PLACE AND DISPLACEMENT:
PERSPECTIVES OF YOUTH ON PLACE IDENTITY

by

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B.S.W., University of Northern British Columbia, 2003

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2019

ABSTRACT

This research describes the experiences of young adults who were displaced during the process of coming into care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Participants were interviewed and asked about how these experiences impacted their lives and future connection to places. Applying a qualitative, exploratory inquiry, personal lived experiences including childhood memories and current situational circumstances were highlighted to underline the importance of place attachment, place making, and identity. Fundamental aspects associated with the concept of place were explored within the reported experiences that participants ascribed to their time spent displaced. Data analysis was completed using thematic analysis which revealed four emergent themes, explored within a framework of place. The results are important considerations for social work education on how the concept of place may be acknowledged, understood and integrated in political structure and the broader social context of neighbourhood and community.

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Definitions

The following definitions are key concepts I have used in my research:

Continuing Custody Order (CCO): The Ministry of Children and Family Development ('the Ministry') has become the child's legal guardian and the biological parents have lost all guardianship rights and the rights to make decisions about the child.

Indigenous: People defined in international or national legislation as having a set of specific rights based on their historical ties to a particular territory, and their cultural or historical distinctiveness from other populations that are often politically dominant. They are the descendants of the original habitants of a region prior to colonization (retrieved from: www.indigenouspeople.net). This term is being used collectively to refer to the different First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities that make up Indigenous people in British Columbia.

Place: Tuan (1975) assigns personhood to place, effectively 'humanizing' it but at the same time allowing place to retain its existence as a centre for the creation of subjective qualities we assign to the objective reality of place. A formulation of place, therefore, ought to conceptualize the objective facets of the physical world as they give subjective meaning to the psychological foundation of people within a particular place.

Promising Practice: I have chosen to use Schwan and Lightman's (2015) term in place of 'best practice' because of the focus on growth and hope, instead of the finality and conclusiveness of using the word 'best' (which comes from a conventional, Western approach to learning and knowledge).

Rural and Remote: The complexity in defining the concepts of rural and remote is in the multiplicity of the subjective experiences utilized in the definitions, so I have chosen to

use what Schmidt (2008) plainly states: “remoteness generally applies to communities that are removed from major population and service centres”. The idea of remoteness also suggests a certain distance from major centres and between other remote locations. These locations have limited access to services based on these distances and experience corresponding challenges to modernized transportation and access. They are more than 150 kilometers from Prince George and have a population under ten thousand people. This community is where the child resided when they were removed from the care of their parental caregiver(s).

Social Work Practice/Theory: "Social work" means the assessment, diagnosis, treatment and evaluation of individual, interpersonal and societal issues through the use of social work knowledge, skills, interventions and strategies, to assist individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations and communities to achieve optimum psychological and social functioning (Social Workers Act, 2008).

Space: Used in my research as a contrast to place; Tuan (1975) states that “space is abstract. It lacks content; it is broad, open, and empty, inviting the imagination to fill it with substance… it is possibility. Place, by contrast, is the past and the present, stability and achievement” (pp. 164-165).

Special Needs Agreement (SNA): An agreement with a parent who has custody of a child with special needs. The parent may give the care of the child to the Ministry and delegate to the Ministry as much of the parent's authority as the child's guardian as is required to give effect to the agreement.

Temporary Custody Order (TCO): The Ministry has become the child's legal guardian and the biological parents have lost all guardianship rights and the rights to make decisions about the child, but only for a specific amount of time.

Voluntary Care Agreement (VCA): A written agreement with a parent who has custody of a child and is temporarily unable to look after the child in the home. Under the agreement, the parent may give the care of the child to the Ministry and delegate to the Ministry as much of the parent's authority as the child's guardian as is required to give effect to the agreement.

Acknowledgement

Throughout the process of conducting my research and writing my thesis, I have many times been humbled by the revelations I discovered through reading, interviewing and reflecting on the importance of place. As a result, I would like to recognize the land in which this research was conducted and in which the participants of this research have had experiences within. I appreciate the importance of place a great deal more now that I have moved through my own experience of exploration, inquiry, and understanding as a result of my research. I, therefore, respectfully acknowledge the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh people, who have been honouring the land and the places in which they have lived since time immemorial. My sincere desire is that we will begin to understand what Indigenous people have always known – that people and place are one.

I would also like to thank my participants for their involvement, sincerity, and willingness to share their experiences with me. Their words have impacted me in only the best ways, this research belongs to them and with others with similar journeys. My hope is that their experiences will be remembered and used in some way to bring about meaningful change.

To my family and friends, I extend the warmest gratitude for all your encouragement and support through this endeavour. I am fortunate to have so many wonderful relationships with which to rely on when I need them the most. Thank you to my strong and independent daughters, Danni and Layne, for your understanding and constant love. To my wonderful partner, Alisha, thank you for your endless support, love, and encouragement. To my mother, Maike, I offer a deep, heartfelt thank you for who you are, an example of what may be the closest thing to perfection I will see in my lifetime.

I would be remiss if I did not mention my academic supervisor at the University of Northern British Columbia, Dr. Joanna Pierce. Joanna is responsible for first “opening my eyes” to the concept of place and I cannot thank her enough for this revelation. She provided mentorship, guidance, and a critical eye with a level of integrity and professionalism I came to count on. She held me to the highest standard of academic performance and for that I am grateful. Thank you.

To my committee members, Professor Dawn Hemingway and Dr. Neil Hanlon, I would also extend my gratitude and thanks for their guidance and invaluable feedback throughout my process. Your encouragement and support was greatly appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank two very special people, Jenny and Celynn, who quite literally changed my life and showed me the meaning of resilience, determination and hope. Their example in life will be forever with me and I will strive to honour them in all that I do.

Chapter One: Introduction

This research explores the importance of place for youth who are removed from their homes in rural areas surrounding Prince George, British Columbia. I explored why youth who are moved to urban municipalities, leaving the support and familiarity of their home communities, become displaced within the new centre. They are separated not only from their families and friends, but from their communities and the environments in which they grew up. Experiences in familiar places and the memories associated with both the emotional and physical connection to those places become interrupted by a permanent move. These young people are sent to live in Ministry placements, often taking with them feelings of abandonment, confusion, and a sense of loss. They become disillusioned and leave those placements to become entrenched in the 'street lifestyle'; a mixture of homelessness, poverty, sexual exploitation, gang involvement, and violence – leading to further displacement. "Essentially, the reasons that caused youth to take to the streets become part of a consistent cycle of disenfranchisement from conventional society" (Tyler, Hoyt, & Whitbeck, as quoted in Davies & Allen, 2017, p. 18). The continuation of transitions while in care (being moved from foster homes to group homes multiple times) only further exacerbate a perpetual state of disconnection and a resulting loss of place meaning and identity.

