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Articles

An Exploration of Home Attachment Representations using an Adaptation of Adult Attachment Interview: Preliminary Data on the Home Attachment Interview

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Abstract

Background: In analysing the literature on household as a physical structure strongly linked to cultural and affective aspects, as well as to universal central psychological needs, a universe of meanings was found. The household, conceptualised as home and safe shelter that contains and protects, but also as a favourite place where the most important relationships of each human being unfold, suggests to use attachment theory perspective as a potentially useful framework to conceptualize the construct of home attachment. However, this perspective needs to be further investigated in order to understand its complex nature. Therefore, this pilot study aims to investigate how individuals represent their own homes according to their feelings and emotions related to their household.

Methods: A qualitative-quantitative survey has been carried out with 50 adults (50% females) divided into five different age groups (from late adolescence to old age). An adapted version of the Adult Attachment Interview, the Home Attachment Interview, was administered.

Results: Analysis identified the relevant aspects that distinguish the “house” as a physical structure, and the “home”, that symbolically encloses emotional and affective experiences suggesting a perception of the “house” as “home”, being a special place characterised by a strong attachment relationship connoted symbolically and affectively.

Conclusions: Attachment theoretical and methodological tools used in the study appear especially useful to investigate and understand the construct of home attachment.

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1. Introduction

The nature of the relationship to one's own house has been depicted as a central topic in environmental psychology. However, several theoretical issues still characterize research in this field. Indeed, the relationship to the household proves a complex construct, partly related to a difficulty to grasp its multidimensional and representational nature. In this paper, we argue that the construct may be efficiently captured through the attachment theoretical (Bowlby, 1999) and methodological (George et al., 1985) tools. In analysing the household as a primary attachment place using the framework of place attachment, many authors (Giuliani & Feldman, 1993; Lalli, 1992; Unger & Wandersman, 1985) underlined that differences between theoretical and empirical approaches created terminological and conceptual confusion plaguing the development of this line of research (Manzo, 2003; Lewicka, 2011; Trentelman, 2009; see Scannell & Gifford 2010 for an overview).

Indeed, several partially overlapping concepts exist such as community attachment (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974), sense of community (Sarason, 1974), place attachment (Gerson et al., 1977), place identity (Proshansky, 1978), place dependence (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981) or sense of place (Hummon, 1992). Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) developed a detailed definition of the concept, defining it as “a positive affective bond between an individual and a specific place, the main characteristic of which is the tendency of the individual to maintain closeness to such a place” (p. 274). From this perspective, they divided the construct of place attachment in attachment to the household (Cooper, 1992; Ahrentzen, 1992), the playground (Chawla, 1992), the square (Low, 1992), the forest (Hufford, 1992; Pellow, 1992) and objects (Belk, 1992).

Other authors attempted to better delineate the concept of attachment to the household. Within the wide range of theories on the topic, two main models appear especially useful in the attempt to understand the multidimensional nature of the construct. Harris and colleagues (1996) integrated the different perspectives regarding the concept of attachment to home, referring to the transactional approach (Low & Altman, 1992). The attachment would be a psychological process developing over time and involving emotional, cognitive, and behavioural components and including six core dimensions. An interesting perspective on the topic has been articulated by Tognoli (1987), who identified several general characteristics that distinguish the “house” from the “home”. These two main theories are partially overlapping, pointing to the same central features/dimensions characterizing the home. The dimension of Positive Evaluation refers to the feelings of attachment to home and global satisfaction towards it. In this respect, it should be noted that recent research highlights how positive evaluation of own home appears

to be associated with a number of positive psychological outcomes such as minor stress and health problems, as well as better quality of life (Tartaglia, 2012; Stokols & Shumaker, 1982). With the Rooting term, Harris et al. (1996) described the way the home plays the role of a psychological and safe center where the resident can go back to regularly (Tuan, 1974; 1980a). This dimension greatly overlaps with the Centrality dimension described by Tognoli (1987), which, in addition to describing the emotional ground where the individual is rooted, also refers to the home as a primary territory being the base from which go and come back after the expletation of social and working activities (Hayward, 1977). Harris et al. (1996) described an additional dimension of the house, defining it as a shelter, and alluding to the characteristics of home as a safe haven that allows to relax, feel safe, and regenerate from the stressful experiences of the outside world (Brown, 1992; Rainwater, 1970).

