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## The pub as a habitual hub: Place attachment and the Regular customer

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### Abstract

This ethnographic study of an English village community explores the attachment that customers develop to the pubs they frequent to make sense of their experiences, especially those that are regular or habitual. The concept of place attachment provides an important framework when analysing the tripartite aspects of attitudinal, affective and behavioural engagement with the pubs they habituate. These elements of attachment are seen inseparable, contributing to our understanding of customer behaviour, whether regular and frequent or occasional and less predictable. The authors present hospitality as a phenomenon that helps individuals structure their expectations, behaviour and emotional ties to a place and suggest that analysis of hospitable places could extend to other stakeholders, including employees and other members of the community who engage with places in different ways.

### Keywords

place attachment; public houses; mundane welcome; regular customers

## 1. Introduction

British Public Houses (pubs) have long served as community hubs, although socio-economic change has contributed to many closures in recent years (Andrews and Turner, 2012), especially in rural areas. This is often explained by a changing operating environment, cost escalation, regulatory changes and failure to satisfy customers (Andrews and Turner, 2012). The last factor may relate to greater consumer choice and behavioural changes among traditional customers, or *Regulars* (Katovitch and Reese, 1987). This paper draws on an ongoing ethnographic study of the pubs and customers in an English village. The village, anonymised as *Haven*, is a growing community with a number of pubs and clubs, all facing the socio-economic challenge of 21st century hospitality. Although there have been no permanent closures there in recent years, publicans and customers express concern about the future, reinforced by temporary closures, one of which occurred during the fieldwork. Investigating these pubs, their customers and the neighbourhood they serve required a frame of reference more meaningful than the vague concept of customer satisfaction and the idea of attachment to place (Low and Altman, 1992) provides one such framework to explore this important hospitality context.

Analysis of human engagement with particular places offers researchers from various disciplinary traditions the opportunity to explore how people develop relationships with places, rather than focusing on organisations, brands, individuals or activities separately. Indeed, this provides a lens for making sense of all of these factors together. However, Baker et al (2012, p,25) caution that place attachment 'is typically difficult to measure' given the complex affective, attitudinal *and* behavioural elements. For example, Tumanan and Lansangan (2012,p.532) concluded that 49% of their participants 'are attached to the particular coffee shop, among which 14% have already established such attachment even at their first few visits', although, simply labelling customers as attached or not seems rather simplistic. This is where the richness of ethnographic data is particularly helpful, enabling the exploration of participants' behaviours and narratives and building a qualitatively detailed account of their attachments to particular places. Thus, this paper contributes to our understanding of the interplay of behaviour, attitudes and feelings of regular customers towards the pubs-as-places they frequent. Such *Regulars* are shown to be a contextually significant, though rarely homogenous, grouping (Katovitch and Reese, 1987; Oldenburg, 1999). They provide a valuable type of *loyal* customer in their own right, while also potentially attracting other customers, effectively acting as cohering agents, influencing, co-creating and reinforcing the social norms of their pubs.

The paper continues with an overview of place attachment literature. An account of the methodology is followed by the study findings, framed around examples of key study participants and their relationship with Haven's pubs (all names of people, places and organisations have been anonymised). The resultant discussion and conclusion probe these findings more deeply, exploring the nature of their attachment to these pubs and their implications for our understanding of consumer behaviour within commercial hospitality today.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Place Attachment

People's attachment to particular places has been explored by scholars from various disciplines, including planning (Friedman, 2010), geography (McEwen, 2014), psychology (Scannell and Gifford, 2010), sociology (Gerson et al, 1977) and hospitality (Tumanan, and Lansangan, 2012). Such multi-disciplinary interest inevitably complicates conceptualisation of the dual notions of place and attachment. Indeed, the idea of place itself is not straightforward, representing 'a physical site... given meaning... through interactional processes' (Milligan, 1998,p.2), suggesting both physiological (interactional) *and* psychological (giving meaning) engagement are necessary. The types of place inspiring attachment vary considerably, including broadly defined neighbourhoods (Gerson et al, 1977), particular buildings (Milligan, 1998), or even spaces within buildings, such as a favourite café table (Shapira and Navon, 1991). Places can be defined through 'personal, group or cultural processes' (Low and Altman, 1992,p.5), whether significant to an individual or wider social set. Perhaps one of the better known conceptualisations of hospitable place would be Oldenburg's (1999) *third place*, presented as a social refuge from home (first place) and work (second place).

Place attachment represents a socially constructed 'emotional link' between person(s) and place in relation to Milligan's (1998,p.2) 'meaning' and 'interaction'. This conceptualisation is echoed by other scholars, although Low and Altman (1992,p.4-5) caution against 'overemphasising' emotion, championing more holistic analysis of the 'interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviors and actions in reference to a place'. Such interplay engages interaction (behaviour) and its resultant meaning (combining cognitive and emotive engagement); it is important to see these as interplay, rather than as linear causation (i.e. *not* as behaviour resulting in affective or cognitive attachment, but as integrative and ongoing experience). Such 'locational socialization', involves repeated interactions with(in) a place and other users, establishing and reinforcing 'meanings and patterns of behaviour' (Milligan, 1998,p.16). However, conceptualisation can vary. For example, Tumanan and Lansangan (2012) present place attachment as wholly affective and attitudinal, citing Low and Altman's (1992) reference to affect as central to attachment, without acknowledging their broader argument about interplay. Such approaches are not uncommon in the literature; Scannell and Gifford's (2010) review shows that researchers often favour two, rather than all three elements. They also briefly introduce each factor, inadvertently drawing attention to the danger of oversimplifying factor interaction, when they assert that the behavioural element 'is founded on the desire to remain close to a place' (2010,p.4). Although such desire is undoubtedly a part of attachment, the behavioural-emotional interactions before, during and expected in the future are also a construct of that attachment.

