The Role of Qualitative Approaches to Place Attachment Research

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Lynne C. Manzo

Laís Pinto de Carvalho

Much has been written about place attachment as a construct over the years. Yet, less attention has been paid to the broad methodological aspects of place attachment, the epistemological underpinnings, and the political implications of researchers' choice of paradigms.[1] In particular, the place attachment literature is lacking an examination of the role and value of qualitative or more subjectivist and critical reflexive[2] approaches as well as considerations of what such approaches can afford in terms of our understanding of the phenomenon.

To address this gap, this chapter aims: (1) to present different onto-epistemological approaches to researching and understanding place attachment; and (2) to examine the specific role and value of qualitative/subjectivist/critically reflexive approaches in terms of *what they make room for* in our understanding of place attachment – that is, how such approaches can broaden our way of studying and understanding place attachment. We contend that qualitative/subjectivist/critically reflexive approaches are essential to exploring the less well-understood and emergent aspects of place attachment. These aspects include place experiences that are not captured in existing measurement tools - for example, how place attachments are complicated by power relations, and how attachments play a role in people's response to place change and increasing socio-spatial precarity (e.g. vulnerability due to displacement via disasters, gentrification, etc.). We therefore aim to shed light on the

unique strengths of a qualitative/subjectivist/reflexive approach to research on place attachments.

Onto-Epistemological Approaches to Research

In order to achieve the goals of this chapter, it is necessary to consider the researcher's fundamental beliefs about reality and knowledge that undergird their methodological choices when conducting research. This is important because different views of reality (ontology) and what constitutes valid knowledge (epistemology) ultimately drive how researchers study the phenomena that they seek to understand, such as place attachment. Historically, researchers have made a distinction between two broad onto-epistemological paradigms; the quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative paradigm is predicated on positivism, a premise that there is a single external reality that is objectively knowable and that can be interpreted through reason and logic. In this paradigm, researchers strive to be detached from what they study with the belief that findings will thereby depend on the nature of what is being studied rather than on the beliefs, values and choices of the researcher. Such objectivity, it has been argued, ensures that the researchers have "constrained their personal prejudices" (Payne & Payne, 2004, p. 153) leading to more reliable findings. In this paradigm, rigor is achieved through the establishment of a standardized set of protocols and procedures that can be applied to any context, as the aim is to establish generalizable knowledge. Toward that end, researchers tend to prefer experimental designs and random sampling techniques with large samples so that findings might be generalized to the larger population whom that sample is meant to represent. Data collected in this paradigm tend to be numeric in nature and analyzed through statistical tests.

In contrast, the qualitative paradigm emerged as social scientists sought to apply the philosophical concept of "*verstehen*" (translated from German loosely as "to understand" or "to interpret") to study human experience and to develop a method to capture the processes through which humans come to know the world (Lapan et al, 2011). On this foundation, the qualitative paradigm gathers data in the form of natural language and expressions of experiences, including visual expressions (Levitt et al, 2018). Scholars from this epistemological position challenge the notion that an independent reality exists outside of any investigation or observation.[3] They further question the feasibility and value of objectivity, which feminist scholar Donna Haraway (1988) has famously called the "god trick" because objectivist knowledge is presented as a disembodied and transcendent "gaze from nowhere" (p. 581). Some scholars have argued that positivist objectivity is not just unnecessary, but undesirable. Consequently, a qualitative approach not only accepts subjectivity, but also encourages researchers to examine closely their own positionality by being reflexive in the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This reflexivity is a methodological principle that calls for self-awareness and careful reflection throughout all phases of the research process regarding the relationships among the researcher(s), research participants, and the subject matter under study.

The onto-epistemological framework guiding qualitative work also calls for reconsideration of traditional interpretations of validity and reliability. By implementing verification strategies and self-adjusting during the process of research, qualitative researchers move the responsibility for incorporating and maintaining reliability and validity from external reviewers' judgments to the investigators themselves (Morse et al, 2002). As a result, the hallmarks of rigor in the qualitative paradigm focus on prioritizing context sensitivity, being transparent in the research process, involving research participants in data analysis to "truth

test" the work, and centering relationality as a way to be accountable to the broader community to which the research participants belong. This measure of rigor also stems from a critique of extraction methodologies (De Sousa Santos, 2016), or modes of research where the information generated does not offer benefits to the people and communities whom the researchers engage. However, there is a tendency to evaluate qualitative research against conventional scientific (i.e. quantitative) criteria of rigor (Sandelowski, 1986), thus marginalizing such research endeavors.