Significance of the Research

For mainstream social work theory, the idea of place and the meaning associated with it bear little relevance to the assessments and methods of intervention that we, as social workers, place importance on. A great deal of energy and time is spent on training social workers to focus on the psychosocial and emotional challenges that face children and youth in care; social workers are instructed and guided to assist clients by addressing their past and

their current state and how their struggles are linked to their experiences all within a social context. Behaviours are at the forefront of significance when attempting to assist clients to become well. Wellness is measured through a change in behaviours and how the individual has adjusted socially. There is an acknowledgement of a client's historical issues, but again only in how it affects interpersonal relationships, emotional wellbeing, and mental functioning. The importance of the physicality of place is not acknowledged as a factor in understanding a client's ability (or inability) to connect to and find meaning with their place of residence. A client's conflict with group home staff, therefore, is seen as a result of the client's social and mental impairment and corresponding behaviour, and not as a result of displacement and a lack of connection to the place they once called home. Although pedagogical content in social work academia does concern itself with all the relevant issues pertaining to a client's history, well-being, struggles, and barriers, practice frameworks and institutional policies and procedures in the field often pay little, to no, attention to the uniqueness of place connection and person-in-environment. An explanatory consideration of place exclusion can be found in how Westerners view the physicality of the environment, "as separate from ourselves, as an objective thing, as a commodity to be developed or traded or wasted or exploited, as an economic unit, as property" (Zapf, 2010, p. 35). In this way, place is both simultaneously "defined" as dispassionately detached and unapologetically devalued from its role in the lives of people.

Additionally, within Indigenous perspectives with which social work practice is supposed to be congruent, "place and self are one" (Kemp, 2009, p. 119). In terms of impacts and wellness outcomes, "displacement is no less the source of powerful attachments than are experiences of profound rootedness" (Feld & Basso, 1996, as quoted in Kemp, p. 120). My

research explored a place attachment perspective from the viewpoint of the youth. Many of the youth coming from rural and remote communities are Indigenous (I am using this term to collectively refer to the different First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and bands throughout British Columbia) and I was curious as to how the place and self are connected for Indigenous youth. My hope is that this exploratory research will be used to eventually impact practice frameworks and help social services workers in the field understand the struggles that youth from rural and remote communities face when they are displaced. This is what Schwan and Lightman (2015) call "promising practice" and that "by setting aside the goal of winning, of being right or having the right approach, or of being the 'good guys' gives us the opportunity to genuinely ask how to develop progressively ethical cross-cultural relationships in the face of continuing colonial violence" (p. 16). In perspective, the complexity of the definitions of rural and remote are prolific, so I am simply using what Schmidt (2008) plainly states: "remoteness generally applies to communities that are removed from major population and service centres" (p. 4). The idea of remoteness also suggests a certain distance from major centres and between other remote locations. They have limited access to services based on these distances and experience corresponding challenges to modernized transportation and access. I have included a more in-depth definition of *rural and remote* in the Definitions section (pp. 5 & 6).

Purpose and Research Question

My research examined the effects of displacement on former youth in care who were moved from their communities in rural and remote areas of British Columbia to urban centres when they were brought into the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). This outmigration of sorts (forced and involuntary) is a journey youth in care take,

leaving their homes to come and reside in group homes, residential settings, or foster placements. These youth are provided with physical settings in which they are to reside and receive food, clothing, and medical care, as well as recreational activities and a school program. The physical spaces provided for the youth (these are not places – places have meaning to the people who are connected there; Tuan, 1975) are clean and warm and safe, yet some youth leave their new placements in favour of residences that are hazardous, unsafe, dirty, and house people who are involved in the street lifestyle. The continued and consistent moves (from their home communities to MCFD residential settings to unapproved residences) that young people in care make has been an ongoing issue for social workers and community professionals who want youth to be safe and healthy but have no choice in where those young people move to. The youth, while aware of these concerns, often look elsewhere for that connection to place by going to locations *they* find more appealing.

Through my research, I explored the meaning of 'place' as defined and discussed by such academic scholars as Tuan (1975, 1979, 1991, 2002), Casey (2001), Gustafson (2001), Korpela (2001), Zapf (2009, 2010). I examined place meaning as it relates to youth who have been in care of MCFD. The concept of place was explored in this research as unique and personal, specific to individual experience. As someone who has worked with approximately a hundred youth in my role as a Guardianship Worker, I have witnessed the effect that displacement has on these young people. I also considered other academic disciplines concerning the importance of place, including geography and environmental psychology (citing scholars such as Morgan [2010], Heft [2003], and Hung & Stables [2011]) and human/cultural ecology (Mazumdar, 1993). These fields of study have long been interested in our connection to places and the importance we assign to them. I believe the discipline of

social work needs to contextually include place in a more relevant way in terms of assessments, interventions, and practice methods in general.

For so many youth who have been displaced (usually by removal from their parent's care), their sense of connection to a place becomes skewed. My hope for future social work practice is to find a way to incorporate 'place' as a facet *of* practice; a meaningful process of investigating youths' connection to historical places (including family home, any transitions), places that held/hold meaning for them as they grew up (including negative experiences/meanings), and what it meant to be displaced and forced to live in spaces they had no choice in deciding on.

My research question focused on the influences and impacts that this type of displacement had on the young adult in question. *How does displacement influence a youth's sense of identity?* I examined the concept of place and how it is given meaning by the youth's connection to various places and, consequently, how that connection or disconnection instils emotional significance through the experiences of those meanings. Further, I discovered that some young people learn to assertively establish a sense of place more effectively than others. Consequently, there may be some skills or techniques available to other displaced young people that could be taught to them as they enter care. Resources may then be developed and allocated to these young people to better assist them in understanding and developing a sense of place identity.

Researcher Social Location

My work within the Ministry has exposed me to many different groups of individuals, the majority of which come from lower class backgrounds and classed, what Eurocentric

ideology would term, as minorities. These individuals have had less opportunity and far more oppression than I have had, both in my personal life and professional career. I would be remiss, then, to not acknowledge my own social identity and hierarchy in relation to the research I have completed. In fact, the primary reason I was able to conduct this research to begin with was because of the opportunity afforded me due to my status as a white male who was born and raised in a middle-class household. Further, any ideas I had of post-secondary education and an ensuing career were talked about freely and openly and I was encouraged and supported in those endeavours.