This interplay is exemplified by Hardy's (2004, p.50) expatriate character, Farfrae, whose extravagantly emotional song about his homeland leaves his audience asking how he could stay away, being 'so wounded [wounded/upset] about it.' Yet, Farfrae demonstrates neither cognitive nor behavioural attachment, having neither intention nor desire to return home, thus displaying affective nostalgia rather than attachment. Thus, caution is required when analysing emotive claims of attachment, without investigating attitude and behaviour. This does not suggest that Tumanan and Lansangan's (2012) findings are invalidated by their definition; they refer to behaviour, though as a separate variable, rather than as part of attachment itself, although, separating variables thus, can obscure or over-simplify factor interplay. Their application highlights another difference in the literature. Much place-oriented research was inspired by perceived declines in community (Gerson

et al, 1977), where places play a significant role in social change (e.g. Oldenburg's, 1999, third place), while researchers like Tumanan and Lansangan (2012) see its value in more practical organisational/managerial contexts.

## 2.2. Attachment to Hospitable Places

It is not surprising that that hospitality researchers found place attachment relevant to customer engagement with commercial venues such as cafes (Tumanan and Lansangan, 2012), restaurants, (Line and Hanks, 2018), bars (McEwen, 2014), pubs (Baker et al. 2016) or broader tourist destinations (Loureiro, 2014). The nature and implications of attachment to commercial premises represents a different perspective to earlier and broader analyses of public spaces, especially those associated with neighbourhoods (Gerson et al, 1977). However, this does not necessarily simplify the concept. Rather, it adds an additional dimension. For example, Felton's (2012) analysis of place attachment within café culture shows how 'a sense of place connectedness, through habitual and regular usage, facilitates social meaning and belonging'. This suggests that attachment develops within, among other things, a sense of familiarity and comfort associated with habitual, regular behaviour. This is of particular importance to Hospitality businesses, whether focusing on the commercial or socio-communal implications of any weakening of ties, or behavioural attachment, to their premises.

Deeper meanings of hospitality also help make sense of how people interact within and frame their relationships to commercial settings. For example, Lugosi (2009,p.404) warns against focusing 'on food and drink transactions at the expense of its [hospitality's] broader philosophical and ethical dimensions'. He provides the example of what he refers to as 'asymmetric hospitality', where key relationships are less between individuals than individuals and their 'imagined community'. This perspective provides an additional factor when exploring customer attachments to commercial hospitality space (places), as demonstrated by one of his respondents who, explained, 'I hate the place but I still go here' (2009,p.404). Although *hating* the place (a strong, if negative, emotion), he believes he should support it; indeed he emphasises an even stronger, apparently more cognitive compulsion to do so, in support of the gay community that he identifies with.

Another theme often highlighted in studies of commercial hospitality is that premises can represent 'neither an exclusively private nor an entirely public place, but a complex blend of both' (Shapira and Navon, 1991,p.108). Such blurring can encourage employees to see themselves as customers, as did Smith's (1985) publican, or customers to perceive themselves as owners. The latter is not a simplistic example of customer sovereignty, but suggests a deep level of identification with or attachment to the place, representing a sort of collective possession (Belk, 1992,p.37). Sandiford and Divers (2011) also identified a practical consideration relating to this public-private blurring, showing how pubs offer a social environment for socially marginalised persons who find little welcome elsewhere. They suggest that if commercial (private) concerns over-segment their markets this can exclude such individuals, who have few, if any, alternatives. In such cases the actual relationship with the possession/place is fluid; it refers to 'something we call ours... whether we mean by this legal ownership, temporary control, or simply identification with a thing' (Belk, 1992,p.38). This perspective offers a particularly useful lens for analysing attachment to commercial hospitality outlets similar to psychological ownership (Asatryan and Oh, 2008). Thus, perceiving a place as a (psychological) possession offers insight into the nature of place attachment for developing a 'sense of mastery, a sense of self, and a sense of past' (Belk, 1992,p.52). Another useful idea, when

exploring such public-private tensions is demonstrated by Lynch's (2011,p.178) exploration of hospitality as 'mundane welcome' in 'a world of hostile potential'.

Lynch (2011) suggests that everyday, or mundane, feelings of welcome provide 'anchorage in the world, a place or sense of security (a 'mooring' in mobilities terminology)'. He likens this to home (akin to Oldenburg's, 1999,p38, 'home away from home'), whether 'permanent or temporary', using the example of a hotel room, 'as not simply a geographical anchorage offering a certain security but also as a starting point for feeling welcome.' (Lynch, 2017,p.179). From a place attachment perspective, the very mundanity of someone's routine experience or expectation of welcome can be associated with a type of place or a specific place, mundanely *used*, such as a pub. This relates to the customers' experiences, feelings, attitudes, memories and expectations. Of course, perceptions of hospitality are not necessarily shared by all; Smith (1985) presented an alternative perspective of hospitable space within his *rough* pub. What initially seems hostile, *inhospitable* space, dominated by aggressive clientele appears less so on closer inspection, with less violence than threatened or mythologised; indeed, the roughness and hostility evident could symbolise a paradoxical welcome to its clientele which exhibits formidable behavioural and emotive place attachment, habitually demonstrating a sort of aggressive-jocularly when defending a favourite space within the premises.

### 2.3. Public Houses as places of attachment and regularity

Place attachment's cross-disciplinary appeal extends to the pub itself. For example, Mount and Cabras' (2016) econometric analysis associated attachment to pubs with community identity, interaction and cohesion, facilitating convivial interaction and minimising antisocial behaviour in the community. Pettigrew's (2006.p.166) marketing study categorises Australians' attachments to pubs ranging 'from fondness to dependence'. This dependent attachment also draws attention to a possible issue of extreme attachment to commercial pubs, with implications for the dependent individual(s) if their pub ever closes. Baker et al's (2016) study took a social-psychological perspective, using Tumanan and Lansangan's (2012) conceptual framework and instrument and drawing on Oldenburg's (1999) third place. They present pub attachment as 'primarily social, but also influenced by the physical environment' (Baker et al, 2016,p.29), including various factors such as pub proximity, frequency of visits, inclusiveness and welcoming atmosphere.

