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CHILDREN'S SENSE OF PLACE IN NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

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Abstract

In the Hispano homeland of northern New Mexico, children's lives are shaped by land, by family, by culture, and by community. The way these forces work together forms each child's sense of place and place attachments. Using short case examples, this article presents a brief overview of children's place experiences and preferences and describes some of the factors that contribute to children's sense of place in three communities, of northern New Mexico which represent a range from urban to rural. It demonstrates the important role extended family and direct experience play in shaping children's sense of place and understanding of nature.

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Introduction

'Sense of place' can be defined as a relationship to place, a dialectical way of thinking of and experiencing a biophysical and cultural place. In recent years, environmental education programs have often included 'sense of place' in their curricula, assuming that if children care about one place in particular, they will eventually care about the environment in general (e.g., Lane-Zucker, 1997; Leslie *et al.*, 1999; Orr, 1993; Pyle, 1992, 1993; Sobel, 1993, 1997/98, 1998; Traina & Darley-Hill, 1995; Turner, 1997). Authors write about a sense of place and the importance of nature in children's experiences (Basso, 1996; Feld & Basso, 1996; Hough, 1990; Low, 1992; Peña, 1998; Relph, 1976) and planners and geographers discuss the importance of preserving and developing a sense of place for community prosperity and preservation (deGroot, 1992; Forman & Godron, 1986; Hart, 1997; Jackson, 1994; Moore, 1986; Perkins, 1988; Relph, 1976; Sagoff, 1992; Spin, 1984; Tuan, 1978; Usner, 1995; Watson, 1997). There are two assumptions inherent to most of these discussions: that attachments to places are necessary for the protection of unique and healthy communities or environments, and that preservation of communities is integral to the psychological well-being of human inhabitants. This latter, psychological relation to place has often been termed 'place identity'. For example, Peña (1998: 11) describes the way 'place' is a 'primary repository for human constructions of meaning and identity [because] humans create meaning in part by inscribing their natural and cultural memories onto … their natural and cultural landscapes'. Peña suggests that through this positioning of memory, people craft their identity.

If, as many authors suggest, the creation or preservation of a sense of place is important in maintaining the quality of the environment as well as the integrity of human life within it (e.g., Altman & Low, 1992; Basso, 1996; Chawla, 1992; Hough, 1990; Kellert, 1997; Proshansky *et al.,* 1995; Relph, 1976; Thompson, 1995), the challenge is then to understand what a sense of place consists of for individuals in a specific context, and to try to uncover what it is about a sense of place that really matters. For without this understanding, creating or preserving a true sense of place is not possible.

This article describes cases from research on the cultural, ecological, and individual experiences that compose a sense of place for children in northern New Mexico. Children's sense of place occurs on multiple scales: there is the child-scale experience of places, though activities such as fort-making, climbing trees, or playing games with friends; there is a family-scale experience of place that provides an historical and cultural context for experiences; and there is a community-level sense of place, where broader cultural values and place relations take shape. Each scale of sense of place is important in what children learn from it, in what benefits they gain, and ultimately the type and extent of connections they will hold for place and nature.

The northern New Mexico region of the United States presents a unique research opportunity because of the spectrum of livelihoods and connections to the land that exist within a shared biogeographic region. Until very recently, some families in northern New Mexico followed a preindustrial way of life, providing their children with an education that in many ways would now be deemed 'environmental'. Children learned how to care for the land, how to live from it, and sometimes, what constituted 'right' behavior toward it. These values and concerns are part of the culture of Hispano families—who came from Spain to settle the region as early as 1540, and created a New World culture in association with the land. It is only recently that some families have converted from a subsistence way of life to a cash economy, and today family occupations represent a spectrum from farming to various levels of wage employment. With changes in communities through economic development, political struggles, and social change (Nostrand, 1992; Peña, 1998; Usner, 1995; Van Ness, 1991), there is greater variation in the lessons passed on through the generations to children today.

In this context, questions about a sense of place—what is it made of? why does it matter?—take on particular significance. Because of rapid changes in northern New Mexico, many families are conscious of their place and sometimes work to preserve or protect it. It is thus possible to describe variation in a sense of place among individuals, even within a region with a common social history and geography, and to document the significance of place when families feel it is lost or diminished culturally or ecologically.

Research approach

The research presented in this article was part of dissertation research that was exploratory and ethnographic in approach. Research was conducted in two phases: phase one was designed to obtain an overview of children's place experiences through composition analysis and mapping accompanied by semi-structured interviews (Hart, 1979; Matthews, 1995; Sebba, 1991; Sobel, 1993, 1998), and phase two was an in-depth study with 16 case children and their families. While only select cases are presented in this article, the methods and results of both phases of research are briefly presented herein (see Derr, 2001 for the complete study).

The first phase of research was conducted with 89 children from Mora, Santa Fe, and Dixon, New Mexico, and involved children composing two essays (one about a favorite place and one that told a family story related to a place), drawing a map of their place use, participating in a semi-structured interview, and completing an activity questionnaire. Children completed each exercise during class time at school. Methods were pretested in Connecticut and New Mexico.

