

## **PhD Dissertation Defense**

**Candidate:** Albert S. Johnson

**Defense Date:** December 16, 2014

**Title:** Experiential and Emotional Basis For Sense-Of-Place

**Committee:** Dr. Lee Talbot (Dissertation Director), Dr. Sharon deMonsabert, Dr. Gregory Guagnano, and Dr. Michael Slimak (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

### **ABSTRACT**

The research investigated individual's experiences and emotions connected to a location of their choosing. The research sought to determine what causes an individual to develop a sense-of-place for a specific location. The research investigated the experiences individuals had with the place they chose to discuss. The persons that participated were also asked to discuss the emotions they felt when they talked about or when they thought about their place. The research was conducted using a mixed method approach of both quantitative and qualitative investigation. The sample was persons over 18 years old living in the United States.

The hypothesis of this research is there are specific sites for which an individual has an affinity based on their personal experience at the site. This hypothesis was tested using five (5) experiences and ten (10) emotions. The research sought the binding elements of a person's affinity for the site. If the hypothesis is correct an individual's affinity for a site will be stronger based on the importance of their experience at the site.

Part One of the research was a series of personal interviews. The transcriptions of the Part One interviews were coded and categorized into types of experiences and how the experiences were described. Through the coding process the questions for the Part Two telephone survey were developed. Coding of the interviews also provided the list of emotions that the interview participants said that they felt related to their place. The questions about experience and emotions were utilized in the telephone survey. There were 413 responses to the Part Two telephone survey. These formed the sample for the study.

The study found that a person's experience has a statistically significant relationship to the strength of the person's feelings for a specific site. The research data and the statistical analysis provide a new base for the study of sense-of-place. This research provides a model for the study of sense-of-place through the process of investigation and discovery of a person's experiences at a specific place, and an investigation of emotions related to those experiences and thereby related to the site.