CHAPTER 2

Comparing the Theories of Interpersonal and Place Attachment

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Introduction

Bonding is central to the human experience. We necessarily form meaningful connections with particular people, groups, objects, and places. These many ties situate and secure us in broader social and physical environments, connect us to the past, and influence future behaviors. Attachment theory focuses on person-to-person bonding and proposes that an innate psychological system regulates proximity to an "attachment figure," a specific person who provides an individual with security and comfort in the face of threats and, at the same time, facilitates their growth (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1969/1982). However, as environmental psychologists and others have shown, most people also develop bonds with places (e.g., Altman & Low, 1992; Giuliani, 2003; Lewicka, 2011).

Until recently, knowledge about place attachment has evolved separately from knowledge of interpersonal attachment. Therefore, the overlap and discrepancies between the two theories has not yet been fully explicated. This comparison is important for revealing potential gaps in the theory of place attachment and for generating opportunities to accelerate its development. In addition, this comparison may also contribute to the understanding of what attachment relationships (of any type) have in common. That is, it has the potential benefit of identifying the general nature of attachment, regardless of the object. Thus, a comparison between interpersonal and place attachment has a construct generalization goal. A few scholars have situated place and person attachment alongside each other, focusing on select aspects of the bonds, such as definitions (Giuliani, 2003; Steel, 2000), development (Morgan, 2010), or loss (e.g., Fried, 2000). However, a more comprehensive comparison of the two theories has yet to be developed.

This Chapter offers an overview of the main principles of interpersonal attachment theory and compares them to those of place attachment. This is not to suggest that place attachment and person attachment relationships are interchangeable, because they undoubtedly have differences. However, we aim to identify which principles of attachment are common across people and places and, conversely, which differ. Drawing on the rich traditions of interpersonal attachment theory, this analysis will inform place attachment, a less mature theory, by identifying appropriate areas for future research.

Theory Beginnings

Interpersonal Attachment

The major tenets of attachment theory stem from the work of John Bowlby (1969/1982) and Mary Ainsworth (1967). Bowlby rejected Freud's view that children's attachment was based on the satisfaction of physical needs such as hunger. Rather, he reasoned that this bond fulfilled the psychological needs for comfort and safety, and speculated that separation from caregivers would produce long-lasting psychological problems. Ainsworth (1967) advanced knowledge of how attachment is expressed behaviorally and provided early cross-cultural validation of the theory. Her most influential work delineated individual differences in attachment, called "attachment styles." Since these seminal works appeared, thousands of articles investigating the theory have appeared.

Place Attachment

Love for place is a prevalent part of human history and culture, as shown by the many references to locality devotion found throughout literature. However, behavioral scientists only began to study person–place bonds more systematically in the mid-1900s. Fried's (1963) study of Boston West Enders who were displaced from their homes was among the first to document the deep affective ties that form between people and places.

Person–place bonding gained interest among humanistic geographers and sociologists in the 1970s. Tuan's (1974) philosophical approach, called "topophilia," or love of place, and Relph's (1976) phenomenological approach, emphasized subjective place experience, deep emotional ties, and individually constructed place meaning. Others explored sense of community using quantitative methodologies (e.g., Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974). Environmental psychologists engaged the topic in the 1980s, fueled by emerging interest in person–place relationships, including territoriality (Altman, 1975) and place identity (Proshansky, 1978; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). Soon, multidimensional definitions of the place attachment concept began to be offered. For example, Shumaker and Taylor (1983) postulated physical, social, and affective components of person–place bonds. These definitions were examined and expanded upon in subsequent work (Altman & Low, 1992). Since then, place attachment research has proliferated.

Some efforts have focused on refining definitional concerns (e.g., Raymond, Brown, & Weber, 2010; Scannell & Gifford, 2010) while others have tested the predictive ability of place attachment, and have begun to establish its practical importance. For example, researchers have examined place attachment in relation to self-regulation (e.g., Korpela, Hartig, Kaiser, & Fuhrer, 2001), war (Billig, 2006), and pro-environmental behavior (Devine-Wright & Clayton, 2010).

