

Problems in Place: Using Discursive Social Psychology to Investigate the Meanings of Seasonal Homes

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Researchers continue to explore the nature of place meanings and especially how these meanings are created, disseminated and contested. This paper uses the conceptual framework of discursive social psychology to identify varying interpretive frames homeowners use to characterize the meaning and significance of their seasonal homes as vacation and recreation residences. Among the frames are refuge from modern life, the importance or centrality of seasonal homes in people's lives, obligations and burdens entailed by maintaining dual residences and interactions within a community. The paper advocates for an approach to place meaning that acknowledges the social basis of meaning yet recognizes and focuses on how individuals appropriate and use interpretive frames to explain their relationships to place.

Keywords discourse, discursive social psychology, interpretive repertoires, place meanings, seasonal homes, sense of place

Introduction

The topic of *place* as a conceptual model has gained increased prominence in the study of leisure behavior (Farnum, Hall, & Kruger, 2005). With this growth has come confusion regarding the assumptions underlying any specific investigation and a corresponding array of seemingly interrelated concepts whose definitions and distinctions can be difficult to reconcile (Patterson & Williams, 2005; Stedman, 2003a; Stokowski, 2008).

Efforts to synthesize the literature on place typically highlight three aspects: material form, location or scale and a relational aspect of place described by various terms including *sense of place* and *place meaning* (Cresswell, 2004; Gieryn, 2000; Sack, 1992). Material form refers to the material setting through which people conduct their lives and includes natural as well as human constructed features. In addition to material form, every place

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is located and can be nested in multiple scales from local to global. Finally, what most differentiates place from other spatial-material concepts (e.g., resources) is the way that place organizes and even constitutes human/social meanings, relations and actions. Thus, places are not only “materially carved out [they] are also interpreted, narrated, felt, understood and imagined; [their meanings are] . . . flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably contested” (Gieryn, 2000, p. 467). They constitute a “fundamental means through which we make sense of the world and through which we act” (Sack, 1992, p. 1).

Across various disciplines much of the confusion regarding place concepts, in particular, comes from the differing ways investigators have approached this third relational/meaning aspect of place (Stokowski, 2008; Williams, 2008). Many descriptions of sense of place combine two somewhat distinct ideas. For example, Entrikin (1976) defined place as a “center of meaning or a focus of human emotional attachment” (p. 616). Likewise, Hummon (1992) defined sense of place as “dual in nature involving both an interpretive perspective on the environment and an emotional reaction to the environment” (p. 262). Stokowski argued that “places have historically also been conceived as centers of symbolism and sentiment” (p. 2). In sum, a theme going back to Tuan (1974) is that people attach meaning and significance to specific places that often coincides with the formation of deep emotional attachments or bonds.

While these differing aspects of relationships to places are widely recognized, individual studies investigating place phenomena differ in their focus on *place attachments* (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Kaltenborn & Williams, 2002; Kyle, Graefe, & Manning, 2005; Warzecha & Lime, 2001; Williams & Vaske, 2003) versus *place meanings* (Brandenburg & Carroll, 1995; Brooks, Wallace, & Williams, 2006; Davenport & Anderson, 2005; Fishwick & Vining, 1992; McAvoy, 2002; Patterson, Williams, & Schrel, 1998; Riese & Vorkinn, 2002; Stewart, Liebert, & Larken, 2004). Studies that focus principally on measuring the strength of attachments and bonds of various sorts typically employ quantitative scales. Such scales are designed primarily to identify individual differences in degree of attachment and are not as well suited, nor necessarily intended, to identify complex patterns or social construction of meanings assigned to place by individuals or groups (Stokowski, 2008). Although exploring both of these ideas simultaneously and even additional ideas about place such as the social and political processes that construct and contest them is possible, a common pattern in the literature has been to operationalize place meanings or sense of place using measurement approaches conceptually better suited to measuring place attachment (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006; Shamai & Ilatov, 2005). How these attachments are supposed to add up to sense of place or constitute the meanings of place gets shortchanged in such efforts (Stokowski, 2008; Williams & Patterson, 2007).

The aim of this paper is to illustrate a conceptual approach to place meanings, anchored in discursive social psychology, which focuses on how place meanings are constructed and represented among seasonal homeowners. Specifically, the purpose of this paper is to apply developments in discursive social psychology to the study of place meanings and extend previous analyses of seasonal home meanings by identifying discursive or interpretive frames homeowners draw on to characterize the meaning and significance of their seasonal homes or vacation residences.

