight people in a tiny two-bedroom space. And in fact most of humanity lives in small spaces and make it work, and so I think that is part of my story, like I can also make this work.” (Sally, 31, South Africa)

Both Greta and Sally understand their preferences for smaller living spaces through a rubric of ethics that focuses specifically on their situatedness as white women who have inherited the unearned benefits of colonialism. Both of these women use the dweller control (Ward,

1976) offered by tiny houses to enact “an idealised drama about contemporary existence” (de Botton, 2007, p.63), which foregrounds them as agentic actors who are trying to live in contradiction to the dominant oppressive relational modes of their societies. The extent to which Sally and Greta’s efforts to countervail the force of colonialism and the reality of fleeing from war is debatable, but it is of sociological interest that the strongly felt ethics of care and fairness are given as the rationale for designing and living in a tiny house. Foucault argues that “[architecture] can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom.” (Foucault, 1984, pp. 245-6). Self-build tiny houses present an interesting example of the owner-occupier-builder embodying the synergy of intentions that Foucault (1984) describes by building and then using the tiny house as an expression of a desire for greater agency in combination with the lived practice of an ethics of fairness, personal responsibility, and, as Greta says, being able to “*spend your time on the things you actually value and care about.*”

Diwata’s description of not wanting to be a “*real hoarder*” like her grandmother is also related to an appreciation of how excess is woven into the fabric of life in the global north. By contrasting her experience of being raised in a single-room house in the Philippines with the excess she encountered in the form of unmanageably huge houses in the global north, Diwata reasons that her current living arrangement in a well-appointed tiny house facilitates an ethical and happy middle ground between the extremes of lack and excess.

4.3 Summary

In summary, the women I spoke to experienced conventional houses as stressful firstly because of their impractically large size, which made cleaning and maintaining them unnecessarily time-consuming. Secondly, women found larger houses stressful due to the pressure of paying for expensive bigger spaces, in addition to the expense of filling the houses with possessions. Thirdly, women found conventional housing stressful because they often recognised that endorsing large houses made them complicit in a global system of exploitation and inequality that they would rather extricate themselves from where possible. In the first half of this empirical chapter, I have shown how some women are using tiny houses to design greater peace and agency into their lives. I have also shown that, within the cohort of women I have spoken to, there is a general sense of disillusionment with the offerings of contemporary consumerism and working cultures and that women are using tiny houses as a tool to alter the impact of these two structural forces in their lives by dramatically reducing their cost of living.

4.4 Part II: Enjoying Control Over Design

Whilst the previous section focussed on the stresses and situations that women have been trying to avoid or escape from by living in a tiny house, the following section focuses more on the pleasures and enjoyments that women are moving towards by living in a tiny house. The predominant theme that arose when women were discussing their experiences of designing and living in their own tiny houses was the enjoyment they got from feeling more

in control of what was happening in their lives. Despite the challenges that inevitably accompany a project of this nature, the overwhelming pattern was that women took strength, confidence, and joy from having agency and authority over the design and build process.

4.4.1 Control Your Home, Control Your Life

A common theme throughout conversations on design and space in the tiny house was the pleasure and comfort women experienced as a result of being in control of their house.

Women spoke about their control over the design and construction, the placement and decoration of the house, and what and who comes into or out of it. Control in the tiny house was often related to a greater sense of control in their lives more broadly, often using the language of being ‘deliberate’, ‘mindful’, and ‘conscious’. Tina, 38, was living in London when we spoke but was in the process of moving back home to Ireland, where she was planning to convert a van to live in full-time. I asked her what she thought the most significant difference would be between her life now, living in a flat in London, and her life once she moved into her converted van.

“I think everything will be more intentional and I think I’ll be able to control things in a way that I want to control them, like everything will suit me and work for me and like kind of, I want to say set me up for success. I’ll have everything planned in such a way that it’ll be kind of bespoke to me. So I feel like there’s lots of things about my environment right now that I can’t control or that um don’t suit me, or don’t work well for me, but once I have my own space that will be, yeah, I think control.” (Tina, 38, London)

Here, the home is presented as the fulcrum of Tina's ability to feel agentic in her life. When she lives in her converted van, she will "*be able to control things*". She positions this in contrast to her current situation, wherein she describes that her environment does not suit her precisely because it feels out of her control. Tina summarises the outcome of this enhanced agency as one that will "*set me up for success*". In this regard, Tina's narrative highlights what Ward (1990) describes as the cascade of emotional and psychological benefits that can flow from dweller control. Nonetheless, Tina's paralleling of the ideas of control and success also reproduces dominant neoliberal values of self-sufficiency, self-discipline, and the imperative for the individual to set themselves up for success (Bhatia, 2017; Binkley, 2014; Bordo, 2003).

Amy, 37, lived in a trailer-based tiny house in Colorado when we spoke. Below, she summarised her feelings about the design and function of her home:

"It brought all of my values into alignment. I wanted, you know, a reduced carbon footprint, I wanted to spend my life doing rather than having, I wanted a space that was aesthetically beautiful, I wanted to have a space that I felt like I could stay in control of; like the cleaning wasn't out of control, repair wasn't gonna bankrupt me. It allowed me to travel and if I didn't want to travel in it it had the Pinterest factor to be an easy Airbnb situation. So it just took all of those values and brought them into one." (Amy, 37, Colorado)

Here, Amy celebrates the versatility of her tiny house, noting that it offers her the option of transforming its function from a primary residence into an Airbnb due to its '*Pinterest factor*', which gives it cultural currency. Foucault's (1984) second defining quality of heterotopias is that they are versatile and can be adapted at will, which is supported by Amy's

analysis of her tiny home. Further, Amy goes on to explain how she wanted a home that she “*could stay in control of*”, revealing that the feeling of control over her home in terms of manageable cleaning and repair costs and the flexibility of being able to travel with her home brought her a transformative level of peace. Not only is this positioned in juxtaposition to her own experience of life before living in her tiny home, but her statement also supports the analysis of tiny homes as a heterotopia in that they offer ‘other spaces’ that invert the normal trends found outside of them, and that part of this heterotopic capacity is realised through enhanced dweller control (Ward, 1976).

Like Tina, Amy presents a narrative of taking personal responsibility for creating a life that “*brought all of my values into alignment.*” Rather than, for example, becoming politically active or mobilising collective pressure on the power structures that enforce a lifestyle of “*having*” or that ensure low enough working wages that repairs could “*bankrupt me*”, Amy demonstrated her willingness and her pride in taking personal responsibility for ameliorating the potential impact of these factors on her life. By constricting her personal living space and her cost of living, her strategy aligns with Bordo’s (2003) invocation of a well-managed and slimmed-down gendered consumer, one who uses the framework of dieting and personal restriction to conform to both patriarchal and capitalist conceptions of what the ideal female consumer should be. This analysis is disquieting, not least because Amy’s own stated aims were to disentangle herself from the market relations she was used to by having a “*reduced carbon footprint*” and refocusing her life on “*doing rather than having*”. My interrogation of her narrative is not to suggest that she has failed but rather to complicate and highlight nuances in what other outcomes and values are visible in her story.

Amy continued:

“Also, the sense of peace and well-being, I just, I didn't think it was a thing. The level of just... whenever I go back to the tiny house I just sit on the couch and the first thing I do is just cry. I just cry my eyes out because I am just so incredibly grateful that...Um It feels like this secret that people don't know about. I'm like, if only you knew, you would change your life radically and today if you understood that this level of peace exists.” (Amy, 37, Colorado)

Reflecting on Amy’s emotive depiction of the affective states brought about by her home reminds me that taking design seriously means, in part, confronting the reality that people can be “inconveniently vulnerable to the colour of our wallpaper and that our sense of purpose may be derailed by an unfortunate bedspread.” (de Botton, 2007, p. 25). When considering how women talk about their sense of joy and pride in the design of their homes, far from being frivolous, their narratives highlight that serenity and a sense of unheroic well-being can be found in “undramatic, frangible scenes of beauty that move us because we are aware of the darker backdrop against which they are set.” (ibid.) Indeed, it is this contrast between the delicate beauty of a space humanely designed and the “darker backdrop” of pandemics, recessions, sexism, the pressures of work, and the difficulties of life that renders tiny houses as such potentially heterotopic places in these women’s lives. Amy does not describe being able to weep with relief in any other place in her world. In her telling, her tiny house is a unique place of gratitude and peace, emblemised as a safe haven or sanctuary.

Melissa, whom we heard from earlier in the chapter, echoes the sentiment of gratitude and peace. She lives on a narrowboat in the UK:

“I can't imagine ever trading this life for my old one , it's as if you've been given the keys to a magical secret world on water and every day I am so grateful that I happened upon it as each day feels as if you're on holiday.” (Melissa, 50's, South England)

Like Amy, Melissa links the transformation of her living space with the transformation of her experience of her life more broadly. Whilst Melissa did not design the narrowboat she lives on, her preferences were instrumental in the decision to purchase this particular boat, suggesting that her agency in this regard was still an important factor. Both Amy and Melissa report the relief and happiness that accompanied their move into a smaller and better-designed living space without mentioning any specifically gendered aspects of their experience. However, for some of the women I spoke to, their move into a tiny house was more obviously based on fleeing from sexist oppression in the home.

4.4.2 Affordability and Women Living Alone

Unlike Amy and Melissa, globally, women do not overwhelmingly report feeling *“incredibly grateful”* for their home lives. Instead, data shows that women take on the lion's share of unpaid labour in the home and are more at risk of violence from men in their own homes than anywhere else (Merry, 2016; Oakley, 2019). The extent to which a person can control their home and their life is linked strongly to their economic profile because money is a proxy for power. Because of the affordability of tiny homes in comparison with conventional flats and houses, this particular housing solution could mean that fewer women would be in the position of having to cohabit with somebody else, often a male romantic partner, in order to share the financial burden of accommodation (Johnson, 2010). The corollary of this is that tiny houses may enable more women to live alone, thereby alleviating at least some of the

demands and dangers women face when sharing a home with men and other dependents (Woolf, 2014). This is the story that Lisa told during our conversation.

Lisa, 33, lived in a converted camper van in Alabama when we spoke. Below, she explains how living first in her car and then in her van enabled her to leave a dangerous and unhappy marriage and rediscover her own priorities.

“So, four years ago I was in a bad marriage, and it was just one of those things where I woke up one day and I walked out and literally left everything I owned behind. I packed a couple of bags of my clothing and I realised I didn't need anything. It's just stuff you know. My safety and my mental health were way more important. And I lived in my Toyota Prius for close to a year and just travelled all over. I was content, you know, I don't have all that extra baggage that other people have, I don't necessarily want all the nice luxuries, but you know I'm content with who I am and I'm content with what I have. That kind of led me to think, okay well how much can I continue to pare down and what are the important things to me.” (Lisa, 33, Alabama)

In Lisa's account of the events surrounding her transition out of a conventional home and into living in different types of vehicles, she echoes various experiences of other women in my thesis. Realising that the way she was living was no longer sustainable, she decided to try and prioritise mental health and quality of life and acknowledged that a conventional consumer-worker life did not offer what she wanted. As expressed by other women in this research, these realisations were synergistically applied to a new life in a tiny house, which allowed Lisa to step away from the people, situations and habits that were causing her pain - crucially in this case, an abusive male partner. This experience could be summarised as moving from

an environment of low ability to control her environment to a high ability to control her environment. Ultimately, it was the affordability of the tiny house that permitted the cascade of other lifestyle benefits.

Bryanna, 60, lived in a trailer-based tiny house in Oregon when we spoke. Here, she describes how important it is to her that she can live alone, specifically away from her long-distance male partner.

“My privacy, oh yeah, I love it. Love it. I've been in two back-to-back relationships of 14 years and I'm reconnected with my partner, yeah he's across the United States from me right now. I don't want to give up my privacy; I had a joke with him I said, and he's a builder and a metal sculpture artist, and I joked with him I said well if if we're going to be back together you aren't sharing my tiny house we're gonna have to build you your own tiny house and put a tunnel to it because and I'm gonna have a wrought iron gate, because when I want my privacy inside this tiny house.” (Bryanna, 60, Oregon)

Like Bryanna, Kelly also lived alone and took great pleasure from this fact. When we spoke, Kelly, 41, lived in a trailer-based tiny house in Colorado. Here, she discusses the psychological impacts of having been in control of her tiny house design and build:

“I built it myself and just the other day I decided I want to put in an electrical outlet. I haven't done it yet but I know I can because I know where the electricity is, you know? I know how to do all of that. I've realised a huge dream. I can do whatever I want! I built a house right? Um and so just recently within the last two or three months or so, I've started to be like - okay, what's next? What is the next big project that I want to work on, and I've got a few

ideas going, and it has kind of been shaped by the fact that I built my house. I can decide what I want to do next and I can make that happen.” (Kelly, 41, Colorado)

The confidence and increased self-esteem reported by Kelly were echoed in several other women's accounts of the impacts of building their tiny houses. By making decisions and causing physical outcomes in their own homes, women proved to themselves that they had the skills, determination, and ability to make things happen in their lives rather than being passive to their circumstances. In this way, tiny houses differ from conventional homes in that, globally, the home is often the location of much uncertainty, stress, and danger for women (Oakley, 2019; UN Women 2021; 2021a). This interpretation lends support to the idea that tiny houses function as a heterotopic space for women that inverts the norms of expectations of the world ‘outside’ the tiny home (Foucault, 1984; Wilks & Quinn, 2016).

When we spoke, Melodie was still building her tiny house, which she intended to sell afterwards. She had recently quit her job in the tech industry in order to build tiny houses full-time. Here, she was discussing her current living arrangement and how she negotiates with her husband, who is not as much of a fan of tiny houses as she is.

“I would love to live in one [a tiny house]. I feel like we live in a small space now, I don't know if I would consider it tiny, but our studio apartment we live in is like 700 square feet [65 metres sq]. So it's pretty small. I would be totally fine living in a tiny house, especially since a good tiny house is specifically designed for who is going to live there and how they live their life, that's just like the coolest part for me. But my husband, you know, working on a submarine for years in such a tiny cramped space, he doesn't really want to come home and

be in another tiny cramped space, which I totally understand and I'm not married to the idea.” (Melodie, 28, Colorado)

In this quote, Melodie is celebrating the thoughtful design of the tiny house, emphasising that it being specifically designed for who is going to live there and how they live their life is “*the coolest part*”. Melodie went on to explain how intimidating and stressful it was for her to decide to leave her traditional office job in order to pursue a career as a tiny house builder, describing how she was in therapy for months over the decision:

“I had to go to therapy for it, yes. It was incredibly hard. I still am not okay with the fact that I don't bring in monthly income. The therapist I had at the time helped me identify that a lot of my stress was actually coming from my job, and also how I feared leaving my job might make my life play out.” (Melodie, 28, Colorado)

In the end, the control that her new career as a self-employed tiny house builder would allow her to have motivated her to leave her job and start her own one-woman construction business. Melodie was the only woman in the cohort of participants building tiny houses as a business, making her an interesting example of how compelling control over design can be. Melodie’s feelings about the importance of being able to ‘make’ her own life by choosing to start her own construction business links to arguments about practices of making, and how these practices can mediate a different way of engaging and understanding the world (Ingold, 2013). In this case, Melodie’s ability to control the content of her day by designing and building a tiny house, even though she would not herself live in it afterwards, was persuasive enough to compel her to leave her job and start a business of her own, despite how difficult it was for her to do this.

Karine, 36, and Anne, 38, are a married couple from Brazil who were living in the South of England when we spoke. They began by building an experimental tiny house on an allotment. At the time of our interview, they were looking for land they could buy or rent to build a tiny house on. Karine and Anne discussed the difficulties of finding somewhere to live as renters because of their two dogs. They shared how they wanted to own somewhere so that they could have control over making sure their living environment was suitable for all members of their family, including their dogs.

“We have two dogs and it's not easy to find a house to rent. We feel like we're pushed into a corner where we need to buy because otherwise we can't find a proper place to live because of the dogs. We were looking for houses but I don't want a big house. We need just one bedroom and garden, but then to be able to have the dogs [landlords] only accept the dogs if the house has three bedrooms and a huge garden and then or it's more than £2,000 per month to rent. It's just so many different factors to try and tessellate into one solution, it shouldn't be this difficult. This is a person's basic need, it's shelter, and there's so much land that people are not using.” (Karine, 36, and Anne, 38, South England)

Anne and Karine described feeling trapped in a housing system that penalises both renters with pets and renters or buyers on average incomes. The couple reported how stressful they found it to try and meet the multiple needs of housing that would allow them to bring their dogs and that they could afford. Ultimately, they concluded that building their own tiny house was the best way to oversee all the different components of their lives in a synergistic way.

Several women located their particular pleasure and relief in being in control over their homes in a framework of not only having designed and built it themselves, but also looking into the future and predicting that they would be able to maintain their homes and fix anything that went wrong without having to rely on external experts and tradespeople. Aine, 44, lived in Portugal and was waiting for her tiny house to be brought from the UK, where she built it, to where she lived in Portugal. Aine shared how her ability to take care of her own home in practical terms aligns with her values of self-sufficiency.

“I think just knowing that I'm living in a space that I've created and it's just, um, god I feel quite emotional, but it's because I configured it completely from the ground up, yeah [starts crying]. So, I wanted to be quite self-sufficient in knowing that if something goes wrong with my house, I've literally built it, I saw it, I can probably fix it.” (Aine, 44, Portugal)

4.4.3 Gendered Barriers to Tiny Houses

Throughout this thesis, I am considering gender to be a socially co-created phenomenon rather than an innate expression of biological sex (Swim, Gillis, & Hamaty, 2020). When analysing tiny house building and the extent to which tiny houses create a heterotopic environment, it is relevant to acknowledge that women report that tiny house building gives them an opportunity to do gender differently, for example, by exerting control over space or escaping from sexist relationships. Nevertheless, designing and building a tiny house also involves challenges to the doing of gender, for example, when women are positioned as incapable by those whom they meet in the wood shop. It also perhaps shows that while the

space of the tiny house itself might provide an experience of sanctuary, some of the spaces that extend from this space, for example, the woodshop or the bank, can still be threatening.

The sentiment of enjoying freedom from reliance on professionals like plumbers, electricians, and carpenters, as Aine expressed above, was not analysed directly by the women themselves as being an expression of freedom from the interference of men in their lives; however, almost all of the women I spoke to had stories to tell about unpleasant, degrading, or threatening experiences they had had when dealing with men in the sawmill, tool shop, or when tradesmen had come to their homes. For example, Lisa, who had fled an abusive marriage and lived in a converted van in Alabama, reported the many frustrations she had encountered whilst financing and building her converted van tiny home:

“I called 22 banks to get a loan, again I have fantastic credit, a fantastic downpayment. Everything is lined up, there's no reason to not go ahead, and I mean the amount of patronising I got, like well what does your husband think about this. I had somebody come out to my property once and he was just just completely patronising, talking about um ‘oh little miss this’ and people asking well who's going to protect me out here. When I was trying to put my electrical line in this past fall, and I had to file complaints because they [tradesmen] were like, well you know if you hadn't gotten divorced then you wouldn't be in this situation. And I mean all the time. And it's like, men don't have that issue. They don't. And it adds a whole other level you have to think about. I am living in the woods by myself, you know it's men coming out here to put in my driveway, to put in my system, and they know I live out here alone and if they're making all these comments about me being alone and not being safe..” (Lisa, 33, Alabama)

This is an example of the well-documented phenomenon that when a woman is unaccompanied by a man, she becomes socially legible as ‘alone’ (Kern, 2020). The treatment of women as being alone and needing help when unaccompanied by a man was also reported by interviewees when they were buying goods and products to build their tiny houses. Gem, 25, was building her tiny house in the Netherlands when we spoke. She recounted subtle but persistent sexist treatment by men who worked in the woodshop where she would go to buy timbers.

“When I would go out to shop for wood, there would only be men there and I would feel very uncomfortable. They would start lifting the stuff for me while I was perfectly able to do it myself. But now that I’ve come there like 15 times they’re like ‘oh it’s the girl that builds herself’ and they are used to me.” (Gem, 25, The Netherlands)

Gem’s story suggests that women alone in the hardware store are viewed as culturally confusing or illegible; it was only after repeated visits that the employees became “*used to*” Gem and no longer interfered by assuming she was incapable of shopping by herself. Like Gem, Melodie experienced being treated as a confusing or illegitimate presence in the hardware store. Melodie recounted how this treatment would subtly change based on whether she was wearing plain clothes or the dirty coveralls that she worked in, but observed that her father would be treated the same no matter what he wore.

“When I wear street clothes to the hardware store to pick up paint or something, I get treated completely differently than if I wear my coveralls. My coveralls are covered in dirt and paint because I work in them, and I get treated so differently at the paint counter than if I’m wearing normal clothes that don’t differentiate whether or not I’m a serious builder if that

makes sense? But that doesn't happen for a man, my dad could walk into Lowe's in a suit or like in cut off shorts and he's going to get treated like he's a serious builder.” (Melodie, 28, Colorado)

Melodie went into further detail about how, just like at the paint counter, people treat her with scepticism and show disbelief in her skills and abilities when they learn she is building her own house.

“I think the other thing that's interesting is people are always shocked that I'm building a house. I'm like, what, a woman can't do it? I wonder if people assume that it's harder for me. Some of the questions I get are about the difficulty of it or like the skill level behind it and I feel like there's an unawareness of the ingrained kind of misogyny in those questions. I don't hear my dad getting questions like ‘where did you learn how to do this?’ or, ‘how did you acquire these skills?’ It's like they just don't question where his skills come from, but my skills get questioned every day.” (Melodie, 28, Colorado)

Kelly echoed this sentiment by explaining that she felt it was the default assumption that women cannot do things for themselves, especially in masculinised activities like construction. Kelly described how these sexist beliefs are ingrained in women's minds but how she disproved these beliefs to herself by doing demanding physical labour that was difficult at first but ultimately resulted in success.

“I also think there's too much of an attitude of ‘I'm a woman so I can't do that’. There was some of that going on where I was like, how am I gonna lift these 10 foot four by fours for my

loft? Right, but then I'm like, oh, well I'll just put the first joist in, pop it up you know, and it was just like, I can actually do that.” (Kelly, 41, Colorado)

Aine recounted how she initially reacted with a more stereotypically feminine response to the men who offered unsolicited critiques of her building work whilst she was constructing her tiny house. However, her story below charts the metamorphosis of her skill level, confidence, and the tone of her reactions to these men over time. Aine’s narrative is worth quoting at length because of the reflexive analytical details she offers about how this transformation of skill occurred in tandem with shifts in her self-perception and identity.

“I've done a lot of upskilling, which is great because it built my confidence in being able to just do stuff and being kind of more than a DIY-er, um and I just really enjoy it. When I'm doing it I feel more confident, like that I've achieved so much. And all of the naysayers and the doubters, like um 100 men that come in and look at it and they go ‘oh I don't know if you should have done it like that’, and I'm just like ‘yeah fuck you’, I'm like ‘where's your tiny house?’ Sorry to swear. [she laughs].

It [the construction site of the tiny house] was in the warehouse of the cement factory where men worked, and so they would wander in and out and just kind of stand there with their arms crossed looking at me. And so I would, you know, try and strike up conversation because they were always like ‘what are you doing?’ so I would explain the whole tiny house thing and um they would generally come across as kind of interested but judgmental. Like they would say, well I don't know if you should have used that type of timber there, I think maybe that would have been better if you'd used this or you'd done that. And because I was still in the process of upskilling, I would listen and I'm like oh my god they know better.

But as time rolls on it's like; they didn't. They didn't know better. It's like they were trying to prove to me that they could have done it if they'd chosen to, and a lot of the suggestions I got was how to make it bigger. So the guy that came in and said why don't you put a porch on the side there that kind of folds in. And it's like, number one: I don't want it that big. Number two: no way that I have the skills to do that. And so it was just that kind of this constant barrage of suggestions really.