I have come to understand through my social work education that inequality exists in many forms and impacts the most underprivileged and powerless in our society. As emphatically patent as this may seem, recognizing one's own privilege and power is crucial to understanding the dynamics of power imbalances when it comes to interviewing participants who have been stigmatised and oppressed based on their experiences with racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. My role as a researcher is not exempt from that dynamic – if I am not cognizant of the inequalities present within our society that govern accessibility and opportunity, I might very well have a differing view of those who are not on the same level, educationally or otherwise, as me. At the very least, a subconscious ignorance might exist that would have the ability to affect how I interacted with research participants. In contrast, I was able to draw upon my social work education and intersectional practice (where it relates to race, sex, and class) and see the experience alongside the individual as valuable and contributing regardless of social or economic position. As Anthias (2012) states so brilliantly, "in public policy there is a focus on categories like single mothers, the poor, the old or those outside class categories such as the underclass. These

pathologizing categories are categories people refuse to associate themselves with" (p. 124). Not pointing attention to class and focusing strictly on the value of the interviewer-interviewee relationship, therefore, was not only beneficial, but ethical and respectable.

Researcher Context

Throughout my literature review, I have found that there is evidentiary support for a place theory that could be relevant to social work practice. I have also worked with youth in my own practice, who exhibit the actions of running away to unsafe spaces as I have outlined above. For me as a researcher, I was interested in the reasons why youth run away and how it relates to the work I do in my role as a Guardianship Social Worker within MCFD. Now that my research is complete, I will be able to utilize the knowledge gained through my analysis to better understand displacement and the importance of place attachment for youth in the care of MCFD. Contextually, my interest in place and placelessness is relevant to identity and connection issues for the youth I work with. Proshansky (1978) conceptualizes and defines place identity by inferring a cognitive connection between the self and the environment as, "those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideals, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment" (p. 155). Here, the key element in the structure of identity is its reliance on a specific environment. This connection enables youth to express and affirm their identity in the place that they associate with 'being'. In turn, this affirmation of identity helps youth grow, mature and develop in a healthy and meaningful manner.

In my literature review, I have outlined how place is defined specific to this research. Place is a broad concept that can be defined in many ways and from many different

perspectives. In this research, place was explored in the context of individual understanding of the physical space in which participants were displaced from, and how each participant defined that space as 'place' with meaning and connection. The unique meaning ascribed by each participant will serve as the connection between place and displacement and how identity is affected as a result. Consequently, I have defined the concept of place and displacement as personal and specific to direct experiences, rather than the broader and more complex issue of Indigenous loss of place and cultural identity due to the effects of historic colonialism and colonization. Although this research did not explicitly address the multi-generational loss of cultural identity by Indigenous peoples, I continue to maintain an active awareness in my practice of the understanding that certain participants may have been affected by this loss. A significant part of my academic studies, both at the College of New Caledonia and my education during my undergraduate degree at the University of Northern British Columbia, have had as their focus, the historical impact of colonialism on Indigenous peoples. If a participant identified as an Indigenous person, I was cognizant of any potential issues that may have arisen as a result of the research questions and possible triggering of the participant. Although no specific issues, in terms of the cultural context in which participants identified, arose throughout the interviews, participants were made aware of relevant and appropriate referral processes to Indigenous community agencies for support.

Conceptual Lens

The epistemology or paradigm that I used to approach this research was social constructionism. I have chosen to use the term constructionism instead of constructivism due to the subtle differences between the two definitions. There are similarities in the way that meaning-making is approached in that "both constructivism and constructionism are most

concerned with how social and personal change can emerge such that we are able to co-exist and thus continue to co-create a world and a life together" (McNamee, 2004, p. 3). Rather than focusing on mental processes like the constructivist approach, "constructionism urges us to explore the ways in which people engage together in their activities" (McNamee, 2004, p. 3). Meaning-making is a relational process. This approach not only posits that individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and make meaning of that understanding, but in how they go about doing that relationally. Those relationships include ones between the individual and that of the place that the person finds themselves in.

Social constructionism allows for the researcher to look for the complexities in situations and to rely on the participant's view of those situations. The subjective meanings of the situations are "negotiated socially and historically" (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). The social constructionist approach to social work practice is one of importance, not just for understanding the conceptualized framework for social problems in general, but for working specifically with youth who are, by the very nature of their growth and development, engrossed with the ever-changing construction of their world view. Social constructionism is concerned with the "importance of clients' perceptions about the nature of reality and the importance of context in the assessment of human emotion, cognition and behaviour" (Goldstein, 1990, as quoted in Furman et al., 2003, p. 265). Within social work practice involving youth who are in the care of MCFD, they are primarily non-conformist in their approach to dominant social norms due to their experiences and the consequent nature of their reality. Social constructionism argues that the concept of what is 'right' or 'wrong' in any given situation is subjective and based solely on lived experiences and consequent beliefs about our world. It is an especially beneficial theory for use in a governmental

practice framework where social welfare is contextualized using objective conditions about the world. Social policy presupposes that social problems, including the ones facing transient youth as mentioned above, are definable and policy makers are therefore concerned with telling (by enacting policy) individuals "*how* the world should work" and, if this process becomes problematic, "understanding why audiences fail to correctly understand the problem at hand" (Loseke, 1999, p. 174). There is a definite, linear form of progression here; the problem is identified, a solution is presented, and an outcome is *expected*. This all happens within the service delivery stream of conventional social work practice – there are lists, forms and assessments that tell the practitioner what issues are concerning enough to warrant an intervention. This intervention is defined and utilized within an urban framework of social work practice – created by social policy analysts in larger, urban centres far from the communities of the youth in which they are trying to help. For youth who are attached rurally, the policies meant to address the problems youth face are contextually ineffective. The social constructionist's primary consideration in contextualizing social problems is not in *what* they are (and which ones are worse than others), but in "how humans *define* this want and pain" (Loseke, 1999, p. 175). If we, as social workers, are to address the problems of displaced youth, we need a framework of policy and practice that is congruent with concepts of rural place attachment. This is an especially important distinction when working with youth who have been displaced; the 'what' of their specific problem has little to do with 'why' that problem is a barrier for that person. What has happened to that young person that they have turned to the one of many social problems as a form of coping with the displacement they have experienced? The pain youth feel is directly linked to the displacement from their community and the loss experienced as a result of what has

happened to them in their lived experience. Social constructionism is concerned with that youth's definition of the pain they are experiencing (and ultimately *how* they came to experience it) and not the fact that they, for example, have a problem with drug misuse. From a professional standpoint in working with this population, I have employed a social constructionist approach to practice, as it has the potential to be a contributing factor for outcomes by exploring the construction of each young person's world and the subsequent deconstruction of those strongly held beliefs. "As adolescent identity is shaped through the filter of culture, understanding the degree to which adolescents are aligned with their culture of origin, or are assimilated into the dominant culture, can help a therapist understand the meaning of "helping" to the client" (Furman, Jackson, Downey, & Shears, 2003, p. 269).