After completion of the first stage of research, interviews were transcribed and coded with a number of themes that illustrated the role of nature or the role of family and culture, in shaping children's sense of place (*cf*. Emerson *et al*., 1995). Of the four themes, presented briefly in Table 1, the first two represent the individual preferences and developmental needs of children, and the latter two represent experiences of children which are heavily influenced

TABLE 1
Themes generated from phase one

Theme	Description
Four wheelers, ramps, and rites of passage	Children learn through adventure & risk-taking, exploration, and self-created rites of passage. *Experiential* needs greater than *place attachments.*
The fort-makers	Children experience imagination, escape, safety, and creativity through active place making and place attachment. *Place* and *place-making* integral to the experiences.
Learning care	Children learn nurturance, companionship, respect, awe from animals, ethnobotany, gardening, and place. *Elements of nature* help children to model *care* for larger scale environment.
The web	Experience of a cultural place, reasons to stay, reasons to go, rootedness vs. transience. *Context* for experience influences the *meanings* children attach to place.

by adult figures. After analysis of phase I data, children were selected from each community who illustrated at least three of the four themes and who cut across socio-economic, cultural, geographic, family and development variables. These children participated in the second phase of research and three of them are represented in the case studies for this article.

The in-depth phase of research included place expeditions with 16 children (eight in Santa Fe, four in Dixon, and four in Mora); 19 parent interviews, typically with the mother; and six interviews with grandparents (two from each community). Children generated a list of places they wanted to show me for their 'place expeditions' (*cf*. Hart, 1979; Moore, 1986), and sites were visited together on foot. Children also talked about additional places that were too far away to visit on foot but that were triggered by stories during the expeditions. For each place, children described how much they used each place, the kinds of activities associated with a place, places that were solitary or for reflection and getting away, and places that were more social in nature.

At least one parent of each case child was interviewed as well as grandmothers from two children in each community. Whenever possible, interviews were conducted with both the mother and father of a child. However, due to the social dynamics in many homes, many primary care givers were women. Interviews focused on a family's length of tenure in a place. their overall sense of community, and the extent to which they view this being passed on to their children and grandchildren. Parents and grandparents were also asked to describe children's play behaviors, important family activities, and priorities for child-rearing (including but not exclusive to what they teach their children about plants and animals). Finally, I asked parents and grandparents to reflect on their childhood and how it was similar and different to that of their children today.

Choice of region and communities

Northern New Mexico is a distinct region that contains a common cultural history and shared roots in a land-based economy. Some families have lived in northern New Mexico for over 400 years, eking a living from the land and its resources. Yet it is also a region of increasing change, and in some ways, change has come more rapidly to this area than most other parts of the nation (Wilson, 1997). Residents are aware of the changes occurring, and some are actively involved in trying to shape the way these changes might take place. As a result, some communities have moved from an insular, subsistence life of farming and trade between villages to a cash economy and wage-labor jobs within the last 50 years (Nostrand, 1992; Van Ness, 1991), and family occupation in this region might fall anywhere on the spectrum between subsistence farming and various levels of employment for wages or salary. Children's experiences are therefore varied and can speak to sense of place from these multiple perspectives.

The specific communities in this study—Mora, Dixon, and Santa Fe—fall along a gradient, with Mora being the most insular of the three communities and Santa Fe the most developed and diverse. Though Santa Fe is often regarded as a wealthy arts community, the children represented in this study were for the most part neither wealthy nor associated with the arts. Many of them are similar socio-economically and culturally to their rural counterparts in Mora and Dixon. Finally, because much environmental education and research is conducted with predominantly white, middle-class children, it was important to work with children whose cultural perspective are often under-represented.

Age and grade selection

Children's place experience has been studied across a wide range of ages. Middle childhood, from ages 6 to 11, is thought to be important period for children to bond with nature (Hart, 1979; Pearce, 1977; Searles, 1959; Sobel 1993). Sobel (1993) suggests that the ages of 9–11 are particularly significant for children in middle childhood to feel 'at home' with the earth and to begin to understand themselves in relation to it. This research was therefore conducted with children of ages 10 and 11, the uppermost end of the 'middle childhood' age range. An understanding of how children in middle childhood respond to their environment—what they use it for, how they benefit from it, and perhaps ways they might begin to disconnect from it in early adolescence—is crucial in creating environmental education that meets children's needs and cultivates caring connections.

Overview of Results from phase one

In northern New Mexico, many social and cultural traditions are connected to the land. Within this context, sense of place and place attachments extend Latin values, such as family, interdependence, and self-reliance (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994), to include stewardship and a relationship with the natural environment (Atencio, 2000). When elders in communities of northern New Mexico viewed a loss of their children's values, or a diminishing way of life, this was at least in part a representation of loss of connection to, or understanding of, the land. Just as some elders in the region expressed their concern that children no longer know the Spanish language, that they are no longer, therefore, 'Hispano', so too did they express deep concern for the relationship children develop and will have with the land and resources that are equally a part of Hispano culture (Derr, 2001).