Debates about the utility of perpetuating a quantitative and qualitative binary have grown, and there is an important movement away from this divide (see, for example, Bassi, 2014; Di Masso et al, 2014; Seamon & Gill, 2016). According to Mazumdar (2005), a more appropriate nomenclature for different research paradigms would be in epistemological terms, for example, positivist approaches and nonpositivistics. Bassi (2014) goes further advocating for replacing the quantitative-qualitative binary with a continuum of critical reflexivity. This framework focuses more on the ethical implications of using certain methods, including asking for what and for whom the research is being conducted, what the research sustains, and what it overcomes.

The quantitative-qualitative binary is also problematic because within each of these paradigms there is a diversity of perspectives and epistemologies. For example, the qualitative approach is not singular, but composed of a theoretical and procedural multiplicity including: pragmatism, grounded theory, symbolic interactionism, narrative research, discourse analysis, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, intuitive inquiry, performative research, non-representational research, affect-based research, ethnography and auto-ethnography, social constructionism, critical theory (Marxist, feminist, cultural, critical race,

queer, postcolonial, disability theories), action research and advocacy/participation studies (Seamon & Gill, 2016). Further, a researcher might employ qualitative data collection techniques typical of that paradigm but approach their research with a positivistic framework. For example, a researcher might conduct in-depth interviews, but still seek to approximate objectivity in the classic positivist sense in their analysis by seeking to quantify the textual data or make generalizable claims (See, for example, the debate between Williams & Patterson, 2007, and Beckley, Stedman, Wallace & Ambard, 2007 on this matter).

Similarly, although the quantitative methodology is usually carried out under a positivist or postpositivist[4] understanding of reality, this is not the case *a priori*. For example, Kwan (2002) argues that researchers can approach GIS as a positivist technological tool, which would limit our understanding and use of it, or we can seek more critical applications, including its use to gather qualitative data. In one study, Kwan (2008) uses GIS along with oral histories and diary data to understand the "emotional geographies" of Muslim women in the U.S. after 9/11. She created visual narratives that document Muslim women's emotional responses to place over time. These narratives ran counter to the then-dominant anti-Muslim sentiment. Hence, quantitative tools and research can also have a reflexive and critical character (Parker, 2007) particularly when the data are non-numeric (e.g. visual).

This suggests that neither quantitative or qualitative approaches have an exclusive claim on challenging normative orders. Thus, relying on a quantitative-qualitative binary can be counter-productive as particular onto-epistemological assumptions are not naturally given by the data production strategies chosen by the researcher. We therefore posit that conceptual and methodological heterogeneity is critical to a full appreciation of the dynamic aspects of place attachments and their various manifestations. To contribute to that heterogeneity, our

particular focus in this chapter is on what Denzin (2017) calls the "multiple interpretive community" typically comprised of qualitative researchers…united by the avowed humanistic and social justice commitment to study the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual" (p.10).

Onto-Epistemological Paradigms in Place Attachment Research

To address the onto-epistemological paradigms framing place attachment research, it is useful to consider first the paradigmatic underpinnings of research on place. This area of research gained momentum in the mid-twentieth century with the emergence of environmental psychology (Saegert & Winkel, 1990; Altman & Rogoff, 1987) and the humanistic critique in geography, including phenomenology (Buttimer, 1976; Seamon, 1979; Tuan, 1977). Place research advanced through multiple concurrent trends including: (1) "critiques of cognitive information processing theories [in psychology]…in which the environment was reduced to stimulus;" (2) the articulation of a transactional approach for studying people in their physical context; and (3) "anti-positivistic reactions to mainstream geography's emphasis on place as…container of action;" (Williams, 2014, p. 90).