At first I would like, down tools and listen to what they were saying and assume that they were right basically, and then over time it was like, you know what, just leave me alone. And I guess that's that is one of the most important things as a woman stepping into a masculine world and trying to learn these skills and modify and adapt to work in that environment, getting involved in its construction and being part of that world is more than just a lifestyle it, yeah it feels like more of a bigger identity shift in a way of life.” (Aine, 41, Portugal)

The transformation described by these women from people who may have initially doubted their own abilities or their right to be in conventionally masculine environments like the hardware store can also be analysed as part of the broader theme of enjoying control over design. Through constructing their tiny houses, these women not only took pleasure from measuring, building, and buying the materials for their homes but also from taking measure of themselves before, during, and after the tiny house construction process. Lisa was refused finance for her home by tens of different banks and was confronted with misogynist judgements about how she should not have left her violent husband, but despite these setbacks, she now lives in a converted van where she feels safe and peaceful. Gem used to feel “*very uncomfortable*” in the wood store, but now, not only are the staff “*used to*” her, but

Gem is also used to this environment and no longer reports feeling uncomfortable. Kelly began the construction of her tiny house with some trepidation about her own abilities thanks to a lifetime of messaging that women are ill-equipped for physical and manual labour that requires strength. Nevertheless, she quickly discovered that she could complete all of the construction tasks that her tiny house required and gained an expanded sense of ability and confidence in the process. Aine developed from assuming that men knew better than her to gaining self-esteem from her own proven abilities and learning to dismiss the unwarranted interjections of strangers.

Whilst it is tempting to offer a satisfying narrative sense of completion that adheres closely to the classic hero's journey story arc, this is not my intention. These women's abilities to achieve their tiny house goals have been enabled by structural factors outside of their own ability to control, including, where applicable, their whiteness, random chance, the availability of social support networks, having money to save for their tiny house projects, and so on. Just like these women's many successes, their need for affordable housing has also been created by structural factors like the deregulation of financial markets, wage stagnation, aggressive neoliberalism and the hollowing out of social security and welfare support (Byrne, 2020; Hoolachan et al., 2017; Jacobs and Manzi, 2014).

4.5 Summary

The data explored in this chapter suggests that women experience pleasure and relief in controlling their tiny houses because this process brings their multiple values into alignment. Amy recounted how a reduced carbon footprint, the ability to travel, and beautiful design

were simultaneously enabled by choosing her specific tiny house and moving into it. Melissa reported the new levels of happiness and gratitude that she experiences on her narrowboat, or her “*magical secret world*”, which she attributes to the journey of pairing down on possessions and prioritising travel and quality time. The findings suggest that having control over how the day is spent and what activities are undertaken has a strong ability to moderate feelings of self-esteem and well-being, as evidenced by Melodie, who started her own tiny house construction business so that she could have more control over how she spent her days in comparison with being employed. The many and various setbacks that women reported experiencing in the form of sexist treatment or internalised misogyny were framed throughout the interviews as experiences that were triumphed over or as roadblocks that women took pride in overcoming. In this way, taking control over the design and construction of the tiny house may have acted as a proxy for taking further control over the self, which resulted in an expanded sense of ability and confidence.

The narratives explored here support Foucault’s (1984) assertion that material technologies or spaces themselves cannot be described as liberatory, but the practices people engage in using material technologies and within certain spaces can be. This chapter has analysed women’s stories of transformation and struggle in the context of the “spatial distributions in which they find themselves” (Foucault, 1984, p. 246) and has especially considered the route to a self-reported higher quality of life and enhanced self-image that their tiny house projects have facilitated. The data investigated in this chapter has shown how women have used the design and construction of their tiny houses to violate some of the archetypal gendered expectations placed upon them as women. The data suggests that inverting gendered expectations around construction may function as a mechanism for accessing the transformational influence of

heterotopia as a “simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live.”

(Foucault, 1984, p. 4).

Chapter 5: Women and Consumption

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents empirical data on how tiny houses impacted women's relationship to consumption. The goal was to understand if and how women were using tiny houses to change their experience of capitalism, with a specific view to investigating their identities and behaviours as consumers through the tripartite lens of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984), dweller control (Ward, 1976), and the slender body (Bordo, 2003). The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise women's consumption experiences in their tiny houses within a wider framework of how market relations and consumer identities co-create gendered existence and hegemonic conceptions of how people should live.

Collectively, the results provided in this chapter give fresh insights into the diverse and complex ways women living in tiny houses concurrently experience increased agency, or dweller control (Ward, 1976), over their consumption and buying behaviours whilst also living through historically extreme economic and environmental crises. Through this analysis, novel insights are provided into the contradictions inherent in women's experiences in the tiny house movement. These, in turn, are explored through the conceptual framework of the slender body (Bordo, 2003), focussing on binge-purge cycles and the valorisation of minimalism as a mirror for the celebration of feminine slimness. My analysis foregrounds the tensions between reported material deprivation alongside reported personal narratives of choice and agency to draw out both the friction and harmony women disclose about their tiny house experience. The chapter explores how these complicated inter-reliances can be better

conceptualised through the framing of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984), dweller control (1976), and the slender body (Bordo, 2003) as spaces rife with inconsistencies and inversions, attempts and enhanced agency, and the presence of self-optimising rhetoric of minimalism.

5.2 What *is* consumption?

Tiny houses invoke several of the core pillars of scholarly theories of consumption, including Veblen's (2018 [1889]) exploration of conspicuous consumption and its role in formulating class differences, Goffman's (1951) account of the role of consumption in maintaining hierarchies of social status, Douglas and Isherwood's (1996) work on how consumption maintains rituals of inclusion and exclusion, and Bourdieu's (1987) elucidation of how taste is used to delineate and maintain entrenched class differences. The data presented in this chapter reveals that whilst women did not often refer outright to class identity or political alignment, their combined narratives did coalesce around a collective reiteration that they are trying to live in a way that combats the "velocity, intensity and perceived meaninglessness of life" (Osbaldiston, 2013, p. 4). In their tellings, tiny houses were evoked as deliberate tools used to make a life lived at a further distance from norms of buying, owning, and possessing. Not only did women present the tiny house itself as a talisman of rejecting financialised housing by recentering the homes' use value rather than market value, but also the subsequent choices around minimising involvement with consumer culture were foregrounded as being central to what the tiny house *does* in women's lives.

Increased freedom from consumer culture has been related to increased freedom from the adverse effects of stress (Boyle & Simms, 2009; Epp & Price, 2008). Indeed, the women in this thesis frequently foregrounded the link between consumer culture and stress. Several

factors play a role in determining the extent and impact of the harmful effects of consumerism. The accumulation of ‘stuff’ has been linked to financial insolvency, a cluttered and overfull home, and a significant amount of time and energy required to clean, sort, and tidy the ‘stuff’ (Gibson et al., 2011; Ivanova, 2011; Schor, 1998). Simply, the fewer possessions a person has, the less time and energy they must spend maintaining those possessions. Further, the less ingrained in consumer culture a person is, the less income is required to sustain the quality of life they are accustomed to.

Reports have indicated that the shift away from high levels of purchasing observed in innumerable tiny households is implicated in greater agency over work-life balance (Harris, 2018). Original empirical data presented in this chapter supports the argument that some tiny house residents specifically locate their decision to buy fewer things within a rubric of enhancing work-life balance. In other words, women often explained their desire to live in a tiny house as a tool that allowed them to reduce the amount of time they needed to work, increasing the amount of time they could spend ‘living’.

The desire to consume differently as a technique to oppose the status quo and the harms associated with consumption is interesting in this population of women because they were largely constituted of well-educated, primarily middle-class, professional women living in the global north. The preponderance of this demographic is not in itself surprising since existing literature has outlined that the majority of the tiny house movement is composed of educated, middle-class professionals (Shearer and Burton, 2019; Willoughby and Collins, 2018). However, their collective appeal to ways of living that would, if taken up more broadly, dismantle significant portions of capitalist modes of relating evidences the growing disillusionment of affluent ‘first world’ consumers (Raworth, 2017; Soper, 2008). Not

belonging to the repressed classes of those so materially deprived that they have little to no purchasing or political power, many of these women could pursue a consumerist lifestyle if they wanted. The data in this chapter reveals increasing discontent among a subset of affluent Western consumers. This discontent is manifested both through critiques of the political and personal detriments of consumerism and through a yearning for enrichments that cannot be purchased in the market, such as the joy of nature or the satisfaction of declining material gifts or work.

5.2.1 Consuming differently

Intersecting class, political, and ethnic categories, the women interviewed for this thesis told stories that centred on rejecting dominant beliefs about the goodness or even the neutrality of consumerism (Engberg and Engberg, 2017; Naveed and Davidson, 2015; Willoughby and Collins, 2018). Sally recounted a highly reflexive and self-aware assessment of the difference between her own feelings about the excesses of consumption as a reasonably affluent white woman living in South Africa and the differing feelings about consumerism expressed by her black and brown colleagues who did not have access to the same financial resources that she did.

“We could have a bigger house, and there is kind of that mindset of like, well, why wouldn't you want more space? And then for us to be like, well, we think there's like excessive consumption, but also I understand why when you have not owned a washing machine, you know, you might have this drive for material consumption.” (Sally, 31, South Africa)

Avery describes how she now has a fairly strict process of deeply considering whether she will really benefit from a new purchase or whether the desire to consume is just fleeting, and explains how she now operates on a one-in-one-out policy.

“I have to really think about what I buy and whether or not I have space for it because I learned the first year that just because you have space for it doesn't mean you should buy it, because then your house looks cluttered and everything just feels claustrophobic. So now I evaluate whether or not I have space for it, and whether or not I want to make space for it. And now I do like an exchange; if I bring something in, something else has to go. It has changed a lot, yeah.” (Avery, 25, Florida)

Tiny house residents frequently advocate for a reduction in buying consumer products and instead foreground the importance of and pleasure of reducing waste and living with ‘less’ in order to experience and enjoy ‘more’ (Naveed and Davidson, 2015; Willoughby and Collins, 2018). Amy summarises this sentiment well: *“I wanted, you know, a reduced carbon footprint, I wanted to spend my life doing rather than having.”* The particular way that this narrative still ultimately reinforces an orientation towards having (experiences) and consuming, albeit now described as ‘*doing*’, may be interpreted as a symptom of the conflicts inherent in expecting a liberal democratic political environment to be able to meaningfully foster efforts towards sustainability.

Baker (2012) argues that modern democratic nations cannot expect to see any real progress towards the reduction of consumption and resource use required to avert climate catastrophe because they consider human interests or preferences as the ultimate measure of progress. Because of this, any structural shifts that would demand halting or reversing progress towards

greater material comfort would be inimical to the values of democratic political systems (ibid). However, the women in this chapter present an interesting rebuttal to Baker's (2012) analysis since they are voluntarily reducing their own material comfort by living in significantly smaller spaces and buying considerably fewer things. That is not to say that the lives of women who live in tiny houses are, by default, more sustainable. It is possible, for example, that the reduction in their cost of living means that they might divert more of their funds to travel by car or by plane, which could ameliorate the sustainability gains made by living tiny or even enlarge their carbon footprint.

Several women I spoke with volunteered their opinions on what 'type' of people tiny house living is suitable for, often focussing on the need to consume differently. The recurrent theme of typifying tiny house dwellers as being people who felt a strong urge to consume differently was striking and persistent. Della explained to me that tiny houses are for:

"People who figured out that they don't need, you know, 100 pairs of shoes and 15 cars and a tv room, a living room, a dining room, a painting room, an exercise room, you know, all that stuff." (Della, 41, Ontario).

In this statement, Della expresses a personal, lifestyle-based analysis of what kind of people live in tiny houses. Her overview is not overtly linked to any political sensibility but does invoke an image of an affluent, financially secure consumer who has sampled the offerings of materialist excess and has been left wanting. Della and others positioned the reduction of materialism as a counterpoint to what they viewed as the perpetual acceleration of modern life, including the frenzied pace of work and obligatory consumption of 'too much stuff', for example, *"100 pairs of shoes and 15 cars"*. Within their stories, tiny houses were presented

as a way to consolidate what were otherwise quite diffuse contestations of consumer norms. Whilst their defiant attitude to inherited norms of consumption was not consistently linked to an ideological commitment to, say, Green Party politics, a lexicon of fairness and an acknowledgement that the status quo was neither bringing them personal satisfaction nor facilitating more comprehensive social and environmental justice was preeminent across the narratives (Lindsay, Lane, and Humphery, 2020).

In the preceding quote, Della acknowledged her agency in perpetuating the attendant risks and harms of consumerism; she conceded that she used to be someone who did want 100 pairs of shoes and the myriad other trappings of consumerist life. As we heard in the chapter discussing design, Della discovered that consuming too much space in her large house was a source of stress and discomfort:

“We had come across a dream home. It was a 5,000 square foot (465 sq m)...so we got that and we lived there for eight years and honestly it became really stressful. (she laughs)...And then like tv in the tv room, like there's a million rooms you know. Uh, a painting room, I had an exercise room, I had all these rooms and I just felt like if I wasn't using them then it was a waste of space.” (Della, 41, Ontario).

When Della suggests that tiny houses are for people who have worked out their priorities, she relies on a highly neoliberal cosmology. Her statement suggests an individualist understanding of social life that anticipates the decisive power of individual preferences and personal efficacy. Rather than viewing herself as a passive victim of the forces of capitalism, Della's narrative positions her as someone who has seized the power available to her and altered her conception of what it means to live a 'good life' (Soper, 2008; 2020). In Della's

telling, the usefulness of Bordo's (2003) conception of the slender body is again highlighted as an analytical tool. Della describes an understanding of herself as exerting self-discipline to shrink the body of her possessions and the footprint of her home. In our conversation, she was palpably proud of her efforts and was pleased with her new, smaller home and her correspondingly reduced buying habits.

As well as reifying an individualistic social cosmology, Della's and many other women's arguments during these dialogues reflected a realisation that, although business-as-usual consumerism gives choice and freedoms, it also imposes constraints and limits their capacity to enjoy experiences outside of market transactions. While the improved material circumstances promoted by contemporary neoliberal democracy increase rich consumers' capacity to spend and possess, it also reduces their ability to enjoy things like leisure time, unpolluted settings, and traffic-free locations (Soper, 2008; 2020). In recognising that rather than a panacea of choice and freedom, consumerism demands cost-benefit trade-offs with sometimes unfavourable outcomes, the women in this thesis may be seen as comprising some of the bottom-up "ground swell of support for voluntary simplicity" that economist Peter Victor (2008, p. 222) has insisted is required for cultural shifts away from ecocide and towards a more egalitarian way of life.

Excerpt of field notes, dated October 15th 2020

Trying to remain cautious of presenting tiny houses as a panacea but the stories women are telling me are so full of hope and energy and power and tales of reclamation of independence and meaning and all this good stuff that I equally don't want to be a curmudgeon and dilute their stories to serve my own critical purposes / because the academic register and tone is not a hopeful one.

I spoke with a sixty year old woman in a wheelchair today who broke down into tears as she told me that she never thought she would ever be able to live in a house which had everything within arms reach for her. It's been about two months now since the cast came off my own leg and it is still very weak and thin and the knee barely bends; there is so much that I can't do and that I need help with. I can't imagine the level of exhaustion and frustration and anger that must come with being in a wheelchair and being confronted every minute with a world that was not made with you in mind at such a basic level of being able to get to things and reach stuff. And she's a woman, and she's mixed ethnicity. Yes, the real solve here would be to remake the world into one that isn't racist, misogynist, ableist etc, but in the meantime tiny houses can really be a quick, cheap, life saving intervention.

5.3 Minimalism as Diet Culture in the Tiny House Movement

In my conversations with the women who participated in this thesis, I often felt that the tiny house was being mobilised as a talisman or a status symbol used to communicate belonging to a clade of people who are committed to consuming differently. The core function of status symbols, Goffman (1951) theorised, is to reinforce solidarity between members of a category and to engender an ambient level of hostility between categories; this process can be defined as cultivating an 'us versus them' mentality. Kelly evokes this partitioning of people who can (us) live tiny and people who cannot (them) by locating the ability to live tiny in a disavowal of consumerism and what she would deem as owning "a lot of stuff". Here, we begin to see the echoes of the somewhat moralising overtones that can accompany conversations around minimalism as a lifestyle aesthetic. Kelly's example is particularly interesting because she characterises her own partner as someone who cannot live in a tiny house:

“To be honest, when my boyfriend and I were talking about it, one of the biggest hurdles was he did not want to live in a tiny house for the same reasons - he has a lot of stuff. He has a lot of stuff. Um and he would not, he doesn't want to get rid of any of it.” (Kelly, 41, Colorado).

Even though Kelly and her boyfriend were still together at the time of our interview, they lived separately because, in Kelly's telling, he was unwilling to change his relationship with his possessions in such a way that would allow them to share a 250-square-foot space together. Kelly revealed that her commitment to living tiny and owning few possessions was more important to her than living with her partner, which I found interesting. Rather than using tiny houses as a sign vehicle to entrench well-defined class status, the women who live in tiny houses often share a tendency of critically questioning default levels of consumerism and, in Kelly's case, to also question inherited assumptions about cohabiting. Whilst the women in this thesis are far from united in their views, they are joined by having taken unusual steps to augur their relationship to buying and owning.

Della said more about what kind of people she thinks are suited to tiny house living. Her narrative invoked a sense of the ethical inferiority of materialism and, therefore, its opposite: the ethical superiority of minimalism. Here, minimalism seemed to be positioned as a superior way to consume differently as she aligned the tiny house approach with individualist, neoliberal semantics of the importance of mindset, of personally recognising lifestyle values, and of being intentional:

“I think materialism really plays a big role. I think you have to have that type of mindset where you are more interested in experiences than things. So I mean you could be a minimalist, you might not be a minimalist, but being intentional with what you put value in; I

think that is kind of what is at the core of someone who can live in a tiny house." (Della, 41, Ontario).

Della's position that being intentionally minimalist is at the heart of a successful foray into tiny house living emulates the rhetoric that self-discipline and personal responsibility are core requirements to succeed in this type of 'good life'. Moreover, the rendering of 'goodness' through minimalism, reduction, and shrinking evokes Bordo's (2003) analysis of the pervasive enforcement of diet culture as a cultural ideal. Della drew links between people who are "*more interested in experiences than things*" and "*being intentional with what you put value in*", suggesting that people who put more value in owning possessions do not do this intentionally. The moralising overtone that positions deliberate minimalism as a valiant and worthy pursuit is recognisable in much of the popular media content that is produced around minimalist living, for example, Marie Kondo's claim that tidying up is magical and life-changing (kondo, 2019), or blogging duo The Minimalists claim that they have helped millions of people improve their lives by decluttering and allowing them to focus on what is essential in life (The Minimalists, no date), or Dominique Loreau's statement in her book *L'arte de la simplicité* that minimalism "demands unshakable conviction" (Loreau, 2018, p. 22).

This discourse stresses that minimalism should be considered as both a practical and moral decision, emphasising that success in this lifestyle involves self-discipline, self-control, and personal responsibility. The moralising tone present in cultural narratives espoused by Kondo, Loreau (2018), and others reinforces an ableist neoliberal interpretation of minimalism as a means of not just simplifying one's life but also of improving oneself and achieving a more meaningful and fulfilling existence through individualised personal responsibility. The latent suggestion here is that those who are unable to achieve deliberate

minimalism are lacking in self-discipline or personal responsibility. Consequently, this messaging contributes to a blame culture that puts the burden of ‘success’ solely on the individual and ignores the systemic and socio-economic barriers that many individuals face in engaging with minimalism in the first place. The idea that minimalist living is a simple matter of choice, discipline, and responsibility obscures the role of privilege and economic power in shaping the ability to live a minimalist lifestyle. I asked Avery if she identified with the minimalist rhetoric that is so often analogous to the tiny house movement.

“Yes and no. I am very minimalist and like I have no problem getting rid of stuff; I don't have much attachment to stuff unless it's books. But I don't like to say that I'm a minimalist because in the movement, it's really like ‘don't buy anything! You have to have the minimal amount of things necessary to live!’ and that's just really not me. That's why I don't think I'm a minimalist, but I have like a minimalist lifestyle, I'm not attached to stuff and I think that that's the most important part of the original movement.” (Avery, 25, Florida).

I loved Avery's analysis of the role and meaning of minimalism in her own life and in the tiny house movement more broadly. From her description, I understood that she finds the minimalist lifestyle to be more about being conscious of what she brings into her life, both physically and mentally, rather than being about a quantifiable reduction in physical possessions or number of dollars spent per month. Avery identified the tendency within tiny house circles to emphasise an almost competitive level of adhering to stringent ideas about who counts as a *real* minimalist. Della raised some examples of this. She explained how her purchasing habits now included more expensive but higher quality goods, reflecting her values as both a minimalist and an environmentally conscious consumer.

“I’m a pretty extreme minimalist naturally, I definitely make sure that all my products are completely 100 per cent biodegradable. I was always very into natural products anyways but, I’m on a composting toilet and I don’t have a septic tank or anything so I actually have a french drain and I want to make sure that I’m not doing anything to harm the earth. So I might spend a little bit more money just to make sure that I’m getting the absolute purest products.” (Della, 41, Ontario).

Della legitimises her increased expenditure on certain products using a logic of environmental sustainability. She focuses on the purity of her purchasing choices, both in terms of her intent to cause no harm to the earth and the material purity of the products she buys. Della’s story supports the idea that minimalism is not just used to achieve a less expensive life but as a “method of increasing the aesthetic quality of one’s personal material culture and household.” (Meissner, 2019, p. 192). Moreover, minimalist lifestyle values emerge as the handmaidens of neoliberal consumerism in that they entreat the individual to take personal responsibility for their own wellness and quality of life whilst compensating for the insecurity of an unequal, volatile, and environmentally destructive socio-economic system (Meissner, 2019). Crucially, this value-driven lifestyle of minimalism is still closely aligned with buying; buying better quality products, buying purer or less harmful or more ethically produced consumables.

Diwata specifically credited a popular TV show about minimalism with catalysing her decision to live in a tiny house. She described feeling inspired when watching someone who had a lot of material wealth decide to live with less in the name of living more. The idea of

having less in order to live more was a recurring motif in my conversations with the women in this thesis:

“Back in 2016 I saw this awesome documentary on Netflix called The Minimalist. So I have always been interested, way before watching that documentary, but this kind of like kicked it off. It kind of put me in awe, like, someone who is at the top of the corporate ladder and they're like; you know what I'm gonna give up all this, all the money in the world that I could be making, and just live minimal, like just tiny, and you know go travel. It just amazed me. And my husband and I were like, you know what, we could do that.” (Diwata, 32, Texas).

Diwata's narrative outlines one of the disquieting tensions in the relationship between tiny houses and consumption. While elucidating how tiny houses can be used to foster reduced consumption, the possibility of increased travel is foreshadowed. In this way, spending and carbon burdens can be analysed as having shifted to different locations rather than having decreased. Diwata attributes minimising and downsizing with facilitating a renewed sense of peace in her life, an important quality for anybody but particularly salient for a full-time homeschooling mother with four children in a tiny house.

“It was also a huge relief, being like, okay, you know what, I don't go into my room and it's filled with stuff that I don't even use. After we decided yes let's just do this, let's just get rid of it, let's minimise, let's just downsize on everything, um it was a huge relief.” (Diwata, 32, Texas).

Aine echoed the sentiment that tiny houses are best suited for a certain ‘type’ of person, one who either constitutionally or politically disavows consumerism. She relied on a causal narrative about her preference for simplicity and not owning too many possessions, which led to her deciding that a tiny house would be the best synergistic housing and lifestyle solution to create the kind of life she wanted. Aine’s phrasing of her tiny house as being ‘useful’ and ‘simple’ points to an aesthetic of un-frenzied enjoyment, which characterises the alternative hedonism and downshifting movements (Lindsay, Lane, and Humphery, 2020; Soper, 2008; 2020).

“I don't have a lot of stuff, I don't need it. I probably have more books than clothes. Yeah, the house is useful for that, yeah I do live, I try and live quite simply.” (Aine, 41, Portugal).

Here, Aine alluded to a gender stereotype to highlight how few possessions she has *“I probably have more books than clothes”* since women are archetypally presumed to enjoy owning a lot of clothes due to the expectation that they should be preoccupied with their appearance (Bordo, 2003). Indeed, the issue of clothes came up on multiple occasions during my conversations. Kelly pointed out that she thinks it is the restricted amount of clothes that a tiny house permits you to own, which discourages other women that she knows from living in one:

“I think for a lot of people it's the stuff. They say: I could never pare down my stuff to fit into 250 square feet. I think that is probably the biggest. A lot of my girlfriends are like I just have too many clothes, I couldn't fit them in your closet. And I have a pretty big closet for a tiny house, I think!” (Kelly, 41, Colorado)

Here, Kelly renders visible the lines of flight between gender and consumption in the home through the periapt of the closet. Her focus on clothes as a site of remarkable difference shows how the tiny house can be understood as an enabling technology that enlivens different ways of doing gender.