The way this heritage was expressed by children varied by community and family. In general, children's experiences represented the gradient between communities in the extent that their experiences are integrated with nature and resources. Children in Mora have greater access to the mountains and thus these places were more readily available for exploration; as a result, they tended to have the most in-depth experiences with nature (Table 2). For example, more of these children talked of seeing signs of bear, elk, or rabbit, and more of these children were able to experience the spontaneous aspects of a natural environment than children in either Dixon or Santa Fe. The gradient between 'urban' and 'rural' was also expressed in the resource activities of children: children in Santa Fe had the least experiences with collecting herbs, foods, hunting or fishing, when compared to Dixon or Mora (Table 3). Given the physical composition of each community and the livelihoods of families within them, these results are not particularly surprising.

What is perhaps more interesting is the way children from each community demonstrated similarities in their reasons for place use, and natural places in particular: children's first priority was the activities a place enabled, followed by togetherness in the place with family and friends and by place features (Table 4). Preferences for the location of activities was similar among communities and between genders. For example, most children

TABLE 2
Children's favorite and exploring places, by community[1]

Place category	Mora ($n=21$)	Dixon ($n=18$)	Santa Fe ($n=49$)
Favorite places			
Mountains	33%	11%	8%
Other natural places (rivers, rocks, ditches)	29%	33%	37%
Special places[2]	33%	28%	12%
Commercial places	—	—	35%
Friends' or families' homes	57%	50%	39%
Exploring places			
Mountains	71%	44%	10%
Places with plants or animals	10%	56%	10%
Other natural areas	24%	28%	39%
Arroyo[3]	—	—	10%
River	5%	22%	12%
Rocky places	—	22%	—

[1] Children could give more than one response; thus, per cents are >100 for any community.
[2] 'Special places' can refer to a fort, clubhouse, or casita (as many children called them), or a special place that children had in some way created or modified. For example, one Dixon girl had a special place at a willow tree by the Rio Grande.
[3] Arroyos are dry creekbeds with flowing water usually only after a major storm event.

TABLE 3
Per cent of children who participate in resource-related activities, by community

	Collect herbs for medicine?	Collect other foods?[4]	Hunt?	Fish?
Mora ($n=18$)	50%	94%	89%	100%
Dixon ($n=17$)	41%	88%	65%	94%
Santa Fe ($n=43$)	67%	72%	40%	81%

[4] Foods such as pinyon pine nuts, mulberries, or wild strawberries.

Table 4
Rankings of children's reasons for favorite places, by community[5]

	Rank	Per cent	Reason
Mora (*n* = 21)	1	71%	Activities
	2	62%	Togetherness with family friends
	3	57%	Place features
	4	22%	Mental well-being
Dixon (*n* = 18)	1	89%	Activities
	2	78%	Togetherness with family/friends
	3	72%	Place features
	4	22%	Mental well-being
Santa Fe (*n* = 49)	1	76%	Activities
	2	67%	Togetherness with family/friends
	3	51%	Place features
	4	8%	Mental well-being

[5] Categories were adapted from Korpela (1995) and from categorization of children's responses for place preference in Derr (2001).

wanted to explore outside in natural areas, and most children used their room as a place to meet overall emotional needs more than any other place (Derr, 2001). Chawla (1992) suggests that children of all ages need places for security, social affiliation, and creative expression and exploration. Children in this study appeared to use their indoor places, such as bedrooms, for most of their emotional needs—for security and for social affiliation—and used nature and outdoor places for exploration. Contrary to previous studies (e.g., Kaplan, 1983; Korpela, 1995; Sebba, 1991), natural places were not of primary importance in meeting children's emotional needs: many children used a combination of their bedrooms, friends' homes, and outdoor spaces for thinking, being alone, or clearing one's mind. Many children also consistently expressed the desire for interactions to be shared with family and friends, and at times, this desire for relationships was of greater importance than the location of the experience. The findings from both phases of research underscore the importance of the *social* in shaping children's experiences (Derr, 2001). The three cases described below represent a diversity of ways that children experience place and lend further support to the idea that places must meet children's needs in order for them to be meaningful.

Case I. Leo Durán (age 10): 'this is *my* mountain!'

Leo proudly puts the finishing touches on his map: a brightly colored silhouette of a big green mountain, a house, a backyard, and a 'plains area where the elk and the bear …'

'Where they what?' I ask, as he hands me his map with this incomplete sentence.

'Well, they just come down there a lot', he smiles. In brightly colored orange marker, Leo has scrolled 'this is my big mountain' through the green in front of his house. The 'bald spot' on the mountain, 'where the elk and the bear …' is one of Leo's favorite places to go and also one that he says is 'the most exciting'. When Leo took me to this spot on the mountain, he said he liked to go there with his father to mend fences, or that sometimes they have picnics there. They go fishing in the river that meanders through this spot, too, 'when my grandma wants fish'. Standing on this hill, we could see the three pastures that are his immediate family's, and his house, and the mountains beyond. 'This is the best place', he said.