Elements related to the function of the home as a place to spend time with family members and in which one feels a sense of belonging and connection converged towards the connection dimension of the Harris et al. model (1996) but are also related to the features of continuity, warmth and social relationship described by Tognoli (1987). Indeed, the Continuity dimension symbolizes the feeling of belonging to a place that establishes a subjective sense of stability and permanence. For these reasons, the first house (chronologically speaking), being the place where individuals made the first steps and the first explorations, and being tightly related to childhood memories of significant relationships and warm atmosphere, is often associated with a positive emotional valence. Moreover, the activity dimension refers to the fact that the house is a place where daily activities that the resident prefers and /or can not easily carry out elsewhere occur (Dovey, 1985).

The Identity dimension of the Harris and colleagues model (1996) is remarkably similar to the description of the auto-expression and personal identity dimensions of Tognoli (1987). Specifically, this central feature is related to all components underlying the process by which the home expresses and reinforces a sense of identity through personalization and preservation of objects (Altman et al., 1981; Belk, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Several studies examining the nature and the role of this dimension illustrate the central role that has been given to the idea that "to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place" (Relph; 1976, p. 1). Then, the Privacy (described in Tognoli's model) component describes the home as a place of regeneration, rest, renewal of physical and psychological energy. Individuals controlling their own space and privacy feel free to regenerate. Finally, Tognoli (1987) deserved special attention to the role played by the physical characteristics of the home, considering them as relevant for comfort levels and consequently

psychological well-being. Noteworthy, this echoes with the recent differentiation between the concept of emotional place attachment (or place identity) and physical place dependence (Kyle et al., 2005; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Williams, 2013; Williams & Vaske, 2003).

1.1 Attachment as a core feature of the relationship to place

Despite the undoubted relevance of such contributions, it appears that these definitions, while describing the emotional experiences regarding the home, still cannot differentiate the attachment-related aspect from other concepts as such as the concept of residential satisfaction, defined by Weidemann and Anderson as “the positive or negative feeling that the occupants have for where they live” (1985, p.156). This indicates that this issue must be taken into account and the concept should be further explored and defined (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001).

Bowlby (1999) developed a useful comprehensive theory of significant human relationships, namely the attachment theory. Specifically, following the conclusions drawn from observational studies and clinical observations on children, Bowlby hypothesized the existence of an innate motivational system (i.e., the attachment motivational system) that drives the individual to obtain and maintain proximity with significant others. He argued that early experiences within the relationship with caregivers would lead the individual, through the cognitive elaboration of repeated experiences, to the development of Internal Working Models (IWMs), that is cognitive systems including representations of the self and the others associated with specific emotional valence and beliefs. These IWMs are stable representations over time, with cognitive, emotional, and behavioural correlates that guide the interpersonal behaviour of the individual throughout the whole life.

The attachment theory perspective appears to be a potentially useful framework to conceptualize the construct of home attachment for several reasons. First, attachment to home and attachment to the caregiver are likely to arise from the same developmental mechanisms, because the homeplace is the principal spatial context where the first relational experiences of attachment occur. Through the emotional stimulus generalization process, the emotional valence of the relational experiences with the caregiver would be generalized and impact in turn the emotional significance imbuing the surrounding context. In support of this affirmation, several authors depicted how attachment relationships develop in parallel with the attachment to home. Specifically, home attachment would mature when a relationship with the caregiver became associated with and generalized to physical objects (Hay, 1998; Fried, 2000; Morgan, 2010). From this perspective, memories and representations of attachment experiences with the caregiver may be indissociable from memories of experiences related to the homeplace. This

may be even more true because of the central role played by physical experiences during the early years of life involving physical caregiving - or neglect - provided by the caregiver (see for instance the centrality of the holding experience as theorized by Winnicott). As argued by Anzieu, the physical envelope – the body and related physical experiences - is tightly related to psychological development. Moreover, it has been argued that the physical context (i.e., body and extended physical context as such as home) may be invested by the psychological experiences of the individual through projective mechanisms. This highlights the potential bidirectional relationship between psychological attachment and physical experiences, including the spatial representation of the ego, that includes home. In addition, the home is the elected place where family relationships arise and develop. Non-verbal communication is thought to underline the development and maintenance of interpersonal dynamics. Indeed, representation of relationship quality and nature of the family culture often used spatial metaphors to define “them” and “us”, “inside” and “outside”.