Several of the women I spoke to explicitly referenced how their shopping and buying habits have been considerably changed due to not having the storage space to keep belongings like clothes, sports equipment, or even food. Some of these changes were for purely practical reasons since tiny houses have considerably less storage space than a conventional flat or house. Taken together, their testaments support what Soper (2008) identified as being a broader lifestyle commitment to alternative hedonism as a form of consuming differently, which reduces harm to the environment and to human communities despite the increased expense and inconvenience these different choices often entail.

“I maybe have to do grocery shopping a little bit more often, just because there's not enough space for everything. There's definitely no storing food, so there's no um like making food and then freezing all leftovers because there's nowhere to store it.” (Della, 41, Ontario).

Della went on to link this new practical consideration to her new habit of buying smaller quantities of food more often, and cooking from scratch more often, too, since storing leftovers was not feasible. She conceded that this was sometimes an irritation and sometimes an opportunity for real pleasure; a slower and more considered approach to food and cooking emerged from Della's reduced ability to store ingredients. Sally explained how living in a

tiny house became a valuable way for her to politely reject the impact of other people's consumption habits in her own life too, for instance, the purchasing of an excessive amount of gifts for her children:

“It's also nice when you have kids that you can't accumulate tons of toys. You know, like the grandparents can't send a new present like every day because there's no space for it. So it provides a nice excuse for keeping some things at bay.” (Sally, 31, South Africa)

Here, Sally points to the affectively impoverishing and unpleasant qualities of consumer culture (Soper, 2008), which she is now able to “*keep at bay*” as a result of living in a tiny house and having the legitimising excuse that there is simply no space to store toys and presents. Likewise, Della's explanation of being unable to accumulate food in the house and, therefore, adapting to more frequent cooking from scratch suggests the enjoyment derived from “the sensual pleasures of consuming differently” (Soper, 2008, p. 572). Similarly, Diwata explained the relief she felt when she was no longer surrounded by things she did not use, which cluttered up her then traditionally-sized living space.

Despite the somewhat agnostic outcomes of spending and carbon burden, what these women's stories all exemplify is an attempt at a lived critique of growth. Whilst their actions are individual and do not amount to a collective cultural shift away from hyper-consumption, their critical engagement with their received social conditioning is nonetheless significant for its ability to trouble the status quo. Beyond demonstrating scepticism towards economic growth as a legitimate social objective, these women also embody the degrowth imperative to live differently by shifting paradigms away from spending, having, and growing and instead towards sharing, caring, and simplifying (D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis, 2014). However, the imperatives of the neoliberal consumer-citizen are again traceable through even this narrative of resistance. Whilst it may be true that the intrinsic enjoyment of reducing clutter or cooking

regularly and slowly are pleasures unavailable to the busy, frenzied, hyper-consumer, the slower alternatives illustrated by my participants are revealed as having been acquired via stringent self-policed adherence to significantly limiting living and storage space. In this sense, the enhanced quality of life that the women in this thesis report remains conditional on their willingness to self-optimize, only now in service to a rubric of alternative hedonism (Soper, 2008) or ascetic Protestantism (Campbell, 1987).

It is this reduction in a tiny house resident's ability to consume and own a certain quantity of possessions which is simultaneously credited with both attracting people to and deterring people from adopting a similar lifestyle. Indeed, Diwata confided that whilst the overall experience of minimising has been a relief, it was also a fraught and difficult experience to parse herself not only from her physical possessions but from the fear-based mentality of consuming and keeping 'just in case':

"Oh my gosh it was hard. It was hard. It wasn't, it wasn't like heartbreaking, but it was like... You know there's little things like oh I'll just keep this later because maybe years down the road I'm gonna need it you know.." (Diwata, 32, Texas).

What the women in this thesis exemplify is not so much an outright rejection of consumerism but a disenchantment with it (Soper, 1998; 2008; 2020). It is this 'turning away from' rather than a complete rejection of inherited consumption habits which Soper argues holds the key to more widespread adoption of the alternative pleasures that could collectively entail the cultural shift necessary to save our planet from obliteration (ibid.).

5.3.1 Cultural Bulimia and the Slender Home

I have found it particularly instructive to draw on the work of Bordo (2003) to understand the narratives presented by the women I have spoken to throughout this thesis around issues of

consumption and minimalism. Bordo (2003) elucidates the complicated and antagonistic relationship that citizens under consumer capitalism must embody. Firstly, as labourers in a consumerist economy, citizens are obliged to sublimate and repress their appetite for immediate satisfaction so that they can complete daily employment duties rather than capitulating to their desire to sleep or to do any other activity which is not considered productive labour. Yet, simultaneously, the same citizens are expected to fulfil their role as consumers by perpetually expressing dissatisfaction with what they have and demonstrating an appetite for indulgence in consuming new things. Because of these dual, inimical forces, the regulation of the desire to consume becomes one of the centrifugal forces of daily life and presents an unsolvable dilemma in the social body since citizens are compelled to endure a non-stop bombardment of advertisements willing them to consume, whilst knowing that overindulgence and excess are socially condemned (Bordo, 2003). Using this approach, tiny houses may be fruitfully considered as one of the tools that certain consumer-citizens are using in their continued effort to regulate their desire to consume.

Gemma specifically referenced the overbearing pressure she felt to consume as part of an inherited idea about how to be a good citizen and live a decent and accomplished life. She told me about how living in London forced her to live very simply because of the financial constraints imposed on her by her rent and the cost of living. Realising that a radical level of simplicity and a dramatic reduction in the amount of money she was spending on ‘things’ was a key revelation about the possibilities of tiny house life:

“I was living in London, smack bang in the middle of London, um and doing the usual; doing the standard and um paying a lot of money for a box, like a little match box that I was living in. Um and that was also mouldy and damp, and yeah so I just got really used to this simple

way of living and how much less anxious that made me. I'm sure this might be a theme with some of the other women you've talked to, how having less really actually makes you feel like you have more. And actually seeing the amount of weight and like pressure there is on consumerism, yeah so living in that way was quite a big revelation to me.” (Gemma, 24, South England).

Gemma’s story highlights the dual inimical forces that Bordo (2003) describes. By living in London and “*doing the usual*”, Gemma was trying to conform with the expectation that young Westerners should have an appetite for success: corporate accomplishment in a metropolitan urban area, and the spending power that accompanies this. However, the material deprivation that this entailed - a matchbox room which was mouldy and damp, left much to be desired. The enforced financial deprivation of living in London was in fact the experiential resource which alerted Gemma to the possibilities of a more countercultural approach to ‘the good life’. That Gemma specifically identifies consumerism as a weight and pressure in her life indicates her reflexive awareness of the perils and displeasures of a business-as-usual approach to a civic life which centres on market transactions (Soper, 2008).

Like Gemma, Amy vocalised her frustration with the ways in which she felt forced to consume services and products to help her get through the day. She references feeling compelled to use stimulants and depressants to cope with the demands of her working life, which she only had to engage in because her cost of living was so high.

“Most of my energy was going toward things that were just getting me through. I was spending any extra money I had on eating out, energy drinks, and drinking to get me through

a job that I hated. I was spending money on services and people to help me because I didn't have the bandwidth or the energy to fix my own car or stuff like that.” (Amy, 37, Colorado).

Amy expresses her concern about the negative effects of normative working and consumption practices: stress, exhaustion, scarcity, and overwhelm. Her resentment towards the volume of activities she felt obligated to engage in, such as eating out and drinking both stimulants and depressants to get her through the day, violated her well-being and did not support her vision of what she wanted her life to be like. Her efforts to adhere to the inherited ideal of what a well-ordered consumer-citizen ought to do left her disenchanted and burned out. Amy, in fact, identifies a key component of the consumer-citizen cycle when she explains that she “*was spending any extra money I had on eating out, energy drinks, and drinking to get me through a job that I hated*”. In this vignette, we see that Amy was trying to buy solutions for her problems from within the market, thereby perpetuating the profitability of the systems which created the problems she was experiencing in the first place. Like Gemma, Amy was also ‘doing the usual’ by trying to consume obediently, in line with hegemonic messaging about what a successful life looks like.

Drawing further on Bordo’s (2003; 2018) work, I was interested in juxtaposing women's stories of having too much stuff before living in a tiny house with their expressions of relief at having less stuff once living in their tiny houses. It struck me that this narrative arc is comparable with the ‘before and after’ photos of dieted female bodies, instilling the message that the before/fat/overconsumption image is bad and, conversely, that the after/thin/minimalist body is good. The social punishment for overconsumption is perhaps most obvious in the case of women’s bodies, where fatness is synonymous with failure and

unlovability since it is interpreted as a failure to achieve standards of patriarchal femininity (Bordo, 2003; 2018).

In the case of material possessions, the stigma attached to excess is less straightforward. A large home is commonly considered a highly prized icon of hegemonic success and achievement (Bellet, 2019; Graff, 2012). The MTV show ‘Cribs’, showcasing the largest and most exuberantly lavish celebrity homes, is airing its nineteenth season and has been running for over twenty-one years. The popularity of ‘Cribs’ and other programmes like it speaks to the pervasive and longstanding cultural obsession with excess and the idolisation of those who can achieve it. Nevertheless, hoarding, mess, or otherwise unregulated consumption is simultaneously reviled. These tensions outline what Bordo explained in her work on the perpetual tensions inherent in trying to consume just enough and in just the right ways to be considered a successful, functional consumer citizen.

In contrast to the spectacle of hyper-wealth and accumulation of material goods that is celebrated by programmes like Cribs, Maja shared her feelings that increasing material goods are correlated with increasing levels of labour to care for and maintain them, resulting overall in a more unpleasant life which is spent worrying:

“I’m like, you know, happiness does not equal fancy car, big house, more shit, more things, because then if you have more stuff and fancier things you have to protect that stuff you’re always worried about losing that stuff you’re always worried about, like, oh I gotta, you know, um make sure that it doesn’t burn down, doesn’t flood, doesn’t you know walk off. And then you spend your life worrying and forget to live.” (Maja, 32, South Carolina).

In Maja's cogent polemic against the logics of consumerism, there is a conspicuous absence of accounting for the causes of the problems she relates (Meissner, 2019). The original data presented here supports the observation that tiny houses are predominantly understood as an individual solution to meeting personal preferences or lifestyle goals. Returning again to the analytical tool of the slender body (Bordo, 2003; 2018), narratives like Maja's reveal tiny houses to be conceived of as a tool for reaching a certain individual ideal without being used to critique the structural forces that create that ideal in the first instance. That is, tiny houses may be to consumption what the thin body is to the patriarchally determined ideal woman: a management method employed to discipline the individual into conformity.

As Bordo points out, those who are denied access to consumer culture as a result of having insufficient resources face a different dilemma, one she describes as forming around how to cope with being "teased and frustrated" by the culture in which they live (Bordo, 2003, p. 199). Advertisements and popular culture more generally see-saw between the two extremes of the consumption contradiction; one moment extolling the virtues of having the latest phone/dress/car, and the next praising the pro-environmental, pro-social heroics of Marie Kondo and other celebrity declutterers, downsizers, and capsule wardrobe ingenues. The core lesson of this ubiquitous social messaging is a crucial one as well as an untruth; it is that the consumer can indeed 'have it all' (Bordo, 2018). That is, a skillful enough adoption of both extreme ends of the consumer journey is attainable to such an extent that the extreme ends are no longer presented as opposites but are instead presented as natural partners. The messaging implies that with the correct efforts and purchasing behaviours, there is no contradiction between the impulse to consume and the impulse to purge.

Throughout my conversations with women about their feelings and values around consumption, I was continually confronted with evidence of neoliberalism as a political-economic project that seeks to impose market logic on all aspects of society, including the individual lives of citizens. In this context, the minimalist lifestyle within the tiny house movement appeared not just as a force to increase productivity and efficiency but as a highly effective way to shape the desires and aspirations of the individuals within the movement. By encouraging individuals to reduce their material possessions and focus on self-improvement, the minimalist lifestyle reinforces the neoliberal message that personal choices and lifestyles are the key drivers of success and happiness. As Harvey (2000; 2017) argues, neoliberalism is not just a matter of individual choices but of structural forces that shape the conditions under which those choices are made. The minimalist lifestyle, and by extension, the tiny house movement as a form of self-optimization and growth, are rendered tools for directing attention away from systemic and structural issues, such as inequality and exploitation, and towards individual lifestyle choices.

Despite this, I continued to be moved by the personal narratives of transformation and liberation that so many of the women recounted. Knowing that the values presented by the tiny house movement could be appraised as a form of false consciousness, where individuals are encouraged to focus on personal lifestyle choices rather than systemic and structural change, I nevertheless identified a strong orientation towards a collective shift in priorities and a growing critical reception of the status quo. I asked Aine how she would summarise what the tiny house movement can offer in terms of critiquing dominant socio-economic norms.

“What I guess the tiny house movement can offer, uh I think it's as big as an alternative perspective on life and the world and living. You don't have to dig very deep or or go very far on the internet to find people living there telling you about their lifestyles and how enriching that is, so I think the simplification narrative really is quite a prominent one and then on top of that the environmental thing you know. We all don't need to be minimalist, but it's just there are alternative ways of living and aspects of that that can be blended in tiny and massive or whatever.” (Aine, 44, Portugal).

What Aine points to above is what Meissner (2019) explored when investigating the claims made by the minimalist lifestyle, which is that minimising the amount of material possessions you have is supposed to lead to significant gains in other areas of your life, including enhanced confidence, fulfilment, productivity, improved relationships and self-image. The messaging around simplification is that we “minimise to maximise” (Meissner, 2019, p. 190), which fits neatly into the overarching neoliberal capitalist imperative to optimise and grow (Gilbert, 2013). Even though many of the women I interviewed were attempting to break away from the traditional paradigm of accumulation, it was interesting to observe that a pro-growth mindset still permeated our conversations.

Echoing Bordo’s (2003; 2018) work on the slender body, more recent work on minimalism reinforces the same narrative of extolling the virtues of self-control and specifically a gendered form of self-denial “as both the outcomes and prerequisites of minimalist living.” (Meissner, 2019, p. 192). This self-denial can be taken to extremes and, much like the pain and horror of a starved body, Miller asserts that so too in extreme minimalism: “There is a violence to such emptiness.” (Miller, 2009, p.13). Using this critical framework, it is possible to understand tiny houses as another iteration of cultural bulimia, of the self being ordered in

multiple irreconcilable directions. The cultural bulimia of the tiny house may be conceptualised as providing a vehicle to participate in normative life, and to reject it, to have ‘nice things’ and to disavow consumerism and the environmental degradation implicit in this, and to own a type of home without being able to own a conventional home. In this way, the deeply rooted cultural struggle between puritanical self-restraint and the capitalist imperative to indulge meet in an uneasy liminal expression of both and neither in the tiny house (Scott, 2013). That is, women living in tiny houses can be viewed as “making a way out of no way” (Gaber, 2021, p. 1086).

Framing tiny houses as an expression of cultural bulimia highlights the struggle between the slender, well-ordered ‘body’ and capitalism as a central aspect of tiny house living. It sheds light on the ways in which this type of living reflects the contradictions and complexities of contemporary culture. I argue throughout this thesis that women living in tiny houses provide a novel critical lens through which to understand the contemporary cultural significance of tiny houses as a form of living in argumentation with the dominating social processes of capitalism and patriarchy. Summarily, the tiny house can be understood as another attempt at a feminised performance of the ideal of “indulgence without excess” demanded by modern neoliberal culture and patriarchal social relations (Scott, 2013, p. 26). It is in this environment that the minimalist lifestyle emblemised by the tiny house emerges as a strategy to traverse the incongruence between the pressure to simultaneously conform to and reject the logics of accumulation and self-optimisation under patriarchal neoliberalism (Meissner, 2019).

Bulimia has been described as a disorder that can be managed but never cured (Scott, 2013, p. 35). Interestingly, in a 2013 paper concerned with the pervasiveness of the cultural experience of the binge and purge cycle, an interviewee evokes the very ideal of the tiny house lifestyle when explaining how there is no way out of consumerism: “The tough thing is

that you can't just give up spending money. Unless you're going to go and like live off the land or something, hunt deer and grow a garden, build a cabin or whatever. You have to live. You can't not have a credit card." (Scott, 2013, p. 35). Like the interviewees in Scott's (2013) paper, the women I have interviewed for this thesis also echo sentiments of not wanting to feel like failures for being unable to live up to the ideal performance of capitalist success. I found this interesting because whilst expressing remorse or shame over not being able to live up to the imagined ideal of capitalist success, many women simultaneously expressed a disavowal of consumerist norms that are directly implicated in global ecocide and human rights violations.

Blühdorn (2011) questions the ability of liberal democracy to make any headway in decentering the political-economic processes which are causing the destruction of our planet and creating existentially threatening climate change. He argues that liberal politics are focussed on enhancing material conditions, whereas meaningful change to avert ecocide will require restricting material consumption and, therefore, material conditions (ibid). Tiny houses present an interesting and difficult example of how liberal capitalism suggests that answers to our pressing social concerns can always be found within the existing system since capitalism's ultimate aim is to perpetuate itself and maintain ingrained channels of power (Gilbert, 2015; Harvey, 2000; Soper, 2008).

That is, tiny houses are presented in popular media as an answer to the housing crisis because they are more individually affordable than conventional dwellings and as an answer to reliance on fossil fuel and our collective urgent need to 'green' our resource use because tiny houses are predominantly off-grid, rely on reusable energy supplies, and are significantly less resource intensive to build and live in (Shearer, 2018; Shearer and Burton, 2021). Whilst all of these things can be true about tiny houses, their existence does nothing to alter rampant

profiteering on land and property, the dominance of predatory landlords, the stagnation of wages and the increasing global reliance on fossil fuels. From a more critical perspective, tiny houses can be viewed as an example of performative resistance, which actually functions to maintain the existing status quo by providing small and inconsequential outlets for people to display their dissatisfaction with business-as-usual without engaging in any collective organising to politically alter the conditions which cause people to want to live in tiny houses in the first instance.

Throughout the analysis of the original data presented in this thesis, I was cautious not to capitulate to the academic tendency towards hyper-criticism verging on pessimism. I did not want to dismiss these women's narratives of hope and transformation as merely the deluded false consciousness of indoctrinated neoliberal consumers. When considering the rich and nuanced stories that women presented about their consumption practices in their tiny houses, I could see the genuine transformations and victories contained within them. Re-centering the conceptual standpoint of the slender body (Bordo, 2003; 2018), the minimalist lifestyle is rendered as a response to, not just a capitulation to, the demands of modern consumer culture. Lived attempts at reclaiming agency enliven minimalism as a folk practice of rejecting the consumerist mindset that prioritises accumulation and the constant pursuit of growth and expansion.

Greta expressed a strong position of critique against materialism and the neoliberal imperative for constant growth and improvement. In her critique of materialism and neoliberal values, Greta highlights the profound effects that excessive consumerism can have on both individuals and society as a whole. Throughout our email exchange, Greta made compelling arguments that status symbols such as wealth and achievement are undeniably toxic because they lead to excessive resource consumption and human and ecological harm:

“I also don't like a materialistic lifestyle, that you always need to have more and bigger and higher. Achievement, perfection, growth, wealth. To me, living in a tiny house is a kind of countermovement to say that you actually don't need a big house to have a good life. That you don't need to have all this materialistic stuff. A lower carbon footprint. More environmentally aware. Ecological. Sustainable.” (Greta, 40's, The Netherlands).

Greta's eschewing of the normative trappings of success such as achievement, perfection, growth, and wealth embodies what Soper (2008) called for in a reordering through which status symbols previously interpreted as “glamorous” and desirable transform into being viewed as “cumbersome and ugly” due to their links with excessive resource consumption and human and ecological harm (Soper, 2008, p. 580). As Harvey (2000) unpacks, the spaces in which we consume function as an expression of moral order. Tiny houses, then, can be seen as spaces which express some of the particular displeasures of consumerism. The frenetic stress implied by Greta's list of materialist values - perfection, growth, wealth - is contrasted with the morally superior list of values expressed by tiny houses - environmentally aware, ecological, sustainable.

Melodie also drew links between her tiny house and her ability to exert greater control over her consumption practices, specifically focusing on reducing the amount of waste she creates as part of her lived commitment to caring for the environment.

“I definitely care about the environment a lot and I was zero waste for a while when we lived in Virginia, which I think definitely heavily ties into the tiny house community in general. Like, if you have a house that you can control, you can control what comes in and out of it and you have a lot more control over the trash that you produce every day.” (Melodie, 28, Missouri)

As Melodie mentions, her tiny house is revealed as a central tool in reducing the amount of unnecessary consumption and waste that she creates. I found her phrasing of being able to “*control what comes in and out of it*” particularly interesting in light of Foucault’s (1984) assertion that heterotopias imply a certain ability to close and open selectively to the outside world. Melodie’s heavy reliance on the concept of control to explain the power and value of living in a tiny house emphasises the importance of spatial agency and agentic participation in a resident’s ability to feel good in a home (Ward, 1976).

5.4 Stuff is Stressful

In the previous chapter I illustrated how notions of space as stressful became part of women’s narratives of the peace and escape of tiny houses. In exploring themes of consumption, I found that women also articulated their relationship with their possessions as also oftentimes stressful. It was common that the women I spoke to explained their relationship with their possessions as being stressful or as causing them disturbing and unpleasant feelings. These feelings were linked to shame around having ‘too much’ compared to the many people who do not have enough. In other words, women related feelings of shame around their unfair advantages, recognising their privilege in an unequal world.

The women I spoke to also recounted feelings of resenting the practical obligations that owning ‘stuff’ entails: the cleaning, tidying, maintaining, and storing that accompanies ownership. Several women also told of feeling obliged to use their things often enough to warrant owning them whilst simultaneously oscillating into feeling that they wanted to jettison their possessions but would feel guilty or anxious about doing so in case whoever gave them the items would find out. Women’s stories of feeling stress in relation to their

possessions highlighted the embodied, affective experience of the bulimic rhythms of consumer culture; one moment applauding the compunction to buy and own, and the next praising minimalists and declutterers for their pro-environmental, prosocial actions. I argue that women's stories of self-disciplining consumption behaviours within a tiny house can be understood as another way of attempting to express the ideal of a well-organised, orderly individual. In doing so, I provide a fresh application and expansion of Bordo's (2003) research on the slender body.

In the narratives that follow, I attempt to trace the journey that so many of the women I spoke to outlined about their growing recognition of and attempts to resist the ways in which the prevailing neoliberal socio-economic model pushes the ideal consumer-citizen to see their house as a haven away from the world, complete with one of everything they might need (Ivanova, 2011; Schudson, 2006). Finding 'stuff' stressful arose in my analysis as being the common strand that linked the multifarious stories around downsizing, decluttering, and minimalism, and was clearly linked to how tiny house residents were using their houses to accomplish various goals and symbolise different ideologies (Carlin, 2014; Mangold and Zschau, 2019).

Sally explained that she felt motivated by a disenchantment with the supposed boons of consumerism and privately owned resources. She linked this to taking personal responsibility for her privilege by living in a way that she feels is just and fair. Sally's examination of her placement within infrastructures of white supremacy and neoliberal capitalism reveals a highly introspective and thoughtful commentary on her personal context.

“South Africa, you know, has one of the highest inequality indexes and so you're living with this extreme, in your face, inequality all the time, so I've always kind of thought about my stuff a lot, and sort of been worried about it like I have too much, and like this is unjust. I feel like people who build tiny houses are interested in this weird balance between ownership and privacy and connection and sharing, um because it is your own house and like I wanted it to be our house.

I have lived in rented spaces and I wanted to be able to like bang a nail in the wall and you know do things with it, um but also because in a tiny house you can't have tons of people over and you can't have people spend the night, it feels kind of individualistic also sometimes which I didn't necessarily like. That didn't sit so well with me. Are we just, you know, like these American Millennial self-centered like, it's the next rich cool thing that rich people do because they think they have too much stuff or whatever.