He shows me an herb he collects for his mom when someone has a cold. He cringes as he takes a bite, but he says it works; it heals. Then he takes part of an Indian paintbrush and says that when he gets thirsty he will drink from this plant. We stand facing his homestead, sucking the nectar from red trumpet flowers. Its liquid is sweet and refreshing. He looks out at the land, the fields, the mountains, his home, and he tells me that he will inherit the house, 'because the youngest gets the house'. When I later asked his mom about this she laughs, 'he said *that*?' There were no plans for the house to go to him, but his mother says it could happen because his brother is on his way to Nashville as a musician, and Leo is now thinking about working as a teacher and staying in the area. 'It's hard for all of us to leave here', she says. Leo is grounded in his sense of place, and there is little else that is as important to him.

We walk around the bald spot and find elk tracks in the field. Some bear scat. Leo said they go up to the bald spot sometimes to trap bobcats. He said he does not really like trapping the cats, but his uncle does. There is an ethical tension between his immediate family, who do not like to trap bobcats to protect the farm animals and some of his extended family, who do. Leo seems to understand why he and his family do not trap the cats, but he is respectful of his elder uncle, too. Leo told me he and his father climb up this part of the mountain every year to get Christmas trees to sell. They mostly collect pinyon and Douglas fir, but he said his favorite is white fir. When I ask why, he says, 'I don't know, I guess because of its soft needles, and that it's kind of blue.' In general Leo does not always seem to know the names of things, certain plants — like the herb we picked for colds, certain birds, but he *knows* the plants and the birds and the other animals in an intimate sense of experiencing them repeatedly, out in his mountain. This is a possible explanation for at least some of the children in Nabhan and St. Antoine's (1993) study who did not know the names of plants or animals: it is possible that the specifics of botanical knowledge are something that come later, with age. For now, Leo knows some of the names in Spanish, and he knows many trees and plants by their other properties, if not by their names. He is comfortable showing them to me. His mother tells me a story of how Leo learns these ethnobotanic ways:

> Sometimes we go visit Grandma Lita. She's a *medica*,[1] and she's 90-some years old. We all sit on her porch and listen to her tell stories of when she was a girl…. Grandma Lita has nine grandchildren, and for some reason none of them have learned the herbal medicine. Leo says, 'I wish I were her grandson, I would learn it all!' He wants to carry it. We go to her and follow the medicines …

Though Leo's mother encourages him to learn the medicines, she says the initiative mostly comes from him.

Leo also took me to a tunnel that goes under the main road between his house and another range of mountains where Leo said he usually could find nests of *las golondrinas* swallows. He knows the Spanish name for these birds, and the shape of their nests, and when the eggs are usually laid. And Leo likes to scour the mountains to find elk horns or other natural objects to collect. Some of his understanding comes from his experiences in the natural world around his home, but much of his understanding comes from his parents, who are committed to instilling much of their cultural heritage into their children. Leo's mother, Maria, believes that Leo actually has experienced more culturally than she did as a child:

> We want to instill, we have tried to instill, the positive aspects of our culture in our children…. I don't think I had the cultural richness he has. My parents are both Hispanic, but I grew up during the era when Spanish was not allowed in schools. And I'm Presbyterian; he's Catholic. so he's exposed to a lot of rituals [that I wasn't].

Maria said that though they try to teach Leo about animals and plants, like the herbs, Leo learns much from his own initiative:

> They live everyday surrounded by plants and animals. They know the importance of water. They know the importance of conserving water. I don't know if he told you or not, but Leo has his own garden that he takes care of. It's his baby. It's not irrigated. He has to haul the water there himself. He does all the hoeing.

Maria said that Leo had the idea to create his own garden, which is away from their house and near the fields where he and I walked.

> He's so proud. And he comes back and tells me he has 11 plants of pumpkins and 20 plants of cucumbers, because he knows how much I love fresh cucumbers. I think one year his dad helped hoe it. But he goes there every evening or early in the morning [to work].

Leo and his father also maintain an orchard together. Leo said his dad makes the best pies: plums, apples, pears. '[It's a] big ole orchard … Pretty soon we'll probably have maybe 25 pies!' Leo also helps his father splitting wood, and he said he *likes* doing his chores—feeding the lambs, the horses, the guinea hens, bailing hay, fixing fence lines. Leo said that if he is away from home for a few days. he starts to really miss it. 'Miss what?' I ask. 'Being outside, doing my chores', he says, 'Riding my horse. Chasing the cows. It's better than Vegas[2] … I keep myself entertained'. These chores are a part of the way of life that Leo embraces.

Leo's sense of place is partly based on the ancestry and cultural place that his family provides, and partly on the way he makes these place experiences personal. Leo's sense of place is of an intensity born out of these strong attachments to places, the ancestral connections to this particular mountain, the resultant 'insider' feelings, and a strong motivation to remain, much as Hay (1998) describes. Or, as Low defines it, his sense of place comes out of genealogic, economic, and narrative ties to the land (Low, 1992). Leo's sense of place is tied to nature and the way of life in the mountains. There is little disconnect between the things he knows about nature and his experiences in them. Every day, as Leo spends time working outside, he learns new things. His learning is contextual and self-guided, and these personalized experiences inform Leo's sense of place. and yet his sense of place also extends to his immediate and extended family, his community-—and members of it like Grandma Lita—and the Hispano culture that has grown and developed within the Mora valley for centuries. These adults also play a guiding roles in shaping Leo's sense of place. It is this combination of ancestral and cultural sense of place that enriches the everyday experiences Leo has. It seems to give them deeper meaning and shape. What does the sense of place mean for Leo? His parents encourage and support the development of a strong self concept in their children. This includes providing and enabling the kinds of cultural and natural experience that Leo desires. As a result, Leo's self concept contains a strong place identity. He knows where he comes from; he knows he has a place he belongs, and this knowing seems to give him confidence, rootedness, and stability.