Moreover, it should be noted that some central concepts of the attachment theory (as well as psychoanalytic concepts) have been described through the use of spatial and homely metaphors. It may be not a matter of chance. For instance, the two main functions of the caregiver in an attachment relationship refer to the capacity to act as a secure base and a secure shelter. The adempience to these two functions, because of the tight relationship between attachment to home and attachment to caregivers, are likely to be performed also by the home itself. Indeed, the subjective experience of coming back home seeking relief and peace may easily be compared to the child’s behaviour consisting in coming back to the caregiver after stressful experiences in the external world. Similarly, the caregiver in the attachment relationship is thought to act as a secure base, providing enough security to the child to encourage him to move away and explore the surrounding environment. Likewise, exploratory processes are known to begin in a familiar context such as the household. Thus, home stability and security may act as a stable landmark to start explorations around the world. Morgan (2010) asserted that repeated interactions of the child with his/her home, moving stock and getting forward from exploratory experiences, would contribute to the development of IWMs, that are stable expectations towards the safety and soothing capacity of the home to provide relief when experiencing stressful events. The idea that attachment to caregiver and attachment to home follow the same developmental processes has been also proposed by Chatterjee (2005) and Chawla (1992), who underlined that the repeated successful matching between child's needs (e.g. emotion regulation, problem-solving, restoration of attention) and environment affordance may constitute the way by which attachment to place develops and reinforces. Therefore, similar to attachment to caregiver,

attachment to home is connoted by: i) the intensity of the affect, or the suffering associated with the loss; ii) the quality of the affect, which largely coincides with its emotive connotations; iii) the duration, i.e., if sorrow caused by separation tends to be felt over a long period, or whether it is quickly forgotten; iv) the inclination/non inclination/refusal, admitting to being inclined or uninclined to develop affective bonds with homeplaces (Giuliani, 1999).

Finally, attachment representations (i.e., IWMs) are tough to orientate the individual to interpret and provide sense to subsequent relevant events in life. Similarly, it has been argued that the story of the individual in the home may be the framework within the individual to produce a private self-narrative that provides meaning to important life events (Agnéray et al., 2015). As Berry asserted: "what is not written in the history is written on the places" (Berry, 1982).

Considering these assertions, it seems that attachment theory and some psychoanalytic concepts (e.g., the Skin Ego) are likely to illuminate the nature of the home attachment. Specifically, the thigh relationship between relational attachment history and home attachment history, the function of both secure base and secure shelter, and the role of home representation as a greater framework that provides meaning (organizing the representation) of important life events are concepts that may be successfully used to shed light on the nature of the construct. In addition, we argue that these components may not be discordant with the main theoretical models (Harris et al., 1996; Tognoli, 1987) of the construct of place attachment but may be successfully integrated with them.

The development of the attachment framework underlines another central feature of the construct, that is the representational nature of the variable. Indeed, Mary Main further extended the perspective, operating a representational changing point (Main et al., 1985). Specifically, she stressed the representational nature of the IWMs and their theoretical relevance to the investigation of adult attachment. Her efforts led to the development of a specific investigative tool, namely the Adult Attachment Interview (George et al., 1985). This semistructured interview aims to investigate the nature of the representation towards the early experiences of attachment, using a specific coding system. Since its initial introduction, the interview has been extensively used in clinical and empirical work, with increasing evidence supporting its utility.