As Williams and Patterson (2005) note, research on place was initially slow to spread outside of humanistic geography and phenomenology because of the dominance of the positivistic paradigm and quantitative approaches in environment and behavior research (see also Low & Altman, 1992). Much early research in environmental psychology inherited the dominant socio-cognitivist approach in psychology that brought with it positivist assumptions about people-place relationships. As Stokols (1990) noted, this work was based in an instrumental perspective that measured different qualities and features of the environment and how these

influenced human thought and behavior (Williams, 2014). Still, alongside this trend emerged qualitative and phenomenological work as an important endeavor against this "over-scientification" of people-place relationships (di Masso, personal communication; see Canter, 1977 and Relph, 1978 for the early debate;).

Just as place research is not grounded in a single research tradition, neither are studies of place attachment. Williams (2014) posits that the legacy of place attachment research includes two conceptions of place as a locus of attachments or as a center of meaning, with the former approach considering place attachment "narrowly as an affective bond," while the latter examines the ways that people construct and express meaning. He further posits that the place as locus of attachment approach has been "quite amenable to psychometric methods of measuring individual differences" across various contexts (p. 93), while research taking the latter approach which is typically captured through discourse and narrative, lends itself to a more qualitative approach (Williams, 2014). However, the distinction between these approaches to place attachment may not always lend themselves to the adoption of a particular paradigm, as we see in studies that take a mixed methods approach (e.g. Devine Wright, 2010; 2011).

Using their own framework for organizing the body of place attachment research, Di Masso, Dixon and Durrheim (2014) make a distinction between what they call a "cognitive/representationalist" approach and a "discursive/constructionist" approach. The cognitive/representationalist approach tends to focus on the internal, psychological experience of individuals, and the way that attachments accomplish individual functions e.g., survival, self-regulation, self-continuity (Di Masso, Dixon & Durrheim, p. 81). In contrast, a discursive/constructionist approach sees people-place relations as a context-specific, dialogic,

social construction with a focus on variability of meanings that have "significant rhetorical/ideological relevance" (p.81). This approach to place attachment, they argue, releases us from seeing attachment as a deep-seated internalized affinity to places that individuals experience, to seeing attachments as linguistically and socially constructed. Still, as we shall illustrate, there are other approaches beyond these that warrant consideration.

Despite articulations of divergent approaches to researching place attachment, a dominant thread within place attachment research has arguably been situated within the positivist and postpositivist paradigm – i.e. the place as locus of attachment thread according to Williams (2014), or the cognitive-representationalist approach as articulated by Di Masso and colleagues (2014). Working from the post/positivist paradigm, scholars have focused on how best to measure place attachment with the use of scales to determine the intensity of attachments to certain locations, and to establish the reliability and validity of the survey instrument (see especially Williams & Vaske, 2003; Kyle et al, 2005). As a result, much place attachment research has sought to standardize measures and procedures, to generalize knowledge about place attachments and to look for causal relationships. The dominance of this trend is verified in Lewicka's (2011) review of forty years of place attachment research. Some have speculated this trend toward positivism and measurement may be due, in part, to a legacy of social science research approach to phenomena as placed outside of situated processes (Di Masso & Castrechini, 2012). This decontextualization has had important consequences for research on people-place relations and place attachment in particular – for example, the de-politicization of these relations, the predominance of individualistic approaches to understanding attachments, and the overlooking of experiences not captured in behavioral or cognitive approaches structured into popular place attachment survey instruments. A critical goal of this chapter therefore, is to shed light on the nature and value

of a more qualitative/subjectivist/critically reflexive approach to studying place attachment. In the following sections, we therefore focus on how qualitative/subjectivist/critically reflexive approaches can expose new possibilities in the study of place attachments.

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Contributions of the Qualitative/Subjectivist/Critically Reflexive Approach to Place Attachment

In this section, we posit that a qualitative/subjectivist/critically reflexive approach is particularly helpful in revealing aspects of place attachment that are less evident in dominant approaches. This includes how: (1) place attachments are influenced by their situatedness in particular geopolitical contexts and power relations; and how (2) place attachments are experienced in non-normative ways, as non-positivistic/qualitative approaches are less likely to reify and reproduce hegemonic understandings of how people relate to place. We wish to highlight these aspects of place attachment because we believe that more dominant approaches risk overlooking and further marginalizing already marginalized experiences and people, which does not serve to advance our understanding of this important phenomenon. We present some empirical examples to demonstrate a diversity of contexts and insights provided by approach to place attachment research.