Case 2. Terésa (age 11): cultural place in the Analco Barrio

Terésa Sánchez lives in one of the oldest *barrios* in Santa Fe. The Analco barrio was founded when Santa Fe was a dusty out-post along the Santa Fe trail, home for *vaqueros* and *caballeros*. Not much remains of the original barrio. The old adobe homes have washed away or been torn down, and newer, smaller adobes have taken their place. It is a poor neighborhood, drab and dirty, known for its heroin problems, crime, and gangs. Domestic violence, drive-by shootings, and speeding, drunken drivers are all part of the barrio and affect children's lives in sometimes significant ways. Terésa once told me that she and her cousins were fired upon in a gang-related shooting. 'We were just walking down the street to Marta's house, and we heard the shooting coming from around the curve [in the road]. They shot right at me and my little cousins. One of the bullets almost hit me in my foot'.

Despite the harsh experiences of this troubled neighborhood. Terésa has developed a sense of place some might never achieve. Her sense of place emerges not just from the environment of her home, but also from the social experiences of play groups, family, art, and religion that are associated with it. Terésa's case demonstrates that the social contexts of experience cannot be separated from those of the physical and natural environment: her social bonds help her to cope with the stark realities of her neighborhood.

When Terésa drew her map, she was able to place her own home, her grandmother's house, her uncle's, her aunt's, and her other uncle's house all within a few block radius. Because one grandmother had 15 children and the other had seven, there are now dozens of grandchildren and great-grandchildren teaming the neighborhood and town—riding bikes along the streets, moving furniture in and out of their grandma's house, working on a car in the front yard, playing Nintendo with a porch full of cousins, playing tag in the park.

Terésa made a 'clubhouse' in the compound where her uncle was constructing a new house. Amid the rebar, adobe, and cement. Terésa finds a quiet place to be alone. But the most important place to Terésa, the one that she attaches the greatest amount of pride and value, is the park just across the street from the Boys and Girl's Club. The park is sandwiched between two roads, and runs lengthwise for a stretch along the sometimes flowing Santa Fe river. Vibrant mural walls stretch along the park, winding down stairs, and extending into the courtyards of Terésa's uncles' complex. When I first met Terésa at school, she appeared proud, drawing the park and her family's barrio on her map, and with this pride was a confidence. Terésa walked with her head high and her long black ponytail jetting down her back. This assurance seemed to help her performance in school sometimes, and she talked about how it was important for her to continue her education. She pointed to her cousins who were having children at 19 or 20 years of age, and how 'that's too young'. She wants to continue her father's traditions of mural art, 'and I don't care what they pay me'. Yet her teachers also notice that Terésa has bouts of depression, and during these times her performance suffers. Her teachers worry about some of the things Terésa will not openly discuss.

Terésa is still teetering on the edges, still finding ways to cope with the 'distribution of sadness' (Vélez-Ibáñez, 1997) that plagues her barrio. She seems to find solace in the park. She describes it as a quiet place, a place she can go to think and be alone. And she describes it as a place she likes to play with her cousins. She shows me all the good hiding spots in the park: places her cousins never think to look. And she talks about the Santa Fe River, and working with her uncle to keep it clean. As we walk through the park, we pick up some plastic bags that have caught on the rocks at the river. Terésa told me one of her favorite subjects in school is science and that she likes exploring the river for fish or frogs. This is something she used to do with her father, and that she still enjoys 'when he's not away on business'. She seems always to be a bit vigilant about protecting 'her' park, the 'Sánchez' park' because keeping it clean and well maintained is part of maintaining the family's honor. This park is their pride and joy. Though it cannot make up for all the struggles that Terésa may face, the significance of Terésa's sense of place is real. Terésa seems to understand this herself. When she shows me the park, she does so with a sense of pride and significance.

Though there are many ways to enter the park. Terésa made a point of bringing me thought the main entrance, where the walls form a gateway and where Our Lady of Guadalupe is prominently displayed. As Terésa shows me this mural, she tells me of her frustration with vandalism in the park. 'We keep having to come out and paint over the graffiti … Someone painted a moustache on her face! That's why it's so dark'.