The relevance attributed to the representational level in the field of attachment echoes with some contributions underlying the need to disentangle the complex relationship of the concept of the house intended as a home. Home has a profound psychological meaning that goes beyond the purely instrumental shelter (Cooper, 1974). Shenk and colleagues (2004) pointed out that the attachment to the house relates to the personal and social meanings that are given to it,

which are directly proportional to the level of importance that these meanings have in a person's life. Tognoli (1987) states that the "house" becomes "home" through an active process in which people transform their environment, creating links with the chosen place to satisfy their needs and desires.

Furthermore, Moore (2000) examines three important factors, highlighting how the "home" is a concept both real and ideal, and a living process of construction of meaning. Mallett (2004) adds that the lack of distinction between the erroneous concept of "house" designed as a residence and a physical "home" understood as "dwelling place, or a living space of interaction between people, places or things" (p. 84), which may lead to a serious limitation to the research on attachment to the home. In this regard, Windsong (2010) asserted that this confusion can lead to overlook the aspect of place attachment. For example, Pallasmaa (1995) speaks of the house as a "widespread and complex condition that integrates images and memories, desires and fears, the past and the present" (p. 133). Rubinstein and Parmalee (1992) similarly asserted that a specific space can become a place with full meaning, thanks to the personal life experiences and social interactions that build up over time. As briefly illustrated, the constructivist perspective in the field of attachment to house suggests that the phenomenon should be better investigated through the adoption of a representational level of analysis, in line with what was asserted by Main (Main et al., 1985) in the widest attachment's framework.

1.2 The present study

With the present pilot study, we aimed to investigate how individuals represent their own homes according to their feelings and emotions related to the homeplace. The brief overview of existing scientific literature in the field evidences the need to further investigate this topic in an attempt to contribute to the understanding of its complex nature. Specifically, the present pilot study aims to investigate the representational nature of home attachment to empirically test the main theoretical conceptualization of the construct as well as examine the utility of both concepts and the tool (i.e., AAI) in the understanding of the home attachment construct.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Procedures

The sample used for this pilot study has been recruited through a purposive sampling technique. For recruitment, there were no special criteria. The sample was chosen based on age groups, starting from the late adolescence, in order to explore home attachment with respect to a specific phase of life. A total of 25 males and 25 females, with an age ranging from 18 to 75 years (M_{age}

= 46.18, S.D. = 15.94) was recruited and divided into five different groups spanning from late adolescence to old age (first group: age range 18-28 yrs.; second group: 29-39 yrs.; third group: 40-51 yrs.; fourth group: 52-63 yrs.; fifth group: 64-75 yrs.). Participants reported their marital status: 32% were single, 54% were married, 8% were divorced, and 6% were widowed. The average number of family components was 2.84. In accordance with the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association, before the taking part in the study, aims and scope were illustrated and participants signed an informed consent. Subsequently, a one-on-one audio-recorded interview was administered by a psychology undergraduate.

2.2 Instruments

The Home Attachment Interview. The interview consists in an adaptation of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; Main et al., 1985), a semi-structured interview that explores both the attachment to the house that respondents considered more significant and the attachment to their current home (when not already chosen as the most significant home). The development of the interview protocol was conceptualized based on the AAI with several criteria of reference. First, similar to the AAI, the Home Attachment Interview is expected to activate the attachment system so to elicit home attachment-related information. Second, it should focus on home attachment-related events and how the relationships with homes are represented. Guided by the above criteria, the current interview protocol contains 9 questions, opening with a warm-up question eliciting information on the home. This is followed by a series of questions tapping into the home attachment representations, separation, distress, and safe haven. The version of the interview used in this pilot study was reported in Appendix 1. The interview, which lasts approximately 15 minutes, should be audio-recorded and transcribed *verbatim*.

2.2 Analytic plan

The T-LAB Pro software version 7.2. has been used to carry out text qualitative and quantitative analyses, via a mix of linguistic and graphic tools (Lancia, 2012). The pre-processing phase included the creation of the corpus for analysis, the importation of the corpus in .txt format, text normalization, segmentation, automatic lemmatization, vocabulary building, and the selection of keywords. In the customization phase of the dictionary, entries not relevant to the query have been removed (e.g., personal names, adverbs) and entries similar to each other have been grouped (e.g., mommy and mother), narrowing the list to 258 entries.