Place and Meaning

The growing place literature in leisure studies contains competing claims regarding the theoretical and methodological nature of place concepts and phenomena (Patterson & Williams, 2005; Stedman, 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Stokowski, 2002, 2008). One critical facet of these discussions is how best to conceptualize the concept of place meanings. The

issues include the locus of meanings (e.g., as inherent properties of the landscape itself, constituted as perceptions or cognitions of individual minds, or emergent and constructed through social discourse), the social versus personal nature of place meanings, and whether meanings can be quantified or are too intangible and phenomenological to be rendered in a metric. Most of the discussion has centered on the particular merits of attitude theory in social psychology as the conceptual basis for meaning.

Taking an affirmative position, Stedman and colleagues (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006; Stedman, 2002, 2003b) promoted using attitude theory as a way to rectify what they saw as a lack of conceptual clarity in sense of place research dominated by phenomenological approaches. Accordingly, attitude theory “can better reveal complex relationships between the experience of a place and attributes of that place than approaches that do not differentiate cognitive, affective and conative domains” (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006, p. 316). In this approach, meanings are equated to individual beliefs or attitudes about a place with an emphasis on precise and generalizable measurements capable of identifying individual differences in these perceptions.

Stokowski (2002, 2008) took an opposing position in criticizing most analyses of place meanings in leisure studies because they follow a traditional social psychological model wherein meanings are reduced to overly mentalistic statements aggregated within statistically produced categories (i.e., in survey work) or researcher-defined themes (i.e., in interpretive studies) that ostensibly reveal the *real* meanings of a place. She argued that focusing on individual attitudes and cognitions necessarily suggests meanings arise from some “internal mental, individualized activity” (Stokowski, 2008, p. 45). In characterizing “a process that is quite different from thinking about sense of place as a quality of the individual mind,” Stokowski (2008, p. 39) points to Greider and Garkovich’s (1994) conceptual analysis of the social construction of place (i.e., landscape) meanings to highlight “the need to explore the symbolic creation of landscape” (p. 39) and how people negotiate the meaning of landscapes. This sociological approach is focused primarily on *how* meanings are socially produced particularly through the media of language and social interaction.

Stedman and colleagues (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006; Stedman, 2002, 2003b) and Stokowski (2002, 2008) represented divergent views on how to study place meaning. Viewing place research as too wedded to a phenomenological perspective, Stedman (2002, 2003b) argued that research on place meanings would benefit from more rigorous adoption of attitude theory. By Stedman’s reckoning, place meaning and place attachment are virtually indistinguishable topics. Viewing existing sense of place research as excessively focused on describing and measuring place attachment (i.e., the converse of phenomenology), Stokowski (2002, 2008) regarded the topic as already overly burdened by the kinds of psychological and individualistic perspectives typified by attitude theory. In her desire to move beyond indexing individual emotions and inventorying individual meanings in favor of social context, Stokowski (2002, 2008) eschewed any focus on individual-level processes or individuals as the unit of analysis. Yet despite the differences, both researchers equate the psychology of meaning with attitude theory and as a result overlook alternative psychological approaches with considerable potential. Schools of thought are found in both cognitive (Bruner, 1990) and social (Gergen, 1994) psychology that view meaning creation as a social act negotiated within a community. These psychological theorists are interested in the meaning systems of cultures and the collective processes of their construction, as well as how individuals *act* within these systems of meaning. This study of how individuals appropriate, perform, or apply certain meanings to specific acts, events, or objects has come to be known as discursive social psychology.

Toward a Discursive Social Psychology of Place

Discursive social psychology represents an increasingly visible research approach that tries to avoid the mentalism of attitude theory while maintaining a psychological focus on individual-level processes (De Rosa, 2006; Korobov & Bamberg, 2004; Potter, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discursive social psychology refers to “a set of ideas and developments from discourse analysis, conversation analysis and rhetoric” that argues people construct “their worlds through their accounts and descriptions” (Potter, p. 234–35). Broadly interpreted, discourses represent “shared, structured ways of speaking, thinking, interpreting and representing things in the world . . . [also] called frames, speech genres, interpretive repertoires, or simply, perspectives” (Webler, Tuler, & Krueger, 2001, p. 435). These accounts and descriptions constitute “a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events” (Potter & Wetherell, p. 138) and construct individual identities (Davies & Harré, 1990; Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Korobov & Bamberg, 2004). Thus, discursive social psychology represents an alternative between overly mentalistic individual accounts of meaning and disembodied semiotic accounts that ignore how individuals appropriate and apply meanings in their everyday lives.

The discursive challenge to mentalism has prompted three distinct positions within social psychology (De Rosa, 2006). First, the emergence of discursive social psychology reflects an *antagonistic* position that sees no way to bridge the divide between discursive and experimental (i.e., attitudinal) social psychology (Potter, 2003a). Some researchers counter with an *integrative* position that presumes an underlying compatibility and possibility for eventual unification (Hammersley, 2003). Finally, some researchers adopt an *associative* position that recognizes each approach has its own interests or set of commitments, but that these may “cross-fertilize” one another. This latter position is similar to one advocated by Patterson and Williams (2005) for place research. They argued for advancing “reflective dialogue” as a means to scientific progress where different paradigms are seen as having the potential to inform the larger domain of inquiry over more typically oppositional (i.e., antagonistic) or integrative dialogues.