As predicted by Low and Altman (1992), place attachment has moved from a concept-development stage in which it is examined, defined, and determined to be multidimensional, to an application stage in which it is applied to practical issues. Despite this, however, the theory would still benefit from comparison and expansion, and one promising starting place is interpersonal attachment theory.

Attachment Processes

Interpersonal Attachment

Bowlby (1982) delineated four psychological processes that characterize attachment relationships: proximity, safe haven, secure base, and separation distress. *Proximity-maintenance* involves the regulation of distance between the individual and the "attachment figure," who provides protection and comfort (Bowlby, 1969). This process is thought to have evolved because infants are vulnerable to threats and environmental stressors; those able to maintain proximity to their caregivers were more likely to survive (Bowlby, 1969/1982). When infants perceive threats, their attachment system is said to enact various proximity-maintaining behaviors that serve to adjust distance to their caregiver. The attachment system is deactivated when proximity has been achieved. The child thereby attains a sense of security, calm, and comfort, and the caregiver, by serving as the locus for this, offers a *safe haven* for the child. As such, attachment processes exemplify how psychological systems (independent of physiological systems) are relevant to survival.

This safe haven is transformable into a *secure base* where the child's exploration and affiliation systems can function while the haven or connection to caregiver is re-established repeatedly (Feeney & Thrush, 2010). Security allows the child to venture out and interact with the surrounding social and physical environment, while remaining within range; therefore, he or she is able to achieve fast proximity and protection as needed.

Attachment relationships can suffer from prolonged periods of *separation*. Infants who are unable to attain proximity to their attachment figure experience separation distress, manifested through protest, then despair, and, eventually, detachment, when the child resists forming close bonds with others (Bowlby, 1969).

More recent models describe how attachment-related behaviors, and their accompanying affects and cognitions, unfold in a sequential process. According to the integrative model (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007), this sequence has three main elements. First, individuals (i.e., children as well as adults) monitor their environments for threats and, if one is detected, the attachment system is activated. Second, individuals monitor the availability of their attachment figure. If attachment figures are available and responsive, proximity is sought and security is achieved. Third, if the attachment figure is unavailable, individuals must resort to a secondary strategy: hyperactivation or deactivation. When hyperactivating, individuals demand the attention of the attachment figure by exaggerating threats. This is more likely when attachment figures are inconsistent, providing help at times but being unresponsive at others. When deactivating, individuals deny the need for proximity; instead they distance themselves from the relationship and become overly self-reliant. This is more likely when attachment figures disapprove of emotional pleas for help or are consistently unresponsive. The chronic use of these strategies leads to individual differences in the functioning of the system called attachment styles.

Place Attachment

Place attachment and interpersonal attachment share several defining features (Giuliani, 2003; Steel, 2000) that differ somewhat in terms of how they are expressed. *Proximity-seeking* is a hallmark interpersonal attachment process that is also exhibited toward places. Proximity to place can be expressed through repeated visits or by electing to live in a place. Vacationers may revisit certain travel destinations (Aronsson, 2004). Pilgrimages satisfy the pilgrim's need for proximity to sacred spaces (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). When physical proximity is impossible, it can be achieved symbolically. For example, American Mormons living in Mexico maintain contact with their homeland by including familiar landscape elements in their settlements (Smith & White, 2004). This is also seen when emigrants name places and design and use buildings in a way that reflects their heritage (Cresswell, 2004).

Unlike proximity-seeking in interpersonal attachment, this process has received less emphasis for place attachment, and so its antecedents have not yet been identified. Whether proximity-seeking to place is causally activated by threatening stimuli is not clear. One similarity, however, is that alternative responses to suboptimal attachments appear to exist for both person and place attachment, but for place attachment this may occur by substituting one place of marginalization with another place of belonging (e.g., Manzo, 2005), whereas coping with unsupportive caregivers occurs by employing secondary attachment strategies (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007).