Social constructionism also lends itself to the concept of what Zapf (2009) refers to as "people as place". Because the realities of youth are socially constructed, so then are their experiences. The interactions between themselves and members of their community have a considerable impact on their lives. They become linked in the community in which those interactions take place. People become the place in which they attach. "The influence of… change on the psychological and social behavior and development of the person occurs through an 'interaction' with the environment" (Lerner, 1992, p. 367). Additionally, Furman et al. (2003) state, that it is essential "to understand the social context through which the adolescent has created their world view. Therapists [practitioners] must find out who the most formative people have been, and currently are, in a youth's life" (p. 268). Understanding the socially constructed realities of youth, and the formative experiences in their community of origin, is integral to deconstructing the negative-impact of situations they find themselves in as a result of displacement.

How important is the concept of place to people? In what ways do we incorporate place attachment in our everyday lives and how do we relate to the physical spaces around us? There is an abundance of information in the literature that supports the importance of understanding place and its role in the formation of our identities and how we give meaning to our relationships in and with places that are important to us. To understand how place (and displacement) affects meaning-making and identity formation, we must examine the foundations of place-based research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Place identity is a concept that has been studied at length by various disciplines, but one that has largely been sidelined by social work. The focus of both social work education and practice is on the individual (person-centred), rather than world in and around them; "the individual person or group has been the subject, the main concern, while the environment has been presented as a modifier or context" (Zapf, 2005, p. 633). The concepts of place and placelessness are integral to social work theory and practice due largely in part to the relocation that many children and youth are subject to when they are removed from their communities and placed in residential care settings. This reality is especially true for rural and remote social work practice. Displacement is a very integral and often overlooked reality of the challenges facing youth who are already struggling with issues of loss, grief, neglect, and abuse. Identity is crucial to growth and maturity, and place identity is intrinsically linked to identity as a whole – an holistic concept that links place with self. To fully understand how place and identity are connected, the concepts of place, place attachment, place meaning, displacement, spirituality, and even technology are to be defined and explored. Theoretical approaches to place as a viable social work practice model are explored in the context of rural and remote considerations.

Defining Place

Place versus Space.

Places are more than spaces. They are more than physical locations, addresses, or points on a map. Places have meaning that is created in those places by the people that live

there. It is through both passive and more direct senses that we turn those experiences into ways of actively knowing our world; by seeing, we "create patterns of reality adapted to human purposes" (Tuan, 1975, p.152). The way we think about our reality and, in turn, how we think about place is epitomized through the use of language; Alexander (2002) calls this "pattern language" which "describes designs that help convert spaces into meaningful places with high potential for attachment" (Lewicka, 2011, p. 223). But what makes place and how is it different from space? According to Tuan (1975), "space is abstract. It lacks content; it is broad, open, and empty, inviting the imagination to fill it with substance… it is possibility. Place, by contrast, is the past and the present, stability and achievement" (pp. 164-5). Place is given meaning by our connection to it and, consequently, instils emotional significance through the experiences of those meanings. It is in this way that places are given value. Consequently, the more experiences you have in a place, the greater the meaning that particular place has; in turn, the stronger place identity becomes. Gerson et al. (1977) and Sampson (1988) speak to residence in places allowing for an enhancement of social ties and an historical context for understanding meaning within places over time. "This may be particularly important in linking significant life events to place, providing the individual with a sense of 'autobiographical insidedness'" (Rowles as quoted in Cuba & Hummon, 1993, p. 115). Place is intrinsically linked to who we are as individuals. It is dynamic and progressive and critically important to the emerging and developing sense of self. Heft fine tunes this point further by proposing that "the 'things' of our everyday environment have perceivable psychological value for us in terms of the possibilities they offer for our actions and, more broadly, for our intentions" (2003, p. 151). He goes on to add that this awareness has its roots in Indigenous cultures and the the act of perceiving and doing and the possibilities that

present themselves as a result come about when we experinece them *relationally*, including our relationship with places. “Affordances are attributable to the intrinsic properties that features, objects, and events possess by virtue of their makeup, and are delimited or specified in relation to a particular perceiver–actor” (Heft, 2003, p. 151). Our environment, and the places to which we belong, hold meaning for us in their functionality (guiding our actions) which Heft (2003) refers to as affordances (what it offers to the subject within the environment), immersing ourselves in “situated doing and being” (p. 151). Hung and Stables’ (2011) geophenomenological perspective supports the place-meaning phenomena further; he states that:

> one certain physical place could give different people different meanings. This is not only for physical reasons but also for mental ones, such as intention, expectation, imagination or memory. Thus the meaning of a place is related to the individual subject and his or her interrelationship with the environing objects.The meaning of a place of one subject could change with time since one’s intentionality might change and the interrelationship between them might be different as well. (p. 195)

Here we have a dynamic and transitional definiton of place meaning, linking the physicalness of place with emotional context that changes as the people within that place change.

As people define places out of spaces, so do places define the people (as we see with Hung and Stables’ definition) that live within them. Tuan (1975) articulately states that “to know a place fully means both to understand it in an abstract way and to know it as one person knows another” (p. 152). Tuan assigns personhood to place, effectively ‘humanizing’ it but at the same time allowing place to retain its existence as a centre for the creation of subjective qualities we assign to the objective reality of place. Casey (2001) illustrates this

point perfectly when he suggests the term "'place-world', a world that is not only perceived or conceived but also actively lived and receptively experienced" (p. 687). Places are important and the meaning we ascribe to our experiences within those places comes from our connection and relationship to them. This "mutual influence" that Zapf speaks of is integral to how we see places as different from just spaces. They represent and embody the experiences and ambitions of people. "Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning" (Tuan, 2002, p. 387). For children and youth who have been removed from *their* place (home and community), the interruption of that dynamic interrelationship becomes severed and affects the ability of those young people to form attachments to other places and, in turn, to other people. Their identity formation is invariably altered as they lose connection to their home and the environment in which they belong.

Place Meaning and Attachment.