(1) Place attachments are influenced by their situatedness in particular geopolitical contexts and power relations

As Haraway (1988) argued years ago, we need situated and embodied knowledge (i.e knowledge tied to the specifics of embodied political identities) as an argument against unlocatable knowledge claims. Place attachment research conducted from a more qualitative, subjectivist, critically reflexive approach helps demonstrate the situatedness of place attachment in its larger geopolitical context because it makes room for people's own narratives and contextualized knowledge. It is less interested in the strength of place attachment than in the nature of the experience as lived and described by research participants themselves. As such, it also calls out the situatedness of researchers themselves (Breuer & Roth, 2003). This is critical to acknowledge since most studies of place attachment are about, and produced from, the global north, especially Anglo-Saxon contexts. It stands to reason, then, that if we accept knowledge as situated per Haraway (1988), then we need to hear from a much wider array of voices. Currently, much of what we know about place attachments is geared toward dominant experiences of the global north and from other dominant groups (i.e. people from western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) societies long considered "standard subjects" that are actually outliers (Henrich, Hein & Norenzayan, 2010).

Qualitative research has been particularly useful in revealing the political component of place attachment, challenging notions such as social conflict, power struggles, and social change. For example, using discourse analysis, Dixon and Durrheim (2000) studied racial exclusion on the beaches of South Africa when apartheid was progressively dismantled. By closely analyzing newspaper articles in the period from 1982 to 1995, they were able to identify the racist rhetoric through which ideological constructions of the place were made. Further research by the authors based on in-depth interviews of holiday-goers on a desegregated beach revealed not only the emotional and symbolic significance of place, but also how the

beach served as a site for the expression of white South African identity for white respondents (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). The open-ended approach employed in this research enabled these politicized and spatialized articulations of identity to emerge via a nuanced examination of respondents' accounts of desegregation.

Di Masso, Dixon and Pol's (2011) study of place meaning and attachment to a public space in Barcelona reveals how practices of attributing meaning and value to places are often more conflict-ridden, action-oriented, and politically-charged than is implied by much research around place attachment. In this study, the authors conducted a discourse analysis with 186 media reports from newspapers across a ten year span, and conducted in-depth interviews with different actors representing citizen and government organizations, to understand their positions in relation to the development of the contested public space. For each site studied, they found rhetorically opposed constructions of place meanings among citizens and protesters on the one hand, and developers and local administrators on the other. They argue that a rhetorical analysis enabled these meanings and dimension of place meaning and attachments to emerge.

In another example, Pinto de Carvalho and Cornejo (2019) studied a small urban community's response to, and recovery from, a volcanic eruption in Chile. In this study, the researchers employed participatory photographic techniques and walking interviews that focused on people's life stories around place to understand the recovery process and the impacts of the volcanic eruption on local residents' place attachments. These methods enabled researchers to see how place attachment intersected with the politics of place, revealing tensions between the official discourse around a neoliberal way of recovery and reoccupation of affected areas, and residents' experiences of place and of disruption. The

research revealed that the State declared only the poor areas on the periphery of the city as unfit for residential use due to the volcanic risk, fragmenting the community by requiring people to relocate in different cities. Further, discourse analysis uncovered how the official designation of places as uninhabitable territory and as places of vulnerability that were illegal to enter contrasted with residents' views of the territory as a lived place of attachments and community. Indeed, poor residents with little political power disobeyed the State and chose to return to their precarious homes even without basic services such as running water. The approach taken in this research demonstrates the power of place attachments, the impact of its political dimensions, and the need for reconstruction strategies to prioritize the care, dignity and livelihoods of community members.

Another qualitative study of place attachments and post-disaster recovery in Christchurch, New Zealand, revealed several critical dimensions of place attachments that might not otherwise be revealed through quantitative techniques (Durgerian, 2019). Here, the researcher examined what she called the "emotional infrastructure" of the citizens of Christchurch, observing how attachments to place helped support the recovery process. In particular, Durgerian notes that the open-ended nature of the interviews she conducted, and the intentional effort to hear people talk about their experience in their own terms, revealed dimensions of place attachment that might not otherwise be evident. For example, people got attached to temporary places for meeting basic survival needs – like locations of a bank of temporary latrines and places to get fuel for cooking because they also became critical social meeting spaces where people could share experiences, maintain social ties and rebuild community.