Places to which one is attached offer a *safe haven* where one can retreat from threats, problem-solve, and gain emotional relief. This has been demonstrated among children, who retreat to favorite places in part to regulate their emotions (Korpela, Kyttä, & Hartig, 2002). Other research has shown that individuals who are more attached to their neighborhoods and homes tend to perceive them as safer than do those who are less attached (e.g., Brown, Perkins, & Brown, 2003). Nevertheless, the experience of a given place as a safe haven may differ based on stage of life, gender, class, and other factors (Sixsmith, 1986). The safe-haven function may be especially important for marginalized groups and individuals who must cope with numerous stressors in their everyday lives (Fried, 2000).

Thus, for both interpersonal and place bonds, proximity-seeking can provide safety and comfort. Like interpersonal attachment, therefore, place attachment enhances one's quality of life because a safe haven offers a reprieve from daily stressors (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983). However, neither interpersonal or place attachment bonds always have a positive valence. The emotions associated with a meaningful place can sometimes be negative or ambivalent (Manzo, 2005).

A place can also be a *secure base* that promotes exploration, providing a reference point and anchor for wider expeditions. Once security is obtained, exploration and confidence can flourish (Fried, 2000) and, conversely, being away can strengthen the bonds to the place (Case, 1996). This suggests that the exploratory and attachment systems could operate in the absence of a human caregiver and that places may provide a surrogate attachment figure. More research is needed to investigate the substitutability of people for places (or vice versa).

The notion of place as a secure base is more often equated to home than to other types of places (e.g., Dupuis & Thorns, 1996). But home should not be the de facto prototype for the location of secure-base place attachment; for some, "home" can be a place of abuse or oppression. A secure base may be found in other types of places. For example, Chawla (1992) found that some children used a tree house, green space, or other location as a secure base from which to explore their environment.

Finally, as with interpersonal attachment, *separation distress* occurs when person–place bonds are disrupted. Disruptions can include changes to a place that are perceived to be threatening (e.g., Devine-Wright, 2009), potential separation (e.g., Billig, 2006), and actual separation (e.g., Fullilove, 1996). In Fried's (1963) classic study of displaced Boston residents, the predominant emotion was grief, not unlike that which occurs when interpersonal bonds are broken. More recently, a sample of individuals who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 experienced acute stress disorder, anxiety, and depression (Abramson, Stehling-Ariza, Garfield, & Redlener, 2008). In contrast to the interpersonal attachment literature, however, a description of how of place-related grief can be healed has not yet been offered.

Attachment Figure Characteristics

Diversity of Attachment Figures

Various persons can serve as attachment figures. Bowlby (1969/1982) assumed this to be one's mother, but fathers (Main & Weston, 1981), caretakers, grandparents, friends, siblings (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997), twins (Tancredy & Fraley, 2006), and others can also serve as attachment figures, although the level of attachment seems to vary with the extent to which key psychological needs are satisfied by this person (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000). Because a variety of people (and objects) can support this need satisfaction, the apparent diversity of attachment figures is not surprising. Now the question is which types of places can serve as attachment figures.

Place as an Attachment Figure

Environmental psychologists have demonstrated that places represent an important attachment "figure" for many people, although place and person attachment figures themselves are not as obviously comparable. Places vary in their scale, tangibility, and familiarity (Low & Altman, 1992), and in their physical and social attributes, temporal elements, and actors' activities within these places (van der Klis & Karsten, 2009). Attachments have been observed at many different spatial and temporal levels and for a variety of place types, ranging from planets, continents, countries, islands, cities, neighborhoods, streets, buildings, homes, specific rooms, and other places; some individuals are even attached to historical, spiritually significant, or imaginary places (e.g., Droseltis & Vignoles, 2010). Sometimes, place attachments are directed towards a generic type or class of places rather than to a specific place; Feldman (1990) termed this "settlement identity."