Attachment to pubs-as-places also resonates with another phenomenon common within pubs and other hospitality establishments – the *Regular*. The pub *Regular* represents a socially-constructed identity in itself, often associated with authenticity and conferring status (Kinkade and Katovitch, 2009). This extends beyond simple recurrence of patronage, offering an 'enduring position within the social structure' (p.309) of the pub, such that *Regulars* can perceive themselves as 'such a fixture in the bar that they even have a right to their own bar stool at a particular place at the bar' (McEwen, 2014,p.302). Becoming a fixture presents a complex perception of self as social member and physical feature; this suggests behaviour and presence so habitual and ingrained that even their absence has an impact on other *Regulars* who acknowledge them as 'full-time' *Regulars*, almost 'emphatically present in spirit' (Katovitch and Reese, 1987,p.309). Smith' (1985) provides an example of this; during his fieldwork, he was warned by regulars that he was occupying 'Tommy's spot' (1985,p.295), Tommy being a significant *Regular*, famed for physical prowess and having imprinted his identity and habitual presence on the other *Regulars*.

The *Regular's* socially constructed identity is perhaps where the place attachment factor interaction is most apparent; Katovich and Reese's (1987) account of bar *Regulars* shows how behaviour, affect and cognition interact in developing a sort of embodiment of attachment through the construction of identity-as-*Regular*. The behavioural regularity of patronage and consistency of comportment within the bar clearly influences and is influenced by social norms, representing affective and

attitudinal reactions to the Regular's status. This can include feelings of responsibility to the place and other users, perhaps contributing to new/younger member socialisation (Sandiford and Divers, 2014), supporting a broader community associated with the premises (Lugosi, 2009), acting as employees (Katovitch and Reese, 1987), offering *friendly* warnings to newcomers (Smith 1985) or simply contributing to the establishment's mundane welcome (Lynch, 2017). Katovitch and Reese's (1987,p.313) tentative typology of regularity demonstrates some of its nuances; so, *Regulars* are the most engaged, habitual and socially integrated customers, *Irregular Regulars*, are lapsed *Regulars* and *Regular Irregulars* are regularly present, without engaging in the establishment's social activities, tending to drink alone. This idea of the *Regular* extends beyond individual identity and attachment to the pub-as-place, suggesting a mutually perceived 'relationship between the pub and drinker—a state of affairs in which they are a part of an institution to which they *belong*' (Mass Observation, 2009,p.133). Thus, individual and social 'identity is anchored to space' (Kinkade and Katovich, 2009,p.3) and people's relationships with particular places contribute to 'a sense of who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going' (Belk, 1992,p.37).

In many ways, the pub offers a particularly pertinent context for research into place attachment, being a place of community activity and facilitating behaviours associated with attachment. It is within this diverse literature on place attachment that this paper is positioned, with the communal sociability within pubs contributing to individual and group constructions of hospitable space and place. The primarily quantitative approach evident in hospitality applications provides a rather teasing introduction, applying ideas of attachment in an attempt to identify affective or behavioural cues, rather than making sense of the complex interaction between factors. This paper utilises a thick description of Haven's pubs through the lens of the *Regular*.

### 3.Methodology

This ethnographic study explores the community orientation and role of English pubs, contributing to our understanding of the social and commercial interaction of people in the secure and hospitable setting of village pubs. This paper draws from the study's most recent fieldwork, conducted over approximately two months. Both authors conducted participant observation within the village pubs and clubs associated with Haven, taking a customer role, getting to know and be known by staff and other customers and developing the rapport essential when conducting ethnographic interviews. Although ethnographic research is often seen as a lone researcher's task, there are examples of multiple fieldworkers working together, not least Mass Observation (2009), in which a team of fieldworkers worked together. Several weeks of participant observation enabled the researchers to observe the natural setting of the pubs, enabling them to experience, first hand, the nature of interactions within them, and establishing a research presence. This was invaluable in introducing them and the project to customers and employees. Thus, the participant observation set the scene for a series of semi-structured interviews with customers and publicans/employees. University ethical approval was granted and interviewees also received a written introduction to the study and completed a standard consent form, following university protocol.

The publicans supported the fieldwork, introducing some customers and recommending others as possible interviewees and 38 were recruited. Sampling was relatively flexible, the main criteria being customer or employee status and willingness to participate. Most interviews were prearranged,

although some were conducted during 'drop-in' sessions, where fieldworkers circulated literature about the research and invited customers to participate there-and-then. All interviews were conducted in the pubs, starting with broad questions about the pub itself (eg '*please can you tell us about this pub?*'), followed by open-ended and probing discussion of participants' experiences in and attitudes towards the venue itself and other pubs and their customers more generally. This approach encouraged participants to reflect on their behaviours, feelings, perceptions and experiences as customers. Interviews lasted at least 45 minutes, often extending well beyond this. Interviews and field-conferences, between the two researchers, resulted in 60 audio files, providing several hundred pages of transcriptions, annotations, field-notes and analysis. Interaction with interviewees during participant observation provides a richness of first-hand experience impossible in many studies, illuminating Interviews through shared experience and familiarity with places (the pubs and clubs, the village and its environs) when researching complex social phenomena.