Driving much of the paradigmatic debate in discursive social psychology is the way advocates approach and reinterpret the traditional idea of mental attitudes as evaluative judgments “bound up with broader systems of discourse or interpretive repertoires” (Potter, 1998, p. 241). Rather than focusing on attitudes as predictive of behaviors, subjects are seen as both building up and marshalling a repertoire of interpretive frames, scripts or tropes of the phenomena to account for their actions. In one example, Wetherell and Potter (1992) showed how the notions of (prejudiced) attitudes were incapable of accounting for contradictory discourses about Maori ethnic relations in New Zealand society (e.g., issues of land rights, language teaching, affirmative action).

Beyond their concern with attitudes, discursive social psychologists share with constructionist minded cognitive theorists like Bruner (1990) skepticism regarding information processing models of cognition, namely that humans are rational information processors who filter stimuli and responses in a computer-like way. Discourse analysts eschew “any form of cognitive reductionism, any explanation which treats linguistic behaviour as a product of mental entities or processes whether based on social representations or some other cognitive furniture such as attitudes, beliefs, goals, or wants” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 157).

Korobov and Bamberg (2004) argued that discursive social psychology remains susceptible to potentially problematic “already-given” entities such as interpretive repertoires, frames or scripts. To avoid these problems, Korobov and Bamberg drew a distinction between ready-made discourses or repertoires that risk discursive determinism and what they described as more *agentive* notions “in which the discursive resources are not always

already given but rather are accomplished” (p. 475). Specifically they developed the idea of “narrative positioning” where individuals strategically pick a discursive position among those available, which when practiced over time become part of a repertoire to be employed in varying contexts. Korobov and Bamberg agreed with Potter (1998) that repertoires are not so much *performed* (e.g., as with attitudes and other cognitive entities) but *performed* (e.g., as in role taking and acting).

Whether conceived as preformed interpretive repertoires or as more immanent products performed within actual conversations, we use a discursive approach to place meaning to observe something of the content and pattern to these discursive performances while addressing the noted concerns. Shields (1991, p. 46) likened what he described as discourses on place images to a kind of “intellectual shorthand whereby spatial metaphors and place images can convey a complex set of associations without the speaker having to think deeply and to specify exactly which associations or images he or she intends.” Butz and Eyles (1997) described these multiple representations of place as different *senses of place*. Similar to discourses, senses of place can never be purely individual or purely collective since they require social process to be brought into being. Likewise, senses of place are not stable because the social processes that create them are continuously changing. They are not unitary since people can belong to multiple social groups with overlapping or contradicting senses of place. Butz and Eyles concluded that “the conventional notions of senses of place as definitive of the relationship between groups of people and their places should give way to a conceptualization of senses of place as necessarily tentative and contingent, particularistic and at least potentially contradictory” (p. 23–24).

Investigations of Seasonal Home Meanings

Seasonal homes provide a particularly germane opportunity to study place meanings. The temporary and periodic migrations from typically urban centers to more rural amenity-rich areas sets up a dynamic for studying the role of the natural environment, how leisure and identity are negotiated in modern life, and bonds that unite and divide communities. While considerable research has been conducted on the meaning of home over the years, the meaning of seasonal homes is a relatively new and emerging area of research (see Hall & Müller, 2004; McIntyre, Williams & McHugh, 2006; Williams & McIntyre, 2001). Jaakson (1986) was among the first to focus on the meanings of what he called “second-home domestic tourism.” Following an interpretive approach he interviewed 300 seasonal homeowners in Canada over a 20-year period to identify 10 broad themes of meaning: routine and novelty, inversion, back-to-nature, identity, surety, continuity, work, elitism, aspiration, and time and distance. Though seminal, the paper offered little explanatory analysis or theoretical direction beyond a simple catalogue of possible meanings. Further, other than suggesting that a survey approach would be problematic, which justified a phenomenological alternative, the nature and production of meaning itself was unexamined.

The topic of seasonal homes received little further attention for over a decade. Silence was broken suddenly by a number of studies. Focused more on place attachment than place meanings, Kaltenborn (1997) identified important “attributes” of seasonal home places in Norway, including nature-culture and family-social. Taking a qualitative approach Chaplin (1999) looked at British seasonal homeowners in rural France. She argued that people use seasonal homes as an attempt to escape from the ubiquitous commodification of modern life and that owning a seasonal home is a kind of “identity project” used “reflexively” (Giddens, 1991) to subvert the process of commodification. At the same time, Williams and colleagues (Williams & Kaltenborn, 1999; Williams & Van Patten, 2006) built on Giddens’ analysis of modernity to examine the influence of globalization on identity or meaning building

projects among Norwegian and upper midwestern U.S. seasonal homeowners. The studies highlighted two main meanings of seasonal homes. Much like Chaplin's British seasonal-home owners, one dominant meaning related to escaping modernity as a way to tackle two of Giddens' four tribulations of the self: powerlessness and commodification. A second meaning, continuity and rootedness, was a way to overcome Giddens' two additional tribulations: uncertainty and fragmentation.