Durgerian (2019) also notes how critical an awareness of her positionality was during this research. For example, she made a concerted effort to reach out to members of the indigenous Maori community to learn about their experiences of the earthquake recovery process. Although she was mainly an "outsider" as a US citizen conducting this research, there were a few critical ways that she approached the research that altered the trajectory of her work. She notes that intentionally approaching people with a curiosity about their stories, and enabling participants to begin and end these stories as participants saw fit was critical. In addition, she made a point of engaging Maori leaders with a purposeful approach of "deep listening" and "authenticity" which helped establish relationships of mutual trust.

Durgerian further explains that a major influence on building relationships was clarifying her "place to stand" or what in Maori is known as *tūrangawaewae*, and her place in time through her genealogy or *whakapapa.* To do this, she provided each participant with a personalized greeting cards of photos of the canoe she made as a young girl with her father, explaining how those photos connected her to family and place. This expression of her own situatedness opened doors to relationships that helped her to understand far more about place attachments in Christchurch than she might otherwise have understood. Together, the studies described in this section demonstrate just some of the ways that qualitative/subjectivist/reflexive methods can be used to reveal the role of power, politics and conflict in place attachment.

(2) Place attachments are experienced in non-normative ways

In this section, we posit that a qualitative/subjectivist/reflexive approach to studying place attachments is also particularly well suited for enabling non-hegemonic perspectives of place to be heard. This is because such an approach allows for people to describe their diverse

experiences of place in their own terms/images; and because a reflexive approach requires a particular sensitivity to the very power relations that impact marginalized groups. Here, we consider place attachments in a context of non-normative place experiences – for example, how place attachments are connected to identity and identity politics as revealed by the stories of marginalized people, and how attachments to domestic space/home can be complicated by mixed emotions and experiences.

Research has demonstrated that for marginalized groups, attachments to place are formed through complicated relationships often forged by exclusion. For example, using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, Manzo (2005) found that for LGBQT+ participants, the places to which they were attached were places of belonging secured for them in dynamic relation to places of exclusion and alienation (see also Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009; Gorman-Murray, 2007). For some, their place of residence was one such place of alienation and rejection and their place attachments were carved from relationships with other places where they could safely be themselves and be accepted. Their stories were related to places instrumental to their experience of "coming out," which included gay neighborhoods, community and drop-in centers, bars, book stores and friend's homes where they were accepted and safe. These interviews also illustrated how negative and ambivalent feelings and experiences were a critical part of people's attachments to place. Measuring place attachment through established scales would not have revealed the nuances and dynamism of place attachments that this study demonstrated, - e.g. the aforementioned dynamic relation between exclusion and belonging, and tensions around the notion of home.

The nuanced complexities of place attachments are also well illustrated through qualitative research in contexts of ethnic-racial relations. For example, Fullilove (2014, this volume)

describes how African-Americans formed attachments to "beloved communities" that were culturally rich centers of belonging created through a history of racism and exclusion, from slavery to "redlining" (discriminatory practices of demarcating urban areas where banks would avoid investing) and gentrification/displacement today. Her critically reflexive, qualitative approach with particular attention to race and power revealed rich layers of complex place attachments that were continually navigated and negotiated through history, borne from a tension between serial displacement and the constant moving and rebuilding of Black communities. Similarly, Durgerian's (2019) critically reflexive approach and use of in-depth interviews in the previously mentioned study in post-earthquake Christchurch revealed that for indigenous Maori participants, the earthquake was, in its own way, a "welcome disruption to a damaging normal." The rich narratives that were gathered demonstrated an important distinction between indigenous and settler ways of relating to the land and how Maori cultural history was erased by colonization. Because of that history, Maori participants saw the earthquake as a way to disrupt the colonial identity of the city and enable a more inclusive vision that accommodated Maori history, identity and presence to be acknowledged and created (Durgerian, 2019). These perspectives, often marginalized in society and in research, were reveals through the flexible, open-ended and narrative approaches taken in these studies.