Sandiford and Seymour (2007,p.740) suggested that ethnographic data analysis can be 'broadly divided into either data management or interpretation'. NVIVO software was helpful for managing data, involving line-by-line analysis and coding to compare phenomena and identify patterns within the data, especially specific observed behaviours, expressed attitudes/feelings and typology development. However, the interpretation of qualitative data is not as straightforward as this can sound. In this study, interpretative analysis took a reflexive approach, exploring what Alvesson and Sköldbberg, (2009,p.305) call 'richness in points', whereby interpretation of data goes beyond 'preliminary first-order interpretations' requiring imaginative interpretation rather than primarily descriptive simplifications of those data', resonating with Sandiford and Seymour's (2007) interpretation and data management elements, respectively. Detailed fieldnotes were central to the process of analysis providing both a management and interpretive tool that extended beyond the fieldwork, being both a *living* record (*descriptive simplifications*) and a dialogical forum (*richness in points*), involving both researchers. This mixture of data management and interpretation represents what Sandiford and Seymour (2007,p.727) described as an 'interactive' approach to data analysis where data management and coding contributed to insightful interpretation and vice-versa, and both contributed to increasingly focused observations and interview questions as the study progressed.

Three themes emerged during the analysis, resonating with the broader literature on place and/or customer regularity. These were based around the importance of *talk* (Oldenburg, 1999) to the social aspects of attachment, the *shared responsibility* of customers in framing, negotiating and offering hospitality (Katovich and Reese, 1987) and attachment being expressed and reinforced by *feelings of ownership* of the pubs (Belk,1992). Theme identification was not a clear-cut process whereby data collection preceded analysis, with this analysis resulting in a timely identification of themes. Rather, they emerged iteratively during and after fieldwork. For example, *talk* is one of many factors associated with sociability, but its particular importance to the study participants gradually emerged during the fieldwork and post-fieldwork analysis, albeit in different ways; some participants highlighted the need to meet friends for an occasional 'catch-up' chat, while others explained (and were observed) talking in a more habitual/mundane manner, greeting fellow-customers in a similar manner every day, enjoying comfortable feelings of familiarity (the same people, well-known topics, a safe conversational context, facilitated by shared and convivial beverage consumption).

The findings focus on two aspects of pubs as places encouraging attachment; examples of *attachment in action* develop into an analysis of different perspectives of *what it means to be a pub customer* in Haven. As an additional contextual factor, the intersubjective use of pub spaces is also



considered. This is followed by a broader discussion of the data exploring the nature and practice of attachment to the village pubs.

#### 4. Findings

##### 4.1. Haven's pubs and clubs

No single study could present a complete picture of a village's pubs, nor capture the many individuals who use those pubs. However, a particular strength of ethnography is the opportunity to develop a growing familiarity with a social setting and its actors; the face-to-face interview is invaluable in finding specific information, but participant observation enriches any second-hand interviewee accounts of a phenomenon.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Contextual information</b>
<b>Roundhead</b>	Village Centre; no food temporarily	National chain; temporary manager
<b>Horseshoe</b>	Village Centre; no food temporarily	Pub Company; normally leased; temporary manager
<b>Union</b>	Village residential area; family restaurant pub	Regional chain (subsidiary of national chain); permanent manager
<b>Collie</b>	Village residential area; fine dining and bar	Regional chain (subsidiary of national chain); permanent manager
<b>Parkside</b>	Village outskirts; fine dining pub	Local chain; leased from Pub Company; permanent manager
<b>Forest</b>	Near village; pub food	Publican leases from Pub Company
<b>Pony</b>	Near village; pub food	Publican leases from Property Company
<b>Swan</b>	Near village; pub food; considerable drinking custom	Regional chain (subsidiary of national chain); permanent manager
<b>Junction</b>	Village residential area; limited bar snacks available	Private club (sports oriented); open to all customers
<b>Battle</b>	Village residential areas; no food; used for community groups and events	Traditional members club; open to all customers

**Table 1. Haven Pubs**

Haven is a growing medium-sized village in the North of England. Table 1 introduces the five pubs and two clubs serving the village, as well as three other nearby pubs. Fieldwork occurred during an unstable period for the village's pubs and clubs, despite Haven's recent growth, giving the opportunity to explore the behaviour of attached individuals and groups at such a time. When fieldwork began both village centre pubs were under temporary management, with the *Roundhead* advertising for a new lessee and the *Horseshoe* awaiting the recruitment of permanent management. During the final week of the fieldwork, the *Horseshoe* temporarily closed, leading to

some *Regulars* shifting their custom to the nearby Roundhead. Both clubs were in flux as well—a rebuilt *Junction* had recently reopened and the *Battle* served few customers and plans were also underway for renovation.

#### 4.2. Some of Haven's customers

These four customer sketches, based on fieldwork encounters coalescing around four separate interviews, illustrate types of engagement with the village pubs. They are indicative, rather than a representative typology, given the 'many and diverse types of people, who, in turn become diverse types of regulars' (Katovich and Reese, 1987, p.310). The first three extended beyond the interviews, as researchers and participants became acquainted during the fieldwork, while the final group was interviewed in more isolation, as befits the nature of the participants' engagement with their pub. However, even this one-off interaction was effectively more than *just* an interview as fieldworkers and participants spent most of the evening together, sharing the rapport-building, broad and informal conviviality of the setting.

##### 4.2.1. The focal point fixture.

Fred is a local businessman and *Parkside Regular*. Although not living in the village, he visits the *Parkside* after work every day, explaining 'I came in 12 years ago and I liked the pub. I like the people... and now, we've built up a good community'. Unlike some participants, Fred only frequents one Haven pub, although he had 'drunk in them all'. He prides himself as being instrumental in maintaining a pub atmosphere there. Many other villagers see the *Parkside* as a restaurant, not a pub, though one of the pub's leaseholders explained 'we try to' reserve one area for drinkers most evenings. Several drinkers can usually be found in this area and everyone knows Fred. They clearly see him (as he sees himself) as a lynchpin of the pub. Fred introduced the researchers to a number of his fellow regulars, who would often purchase his drinks as a sign of affection and respect.

