Place Attachment

Chapter · December 2012

DOI: 10.1016/B978-0-08-047163-1.00543-9

CITATIONS

READS

54

2,194

3 authors, including:

Barbara Brown
University of Utah
108 PUBLICATIONS 6,315 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Irwin Altman
University of Utah
138 PUBLICATIONS 11,916 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Project Economic Resilience of Property Values in Historic Districts View project

Project Energy Balance View project

Author's Contact Information

AU1 Barbara B. Brown, Irwin Altman, and Carol M. Werner

University of Utah Salt Lake City UT 84112 USA

e-mail: barbara.brown@fcs.utah.edu

Keywords: Emotional cartography; Photovoice; Place attachment; Place attachment disruption; Place aversion; Place dependence; Place detachment; Place identity; Sense of place; Territoriality; Topophilia

Abstract

Place attachments are the positive bonds people form with places, arising from affective, behavioural, and cognitive ties between individuals or groups and their sociophysical settings. Across the lifespan people frequently form profound attachments to homes and neighbourhoods, which facilitate stability, identity, and positive experiences. Place attachments also change, as old attachments evolve or are disrupted and new attachments form. Environmental and societal changes from global climate change and other natural and sociopolitical disasters are expected to threaten place attachments at an increasing rate and to motivate greater research attention to how place attachments might help preserve places.

a0005

Place Attachment

B B Brown, I Altman, and C M Werner, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT, USA

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Glossary

g0005

Place attachment Positive bonds developed from behavioural, cognitive, and affective ties between individuals or groups and multiple levels of their sociophysical environment.

g0010

Place dependence How well a place satisfies needs relative to other alternatives.

g0015

Place identity Clusters of positive and negative cognitions or beliefs about a wide variety of places that help define self-identity.

g0020

Satisfaction with place The psychological state achieved when a place fulfils some needs, which does not necessarily require a positive bond to place.

Sense of place Place meanings, attachment, and satisfaction that derive from social construction as well

as place properties.

Territoriality Perception that specific places or objects are owned by the person or group, with greater territoriality for psychologically central places of longterm occupancy.

Topophilia Vivid and concrete personal experiences of affective bonds with places, from fleeting to enduring.

g0025

g0030

g0035

s0005 Defining Place Attachment

p0005 Place attachments, first described in detail in a 1992 edited volume by Altman and Low, involve affective bonds to places across multiple geographic scales, with a variety of temporal qualities and social actors and processes contributing to the bonds. In that volume, after reviewing past conceptualisations of place attachment, Brown and Perkins concluded that attachments typically involve positively experienced bonds that individuals and groups form with sociophysical environments, which grow from behavioural, cognitive, and affective ties. Although people experience place attachments in many settings, this article highlights attachments to residences and neighbourhoods.

p0010

Typically, place attachments grow as people inhabit, use, and invest meaning in settings such as homes. For example, memories of pleasant social interactions at home enhance attachment and become inextricably woven into bonds with the home. Decorating the home, retreating to a bedroom, or hosting a party are practices that serve our needs, reflect who we are, and deepen attachment.

Place attachment offers a different emphasis than several allied concepts (see Glossary), although they are sometimes used interchangeably. For example, place identity focuses more on how place relates to self-identity. Sense of place involves a complex of attachment, meanings, and satisfaction. Place dependence refers to places that satisfy needs relative to alternative places. Satisfaction with place involves fulfilling needs, not necessarily forging bonds. Topophilia involves affective

bonds from fleeting to enduring. Finally, human territoriality focuses more on perceived ownership. Thus, our definition of place attachment is a multifaceted phenomenon, somewhat different from other concepts used to understand people-place relationships.