The murals are a family creation: Terésa's father skectched each drawing, and uncles and cousins would follow along to complete the paintings. Terésa points to the dragon that winds down the stairs to the center of park: 'This was the first thing he painted, and it made me scared. I called it the big-nosed snake, and my dad thought that was really funny'. Though there are some paintings of northern New Mexico—the Catholic church, farming, and the Rio Grande—Mexican symbolism predominates the murals. Yet the largest of the murals in the park represents the tragedy that underscores Terésa's life. She describes her parents as 'the best things that ever happened to me!' But they are alleged to have drug problems and related trouble with the law. This last mural shows a man held behind prison bars, with a wife crying outside the bars. A ghost carries the scales of justice, and an hour-glass measures the time left to serve. Terésa will not talk of this to me. Her parents are always 'away on business'. And while her mother sometimes goes for 'business', it is her father who is away the most. Her family supports this story, and it is one that they tell to the teachers at school as well, but others at the school and in her neighborhood confirm that the 'business' is a story, designed to protect the family honor. It is clear that Terésa lives in a carefully constructed world that she and her family create to protect her father. When Terésa explained her father's murals to me, she did so with only a partial understanding of their symbolic importance. What she seemed to gain at this time and age was a sense of pride in her heritage and identity. Terésa seems to have a more informed and developed sense of self than others of her friends, at least in part because of these murals and her family's role in them.

What does a sense of place mean for Terésa? What does it provide? Vélez-Ibáñez (1997: 182, 184) describes a distribution of sadness based on 'miseducation, poverty, physical and mental illness, crime, drugs, and over-participation in wars' that will continue to be distributed 'despite clusters of exchange and the great investment in social relations, children, and a sense of place and space'. Terésa is one of the despites. Despite all the hardship, sadness, and sorrow, she has a strong sense of place. Terésa declares the city park as her own. 'This is the Sánchez' Park'. And her familial sense of ownership gives her a connectedness and pride that some of her peers do not have.

In many ways, Terésa's place attachments follow the typology that Low (1992) outlines, where ancestral ties, loss or destruction of place, economic links, spiritual connections, ritual pilgrimage, and story-telling all can serve to create attachments to place. Terésa has genealogical ties to this neighborhood: her family has lived in the barrio for at least four generations, and her grandmother was raised in the same house where she lives now. In the case of Terésa's family, this genealogical tie to a particular place provides them not only with historical connections, but also increased stability, as despite the poverty, they are able to hold on to a place to live, grouped together with others from their extended family.

Low also suggests that when ties to land break down or are lost, this can result in a place attachment based on loss or destruction. Though the places where Terésa lives have not been destroyed or lost, they are threatened by instability and violence. This inward instability is recognized by those who live with it, and in this way family members of all ages talk of the struggle to make the neighborhood a safe place. The loss then, is one linked to the history of a family network of places, safe and hospitable to roam. No longer do families feel comfortable with their children crossing the street or visiting a friend, and this plagues the entire barrio. But the Sánchez' family, through the creation and maintenance of the park and its murals, are trying to create a different kind of place within the barrio—one that draws upon ownership of place. In the case of the Sánchez' family, ownership has a dual meaning: they own property and homes within the barrio, creating a network throughout a two-block radius, but they also claim ownership over the Santa Fe City Park, which they've named 'Sánchez Park'. This second type of ownership is not based on deeds or land titles, but on ownership that comes from creating a place. This kind of ownership is critical in Terésa's commitment to the park, to keeping it clean, and to working as the park's vigilante against vandalism or destruction.

Terésa's family also developed 'cosmological' ties to the park through the creation of murals which present both mythological and idealogical ties to place. These symbols extend beyond the park, and serve to link the murals in the park—the immediately experienced place of Terésa and her family—with the broader culture of the *Hispano mexicano* population in the greater Southwest. Our Lady of Guadalupe and Aztlan—the mythic place of emergence of the Aztecs—are both part of these murals, and these symbols serve to connect their local home to the cultural and spiritual homeland. A dedication ceremony that Terésa's family held for one of the murals is a further connection to the ideology and religion tied to place.

Finally, Terésa demonstrates narrative attachments to place through the origin myths, moral stories, family histories, and personal accounts of experiences in the park and neighborhood that she and her family tell. Terésa draws from a diversity of stories, including her own, to connect with her home places. The strongest of these for Terésa are the ties to her family history and her personal experiences in helping to create and dedicate the murals.

A sense of place of Terésa is thus composed of all these intertwined ideas—sometimes mythological, sometimes everyday—about the place where Terésa and her family live. That all these different categories come together in describing Terésa's place attachments speaks to the strength of her bonds with place. Hay (1998) suggests that sense of place is stronger for families who have such cultural and ancestral ties to a place. These ties go beyond the mere personal experience with place and provide greater rootedness. What distinguishes Terésa from her barrio friends is the strength of the bonds in her extended family and the ties to their neighborhood through the park and murals. The unique combination of the history of place with her family's involvement in place-making creates a strong place identity within Terésa. This seems to give her a strength that others who live in similar circumstances do not have. In this way, having a strong sense of place may help strengthen her identity, and it may help her down the road. It may help her escape the impoverished aspects of her neighborhood to do some of the things she strives for.

Terésa's case is also an important one in demonstrating that a sense of place does not equal a sense of nature. Though the park contains a river and some trees, these are small elements of nature in a neighborhood that is primarily human-constructed. Terésa seems glad to have these elements of nature near her home, yet they do not play a role in shaping most of her experiences. For example, when she and her cousins play in the park, they play social games such as hide-and-go-seek or tag or ball. Nature in this case is simply a background for their experiences. This directly contradicts what Sebba (1991) and others (e.g., Kaplan, 1983; Sobel, 1993) assert—that nature is a primary part of children's experiences rather than a backdrop. For Terésa, the exact opposite was true most often. This does not mean that Terésa didn't enjoy the occasional times when she and her father did look for tadpoles in the river, for example, but it did not contribute much to her sense of the world in the Analco barrio.