Casey (2001) takes the reciprocity of place and self that has been discussed above and enhances that interactive characterization by stating that:

> the relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence (that much any ecologically sensitive account would maintain) but also, more radically, of constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other. In effect, there is no place without self and no self without place. What is needed is a model wherein the abstract truth of this position can be given concrete articulation without conflating place and self or maintaining the self as an inner citadel of unimplaced freedom. Just

> how, then, is place constitutive of the self? How does it insinuate itself into the very heart of personal identity? (p. 684)

Casey's argument is the fundamental groundwork of an intended place theory of practice that would seek to address issues of displacement among youth in care. If social work practice models viewed place and self in the way Casey suggests, more emphasis would be placed on the importance of place meaning and attachment. Attachment itself cannot be defined without strong, emotional contextualization; this characterisation is specifically important when discussing the emotional bonds one creates when connecting with place. Problematic with this presentation of emotive significance is the question Lewicka (2011) asks, when she posits, "what is it that we really know about people's emotional bonds with places?" (p. 209). Consequently, then, how would we quantify a strong, emotional connection, or a profoundly deep-seated relationship, with place? The answer seems to reside in a more personal sense of self and place. Any theory that would seek to address the concepts of place and self within an emotional context needs to be less prescriptive and more permissive of personal experiences. By being acutely aware of the shortcomings of empirical measurement as well as the inadequacy of social process exclusivity from more qualitative approaches, one can manage a theoretical hypothesis of place attachment and identity. Gustafson (2001) supports the lens of personal experience and self-identification over time when he states that, "in particular, many respondents associate their place of residence with security and a sense of home" (p. 9). This is something that most of us are aware of subconsciously and use to imbue place with meaning. Gustafson goes on to talk about three underlying dimensions (distinction, valuation, continuity/change) that "organize the attribution of meaning to places in more basic ways" (p. 13) which cannot be easily defined or charted within a model or prescriptive order. Place

attachment and meaning, therefore, should be evaluated from an approach that focuses on process and the dynamic view of personal experience over time. Gustafson ends discussion about his framework by suggesting that it could be used to investigate place meaning more generally or for the systematic comparison of place meaning for different groups of individuals.

Attachment and identification with place implies action and involvement. In order for people to interact with the physical and social domains of place, they must socially construct this physical/mental union by moving between place and self. Where most suppositions on place-based theory tend to propose intended directions and questions for practice construction, Morgan (2010) speaks directly to how attachment theory "points the way towards a developmental theory of place attachment" (pp. 14-15). He proposes an incorporation between human and place attachment where an interactional pattern emerges from the integration of an attachment figure (caregiver) and the exploration and interaction with place. The exploration-assertion and attachment-affiliation motivation systems detail how a child moves between a caregiver and the environment in a cyclical pattern. "The long-term affective bond known as place attachment is the conscious subjective manifestation of that internal working model. This is the process by which place attachment develops" (Morgan, 2010, p. 15). This integrated model is by no means exhaustive or conclusive, but it is certainly a good start to realizing a comprehensive, practical model for working with "people as place" (Zapf, 2009). Casey (2001) validates this position by stating that "the enactive vehicle of being-in-place is the body" (p. 687). In this fundamental development, "the body serves both as point of departure and as destination" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 194). This is the developmental process by which place attachment happens. The person (the physical

body) meets the place-world by departing or going out to experience place through that person's socially constructed reality, affected and defined by race, gender, class, and a myriad of other sociological factors. In doing this, "the place-world is energized and transformed by the bodies that belong to it, while these bodies are in turn guided and influenced by this world's inherent structures" (Casey, 2001, p. 688). Consequently, the person leaves their mark on the place it has felt, experientially bearing "the traces of the place it [the body] has known" (Casey, 2001, p. 688). Then by the very nature of this integration, place itself is changed and transformed by persons' involvement inside it. This is realized in Erikson's work on the development of identity; Manzo (2003) states that:

> for Erikson, identity is a dynamic process that balances rootedness and uprootedness. This is a process that continues through adulthood where the enduring value of childhood places reveals how both memories and immediate experiences in places offer opportunities for creative self-development. (p. 52)

The external world is a source of experiential material that helps build the inner potential of the individual – relationships to the world around us, to places, are integral to our growth and development.

Cross (2015) presents a framework that also describes place attachment as an interactional process. She proposes seven common processes (sensory, narrative, historical, spiritual, ideological, commodifying, and material dependence) in which people create meaningful bonds with places. She insightfully adds that, "place attachments are created in the intersection of experience and meaning, which occur simultaneously through several processes and at the individual, interpersonal, and cultural levels" (p. 501). Raymond (2010), too, offers a model of place attachment that integrates five dimensions (place identity, place

dependence, nature bonding, family bonding, and friend bonding) and found that rural landholders developed strong attachments to the physical and social characteristics in which they lived. Those characteristics also have an important role in supporting place identity and place dependence. “The attributes of the physical and social setting therefore cannot be viewed in isolation of the highly personalized emotions formed in these settings which we refer to as the personal context to place attachment” (Raymond, 2010, p. 433). Scannell and Gifford (2010) also put forward a model for place attachment (person-process-place) and surmise the question of why people develop such strong and lasting bonds with places by stating that place attachment serves many functions, including “survival and security, goal support, and temporal or personal continuity. Implicit in each of these proposed functions is a particular definition of place attachment…” (p. 5). The case for place importance is clear and the meaning and attachment that place signifies *in* each person cannot be ignored, especially if we are to mitigate issues of displacement and placelessness.

A formulation of place, therefore, ought to conceptualize the objective facets of the physical world as they give *subjective* meaning to the psychological foundation of people within a particular place. Among geographers and environmental psychologists, there is an emphasis on the physical environment and how it affects, and relates to, human behaviours as well as the interconnections of people and places. The integration of human and physical geography is evident in a theme identified by the National Research Council (1997); “integration in place… mutual influence of people and things located in the same place, interactions to develop the character of a place” (as quoted in Zapf, p. 146). Again, we have an emphasis on a subjective quality (character) within an objective or neutral context (place), reciprocally influencing one another. It is possible, then, that we have a foundational and

workable definition of place attachment and identity. A social work theory on place should, ideally, encompass a multidisciplinary theoretical response that accepts place "as a foundation concept that integrates human activity with the physical environment" (Zapf, 2009, p. 158) within a set of what Droseltis and Vignoles (2010) theorize as "dimensions that describe various facets of place meaning rather than features of places that give rise to such meanings" (Lewicka, 2011, p. 223). Place, therefore, has inherent meaning and, as such, is worth the attention of practitioners who seek to understand that meaning as it has been applied, over time, to the people who associate place with personal value. Various research studies support a strong theory of place meaning and attachment, as outlined by Kyle, Mowen, and Tarrant (2004), who suggest that a component of place attachment is "place cognition" relating to what Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) talk about when they state that place identity is a "substructure of a more global self-identification in the same way that one might consider gender identity and role identity" (p. 443). There is an awareness and understanding associated with place that is linked to self-identification and identification with others around us. An interruption to this dynamic process (singular or multiple) through displacement can have long-lasting effects on the ability to form a healthy sense of identity, affecting the individual's world view through their inner existent ability (or lack of potential).