History of Place Attachment Research

s0010

Place attachment research explicitly recognises the rich- p0020 ness of positive bonds connecting humans with their homes and neighbourhoods. Place attachment researchers study, for example, how residents transform a house into a valued home by using it and investing it with meaning. Place attachment research thus provides a counterpoint to much research that had focused on housing solely as a commodity or an economic investment. In Fried's 1963 classic study of a Boston neighbourhood, residents were displaced when their homes, officially declared blighted, were razed for urban renewal. Expert outsiders thought residents would appreciate newer, better-quality housing, but residents resented the experts' claims to their neighbourhood and grieved over the destruction of their homes, despite their homes' physical deterioration. Those with stronger positive bonds to their former homes grieved most and many tried to secure new housing nearby, to remain close to the neighbourhood. Even decades later residents continued to publish a community newsletter, and families patronised a common summer camp in an effort to maintain community ties. In lowerincome Baltimore neighbourhoods, Brower in 1980 described how routines of use and social connections

with neighbours and kin established attachments to neighbourhoods and front yard areas. As in Boston, outsiders often viewed the residents' use of front yard areas as disreputable, thus failing to respect their place attachments.

These two early studies highlight a number of p0025 themes found in subsequent research. Place attachments are often profound; humans are so embedded in their environments that they do not always reflect on those bonds unless called to do so by outside threats, new situations, or turning points in life. Although individuals develop a sense of positive identity, security, and continuity in place attachments, the very foundations of those bonds are constantly changing, so place attachments also undergo change and transformation. Place attachments can be valued but contentious and residents still find their bonds to homes or lands at risk. Although early studies focused on threats to place attachment from urban neglect and renewal, subsequent studies reveal a wider range of place attachment changes, attributable to natural disasters, human-created disasters (war, political upheaval, and climate change), and normal lifespan events, such as ageing and relocation.

80015 Levels of Analysis

p0030 Although the term 'place attachment' was first applied to homes and neighbourhoods, humans inhabit and use complex environments characterised by multiple levels of scale, from specific objects, to homes, neighbourhoods, cities, and nations. The nature of positive bonds to things and places can vary across these levels. For example, residents sometimes report stronger attachments to their cities and homes than to their neighbourhoods. Place attachments are also selective, with residents developing attachments to some neighbourhood settings, such as adult day care centres, coffee shops, or children's outdoor play areas, but not to others.

s0020 Temporal Processes

p0035 Place attachments also have temporal qualities. Longer durations of residence or engagement often relate to stronger attachments, although the salience and nature of bonds may transform over the life course. Place attachments to home may be especially important for those confined to home, such as youth, elders, and caregivers. On a day-to-day basis, places attachments are established through the temporal patterns of home life, with home providing a haven that allows for times of relaxation and private restoration as well times of conviviality. Seasonally, holiday celebrations and gardening rituals

may strengthen place attachment. In sum, place attachments are not static but involve complex daily, seasonal, and lifespan temporal processes that bond people to places.

Sociophysical and Psychological **Processes**

s0025

Place attachment necessarily involves a unity of psycho- p0040 logical and social processes and physical settings. People and their relationships are embedded within physical contexts so that the very meaning of social processes cannot be abstracted from place, but is informed, constrained, and nourished by places. People actively cultivate place attachments with a home by selecting or building the home, arranging the furniture, tending the yard, hosting events, and enacting the routines of daily use and upkeep in the home. Attachment to home often extends beyond the immediate residents. For example, many societies have house-blessing rituals that help transform a house into a home that reflects individual and group identity, including in some societies the identities of family ancestors and house gods. These practices support a sense of security and continuity, identity, self-regulation, privacy regulation, self-esteem, and restoration. Place attachments are also informed by other social and physical dynamics. Power relationships, for example, are reflected in place attachments, such as when teens' bonds with their bedrooms are enhanced by the 'keep out' sign they erect on the door or when town officials use local parades to celebrate town identity but also decide who cannot participate.

Physical qualities of places contribute to but do not p0045 determine place attachments; instead, the sociophysical processes that create positive bonds are required. Nevertheless, some places are believed to be easier to bond with, such as high-quality housing and places with nature. The ancient Greeks even believed a 'genius loci' or guardian spirit imbued places with unique meanings that enabled attachments. The physical environment contributes to personal and social processes needed for effective functioning, which may account for positive bonds to places even when those places are of poor quality. Thus individuals can become attached to their homes regardless of social class and housing dilapidation.