Compared to interpersonal attachment research, place attachment research has devoted more attention to the characteristics of the attachment figure. In terms of the physical place, attachment is usually stronger for places of good environmental quality, such as those with natural elements, or distinctive physical terrain or urban design (Uzzell, Pol, & Badenas, 2002). Other physical features such as climate and proximity to water may facilitate attachment if they resemble features from places of one's childhood (Knez, 2005), or birth country (Ryan & Ogilvie, 2001). Places of attachment can also include social features; at the neighborhood level, having many friends and participating in community activities are important (e.g., Fried, 1963; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974).

Multiple Attachments

Multiple Interpersonal Attachments

Most attachment studies describe a single bond (e.g., between individuals and their caregivers), but others have noted that people form bonds to multiple attachment figures (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007; Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997). Young adults hold between one and twelve attachment figures at a time, averaging about five (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997). However, not all attachment figures are equal; a preference hierarchy exists among them (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997). Among young adults who are not in romantic relationships, mothers are ranked most highly as attachment figures, followed by fathers, siblings, and best friends (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997). Those in romantic relationships rank their partner at the top of the hierarchy, but otherwise the ordering does not change.

Multiple Place Attachments

Multiple place attachments are possible, if not common (e.g., Feitelson, 1991). Among air force officers and their family members, 82% of respondents were attached to one or more previous residences, and approximately 45% were attached to at least one past residence as well as their current residence (Giuliani, Ferrara, & Barabotti, 2003).

The formation of a new place bond is important to adjustment, well-being, and health (Hornsey & Gallois, 1998). For example, the reconciliation of old and new place bonds is related to homesickness in new residential environments (Scopelliti & Tiberio, 2010). Students with more social ties in their hometowns, and a lack of affective attachment to their new community, are more likely to be homesick. Nevertheless, the old place bond can be used to aid in this transition through interchangeability processes, if similarities between old and new environments are emphasized (Ryan & Ogilvie, 2001). Students who live abroad prefer areas in their new environments that have home-like qualities. Perhaps referents of home may ease the negative effects of relocation. If so, multiple place attachments can coexist if they are organized through a central place attachment schema, which Stokols and Shumaker (1981) called "generic place dependence." Seeing elements of one's former residence, town, or country enables stable attachments even among individuals who are mobile.

Although multiple place attachments exist, they are not always readily formed, or even desired. Among commuter couples, partners who live away from their primary residence part-time often have difficulty forming an attachment to the commuter residence (van der Klis & Karsten, 2009). In part, this distancing serves to protect the centrality of the primary home or other place to which one is attached, and it also seems to have an emotional component. This persistence of attachment to one specific place has been called "geographic place dependence" (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981).

The Development of Attachment Bonds

The Development of Interpersonal Attachment

The attachment system is said to be present at birth, but its organization changes over the lifespan (Bowlby, 1969/82). To engage caregivers, newborns are equipped with innate attachment behaviors such as crying. Around 6–9 months, children enter a sensitive period when the attachment bond becomes more concrete. Among preschoolers, independence widens, and children spend slightly more time away from their caregivers (Marvin & Britner, 1999). Eventually, a greater need for autonomy arises in adolescence, but the attachment persists and adolescents usually continue to use their parents as a secure base and source of support. Romantic and other new attachments formed in adolescence and adulthood can contribute to, or alter, the structure of individuals' mental models of relationships. Thus, although parental attachments exert a strong influence, they do not preclude the development of new bonds.

The Development of Place Attachment

Knowledge about how person–place bonds are initiated and consolidated has much potential applied value. It could be used to assist new residents as they adjust to unfamiliar places, to create programs that improve community involvement, or to stimulate place-protective behaviors. However, less is known about the development of place attachment than interpersonal attachment, and existing research is mainly limited to the formation of childhood-related place bonds, and it often focuses on home environments rather than a diversity of places.

One proposal is that place attachment in childhood develops through a widening of the child's secure base from the caregiver to their home and outward to the neighborhood, and eventually to the larger community (Hay, 1998). Trust in these new secure bases develops with experience, familiarity, and symbolic connections to one's caregiver or group (e.g., Fried, 2000).