Displacement and Relocation

Although some children and youth require Ministry involvement and intervention that ends in a removal from their home, the act of placing those children in a safer and more stable environment also has the unintended effect of placelessness – a sense of loss and displacement because of a forced relocation. Speaking to Starobinski's (1966) work on nostalgia, Tuan states, "the sense of place is perhaps never more acute than when one is

homesick, and one can only be homesick when one is no longer at home" (1979, p. 419). Tuan adds that, in speaking about when our boundaries are threatened, "we owe our sense of being not only to supportive forces but also to those that pose a threat" (p. 419). Our sense of who we are is intrinsically affected by not only our connection to place, but also to our disconnection from it.

Being removed and relocated can make that sense of homesickness a focal point of associative loss. On discussing Case's (1996) dynamics of 'home' and 'away', Manzo (2003) states, "Case argues that being away from the residence causes those things, people and activities that are associated with it to become more apparent through their absence" (p. 52). As to places associated with violence or trauma, "the dialectic of insideness/outsideness described by phenomenologists is particularly important (Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1981)" (Manzo, 2003, p. 52). Children who are victims of abuse and neglect no doubt need safety and an environment of both physical and emotional security, but there also needs to be a recognition of the impact of displacement. Existential outsideness is the equivalent of separation from place, leaving children feeling confused and alienated, even if the separation is one rooted in protection. The home is supposed to be the most intimate and safe of all places, and when that is disrupted, children are left feeling lost. Relationships to places as they coincide with identity development, suggest that how we feel about places can be a conscious process, especially during times of change. Manzo (2003) points out that research describes these processes during times of voluntary relocation, but that "we need to learn more about how experiences beyond disruption or disaster can precipitate increased awareness of our surroundings" (p. 53). In a research study on forced relocation (Boğaç, 2009), refugees were asked to compare their home or childhood environments with that of

their new residences. They all reported that the place of their childhood environment would always be 'home' and that they were living in their current place as a means of survival. Even though that fact assumed a weaker connection to their current residence, all refugees stated that it would not be easy to leave another home. They did, however, feel that their attachments to past places/environs affected future attachment expectations; "under these circumstances and not knowing what will happen in the future very much affected the participants' attitudes towards the existing environment in *every* aspect" (emphasis added, p. 276). The participants also had the feeling that they were living in the houses as "guests" because they knew the homes belonged to people from another culture. These points are not surprising but may be eye-opening and a point of further discussion for social service professionals working with displaced individuals. Children and youth who have been removed and placed in a residential setting may share these experiences and feelings. Feeling like a stranger and not knowing what the future holds for these young people directly impacts place attachment and a sense of identity. With additional moves and rotating staff persons, it is no wonder why youth leave these residences in search of other 'places'.

Youth in residential settings may have a myriad of feelings and emotive responses to being in a place that they do not wish to be in. Korpela (2001) presents study findings that speak to being in 'unpleasant' places:

> the most frequently mentioned aspects of experiences in unpleasant places are unpleasant people (vs. loving and caring relationships in favorite places), a desire to avoid or leave (vs. belonging), feelings of uncomfortableness (vs. comfortableness), fear (vs. safety), and angriness. Nervousness (vs. relaxation), nausea, or suffocation

> together with desire to leave constitute an indication of stressful (vs. restorative) experiences within unpleasant places. (pp. 586-587)

He adds that studies on depressing places indicate that the physical aspects (not just psychosocial) of places might also contribute to feelings of depression or sadness. The locked doors to kitchen cabinets, an office area off-limits to youth, and a myriad of other structural aspects of group home settings may be contributory to youth's feelings of placelessness and loss as their "home" environment is seen and defined as a 'depressing place'. This, in turn, affects a young person's ability to form healthy attachments to their current 'places'; the term "attachment implies closeness, both physically and mentally. In the case of an 'imprisoned' state of being, a person is tied to a place against his or her will" (Minami, 2009, p. 213). Forced displacement has long-lasting effects on a young person's ability to attach to place, form a positive sense of identity, and plan for their future, leaving them dealing with feelings of isolation, loneliness, sadness, and in some cases depression.

For social service workers engaging with these children and youth, it is important to understand that placelessness and a lack of attachment does not necessarily mean that a sense of self completely disappears as a result. As places change or become attenuated or forgotten, the sense of self associated with place and meaning does not entirely disappear. Casey (2001) speaks to the resiliency of personal identity even under severe circumstances; he talks about dangers to identity as a result of what he calls "leveled-down places" which we are surrounded by today. If identity (and consequently place identity) is to survive and thrive, it must resist "becoming an indecisive entity incapable of the kind of resolute action that is required in a determinately structured place..." (Casey, 2001, p. 685). Casey offers some

hope here for the individual, eliciting the kind of emotional determination needed to regain the attachment to healthy places through resiliency and strength of character.

Identity and Connection

For most people, place is intimate and connection to place lies in a deep, spiritual (or highly emotive) bond that is accompanied by memories of childhood, relationships, and community. Many of the youth coming from rural and remote communities are Indigenous and exploration of this "place/self" connection is paramount to comprehending the spiritual connection each person has constructed (or has failed to construct). A cultural and spiritual lens must be used to identify and understand place experience for those who have been displaced. Concepts of place attachment and meaning cannot be understood outside the significance of specific cultural context. Manzo (2005) discusses an ethnographic study of a national park and how "ethnic and immigrant groups can feel excluded because of a lack of sensitivity to cultural identity and lack of representation" (Low, Taplin, Scheld, & Fisher, 2004, p. 71). These studies lend credence to a socio-cultural approach to the study of place meaning and how social constructions of identity impact place experience and create diverse meanings in the context of culture. Place importance and a culturally-specific sense of self and identity are synonymous within Indigenous populations. Due to the intergenerational trauma that Indigenous peoples have endured, their disconnection to the land (place) is a paramount consideration in understanding place attachment within Indigenous communities. For Indigenous children and youth who have been removed from these communities, the magnitude of disconnection with place is even more severely felt. When discussing Yoly Zentella's research, Minami (2009) suggests that:

> the loss is not necessarily an immediate experience of the individuals who actually went through the loss of previously attached environment, but is extended over generations of a particular culturally constituted population which forms historical (genealogical), cosmological, religious, economic, and semantic (narrative) links to the land, which is not only the attached object but also the place to which a whole cultural group asserts its rights of ownership. (p. 210)

That generational "loss" is felt by everyone in the community, including cultural leaders and elders who have been tasked with spiritual guidance. Mazumdar (2004) links place attachment with spiritual socialization in which the community "can play an important role in identity formation, teaching through prayers and rituals, stories and symbols, as well as through *personal experience of the place*" (emphasis added, p. 390). These rituals are important, and their significance is realized in the places in which they are fulfilled. In an earlier article, Mazumdar (1993) asks the pertinent question (and follows it with an equally apt answer) about how emotional connectedness is created and sustained in places with sacred or spiritual significance. He talks about the process of sacred place making and how that ties people emotionally to the land. "By differentiating 'our' land, invoking 'our' family deity and 'our' ancestors, by arranging 'our' sacred objects a sacred microcosm is created that is uniquely 'Ours'" (p. 238). This is a process of creation involving the family and community in the purification of the land and the "creation… of a sacred niche" and one in which "places and objects become part of our self identity" (Sartre, 1943 as cited in Mazumdar, 1993, p. 238). Place, identity, and culture are indeed a triumvirate of substantial meaning.