Case 3. Marcos (age 10): place-making in 'the mighty jungle'

When I was describing the map making exercise to children in Dixon, Marcos shouted out: 'I know exactly what I'm going to draw!' He had discovered a new cave the previous night, and he couldn't wait to talk about it. Marcos also drew a map of his house and his grandmother's house, and the well-worn path that leads between the two on his family's property. The physical proximity of these homes only begins to represent the close and intimate relationship Marcos holds toward his grandmother and his experiences at home and in nature. His grandmother followed the old ways of living, growing chiles for cash and food for subsistence on the four acres of land around their home. With the exception of coffee and sugar and a few other amenities, all her food came from this land. 'I see people spending $100 $125 on groceries, and I don't have to do that, I spend $10 *or* 15!' she explained.[3] She farmed in her bare feet, plowing the land by hand in her younger years and with the aid of a 1952 tractor for 37 years after that.

Marcos helped his grandmother with this farming, from tilling the soil to planting crops to taking them to market every Saturday. His grandmother passed away three years previously, but she still lives on in his memory and plays a special role in shaping his experiences. Now Marcos spends time near his grandmother's house as a special place that binds him to her and their past ways of life. He describes her house and the grass and flowers around it with great care. Their family still burns candles in the house for her and maintains the property outside. Marcos also took an interest in creating his own small scale gardens in memory of his grandmother. He and his mother build small raised beds, framed with wood, where Marcos is continuing to grow peas, onions, lettuce, and some corn and chiles. It is clear that though Marcos enjoys the gardening, it is an act that re-connects him to his grandmother as much as it is physically working with the land and making things grow.

Marcos also spends much of his time outdoors in the rocky mountains and arroyos that run along the back of his family's home. Here, too, he constructs a place in honor of his grandmother. A cross rests high in the crevices of several small boulders. Next to small pinyons, junipers, and prickly pears, the white wooden memorial is visible from home, silhouetted against the bright blue sky. Though her gravestone is in the Dixon cemetery. Marcos prefers this place that he can visit, maintain, and honor every day. This mountainous area is also a place for Marcos to explore. Marcos plays mostly alone, sometimes with his brother. They live far enough from others that his friends from school don't come to his house. Sometimes cousins and uncles come to visit. But Marcos does much of his exploring alone. He is an avid explorer, full of curiosity and enthusiasm. Marcos well fits Hart's (1979: 40) descriptions of childhood exploration: 'Children seem to find as much enjoyments in getting to places as they do in being there. In fact, there often is no 'there'; they are just exploring'. This was apparent from his very first mapping exercise, but it became most apparent during our place expeditions.

Marcos took me down an arroyo, which he said was a really good place to ride bikes, and just as he said it, he jumped off his bike and ran up 'the mountain'—the steep, sandy banks of the arroyo—and slid back down, jumping into the arroyo. Up and down he went. After climbing some steep boulders, Marcos sat down at the top of the arroyo to rest, and I sat on a rock below him.

'I see you've found the King's Chair', he laughed. To me, this rock was a random boulder among many. But for Marcos, it was a rock personally known, of special shape and size, with a high back and arm on one side, quite comfortable and good for reclining. Clearly, ideal for a King to sit upon. He points to a large boulder that he likes because it 'looks like lava'. And on we went, up the rocks, toward the top. We stopped at a few 'caves' along the way—small crevices between the joinery of boulders, just large enough for Marcos to sit comfortably and sheltered.

Marcos also has an area which he named 'The Mighty Jungle' because he thought it looked like a good spot for a lion—in this case a mountain lion—to rest. He sings the song as he shows me this place, hopping down from the highest rocks to those far below. In a different area is a grove of low growing junipers, next to an old junk pile, which Marcos said was a good spot for hiding or resting. He nestles in among the soft bed of needles and smiles: 'this is my fort'. Though Marcos does not seem to know it, his mother also used this space as a fort. Marcos and I took his picture there, and when I gave a copy to Margarita, she smiled, saying 'That's where I had *my* fort. We used to make little walls and excavate in there. I loved that spot'.

Another fort which Marcos described to me was one that he claimed his father had built for him. When I asked Marcos if I could come see the places he had told me about, he said 'sure', but quickly added, 'but I had to take my clubhouse down'. The fort he had described was an elaborate two-story structure his father had built for him, complete with a fire-pole for sliding down and electricity for television and comfortable furniture. When he realized I was coming to see this place among others, he realized he had been found out: there was no such clubhouse. Though he never completely confessed to this, I had an idea what was going on even before we made arrangements to visit. When I asked his mother about it, she explained it in two ways: 'he has a vivid imagination; he likes to make things up. He is often telling stories', Margarita said. 'He comes from a family of big imaginations, though, My brother … was always walking around with a rope [like a lasso], and he'd look up in the sky and say. 'I put the moon up in the sky with a rope!'