Place Attachment and Aversive Experiences with Place

s0030

Restricting the definition of place attachment to positive p0050 bonds highlights their value and importance; however, a persistent theme in research has been the interplay of positively charged place attachments with more negative

experiences. Although some researchers conceive of place attachment as encompassing negative feelings that serve to attach people to place, others reserve distinct terms for negative experiences that may prevent or undermine place attachments: alienation, placelessness, place aversion or topophobia, place ambivalence, place attachment disruption, and stigmatised places.

Negative emotions and thoughts about places can coexist with positive bonds, creating complex meanings of and ties to places. Homes can be the site of security, continuity, order, pride, and identity as well as violence, drudgery, chaos, shame, and alienation. As noted by Claire Cooper Marcus, home can be both a haven and a trap. Women in particular often say their homes are like prisons of unceasing work on behalf of unappreciative families, yet women also say they achieve personal pride and positive identity from their work in the home, which strengthens place attachment.

In sum, place attachment research varies in terms of the nature of the place attachment bond (cognitive or affective or both, positive or negative or both), temporal processes, and levels of analysis. These themes are explored further in the remaining sections that highlight attachments at different phases of life and in different kinds of places.

s0035 Place Attachment to Home for Youth and Adults

p0065 Place attachments among children often begin with the home, objects in the home, and nearby outdoor places. Children develop strong attachments to favourite toys, objects, bedrooms, and other areas that serve emotional needs and provide retreat and social spaces. Children forge and assert their identities partly by creating and transforming spaces into places of attachment, especially in places uninhabited by parents or other adults, such as forts or hiding places or small leftover spaces. In the teen years, a 13-country study showed that place attachments were associated with a sense of safety and the perception that neighbours were friendly; in addition, boys were more strongly attached to the home area than girls. Although homes often provide teens with a secure retreat, enhanced mobility allows teens to become attached to a wider variety of places.

Bonds children form may prove enduring. Temporary moves, such as to boarding school, may cause children to appreciate their bonds with home. As youth transition into adults and move away for longer periods they often report homesickness and a sense of having lost one's place. Even years after leaving a childhood home many remember fondly their special places from childhood. These childhood bonds are sometimes revealed when adults walk through neighbourhoods using a technique called

emotional cartography. This technique tracks physiological responses and participants record psychological responses during a walk. Memories of childhood places and events become intermingled with contemporary feelings and events, revealing a rich map of past and present experiences with places.

As people age, many change residences for education, p0075 marriage, or other life events. Attachments to these new settings are intricately tied to the physical features, social relationships, and social and political contexts of the culture. A US study documented how newlyweds acquire favourite objects such as decorations or furniture that enable them to forge and enjoy their new marital identity. Even objects considered ugly by the couple may be prized and displayed nonetheless because the gift bespeaks a valued relationship or event. Couples also prominently display objects for others to see, such as wedding photographs. One study showed that couples who had such positively valued objects also had close and supportive relationships. As individuals continue to live in a place, their attachments and family-oriented symbolic associations often increase.

Place Attachments to Second Homes

s0040

Some have conceptualised bonds with temporary homes p0080 as deficient, based on inauthentic or superficial ties to aesthetically appealing places. But research shows that attachments to second homes can be strong, growing from appreciation of temporal rhythms of anticipation prior to the journey and regret upon leaving, enjoyment of sunsets and other natural events, and times with family and friends. Residents especially value their second homes as places that allow them to get away from civilisation and the commodification of life, connect to nature, and reflect upon or change identity. Positive bonds to a second home are appreciated despite negative experiences, such as maintenance responsibilities, vulnerability to burglary, or feeling alienated from year-round residents. On the other hand, some vacationers to South African beach towns felt that racial desegregation transformed their homely retreat into a place that highlighted distressing social change and upheaval, a phenomenon that likely happens in many full-time communities as well. In summary, psychological attachments to second homes can be complex and responsive to a variety of physical and social qualities.