Rural and Remote Considerations

> "Outsiders say 'nature,' because the environment seems barely touched. Insiders see 'homeplace' - an environment that is familiar to them, not because they have materially transformed it, but because they have named it. It is their place - their world - through the casting of a linguistic net". (Tuan, 1991, p. 686)

The importance of understanding rural environments in the context of place attachment is critical to considering how children and youth who are removed from these places deal with the emotional reactions as discussed above in relation to identity and connection. Rural places are often smaller than urban sprawl and, consequently, have more closeness among community members and a deeper sense of the 'self' in relation the surroundings. This distinction is apparent in what Casey (2001) calls thinned-out places (lending on Sack's [1997] work), whereby place becomes less enriching and meaningful and becomes more void, effectively merging with space. These thinned-out places "do not even hold, lacking the rigor and substance of thickly lived places-in contrast once again with the ethereality of pure space, which cannot properly hold anything" (Casey, 2001, p. 684). There is a richness and substance inherent in rural and remote life that is potentially lacking in larger, urbanized areas. Again, supporting this argument, Gustafson (2001) proposes a tripartite model of place meaning where self, others, and environment are linked together; he conducted research on spatial scale differences in places and his findings "indicated that small places were often given meanings situated at the self pole of the model or in the self's relations with others and/or the environment" (p. 12), and uses the term "self-related meaning" when attributed to smaller places of residence.

Abbott-Chapman et al.'s (2014) study on rural belonging noted that the benefits found (using Durkheim's typology of bonds) amongst the participants included "'Emotional' or metaphysical attachment to place, land, natural environment and space found expression as 'freedom', 'familiarity', 'peace' and 'close to nature'" (p. 302). Interpretation of their findings found that there is a significant level of support among community members, "illustrating the strength of *place attachment and rural social capital* in rural areas and their contribution to family and community wellbeing" (emphasis added, p. 306). Eacott and Sonn (2006) speak to community inclusiveness and closeness in their study on youth experiences in rural communities. The idea of youth migration was assessed in terms of what made youth want to stay in community as opposed to reasons why they would leave. Apart from the actual statistics on migration, certain things stood out as unique and specific to rural life; "the sense of *being known* and identified within the community provided participants with a feeling of comfort as it reaffirmed their position of membership within the towns" (emphasis added, p. 207). The idea of being known in a rural community stands out as being distinctive in rural life and important to concepts of identity and self. Participants all reported having strong feelings for those places that made them feel like they were "someone". Adding to this, Pretty (2003) found in a similar study of rurality and sense of place that being connected to the community and its residents were important aspects of living in rural environments; the collected sense of belonging within community "suggests the importance of collective social identity to one's individual place identity. There were many comments from adults and adolescents that one could rely on others in the town for assistance, whether or not they were friends" (Pretty, 2003, p. 283).

Theoretical Inquiry

The conceptualization of place as a singular, objective condition is, as I have provided evidence for above, counter-productive to a rich and diverse theory of place attachment. Viewing place objectively seems only to revert thinking back to the concept of space or environment as merely a physical thing existing statically in the world. Place researchers know this is not true (Tuan, 1975; Tuan, 1979; Zapf, 2010). In Wollan's (2003) discussion on *Heidegger's philosophy of space and place*, he talks about how spaces become places as a result of people being present within them and that the access to those places can only come about through our understanding of them. Sack (1997) supports this by adding that "the very fact that place combines the unstructured physical space in conjunction with social rules and meaning enables place to draw together the three realms, and makes place constitutive of ourselves as agents" (p. 33). Places are subjective, and theoretical inquiries that focus on subjectivity are most relevant to building a theoretical framework for place practice. Experiential theories that focus on the subjective qualities of person/place relationships are appropriate for this type of research; theories that explore and attempt to understand reasons why an individual's reality (including their conception of place) has been formed the way it has. These frameworks allow place to be conceptualized, rather than defined, as "bounded, unique, with a clear identity of its own, having a genius loci, being historically rooted, and providing rest, rather than movement" (Lewicka, 2011, pp. 223-224). It is for those reasons that place is important and integral to its connection with people – they are interdependent in their need for one another.

Malpas (1999) warns that social constructivists have, in the past, failed to account for the "individuated nature of subjective experiences and the link that the body creates between

subjectivity and the objective material world" (Morgan, 2010, p. 11). A phenomenological approach, similarly, has been criticized in ignoring social forces that influence the contesting of place meaning as well as lacking any empiricism (Morgan, 2010, p. 11). However, thoughtful consideration of these critiques does not diminish or dismiss the significance of an approach to place attachment that celebrates place interaction in the development of an individual's "personal identity and deepest-held values" (Frederickson & Anderson, 1999, p. 22). Consequently, theoretical approaches that explore deep, emotional significance and quality of place relationships (Morgan, 2010) are key to understanding attachment and identity. Subjective lived experiences that point to an understanding of the nature of people's emotional relationships to places provide a rich theoretical basis for study, focusing on the meanings and experiences of places through qualitative discovery. "They dig deeply into the ontological nature of humanity and considers 'being-in-the-world' as a fundamental, irreducible essence - so that place is an inseparable part of existence" (Manzo, 2003, p. 48). Hung and Stables (2011) elaborate further and proposes a geo-phenomenological approach that combines phenomenology and geography in an experiential theory that "emphasises the position of the subject in the environment and its interrelation with the environment" (p. 195). Whereas traditional geographical experience views the experiencing subject as removed and distant from the environment (almost as a spectator), the geo-phenomenological experience views the subject as involved and engaged in their environment, in a conscious interplay of relationship.

