

MEASURING PLACE ATTACHMENT: MORE PRELIMINARY RESULTS

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Introduction. How people create meaning (attitudes, values, and beliefs) and identity is among the most important questions facing social science at the close of the 20th century. As a condition of modernity, a "crisis of meaning" is often associated with a decline of place-based community. However, modernity is not so much about a decline in meaning, as it is a change in how meaning is created or constituted in modern life. As Sack (1992) sees it, meanings are increasingly created in a spatially decontextualized world of mass consumption and mass communication; a world in which market forces create and destroy meaning at a rapid pace. As meaning has become homogenized, "thinned-out" and detached from place, people are left much to themselves to construct meaning and identity. With the decline of traditional sources of meaning, the "freedom" of leisure is frequently cited as an important context for meaning-making; though as forms of leisure, consumerism and mass tourism are also subject to the same forces that contribute to a thinning of meaning (Sack, 1992). An important issue in leisure theory, then, is to understand the extent to which people can and do use leisure to "thicken" the meaning in their lives and reconnect themselves to place and community. Unfortunately, historical emphasis on objective knowing and rationality have impoverished the concept of place as context, directing inquiry "away from understanding the way in which the experience of place plays an important role in the construction of individual and group identity" (Entrikin, 1991, p. 134). Developing ways of measuring place meanings and attachments may illuminate the prospects for leisure to provide meaning in the modern world and enhance the management of recreation resources as places for making meaning. As one step toward better understanding of place-based meaning in leisure, this paper describes an effort to develop quantitative measures of attachment to outdoor recreation places.

Though many concepts and approaches to attachment have emerged in environmental psychology and consumer behavior, Williams et al. (1992) identify two types of attachment to recreation settings: goal-directed/functional and emotional/symbolic. Functional attachments or what Stokols and Shumaker (1981) describe as place dependence, have to do with the opportunities the setting affords for fulfillment of specific goals or activity needs. Though some may value a place because it is a good location for hiking, camping, fishing and so forth, or because it has outstanding scenery (making the setting highly valued for recreation purposes), the people who use the place may or may not feel a strong sense of attachment to it. Emotional/symbolic meanings, what Proshansky et al. (1983) refer to as place-identity, concern the importance a person attaches to the place because of what the setting symbolizes. These symbolic meanings may be very personal (a childhood stomping ground) or shared (the way national parks symbolize American heritage).

Methods. This presentation reports on a series of studies to develop a scale which taps each of these two dimensions of place meanings. Research from environment psychology, consumer behavior, and leisure studies was consulted to generate place attachment items. In addition, items were proposed, reviewed, and edited by three researchers (other than the authors) which resulted in a list of 61 items dealing with place dependence and place identity. These items were evaluated for construct validity and reliability by presenting them in the form of a questionnaire to 380 students from several universities who completed a place attachment questionnaire as part of a class assignment. Subjects responded to items such as "This place means a lot to me" and "I wouldn't substitute any other area for doing the type of things I did here" on a five-point Likert scale ("strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"). Subjects were asked to respond with respect to a "wilderness, backcountry, roadless or natural area" they had visited recently. A 25-item subset of the 61 items was used in a visitor survey of the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area (n= 369) and a 15-item subset was used in a visitor survey of Shenandoah National Park (n = 2005).

Results. Comparison of the factor structures for the three data sets are presented in Table 1. After eliminating items with low variance and extraneous content, responses to 33 items from the student data were reduced to four factors. These were labeled Dependence, Identity, Expression, and Centrality. Factor analysis of the 25 items from the Mt. Rogers data produced a similar four factor structure. The Mt. Rogers analysis largely replicated the dependence and identity factors. However, the structure of expression and centrality varied as there were fewer items in the Mt. Rogers item pool representing these factors. Using only 15 items, the Shenandoah data resulted in a two factor solution, reproducing the dependence and identity factors of the other two data sets. None of the expression and centrality items were included on the Shenandoah survey. For the dependence factor, the internal consistency was 0.88 in the student data, 0.94 in the Mt. Rogers data, and 0.89 in the Shenandoah data using the same five items. For the identity factor the internal consistency was 0.92 in the student data using seven items. Using only four of those seven items the reliability was 0.94 for the Mt. Rogers data and 0.86 for the Shenandoah data. The content of the expression factor varied between the student and Mt. Rogers data sets so reliabilities are not directly comparable. The reliabilities were 0.83 to 0.85 respectively. The fourth (centrality) factor from the student data had a relatively low reliability at 0.73. The fourth Mt. Rogers factor was dominated by two items from the student identity factor. Based on the Mt. Rogers data all four place attachment dimensions were related to activity preference, importance and involvement, focus of experience (setting versus activity), and past experience at the site.

Discussion. These results suggest that place dependence may be distinguishable from place identity as a form of attachment. Although only two dimensions were designed into the scale, place identity appears to contain subcomponents similar to those found in the activity/object involvement scales developed in leisure and consumer behavior.

References

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Table 1. Factor Structures Across Three Studies

Item No.	Identity Factor			Item No.	Dependence Factor			Item No.	Expression Factor		Item No.	Centrality Factor	
	STU	MtR	SHD		STU	MtR	SHD		STU	MtR		STU	MtR
22	72	26	-	7	72	74	73	26	70	-	32	61	52
11	70	71	73	8	69	75	78	45	64	-	52	54	13
9	66	65	72	5	64	73	73	39	61	71	4	50	11
30	63	27	-	13	64	72	80	33	60	44	17	49	-
6	61	54	62	14	57	70	68	50	59	68	29	41	-
12	60	63	66	37	55	55	-	44	52	-	33	18	50
15	52	67	70	35	52	49	-	38	46	63	22	12	81
16	50	55	-	40	50	-	-	35	44	53	30	12	80
1	48	-	65	51	50	51	-	51	42	52			
4	42	50	62										
Eigenvalue	2.0	13.7	7.8		13.8	1.3	1.5		1.1	0.96		0.78	0.88
% variance	6.1	56.9	51.8		41.8	5.3	9.9		3.3	4.0		2.4	3.7
Cronbach's Alpha	0.92	0.92	0.86		0.88	0.94	0.86		0.83	0.85		0.73	0.92

Notes: Boldfaced Factor Loadings used for calculating Alpha Coefficients.

Dashes in columns indicates item not included in the data set.

Shenandoah study did not include items relating to Expression and Centrality.

Key: STU = Student Data

MtR = Mount Rogers Data

SHD = Shenandoah Data