A qualitative approach to place attachments also enables consideration of the complexities of emotional responses to place, revealing how one's residence can sometimes be characterized by negative and ambivalent feelings. This is an extension of earlier feminist literature that challenged the then-prevailing view of domestic space as a place of peace and refuge, noting instead its role as a site of women's reproductive and care work, where experiences of loneliness, isolation, seclusion, invasion of privacy and violation of rights can occur

(Ahrentzen, 1992; Massey, 1994/2001; McDowell, 1997). Along the same lines, Moore

(2000) links the study of place attachment to critical studies of the home, making visible the

diversity and tensions in attachments to the residence that incorporate understandings of the

material, political and cultural production in which these experiences are developed.

Similarly, for González (2005), home involves aspects of both topophilia (love of place) and

topophobia (fear of place). Through the use of in-depth interviews with rural women from

southwestern Spain with little formal education who are not employed outside the home, this

study demonstrates how the same space can be lived differently by women and men, and how

relationships to home can reproduce ideologies, stereotypes, alienation and gender violence.

Overall, this study reminds of how place attachments can be saturated with sometimes

contradictory emotions.

Explorations of place attachments in public/social housing demonstrates that people's

attachments to place can run counter to dominant discourses about that housing. For

example, studies of forced relocation through urban restructuring programs in the US

(Manzo, 2014) and Europe (Kleinhans & Kearns, 2013) reveal that people's relationship with

their housing was quite complex, and that it was complicated, in part, by the contrast between

resident's lived experience of place and the rhetoric of "severe distress" that was deployed to

justify the demolition of their housing. For example, Manzo, Kleit and Couch (2008) found

that public housing residents had strong bonds to their housing and enjoyed thriving mutual

support systems among neighbors despite the housing being labeled as distressed by local

housing authorities and slated for demolition. This created a great deal of ambivalent

emotions among residents revolving around four competing themes; feelings that community

was a good and supportive place to live, discomfort over the stigma of living in public

housing, anger and fear about being forced to move, and struggling to exonerate the housing

authority's requirement to relocate because of their power and because residents were told it was in their best interest to move. The use of in-depth interviews with residents revealed the active process of meaning making as residents struggled with the externally imposed label of distress in contrast to their own experiences of place and the necessity to move. The qualitative approach enabled us to gain an understanding of the agency of residents – particularly poor people who are often stripped of their agency – in a way that could not have been revealed by surveys alone.

Summary

To truly understand any phenomenon through research we "need multiple paradigms and critical reflexive approaches to have a better account of the world" (Haraway, 1988, p. 579), what Patterson & Williams (2005) have called "critical pluralism." Conceptual and methodological heterogeneity is essential for a full appreciation of place attachment and its various manifestations and dynamics. In this chapter, we sought to highlight the role and value of qualitative/subjectivist/critical reflexive approaches to place attachment as a means to understand those aspects of the phenomenon that are less well understood by research thus far, including place attachments that fall outside of normative expectations and experiences. In particular, we have argued that research from a qualitative/subjectivist/critical reflexive perspective allows for a range of marginalized place experiences to be explored, and offers unique insights into place attachments that are distinct from the kind of data obtained from established quantitative measures.

In their critical analysis of Latin American environmental psychology in the first decade of the millennium, Wiesenfeld and Zara (2012) observed that the ethical-political dimensions of

place research have been neglected. This includes questioning the neutrality of researchers, the emphasis on the study of individual processes isolated from the particular and political contexts in which people are immersed, and the use of research knowledge in service of relations of inequality, oppression and exploitation – e.g. normalizing white middle class educated experience as "standard" (Henrich et al., 2010). We maintain that the same challenges hold true for much place attachment research today. Qualitative, subjectivist and critically reflexive approaches can help scholarship on place attachments break away from these trends by its vigilance to power relations in the research process, and by including voices from the margins through the use of narrative and image-based approaches that enable people to tell stories of place in their own terms.

Denzin (2017) recently noted that **"**critical qualitative research is under assault" as "scholars around the world …struggle against the regulatory practices of neoliberalism" (p.15). In light of this context, we have sought to highlight some of the unique dimensions of qualitative, subjectivist and critically reflexive approaches to studying place attachments. Going forward, it would be helpful to keep in mind that research on place attachments that is conducted in a politically aware manner also makes room for research to initiate social change. That is, reflecting on "who owns the research issues, who initiates them, in whose interests the research is carried out …what counts as knowledge and who is transformed by it" can enable place attachment work to not only capture a fuller range of the human experiences of place, it can enable people to partake of their own liberation (Edwards & Brannelly, 2017, p.272).