Place Attachments to Homes in Old Age

s0045

Many elders prefer to 'age in place', even when dimin- p0085 ished physical or financial abilities make it difficult to remain. Research shows that older age and more years

in place predict greater place attachments, and that strong place attachments in old age relate to well-being. Elders may arrange a favourite 'control centre' at home, with easy access to good seating, a window view, the television and telephone, and other supports that help maintain independence and attachment, despite limited mobility. Compared to youth, elders may be more aware of how their home supports independence and may view future moves as threats to independence and autonomy. Indeed one study showed place attachments among ageing African Americans provided a reservoir of strength in the face of physical decline of ageing. Other research shows that women, who typically perform more domestic labour in their homes, often report place attachments based on everyday routines or their identities as family caregivers. Men, who typically spend more time outside their homes, often report place attachments based on the private retreat qualities of homes. Elders report that place attachments are supported by the beauty and solitude of places, safety from crime, historical ties, and symbolically important objects in homes.

p0090

Retirement communities sometimes offer a range of housing, from independent living apartments to skilled nursing units, so that, in theory, place attachments can be maintained despite the changes of residence dictated by health needs. In such communities stronger attachments are associated with more social bonds, close proximity to other residents and to a central activity building, and having shared enclosed garden spaces. New residents of assisted living facilities who report stronger attachments to the town and who are more socially involved with nonfamily members form stronger place attachments to their facility. In summary, attachments are important to elders and attachments to new places can be established through investments in the new people, activities, and places.

s0050 Home and Place Attachment Changes

p0095 Change is inherent in life, and many individuals create bonds to places that provide a sense of continuity and stability despite the reality of change. Changes may create problems depending on whether changes are positive or negative, or gradual or sudden. At times place attachments undergo positive and gradual changes, such as when residents personalise or expand a place to reflect their changing identity and needs; a vacation enables one to appreciate the home upon returning; a garden matures and flourishes; and a neighbourhood revitalises. Changes can be positive and sudden, like becoming a new homeowner or moving to a cherished place and feeling immediate attachment. Even when changes are positive, the disruption of bonds to a prior home can be disorienting. For example, even among students who desire to

move to a university, their upended attachments feel disorienting and new ones can be slow to develop. Changes can also be negative and gradual, such as when a neighbourhood slowly declines or land gradually erodes under coastal homes; place attachment bonds may change or prove resilient in the face of such threats.

Of particular concern are sudden and negative changes p0100 that profoundly disrupt place attachments, such as abrupt and massive disasters. Unfortunately, as world population swells, global climate changes, and new migration patterns occur, place attachments may be increasingly subject to sudden and negative disruptions (see **Box 1**).

Sociopolitical Contexts and **Consequences of Place Attachment**

s0055

Place attachments can be strengthened or threatened by p0110 the sociopolitical contexts in which they are embedded. Sociopolitical forces can facilitate place attachments, such as when laws and policies protect private property, ease homeownership, maintain neighbourhood quality, and extend housing opportunities to diverse social groups. Sociopolitical forces can also prevent or threaten place attachments, such as when immigrants, women, minorities, or other groups are denied access to residential markets. For example, in the United States, it is legal in many areas for gay individuals to be denied or evicted from housing.

Place attachments have also been found to buffer p0115 individuals from sociopolitical threats or exclusions.

Box 1 Environmental Disasters Disrupt Place **Attachments**

p0105

In 2005 Hurricane Katrina destroyed parts of the Louisiana coast of the United States and rivers flooded the town of Carlisle in the United Kingdom. Katrina survivors longed for old and familiar places and reported increased family conflicts in the absence of their supportive community ties and places. At the same time, they had mixed feelings about returning home, given the enduring evidence of community destruction and the difficulties of starting over, perhaps in an emergency trailer that does not foster new attachment. Postdisaster destruction and looting can add to survivors' sense of loss, insecurity, and dislocation. The Carlisle flood victims similarly lamented the loss of their homes and valued possessions, such as one flood victim who found the print on her wedding certificate wiped clean. Although some postdisaster Carlisle homes were still liveable, survivors lost their customary supports for privacy, comfort, security, and routine; they felt housed, but not at home. These are just two global instances of place attachment disruption; many more occur without research documentation. Disruptions predicted to be associated with climate change suggest that millions of individuals will become environmental refugees, with their homes destroyed or uninhabitable. Place attachment disruption will be one psychologically devastating piece of a larger social and environmental crisis.