In the present pilot study, the corpus data provided by the software input comprised 50 imported text, 2.084 elementary contexts, 88.899 occurrences, 6.437 words, 4.355 lemmas, 3.229 Hapax (words with occurrences = 1). Through the custom settings, the threshold frequency has

been increased from 4 to 10, to make the search more parsimonious in the identification of lexical entries that were sufficient and necessary to the formulation of the theoretical model from the empirical data collected in this study.

The analysis phase allowed to examine the data with different instruments. The Word Association tool was used for the co-occurrence analysis. For the Thematic Analysis, Modeling of Emerging Themes, and Thematic Analysis of Elementary Contexts were performed. Finally, for Comparative Analysis, Simple Correspondence Analysis was carried out.

3. Results

3.1 Word associations

Through the Word Associations instrument, which enabled to verify how the relationship of co-occurrence between the headwords proves significant, the association of related words to three lemmas relevant to this study was drawn, to gain an overall vision of the issues associated with such content. These chosen terms are "house", "shelter" and "childhood".

Regarding the lemma "home", in agreement with the literature, it was found that the home is a space that transcends the purely instrumental shelter (Cooper, 1974) but is closely linked to the personal and social meanings that are given to it (Shenk et al., 2004) and strongly recalls the concept of place attachment, defined as an emotional bond between the house and its inhabitants (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Words that are associated with this lemma suggested the presence of a representation ("Memory", "To represent") imbued with emotional components ("To feel"; "Pleasure") of a Secure Base from which to explore ("Change"; "Live"; "Leave"; "Return") that developed within a close relationship with the attachment figure ("Mother"; "Relationship"). Results towards the words associated with this lemma are illustrated in Table 1. Some extracts are repropounded in order to present these word associations:

"When I remember my house, I remember it as the arms of a mother" (Cod035, male, 48 years old, workman).

"For me, home is the center of my life" (Cod020, female, 28 years old, barman).

Table 1. Word Associations to the lemma “home”

Lemma	Coeff	C.E.(A)	C.E.(AB)	Chi²
To feel	.447	475	347	38.487
Life	.418	419	305	31.424
To represent	.343	224	183	45.805
House	.335	156	149	85.068
Relationship	.304	129	123	68.718
Pleasure	.296	176	140	28.219
To live	.289	175	136	22.821
Tranquility	.257	139	108	17.756
Change	.25	102	90	33.775
Memory	.249	190	122	0.994
Choice	.238	108	88	20.362
Rise	.238	134	98	9.079
Mother	.234	162	106	1.552
Beautiful	.231	172	108	0.298
Small	.224	127	90	5.701
See	.224	151	98	1.124
Leave	.215	86	71	17.752
Return	.191	78	60	8.793

Note: Coeff: coefficients of the cosine; C.E.(A): number of elementary contexts in which the lemma appears; C.E.(AB) number of elementary contexts in which the lemma appears associated with the central lemma.

With respect to the lemma “shelter”, associated words were related to moments of relaxing, peace, and tranquility, in agreement with the view of many authors who have studied place attachment such as Brown, (1992), Low and Altman, (1992), Harris and colleagues (1996), and Rainwater (1970). The words associated with this lemma illustrate how a function of the home is of a safe shelter, a place where one can satisfy the need (“Need”) of emotional comfort (“Peace”, “Tranquillity”, “Safe”, “Security”) in front of difficulties of the external environment (“World”, “Succeed”). Moreover, the elevated personalization of this place emerges (“homely”; “for me”), evidencing the double level of symbolization of the place: both a place to belong and a place to possess. The following examples may illustrate such word associations:

“For me, it has always been a landing place, I go home, close the door and for better or worse, I am out of what it could happen to me, here' this is, a refuge, a safe place” (Cod010, female, 74 years old, retired).

“During the flood, it was definitely a safe haven because we found ourselves together with other families [...] to face these ugly moments and there we found peace” (Cod043, female, 36 years old, teacher).