Stedman (2003b, 2006) took a more quantitative approach in comparing permanent and seasonal homes in the upper Midwest United States. Like others, he singled out two meanings, social/home place and place of escape, for analysis. With particular interest in the *source* of these meanings, he suggested that seasonal residents were more likely to describe their home as a place of escape from civilization. At the same time seasonal residents who spent more time at their seasonal home were about equally likely as year-round residents to see their lake (i.e., the setting of the seasonal home) as a community of neighbors. Combining interviews, surveys, personal project elicitation, and experience sampling methods, McIntyre, Roggenbuck, and Williams (2006) suggested a more complex relationship between the meanings of home and escape. Their study predominantly focused on the use of "nearby" seasonal homes defined as those within a two-hour drive. Rather than seeing the seasonal home as a compensatory escape from civilization and daily routine, they characterized home and away as falling along a continuum whereby some seasonal homes were experienced as part of the "home range" providing a complementary lifestyle of routine and familiarity versus seasonal homes that involved considerable travel and contributed to the compensatory segmented meanings of escape and novelty associated with being away.

Thus far the accumulating body of findings on the meaning of seasonal homes has either lacked explicit attention to the nature of meaning itself or has been interpreted primarily in relation to escape or how owners use secondary residences to organize a coherent identity and maintain a sense of self in the face of the disorienting aspects of globalization. In applying discursive social psychology to the study of seasonal home meanings in this paper, we adopted the associative (i.e., reflective) position that considers paradigmatic differences within and between discursive social psychology as inevitable and even desirable (Patterson & Williams, 2005). As with most approaches to discursive social psychology, our attempt to identify various interpretive frames that seasonal homeowners use to describe their second home experience was not an effort to identify universal categories of meanings, but rather exemplars of the ways people interpret, explain, and account for their actions and evaluations. In contrast to some positions (e.g., Potter, 2003a; Stokowski, 2008), we do not necessarily exclude the content of what people say as legitimate sources of information about meanings. In the end, the meanings embedded in narratives and texts are beyond anyone's direct observation. All anyone really has available are the discourses about meaning (Wuthnow, 1987).

Methods

In-depth interviews were conducted with 24 seasonal homeowners in the Hayward Lakes region of Northwest Wisconsin during the summers of 1996 and 1997. Each interview was tape recorded (averaging 60–90 minutes), transcribed verbatim and cross-checked with the original interview. These semi-structured interviews were conducted at the participant's seasonal home and designed to elicit place narratives on how they came to own their seasonal home, what the home means in their life and attachments to the area including special places, community involvement and interactions with local residents. Sample questions from the complete interview protocol (Van Patten, 1999) included: "What is special about

this area?” “How do you know when you are Up North or in the Northwoods?” “How would you describe the difference between life at your primary home and life at the cabin?” “What has changed about this area?” “What is a typical day like at your seasonal home?” “What made you decide to buy a seasonal home here?” “What are your future plans for the seasonal home?”

The first round of interviews focused on four lakes chosen to represent major types of seasonal home developments in the area. The selection of specific homeowners occurred through a snowball sampling technique with initial contact at the lakes occurring primarily through individual lake associations. The second round of interviews came from volunteers of a written questionnaire mailed to seasonal homeowners in the area and was conducted in July 1997. This method of identifying interview participants enabled us to achieve a better geographic and demographic representation than the lake associations chosen from the first round of interviews. Questions for the second round of interviews were influenced by previous interviews, but then questions focused on the narrative of what their seasonal home means to them. Themes explored in more depth included the difference between homeowners' lives at the seasonal home compared to their primary residence, how they used their seasonal home and the importance it had in their life. Questions also focused on community issues including conflicts related to land ownership and lack of involvement in local management decisions.

After individual interviews were transcribed, a hermeneutic approach was used for data analysis and interpretation. The goal was to conduct an “in-depth exploration of individual interviews to identify predominant themes through which narrative accounts of specific experiential situations can be meaningfully organized, interpreted, and presented” (Patterson, Williams, & Scherl, 1994, p. 241). The hermeneutic coding and retrieval followed theoretical assumptions of discursive social psychology and focused on how respondents explain and interpret their experiences (Hayes, 2000).