But Margarita also believed that this particular story had to do with Marcos' desire to be with his father again: 'We've been divorced since Marcos was two years old. His father found a new lady friend, and they have younger children, and those children take away from his time with Marcos and José … I guess he wishes for more with his father. He has a lot of anger about that'. She mentions how much more difficult it is on her own, now that her family support network is gone. 'I'm trying to change things. It's been hard since their grandparents passed away'. Margarita says the mountainous area outside their home is an important place for Marcos to cope with his anger—anger over the loss of his grandmother and great-grandmother and anger over the loss of his little-involved father who lives a few towns away. She says it is an important way for him to cope with his losses and frustrations, and Marcos agrees. 'Sometimes I just come out here and throw rocks', he told me. Even so, it makes Margarita nervous to have her son playing alone in the mountains when she is at work:

> He's out there [pointing at the mountains where Marcos explores] all the time. But I've spotted mountain lion, we have resident mountain lion, and there's bear, and I have to get up at four every morning to whistle at the coyotes [that come near to the house], there's so many of them. And there's rattlesnakes. It makes me nervous. They [her two boys] may look big, but they're only boys. I worry.

Margarita also talks about the danger of playing and swimming in the Rio Grande, which is just across the busy highway from where they live. 'I leave at 7:15 [every morning] and the bus doesn't come to get them until 20 [minutes] to [8:00 o'clock]. I worry about them standing on this highway. I have them call me right before they leave on the bus, and when they get home first thing'. Because this curvy mountain highway of fast moving traffic on the throughway between Santa Fe and Taos divides their home from the river, Marcos and his brother rarely get to play there. 'When I was a kid', Margarita remembers, 'we used to go to the river a lot. I was a fish. Now, I only let them go swimming when I'm with them'. But Margarita confesses that it's not just the highway crossing she worries about, but the river itself, which is always unpredictable and changing. Margarita tries to make an effort to get them out to the river when she can. 'They keep saying they want to go fishing. So I've got my fishing license, and I' gonna go to Wal-Mart and get a pole and some line'.[4]

Margarita also talked about the changes she has seen, how Anglo people moved into the community from outside and changed some things: 'People came from outside and excluded. Things are done for them [the newcomers] and not for the benefit of the whole community'. Yet it is important for Margarita to stay in Embudo because 'it is purer than [other places]'. Margarita said she had thought about moving after her mother and grandmother passes away, 'But I see that gang stuff [in places like Española]. It's purer out here. The most they're into here is that [WWF] wrestling.[4] I'd move because of work, there's no jobs [here]'. But she continues to stay because of her children.

Marco's sense of place is clearly ancestral and also cultural. Working with his grandmother, he learned to work the land. They collected herbs for medicine, and with his remaining family, Marcos still collects pinyon nuts for eating. His grandmother passed on *dichos*, Spanish proverbs, and stories like *la llorona*.[5] Marcos has a sense of place that is also personal and infused with loss: loss of the guiding hands who made him laugh and shared in his learning. Because of this loss, his sense of place is now constructed more of narratives. Margarita tries to pass on not only cultural stories, but also family stories tied to the land, and events from when their grandmothers were alive and active in their lives. They also have economic ties to the small piece of land that is their home, a property that has been in the family for at least five generations. And though, as Margarita explained, the community has changed from Marcos's grandmother's time, it is still a community that both Anglos and old Spanish families strive to keep alive.

Yet Marcos also represents a different kind of sense of place, one largely constructed from his own childhood explorations and imaginative placemaking. Marcos' places are found in the nooks and crannies of mountain spaces around his home. He does little in the everyday yard around his house, and in fact said that he would prefer to watch television or play Nintendo than play in his yard. Playing *in the mountains*, however, is far preferable to anything else, and this is the area Marcos chooses to cope with his losses and anger, to think, to imagine and to explore. This is a sense of place different from that of Low's (1992) or Hay's (1998) categories—it is personal, intimate, and completely constructed by Marcos for his own needs and interests for adventure and getting away.

Summary

The cases presented herein demonstrate the diverse ways a sense of place can develop in children's lives. When a child experienced nature, culture, and family as an interwoven entity, his or her connections and attachments were indeed strong and meaningful. for Leo and Marcos, nature was an important component to their sense of place. For Terésa, sense of place had little to do with the natural world yet her place connections were meaningful in providing roots and belonging that other children in her neighborhood did not share. The contrasting places these children attached to suggest the importance of family, social relations, and personal meaning over physical features of spaces in children's place relations.

Notes

[1] A women who practices traditional, herbal medicine.

[2] 'Vegas' here refers to Las Vegas, New Mexico: the nearest town, about 30 miles from Mora.

[3] This quote, and the descriptions of her farming, come from interviews with Marcos' mother and from Channel 7 News footage filmed in 1988 that Marcos' mother showed me. The footage was part of a series of features highlighting local people and rural life. Marcos' grandmother was not seen as being unique but rather, *representative* of the way of life in Dixon.

[4] WWF stands for World Wrestling Federation, a popular wrestling television program in the United States.

[5] The story of *la llorona*, a weeping woman who haunts rivers looking for her children, is known by many children of northern New Mexico, and many claim to have seen or heard her.

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