But what I think is so cool is that all the people that we've interacted with freely sharing information, really generous, really helpful, really have a sense of community and connection. A lot of people that we've encountered are interested in alternative ways of existing in the world. Everything doesn't have to be about the accumulation of privately owned resources.” (Sally, 31, South Africa)

Sally’s examination of her locatedness within global structures of white supremacy and neoliberal capitalism demonstrates a high level of self-awareness regarding her personal context and her reasons for implementing the tiny house as a tool for minimising harm. Sally was motivated by a disenchantment with the promises of consumerism as well as by a desire to take personal responsibility for her privilege by living in a way that feels fair vis-a-vis her

wider community of disadvantaged black and brown neighbours. Sally also praised the networks of sharing and mutual aid she encountered through her experience of building her tiny house and analyses that people who live in tiny houses are cognisant of the tensions between consumerism, independence, and community.

Her description of the liminal zones that tiny house residents inhabit evokes imagery of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) in that they at once encompass seemingly juxtaposed qualities: “*people who build tiny houses are interested in this weird balance between ownership and privacy and connection and sharing.*” In Sally’s telling, it was the process of disconnecting from typical consumerism that enlivened her feelings of connection to other people and her sense of there being real, attainable alternative ways of life. Occupying a tiny house was positioned as offsetting some of the more grotesque aspects of capitalist hyper-consumerism, for example, the “*extreme, in your face, inequality*” and reveals that Sally, like so many of the women I have spoken with for this thesis, relates to consumerism through a prism of overlapping scepticisms and displeasures (Soper, 2008; 2020).

Like Sally, Tina also spoke about the importance of her sense of connection to life and how this has been enhanced by disengaging from consumerism and the accumulation of ‘stuff’. Tina explored her capacity to feel not just connected to nature but to experience herself as an expression of nature through reducing her consumption and striving to own fewer and fewer possessions. In this regard, her personal manifesto for minimalism confirms the assertion that committing to a minimalist lifestyle implies an enhanced experience of self and improved relationships with others (Loreau, 2019; Meissner, 2019). Tina extolled the virtues of minimalism and explained how the benefits of this lifestyle check the inherited Western

model of consumption, which has become synonymous with living the 'good life' (Soper, 2008).

"I think we should all kind of strive to live smaller and to have a smaller amount of things. Renewable energy and living off-grid even like just having wind power or solar power or like all of these things grey water catchment all of this like we should kind of live in harmony with the land more rather than just stripping it bare.

It's kind of weird because I used to suffer from a lot of anxiety, and I think a lot of it was fuelled by this kind of over consumption, and the more I get into more sustainable ways of living the less my anxiety is. The more minimal I am, the less my anxiety is. The less things I have, the more kind of I feel like I'm doing in harmony with the planet, then the better I feel. It just makes me happy and sort of peaceful, like I'm living in harmony rather than destroying.

Because I do feel like consumerism, like all of that kind of thing where we're made to feel like we're not part of this ecosystem, we're made to feel like we're not enough if we don't have all of these possessions and all of this money and all of these things, and these big houses, and once we strip all that back and figure out exactly what we need on a minimal sustainable level then we don't really impact the planet that badly so I think it's all tied together." (Tina, 38, London)

Tina elucidates on the causal relationship she experiences between owning fewer possessions and feeling less anxiety and more harmony. Tina's narrative recounts a life of enhanced pleasure and good feelings through having reimagined her relationship to consumption and ownership. Her story clarifies what Soper (2008) calls a gradual "emergence and embrace of

new modes of thinking about human pleasure and self-realisation.” (Soper, 2008, p. 571).

Tina’s explanation also recalls Miller’s (2008) questioning about the assumption that a relationship with material possessions precludes a relationship with people and planet. Miller goes so far as to assert that, in fact, the inverse is true; that “the closer our relationships are with objects, the closer our relationships are with people.” (Miller, 2008, p. 9), but this does not appear to be what Tina has experienced. I did not ask her if commencing on a journey into minimalism also involved a deepening of her appreciation of some particular few valuable objects, but one of my other interviewees, Greta, did mention this:

“You value the stuff you have more. You are more aware of everything and yourself. You know what your house is made of. You live more outside. More connected to nature. Less energy consumption. More connected to people around you.” (Greta, 40’s, The Netherlands)

Not everybody I spoke to identified as a minimalist, but even Gem, who specifically declared that she was “*the opposite of a minimalist*” confirmed that she anticipated living with fewer possessions would lead to a feeling of enhanced peacefulness and calm in her life:

“I’m the opposite of a minimalist, but I think I’ll manage because sometimes this not being a minimalist is very um restless in my head, so I’m also hoping to find a bit of peace and quiet in a home with a limited amount of stuff.” (Gem, 25, The Netherlands).

The stories these women recount about finding stuff stressful may point to a living example of “a new erotics of consumption or hedonist ‘imaginary’.” (Soper, 2008, p. 571). The women who live in tiny houses can be viewed as one of the current manifestations of what Soper identified in 2008 as the emergence of a counter-consumption trend taking hold in the

popular imagination and the growing currency of counter-hegemonic conceptions of ‘the good life’. At the same time, I find a disquieting parallel between the themes of reducing their bodies of possessions and the diet culture narratives of the feminine imperative to reduce physical body size (Bordo, 2003; Jovanovski, 2017). Just as Naomi Wolf described how training women to obsess over their weight and diet is a “potent political sedative” (Wolf, 1990, p. 187), I likewise can see how a modern preoccupation with the weight of their possessions may similarly be draining women’s resources from collective political action. It does not escape my notice that, except one, all of the women who came forward to participate in this thesis were living in independent tiny houses rather than collectively or communally organised ones.

5.4.1 Deprivation versus Minimalism: What’s the Difference?

For those women from lower socio-economic backgrounds or who found themselves in financial hardship, the decision to downshift or to pursue a ‘new hedonics’ of consumption (Soper, 1998; 2008) was less obviously voluntary (Lindsay, Lane, and Humphery, 2020). For less economically secure women, moving into a tiny house can, in fact, highlight and retrench economic and social inequality (ibid.). Jackie was 29 when we spoke and was living in Los Angeles. Here she describes the first tiny house she lived in when she first moved to LA from Australia six years prior.

“I moved to Los Angeles and then I realised everything was super expensive um and I couldn't afford it and so then I got offered this really shitty trailer and somebody's property.

It was like - hey you can come live here super cheap, help out on the ranch and like there you go. But the trailer was unliveable. It was absolutely terrible.” (Jackie, 29, LA).

Despite the ‘*absolutely terrible*’ conditions that Jackie endured, she goes on to reflect that the experience taught her valuable and meaningful lessons about what she needs to have and own in her life.

“I think that really taught me what I wanted and what I absolutely needed out of things. Like I knew what was definitely necessary for my life and then what I really was fine without. So then in planning this [subsequent tiny house] I mean it was just literally everything that I really wanted.” (Jackie, 29, LA).

Jackie’s story illustrates how tiny house living is at once indicative of retrenching socioeconomic progress; she arrived in LA with little money and survived in a ‘*terrible*’ and ‘*unliveable*’ tiny house initially, but nevertheless, tiny house living is also revealed as a valuable tool in teaching Jackie ‘*what was definitely necessary for my life*’. Jackie goes on to describe her subsequent tiny house as being ‘*just literally everything that I really wanted*’; a situation that she explains was only made possible by the extremely affordable cost of living provided by the first, albeit unpleasant, tiny house. Overall, Jackie recounts her tiny house living experience as a positive one which has freed her from the entrapment of believing she needs to live in a way that supports the status quo. She expresses her exasperation:

“There’s no standard to this [life]. I don’t know why people keep trying to like make themselves in the standard. You can have anything in this [type of home], this is your priority, if you want to, have it.” (Jackie, 29, LA).

Another example highlights how relocating to a tiny house can emphasise and reinforce economic and social disparities, especially for women who are less secure financially. Jo moved into a converted van so that she could move to Canada from Australia and live near to the climbing gyms that she both used and worked in. Here, Jo recounts the level of material deprivation she initially experienced after having moved into the van:

“When I first moved in it was like, nothing. We had a bed frame. We were sleeping on this kind of janky bed and we had a boulder pad opposite the sliding door in like a couch setup, and for a while that was kind of it. So I'd cook meals like sitting on the pad on the floor. It was like very, I don't know, I guess it's what people picture homelessness to look like. It was pretty bad. We didn't have a heater. Sometimes I think my sleeping bag was minus nine [degrees Celsius].” (Jo, 27, Vancouver).

However, like Jackie, Jo was able to use the extremely low cost of living in a very poor-quality home to save a significant amount of money, which she would otherwise have been unable to do. She explained how this money had been used to upgrade and create a high-quality living space in a new van.

“Yeah so our rent, because we're still paying off the van, um so our rent is about 300 [CAD] a month instead of what I was paying beforehand, like 800 [CAD] I think. So now we bought a fridge, and we bought a little oven and we bought a skylight. I think, probably, I haven't added it up but I think it'll be somewhere between 15 to 20 000 [CAD]. But yeah I mean it's like a house, you can't get a house for like twenty thousand dollars.” (Jo, 27, Vancouver).

In both Jackie's and Jo's tellings, it is possible to see reverberations of dweller control (Ward, 1976). Both women decided to relocate to new countries, and both experienced significant deprivation when they first arrived. Despite this, they make sense of their experiences by locating them within a framework of agency and an enhanced ability to choose; both women position the initial difficulty of their poor quality tiny houses as being a precursor to a quality of life that now surpasses what they believe they could enjoy if they had not endured the initial discomfort. In their remembering, both the first and second tiny houses are invoked as tools that enabled them to achieve certain goals in their lives at the time. For Jackie, the first tiny house enabled her to save money and learn skills to build her dream tiny house afterwards, one in which she could reject "*making herself in the standard*" and prioritise what really matters to her - principally her animal companions:

"I've designed this tiny house with the ferret cage in mind, and I had rats at the time so it was like originally going to be this whole loft was going to be full of cages." (Jackie, 29, LA).

Likewise, for Jo, the very low cost of living, which intersected with the very low standard of living, did ultimately help to put her in a situation where she could afford to have a home of her own for "*twenty thousand dollars.*" Despite the happy conclusions that Jackie and Jo recounted, the spectre of deprivation continues to follow tiny houses. Even in the face of the increased mainstream coverage of tiny houses, traditionally housed residents have been known to voice concerns over a reduction in the value of their own properties should tiny houses be built in the area (Brown, 2016; Mangold and Zschau, 2019). Data on whether or not the presence of tiny houses affects conventional house prices is scarce due to the low overall number of tiny house builds. However, given the documented stigma surrounding tiny

houses and their connotations with poverty, it would not be surprising to see the predicted outcome come to fruition (Chapman et al., 2019; Shearer and Burton, 2019).

The opposition to tiny houses appears to be based largely on unfounded discrimination and stigma in combination with the immediacy and physicality of the tiny homes themselves (Mckenzie and Jones, 2015; Shildrick, 2018). Where local residents resist plans for the development of tiny house communities on the grounds that it might lower their own property value, such resistance is not documented towards more abstract government or corporate actions that carry a much greater risk of reducing the value of a home, for example by increasing interest rates or changing terms of borrowing (Blanton et al., 2015). There appears to be a significance to the immediacy of being able to see a physical tiny house and attributing a causal relationship between that and whatever social or economic fear a traditionally housed person is experiencing. This may explain, for instance, why homelessness is stigmatised, but private capital expansion via corporate restructuring (which causes some homelessness) is not (Chowdhury & Žuk, 2018; Ivanova, 2011).

Several women acknowledged the stigma attached to their tiny homes. Maja described the stereotyping that she experienced from her family when explaining her plans to live in a trailer-based tiny house.

“It's all about perception. For instance my brother, when I was initially talking about it he was like you're gonna build a trailer? And those are very badly stigmatised here and even like my parents I heard that from them early early on like you know even in our childhood people living in trailers like they would always put down. But now I see that if that's what they can afford and that's housing them, good on them, what does it matter? But no one

wants a trailer park next to them because of the stigma, you don't want a trailer park.”

(Maja, 32, South Carolina).

Likewise, Aine identified the association between trailer-based tiny homes and the travelling community and reasoned that the discrimination faced by tiny house dwellers is related to their visual similarity. However, Aine also offered a counterpoint to this analysis by highlighting that tiny homes can also be associated with a left-leaning ‘hippy’ community, which is also stigmatised, although for different reasons:

“People don't like them because it's a bit kind of traveller or gypsy, and maybe, yeah I'm not sure if a lot of people associate tiny houses with a very kind of left-wing hippy alternative community which maybe they don't want to be anywhere near.” (Aine, 44, Portugal).

Aine also noted that a common criticism of tiny houses is that they are bourgeoisie caravans, implying that tiny homes are being used as a new form of gentrification which perpetuates the existing status quo and unfair distribution of resources, whilst at the same time embodying the material deprivation associated with travelling communities. These appraisals highlight the disquieting multifacetedness of what tiny houses can be interpreted as indicating. I argue that it is this multitudinous embodiment which, in part, identifies tiny houses as being heterotopias, open to fluidic interpretations and uses.

The view that tiny houses evoke a potentially disconcerting left-leaning ‘hippy’ political presence was also picked up on by Gem.

“I think it's mainly the off-grid aspect. Yeah, so when you're telling them that you're going to be going to a composting toilet they're like - oh that's gross. Having your urine filtered by plants outside is like - oh no that's too hippy, too weird. So I think that's the main aspect.”

(Gem, 25, The Netherlands).

Gem qualifies the "hippie" aesthetic by citing examples of low-resource waste management strategies, such as dry composting toilets and natural urine filtration systems. Her analysis suggests that it is the low-resource use approach of off-grid tiny houses that unsettles more conventionally housed neighbours, highlighting the disquieting influence that examples of consuming and living differently can have. While these approaches to living may appear extreme to some, Gem's argument seeks to demonstrate that resource-saving solutions are practical and achievable for those with access to appropriate knowledge and resources.

Tina identified that tiny houses might be seen as threatening to others due to their unfamiliarity with what a tiny house is and what kind of people live in them. Again, Tina picked up on the stigma associated with travelling communities or any type of dwelling which is not traditionally constructed in the dominant white European middle-class standard.

“I think it's unfamiliar isn't it, you know. Yeah, you just don't come across it as much so it all feels a bit more intimidating because it's just slightly more unfamiliar, and I think there's a lot of like kind of stigma attached to being transient and like living in a caravan or living in a house on wheels.” (Tina, 38, London)

5.5 Summary

The data provided in this chapter demonstrates how tiny homes and the women who live in them may be seen as representing oblique kinds of resistance; their narratives illustrate methods of (re)claiming agency whilst nevertheless remaining structurally constrained on the one hand as labourers under capitalism, and on the other as women under patriarchy. My thesis emphasises that these women are not passively accepting the societal norms and systems that restrict their freedoms but instead are finding creative yet interim and imperfect responses to the constraints they face. Women's answers to the impact of capitalism and patriarchy in their lives are not meant to be presented as a 'solution' but rather as a contribution towards what Colin Ward (1976) argued was so important within academia: to pay critical attention to what real people are actually doing about the problems they encounter in their own lives.

Further original contributions are made in this chapter through revealing how women's narratives underscore the unsettling contradictions between their desire to reduce their environmental impact and their ambiguous successes in doing so. An ongoing point of contention lies in whether overall consumption and carbon burden are indeed reduced or merely shifted, for example, away from buying clothes and towards driving farther, ordering more take-out, or paying for 'experiences'. Ambivalence around the extent to which women in this thesis have 'really' reduced their participation in consumerism is not considered a problem since the focus is on women's narratives of the self and their reported transformations through building and living in their tiny houses rather than their 'actual' carbon footprint or budgets. The tripartite analytical approach of interpreting women's stories about consumption through the lens of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984), dweller control (Ward, 1976), and the slender body (Bordo, 2003) pursues the overarching contribution of this thesis.

This chapter has particularly invoked Bordo's (2003; 2018) work as a central way of critically exploring consumption and tiny housing. Using the slender body (Bordo, 2003) as an analytical tool takes me further than Foucault (1984) alone could. Where Foucault's (1984) heterotopia facilitates a consideration of women's tiny houses as heterotopic and contradictory spaces, Bordo (2003; 2018) allows my analysis to hold in place the gendered relations of these spaces. My thesis makes contributions beyond Bordo (ibid) by evaluating the discrepancies between differently classed and racialised women. By dealing with intersectionality as a formative component of how the slender body is used as an analytical tool in the case of women building tiny houses, I hope to offer a unique contribution to the sociology of gender and the home.

Finally, my participants believed that communicating their experiences was critical to assisting others who may be experiencing the kind of heaviness and despair that they describe as accompanying entrapment within consumerism. The majority of the women in this thesis said openly that they engaged in this thesis expressly to contribute to greater societal change surrounding consuming, purchasing, and owning behaviours and to advocate for tiny houses. They aimed to confront and debunk popular beliefs that consumerism is inevitable and enjoyable and wanted to leverage their own stories to proliferate examples of living differently. Again, women's interim and shifting responses to the pressure to spend, buy, and own are analysed with granular attention here following Ward's (1976; 1990) call to draw attention to how real people are attempting to solve their own problems. In doing so, I have shown how women tiny house dwellers' accounts of consumption can also be read in relation to ideas of alternative hedonism by emphasising the pleasures and gains they have found in and through their tiny houses.

Chapter 6: Women and Work

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents empirical data on how tiny houses impacted women's relationship to work. So far in this thesis, I have offered an analysis of temporal and spatial relations to tiny housing with the making of the home in chapter four, followed by the change in consumptions facilitated through tiny house living in chapter five. In this final empirical chapter, I present an exploration of what is lost and gained through tiny houses in labour and market relations. This chapter aims to understand if and how women were using tiny houses to alter their relationship with and experience of capitalism, and how women's lives were different before versus after living in a tiny home regarding their experience of labour.

The chapter situates women's experiences of work in a broader context of how the home co-creates gendered life and speaks to visions of how women can work differently. The analysis is presented using the tripartite theoretical framework of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984), dweller control (Ward, 1976) and the slender body (Bordo, 2003). Taken together, the findings presented in this chapter contribute novel understandings of the nuanced and complicated ways that women tiny house residents are simultaneously experiencing enhanced agency whilst also living under conditions of historically extreme economic and environmental crises. The research presented in this chapter highlights how tiny houses and the women who live in them can be seen to represent 'slantwise' (Arrigoitia, West, and Peace, 2018; Campbell and Heyman, 2007) forms of resistance in that their narratives

demonstrate ways to (re)claim agency whilst also remaining structurally oppressed (Wilson and Wadham, 2023).

It was common for women to discuss how their tiny house changed their experience of both paid and unpaid work. Whilst several women continued to work full-time in the same job they had before moving into their tiny home, many women reported that they had changed jobs, reduced hours, or become self-employed. Participants commonly revealed that they found their employment unenjoyable, meaningless, and frustrating, frequently presenting their feelings about work within a rubric of wasted time, energy, and life.

The data marshalled in this chapter further supports theoretical scholarship on the continuing alienation of workers under modern neoliberal capitalism and the detrimental effects that neoliberal fiscal and social policy has on employees' well-being (Frayne, 2015; Kennedy, Krahn, & Krogman, 2013; Wajcman, 2015). Women's decisions to change their relationships with work were not always easy, and several women described the fraught period of their lives during which decisions around work took place. Bearing in mind that heterotopia has been theorised to function as a site "that represents incompatible spaces and reveals paradoxes" (Sudradjat, 2012, p. 29), women's reported experiences of strain as well as enjoyment in the reformulation of their working lives through their tiny house journey is consistent with this understanding. The incompatibilities of these heterotopic experiences are drawn out with the application of Bordo's (2003) slender body approach, underscoring the continued presence of the neoliberal imperative to continually self-improve, streamline, and 'minimise' distractions from productivity.

6.2 Mortgage as the Anchor to Work

During discussions with my participants, mortgage encumbrance was frequently raised as a talisman of debt entrapment and a lifetime obligation to overwork. Participants were sceptical about the offerings of a traditional route into property ownership and viewed mortgages not as a way to build equity but as an entrapping form of debt which would anchor them to unacceptable working patterns and demands on their energy and time.

“Honestly I have zero desire to have a 30-year mortgage. Around here around DC, it's like, you can't. If you want to live in DC it's \$500,000 plus. So with all that said, I had zero interest in having that type of debt, not that I could actually afford to have that debt, but even if I could, I don't want that.” (Ellen, 40, Maryland)

Ellen’s narrative portrays mortgage encumbrance as a form of debt that reinforces existing power dynamics, restricts freedom and agency, and perpetuates social inequality. Throughout my conversations with women, mortgage encumbrance was unpacked as a manifestation of the contradictions and crises of capitalism, which tiny houses were being used as a tool to interrupt. Tiny houses were animated as a living critique of mortgage encumbrance, as a way to provide an alternative to the entrenched intersection of debt and power. Like Ellen, many of the women I spoke to identified the role of debt, specifically mortgage debt, in shaping social relationships and maintaining unequal power dynamics. They told personal stories about how the financial system, through the creation and promotion of mortgage debt, entraps individuals into a lifetime of overwork and dependence on wage labour and how they were using tiny houses as a way to disrupt this cycle. Kelly made a similar analytical point, highlighting that she could and has previously taken on a mortgage for a conventional property but has elected not to at this stage in her life.

“You know, for my condo [flat], I took out a 30-year mortgage. For this tiny, I took out a seven-year loan and I’m gonna pay it off in four, so, you know, such a big difference.” (Kelly, 41, Colorado).

Unlike Ellen, who stated that she could not afford a mortgage even if she were willing to apply for one, Kelly had already taken on mortgage debt in the past. I highlight this to draw attention to the range in demographics represented by the data in this thesis - it was not the case that only women who were financially excluded from traditional home ownership were drawn to tiny house living. In the quote above, Kelly alludes to how the financial sector creates debt and generates profit. By taking on mortgage debt in the past, Kelly was subjecting herself to a set of financial obligations and relationships that are structured by the dominant capitalist system. Her example highlights how, whilst it was not possible for her to eschew this debt-based relationship entirely, she could reclaim some agency over the weight and duration of the debt relationship through buying a tiny house rather than a conventional house.

In this sense, I argue that tiny houses operate within and against overarching social infrastructures like consumer capitalism and patriarchy, enacting slantwise resistance rather than outright rejection (Arrigoitia, West, and Peace, 2018; Campbell and Heyman, 2007). Kelly’s decision to purchase her tiny house can be read as a form of resistance to the dominant cultural and economic norms around homeownership, a resistance enacted through spatial, architectural techniques which centre dweller control (Ward, 1976; 1990). By choosing a smaller, more affordable home and paying it off quickly, Kelly was striving to create an environment that was more conducive to her own well-being and financial security,

as opposed to complying with prevalent expectations regarding homeownership, debt, and the working habits that are required to service this debt.

Like Kelly, Amy recounted how liberating herself from the strictures of a mortgage brought her a level of peace that she had not thought possible. She specifically tied this sense of liberation with the importance of freeing up her time to perform unpaid care work for her sister, a highly meaningful activity which Amy explains would have been impossible if she were required to engage in full-time employment.

“I had gotten some money, I had gotten an inheritance and presumably it was for a down payment on a traditional mortgage or a wedding or something, and I could have done those things but I opted to buy the [tiny] house in cash, and what that allowed me to do was, instantly, I had taken my life's biggest expense and 30 years ahead of time eliminated it, and I cannot explain the level of peace that I have from that decision. It's given me breathing room while I'm caring for my sister. Her medical treatments have been insane and I realised that there could be a point in life where I am her full caretaker, I'm fully financially responsible for her because it's still unclear whether she's going to be able to work a traditional job, so, in the back of my head I saw a house that had sleeping space for both of us that was beautiful that we could transport as my job or her treatment needed that had the life-saving medical equipment inside of it.” (Amy, 37, Colorado).

Amy's story emblemises what Colin Ward (1976) referred to as housing that is much more responsive to people's changing needs than traditional developer-led housing. Amy's tiny house synergises both practical and political considerations. It provides the flexibility that she needs to administer unpaid care work to her sister, and it eliminates her *“life's biggest*

expense...30 years ahead of time”, freeing her up to make different decisions about how to work and live, unencumbered by a lifetime's worth of monthly mortgage payments. I argue that Amy's story highlights a contemporary form of housing anarchism in action; hers is a narrative of prioritising her own well-being and freedom through housing-based dweller control rather than adhering to inherited societal norms around home ownership and career paths. In Colin Ward's (1976; 1990) examination of anarchism and housing, he underscores the imperative of individuals assuming agency over their residential spaces, as opposed to depending on governmental entities or private development firms, who, he believed, were bound to do an inferior job to the residents themselves.