The first step of *data simplification and reduction* (Froggatt, 2001) involved reading and re-reading transcripts to gain familiarity with the data and investigate patterns. This information was used to develop a coding scheme to analyze a portion of the data using the QSR N6 software package to code, develop node structures or networks (Bliss, Monk, & Ogborn, 1983) and search texts. Drawing on themes previously identified in the second home literature (e.g., Jaakson, 1986; Kaltenborn, 1997) individual units of text were examined for common frames, scripts or tropes respondents employed to describe their relationship to their seasonal home and related experiences including outdoor recreation activities and conflicts, land management issues, seasonal home experience, community issues and regionalism. During the second step in the process, *data complication*, codes were re-examined for conceptual linkages and relationships within and across the transcripts. The results reported here were conducted *across* 13 transcripts selected to represent the diversity of respondents based on such characteristics as gender, length of ownership, age, lake and depth and extent of responses to interview questions. The themes – escape, back-to-nature and simplicity; centrality and identification; obligations; and community and social interactions – are generalized representations of the kinds of meanings or interpretive frames employed by seasonal homeowners of a distinct geographical region based on aggregate responses from the interviews.

Results

One finding that distinguishes this study from others conducted on the meanings of seasonal homes is the overriding discourse about the Northwoods or “Up North,” an area encompassing the northern reaches of Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan (including the

Hayward Lakes area) that carries mythic meaning to midwesterners (Chall & Johnson, 1992; Olmsted, 2004; Walck, 2004). As Bawden (1997) noted “Up North” is a common expression among residents of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, which refers to an idealized place discursively reproduced as a ritual retreat to the pristine, wild and simple in contrast to the cities to the south. One interviewee described the Hayward Lakes area as “paradise—God’s play land.” Another talked about how easy it is to become attached to this place: “This country is very strange. I mean it seems like once you get it in your blood, it’s kind of hard to get it out.” This elusive affinity for “Up North” keeps people coming back to the area and helps define who they are as human beings.

When asked how they came to have a seasonal home, all 13 interviewees told of a longstanding connection to the Northwoods usually related to summer vacations with family or friends or a simple desire for a “lake place.” While some personal histories were tied to cabins, homes, and resorts in the Hayward Lakes area, others described the experience in broader terms as something you were expected to do as a resident of the area. One respondent stated: “Everybody in Minnesota, Wisconsin goes to a lake in the summer. That’s the thing to do.” People without strong personal connections to seasonal homes in their past also felt some expectation to conform when starting families or reaching retirement. “As we approached an unmentionable age,” stated one respondent, “we started to think that maybe we should have a home away.” Since she and her husband had vacationed at a friend’s cabin on the lake, they decided to buy a home nearby.

The Northwoods are a strong draw for people but can also be viewed as an interpretive frame that people perform within the seasonal home context. Whether it is their self-imposed identity as a “lake person” or the rustic cabin décor they adopt for their surroundings, seasonal homeowners tended to tell many of the same stories related to their experiences. We structured the major themes from the interviews as discursive frames that people may employ to describe and define their seasonal home experiences. Many of these themes are applicable to other seasonal home studies but are shaded by the significance of the place where they occurred.

Escape, Back-to-Nature and Simplicity

The most common story people told to explain what their seasonal home meant to them involved escaping modernity by seeking refuge in nature. Based on the 13 interviews, this story has several facets including closeness to nature and a simpler life linked to the Northwoods. Within this context, the seasonal home was often represented as an oasis from the modern world and normal everyday life. As a separate home in a rural natural environment, it epitomized living life differently at least for a while. Not only did people express a greater awareness of nature, they claimed to adjust their lives to more natural rhythms. When asked how life was different at his seasonal home compared to his primary residence in Minneapolis/St. Paul, one interviewee responded:

Boy, it’s just a totally different feel. I mean it’s the woods, the trees, the lakes, the water, wildlife, birds, seagulls go by. . . . I think you see things and feel things differently when you’re here versus in the city. . . . It’s just that you have a different focus. You’re into working normally, where up here it’s just the opposite. You’re into relaxing and getting away from everything.

For this respondent the ideal of how to live differently admittedly took some learning and adjustment and was not a pre-existing frame he brought with him from the city. He admitted that when he first built his seasonal home he imagined a suburban home and yard

that he later realized by observing and interacting with neighbors did not fit in with the surrounding natural landscape. He blamed the architect, interior decorator, and landscape architect who designed the space. He also blamed himself for not knowing how to live in a place other than the city. His narrative indicated that he now made the ideal of a more rustic seasonal home part of his interpretive frame for seasonal home meanings.

The escape story involves a physical as well as mental distancing from everyday life. While repeated trips to and from the seasonal home can become monotonous, they were also interpreted as part of the seasonal home experience that helped build excitement and expectancy:

There's probably two mental things that occur. [When] I get to a little town about an hour away from Minneapolis, I can pretty much rinse work out and that kind of thing. And then once we get to around Spooner [approximately 30 miles from the cabin] it starts looking and feeling different.