Table 2. Word Associations to the lemma “shelter”

Lemma	Coeff	C.E.(A)	C.E.(AB)	Chi ²
World	.236	16	5	108.795
Peace	.146	15	3	39.673
For me	.107	113	6	14.179
Home	.09	1268	17	0
Homely	.084	46	3	9.515
Succeed	.075	57	3	6.792
Need	.073	27	2	7.588
Safe	.073	27	2	7.588
Life	.065	419	7	0.423
Tranquility	.064	139	4	2.644
Get	.061	86	3	3.113
Feel	.061	475	7	0.079
Child	.055	12	1	4.449
Dear	.055	12	1	4.449
Nest	.055	12	1	4.449
Security	.049	15	1	3.23

Note: Coeff: coefficients of the cosine; C.E.(A): number of elementary contexts in which the lemma appears; C.E.(AB) number of elementary contexts in which the lemma appears associated with the central lemma.

With respect to the lemma “childhood”, the associated words appeared related to feelings and affects and connected to the home environment as the first place of exploration of the child, in line with the literature (Bradley, 2006; Burton & Clark, 2005; Mallet, 2004). In particular, it emerged how childhood memories are very often connected to the house, understood as a family that nourishes and protects while growing up. The story of the home is narrated through the childhood memories (“Memory”). It seems to be a place that acts as a framework for relationship (“Parent”; “Friendship”) and significant life events (“Marry”; “Born”) of childhood but also for the representation of the childhood itself (“Play”; “Games”). In this sense, the home appears to be indissociable from the emotional components that characterized the interpersonal relationship in the growing process (“Grow”, “Serenity”; “Love”). The following sentences support these results:

“Serenity because I spent my childhood there so my best moments” (Cod018, male, 28 years old, employee).

“*That is the house that I remember fondly because it is the one of my childhood*” (Cod013, female, 57 years old, employee).

Table 3. Word Associations to the lemma "childhood"

Lemma	Coeff	C.E.(A)	C.E.(AB)	Chi ²
Memory	.178	190	12	48.977
Parent	.14	76	6	31.505
Play	.132	38	4	29.882
Games	.129	10	2	31.358
Serenity	.107	33	3	18.566
Love	.105	15	2	19.695
Apartment	.104	35	3	17.216
Grow	.104	35	3	17.216
Beautiful	.093	172	6	8.992
Live	.093	175	6	8.701
Life	.09	419	9	4.573
Friendship	.086	91	4	8.796
Home	.08	1268	14	0.064
Tie	.079	107	4	6.63
Marry	.077	64	3	7.252
Ball	.072	8	1	9.085
Lived	.071	33	2	7.098
Born	.071	134	4	4.229
Bedroom	.05	17	1	3.37

Note: Coeff: coefficients of the cosine; C.E.(A): number of elementary contexts in which the lemma appears; C.E.(AB) number of elementary contexts in which the lemma appears associated with the central lemma.

3.2. Multidimensional Scaling

Via Multidimensional Scaling and Modeling of Emerging Themes which monitored, investigated, and modeled the main emerging themes, eight themes were identified. These were derived from two existing models developed by Tognoli (1987) and Harris and colleagues (1996). This aimed to test if the identification of dimensions that theoretically distinguish a "house" from a "home" fitted with empirical data. The model obtained a good fit with a value of stress below the cut-off of .10 (stress = .0896). The themes were re-labeled according to the values associated with the shared words and specific words indicated by the Modeling of the Emerging Themes. Analyses showed that the patterns of results distinguishing between

different meanings gravitated around the house representation: *Connections* and *Rooting* included emotions related to the place, *Activity*, *Shelter*, and *Privacy* were related to the primordial meanings associated with the home represented as a nest, while the *Physical Conditions* and the *Positive Evaluation* represent the affective symbolization of the place itself, and the *Identity* refers to the function of the place as a mirror of the self.