Residents of neighbourhood enclaves or ghettos, despite larger societal views of these places as stigmatising, often develop strong place attachments, perhaps in reaction to their low status and lack of welcome elsewhere. For example, experiences of racism within the broader society have been argued to intensify the positive qualities of attachments to home among racial minorities. In a neighbourhood affected by physical decline, Hispanic residents reported stronger attachments than their majority non-Hispanic white neighbours, which might reflect their exclusion from more affluent neighbourhoods. Residents of gay enclaves also reported feeling symbolic and emotional comfort and a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood, which contrasted with the censure and negativity outside their neighbourhood. Residents felt more acknowledged for their individual qualities and less stereotyped when in their neighbourhood. Finally, children confined close to home may develop especially strong home-based place attachments, albeit as a partial function of their exclusion from participation in other places.

s0060 Place Attachment and Negative Consequences

p0120 This article has noted how place attachments involve positive bonds. However, place attachments may also give rise to negative personal and societal consequences, topics of increasing research attention. At the individual level, place attachments to an immigrant enclave, for example, might over time become restrictive, preventing residents from exploiting educational or job opportunities outside the neighbourhood. Similarly, desires for place attachments motivate some to acquire costly home mortgages that result in economic stress and ruin. At the group level, place attachments can fuel conflict and xenophobia, by helping to define 'us' and 'our place' in contrast to the perception of 'them' and 'their place'.

Place attachments sometime commit us to dangerous places and practices by allowing us to minimise or deny the negative or risky qualities inherent in the objects, places, and practices central to attachment. For example, residents of a town that was periodically devastated by mudslides preferred rebuilding rather than resettling to safer areas; homeowners drawn to a town because it offered a rural retreat ignored the nearby toxic dump that eventually contaminated their homes and eroded their place attachments. Similarly, strong but false feelings of security in homes may blind residents to the need for protection from threats of burglary or natural disasters, and strong religious and home bonds motivate residents to remain in war zones despite threat of attack.

As consumers around the world are increasingly p0130 attached to the suburban consumption landscape as a

way of showing individual achievement, social distinctiveness, and cultural taste, the negative environmental and social consequences of these forms of building attachment become more evident. Environmentally, suburbanstyle houses and their infrastructure may destroy lands. Residents' gardening and lawn care activities often build pride of place, commitment to neighbours, and display of family and neighbour identity, all of which foster place attachment. Yet when residents conceive of gardening practices in these positive ways, they may minimise the environmental damage and human health risks posed by toxic substances used to enhance the beauty of the home and landscape. Even holiday decorations, which normally support place attachments, sometimes expose residents to chemicals considered probable carcinogens, a danger we may be less alert to because of our focus on place attachment. Positive bonds to the important objects in our places of attachment may blind us to degrading labour practices and destructive environmental processes used in their creation.

Place Attachment and Preserving the Environment

s0065

Relph has claimed that strong bonds with places entail p0135 a sense of care and responsibility for them. Research has been mixed on the question of whether place attachments can motivate care for the people or places involved in attachments. Some studies connect place attachments to socially protective bonds, such as greater social capital, more nearby friends and neighbour relationships, lower vulnerability and victimisation. Other studies connect place attachment to direct place protective actions, such as a willingness to pay, work, or take actions for preserving the environment or countering environmental threats, attending workshops focused on local place developments, or remaining in the place. However, in some cases, stronplace attachments are unrelated to civic engagements; or attachment to the block or apartment building relates to less investment in city-wide civic engagements; or strong attachments motivate some residents to resist societal benefits, such as hydropower plants, when sited near their homes. What is seen by outsiders as a NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) reaction is seen by residents as place protective action.