One recent model proposes that the development of place attachment and interpersonal attachment are part of a synchronous, mutually reinforcing process (Morgan, 2010). When the physical environment is rich with fascinating stimuli, it can activate the exploratory system. Children then move from their caregivers to explore and play in the environment, an interaction that generates positive affect. Should a child become threatened or too distant from a caregiver, the attachment system is activated, proximity is sought, and positive affect is restored. From this

secure base, the exploration–proximity cycle can continue, and through repeated interactions over time, two internal working models develop: one of the child–caregiver dyad, and one of the child–place dyad.

Therefore, both interpersonal and childhood-based place attachments may develop through repeated processes of arousal, interaction, and pleasure, but more evidence is needed to support this theory. Furthermore, new place attachments among adults may not necessarily stem from interactions between place and existing attachment figures, but could arise for other reasons. Therefore, more research is needed to determine the processes of new place attachment development in adulthood.

Individual Differences in Attachment

Interpersonal Attachment Styles

Attachment-related affect, cognition, and behavior differ across individuals. Indeed, many studies have explored individual differences called attachment styles (Ainsworth, 1967; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). For infants, three categories of attachment were initially proposed: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant.

Ainsworth found that approximately 65–70% of infant–caregiver dyads were *secure*. Infants with a secure bond are more likely to seek proximity when distressed, and are more successfully comforted by their caregivers. Interactions with caregivers who are warm, responsive, and available promote confident exploration, and improve social interactions. About 15–20% of dyads were *anxious-ambivalent*. These infants displayed protest and distress when separated from their caregiver, and an angry response upon reunion, as if to rebuke them for leaving (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Another 15–20% of dyads were *avoidant*. These infants showed little reaction when separated from their caregiver, and ignored them upon their return (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Later, a less-frequent category called *disorganized* attachment was proposed (Main & Solomon, 1990). This bond involves inconsistent, unpredictable responses from the infant, oscillating between avoidance and anxiety.

The current view of adult interpersonal attachment maintains that attachment styles range along two continuous dimensions: anxiety and avoidance (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998), and securely attached individuals score low on both dimensions.

Place Attachment Styles

Stable individual differences in place attachment have received little attention, but several research questions are pressing. One is whether interpersonal attachment styles interact with the strength of attachment to place. For example, insecure interpersonal attachment styles are associated with lower levels of place attachment, place-related need fulfillment, and neighborhood social bonds (Tartaglia, 2006). Also, children with an anxious attachment style are more likely to experience homesickness than their secure counterparts, who are more independent and

willing to explore while away from home (Thurber & Sigman, 1998). This suggests that interpersonal attachment styles are connected to place attachment constructs, but more research is needed, particularly in terms of place attachments in adulthood and in later life.

A second question is whether different stable place attachment styles exist and, if so, whether they are comparable to interpersonal attachment styles. Given that the main types of attachment styles have been found to exist for different types of attachment, including attachment to groups, objects, and religious entities (e.g., Belk, 1988), it seems plausible that similar attachment styles may exist for place attachment.

One attempt to develop a measure of individual differences in place attachment (McBain, 2010) adapted the Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) to assess place attachment style. Place attachment styles moderately positively correlated with their interpersonal attachment counterparts. For example, individuals high in secure interpersonal attachment were more likely to report feeling secure about their relationship with their current home and less likely to report feeling avoidant or anxious, although it is unclear whether the same would hold true for any non-residential places to which people are attached. The construct validity and reliability of this measure is not yet established, but more research is likely to be fruitful, especially if non-residential places are also studied.

Stability of Attachment

How Stable Are Attachment Patterns throughout the Lifespan?

An important question about attachment styles is the extent to which they are stable: Do early attachment representations persist later in life? Fraley (2002) argued that a prototype of attachment is generated from infants' early experiences with their caregivers, and that this early representation remains somewhat stable over the lifespan. Although people may construct additional representations for new relationships, the default is that the prototype will retain its influence through a self-fulfilling prophecy (Fraley, 2002).