We close this chapter by inviting an opening – of a renewed discussion regarding the epistemological and methodological implications of place attachment research. It is essential

for researchers to ask: What is the contribution of our epistemological and methodological decisions to our understanding of place attachments? Does the design of our research reproduce existing power dynamics or reveal and challenge them? Do we design research that involves people as active agents of their attachment experience? These are critical questions we must ask ourselves if we are to truly understand the full multitude of ways that people form place attachments. We must understand place attachments and what they represent in people's own terms in their lives in a way that can be more understanding and sensitive to people's unique experiences and not merely reproduce what we already know or assume.

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[1] While Hernández et al (2014, this volume) provide a fine overview of theoretical and methodological aspects of place attachment research, the focus is more heavily on quantitative approaches, and while Seamon and Gill (2016) offer an excellent overview of qualitative methods, it is more broadly about methods for environmental psychology as a discipline rather than place attachment research specifically.

[2] It is our contention that a qualitative approach to research is commensurate with subjectivist and critically reflexive approaches in that they all consider knowledge as positional and subjective, and they do not see this as a methodological shortcoming. Further, critical reflexivity calls for explicit consideration of the process of knowledge construction including acknowledging how a researcher's background and position affect the research. Rather than considering this a reliability problem, it is viewed as providing a richer understanding of the phenomenon under study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

[3] While most qualitative researchers disagree with the objectivity espoused by positivism, others maintain that qualitative work can still be conducted within a positivistic framework. An extension of this is evident in "mixed methods" research that combines qualitative and

quantitative data collection and/or analysis. However, as Williams & Patterson (2007) point out, this is really a mixing of distinct research paradigms and it remains an open debate whether these can be integrated in a single research design and how such work should be evaluated.

[4] Like positivists, post-positivists believe there is a reality independent of our thinking about it, but they recognize that all observation is fallible and all theory revisable. Consequently, they emphasize the importance of multiple measures and use of triangulation to better understand the subject at hand (Trochim, 2020.)

Table 7.1 Comparison of paradigmatic approaches to research especially as related to place attachment

	Positivist Approaches	Subjectivist/Critically Reflexive Approaches
Research interest	Explanation: prediction and control	Understanding, criticism and transformation/restitution and emancipation
Ontology	Realism, typically singular reality but possible multiple subjectivities (biases) Apprehensible reality	Historical realism (critical paradigm): reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time; And relativism (constructivist paradigm): local and specific co-constructed realities
Epistemology	Objectivist	Transactional subjectivist
Methodology	Experimental/manipulation of variables	Dialogical/hermeneutical/dialectic
Values	Excludes/ denies values; seeks to avoid researcher subjectivity (bias)	Includes values, recognizes importance of positionality/reflexivity
Methods	Predominance of quantitative (e.g. Large-scale surveys)	Predominance of the qualitative (e.g. Narrative & graphic approaches)

Approaches to place attachment	Place attachment as universal and apprehensible phenomenon	Place attachment as context-occasioned and socially constructed phenomenon
	Search for generalization and causality through standardized measures	Search for experience, meanings and their variability, situated in singular contexts
	Emphasis on explaining individual processes	Emphasis on exploring individual and collective processes and lived experiences
	Place attachment usually not studied as a political phenomenon	Place attachments usually studied as a political phenomenon, affected by power relations
Liberative /Change Potential	Liberative potential through innovative/critical use of traditional tools (e.g. GIS)	Liberative potential through the critical data production strategies, analysis and dissemination of results. Positivistic analysis of qualitative data can perpetuate status quo / hegemonic approaches

Source: Guba and Lincoln (1994), and Di Masso et al. (2014) modified by the authors. Our intention here is to highlight substantial differences between these distinct approaches. We recognize that they are but two of many approaches, and that they might be, in some aspects, more like anchors on a continuum with more nuanced or hybrid approaches between them. For example, post-positivist critical research could acknowledge the researcher's influence/positionality and might include mixed methods. However, it is also true that while some aspects of research paradigms might fit on a continuum, others, like ontology, are incommensurable.