Yet Amy's story of enhanced agency is also deeply relational - her decisions were strongly influenced by her desire to care for her sister. Through rejecting the mortgage-based model of living, Amy's tiny house is illuminated as a sort of heterotopic 'counter-site' to the dominant cultural order. Her small home and prioritisation of unpaid care work stands in opposition to a culture which valorises owner-occupation in a large brick house and a 'successful' career in a highly esteemed, usually corporate, setting - employment which insinuates long hours and a level of identification with the job title. At the same time, Amy is still an owner-occupier, and her prioritisation of unpaid care work conforms with gendered schemas of who should sacrifice their own interests in order to care for others.

Over and over again, the women I spoke to described mortgage debt as a trap, a weight, a burden, and something they were using their tiny houses to evade. The link between mortgage encumbrance and the tessellating entrapment within the strictures of unsatisfying or harmful waged labour was made obvious by participants. Aine shared her feelings about the relationship between mortgage debt and the cult of work:

“Yeah the whole financial thing and having lower overheads. I thought this is great because I won't have to work full-time doing a job that I don't like and all of those kinds of things.”

(Aine, 44, Portugal).

Aine contrasts the “*whole financial thing*” of living in her tiny house and the “*lower overheads*” that this implies with her historical and formative experience of working full time in a job that she does not like. Aine’s quote highlights how debt-based financial obligations can restrict an individual's freedom and mobility and confine them to a particular lifestyle centred around work and debt servicing. Aine’s tiny house, in contrast, is portrayed as a way to evade this entrapment and create more space for dignity and agency. Aine’s desire to have lower overheads and to work less or to seek out meaningful work can be seen as rejecting the dominant capitalist values that prioritise profit over personal well-being and fulfilment. Literature establishes that heterotopias exist outside the norms and conventions of everyday life and are often associated with moments of crisis or upheaval (Faubion, 2008; Hetherington, 1997; Sacco et al., 2019). In this case, the tiny house is illuminated as a heterotopia that allows for a break from the dominant social and economic structures that trap individuals in a cycle of wage labour and mortgage debt.

Tina also critiqued the prevalence of mortgage debt as a normalised route into ownership. She was quick to point out that whilst someone is paying their mortgage, they do not technically own the home they are paying for - the bank does. Tina spoke to me about her disquieting feeling that something was not quite right about debt encumbrance and the false consciousness of ownership.

“I think I’ve always struggled with the idea of being tied down to a building, of the idea of a mortgage, the idea of having to pay all this money all the time consistently and never really kind of owning anything.” (Tina, 38, London).

Tina echoes the critiques made by Ward (1976) about the harms that private property ownership wreaks on individuals and society as a whole. Ward argued that the notion of property ownership is a social construct that leads to the concentration of wealth and power into the hands of an elite few whilst also stifling creativity and limiting the use of land and resources. Tina highlights that mortgage servicing is an illusion of ownership that is in fact a form of servitude to the prevailing financial system, which uses assetised housing as one of its chief tools.

I found interesting links between women’s stories of rejecting mortgage debt in order to reject normative labour practises and Ward’s work on the need for self-organising, decentralised communities based on mutual aid and creative cooperation. Like Tina, many other women shared with me about using their tiny houses as a tool to realise their desire to escape the trap of mortgage debt and find alternative ways of living that allow for greater agency, self-sufficiency, and creativity. Ward believed that the development of disparate, self-organised micro-communities is crucial for creating a more just and sustainable society and that the traditional model of property ownership based on mortgage debt is a significant obstacle to this goal. I was reminded of this line of argument when speaking to Petra, an artist in The Netherlands.

“Creativity needs a certain mental state to be able to actually get ideas and be creative, and so what I was thinking of is how to invest in my time to be able to create space next to a part-

time job where I could develop my own work and do my own projects. So basically I thought of a way not to get caught into a full-time job, and that was by investing in building a tiny house myself." (Petra, 25, The Netherlands).

Here, Petra states that she did not want *"to get caught into a full-time job"*, highlighting full-time employment as a kind of trap to be avoided. The reason she gives for wanting to avoid this trap is that she prizes the experience of creativity, which she believes *"needs a certain mental state"*. The specific mental state required for creativity is described as needing a *"space"* where she could nourish her own creativity and *"do my own projects"*. While speaking with Petra, I was reminded of the concept of "experimental freedom" described by Ward (1990, p. 35). It was quite literally creative experimentation that Petra was trying to design into her life, and paid employment was deemed antithetical to this desire. In this way, her ability to resist paid labour devouring her energy and time was made possible by her tiny house, highlighting how these small spaces are used by women to resist problematic aspects of daily life. When these examples are taken together, the tiny house can be seen as a place where alternative social relations, norms, and practices can be experimented with and explored - spaces which specifically centre financial, temporal, and emotional agency (Foucault, 1984; Ward, 1976).

Expanding on the theme of scepticism towards meaningless employment, several interviewees specifically mobilised the language of the 'American Dream' to locate their discomfort and unwillingness to remain complicit with a system that they perceive as failing to deliver on its promises. Here Melodie explains her experience of her tech job and why she eventually decided to leave full-time employment to become a self-employed tiny house builder.

“I just realised that I don't think I can do the corporate ‘America job at a tech company’ type of thing. Um, it's kind of soul sucking. It's a great company, like they're so flexible, they're so fun, their culture is perfect. I could not have asked for a better job, um but the fact that like I was still ending my day every day at a good job with so many good friends, doing work that like was engaging and at one point was fulfilling, and then I would get off work and I would sit on the couch and have like a mini quarter life crisis. I would just be like, what is this? Why am I spending my time doing this? Like in theory, I should enjoy this. I just became more and more disconnected, and that disconnect became more and more obvious as time went on. I just couldn't do it anymore. I felt like I owed it to myself to try to just quit and go full into the tiny house, try and finish it, try and sell it, and see how it goes.” (Melodie, 28, Missouri).

Melodie wrestled with the difference, or disconnect she calls it, between how good her job was on paper according to the criteria that neoliberal messaging tells consumer-workers that they should enjoy, like a fun culture and flexible working hours, with her personal experience of actually finding the job “*soul sucking*”. The discomfort and confusion she felt about not enjoying working for a “*great company*” can be in part explained by the essential alienation that all workers are subject to under capitalism, in that despite having a “*perfect culture*”, the true culture definitionally remains one of exploitation and coercion of the workers by the employers (Graeber, 2019; Horgan, 2021).

Melodie went on to describe how she agonised over the decision to leave her job for months because she felt that she should be enjoying the “*corporate America job at a tech company*”. Her feelings of guilt about not enjoying her corporate job and her mistrust and suspicion of her own feelings of dissatisfaction speak to the effectiveness of neoliberal governance, which

teaches individuals what to aspire to and how, whilst deflecting emphasis from the structural causes of inequality, stress, and exploitation and instead focussing rhetoric onto the individual to understand themselves as autonomous, self-responsible, and self-optimising (Gilbert, 2013; Solimano, 2014).

Amy also expressed critical engagement with the neoliberal myths of meritocracy and the false promises of corporate capitalism.

“I was very disenchanted with the American Dream. I remember being in high school and I took a career aptitude test that told me I should be a data systems analyst for an HR company. I was devastated. I remember just sitting there and holding this piece of paper and that was the first time that it kind of dawned on me that school was preparing me for a job, and I guess in the back of my head I had thought that like after school I would have the rest of my life to live, and I remember making this fervent wish the universe that I wanted to make a living, living. I wanted to spend my life living. That to me just seemed like the best way to honour life you know.” (Amy, 37, Colorado).

In this quote, Amy outlines the fundamental alienation that workers under capitalism are subject to by recounting her experience of having her personality and future prospects reduced to a confined technocratic position within corporate employment. Amy emphatically states that she *“was devastated”* by this because of the realisation that the education system she had been progressing through did not function to enrich and broaden her mind but to condition her to accept and submit to the rules and regulations of employment. She contrasts the dehumanising reduction of her life into a job role with her *“fervent wish”* to exist in a way that *“honoured life”*. The implication here is that, in her mind, employment under capitalism

is incompatible with honouring life. Further critical commentary was offered by Amy regarding the moral status of employment, which functions to discipline consumer-citizens into incorporating a strong neoliberal work ethic into their sense of self.

“And it’s not that I don’t think work is important, and not that I don’t think that jobs need to be done, but I don’t think that work and a job are synonymous. I also think that, at least in the United States, it’s very moral to have a job. If you don’t want to work you’re a terrible person. It’s not that I don’t want to work, it’s that I want to pursue meaningful work, and I was very upset by this idea that my life was going to be passing me by while I was in a cubicle doing work that wasn’t meaningful with health that was deteriorating and people promised that at the end you would get to retire?” (Amy, 37, Colorado).

Amy’s dismay with the status quo, especially her focus on the cult of work and its dominating moralising presence, was expressed in some form by most of the women interviewed for this thesis. It was common that, like Amy, the women I spoke to would foreground their decision to live in a tiny house with their assessment that work was a source of stress, anxiety, and frustration in their lives and that a tiny house was the only way they could deliberately restructure their lives around something other than work. This data supports Ward’s (2017) writings on the reclamation of citizen control through architecture and expands on it by suggesting that tiny houses can be understood as a set of practical techniques mobilised in rejecting and dismantling authoritarian types of organisation. Through this lens, tiny houses can be seen to replace incumbent forms of social organisation with more self-governed, self-directed ways of life. The data also contributes to Frayne’s (2015) collection of case studies on how people are refusing the cult of work by helping us to better understand those individuals who resist the colonisation of their lives by contemporary

economic demands, and carve out new or different ways of consuming and contributing to the world around them.

Excerpt of field notes, dated November 4th 2021

I had my progression meeting today and through conversations with my supervisors realised that I am ambivalent about writing stronger critiques of the things my participants have been saying to me. I am so cautious of making sure my entire process is aligned with a feminist and non-extractive ethic of relating that I worry about pointing out, for example, the romanticization of smaller spaces, the fact that it is illusory for anyone to say they are ‘stepping outside of’ consumer capitalism, that extolling the virtues of optimised space/efficiency/productivity is a highly capitalist sentiment. The progression meeting helped me to see that critiquing these ideas is not the same as critiquing the individuals who express them. We discussed that as academics, we are equipped with analytical training which allows us to identify differences between what individual women say they are doing and the wider context in which these decisions are being made. We can be sympathetic to their experiences whilst also critiquing them.

I just keep thinking about how any one of the 30-plus women that have shared their lives with me over the last year and a half would personally feel if they read the thesis and could identify themselves, and what they would think about the analysis surrounding the pieces of our conversation that have been plucked out and used in order for me to achieve my goal of earning a PhD. I don’t ever want the tone to be ‘What these women think is happening is X, but I know better and it is actually Y’. I can’t tell to what extent I am achieving this goal.

6.3 Forms of Gendered Work

The concept of work is used interchangeably within anglophone societies to mean paid employment, unpaid housework, creative works of art, relationships that are hard work or need work, or tasks around the home like DIY or work in the garden. Each of these categories of work was mobilised across the data corpus during my conversations with women. In each instance, the transition into tiny house living accompanied a modification of relationship to and beliefs about certain kinds of work. The following section will explore data surrounding the different types of work that women were motivated to change. Typically, interviewees offset their obligation to do specific kinds of work with other, more preferable types of work. For example, Gem explained how she wanted to reduce the amount of time she spent in paid employment so that she could spend more time working to become what she described as “*self-sufficient*”; a process which, to her mind, involves washing and mending clothes by hand and growing her own food:

“I am hoping to live with more free time. I'm thinking of having a job like three days a week and in the other days make a life that is self-sufficient. So, um, having the garden and growing the vegetables and making my own bread, mending my own clothing, um all those things take up a lot of time. So yeah, doing laundry by hand. All those things.” (Gem, 25, The Netherlands).

Gem describes a desire for greater self-governance and recounts a bucolic vignette that evokes a strong sense of a slowed pace of life and the pleasures of unfrenzied, time-consuming manual endeavours like mending clothes and growing vegetables. Such practical tasks are often coded as indicative of deprivation; they are the tasks that the global north's middle and even working classes predominantly outsource to the global south's cheap labour or mechanisation. In this way, Gem's fantasy of what her life will be like in her tiny house

communicates an appetite to escape the normalised power structures of contemporary society. Her desire to live with more free time and engage in self-sufficient activities can be seen as an attempt to control her life and resist the normalising forces of consumerism and the dominant cultural narrative surrounding work and leisure. Gem's choice of a tiny house, with its focus on simplicity and self-sufficiency, can be interpreted as a rejection of the disciplined and regulated forms of architecture and space associated with institutions like the traditional nuclear family home, the office, and the school, which can be seen as microcosms of broader power structures in society (Foucault, 1984).

For other women, moving into a tiny house meant they could live alone and no longer feel it was their duty to provide household and emotional labour for the people they previously lived with. Avery put it concisely; moving into a tiny house enabled her to live without a male partner to focus on giving her young daughter a childhood she would not "*have to recover from*":

"Um, one; I got rid of the whole man. No, I'm kidding, you could totally do it with a partner, but, you know, letting other people's fears and doubts about this lifestyle like mess with me, but once I got out of that it was so much easier. And definitely the free time, like, I love money, okay. I would love money, but I want to give my daughter a childhood she doesn't have to recover from." (Avery, 25, Florida).

In this quote, Avery references grappling with societal expectations surrounding relationships, family, and homeownership. The mention of having gotten rid of "*one whole man*" speaks to a rejection of traditional heteronormative gender roles, particularly in the context of a male partner standing in the way of her adopting the lifestyle she wanted.

Avery's reckoning with how to construct her family inside her tiny house is an example of the complex interplay between individual agency, spatial politics, and cultural constraints;

whilst she was seeking a different kind of life and was pushing against societal expectations and norms to achieve it, at the same time, her desire for financial stability and her anxieties about her daughter's future were shaping her choices. In the context of Bordo's (2003; 2018) work on the construction of cultural meanings around bodies and identities, Avery's story might be seen as an example of how dominant cultural narratives about gender, family, and work-life balance influence women's experiences and choices. Avery's decision to prioritise her daughter's childhood, rather than traditional markers of success like heteronormative cohabitation, removes these norms and asserts her own agency through the material tool of her tiny house.

I found Avery's decision to do everything in her power to give her daughter a childhood she did not "*have to recover from*" particularly poignant, especially since it involved consciously choosing to be a single mother rather than be in a partnered or cohabiting relationship.

Presumably, there are several ways in which the decision to be a single mother might disadvantage Avery; she bears the entire financial, emotional, and physical responsibility for her home and her daughter. There is no second income, and nobody living in the home to help with daily tasks. However, this is precisely what her reasoning took into consideration - Avery pointed out that having a male partner living in her house did not ease the burden of labour but contributed to it. Her experience is supported by decades of research which shows that cis-gender heterosexual men cohabiting with women more often contribute to increasing domestic work-load for women than reduce it (Francis-Devine, 2021; Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007; Living Wage Foundation, 2022). Avery's story highlights one of the prime examples of the agency-enhancing capabilities that tiny houses can offer: the option for women to live without a partner.

Della shared another story which highlighted the agency-enhancing capabilities of tiny houses. Della also explored her historical patterns of taking on the gendered work of looking after the home and her husband and how this led to her feeling drained and uncomfortable in her own life. She locates this experience within a rubric of learned behaviour from her childhood and intergenerational trauma, which she replicated as an adult. Like Avery, Della invoked a sense of recovery through spatial strategies.

“I didn't come from the happiest of households and I think that, you know, if we got all psycho-social about it, um that might have actually led to a big part of me wanting to do this [tiny house living]. Because I was the oldest and so I was like the peacekeeper, and I was the one that uh took responsibility and did everything, and I found that that did transfer into my later years with my ex-husband. You know, I took care of everything, plus him, and it does get tiring because then you feel trapped in that kind of traditional housewife role, even though it's on the opposite end of the scale because I'm technically superwoman; taking care of everything right; paying the bills, making the money, taking care of the household, taking care of the husband.” (Della, 41, Ontario).

Della described the gendered labour that she felt obliged to perform in the house that she shared with her husband and how this led to her feeling trapped despite living a life that might externally be appraised as successful. Della speculated aloud that changing the “*peacekeeping*” and self-effacing habits that she learned as a young girl may have been “*a big part of me wanting to do this,*” i.e. move into a tiny home. One of Foucault’s (1984) principles of heterotopia is that “heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both insulates them and makes them penetrable.” (1984, p. 7). Foucault goes on to specify that in order to gain access to heterotopias, “one must have a certain permission” (1984, p. 7). It is perhaps this element of physical boundary setting and the consequent

protection of energy that Della could achieve in a tiny house that she could not attain in a traditional home, particularly when living with a man.

When Della contrasts her previous experience of living with her ex-husband with her current experience of living alone in her tiny house, it exemplifies how her home did not used to be somewhere she could be insulated from the burden of gendered work. In contrast, now her tiny house is less penetrable to these demands. She describes her previous home life as making her “*feel trapped*” because she was “*taking care of everything*”. She now indicates that she has much more independence and the ability to decide what kind of work she is willing to do and whom she is willing to do it for:

“I think for me anyways it's like: I don't need that. I can choose to have my world be whatever I want it to be. I just had to let go of that societal view of everything; husband, success, you know like, busy, expensive, career, and a beautiful home. Once I got past that and didn't care what people thought then, yeah, I get to be my own independent woman, quite comfortably not needing anything, just having what I choose and what I want, um, based on what I actually really want, what my heart wants. So, yeah, I mean, um, it [tiny house living] could open up a lot of doors for women who are not in the best of situations.” (Della, 41, Ontario).

Here, Della positions her life in her tiny house as being a “*world*” that can “*be whatever I want it to be.*” Her choice of words incorporates a common language with the theoretical positioning of heterotopias as “*worlds within worlds*” (Johnson, 2012, p. 1). Della specifically identifies a collection of notions that she deems to symptomise the societal expectation of what women should pursue under heteropatriarchal capitalism; “*husband, success, busy, expensive, career, and a beautiful home.*”, and then juxtaposes these with “*what I actually really want, what my heart wants.*” Since the home has been invoked as

being a key factor that previously constrained Della's life and now facilitates the expansion of her control and freedom, I argue that the tiny house offers an example of when "[architecture] can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom." (Foucault, 1984, pp. 245-6). Della integrated an analysis of the economic hardship that many women face and how this inhibits their ability to leave unhappy partnerships, and then located tiny houses as being one possible avenue that could be used to facilitate women's independence, particularly in older age:

"A lot of women will choose not to leave their marriages once they hit fifty because of the financial ruin. Like, it's more financially detrimental to leave a marriage, it's hard to recover at that age or older. But tiny houses would be a solution to allow women that freedom where they're not actually going to be struggling heading into their retirement years." (Della, 41, Ontario).

Della highlights the financial challenges faced by women who want to leave a marriage, describing the risk as "*financial ruin*". The economic vulnerability of women in this context is a critical feminist issue underscoring the gendered nature of financial precarity. Della argues that the affordability of tiny houses provides women with a means to live independently outside the confines of traditional hetero-patriarchal arrangements. Through her telling, tiny houses can be understood as providing women with a greater sense of control over both their financial and relationship futures. The tiny house emerges as a tool that can enable the freedom to make choices that may have been otherwise foreclosed due to economic constraints. Moreover, Della's narrative highlights the ongoing importance of considering feminist perspectives in discussions around contemporary housing and finance issues. In this case, feminist analysis reveals the systemic and structural inequalities that

shape women's experiences of housing and homeownership and can highlight how tiny houses offer solutions that are responsive to women's needs and desires. Throughout the interviews, the women I spoke to recognised how financial precarity disproportionately affected them. Like Della, many women identified the home as a fulcrum of several tessellating forms of disadvantage, and in this context, presented tiny houses as one possible tool for mobilising towards more equitable ways of living that promote gender equality and social justice.

Like Della, Amy also spoke about the gendered entrapment of women in unhappy or unsafe households. She raised the critique that due to the economic disparity between what women and men typically earn, there are severe and dangerous implications for heterosexual relationships. Amy expressed an acute awareness and concern for her friends who were in what she described as “*very scary*” situations:

“It's [tiny house living] definitely very empowering [for women]. I have a lot of friends whose husbands earned the income and they, I don't want to say financially trapped because I think where there's a will there's a way, and I don't want to box them in that way, but, uh, whose lifestyles would change very dramatically if they were just to decide to leave their partner, and I think that's very scary.” (Amy, 37, Colorado).

Amy's belief that “*where there's a will, there's a way*” struck me as being indicative of the deeply ingrained mentality of neoliberal governance, which purports that the only factor standing between an individual and their desired outcome is grit, determination, and the willingness to work hard enough to achieve the aim (Gilbert, 2003). The efficacy of neoliberal forms of governance is such that the particular ideological approach of neoliberalism no longer needs to be defended but is instead presented as intuitive, natural, and inevitable (ibid.). Consequently, a highly unequal and hierarchical regime of social

relations is celebrated whilst simultaneously propagating the notion that any individual has an equal chance to achieve any goal they can imagine (Gilbert, 2003, p. 10). Rhetoric which reflects and reproduces this hyper-individualised endorsement of meritocracy, despite abundant evidence of rigidly enforced structural inequality, was common throughout the interviews.

Whilst Amy did not want to say “*financially trapped*”, she did concede that her female friends would be in “*very scary*” situations if their relationship with higher-earning men ended. The charity Surviving Economic Abuse describes economic abuse as “designed to reinforce or create economic instability. In this way, it limits women’s choices and ability to access safety. Lack of access to economic resources can result in women staying with abusive men for longer and experiencing more harm as a result.” (Womens Aid, 2017). Whilst it is not the case that the women in this study were necessarily subject to economic abuse, like all forms of misogyny, gendered economic abuse exists as part of a spectrum of sexist activity within a patriarchal system (Johnson, 2001; Melo Lopes, 2019).

Another principle of heterotopia that Foucault (1984) outlines is that they are spaces of illusion that draw attention to the illusory nature of all other spaces. To pursue the theory offered by Sudradjat (2012), it may be possible that in creating these new tiny house spaces, an illusion of a safe and creative space away from male violence and financial oppression is forged. Again, the tension between freedom and constraint is emphasised in this analysis, since whilst it may be accurate, as in Della’s case, that some individual women will experience greater financial and personal agency thanks to living in a tiny house, this does little to improve the broader structural reality of living in a patriarchal capitalist society.

Amy and Della were not the only women to volunteer a critique of the gendered disparity in earnings and the effect this has on women's freedom and mobility. Kelly spoke about her

career as an educator and how her earnings were incompatible with her goals of living independently on a small homestead until she discovered tiny houses as an option. Kelly pointed out that several of her female colleagues could only live in suitable homes because they were partnered with a higher-earning man. She also pointed out the influence of intergenerational wealth in the form of loans or gifts from parents.

“I wanted property, I wanted chickens, I wanted a big garden and I would never be able to afford that on my salary unless I was married to someone else who could help, you know, do that. I think that for a lot of women, at least women I talk to and who are in the same career as me, that is the case. They cannot afford things without their husband, or without, you know, their parents co-signing on a loan or whatever. And so for me that was another really nice thing about the tiny.” (Kelly, 41, Colorado).

Kelly covers a lot of analytical ground in the excerpt above. She begins by outlining the core markers of the kind of life she wanted: a bucolic scene emblemised by the outdoors and domestically productive animals. However, she quickly asserts that this life would be impossible for her to achieve without the financial aid of a higher-earning male partner since she is not paid enough to afford this life on her own; here, she cites both her career as an educator and her status as a woman and a heterosexual to contextualise her economic position.

By justifying her assertion with references to anecdotal evidence that invokes the spectre of economic inequality and the resultant reliance on male or parental financial aid, Kelly locates her narrative within a schema of both gender and class inequality. She concludes by acknowledging that it is ultimately the affordability of the tiny house which liberates her from constrictive life-long debt and the associated dependence on men or family to attain her preferred lifestyle. The way she locates her tiny house as imbuing her life with independence

from both men and the pressures of decades-long debt calls to mind Saldanha's (2008) work on heterotopia in which he interprets heterotopias as being able to induce alternative social orderings. In Kelly's quote above, it is the tiny house that means her life is marked out as different from the many women she talks to who are in the same career as her and are disabled from financing their own lives.

