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Understanding and Negotiation of Roles in Non-commercial Homestays: A Host Perspective

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Title: Understanding and Negotiation of Roles in Non-commercial Homestays: A Host Perspective

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Abstract:

An ethical relation comprises the welcoming and treatment of the other who enters the home. As soon as the stranger crosses the home's threshold, the encounter between themselves and the host is regulated by a combination of space, control, sovereignty and ethics issues (Bulley, 2015). As both sides have to relinquish some of their power and adapt their behaviours and routines, the guest tries to maintain some of their freedom and the host their sovereignty over their home (Lynch, DiDomenico & Sweenie, 2007). To that end, the latter imposes certain explicit or implicit house rules. However, rules regarding space, behaviour and daily routines convey and emphasise power balance and power relations (Anderson, 2014). The relationship becomes more complicated when further dimensions enter the exchange. In situations where an individual's home becomes their workplace, such as bed and breakfasts, hosts have been found to employ various mechanisms to set boundaries, spatial and emotional, between themselves and their guests (DiDomenico & Lynch, 2007). However, the question arises: How is the relationship dynamic affected when it is the guest who works for the host?

This PhD research is examining the host-guest relationship in encounters where the guest receives bed and board in exchange for a few hours of daily work. Such transactions include WWOOFing, Workaway and HelpX as well as au pairing, in which a small financial transaction is involved, with the au pair receiving pocket money on top of food and accommodation. In most of these exchanges there is no formal contract, and the rules are often blurry and unclear. A combination of autoethnography and in-depth interviews were employed to explore the development of the relationship between the two sides, their perceptions of fairness and how their roles are negotiated and established accordingly. For the autoethnography, the researcher stayed as a guest in two different homes, and reported and analysed observations, feelings and thoughts that arose during the encounters in relation to the various aspects of the exchange. The findings from the autoethnography informed the questions for the second stage, the interviews, with 50 hosts and guests.

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Both the host and the guest enter the relationship with their own preconceived notions of what their role is, what the other side's role is and what is fair to provide and expect. Due to the complex nature of these exchanges that include aspects of work, hospitality, education and personal relationships, the roles that individuals have are not straightforward but rather a combination of different and often contradictory roles. This presentation will focus on the understanding that hosts in this exchange have of their own and their guest's role. These perceptions tend to evolve and adapt during each encounter, with the hosts trying to communicate their expectations to their guests in direct or more subtle ways, in an effort to negotiate the rules of the transaction while balancing between the conflicting facets of their various roles as employers, hosts, mentors, educators, (host) parents and friends.

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