The Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
Department of Psychology

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2008 University of Victoria MSc
2003 University of British Columbia BA

The Bases of Bonding: The Psychological Functions of Place Attachment in Comparison to Interpersonal Attachment

Monday, December 9, 2013
9:00 AM
David Turpin Bldg., Room A144

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Robert Gifford, Department of Psychology, UVic (Supervisor)
Dr. Andrea Piccinin, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)
Dr. Reuben Rose-Redwood, Department of Geography, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Marcia Lewicka, Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Barbara Hawkins, Department of Biology, UVic
Abstract

This dissertation identified key parallels between the theories of place attachment and interpersonal attachment, a comparison that then informed three objectives of the research program: (1) to explore the functions of place attachment and describe which are shared with interpersonal attachment; (2) to examine how these functions differ according to stable individual differences in place and person attachment; and (3) to assess whether these functions differ according to the geographical scale at which the attachment rests. An additional methodological goal was to bring a new approach to the study of place attachment, drawing on experimental paradigms used in interpersonal attachment research.

Study 1 began the inquiry into the functions of place attachment with a content analysis of community members’ open-ended descriptions about places to which they consider themselves attached. Thirteen categories of benefits were revealed: memories, belonging, relaxation, positive emotions, activity support, comfort--security, self-growth, freedom--control, entertainment, connection to nature, practical benefits, privacy, and aesthetics. These functions were discussed with reference to the functions of interpersonal attachment previously identified in the literature.

The next two studies used experimental methodologies to further evaluate, and expand upon, the functions of place attachment. Study 2 evaluated whether a security function exists for place attachment by assessing the impact of threat exposure on the mental accessibility of place attachment words. Threat exposure was operationalized by mistakes made on a lexical decision task, and place attachment proximity was represented by subsequent reaction times to place attachment words in this task. Results showed that exposure to threats increased proximity-seeking to places of attachment, but not to other types of places.

Study 3 evaluated the ability of place attachment to provide belongingness, control, meaningfulness, self-esteem, and improved affect, and this was done within the context of a commonly-used ostracism paradigm. Place attachment was manipulated using a visualization exercise, and ostracism was
manipulated using a bogus rejection paradigm. The dependent variables included participants’ current moods and experienced levels of psychological need satisfaction. Although ostracism did not interact with the place attachment visualization, the latter was found to increase individuals’ current levels of self-esteem, meaning, belongingness, control and negative affect, but only among participants without an avoidant place attachment style.

This comparison between interpersonal attachment and place attachment revealed some overlap between the two types of bonding, and most importantly, inspired new research questions and methodological approaches to advance the study of place attachment – a less mature theory, but one with much applied value and theoretical potential.

**Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships**

**2009-2012** SSHRC Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Doctoral Scholarship

**2008-2011** Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions Graduate Fellowship

**2010** The Alexander & Helen Stafford MacCarthy Muir Graduate Scholarship

**2010** The Donald Wagg Graduate Scholarship

**2008** Lieutenant Governor’s Silver Medal for Outstanding Master’s Thesis

**2008** Quality Move Management Graduate Scholarship.

**2008** Laureate of the CPA Certificate of Academic Excellence

**Selected Presentations**

Scannell, L., & Gifford, R. (April, 2013). *Safe havens: Threats increase the mental accessibility of important places*. Poster presentation, 93rd Annual Western Psychological Association Conference, Reno, NV.

presentation, 92nd Annual Western Psychological Association Conference, San Francisco, CA.


**Publications**