##### 4.2.2. Regular fixtures: incoming couple

Jon and Joanne moved to Haven 20 years ago and started frequenting the *Roundhead* several years afterwards, developing into *Regulars*; 'now we're here everyday'. They have favourite spots at the bar, Joanne normally seated and Jon standing, engaging in 'chatter and banter' with other *Regulars*. Their patronage extends beyond this, however; three years ago Jon started working 'behind the bar' during a management crisis, in his words 'I was slightly inebriated and volunteered' and has been working part-time ever since; in addition he organises a weekly talent show, with Joanne compering. They were interviewed together and explained the appeal of 'their pub':

Joanne: It's about the relationship... feel a relationship to these people...

Jon: to the pub...

Joanne: ...and to the pub.

Jon: it's the mentality...

Joanne: it's a sense of responsibility...

Jon: It's our pub. The village, you know?

Joanne: and I want to come in and feel comfortable...

Jon: talk to anybody... everybody, without falling out with people.

#### **4.2.3. The *regular itinerant*: on patrol**

Retired, long-term Haven resident Chris had previously worked for the *Horseshoe*. He has a regular schedule, visiting the two village centre pubs and both clubs every day between lunchtime and early evening. Chris demonstrates deep attachment to *his* pubs, explaining this in relation to the village rather than the individual pubs. He also serves on the *Battle's* committee and is well known by many other participants. Whether meeting him in the pubs/clubs, walking between them or shopping in the village store, he offers a warm greeting. His relationship with the pubs themselves seems pragmatic; although seeing the pubs as a 'community hub', he recognises that they require people to actually use them. Thus, his pub-going is partly pleasurable social activity and partly community duty. He seems calculative about his schedule, partly based on cost and partly situational; he tries to visit 't'*Roundhead*' by 2pm because that was when 'all t'lads met up'. Chris differs from the other participants as he is rarely seen 'of a night-time' although he did come into the *Battle* during a field-visit there and worked evenings for two weeks in the *Horseshoe* during a staffing crisis.

#### **4.2.4. Occasional 'regulars' (*passing through*): a *Girls Night Out*...**

The researchers met and interviewed three women (Becca, Lexa and Rosa) sitting at the bar in the *Swan*. All living locally, they were occasional customers and were having a drink prior to visiting a club in the neighbouring town. Becca explained they were having a 'Girls Night Out' –the way she emphasised the words gave this a rather ironic tone (she later shared her dislike for what she perceived as a 'Northern' tradition of men and women socialising separately on certain days; 'why don't people just do what they want to do together?'). During the evening, it became clear that two of them found the pub friendly and familiar, while Becca explained she rarely visits the pub without the others—indeed she did not always feel comfortable there, but valued her friends' company sufficiently to do so. The others demonstrated more attachment, linking this to the décor and clientele (friendly and familiar), its convenient position and inexpensive wine.

### **4.3. Making Sense of Attachment to Place**

The remainder of the paper focuses on, but not exclusively, the participants introduced above, in order to explore their attachments to the pubs they frequent.

#### **4.3.1. Haven's Pubs as mundanely welcoming spaces inviting regularity**

Observing, participating with and interviewing pub users in Haven soon demonstrated that 'place' itself is a complex and messy concept. Participants' perceptions of pubs were coloured by various factors including the physical space, the people sharing that space, their activities, accumulated memories and future expectations. The main unifying characteristic across these factors relates to Lynch's (2017, p.178) view of hospitality as mundane welcome, where the pub offers an expected

routinely hospitable environment and welcoming refuge from ‘a world of hostile potential’. This *potential* tended to be implied rather than explicit, except for occasional references to hostility or even violence, generally hypothetical or associated with other pubs. For example, Fred explained that in the *Parkside*, ‘if anybody has a disagreement, you will find three or four people [*Regulars*] stood somewhere near’, prepared to intervene if required. He shows an understanding of internalised norms, explaining that in some pubs tensions can escalate quickly, but not *here*. In addition to such hypothetical references, there was an implied undercurrent of ‘familiar and secure positions rather than their alien and tentative positions’ (Katovich and Reese, 1987, p.308). This suggests a security of familiarity, akin to Oldenburg’s (1999) third place, which encourages and reinforces a *Regular’s* self-identity. Chris’ apparent feelings of ownership towards pub and village combined both as a sort of interlinked place offering comfort and security, a construction Jon and Joanne described as an ‘extension of your home’. On a number of occasions during their interview they returned to the idea of feeling secure, personalising this expectation in relation to their own behaviour; Joanne pointed out that if ‘[I] find myself getting close to being adamant about something, I just kind of go “just get me another glass of wine, I’ll be fine”.’ Thus if she feels herself becoming upset about someone’s words or behaviour she reminds herself to calm down, diverting her attention with another drink; her own self-control demonstrates behavioural norms that she expects other *Regulars* to have internalised too.

Other participants gave similar accounts of their own local pubs (‘there’s no trouble here’), often counterposed by descriptions of pubs where hospitality is less reliable and secure. Such accounts are often vague and suggest a certain mythology of safety/danger, which does not suggest ‘falsehood’, rather representing ‘tentative ideological conceptions’ (Lugosi, 2009, p.400)—a reinforcing discourse that pubs *can* be aggressive and dangerous. This resonates with Smith’s (1983) inference that even in rough working class pubs, such trouble may be exaggerated by *rough Regulars* and disapprovingly cautious outsiders, while Haven’s pub customers emphasise (and value) the myth of security, within a comfortable and predictable environment. Their concerns extend beyond physical security to a more subtle hospitality, where habitual welcome from a group of fellow habitués provides psychological security.