Colin Ward's (1976; 1990) work on anarchism, dweller control and the built environment emphasises the importance of individuals taking control of their housing rather than relying on the state or private developers. Kelly's choice to downsize to a tiny house and pay off her loan in a shorter time frame exemplifies this type of self-sufficiency and individualism.

Furthermore, Ward argues that housing should not be seen as a commodity but as a human right. Kelly's ability to achieve her dream of owning a property without relying on a partner or a 30-year mortgage is a step towards reclaiming this right. At the same time, her ability to purchase a tiny house with a shorter loan term is not necessarily a sign of progress but rather a symptom of the broader housing crisis. The fact that she had to take out a 30-year mortgage for her previous home and that she just needed a shorter-term loan to afford a tiny house demonstrates how the cost of housing is artificially inflated by the workings of capitalist accumulation (Harvey, 2000).

Again, I return the analysis of this thesis to the disquieting tessellation of multiple contradictory phenomena visible in the example of women living in tiny houses. I recognise the valid critique that the solution to the housing affordability crisis is not just to promote alternative housing models, like tiny houses, but to fundamentally transform how land and housing are produced and exchanged. While a few women spoke about their desire for collective, democratic control over housing production and land use, much more common was an individualistic cosmology that centred the tiny house as a singular tool to be used in

the bettering of their own lives. It is not the aim of this thesis to pass judgement on their approaches but rather to highlight how certain relational models and ontologies, in this case, an individualistic, neoliberal cosmology, are made legible even within narratives of resisting the cult of work, the constraints of mortgage debt, and the financialisation of housing.

6.3.1 A Mother's Work

Throughout discussions of women's work in and around the home, tiny houses were revealed as a palimpsest – layered spaces holding traces of their different uses and moods. Diwata spoke about how living in a tiny house allowed her to do exactly the kind of work that was most meaningful to her: raising her four children. She explains how she initially tried to incorporate paid work with unpaid parenting work but, ultimately, this was infeasible due to the time constraints paid work imposed.

Diwata: *“Currently I am just a stay-at-home mom and I homeschool all four of my kids.*

Alice: *“That's, that's a lot of work, that's not 'just' anything.”*

Diwata: *“[laughing] Oh you're right, you're right. When I say 'just' it is, it is a lot of work.*

I'm pretty busy, but I enjoy it. It's been amazing, yeah. I love being a mom and I did not mind just being at home with my kids. And like, work-wise, I was a preschool director, so I did that for a little bit until I realised, you know, what I do want to do, which is homeschool my kids.

Yeah, because I had to put them back into public school because I was working so much, and then I was like, you know what, let's just homeschool.” (Diwata, 32, Texas).

I was interested but not surprised to hear Diwata position her status as a full-time carer to her four children as being “*just a stay at home mom*”, and, as the transcript evidences, I was not

content to allow this subtle linguistic downgrading of her efforts go unchecked. My tone was light, and I was smiling when I made my point, but the sentiment behind it was serious.

Patriarchal cultures perpetuate the false idea that women are essentially passive, contributing little of economic, social, or cultural value as a result of their essentially feminine nature (Johnson, 2001, p. 81). This gender cosmology is used to justify women's devaluation more broadly and to bolster the mythology of the natural state of men as being the opposite of women: active providers and decision-makers (ibid).

As Johnson points out, "This borders on the ludicrous, for it obscures the truth of women's work, which has historically counted for the bulk of productive labour." (Johnson, 2001, p. 81). Indeed, feminist economists have long pointed to data showing that women's unpaid labour in the informal economy would account for the greater part of GDP in a majority of the countries studied, if it were counted (Waring, 2003). The continuing refusal of governments to acknowledge and include women's unpaid labour, which makes possible the bulk of paid labour in the formal economy, has been described as a result of "breathtaking conceptual ignorance and undoubted Western bias." (Waring, 2003, p. 36). It was this conceptual ignorance that I hoped to avoid and reject in my own conversations with women about the vital work that they do, which explains my insistence on interjecting during my interview with Diwata.

The example that Diwata raises above provides an illuminating illustration of what Waring (2003) and Johnson (2001) discuss regarding the devaluation of work done in the informal economy. As Diwata explains, the care work of teaching and raising children was a paid position with healthcare and pension benefits when she performed these tasks for other people's children in a school. However, the work becomes unpaid when she undertakes the same duties and more for her own children in their home. This factor contributes to the risk of

financial ruin that Della spoke about in the previous section; whilst many women have spent their lives working, they have not been paid for this labour and so are more constrained in the choices they can make about where to live and with whom. Like Diwata, Sally, who lived in a trailer-based tiny house in South Africa with her husband and two children, attributed her ability to do the important work of mothering in precisely the way she wanted to do it to the fact that she and her husband and two children live in a tiny house. However, unlike Diwata, Sally also ensured she could continue doing waged labour as well.

“The biggest thing that we have gained from living in a tiny house comes back to time, because when Daniel [her husband] got a job he intentionally didn't get a full-time job because he didn't need to get a full-time job. We have small children, and it was really important to us that we co-parent and that it not just be all on me looking after the kids. So I was working part-time and he was working kind of three-quarter time so he could finish work at three o'clock every day, so that is the biggest thing.” (Sally, 31, South Africa).

Free time is widely recognised as being an essential component of a good quality of life and feelings of well-being (Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2012). The capacity to access and enjoy free time is constrained by demographic factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and gender, with working women most commonly shown to experience “multiple and more severe time constraints” than other groups (Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2012, p. 468). In contrast to this, Sally explains how, despite being active in the paid labour force whilst being a mother herself, her own experience of time has been significantly modified by living in a tiny house. Her experience of enhanced free time and equality in parenting principally relates to the reduced cost of living, enabling both herself and her husband to share more equally in both unpaid and paid labour obligations. Sally expands on the implications of being able to co-parent in her relationship with Daniel, her husband. She described how she felt their

feminist approach to parenting designated them as outsiders in their group of friends because so many people are forced to replicate gender roles in their homes due to sexist pay inequality.

“It is a uniting experience because we are sort of the like counter-cultural ones in our group when it comes to co-parenting, um in that we would intentionally make decisions so that we could co-parent instead of just making a decision based on the money, which is I feel like what most people end up having to do. It's like, well, whoever has the job that's going to pay more, and generally that's the guy in our community, so of course the dad is going to go to work all the time and the mama's going to be with the kids. So I think living in a tiny house enabled us to make more decisions that were based on our values instead of the convention or the money.” (Sally, 31, South Africa).

Sally's telling reveals the tiny house as a structure that holds a form of gender equality together. Her analysis also provides a sophisticated assessment of how the supposed 'natural state of things', i.e. that men work, and women look after the children, is a social construction. In so doing, Sally demonstrates that tiny houses act as enabling architectures that open up other ways of being. The idea of enabling places not only links to Ward's (1976) work on dweller control but also to a longer lineage and continuing scholarship on health geography debates about places being active in processes of recovery and wellbeing (Duff, 2011; 2012). Interestingly, several of my participants also spoke about trauma and recovery in different contexts; Della remarked that tiny house living allowed her to undo some of the generational patterns from her unhappy childhood, and Avery shared that her tiny house enabled her to give her daughter a childhood she will not have to recover from.

Diwata and Sally each experienced a more traditional type of motherhood in that they are both the biological parents of their children. During a conversation with Julia, a software

developer who had just finished constructing a trailer-based tiny house in South Carolina, she pointed out that some kinds of tiny house living do not support other forms of parenthood.

“My partner and I have talked about if we ever want to foster or adopt; that's not possible with a tiny house. You can't foster a kid who doesn't have a room of their own. So, if we're talking about true sustainability and actually giving back to our community, I don't know if tiny houses are necessarily the solution.” (Julia, 30, South Carolina).

Again, the tension between freedom and constraint, which is symptomatic of tiny house living, is foregrounded here, since whilst Julia was able to enjoy enhanced financial freedom due to the lower cost of living in her tiny house, her ability to choose to expand her family and become a foster carer is constrained by the legal conditions of fostering in South Carolina and the material smallness of her home. As in so many cases, the physical size of the tiny house is the mechanism by which both increased freedoms and decreased freedoms are wrought. Julia raises an excellent critique about the myriad different ways that sustainability can be conceived by highlighting that some aspects are precluded by tiny house living.

6.4 Work That Isn't Really Work: Labours of Love

On many occasions throughout the interviews, women would talk about the work they put into designing and building their homes, the work they would like to do more of in an ideal world, and the work they do more of now since living in their tiny house - like chopping wood and growing vegetables and washing their clothes by hand. The elective labour of growing food and washing clothes, for example, whilst very demanding, was not parsed in the same tone as activities undertaken in the labour market for a wage. Every woman I spoke to mentioned that they wanted to spend less time at work having their labour exploited for

profit, though they did not always phrase it in those specific terms. There was an enduring sense of scepticism about the current normative social arrangement of having a paid job as the centrifugal organising force of human life. In summary, they wanted to spend less time being employed and spend more time working for and with themselves. The women I spoke with told stories of self-improvement through developing skills like painting, writing, massage, foreign languages, animal husbandry, voluntary work in their communities, pro-environmental work and all manner of other gainful ways to spend their time which did not involve being managed or waged.

The women I spoke with wanted more agency, and agency was spoken about as something which was incompatible with employment. The incompatibility of agency and employment is a useful framing through which to consider individual attempts at enhancing personal freedom since employees are definitionally engaged in a political relationship of control and subservience to their employer (Frayne, 2015; Marmot, et al., 1991). Katrina was 30 years old when we spoke and worked in hospitality in Yorkshire. During our conversation, Katrina linked the freeing up of mortgage obligations with the freeing up of time that would no longer have to be spent in paid employment. She further went on to frame both mortgage and rental commitments as “*dead money*”, suggesting that she does not endorse the common Western idea of accumulating equity through owning property as an asset via the repayment of a mortgage loan.

“Yeah I think just having like my own land and not having a mortgage, just that obviously frees up a lot of time. And I know you have to put a bit more work in in terms of your water supply and keeping warm, like chopping wood for the wood burn and stuff like that, but it's like quite an enjoyment. And growing your vegetables, I just think that kind of lifestyle just

appeals to me a lot more than actually like, you know, paying towards a mortgage or paying towards rent which is just kind of like dead money in effect.” (Katrina, 30, Yorkshire)

Here, Katrina delineated the kinds of work that she aspired to spend more of her time engaging in and rhetorically juxtaposed these against the kinds of work that she associated with a lifestyle in which mortgage or rent is the deciding factor in how a person spends their time. Rather than abandoning the central place of work in her life, Katrina outlines a pivoting away from the obligations of paid employment that is created by the heavy burden of accommodation payments and instead focuses on the central place of labour which is necessary to meet her day-to-day basic needs of water, heat, and food. As was the case in several interviews with other women, she references the mortgage as being emblematic of the strictures of employment and time poverty. She references physical tasks like gardening, growing food, and chopping wood to illustrate the new and different kinds of self-directed work that she associated with agency and enhanced freedom.

Like Katrina, Gem also talked about the kinds of labour she was looking forward to doing more of once she moved into her tiny house in The Netherlands. Gem was 25 when we spoke and had recently graduated with a degree in design. She was in the process of building a timber-framed tiny house in a community of nine other dwellings in The Netherlands in a designated tiny house community that was being supported by the local authority.

To return to a quote from earlier in the chapter, Gem observed: *“I am hoping to live with more free time. I’m thinking of having a job like three days a week and in the other days make a life that is self-sufficient, so um having a garden and growing the vegetables and making my own bread, mending my own clothing, doing laundry by hand all those things.”* (Gem, 25, The Netherlands).

Gem's desire to do her laundry by hand would likely be considered quite extreme in the highly automated, wealthy global north. She explained her intention to wash her clothes, grow her food, and mend her clothes in the context of a strongly felt dedication to living more ecologically and reducing her carbon footprint to the greatest extent possible. Her posture towards pro-environmental life included a profound reduction in her consumption habits as well as living as much off-grid as she could manage. Her commitment to living more sustainably required a great deal of labour, but she did not phrase these tasks as being work since she started the conversation by explaining that she hoped to live with more free time. For Gem, activities like making bread and mending clothing are included in the ways she will spend her free time, and are contrasted with how she will spend time in the other three days of the week in her job.

Gem's story highlights further tensions of tiny housing as a spatial solution to structural issues. Gem talks about having more time to perform labour by hand, which traditionally and historically were the time-consuming activities that were viewed as problematic because they kept women in the unpaid domestic sphere. Nuances arise here in relation to ecological living and the enduring gendered differences in efforts towards low-carbon living (Dicaprio, 2018; Brough et al., 2016; Swim, Gillis, and Hamaty, 2020). Diwata's commitment to home-schooling, Gem's desire to wash and mend clothes by hand, and Katrina's appetite to chop wood for fuel and grow her own food make the tiny house come into relief as a partial return to a pre-industrial state of economic relations where the home was also a kind of workshop, predominantly run by unpaid women. The complexities here between women's narratives of expanding agency and the highly gendered nature of the tasks they describe exemplifies the tensions inherent in the idea of tiny houses as a spatial response to structural problems.

Like Katrina and Gem, Tina also spoke about tasks, especially manual labour, that she was looking forward to engaging in as part of her progression towards a life of amplified time freedom through building a tiny house. Tina was 38 when we spoke and was living in a flat in London whilst preparing to move back to Ireland to undertake her tiny house project. She discussed her excitement about acquiring new skills through the work required to convert a van into a living space.

“I’m so excited, I’ve literally been like days, months, looking up van conversions and videos. I thought I was going to do a school bus or something big, but now I’m like maybe a Citroen Berlingo or something like that, just something small to give me that freedom while I’m trying to save for a tiny house. I just want to learn all those kinds of things, like I think when I was younger I was quite obsessed with the idea of buying houses and flipping them and learning all the skills to do things like electrics, plumbing, all that. I’d love to do all that. So I think I see it as a challenge and I want to learn everything along the way.” (Tina, 38, London).

Converting a van into a living space is a demanding and labour-intensive project, especially since Tina expected to work alone. Despite the numerous demands this project would make of her, she discussed with visible excitement the learning opportunities and skill-building that she was looking forward to. It is perhaps significant that for Katrina, Gem, and Tina, the tasks they seemed happy to undertake were all self-directed work they chose to be involved in. No boss or manager will reprimand these women for not mending their clothes, growing their vegetables, or plumbing their sinks, nor are there any key performance indicators to meet. The only indicators these women have to consider in undertaking these various tasks are their inclinations and appetites.

6.5 Confirming and Denying Neoliberal Capitalism

The logics of capitalism demand consumer-citizens to express identity through consumption and work, teaching that all aspects of human life must be embroiled in market transactions (Solimano, 2014). As a complementary state arm of this economic ideology, the logics of welfare bureaucracy exist to prevent unemployed people from realising alternative priorities or abandoning participation in capitalism altogether (Beatty and Fothergill, 2018; Frayne, 2015). I argue that tiny houses play a role in popularising and making possible new ways of realising alternative priorities (Wilson and Wadham, 2023). The women I interviewed for this thesis demonstrated ongoing scrutiny towards the idea of expressing identity through paid work. The original data I present in this chapter highlights women's critique that neoliberal capitalism's promise of fulfilling work and finding meaning in the marketplace is empty. This flowchart of realisations was often credited with catalysing their initial move into a tiny house and, subsequently, is what solidified their commitment to their ongoing life inside this new home and this new way of being. In their stories, tiny houses unfold as both a physical and an imaginative space where different world orders can be conceived and enacted.

Maja lived in South Carolina in a trailer-based tiny house that she was in the process of completing when we spoke. At one point during our conversation, she clarified her view that not only is traditional employment unfulfilling, but it is also counter to our evolutionary predilections as a species.

“It's all about time or money, which do you value? Because if I work a 40 hour a week job at a place I, you know, may or may not care for, you know I'm giving them all my energy and then I have to hire out things like building a tiny, because I just won't have the time. I just think that you can work your life away working for somebody else, or or even for yourself, and totally miss life. Like we didn't grow and evolve to sit eight hours a day at a desk. And

we're training little drones in society now, that's what the school systems are training them to be little desk monkeys, and I just think that there's more to life than that, more to life than just wishing your life away for the weekend." (Maja, 33, South Carolina).

Echoing Amy's critique of her experience with her school career advice, Maja's critique charts a broader disillusionment with societal institutions like education as well as conventional employment by highlighting the production-line-like chain of education being used to prepare young people to accept unfulfilling "*desk monkey*" jobs in the future (Frayne, 2015; Graeber, 2019). Maja's analysis establishes her derision towards the neoliberal vision of individual competition and participation in the marketplace as the only legitimate means of distributing resources and opportunities (Gilbert, 2003). Despite this, her answer to extracting herself from these systems of social reproduction is itself a highly individualised response. Part of her tiny house's heterotopic function is that it provides both a literal and a figurative zone of exclusion away from the norms and practices she so clearly derides, where she can manifest the values and habits that feel natural or preferable to her. In other words, her tiny house is a place that can transform interconnections between people, space, and culture (Saldanha, 2008).

When Maja spoke about "*missing life*" and not being able to build her own tiny house because her time would belong to her employer, she was identifying the situation that Graeber documents when he writes: "A worker's time is not his [sic] own; it belongs to the person who bought it." (2019, p. 102). Maja used the image of the "*desk*" as the emblem of the unfulfilling, time-consuming, and repetitive drone-like activity that she presented as constituting the majority of employment that causes most people to "*totally miss life*". Nevertheless, her analysis remains couched in terms of individual choice rather than structurally imposed limitations. She asks rhetorically, "*It's all about time or money, which*

do you value?” suggesting that once a person has decided which resource they value the most between time and money, they are then adequately prepared to forge a life which aligns with their preference. Maja’s emphasis on a framework of individual choice evidences the efficacy with which neoliberal ideology refutes its own specificity and historicity, instead presenting itself as a logical, common-sense approach to life (Gilbert, 2003, p. 12).

Like Maja, Della also recounted how she felt she was missing out on life when she lived in a more traditional home and worked more traditional hours. She shared about the harried and “*crazy*” working life she used to endure before she moved into her tiny home. Her narrative highlights the mutually sustaining social processes of financialised life and entrapment in paid labour, rendering the assetised home visible as a fulcrum of her experience of time, energy, and affective states:

“Before...I worked a crazy amount of hours to pay the bills and I burnt out, um so now I do all these fun jobs just to make the money that I need. It's very different. As much as I don't have a lot of disposable income, I'm not having to work my ass off to pay for a McMansion. I can't speak for all the tiny house people, but I think I'm way more in the present moment, yeah, you get to enjoy life right now. I'm not constantly thinking about making sure I have enough money to pay my bills. I don't have to worry about that, I get to just enjoy today which is really nice.” (Della, 41, Ontario).

In this quote, Della locates the major financial burden which tied her to working “*a crazy amount of hours*” as being her previous house, or, the “*McMansion*”. The way Della evokes the pervasiveness of her previous anxiety about making enough money to support the cost of her home and bills is striking; she had to work her “*ass off*”, and was “*constantly thinking about*” having enough money to meet her basic expenses, all of which revolved around the

home. The psychological toll of this kind of perpetual anxiety is well-documented in the literature (Horgan, 2021; Ryle, 2008). In contrast to the preoccupation with money and spending a “*crazy amount of hours*” at work, Della now reports that the absence of the mortgage linked to her ‘McMansion’ and her more affordable life in her tiny house means she doesn’t “*have to worry about that*”, and that now she “*gets to just enjoy today*”.

As Della touched on earlier in the chapter (“*husband, success, you know like, busy, expensive, career, and a beautiful home*”), the home can be viewed as a symbol which represents the idealised outcome of being a successful worker under capitalism, and so performs an essential role in disciplining attitudes towards different ways of living and working (Graff, 2012; Woodward, 2003). Subsequently, the presence of affordable, mobile tiny houses in a neighbourhood provides a two-pronged attack on the routines of affluent areas. Firstly, the connotations of poverty and associated stereotypes of drug use or a ‘hippy’ way of life may be interpreted as a threat to the financial investment in traditional homes and the obligation to work that underpins this. Secondly, the value systems presented by tiny houses offer a stark juxtaposition to the normative value system endorsed by typical larger homes and may be seen to undermine or cast aspersions over the working, spending, and living habits of these more traditional residents. Indeed, Aine mentions that the differing values that tiny houses can be read as endorsing are why some people are averse to them being put into traditional suburbs.

“I’m not sure if a lot of people associate tiny houses with a very kind of left-wing, hippie, alternative community which maybe they don’t want to be anywhere near.” (Aine, 41, Portugal).

Aine locates the disapproval of tiny houses within a class-based rubric by designating tiny houses as left-wing and hippie, political categories notable for advocating for more fairly distributed resources. Her description foregrounds how tiny houses and the people who live in them can be seen as rejecting neoliberal capitalism and advocating, by their very existence, values based more centrally on equality, sharing, and other ‘hippy’ qualities. Invoking the moniker of ‘left-wing’ might be variously associated with more distributive fiscal policy and movements like the four day work week or universal basic income, all the way over to strong left politics like socialism and communism (Banerjee, Niehaus, and Suri, 2019; Bidadanure, 2019; Frayne, 2016). This, too, supports an analysis of tiny homes as being capable of both confirming and denying neoliberal ideals because policies like the four day work week and UBI are not by their nature anti-capitalist and, in many ways, function to sustain capitalist realism (Bidadanure, 2019; Fisher and Gilbert, 2013). I argue that the same can be said for tiny houses.

6.6 Summary

This chapter has presented data which explores the links between tiny houses and practices of contemporary resistance to modern working culture. Data presented in this chapter provides a novel contribution to understanding contemporary responses to the neoliberal, austerity-driven financial landscape epitomised by wage stagnation, growing inequality between the rich and the poor, and widespread dissatisfaction with work. Specific insight into the narratives of women tiny house residents illuminates how altering their engagement with paid work transformed their self-image and quality of life, specifically because women are shown to be undervalued, underpaid, and under-promoted in the paid workforce (Francis-Devine, 2021; Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007; Living Wage Foundation, 2022). The chapter also

explored women's changed experiences of unpaid labour after living in a tiny house. The original data showed how tiny houses were sometimes being used by women specifically to bring about changes in their gendered experience of unpaid labour, like Della who described how her tiny house enabled her to release imposed ideas of success like "*expensive, big house, busy, husband*" so that she could create a life focused around what her "*heart truly wants*". Also like Avery, who described how living in a tiny house allowed her to "*get rid of one whole man*" so that she could live alone and in peace and give her daughter "*a childhood she would not have to recover from.*"

Specifically, this chapter has contributed new insight into the ways in which women report using tiny houses as a technology to attenuate the adverse effects of archetypal gender roles in their lives, particularly in the arena of unpaid domestic labour. Answering the call to consider the home not as a bounded spatial arena but as an amorphous set of events comprised of social encounters (Friedman, 2010), the original research presented in this chapter has contributed to complicating sociological engagement with how homes co-create the lives of the people who live in them. By interrogating how tiny houses are conceptualised and experienced by the women who live in them as part of a cosmology of personal agency, new insight into how tiny houses become attributed with the transformative power of enabling women to adjust their relationship with paid and unpaid labour has been offered.

The data presented in this chapter tracks shifts in how women are trying to spend their time and how they are deliberately using tiny houses to do this. Their stories speak to the work of Graeber (2019), who writes persuasively on the difference between having a life versus taking refuge in fleeting moments of "compensatory consumerism" (Graeber, 2019, p. 252). For example, we heard from Amy, who recounted that she was so exhausted from work that

she was spending much of the money she earned there on just such compensatory commodities - coffee, alcohol, takeout food, and services to get her through the day. In contrast, now she experiences a level of peace she did not know was possible before living in a tiny house. The chapter has contributed to existing scholarship on the reclamation of citizen control through architecture and on the ways in which people are refusing the cult of work. It highlights how tiny houses can be understood as practical techniques mobilised in rejecting and dismantling authoritarian types of organisation and replacing them with more self-governed, self-directed ways of life. The chapter argues that the tiny house movement represents a broader critique of contemporary capitalist society and that women are using tiny houses to carve out new and different ways of working and contributing to the world around them with a specific view to liberating their time from mortgage encumbrance and the obligation to paid labour that this demands.