3.3 Thematic Analysis of Elementary Contexts

Furthermore, thematic analysis of elementary contexts brought results in accordance with relevant literature on place attachment (e.g. Altman et al., 1992; Brown, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dovey, 1985; Hayward, 1977; Harris et al., 1996; Low & Altman, 1992; Rainwater, 1970; Smith, 1994; Tognoli, 1987; Tuan, 1980). Specifically, results showed that specific lemmas were descriptive of the considered dimensions. In the dimension of *Positive Evaluation* words referring to the feeling of attachment to the house were found (e.g., "remember"; "find"). The dimension of *Rooting* included words such as "welcome", "hot", "important", "share", "safe", or "peace", representing home as the center of the psychological individual, and as a safe place where to go back. The dimension of *Shelter* comprised terms such as "return", "happy", "quiet", "preferred", "key", all words describing a nest protecting from the outside world, a shelter in which to feel safe. In the dimension of *Connection*, words referring to the interpersonal dimension were found, related to the relationships that an individual cultivates within his family context (e.g., "father", "mother", "brother", "relative", "school", "country", "campaign"). The *Activity* dimension included words such as "morning", "evening", "food", "hold", "seek", "for me", that describe moments and situations in which individuals can focus on favorite aspects of the home. In the dimension of *Identity* the words "bedroom", "bath", "sitting-room", "kitchen" and "comfortable" exhaustively describe how the customization of the house's spaces is symbolically associated with the identity of its residents. The dimension of *Privacy*, including terms such as "close", "door", "welcome", "significant" and "study", seems to metaphorically describe the concept of space itself. The house is perceived as the place where one can close the door and focus on his privacy. Finally, in relation to the *Physical Dimension*, we found the words "place", "old", "move", "transfer" and "stay", which seems to refer to the activities that are performed to satisfy the physical and psychological needs of the inhabitants of the house.

Then, a factor analysis was performed building a representation of the contents of the corpus using significant thematic clusters and leading to the labeling of two factors. Each factor organizes a spatial dimension (axis at the center of which the value is 0) that develops in a bipolar

mode so that objects placed on opposite poles are most different from each other (Lancia, 2012). The two factors ordered the relevant information contained in the data tables and their polarity. It was then possible to label the ends of the axes and the cartesian t axes themselves, to better understand how these dimensions are oriented and how they can be classified at a more general level.

The X-axis labeled “Bonds” represents the continuum describing the management of the relations to the internal space of the house. This ranges from interpersonal elements (relationships with family and friends) to intrapersonal components (interiority of the individual). Then, the modality from which the house is symbolized - how the individual perceives and represents the house - lays on the Y axis, labeled "Symbolization". This continuum ranges from the Secure Base polarity (considered as a safe place from which to explore and turn back) to the protection polarity (understood as a place that acts as a protective shell comparable to the womb). As illustrated in Table 4, the results document that the theme more strongly faced in the context of the interviews was related to the rooting dimension, suggesting that the house is a psychological center to which the resident can come back regularly (Tuan, 1974).

Table 4. Dimensions percentage

Dimensions	Percentage
Positive Evaluation	12,6%
Shelter	10,1%
Rooting	17,5%
Privacy	13%
Identity	12,5%
Connection	13,4%
Physical Condition	10,7%
Activities	10,2%

4. Discussion

The main goal of this pilot study was to contribute to the understanding of the concept of home through an analysis of the subjective representation of the feelings and emotions perceived by individuals with respect to their own homes. For this purpose, we especially referred to the theory of place attachment (Brown, 1992; Low & Altman, 1992; Rubinstein & Parmalee, 1992; Harris et al., 1996; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Mallett, 2004; Rainwater, 1970). We argued that the perspective of the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1999; Main et al., 1985) and the related tools developed in the field are especially apt for a deeper investigation of the topic.

As proof of this, analyses conducted on fifty interviews addressing the attachment to home and investigating participants' most significant emotional and affective experiences showed results in agreement with existing theoretical literature (Bachelard, 1989; Coppola Pignatelli, 1977; Freud, 1929; Jung, 1961; Jager, 1985; Lotz, 2003; Rank, 1924). Specifically, data support the idea that the homeplace transcends the physical function by taking on a strong emotional and affective value (Bachelard, 1989; Cooper, 1974). Indeed, we observed that qualitative data evidenced the protective role of the house, described as a refuge from the outside world and a nest in which to relax and regenerate (Brown, 1992; Harris et al., 1996; Low & Altman, 1992; Rainwater, 1970). Moreover, our results expand current knowledge on the topic, suggesting that the physical features of the home may be closely related to the psychological dimension of residents because of the richness of the symbols present in the house which contribute to the construction of identity (Altman et al., 1981; Belk, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Also, our results shed light on the existing connection between memories associated with home and childhood. This further supports previous evidence asserting the primary role played by this specific place in such delicate phase of development (Bradley, 2006; Burton & Clark, 2005; Mallet, 2004; Ziol-Guest & Kalil, 2010).