The *Regular* expects (based on experience) a welcome from server and served within consistent, predictable spaces (furnished the same way, with the same people, greeting each other in the same way) every day. Lexa valued a homely sense of comfort in the *Swan*, meeting her friends after work, not ‘bothered about getting changed’, whereas in the *Collie* she feels obliged to dress-up. Such examples might be overlooked in attachment studies utilising less rich methodologies. Indeed, *Occasional Regulars* like Lexa can be dismissive of their pub, complaining about the publican, clientele etc., while actually experiencing an easy to miss, but valuable (and valued) mundane hospitality (Lynch, 2017, p.178). Although different to the attachment of more habitually regular customers, this expectation of consistent hospitality is no less significant to them; it offers psychological safety when meeting and interacting with new people (strangers) and casual acquaintances, or ‘friends with a little f’, who remain less familiar and predictable than well-known friends (Sandiford and Divers, 2014, p.94). This hospitality, welcome and security is offered by other pub users as much as staff. Rosa actually explained that although the *Swan’s* publican ‘is not very friendly... a bit of a miserable twit,’ she was there to ‘chat’ with her friends, not him. This attitude highlights the importance of regular customer empowerment and engagement within the hospitable environment. The familiarity of mundane hospitality (Lynch, 2017) was also highlighted when

discussing other pubs. Village centre pub users often criticized geographically and socially peripheral pubs. Participants saw some places as ‘just’ restaurants rather than social hubs. However, the fieldwork did uncover micro-groups of drinking customers, even in pub-restaurants, such as Fred’s *Parkside* group, and some food-pubs actively encourage this, despite occasional tension about staying open later for relatively few, less lucrative drinkers. Similar to Chris, customers often demonstrated a pragmatic view of pubs. They recognised that, although ostensibly valued by many, demand has reduced as a result of changes in modern life and many expected the *Horseshoe* would only reopen as a pub-restaurant.

#### 4.3.2. Regulars’ attachment to Haven’s pubs

Another important aspect of pub-as-place relates to particular spaces within the premises. Lee and Altman (1992,p.5) showed how place can vary from the ‘very large’ planetary or neighbourhood spaces to the ‘very small sized’, such as rooms or even objects. Participants often engaged with particular spaces habitually, demonstrating and explicating types of attachment. The *occasional regulars* preferred a table for ‘chit-chat’, seeing this as communicating a request to not be disturbed, though they were pragmatic about this; when first approached during the fieldwork, they were positioned by the bar, having ‘lost’ their table when smoking in the outdoor smokers area. They saw the bar area as a space for more informal interactions, labelled by Rosa as being ‘on the pull’ and clarified as wanting ‘to be noticed’ or socially *available* for more casual social interaction. Somewhat tangentially, although relevantly, Laurier et al (2001) refer to transient engagement with spaces within a café, focusing on formal and informal rules of behaviour regarding table etiquette and the intersubjective ‘value’ (2001,p.208) of a table’s position; without engaging explicitly with *attachment* to the café and its spaces (tables), its relevance is apparent to ‘regular, repeated patterns of interaction’ (2001,p203) and the relationship of *Regulars* to particular, preferred tables.

*Regulars* often showed strong attachment to particular spaces, and analysis of this tendency can be enlightening of their behaviour. As a *regular itinerant*, Chris was clearly very comfortable in *his* pubs’ public bars and this linked to the familiarity of space and time. He explained, if ‘[I] come out of a Wednesday night, I might have to go next door. I feel a bit queasy; a bit uncomfortable, because I’m lost’. Next door refers to the adjoining room, similar in design to his preferred space. However, he followed his comment up, as if he felt the conversation was getting too serious for *pub-talk*, with the observation ‘but then you find [thoughtful pause] you’ve got a pint [of beer], does it really matter?’ It is perhaps surprising that little scholarly attention has been given to such mundane, but important issues of space/place usage and attachment within pubs and bars both in the UK and internationally. This is despite a wide acknowledgement of almost obsessive attachment to a particular place, stool, chair or table (Smith, 1985). For example, White (2011) recounts a story of a bar ‘patron coming day after day, sitting on the identical bar stool and ordering the same two glasses of white wine’, an attachment honouring a long absent friend. Such examples are much more common in popular culture (e.g. the US sitcom *Cheers*) and more literary sources (e.g. Treadway, 1992).

Chris recognised that his reaction to being outside his comfort zone of time and space came as a response to breaking long-ingrained habit. Pettigrew’s (2006.p.166) ‘dependence’ level of attachment could be inferred from Chris’s account and other observations. Certainly, the more regular customers did exhibit a preference for a particular bar, table or bar stool, most obviously in the village centre pubs and the *Parkside*. It was also noticeable that a small group of *Horseshoe* regulars kept to a quieter part of the *Roundhead* when the *Horseshoe* closed-down temporarily.

They were quieter than in their *own* pub, though they did interact with some of the itinerant regulars, suggesting temporary ‘displacement, defined as an involuntary disruption in place attachment’ (Milligan, 1998,p.3). Although it is not unusual for analyses of the social negotiation of space to see ‘regulars as part of an overt and anchored culture’ (Kinkade and Katovich, 2009,p.4), it is important to recognise the dynamic nature of cultural social-negotiation of space and status. Thus, Smith’s (1985,p.295) absent *Regular’s* status relied partly on his fellow *Regulars* protecting his favourite spot in the bar and their understanding of his ability to ‘take out’ challengers to his status within the pub. Thus, Chris’ discomfort away from his usual place could relate as much to a threat to his status as a significant *Regular* as to a break in habit.

## 5. Discussion

Beyond an expected welcome and status reinforcement in *their* pub, most participants exhibited and described individualised engagement with particular pubs. Regulars like Jon, Joanne and Chris showed high levels of attachment and personal identification with either one or more pubs. Chris’ more divided patronage was partly explained by a broader view of place (focusing on the village rather than individual pubs. Certainly his timetable was predictable; although often jokingly downplaying his feelings, he clearly cared deeply for his four ‘locals’, serving on a club committee and even coming out of retirement to help-out in the *Horseshoe*. Such behaviours highlight the danger of investigating place attachment through a wholly affective or attitudinal lens. For example, Tumanan and Lansangan’s (2012,p.532) concluded that participants who were ‘attached to coffee shops were more predisposed toward emotions and attitudes’. Apart from seeming somewhat tautological, this delimits attachment to those who are happier to express emotion, rather than recognising different types of attachment. Indeed, some *Regulars’* discourse could suggest very negative emotions and attitudes towards their pub; Charlie, a *Roundhead Regular*, had few positive things to *say* about the pub, management or beer (‘it’s too crap’), reminiscent of Lugosi’s (2009) interviewee. Yet despite much grumbling, he continued to frequent the pub, *demonstrating* (rather than verbalising)—the antithesis of Farfrae (Hardy, 2004)—that he ‘identifies with the place and feels somehow connected to it’ (Loureiro, 2014,p.7). Such attachment is more difficult to identify than effusively expressed praise, but, from a behavioural perspective, tells a fuller story of a *Regular’s* attachment.