This chapter explored the metamorphosis of the place of work over the last century into “a bizarre sadomasochistic dialectic whereby we feel that pain in the workplace is the only possible justification for our furtive consumer pleasures” (Graeber, 2019, p. 252). It is this process that Maja invoked when she stated that some people spend all their time working and end up missing out on their lives. It is also what Amy identified when she told the story of not wanting life to pass her by. It is inflected in the heartbreak she recounted when she was advised at the culmination of her schooling that she should ‘be’ a data analyst for an HR company. It is what Petra spoke about when she said she did not want her time and energy to “*get caught by a full time job*”. Taken together, the narratives presented in this chapter confirm the enduring relevance of work like Graber’s (2019) whilst also contributing a novel analysis of how women are using tiny houses to question, interrupt, and change the impact of modern working cultures in their lives.

This chapter explored how decades of wage stagnation coupled with increasingly insecure working conditions in a context of intensifying neoliberal monetary and social policy has left women particularly disillusioned and exhausted and locked out of home ownership (Graeber, 2019; Hoolachan, et al. 2017; Weeks, 2016). I presented data that showed how women and mothers are especially penalised by modern working cultures as they are overwhelmingly still expected to perform unpaid emotional labour and care work whilst also being active in the waged labour market for less pay than their male counterparts (Chatzitheochari & Arber, 2012; Oakley, 2019). The accounts explored in this chapter demonstrate novel contemporary examples of how women are critically engaging with inherited cultures of overwork and identity-making through employment. Women like Maja deliberately came to tiny houses so that they did not have to endorse being a “*desk monkey*” and end up “*missing out on life*”. Several women described that they were using their tiny houses to realise their goal of working in the labour market for only two or three days a week. Petra wanted to use her liberated time to create art; Gem wanted to use her liberated time to make bread, hand wash her clothes, and grow vegetables. Katrina also wanted to spend her time chopping wood and being outside, rather than taking on mortgage or rent payments and then spending her time working to afford the “*dead money*”.

The chapter suggests that within female populations interested in the tiny house movement, there is significant activity being done to disentangle the self from normative working cultures (Gollain, 2016; Graeber, 2019; Kennedy, Krahn and Krogman, 2013). Particular attention was paid to how women were using tiny houses to interrogate and disagree with inherited ideas about gendered work. This was exemplified by Sally, who explained that she and her husband decided to live in a tiny house specifically because it would unlock their

ability to co-parent equally rather than being forced to replicate archaic and unsatisfying patriarchal gender norms around who earns money and who does unpaid labour. Despite this, tiny houses are not a panacea of equality and liberation. Julia explored how living in a tiny house makes her ineligible to foster due to laws about having separate bedrooms in South Carolina, demonstrating that whilst tiny houses may enhance the capacity of some women to live in alignment with their values, in other instances, tiny houses diminish this same capacity.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In the aftermath of the 2008 global recession, tiny houses gained significant traction (Mangold and Zschau, 2019; Shearer, 2018; Weetman, 2018; Willoughby and Collins, 2018). The increasing popularity of tiny houses has been theorised to be a response to the intersecting crises of the affordable housing shortage, environmental destruction, and the dramatically escalating cost of living (Anson, 2018; Crawford and Stephan, 2020; Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017). The affordable housing crisis, recognised as a global human rights crisis, is particularly pronounced in countries that uphold conservative, neoliberal policy and cultural agendas, including but not limited to the UK, Ireland, Australia, and the USA, where the crisis is notably acute (Arundel and Doling, 2017; Beswick, Imilan, and Olivera, 2019; Lund, 2019). It is also in these locations where the uptake of tiny houses has been noted as being particularly strong, which suggests that the adoption of tiny houses may occur in response to environments of constraint and limited choice (Mangold and Zschau, 2019; Shearer and Burton, 2021; Willoughby and Collins, 2018).

It is of academic interest to understand the lived experiences of tiny house inhabitants since research indicates that the quality and security of housing plays a pivotal role in moderating quality of life, including mental and physical well-being (García-Mira et al., 2017; Streimikiene, 2015; Suglia, Duarte and Sandel, 2011). Moreover, the home has emerged as a powerful site of both doing and undoing gender (Galinsky, Aumann, and Bond, 2013; Mallett, 2004). The implications of consumerism and its economic and environmental effects

are also closely tied to the home (Meissner, 2019; Saunders and Williams, 1988; Woodward, 2003). In light of these multifaceted issues, this thesis aimed to explore the unique experiences of women who live in tiny houses. Although prior scholarship has explored the motivations and outcomes of tiny house living (see for example Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017; Shearer, 2019; Shearer and Burton, 2021) a comprehensive examination of the gendered experiences of women had, to the best of my knowledge, yet to be undertaken.

The narratives marshalled throughout this thesis highlight the tensions between capitalist imperatives and human values and reveal the potential for tiny houses to serve as a means of resistance. Through their personal journeys, the women in this thesis have demonstrated the power of reclaiming agency and creating a sense of purpose and fulfilment that is not solely defined by gendered and market-driven exchanges. These examples offer valuable insights into how women can challenge dominant societal norms and systems and pave the way for a more equitable and sustainable future.

Throughout the thesis, the imperfect and contradictory semantics of work, consumption, and relating in these women's lives have been acknowledged. It is this very quality of multiplicity and unsolvability that renders heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) the ideal conceptual tool with which to hold and consider the data. It is thanks to heterotopia's characterisation as a site "that represents incompatible spaces and reveals paradoxes" (Sudradjat, 2012, p. 29) that the concept can be so usefully and applied to analysing what women are doing in and with their tiny houses. Heterotopias are, above all, spaces of pluriformity and possibility, and these qualities have been rendered visible through the narratives of the women presented in this thesis

7.2 Answering the Research Questions

I will now offer a detailed summary of the conclusions drawn in response to each research question.

In light of the growing significance of the tiny house movement and the under-researched phenomena of women's experiences in this arena, this thesis set out to answer three core questions:

1. How are women using tiny houses to reconfigure their relationship with and experience of capitalism and patriarchy?

This core question centred around examining whether and how tiny houses intersect with efforts towards loosening the grip that patriarchal neoliberal capitalism, the cult of work, and the pressure towards productivity has on these women's lives. Drawing from Frayne's (2015) writing, this research question took steps towards better understanding those individuals who resist the colonisation of their lives by contemporary economic demands. Women's reconfigured experiences of capitalism and patriarchy often hinged on experiencing heightened levels of agency through dweller control (Ward, 1976). Uniquely, this thesis added an examination of how women are using tiny houses to change limiting gendered expectations and the pressures of patriarchy and instead carve out new or different ways of working and contributing to the world around them as women. This analysis was enhanced and problematised by considering the tension between expansions and shrinkages in their lives through the lens of the slender body (Bordo, 2003).

My aim was that data collected in response to this question might contribute to feminist literature on how housing affects well-being, specifically in relation to women's responses to the affordable housing crisis. The literature already shows that the quality of housing impacts quality of life. However, there was very little literature on the quality of a small space or on the power of self-build to shape gendered understandings of the self. Interwoven with this overarching research question were adjacent areas of interest, such as how multiple needs are synergistically met through tiny houses, what the effect on women's identity is, and how this experience impacts their perception and understanding of their own gender.

This thesis provides the first comprehensive investigation of how women are using tiny houses to change their experience of capitalist patriarchy. This research has shown for the first time that some women specifically and deliberately use tiny houses as a way to escape patriarchal relations, both at home and in the workplace. Therefore, a contribution of this research has been to confirm that a constraining factor in women's ability to 'opt out' of heteronormative patriarchal relations is the cost of housing and women's comparative financial hardship due to the pay gap and the burden of carrying out the majority of unpaid labour. The data presented in the findings chapter on work makes a strong case for supporting the significant and meaningful impact that a reduced cost of living has on residents. All women reported that their cost of living had decreased after living in a tiny house, which was responsible for a cascade of other quality-of-life improvements.

In summary, tensions between conforming and resisting presented by the women in this thesis illuminated how resisting *the ways in which* capitalism and patriarchy affected their lives was valuable; it is not the case that their forays into tiny house living were futile simply because capitalism and patriarchy continue to exist and have not been undone by their

actions. In response to research question one, the data suggests that tiny houses can function as simultaneously physical and imaginative heterotopic spaces where alternative world orders can be imagined and embodied (Foucault, 1984).

The second research question of this thesis was:

2. What do women say about how their experience of designing and building their own home impacted them?

Data gathered in response to this question was used to frame and understand the processes and practices of building a tiny house from a gendered lens. Narrative data collected in relation to this question was used to better understand broader overarching influences that linked women's experiences of the tiny house movement across continents. This thesis revealed how transitioning into the heterotopic space of a tiny house could catalyse multifaceted layers of identity change in residents, often by enabling a sense of enhanced agency through dweller control (Ward, 1976). From this perspective, tiny houses could be seen as an incubation space where multiple assumptions, beliefs, and values could be critically engaged with and questioned, often taking women through a process of metamorphosis.

In so doing, this thesis adds to the small but growing academic literature on tiny houses by considering the specific experience of women who live in them (see for example Wilson and Wadham, 2023). Whilst general motivations for tiny house living have highlighted the catalytic force of the affordable housing crisis and a generally expressed desire for a lower carbon lifestyle, especially from younger generations, this research makes an original

contribution to understanding the significance of tiny houses to women. The data presented in this thesis contributes to the scholarly work on how identity is (re)formulated around house and home.

This investigation disclosed fresh insight into how women's understanding of their own gender can be shifted by completing the design and or building of their own tiny home. The data showed that the design and build experience acted as a vehicle for self-reflection, challenging internalised misogyny and expanding women's sense of capability. Not only did the women in this study gain new skills, such as using sketch up, negotiating prices with tiny house builders, undertaking carpentry, and learning metal work, but they also reported gaining a stronger belief in their future ability to take on further unfamiliar challenges. Since the dominant patriarchal conception of femininity is falsely rooted in women being frail, vulnerable, and in need of protection, the experience of taking ownership of the tiny house project was revealed as having transformative powers for the women in this study. In this way, this thesis has provided an original contribution to understanding the particular impact of tiny houses as heterotopic spaces on the reformulation of gender identity, and points to potential future applications of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) and dweller control (Ward, 1976) as tools in the feminist struggle.

The third and final research question of this thesis was:

3. (How) are women's lives different before versus after living in a tiny home?

Living tiny was presented as a lens through which women could gain a different insight into their entrenched habits of working, buying, and relating. After living in a tiny house, women

described feeling more aware of how their consumption practices linked to global impacts on inequality, the environment, pollution, and landfill, demonstrating a posture towards using their homes to reduce waste and harm (Pickerill, 2016). Many women positioned tiny house living as being a catalyst to live in a more ‘deliberate’ and ‘intentional’ way regarding what they bought or how they worked and why, in contrast to their historical habits of unconsidered or default consumerism. Vocabulary around centring values of intentionality and deliberateness reinforces the usefulness of using dweller control (Ward, 1974) as a theoretical lens to understand the experiences of these women.

It was common for the women in this study to discuss how their tiny house changed their experience of both paid and unpaid work, and in this sense, their experiences fundamentally supported the usefulness of heterotopia as outlining how tiny houses helped to create alternative world orderings (Foucault, 1984; Saldanha, 2008). Likewise, women’s narratives around their experience of enhanced agency further illustrated the value of using dweller control (Ward, 1976) as an analytical tool in positioning their reflective accounts of using the built environment to reclaim power.

A further contribution of this thesis lies in exploring the ways in which Bordo’s (2003; 2018) theory of the slender body can be applied to narratives of feminine self-control and self-denial in discussing the virtues of tiny houses. Women routinely used a moralising rhetoric which positioned the shrunk or ‘slender’ proportions of tiny houses as being ethically superior to their ‘obese’ counterparts, McMansions being the archetypal trope of this type of excessive consumption. Just as women are praised for taking up less space by disciplining their physical bodies into petite and archetypally attractive (heteropatriarchally defined) shapes, likewise, this thesis found that some women were casting their tiny houses through a

similarly mode of 'less is more', where self-denial and restriction brought a sense of pride and accomplishment. This analysis sits alongside the analysis of how women themselves report using their tiny houses as a deliberate tool in distancing themselves from the expectations of domestic patriarchy in other forms. Crucially, tiny houses were presented as enabling some women to live alone, thereby enabling them to reject the subtle and overt gendered expectations of providing emotional and domestic labour to a household. Overall, the analysis draws out how women used tiny houses as opportunities to carve out new gender identities but also invoked the perpetuation of patriarchal ideas of feminine slenderness and restraint.

Particularly during discussions around design, what emerged from women's accounts was a trend of increased agency and confidence. I argue that it makes sense to consider agency and confidence as resources in a person's life, and so the design and build of these women's tiny houses was intimately linked to, perhaps, less of a reallocation of resources and more of a genesis of resources. It is in the genesis of feelings of agency and confidence that the heterotopic function of tiny houses is revealed. Women contrasted their lives before living tiny with their lives post living tiny. Before, they identified constraints and discomfort in their lives around financial constriction, jobs they found unsatisfying, being time-poor, and being beleaguered by unequal burdens of domestic labour. After living in a tiny house, at least some elements of this 'outside' or 'before' world were recalibrated or became inverted.

Whilst it is not the case that every woman reported a neat transition to their new heterotopic life in a tiny house where all of their previous grievances were ameliorated, every woman did report that some of their prior circumstances had been improved after living in a tiny house.

A novel finding revealed in the data gathered around the design and build process is how unexpected the genesis of resources like agency and confidence were for the women in this research. It was common for women to express surprise around how much, how significant, and how impacting the enhancement of their sense of independence and confidence was.

Several women explicitly stated that they wondered if they would even be able to complete the project. Others shared that they doubted their abilities beforehand. The heterotopic and agency-enhancing power of the construction process was revealed in the inversion of these beliefs once the tiny house had been completed (Foucault, 1984; Ward, 1976). Women often entered into the venture of building or buying a tiny house because of financial constraints but emerged from the experience unexpectedly transformed; their perception of themselves enhanced by their triumphs in overcoming the many hurdles associated with building and living in a tiny house.

7.3 Theoretical Contributions

This thesis has been conceptually rooted in the work of three core scholars: Foucault's (1984) heterotopia, Ward's (1976) dweller control, and Bordo's (2003) slender body. In examining the research questions through the tripartite lens of heterotopia, dweller control, and the slender body, this thesis has made novel contributions to understanding how women are using tiny houses to reclaim control over various aspects of their lives, including physical control over their home, broader control over their work hours, and a shift in questioning the dominant social norms around the superiority of cohabiting in a conventional mortgage leveraged house. In the context of increasingly discredited norms of heterosexual marriage and rampant neoliberal policy making, which has strangled the affordable housing market,

tiny houses emerge as a potential lifeline for some women to remake the confines of their lives.

The tripartite theoretical framework of dweller control (Ward, 1976), heterotopia (Foucault 1984), and the slender body (Bordo, 2003) has been used to offer a novel analytical contribution to the scholarly area of sociology of the home, gendered responses to the housing and cost of living crisis, and has brought further nuance to scholarly appreciation of how people are resisting the colonising forces of work in their everyday lives (Frayne, 2015; 2016). The original research presented in this thesis contributes to the sociological understanding of the home and how it shapes the lives of its inhabitants (see, for example, de Botton, 2007; Pickerill, 2016; Woodward, 2003). The idea that the home is not just a physical space but a complex and dynamic set of social encounters is a central theme.

By exploring how women conceptualise and experience tiny houses, the thesis offers a nuanced perspective on the ways in which tiny houses can be understood as a technology for personal agency, enabling women to transform their relationship with paid and unpaid labour, consumption, and with themselves. Overall, the thesis provides a critical perspective on the role of tiny houses in contemporary society and how they can be understood as a means of resistance to the dominant cultural and economic norms that perpetuate gendered inequality and exploitation. The original findings underscore the importance of considering alternative lifestyles and housing arrangements to better understand the challenges women face in the modern world and identify how women themselves are responding to these challenges. I will now review the three main theoretical contributions that this thesis makes.

Firstly, this thesis contributes to theoretical understandings of heterotopia, as women were revealed to be using tiny houses as a way to invert a multitude of social norms. For instance, where dominant patriarchal norms cast women as incapable and passive, this thesis showed that women used the designing and physical construction of their tiny houses to contest this sexist archetype. By taking their housing situation literally into their own hands, the women in this thesis created a heterotopic liminal zone whereby they continued to exist in the broadly unchanged environment of patriarchy but also acted as living disagreements with the social norms that would define them as incapable of mastering the masculinised skills associated with building a home. This thesis revealed how the heterotopic experience of women triumphing over adversity, learning new skills, and ultimately succeeding in designing and or building a tiny home had long-lasting impacts on reformulating their ideas about themselves as women.

This thesis further contributes to academic work on heterotopia by demonstrating how the tiny home can act as a refuge away from the ‘outside world’ where new and different norms can be introduced and become entrenched. The women in this thesis showed how their tiny houses allowed the transposing of inherited or taken-for-granted gender norms. As a result, tiny houses were revealed as an emergent contemporary example of heterotopia being created and enacted. Relatedly, this finding has implications for areas of further research and for practical, applied ramifications, such as strategically using tiny houses as part of a wider social justice program.

The second theoretical contribution of this thesis fits within understandings of folk solutions to the global affordable housing shortage. Specifically, this thesis extends Colin Ward’s theorising on how dweller control is achieved through anarchist practices within housing by

exposing new and emerging manifestations of dweller control efforts outside of the traditional routes into housing. This thesis contributes to understandings of modern manifestations of anarchist efforts to achieve dweller control in the post-2008-crisis, post-coronavirus landscape of unprecedentedly high property prices - both in purchasing and renting - as well as high job insecurity and a significant year-on-year decrease in relative purchasing power for the average citizen. This thesis uncovers how women are attempting to align themselves with an alternative vision of homeownership that they have been raised to revere by incorporating quasi-anarchic problem-solving to the issue of housing (Byrne, 2020; Hoolachan, et al., 2017; Shaw, 2018). This thesis further extends the usefulness of Ward's (1976) dweller control in relation to women's gendered feelings of agency and empowerment in being able to customise their houses in ways that enable them to live their lives and use their time in ways they find more fulfilling.

The third theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in revealing how Bordo's (2003) conceptual work on the slender body can be applied to the tiny housing movement as a form of regulatory self-control. This thesis exposed how the process of constructing a moral identity of superiority around practices of self-denial can be applied to the tiny housing movement; specifically the way that feminised self-denial manifests itself through the women who live in tiny houses as a way to alter their relationship with capitalism and patriarchy. This thesis provides examples of how ambivalent actions around resisting capitalism and patriarchy can be when these actions take place within the same systems they aim to subvert. For example, just as women have been shown to claim that adhering to patriarchal expectations of how they should look 'feels good', i.e. they are rewarded for conforming, so have women in this thesis expressed a sense of pleasure and pride in conforming to the neoliberal ideal of the self-optimising, non-state reliant self by finding an individual solution

to the structurally imposed problems. In other words, this thesis contributes further evidence that resistance does not take place without contradiction.

Further, this research extends and strengthens existing literature on the particular area of the tiny house movement and the ways in which neoliberal governance has infiltrated the collective consciousness of even this subcultural group (see, for example, Ford, and Gomez-Lanier, 2017; Shearer and Burton, 2021; Weetman, 2018; Willoughby, Mangold, and Zschau, 2020). The data presented shows how, whilst the destruction caused by the housing crisis and the 2008 financial recession are widely acknowledged, individual women continue to be primarily concerned with what they can personally do to ameliorate the impacts of these structurally imposed limitations on their lives. There was a noticeable lack of conversation on federating collectively or politically around social issues and agitating for policy or systemic change. This research confirms recent scholarship on how some tiny house residents agree with the dominant Western narrative that home ownership is superior to renting and appear willing to compromise their goals in this regard in order to become ‘tiny’ homeowners since conventional channels of becoming a homeowner are not available to them (Carras, 2019).

Despite reinforcing the neoliberal mentality of rule, tiny houses may also function as a critical heterotopic technology in the feminist struggle against limiting sexist beliefs about women and feminine people and against patriarchal oppression more broadly. The data reveals a common strand throughout the experiences of women who have designed and or built their own tiny homes, which is that the experience of doing so directly refuted limiting beliefs and internalised misogyny. This effect was especially evident in the women who had constructed their own homes by hand. Kelly stated that now that she has built her own house, she feels like she can do whatever she wants in life. Similarly, Gem reported how she initially

felt uncomfortable in the masculinised environment of the wood store, but her repeated presence there has taught her that she can overcome the stigma of being a woman in a ‘man’s place’.

A further contribution of this thesis is in illuminating how the tension between rejecting and accepting hegemonic social norms like patriarchal domesticity was also reflected in how women explored their relationship with consumption. The findings presented in this thesis make it clear that a desire to consume less coexists with a perpetual desire to consume, as women reckon with both their anti-consumerist sentiments and their desire for a certain level of material comfort. This thesis supports theorising that consumption continues to perform key roles in identity formation, even in the context of anti-consumerism (see, for example, Douglas and Isherwood, 1996; Hogg, Banister, and Stephenson, 2009; Soper, 1998). During conversations around changed consumption practices, the women in this thesis often highlighted the shifts in their practices as being underpinned by a moralised commitment to environmentally sustainable products, organic food, and higher quality commodities, which were presented as lasting longer thanks to their higher quality and therefore precluding the need to consume more often when things break or cease functioning.

This thesis offered a nuanced exploration of how, whilst tiny houses contain the potential to be used counter-culturally, they are not in and of themselves radical or counter-cultural. That is, it was the activities, values, and beliefs of the women who lived in them that enlivened the tiny houses with a subversive potentiality or not. The thesis showed that tiny houses are not expressly used to highlight alternatives to the status quo. It was examined how, in fact, it was also possible for tiny houses to be used directly to perpetuate a commodified hyper-consumerist neoliberal mentality. Corporate entities are already using tiny houses as rental

units and explicitly refer to them as property investments which still capitalise on the market share of desperate renters or luxury holidaymakers in the name of generating private profit (see, for example, *The Best Luxury Tiny House Holidays*, 2023; *Welcome To Tinywood Homes*, no date).

This thesis does not claim that the way people think about and use tiny houses can be neatly bisected into counter-cultural and conformist groups. Amy specifically referenced all of the components mentioned above: that she wanted a lower carbon footprint, she wanted to work less and experience more, she wanted to buy fewer things, *and* she recognised that she could Airbnb it for a passive income. I hope that this thesis has shown that tiny houses are as multifaceted and contradictory as the people who inhabit them. Further, like the people who live in them, tiny houses are produced under a neoliberal capitalist patriarchal system and are obliged to exist within it. This embeddedness means that both tiny houses and their residents have a fraught and non-linear relationship with the values and power differentials inherent in patriarchal capitalism when they are used to resist or to trouble these same values.

This thesis is also not claiming that every person who engages in designing and or building a tiny house will find empowerment or an expanded sense of capability through the process. The sample of women in this research and the tiny house movement more broadly likely self-selects for those with both the appetite and ability to undertake construction projects. Even those women with no prior construction experience, which was a majority of them, are likely to have come to tiny houses out of some small but fundamental confidence in their ability to learn new skills or ask for help. In summary, it seems likely that engagement in the tiny house movement demands a certain level of social and cultural capital even where financial capital is absent.

7.3.1 Summary of Thematic Contributions

This thesis is the first to use the tripartite theoretical framework of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984), dweller control (Ward, 1976), and the slender body (Bordo, 2003) to analyse the functions and outcomes of tiny house living for women. In so doing, the thesis makes a significant empirical contribution to housing studies literature, particularly scholarly work on tiny houses, and also contributes original research to feminist debates on the intersection of housing and life outcomes (Fertig and Reingold, 2007; Levett, et al., 2003; Maditinos, Papadopoulos, and Prats, 2014; Suglia, Duarte, and Sandel, 2011). The empirical findings of this research make an original contribution to understanding why women, particularly, approach tiny house living.