This "mental clearing" is part of a ritual journey tied to specific landmarks. It acts as subliminal reminders to relax and let the cares of the modern world slip away.

The seasonal home was almost universally described as a place to relax and spend time with family and friends, but not until finally arriving at the seasonal home did they give themselves halting permission to relax and enjoy:

You know, I'm gone in the morning and I'll get back in the early evening [from work]. So, I have just evenings and weekends with everybody, and for me it's real nice just to be more relaxed. [At the cabin] we're all together all day long and doing whatever we feel like, so this is a real good time for all of us to just be together. [Sometimes work intrudes but] mostly I try to set it up where people know not to bother me unless it's an absolute emergency, and so I try to get away mentally, too.

Respondents not only talked about how schedules and obligations largely disappeared, but how leisure moved forward to assume primary significance. One female respondent noted how even activities as innocuous as reading suddenly seemed acceptable to do at her seasonal home, whereas at her primary residence she felt guilty. Another respondent offered a similar explanation:

I love the idea that I can stop doing all the things that I usually do at home . . . I hardly know what time it is and doing what I want—spend hours at the piano and stuff like that. I just do things, so it's long term here, whereas at home I have to live on a tighter schedule.

Centrality and Identification

Another predominant frame people used to talk about their seasonal home was as a central place of identity in their lives. Regardless of whether respondents owned their seasonal home for only a few years or passed it down through the family, it was discussed as a central organizing fixture of life often involving extended family. It was an anchor in an increasingly fragmented modern world. For some, the seasonal home was a culmination of a lifelong search as described by the following interviewee.

At that time [1989], we paid \$52,000 for this land and 250 feet [of shoreline] and nobody on this lake had ever paid that much for land. We were laughed at. People thought we were crazy, but we were buying not only a piece of property, we were buying our dream. I don't know how to explain what it is about this place but there is a sense of being home.

The seasonal home brought coherence to what was otherwise a separate and distinct niche from the rest of their life. In a time when places have become increasingly homogenized and devalued, and people roam aimlessly from one uninspiring place to another, seasonal home ownership was constructed as an opportunity to recapture an illusive attachment to place:

We moved and owned 8–10 different homes and so we've never had any sense of ownership that was worthwhile to have anything that was going to be there. Where here it seems like you have an opportunity to be here forever; and therefore, doing something has more permanency to it.

Seasonal homeowners viewed themselves not as transitory visitors casually wandering across the landscape, but vested residents who made a strong commitment to a place that enriched their lives.

At the same time, many of the interviewees expressed deep attachments to their primary homes as well. Although urban areas may have drawbacks such as overcrowding, pollution and crime, they also provide amenities that people enjoy. Access to shopping, entertainment and healthcare were important factors as were connections to family and friends. One respondent described these dual attachments in terms of the emotional impact she felt each time she left her "home," whether it is her primary residence or her seasonal home.

Actually, I hate to move twice a year. I hate to move back home when we're going to go in October. I feel real bad leaving. I feel bad in Florida leaving to come up here in the spring or early summer. I feel trauma both times. After I get settled in then I like it.

Obligations

Research on seasonal home ownership tends to overlook the negative aspects. Although some interviewees reframed these discourses to be positive, the obligations and responsibilities associated with owning a second home especially when it is geographically separated from the primary residence were real. Many of the seasonal homes in the Hayward Lakes area are not winterized or only partially winterized so for large periods of time the seasonal home may be unoccupied, which increases the maintenance needed to open and close the home for the season. The seasonal homeowner must also worry about damage occurring to their home in their absence. Many of the people interviewed either had a friend that lived in the area full-time or hired someone to look after their place in the off-season. Even after taking precautions, occasional burglary and vandalism occurred. The homes of several of the interview participants had been burglarized at least once, although the damage was often minor.

Most of the obligations associated with seasonal homes were more mundane but no less demanding than those of the primary residence. Simply storing and un-storing recreational equipment like boats and docks can be a major undertaking. Maintenance was also associated with keeping the undergrowth from overtaking the seasonal home and yard.

Some seasonal homeowners seemed to thrive on such “projects,” while others avoided them. In either case it was an issue that was negotiated in conjunction with seasonal home ownership:

[My husband] likes projects, you know, a list of things he can dream up to do. He’s very busy. He has a workshop down there. Oh, he’s always building some fence to keep the deer out. We have more fences and now that the deer are so much bolder, well he’s building a gate. I don’t know what all he does up here and he keeps saying, “Oh, I could dream up more projects.” He chops wood. He plays in his workshop.