That attachment styles are stable seems true for romantic attachment; attachment security with romantic partners moderately correlates with early attachment security (Feeney & Collins, 2001; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). This raises the question of the stability of place attachment and its styles.

Stability of Place Attachment

Like interpersonal attachment, place attachment is presumed to persist over time (e.g., Giuliani, 2003). However, longitudinal research on place attachment is limited to a few studies. In one, participants selected their favorite place type, and rated their level of attachment to a specific favourite place (Korpela, Ylén, Tyrväinen, & Silvennoinen, 2009). Ten months later, the participants repeated this process. The results showed stability for both favourite type of place and specific favourite places. However, attachment to a particular place can be less stable among adolescents and young adults (Elder, King, & Conger, 1996). Thus, place attachment

may persist over time but stage of life may play an important role. Furthermore, a growing body of work indicates that economic, social, political, environmental, and other external disruptions can reduce the stability of place attachments (e.g., Brown & Perkins, 1992; Fried, 2000; Devine-Wright, 2009).

In sum, the stability of interpersonal and place attachment has been investigated in different ways. Interpersonal attachment researchers have focused on the stability of attachment *styles*, and place attachment researchers have focused on the stability of specific or generic place *types*. Place attachment theory clearly would benefit from more longitudinal studies, consideration of different types of places, and the impacts of place during different stages in the lifespan. Also, of course, whether individual differences in styles of place bonding exist needs to be established, and if so an important next step would be to explore their stability over time.

Summary

Attachment extends beyond the primary infant–caregiver relationship to other people and to places across the lifespan. The extension of interpersonal attachment theory to place attachment reveals similarities in the way we bond to people and places, yet there are some differences as well. Both types of attachment are maintained through proximity-seeking, and if positively valenced, they can provide individuals with a sense of safety and comfort. In turn, these bonds can then fuel explorations of broader environments. In contrast to interpersonal attachment theory, however, place attachment theory needs more research on the existence and nature of negatively valenced person–place bonds, although some work does point to forms of weak attachment, alienation, and placelessness (e.g., Hummon, 1992; Lewicka, 2011).

People possess a proclivity both for interpersonal and for place attachment, which are extremely common, if not universal. Both types of bonds probably form over time, although the developmental course of place attachment is less well understood than that of interpersonal attachment. In both cases, bonding can occur with multiple persons or places, but the hierarchy of places and their relation to interpersonal attachment figure hierarchies has not yet been investigated.

One may question whether bonds to places can be as strong as bonds to people because, for example, responsivity and communication either are non-existent for places, or are of a different kind. The differing nature of these attachment figures may limit their comparability. Nevertheless, the parallels between the psychology of bonding to people and to places are fascinating. The combined study of interpersonal and place attachment offers one connection between developmental, social, and environmental psychology. We suggest that each should inform and enrich the others, and, ultimately, the experience of human bonding will be better understood.

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Proof for Chapter 2: "Comparing the Theories of Interpersonal and Place Attachment."

Corrections:

p. 23, paragraph 2, sentence 2: "Therefore, the overlap and discrepancies between the two theories has not yet been fully explicated." – should say "have" instead of "has"

p. 23, paragraph 3, sentence 1: "This Chapter offers an overview of the main principles of interpersonal attachment theory and compares them to those of place attachment." –"Chapter" should have a lowercase "c"?

p. 27, paragraph 1, sentence 1: "The notion of place as a secure base is more often equated to home than to other types of places" – Should say "The notion of place as a secure base is more often associated with home than with other types of places"

Other corrections

p. 27, paragraph 2, sentence 4: "More recently, a sample of individuals who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina" -- delete "More recently", so it reads "A sample of individuals who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina"

p. 31, paragraph 4, last sentence "This raises the question of the stability of place attachment and its styles." Change to "This raises the question of the stability of place attachment styles"