Interviews often uncovered attachment akin to feelings of ownership (Belk, 1992), especially among *Regulars*. This highlights a tension not uncommon in the literature on pubs, most evident in the name *Public House*. Apart from a few social enterprises, very little is really public about a pub; rather, like Felton’s (2012) cafés, they are ‘semi-public space[s]’. Even Becca (the *occasional regular* less attached than her companions) indicated tentative ownership feelings towards the *Swan* when discussing another pub more negatively, explaining ‘It’s not *my* pub. It’s not my sort of place’. Simply being able to identify what is *not* her ‘sort of place’ hints at broader personal expectations of place attributes (ambience, clientele, social norms etc.). Knowing where she did *not* expect to feel welcome provides further insight into why she *did* feel welcome in the *Swan*. Other participants discussed negative indicators, especially regarding amenities such as loud music, gambling machines and television, often seen as detracting from a pub’s ambience, although these could be time-delimited; so, television would be valued for major sporting events, but not if constantly broadcasting (the *Horseshoe* and the *Swan*, were the only Haven pubs to offer this).

Fred's pride in his leadership role in the *Parkside* community was another convincing demonstration of attachment and psychological ownership (Asatryan and Oh, 2008), a sense shared by his fellow *Regulars*. This represents what Belk saw as both collective and personal ownership, symbolising 'histories and futures that transcend our individual lives, they can provide a firmly anchored source of identity and community' (Belk, 1992,p.42). This offers further insight into Fred's relationship with the pub. Fred discussed the inclusiveness offered by the *Parkside* community to less frequent users. It also serves a nearby guesthouse and Fred offers hospitable welcome to its guests and enjoys catching up if they return: 'They remember me; I remember them—I don't always remember the name, but... they get back into t'conversation'. Such inclusivity enables occasional visitors to join the bar conversation with locals. So, apart from Fred's own attachment, he has identified looser attachments to the place in such visitors who find welcome, comfort and pleasure in renewing acquaintanceships. Such relationships help differentiate between a *Regular* and less regular customers. Fred, Jon and Joanne demonstrate intense relationships with the pubs they frequent, but, despite having preferred spaces within their pubs, their activities focus around the people there, Fred as respected leader and Jon and Joanne as group-members, with periodically enhanced status when Jon works or Joanne comperes the talent show. Thus, they 'experience a coherent shared past in a present as they project shared futures' (Katovitch and Reese,p.309). It is not surprising that such customers are referred to as *Regulars* (rather than regular customers), as their relationship with the place extends beyond that of customer, encompassing complex attachments and associated statuses. Less regular customers might exhibit a weaker bond with a pub, such as the *Occasional Regulars* who select a venue based on purpose ('it depends what kind of night we want'). Habitual *Regulars* demonstrate clearer behavioural attachments to a pub (Jon and Joanne) or pubs (Chris). However, over-emphasising habitual regularity can detract attention from occasional drinking partners, who only visit the *Parkside* rarely, but make a special effort to do so when staying nearby. The higher profile 'full time' *Regulars* (Katovitch and Reese, 1987,p.309) also acknowledge that they are reducing in number and often see this as reflecting their age, with younger people less likely to engage as whole-heartedly with pub-life. Despite this, more casual local custom still suggests behavioural links to particular pubs, although attachment may appear less intense than the habitual patronage of the *Regular*. Even when making sense of more regular customers, the type of attachment, or the conceptualisation of place *to be attached to* from participants' perspectives, varies.

The nature and identity of the *Regular* is rarely straightforward; Typologies such as Katovitch and Reese's (1987) often seem simplistic, where even a 'full-time' *Regular* is likely to be time-delimited in a pub open all-day, with the *Regular's* implied presence unrecognised by others who never actually meet her/him within their own regular visits. There is also a danger of exclusivity, often implied rather than explicit, if the mundane welcome of *Regulars* for each other, does not extend to the newcomer or occasional visitor, despite the best efforts of leaders such as Fred. On entering the village pubs, newcomers are often faced with a row of people's backs, sitting or standing in a huddle along the bar. Even at quiet times it can be intimidating for a newcomer to approach the bar, even to purchase a drink or snack. As Oldenburg (1999,p34) insists, 'the acceptance of newcomers is essential to the sustained vitality of the third place'; in the village pubs, initial entry can be eased by familiarity with pub norms more generally, or even an introduction, as Joanne found when first introduced to a pub by Jo; 'I was accepted straight off because I was with him'. Social paradoxes, such as the inclusive-exclusive tension involving cohesive groups of *Regulars* and public-private blurring, do seem particularly evident in pubs. Pubs are places of informality, though user status provides significant social glue, whether represented by Fred marshalling his followers or Jo and

Joanne taking on more explicit roles, similar to Lugosi's (2009) customers helping management. Similarly, with other third places, pubs are often seen as socially egalitarian levellers (Oldenburg, 1999,p23), while historically being associated with a gender divide (Hey, 1986). They are places to meet and places to be alone; often seeming to lack rules of behaviour—even encouraging the occasional *character* (*Regular*, bar-worker or publican) to break certain norms (Katovich and Resse, 1987), while policing complex behavioural codes as Fred describes, tacitly constructed and contributing to the experience of attachment; such unspoken psychological contracts can confuse newcomers, whether customers, staff or management, yet have significant implications if broken by them.