Finally, from the analyses carried out, a theoretical model emerged based on empirical data and two existing models in the literature (Harris et al., 1996; Tognoli, 1987). Specifically, this included eight major dimensions (Positive Evaluation, Rooting, Shelter, Connections, Activities, Identity, Privacy, Physical Condition) oriented on two continuums (Bonds and Symbolization). Within this model, we found that most of the respondents tended to represent their home as a secure base from which to depart and come back, that also supports the development and maintenance of family relationships. A minor but still important proportion of the respondents tended to represent their home as a protective place that supports family relationships, or as a personal and private place that allows the individual to escape.

Moreover, our results indicated that the attachment theoretical and methodological tools appear especially useful for the purpose of investigating and understanding the construct of home attachment. Indeed, the use of the adapted version of the AAI elicited a rich quantity of material and allowed participants to produce descriptions that go beyond elements related to the main dimensions of the well-known theoretical models (Harris et al., 1996; Tognoli, 1987) referring also to attachment theory concepts. Indeed, we found support for our hypothesis that some central concepts of the attachment theory such as secure base and secure shelter have been identified throughout the analyses of participants' narratives. Despite the exploratory nature of this study, the innovative preliminary results obtained contribute to the drawing of a future line

of research, enriching insightful theoretical observations already formulated by other authors such as Morgan (2010).

5. Limitations, conclusions, and future directions

Some limitations (e.g., the limited sample size and the exploratory nature of the study) mainly due to the absence of available and validated instruments that measure attachment to the house are to be mentioned. This may be partially due to the complexity of the concept, yet to be fully captured. Indeed, the multiple aspects contributing to the construction of home attachment often involve some confusion in the construct definition. It would therefore be useful to individually examine these issues and then compare them in order to achieve a more unified and comprehensive vision of the construct of reference. A possible future goal would be to expand the scope of the search on home attachment, exploring the constructs and creating an *ad hoc* questionnaire that will enable researchers to gather insightful data and obtain valid and reliable results.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Ethical approval: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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Appendix 1. The protocol of the Home Attachment Interview

1. Could you start telling me a little bit about the different places you lived? Could you tell me where you were born and, if you changed several homes, who were the people who you lived with within the different houses?

2. (Now I'm wondering if you) could tell me which place you felt most connected to, and why? Why you don't have this feeling towards other places?

3. Now, I would like you to describe to me in greater/further detail what you feel is the most meaningful home for you.

4. Where, in the home you consider significant/meaningful, do you feel most at home?

A. Why?

5. Continuing to talk about your relationship with the house you chose as most meaningful, I would like you to choose three adjectives or words that describe the relationship you have with this place. I know you may need some time, so you can think about it for a few minutes and then I would like you to give some reasons for your choices. I will write down each adjective as you tell me.

A. The first thing you said is...Can you think of a specific event in relation to this word?

B. Then you said... Can you think of a specific event related to this word?

C. At least you said that... Can you think of a specific event related to this word?

6. Now, I would like to ask you about what the home you chose as most meaningful has represented to you.

For example, some people tell us that when they are restless, they feel more calm/peaceful or protected at home, others that their home is just the place where they sleep or eat, others that it is the place that represents their taste and economic possibilities. For you instead?

A. Could you tell me an episode that represents this feeling?

7. Do you remember when you left this house? How did you react?

(only for those who chose a home of the past and not the current home as their significant house)

8. Have you ever felt that you were not safe in the home you chose as most meaningful? For example, some people told us that some places in their house scared them. Has anything like that ever happened to you?

9. How do you feel your current home represents you?

(only for those who chose a past home and not the current home as their significant house)