These projects were in direct contrast to his “normal” life as a doctor at the Mayo Clinic and illustrated a point about work and leisure. While people consciously tried to leave work behind, many of the activities that seemed like work at the primary residence were reinterpreted in a leisure context at the seasonal home. The majority of the interview participants seemed to genuinely enjoy maintenance activities associated with their seasonal homes, although a few rejected the notion. One of the interview participants described his feelings in the following passage:

I’ve heard stories from friends over the years and when they go to the cabin all they do is work. They’ve got to fix the grass or fix the windows. They’ve got to paint and have projects lined up and they can’t wait to get back home so that they can rest. So that was one of the things that we worked through, and we’d say we’re going to have a caretaker or somebody that helps so that we don’t have to get caught up in it. [We] made a pact with ourselves and that’s what we do. I don’t have projects.

These sentiments were echoed by a few of the respondents who chose to live in condos rather than single homes to reduce required maintenance. The justification allowed for greater freedom and emphasis on leisure.

Community and Social Interactions

Since seasonal homeowners were concerned primarily with leisure activities and did not live in the area full-time, the interactions they had with other people living in the area were different. Seasonal homeowners and full-time residents can form strong social groups particularly around individual lakes. For example, almost all lakes in the area had some form of property owners’ association that helped regulate recreation use and water quality of the lakes and foster group relationships. At the same time, some seasonal homeowners felt marginalized from the local community because they were not considered “residents.” One point of contention that arose in eight of the 13 interviews was the notion of taxation without representation. Seasonal homeowners paid relatively high property taxes, yet were not allowed to vote on issues affecting them:

We pay more taxes than most people [here] pay. [Yet] we don’t get much of a road out here. I don’t think that I ought to come here and vote for congressman or anything, and then go home to Illinois and vote for congressman, but I sure as heck should be able to vote as to whether or not they are going to fix this road or that road. So voting for county should come.

Part of the separation between residents and seasonal homeowners seemed intentional. For many, the primary reasons for spending time in the Hayward Lakes area were being at and enjoying their seasonal home. One interviewee said he considered his weekend trips a failure if he had to use his car before he had to go back to his primary residence. He wanted to avoid a trip into town. Another respondent, when asked how often he goes to Hayward, replied: "As little as possible. It's a zoo there. If I spent more time in town, I'd probably know a lot more people. You can't meet anyone if you don't go see them." This trend also helped separate seasonal homeowners from tourists who had a more active presence in town.

Not only were differences evident in the interactions between seasonal homeowners and residents, but also long-term seasonal homeowners seemed to view newcomers as more transient and less attached to the Hayward Lakes area, which created further distance. Some interview participants belonged to families of the first people to build seasonal homes in the Hayward Lakes area. One such respondent, whose family built their home in the 1930s, remarked about his relationships with locals and other seasonal residents:

We're old-timers up here for most people. Yeah, we're a little more stable [than] all those people from Illinois, and we're not just the typical tourist that come in and bought a place and come up for a few years and then it's on the market again. We clearly have been here for a long, long time.

Discussion

This study used the conceptual framework of discursive social psychology to investigate place meanings among seasonal homeowners. Specifically, the study employed narratives from 13 in-depth interviews to explore interpretive frames used to describe meanings associated with seasonal homes. Even though the Northwoods or "Up North" played a significant role in our research, findings were generally similar to other seasonal home studies (Jaakson, 1986; McIntyre, Roggenbuck, & Williams, 2006; Stedman, 2006). Escape and centrality (i.e., identification) were affirmed as important interpretive frames employed by seasonal homeowners. These frames had positive connotations and suggested ways that people weave together dwelling, working and playing in response to the fragmenting and disorienting qualities of modern mobile lifestyles.

The study highlighted two additional interpretive frames for describing the meanings of seasonal homes that emphasized some ambiguity for seasonal homeowners. The first relates to how seasonal homeowners negotiated tensions between experiencing the seasonal home as a leisure environment valued as a place of refuge and the "work-like" obligations that came with home ownership. Some seasonal homeowners managed to reinterpret what would be work-like obligations at the primary residence as part of the leisure context at the seasonal home. A second ambiguous discursive frame involves negotiating contradictions between being a local and an outsider at the same time. Overtones of elitism and prestige were associated with owning a seasonal home accompanied by desires to be treated not as a tourist but a local. Seasonal residents belonged to property associations, paid property taxes, and had ties to the community yet had no political voice in civic affairs and remained outside many local social networks.

The concept of leisure has always been deeply intertwined with notions of home. Consequently the use and meaning of seasonal homes had important implications for understanding leisure as an identity and meaning-making practice fitted to the increasingly modern global patterns of living and working in geographically extended and multi-centered social networks (McIntyre, Williams, & McHugh, 2006). Home carries idealized meanings

emphasizing notions of centrality and rootedness, continuity and order, refuge and appropriation, identity and gender, social and family relations, and position and community within society (Tognoli, 1987). Home places are often seen as “bridges to the past” (Manzo, 2005) that anchor identities (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) and provide social continuities across the life course (Gustafson, 2001). In addition to ideas of continuity and identity, Gustafson (2001) emphasized how meaningful places are generally *distinguishable* as a territorial unit, but also open to change as new meanings develop sometimes through conscious efforts of respondents. Our findings underscored these themes, especially continuity and identity, but also highlighted that respondents often discuss how they juggle and justify work projects and/or leisure in the context of their seasonal home.