Future Research

s0070

Both methodological and substantive advances could p0140 enrich our understanding of place attachments. Place attachment research is often based on surveys (see Table 1) but methodological and technological advances

b0005

t0005 **Table 1** Place attachment survey questions

Survey Items and Response Options

1. On a 1-10 scale where 1 is not at all proud	and 10	is extr	emely p	roud, h	now pro	ud are	you of:				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Don't know
a. Your neighborhood	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
b. Your block	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
c. Your house	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
d. The way your front yard looks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
e. The way the outside of your house looks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. How attached do you feel to the block you	live on	from 1	to 10, i	f 1 is no	ot at all	attache	ed and 1	I0 is str	ongly a	attached	?
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Don't know
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

3. If, for any reason, you had to move to another neighborhood would you be:

Very unhappy(4) A little unhappy(3) Happy to move(1) Doesn't make any difference (2)

Scoring

Place attachment = (1c + 1d + 1e)/3 + (1a + 1b + 2 + 3)/4, all variables z-transformed.

AU2 Note. Survey used for publication by Brown, Perkins and Brown(2003).

can provide new ways to understand place attachments. Researchers can have participants report place attachment experiences and settings throughout the day (experience sampling), use tours to inquire about attachments ('go-along' interviews), employ participant photography and reflection upon places (photovoice), or provide maps that combine participant annotations with physiological monitoring (emotional cartography).

In terms of new substantive directions, in the face of ecological threats to our planet, future research should focus on how to prepare human populations for place detachment, increasingly needed as people are forced to migrate away from homes by environmental risk, erosion, destruction, or depletion. Future research will also be needed to understand how to engage place attachments to protect places. This issue is especially complicated given that the destruction of distant places can have farreaching local consequences. Mobilising residents to protect against gangs menacing one's own neighbourhood may be easier than mobilising against distant threats, such as the destruction of rainforests across the globe, or mobilising against hidden threats, such as the toxic dangers present in our most cherished places and possessions. Finally, given increasing population mobility that brings diverse peoples together, research is needed regarding whether place attachments might be shared and appreciated in ways that bond diverse groups instead of dividing them.

See also: Home Objects (00314); Neighbourhood Reputation (00574); NIMBYism (00572); Privacy, Haven, Sanctuary (00376); Redevelopment and Displacement (00049); Restorative Housing Environments (00499); Second Homes (00576).

Altman I and Low SM (1992) Place Attachment. New York: Plenum.

Further Reading

Brower S (1980) Territory in urban settings. In: Altman I, Rapoport A, and Wohlwill JF (eds.) <i>Environment and Culture</i> , pp. 179–207. New York:	<u>b0010</u>
Plenum. Brown BB and Perkins DD (1992) Disruptions in place attachment.	L0015
In: Altman I and Low S (eds.) <i>Place Attachment</i> , pp. 279–304. New York: Plenum.	<u>b0015</u>
Brown BB, Perkins DD, and Brown G (2004) Incivilities, place attachment and crime: Block and individual effects. <i>Journal of Environmental Psychology</i> 24: 359–371.	<u>b0020</u>
Devine-Wright P (2009) Rethinking NIMBYism: The role of place attachment and place identity in explaining place-protective action. Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology 19(6): 426–441.	<u>b0025</u>
Fried M (1963) Grieving for a lost home. In: Duhl L (ed.) <i>The Urban Condition</i> , pp. 151–171. New York: Basic Books.	<u>b0030</u>
Hidalgo MC and Hernandez B (2001) Place attachment: Conceptual and empirical questions. <i>Journal of Environmental Psychology</i> 21: 273–281.	<u>b0035</u>
Manzo LC (2003) Beyond house and haven: Toward a revisioning of emotional relationships with places. <i>Journal of Environmental Psychology</i> 23: 47–61.	<u>b0040</u>
Marcus CC (1995) House as a Mirror of Self. Berkeley, CA: Conari Press.	<u>b0045</u>
Proshansky HM, Fabian AK, and Kaminoff R (1983) Place-identity: Physical world socialization of the self. <i>Journal of Environmental Psychology</i> 3: 57–83.	<u>b0050</u>
Relph E (1976) Place and Placelessness. London: Pion.	b0055