

Relation between Privacy and Place Attachment in Student Housing

Shirley A. Elprama, Antal Haans, & Yvonne A. W. de Kort

Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven, the Netherlands

Introduction

Students often move to the city in which their university is located. Such voluntary relocation has implications for place attachment, described as the affective bond or link between one individual and a specific place and/or the people living in that place. Developing emotional ties with their new environment is important, because place attachment positively affects well-being (Harris, Brown, & Werner, 1995).

Living in student housing, in which facilities are often shared, has consequences for one's need for privacy as well (defined as a personal experience pertaining to excessive amounts of social exchange; Haans, Kaiser, & de Kort, 2007). Obtaining an optimal amount of privacy is important to people, because it serves functions such as rejuvenation, autonomy, and self-reflection (Pedersen, 1997).

Although research on the relation between privacy and place attachment has been surprisingly scarce, it suggests that a high need for privacy (i.e., too much social exchange) is detrimental to place attachment (e.g., Harris et al., 1995). In the present research, we aimed to confirm this relation. Also, we investigated whether the relation between privacy and place attachment was explained by the extent to which students were successful in attaining privacy related goals (e.g., self-reflection). In addition, we explored whether sharing facilities affects privacy regulation.

Method

An online survey was completed by 369 students living in shared student housing. Measures included three dimensions of place attachment (i.e., social bonding, place dependence, and place identity), a behavior-based need for privacy scale (cf., Haans, et al, 2007), three privacy-related functions

(rejuvenation, autonomy, self-reflection), and a well-being measure.

Results and discussion

As expected, place attachment was positively related to well-being ($r > .12$). Moreover, the need for privacy correlated negatively with the three dimensions of place attachment, suggesting that students who experience a suboptimal level of privacy are indeed less likely to develop strong place attachment.

Mediation analyses revealed that this relationship was mediated partly by the extent to which privacy goals were attained, especially autonomy and self-reflection. In other words, optimal levels of privacy increased place attachment, because it offered opportunities for contemplating on past behavior (i.e., self-reflection), and autonomy. Interestingly, sharing facilities (e.g., a kitchen or bathroom) predicted the need for privacy only poorly. In contrast, the degree to which the student and his or her house matched was found to be a better predictor of the need for privacy.

This research can inform the design of student housing as well as the optimization of processes for room/house allotment and selection.

Acknowledgement

We thank Harald Evers and Elly Bogers of Vestide for facilitating data collection.

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