Chris' case seems more complex than many participants', given his wider-ranging patronage. In practice, Chris's intra-community mobility was influenced by his lack of inter-community mobility (having no car); spending almost all his time in *Haven*, he divides it between the pubs and clubs within walking distance. Similarly, the *Swan* trio actually raised a deeper implication of attachment, despite their less regular patronage. Their preference to use different pubs for different purposes demonstrates the more cognitive/attitudinal element of attachment, beyond simple habit and affective connection. At the time of the interview, 'chit chat' was their focus, with 'being seen' planned for later that night. Lexa's view of the *Swan* as relatively 'downmarket' contributed to her comfort coming straight from work, without changing clothes, combining convenience with comfort (not feeling under-dressed when enjoying a predictable welcome). So, although the group valued cheaper prices, it also became clear that they felt more *comfortable* and valued the pub's informal hospitality, particularly when relaxing and chatting. This type of custom differs from the ideal of the *Regular*. Although much commentary on *Regulars* seems rather dismissive of 'neutrals' or 'non-regulars' (Katovitch and Ressex, 1987,p.313) as peripheral to the pub's core custom, they often make up the majority of customers in pubs, so it would be inadvisable for any Hospitality operation to alienate such non-regulars.

## 6.Conclusion

This paper explores the nature of pub usage within a single community. Although inevitably not exhaustive, this analysis contributes to an understanding of place attachment in relation to the identities and statuses of and among *Regulars*. Ethnography enables researchers to explore behaviours within and attachment to places such as the pub more deeply than cross-sectional, mono-method approaches can do. It highlights how place/space, the people and activities/behaviours within particular places foster and reinforce psychological, affective, social and behavioural bonds. This study suggests overgeneralisation of customers into a small number of *types* may deflect attention from the diversity of individually interpreted, enacted and embodied attachment as illustrated by the examples provided. The individualisation of group-orchestrated attachment is even demonstrated within the two *types* that included multiple individuals; Rosa, Lexa and Becca express different levels of attachment to the *Swan* and to other *Haven* pubs. Even Jon and Joanne, a married couple, behave differently within the *Roundhead*, with Jon visiting different parts of the pub, approaching other customers for a chat, while Joanne is more comfortable in her familiar space, sitting by the bar, with fellow *Regulars*. Thus *Regulars* behave within the tacit spirit of pub norms, while exploring and reinforcing their own social identity. Arguably, the blurring, or association of, various factors (place-and-community, place-and-people associated with it, or place-



and-activity) is inevitable, as such factors are inseparable; the place is a focus for attachment because of the activity and community associated with it. However, a similar inseparability of place from other factors, such as the pub's neighbourhood, fellow customers and staff/publican, suggests that over-focus on attachment to a pub-as-place could divert researcher and management attention from the wider consumption context.

Consumption trends, whether regarding time, money, inclination or broader expectations of increasing choice in social and leisure opportunities, influence the prevalence of 'full-time' Regulars (Katovitch and Reese, 1987, p.309) and the level of attachment fostered. Certainly, Lexa and her friends demonstrated attachment to the *Swan*, although they were certainly not as committed to the place as the other *Regulars* featured here. However, regularity of custom and behaviour alone does not provide the full picture of someone's attachment to a place, or its associated activities/social context. Less habitual regularity could relate to an increasingly segmented leisure environment, whether resulting from careful marketing or more socially emergent influences. However, perhaps, as with other socially constructed attachments (to place, pub, barstool, fellow *Regulars* etc), there is a danger of over-segmentation in places like pubs, with a broader customer-base and social function (Sandiford and Divers, 2011; 2014). Thus, pubs, such as *Parkside* that recognise and celebrate a community role can potentially retain a pub-like spirit often lacking in pub-restaurants.

The richness of data collected also raises more questions than one study could hope to answer. Many of the participants, especially the self-identified *Regulars* are, and recognise themselves to represent, an aging clientele, so it is not clear if or how such a customer base could be refreshed in the future. Longer-term fieldwork could explore this issue, seeking to explore the route from peripheral newcomer to the status of fully accepted and integrated *Regular*. The literature on pubs and pub-like places also suggests that international analysis would further contribute to our understanding of human sociability; although some see the English pub as culturally unique, it does share some properties with other national traditions as suggested by the breadth of the literature on the topic of hospitable pub-like spaces.

## 6.2. Implications for Researchers

In addition to contributing to consumer behaviour theory, broader investigation of place attachment offers considerable scope to explore other stakeholder (eg employees') attachments to and engagement with such places. This would contribute to a more holistic understanding of how service industries, such as hospitality, exist within and contribute to the communities they serve. Analysis of customer and wider community attachments to hospitable institutions such as the pub, enhance our understanding of how and why pubs seem to be declining in rural neighbourhoods, despite apparent affective, but not behavioural, attachment. Rather than developing prescriptive typologies, the individual nature of attachments, even when part of wider socio-communal constructions of place, is essential to make sense of this complex concept. Thus qualitative researchers could focus more on phenomena at an individual level to better understand experiences of attachment, whether as *Regular* or not, exploring the perspectives of individuals *within* the group to illuminate the socio-psychological nature of regularity and attachment.

### 6.3. Implications for Practice

The concept of place attachment offers managers a lens for viewing their own premises, customers and practices, raising awareness of customer roles within the pub community. However, simple applications of place attachment are less likely to engage with significant questions about its nature and implications if management become complacent about customers regularity. Over-focus on customers' habitual behaviour *or* affect would detract attention from the interaction of factors in any implied attachment. It seems likely that publicans could face fewer 'full-time regulars' (Katovitch and Reese, 1987, p.309) in the future, suggesting they may need to foster different types of customer engagement/relationship, while recognising that any attachment to their pubs is part of a complex interaction of factors; indeed, the individuality of regular customers suggests that sophisticated segmentation is unlikely to be as valuable to them as simply getting to know their customers at an individual level.

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