Beyond examining specific meanings associated with seasonal homes, an important aim of our paper was to present discursive social psychology as a possible theoretical frame for examining place meanings. In adopting this approach we affirmed a number of critiques (Gergen, 1994; Stokowski, 2008) suggesting that symbolic meaning is not as much a mental achievement as a social one. This view has a significant following in social psychology (Potter, 2003b), a growing awareness in cognitive psychology (Bruner, 1990), and emerging role in sense of place within leisure and tourism studies (Brooks et al., 2006; Saarinen, 1998; Suvantola, 2004; Williams & Kaltenborn, 1999). This view also contradicts the arguments of Stedman and colleagues (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006; Stedman, 2002, 2003b) for place studies based on attitude theory. As Gergen noted, “The traditional view that meaning originates within the individual mind, is expressed within words (and other actions), and is deciphered within the minds of other agents is deeply problematic” as “it would be impossible to understand anything outside one’s preexisting system of meanings” (p. 262).

At the same time, highlighting the failure of traditional attitude or cognitive theories to account for the social or relational nature of meaning risks confounding an explanation of the *social* origins of meaning with an understanding of how meanings are *individually* appropriated and performed. Even if for Gergen (1994), “the chief question is how we can apprehend each other’s meanings, successfully communicate, or understand each other” (p. 254), this question presupposes that the intended meanings of an individual may vary. In this paper we employed discursive social psychology to frame fundamentally psychological questions: What does this place mean to you? Why do you identify with this place? In contrast, other investigators may pose more socio-political questions: What meaning does this place have for society? How are these meanings socially produced, transmitted, and contested? As Suvantola (2002, p. 35) asserted: “Personal meanings develop in the context of personal experiences of place. [In contrast] the public meaning of places is expressed, for example, in architecture and monuments, in the official information about the places and so on.”

In the psychological frame, there is the assumption that people often establish an individual or personal relationship to specific places with investigators interested in the range and variability of such relationships (Gustafson, 2001; Manzo, 2005; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Regular involvement with particular leisure settings are by this reckoning closely associated with expressions of identity and individuation (Brooks et al., 2006). From the contrasting socio-political perspective, managers of leisure spaces seek to understand what a specific place means at a societal (i.e., opposed to individual) level and how these meanings are socially constructed and politically contested within a group, community or society (McAvoy, 2002; Stokowski, 2002; Yung, Freidman & Belsky, 2003). Such meanings and the processes of their production transcend aggregated individual meanings and may be more likely to be revealed in the kinds of discourse analysis advocated by Stokowski (2008) that rely on public discourses (e.g., documents, hearings).

Similar issues animate a vigorous debate about whether discursive social psychology necessarily requires the imposition of a narrow paradigmatic orthodoxy or constitutes a general method that offers supplements and correctives to more conventional (e.g., attitudinal) forms of social scientific research (De Rosa, 2006; Hammersley, 2003; Potter, 2003a). In particular, Hammersley argued that discursive social psychology inappropriately and unnecessarily rejects the view of social actors as possessing or being guided by any “substantive, distinctive and stable mental characteristics” and “rules out the content of what people say about the world as a source of analytically usable information” (p. 752). He further argued that these two paradigmatic commitments, which incidentally form the core of Stokowski’s (2008) call for a more social sense of place, are violated regularly in practice. Our approach appears to be more in line with Hammersley than the narrower set of paradigmatic commitments he associates with discursive social psychology and seemingly endorsed by Stokowski. In our attempt to identify various interpretive frames seasonal homeowners used to describe their experience, we did not reject out of hand what people say about seasonal homes as potential sources of information about meaning. Yet, we are not making the claim that these frames represent *real* or potentially universal categories of meanings. Rather, they are exemplars of the ways people interpret, explain and account for their actions and evaluations.

In sum, with respect to place meanings a continuing need exists to clarify the epistemological preferences, theoretical assumptions and methodological practices that constitute varying approaches. We have attempted an account of place meaning that avoids the excessively mentalist accounts typical of much of the literature on place meanings. At the same time, and in contrast to Stokowski’s (2008) call for a *social* sense of place that appears to rule out the content of what people say as a source of information about meaning, we have sought to retain a psychological focus on how meanings are individually appropriated and performed. Our goal was not to pit one approach against another, but to advance an associative position and reflective dialogue across multiple perspectives that inform the larger discussion in a way that allows each to “cross-fertilize” one another while acknowledging their unique interests and commitments.

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