Existing literature demonstrates that tiny house residents as an undifferentiated cohort report motivations for living tiny as predominantly revolving around financial motivations and a desire for a reduced cost of living (Anson, 2018; Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017). Secondary and tertiary motivations are reported as being related to a desire to consume fewer ‘unnecessary’ products, which tiny house dwellers recast as distracting or stressful, and a desire to reduce personal carbon footprint (Anson, 2018; Crawford and Stephan, 2020). This thesis reveals how the motivating factors listed above are inflected by gendered experiences for women who want to live tiny, highlighting nuances on the particular ways that women are impacted by financial and time constraints by patriarchal domesticity and capitalism. The original contribution of the thesis is significant in this regard as a gendered analysis of women in the tiny house movement is an underdeveloped area of scholarship within the tiny house academic oeuvre.

This thesis exposed how women were using tiny houses to either change or outright escape the perceived limitations and inequalities of domestic patriarchy. The data collected from both single and partnered women, women who were cohabiting with partners and women who lived alone, women with and without children, women in their twenties to women in their sixties, suggests that tiny houses have benefits to offer to many different types of women who have different kinds of lives and families. The prominence of women's stories about how living tiny significantly changed and improved their experience of being in the home as a woman, how tiny living revealed itself as a tool that they could use to shift the gendered expectations of their roles, duties, and responsibilities is significant and worthy of further research.

Despite the many legitimate criticisms levied at tiny houses as being foremost an individualistic response to structurally maintained inequality (Harris, 2018; Milkman, 2016; Willoughby and Collins, 2018), the frequency with which ideas about the importance of sharing, fairness, and community arose in my conversations indicates what Miller also found in his exploration of one hundred households in London, namely that “On the whole, most people seem to feel that being solely an individual is, largely speaking, a failure in life.” (Miller, 2008, p. 208). The data presented in this thesis exemplifies responses to the inherited consumer culture that foregrounds an altruistic concern for the environment, other people, and fairness more generally (Soper, 2008). These women, though from different backgrounds, demonstrate a perception of the harmful and undesirable consequences of consumerist capitalism, which, in turn, offers a logical framing of their seeking alternative ways of living, buying, and relating. To the extent that these women are doing what they can to control and change their own households' expenditure and consumption habits, their choices are individual ones. Nevertheless, this individual activity is undertaken with an

awareness of the compounding effects of the many individual efforts of other tiny housers' around the world.

Whilst the women I interviewed for this thesis came from a range of class, educational, and income contexts, they were united in their stated desire for a less ecologically destructive way of life, a fairer and more affordable living situation, and in their searching for ways to disentangle themselves from compulsory consumption and 'excess' in its varied forms (Pickerill, 2016). In sum, they broadly supported a position of alternative hedonism and expressed their desire to consume differently (Ryle, 2008; Soper, 2008). By choosing to live in tiny homes, these women are challenging the established cultural conventions that dictate how we should live, work and consume. This can be seen as a form of resistance as they are reclaiming their agency and challenging the capitalist notion of home ownership and consumption.

Bordo (2018) argues that because consumers under capitalism are taught to react with desire and longing when presented with the idea of 'new things', since the satisfaction of this appetite is what sustains the economy, that people must devise strong defences or coping mechanisms against capitulating to these desires, or else face ruin. Under this reading, it becomes possible to understand tiny houses as one vestige of these defences against the relentless pressure to consume. Narratives presented by my interviewees straddled both the abandonment of consumerist values and the evangelising of alternative or superior forms of moderated consumption, resulting in a disquieting ambivalence around the ideas of buying and owning. The recurrence of words like 'minimalism' and 'simplifying' in our conversations overlapped with a sometimes moralising tone when discussing the eco-friendly products that some women would now buy, or the reclaimed floorboards they purchased for

their flooring. Rather than eschewing consumerism values altogether, “they seek to oppose clutter and busyness while simultaneously promoting new forms of consumer demand and productivity.” (Meissner, 2019, p. 193).

Whilst the women I spoke to critiqued the logic of accumulation, the shadow of a pro-growth mindset loomed large. Maximising productivity remained foregrounded in many of the conversations, only instead of discussing excelling in employment, the self-optimising growth rhetoric was applied to the project of the self. Tiny houses were presented as freeing up resources that allowed women to ‘work’ on themselves by spending more time doing hobbies, cultivating relationships, building skills, and exercising. That is, accumulation in terms of physical consumer possessions was widely critiqued, but accumulation in terms of maximising productivity was endorsed (Meissner, 2019). In summary, the stories that women shared about their feelings around consumption, accumulation, and productivity extend the evidence of “capitalism’s tendency to appropriate and commodify its own counter-culture” (Meissner, 2019, p. 186). At the same time, these women’s personal choices to live in a tiny house and restrict their ability to buy, consume, and store goods can also be interpreted as the kind of restriction of material conditions which may be effective in contributing to delivering more sustainable ways of life in the West.

Given how difficult it is to envisage a world without capitalism, the imagined, even longed-for, better futures outlined by the women in this research are imbued with a radical potential. Efforts to resist capitalism must, by definition, occur inside a capitalist system. Because of this, it is unavoidable that counter-hegemonic efforts will always cohere in part with capitalist logic (Wilson and Wadham, 2023). Anarchist organisers of any kind must continue to eat, dress, and use resources inextricably tied to capitalist systems of production and exploitation (ibid). Throughout this thesis, the energy of picturing a future of a more fair and equitable

housing and relational environment is not just used but *lived* in opposition to those who assert there is no alternative (Harvey, 2000). The women in this thesis serve as a reminder that struggles against harmful social structures are not confined to the political or economic spheres, but are deeply ingrained in the daily lives of people and communities. Their stories illuminate the potential for both individual and community resistance to disrupt the current social and economic logic and envision a better future for everyone.

The data marshalled in this thesis shows that the dialectical tension between conforming to and resisting dominant norms underscores the value of challenging pervasive structures like capitalism and patriarchy. It would be incorrect to say that women's choices to live in tiny houses are ineffective just because they have not entirely changed the larger systems of capitalism and patriarchy. The findings of this thesis suggest that making tiny houses more easily accessible to vulnerable women could be a valuable accompaniment to existing protections and support put in place for women, especially in protecting women from male violence since a majority of these incidents take place in the home that women share with their abusers. Using tiny houses to enable women to live alone could significantly enhance a woman's ability to enjoy a life free from male violence.

7.4 Repositioning the Researcher

Reflexivity played a crucial role in the generation of this thesis. Of particular value was the inclusion of field journal entries, some of which chart the development of friendships between myself and some participants. For example, as discussed in the methods chapter, during the data collection phase of the thesis, it was revealed by one of the interviewees, Penny, that one of the reasons she gained some solace from constructing her tiny house was

because it temporarily gave her respite, if only briefly, from caring for her disabled husband and terminally ill daughter. On learning this, I was deeply moved. My sincerely held feminist values of mutual aid and an acknowledgement of the life sustaining value of human connection and kindness underpinned my decision to offer a more intimate and ongoing line of communication between Penny and myself. My offer was happily taken up, and resulted in Penny and I becoming pen pals and exchanging several books and letters through the post. This demonstrates the value of feminist praxis in circumnavigating an extractive, colonial approach to research and the human beings involved, but also foregrounds a nuanced understanding of the multiple roles of the researcher and the researched (Letherby, 2003).

The inclusion of field note journal entries charted the challenges I faced in learning how to write empathetically about women's accounts and find some critical distance to explore the contradictions they contained. This methodological approach centres a richly humanising view of what we are doing when we do research and seeks to trouble the fantasy of a removed or objective researcher. By acknowledging and then, crucially, acting on the understanding that the people involved in my research are real human beings with lives as rich and as difficult as my own, networks of mutual aid and care can be created and strengthened through the research process, meaning that the research outcomes include not only reports, journal articles, and PhD theses, but also friendships, happy memories, and the life-enhancing opportunity for human connection.

As part of a commitment to conducting this research with a class-conscious approach, my field note journals offer a level of transparency and a clear expression of the development of my thoughts in layperson's terms. Throughout this thesis, I emphasise my epistemological and ontological position that I am not a removed or objective researcher by using first-person

pronouns and foregrounding my personal feelings about the research stages by including the field note journal excerpts. In charting my own curiosities, struggles, and pleasures along the course of the research process and the decision-making that accompanied it, a richer and more nuanced layer of analysis was presented, not only of the interviewees but also of myself as a researcher. By presenting the un-polished development of my thoughts and ideas alongside presenting the thoughts and ideas of my participants, I hope that a more egalitarian power dynamic is enacted through the write-up of this thesis in accordance with feminist and class-conscious principles (Lietz et al., 2006; Spry, 2001). This methodological approach offered a unique contribution in demonstrating deliberate reflexivity and an active consideration of how my own values and beliefs inevitably affected the phenomena under investigation (Horsburgh, 2003; Lietz et al., 2006).

7.5 Policy Implications

The original contributions and findings of this thesis have implications in applied and policy areas, where, for example, disaster relief efforts in areas stricken by climate events may want to focus their humanitarian efforts on housing and supporting women since women take on the majority of the ‘remaking’ tasks in an area that has been destroyed (Anderlini, 2007). Further, since disturbing events such as flooding, fires, or epi/pandemics are shown to increase the incidences of male violence against women (Sánchez et al., 2020), this thesis provides preliminary evidence that tiny houses may be strategically employed to provide private shelter for women and their dependents. Whilst this thesis did not specifically address the use of tiny houses in interrupting cycles of domestic violence against women, the contribution of this research in evidencing the enhanced self-reported confidence, calmness, and financial stability that women reported suggests that a valuable area for further research

will be in considering how and if tiny houses could be used to support women experiencing domestic violence.

7.6 Research Limitations

This thesis presents only a partial insight into the experience of women who design, build, and live in tiny houses. The research included 33 women from seven countries and cannot be said to offer an understanding of women's experience of tiny houses as a whole. A majority of participants were white, with two black, one Phillipeno, and one mixed-race woman having taken part in the research. This white-skewed demographic spread broadly mirrors existing scholarly work on who makes up the tiny house resident population; however, it is unclear whether this is an accurate portrayal of true tiny house resident demographics or whether issues of accessibility and the nuanced machinations of institutionalised racism and white supremacy make it more difficult to find and recruit racialised tiny house residents. A fertile area for further research lies in finding ways to reach and explore the specific experiences of black and brown women in the tiny house movement.

There are also limitations of the interview method to consider. My conversations with women were brief, lasting between forty and ninety minutes, and were usually a one-off event. The experiences these women related cannot be said to be complete, nor that what they felt on the day of our conversation is representative of what they feel and think most of the time. This snap-shot approach of a one-time conversation definitionally excludes an awareness and analysis of cyclical changes in their experiences as tiny house residents, seasonal differences in their comfort and enjoyment of their tiny homes, and the shifting place-based experience of life, especially for those in mobile tiny houses and converted vans. This thesis does not

claim to recount the ‘whole story’ of my participants nor the female tiny house community more broadly. Factors such as further economic recessions, changes in minimum wage, and changes in planning code and zoning laws would profoundly alter the histories and experiences of the women included in this thesis, which means the analysis and contributions offered here are only a snapshot of a moment.

Because this thesis was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout the associated lockdowns, most interviews took place over Zoom. The specific methodological implications of this are considered in detail in the methods chapter, but it is worth briefly summarising again that building rapport and trust over Zoom presents several challenges. Paralinguistic features and body language are significantly more difficult to observe and respond to, which makes relationship-building much more difficult compared to conversing in person. Many people experienced ‘Zoom fatigue’ as a result of the global shift to working, socialising, and interacting daily over Zoom or similar programs. This may have led to hesitancy or disengagement with the interview process from some or all of the participants. I myself had grown weary of Zoom, and the prospect of conducting yet more interviews through a screen with intermittent sound quality and wifi connectivity sometimes filled me with dread. By my own reckoning, I am fairly confident that this did not excessively degrade my ability to conduct the research nor to be friendly and welcoming to my participants since it was usually easy to reach a level of comfort and enjoyment once the conversation had been established. Nevertheless, it would be remiss not to mention that conducting qualitative sociological research during a global pandemic, several long bouts of isolation, and using only Zoom is not what I had planned or hoped for and will have undoubtedly affected the research in ways that I may not yet fully appreciate. Initially, I hoped to conduct on-site visits and enjoy face-to-face interviews with participants. Given the importance of the materiality

of their tiny houses, I am sorry to have missed the opportunity to experience the embodied presence of their homes alongside these women myself. I hope this is something I can do in the future.

7.7 Future Research

These findings contribute in several ways to scholarly understanding of tiny houses and provide a basis for further research to explore areas including but not limited to the quantitative difference in carbon burden of tiny house lifestyles versus conventionally housed residents, where women and men do share a tiny house is there a meaningful difference in how domestic labour is distributed, do women living with men in tiny houses experience less antagonism or abuse than conventionally housed heterosexual partners, do women who have enjoyed the experience of designing and building their tiny house go on to use these skills elsewhere or attempt things that they suspect they may not otherwise have attempted if it was not for the experience of building their own home?

In the next five to ten years, disrupting climate events are predicted to increase in both frequency and severity (IPCC, 2022). In this context, tiny houses may take on greater significance for the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of climate refugees who are displaced due to droughts, flooding, famine, and fires. This will be especially relevant for women who are more at risk from climate breakdown because they are usually poorer and, therefore, less well equipped to relocate and cope with refugee status. Further, because women's labour predominantly rebuilds displaced and disrupted societies, women's role in resilience in the face of catastrophic climate breakdown will become simultaneously more precarious and more vital than ever before (see Anderlini, 2007).

This thesis has pointed to but not explored in depth the experience of older women living in tiny houses. The experience of older tiny house residents is an important area for future research as women globally hold fewer assets and have smaller pensions than their male counterparts, which leaves them more vulnerable to experiencing deprivation, including homelessness in older age (World Inequality Report, 2022). It may also be beneficial to conduct research into children's experiences of living in a tiny home, as this is also an area in which understanding is lacking.

7.8 Concluding Thoughts

When women recounted their experiences that so many of their goals and values found alignment in their tiny houses as opposed to in their 'before' lives, tiny houses emerged as spaces of hope and a step towards an imagined better future. It is in their capacity as enclaves of hope and imaginaries of alternative futures that tiny houses function as heterotopic spaces (Foucault, 1984). Indeed, hope and imagined better futures continue to play a central role in humanity's ability to survive under the dual forces of capitalism and patriarchy, such that "It seems hard to envision any human context without it." (Ringel, 2021, p. 881). However, the inherent ambiguity of hope and its effects cannot be easily dissolved. A more critical interpretation of the hope expressed by the women in this thesis is that their hope functions as an impediment to changing the status quo, ossifying collective action and diluting the will to change current realities (Ringel, 2021).

I offer no conclusions here as to what is 'actually' happening, either in the world at large or in the lives of the women who have shared with me. Following the critical realist underpinnings of my approach, this thesis acknowledges the importance and impact of both material conditions and personal interpretations (Bhaskar, 2016; Danermark, et al., 2005).

More specifically, I invite a consideration of the multiple truths that appear to co-exist at once in the rich examples of women living in tiny houses. The difficulties and contradictions illuminated by the stories presented in this thesis might compel an agreement with Latour (2004) that after so many years of studying it, hope does not seem to have much left to offer in terms of analysis and theory. Yet the data presented in this thesis urges me to disagree. Whilst my research shows that the tiny house movement mirrors parts of the popular consumer fantasy and the values that lie behind it, the ideas of dweller-control and self-help help (Ward, 1976; 1990) reveal a more hopeful picture in which the movement's radical potential remains.

As I have already argued, counter-hegemonic struggles will always cohere in part with the logic of the systems they critique. I further argue that herein lies the relevance of the triadic analytical framework I use throughout this thesis. In considering how tiny houses are being used by women through the lens of creating an 'other' or a heterotopic space (Foucault, 1984), and in how this other space catalyses their sense of agency and personal power through dweller control (Ward, 1976), and finally in how this enhanced agency interacts with their ideas of the value of femininity and self-discipline (Bordo, 2003; 2018), space is made for tiny houses to emerge as both reproductive of and challenging of existing social norms.

Those who assert that 'there is no alternative' (Harvey, 2017) are refuted through the demonstrations of how the women in this thesis discover for themselves temporary, incomplete solutions to the multiple dilemmas of the housing crisis, the cult of work, patriarchal oppression, and consumerism (Wilson and Wadham, 2023). At the same time, the data I have collected throughout this thesis suggests that individual 'solutions' to the structural problems women attribute to making their previous lives untenable are recast as being easier to endure after the move into a tiny house. Ringel (2021) has argued that this

type of performative resistance can make people more likely to replicate the relational modes which harm them in the present. It is within this complicated knot that the ongoing tussle between contesting and conforming to dominant social models of relating, working, and purchasing is rendered visible through women's stories of their tiny houses.

Despite all this, women's stories of personal change, skill building, and affective transformation make it difficult for me to deny that the tiny house movement as a whole presents a compelling and progressive counter-narrative to the established status quo. Taken together, the stories women have told me about their desire to live, work, and consume differently point to an elegiac sense that life has a lot more to offer than that which can be found in the market. From finding possessions stressful to arriving at the view that unused space is wasteful and excessive, these women voiced their disturbance that obligatory consumerism is implicated in maintaining a burden of over-work, mental and physical ill-health, and the degradation of the lives of workers and the planet.

This thesis chartered a movement towards reevaluating small spaces as being cosy and helpful in manifesting a sense of manageability and pleasure in women's lives. Tiny houses were presented as being one of the core enabling factors in facilitating my interviewees to make real changes in how much they had to remain engaged with and complicit in the harmful social processes they associated with the cult of work, debt-based property ownership, and inherited gender norms. From Sally who described how paring down her buying habits and her possessions led to her finding solace and solidarity in "*all the people that we've interacted with freely sharing information, really generous, really helpful, really have a sense of community and connection.*", to Aine who shared that, for her, living in a tiny house and changing the way she buys and spends has wrought a life-changing impact: "*it's as big as an alternative perspective on life and the world and living.*" These women have

identified and articulated their own lived experience of having grown to see powerful and exploitative social processes not as inevitable, or fun, or as a treat, but as a poor compensation for other much more meaningful losses (Soper, 2008).

Harris (2018) likens tiny houses to lighthouses by drawing out how, whilst a lighthouse is a diminutive space to live in, it also functions to guide ships to safety through dangerous and difficult weather conditions. In this analogy, tiny houses are acting as a small beacon of hope and a vision of what potential alternatives are possible within the miasma of patriarchal consumer capitalism (Harris, 2018, p. 41). Throughout the interviews, women commented on finding hope or being shielded from some of the more aggressive implications of these social processes thanks to living in their tiny houses. Taken together, the activities and values of the women in this thesis constitute activities of dialectical utopianism (Harvey, 2000). While pointing to alternate human futures, dialectical utopianism is grounded in actual possibilities for change; we might say ‘folk’ possibilities for change. It is in the practicality and relative accessibility of tiny house living that small steps might be taken towards alternative futures. Ward (2017) emphasises that there is value in paying attention to what real people are really doing about the problems they encounter in their lives. I likewise argue that women building and living in tiny houses constitute a valuable and novel example of contemporary responses to multiple crises and demonstrate an important and energising example of reimagining a better future.

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Appendix

Interview guide

1. Introduction & demographic data
 - a. Can you tell me how old you are?
 - b. Where you are based geographically
 - c. Your relationship status and sexuality
 - d. Your highest level of formal qualification
 - e. What do you do for work?
 - f. Cost of tiny home & approximate income
2. Motivations to live tiny

- a. Can you tell me about how you become involved with tiny houses?
 - b. What initially attracted you to tiny houses?
 - c. Would you like to tell me in your own words about your tiny house experience?
 - d. What is it about tiny houses that you are attracted to, rather than a small apartment for example?
3. Impact of living tiny
- a. Has living tiny changed anything about your life? How?
 - b. How do you spend your time now compared to before?
 - c. In what ways has this process changed the ways you think about yourself?
 - d. Describe your quality of life. What does it mean to you?
4. General Questions
- a. Have you had any experiences that you think happened specifically because you are a woman?
 - b. How have people's responses to what you are doing been shaped by ideas about gender?
 - c. What do tiny houses offer you as a woman?
 - d. Are there any thoughts or comments you would like to share that we haven't covered?

Participant Matrix

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Location	Cost of Tiny House	Type of tiny house	Job	Relationship status	Sexuality
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Amy	37	White, American	Colorado	\$65,000	THOW	Real estate & entrepreneur in tiny house space	Single	Lesbian
Gemma	26	White, British	South UK	£10,000	Converted Van	Various, film maker	In a relationship, not cohabiting	Queer
Jo	27	White, Canadian	Vancouver	15-20,000 CAD	Converted Van	Climbing instructor	In a relationship, cohabiting	Heterosexual
Jackie	29	White, American	Los Angeles	\$22,000	Converted Van		Single	Heterosexual
Della	41	White, Canadian	Ontario	\$95,000	THOW	Various, masseuse, psychic investigator	In a relationship, not cohabiting	Heterosexual
Kelly	41	White, American	Colorado US	\$37,000	THOW	English teacher	In a relationship, not cohabiting	Heterosexual
Aine	44	White, British	Portugal	£12,000	THOW	researcher	In a relationship, cohabiting	Heterosexual
Anne	38	White, Brazilian	London from Brazil	Not purchased yet	looking at thow	Housewife	In a relationship, cohabiting	Lesbian
Karine	36	White, Brazilian	London from Brazil	Not purchased yet	looking at thow	Software engineer	In a relationship, cohabiting	Lesbian
Ellen	40	White, American	Washington DC / Virginia	RRP 105,000 but she paid less, not at liberty to say	THOW	Virtual assistant	Single	Heterosexual
Sally	31	White, South African	South Africa	\$20,000	THOW	Works for a non-profit	In a relationship, cohabiting	Heterosexual
Melissa	50's	White, British	South UK		Narrowboat	Retired	In a relationship, cohabiting	Heterosexual
Julia	30	White, American	South Carolina / Pennsylvania	\$30,000	THOW	Social worker	In a relationship, cohabiting in a ranch her boyfriend bought. She built the tiny house for herself to live in alone.	Heterosexual
Penny	77	White,	Queensla		Camper Van	Full time	In a relationship,	Heterosexual

		Australian	nd, Australia		& THOW	carer for husband	cohabiting	al
Greta	40's	White, European	Netherlands		Yurt in a shared community space	Various	In a relationship, not cohabiting	Heterosexual
Tina	38	White, Irish	London / Ireland	not built yet	Looking at converting a van	Unemployed, just finished a masters	Single	Heterosexual
Catherine	52	White, British	UK		Converted Lorry	Portfolio, odd jobs	Single	Heterosexual
Katrina	31	White, British	North England	£12,000	THOW	Hospitality	Single	Heterosexual
Petra	26	White, European	Den Bosch, Netherlands	€25,000	Timber framed greenhouse	Graphic design	Single	Heterosexual
Bryanna	60	Asian	Oregon	\$76,000	THOW	Retired	In a relationship, not cohabiting	Heterosexual
Maja	32	White, American	South Carolina	\$15,000	THOW	Portfolio, yoga,	In a relationship, cohabiting in a house but building the tiny house by herself	Heterosexual
Deela	50's	White, British	UK		Van	Retired	Single	Heterosexual
Gem	25	White, European	The Netherlands	\$40,000	THOW	Student	In a relationship, not cohabiting	Heterosexual
Avery	25	Mixed black African	Florida, US	\$75,000	THOW	student	single	Heterosexual
Melodie	28	White, American	Missouri, US	\$30,000	THOW	Tiny house builder	In a relationship, cohabiting but not in the tiny	Heterosexual
Ansley	23	Mixed black African	Florida, US	\$80,000	THOW	Student	Single	Heterosexual
Helen	25	White, British	Wales	£500 (they already had the van I think)	Van	Tiny house builder	In a relationship, cohabiting	Heterosexual
Fiona	25	White, Irish	Ireland, soon to be Milan	€4,000	Van	Student	In a relationship, cohabiting	Heterosexual
Lisa	33	White,	Texas	\$5,000	Camper van	Marketing	Single	Heterosexual

		American						al
Diwata	32	Phillipino	Texas, US	\$70,000	THOW	Full time mother	In a relationship, cohabiting	Heterosexual
Tiffany	29	White, British	South UK	£10,000	Converted garage	Costume maker	In a relationship, cohabiting	Heterosexual
Sarah	38	White, American	Minnesota, USA	\$40,000	THOW	Software licencer	Single	Heterosexual
Esther	33	White, British	South UK	£18,000	THOW	Draftsperson	Single	Heterosexual