Discussion

There is a definite need for place attachment in social work theory and practice. Furthermore, there are a number of grounded reasons for place meaning to be at the centre of

identity and self-conception. The research I have discussed and examined point to a possible explanation as to why children and youth in care remain 'unattached' to their life (government care, staffed caregivers, etc.) and seek connection outside the "safety and security" of residential resources. There is a concerning gap in our understanding of why youth leave one setting in favour of another that is classified as "unsafe and dangerous" by service providers and caregivers. These displaced youth who have been forcibly relocated as a result of Ministry involvement have no connection to their childhood environments and suffer a loss of attachment to their home communities and culture. If we are to comprehend the effects that placelessness has on these youth and the correlation between that and why they seek out places to belong, we must understand place as a meaningful way to establish identity and a sense of self that is healthy and promotes ongoing growth and development.

My research sought to understand place through interviews with participants who spent time in care of the Ministry. Being as though I was interested in the lived experiences of those participants, my methodology reflected the importance of exploratory inquiry. Stories were shared, and ideas examined within a qualitative framework and approach to the research study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Qualitative Research

My research proposal will be approached through a qualitative lens; more specifically, I have chosen Qualitative Exploratory Research for my methodology. Tesch "identifies 'descriptive/interpretive' approaches, which are oriented to providing thorough descriptions and interpretations of social phenomena, including its meaning to those who experience it" (as quoted in Dey, 2005, p. 3). Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning that people ascribe to a social or human problem. "The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2014, p.4). Since there are no studies to refer to in terms of place theory as it relates to rurally attached youth and displacement, this research was exploratory. The focus on individual meaning and the translation of each person's complex situation made exploratory research ideal for this type of study. The concept of place was explored in this research as unique and personal, specific to individual experience. Studies from Scannel and Gifford (2010) talk about place attachment and its suitability within qualitative research; "The [person-process-place organizing] framework organizes related place attachment concepts and thus clarifies the term. The framework may also be used to stimulate new research, investigate multidimensionality, create operational definitions for quantitative studies, guide semi-structured interviews for *qualitative studies*…" (p. 1, emphasis added). Gustafson (2001) also presents his research in a qualitative framework when he posits, "The purpose of this paper is to outline a tentative analytical framework for mapping and

understanding the attribution of meaning to places. I will begin with a selective review of earlier theoretical and empirical research and will then present findings from a *qualitative interview study*… (p. 5, emphasis added). Gustafson also utilizes various qualitative studies in his own research paper.

Qualitative research scholars are "constantly challenging the distinction between the 'real' and that which is constructed, understanding that all events are mediated and made real through interactional and material practices" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. xiv). This is the baseline for the multitude of ways that the open-ended nature of qualitative inquiry affords, realized through the ever-changing world around us. Consequently, realities also change and so do our experiences, leading to diverse ways of understanding and doing qualitative research. Qualitative data deals with meanings and the analysis of those meanings is reached through conceptualization. These attributes make qualitative research an intricate and rather assumptive field of inquiry. Researchers in the field are interpreters of natural phenomena as it exists in the world through the lens of observers, or the ones being studied, in an attempt to discover meaning. The interpretive methods depend on the questions and the context in which they are asked – it is in this way that methods and strategies to obtain information are utilized, often without advance selection and using more than one form on interpretative practice. The practice of qualitative research revolves around a central theme; "the avowed humanistic and social justice commitment to study the social world form the perspective of the interacting individual" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. xvi).

From a social constructionist perspective, qualitative research methodology views societal issues through politics of inquiry. Qualitative analysis with a social constructionist lens can be used to address problems of social relevance, because it acknowledges that social

transformation may be possible as a result of the research; “the power of qualitative inquiry comes also from the fact that it is able to work with hard-to-reach groups” (Flick, 2017, p.4). There is an implication that the research will be used to improve the life of these groups through the use of ethical research practice while keeping in mind theoretical approaches to social problems like feminist theory, decolonization, racial equality, and research ethics that promote and engender meaningful social change. A critical, qualitative inquiry allows research practices to change as we challenge assumptions about the methods we employ and the people involved in our studies. This is particularly relevant to my research – “we need a comprehensive understanding of participants’ life worlds, experiences, knowledge, and practices for a critical approach of qualitative inquiry to be able to foster change in that area” (Flick, 2017, p. 6). My hope is that, as a result of my research, change will be realized in the lives of children who come into, and are already in, the care of MCFD. Additionally, the use of an exploratory study typology will allow the research data collected to promote further areas of study. The benefits of an exploratory study design are that you are interested in the “how” and “why” questions and the social constructionist context allows each participant to answer freely and within their own experiences. There are no predetermined assumptions about what will be disclosed or reported – exploration of the area of study is the focus and the primary role for case study research is to act as a prelude to any subsequent studies (Yin, 2013). Curiosity and instinctive “detective-work” will guide that exploratory process – it is the flexible and insightful nature of qualitative exploratory research that allows for the ability to respond to unanticipated information with an open mind and follow new leads or directions for study.

Based on the resulting outcomes of my research, exploration of place as it relates to displacement among youth in the care of MCFD may now be an area of new insight and potentially increased clarification on any held assumptive beliefs about why youth leave residential care homes for unsafe living arrangements. Qualitative exploratory research is ideal for research based in social work practice and human services, "as the goal of our interventions is similar to that of the qualitative researcher – to enhance the discursive power of silenced voices" (Ungar & Nichol, 2002, p. 137). My desire as a new researcher is to do just that – to allow displaced young people the opportunity for their voices to be heard on what it is like to be and feel displaced. Research becomes a social intervention of sorts, whereby the individuals being interviewed are given a chance at self-empowerment – an opportunity where otherwise their realization for power has been delimited and restricted.

Due to the very idiosyncratic nature of place meaning and the extreme subjectivity of that meaning to each person, an exploratory inquiry was appropriate for this type of research. The social constructionist theoretical approach allowed for the stories and experiences of individuals to be made known and their realities uncovered through investigative questioning. Foreseeing a potential place theory for social work practice, it is my hope that the qualitative research I conducted will affect policy and education in the social work field, and be used to "develop theory, evaluate programs, and develop interventions because of its flexibility and rigor" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). A critical approach to the research is integral – place attachment and its connection to rural and remote places and 'being' is not reflected in generalist social work practice where an urban theory and framework is often the default, albeit subconscious, method for educating and training practitioners. Changes toward a rural and remote theory of practice that has at its core the concept of place attachment are

possible if we are to listen to the unheard voices of those who have been displaced. Critical research of a qualitative and exploratory nature will assist in this endeavour; "critical researchers often regard their work as a first step towards forms of political action that can redress the injustices found in the field site or constructed in the very act of research itself" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 305). The exploratory milieu of place research is grounded in the conditions of the methodological approach; the group I studied has received, to date, little to no "systematic empirical scrutiny" (Stebbins, 2008, Exploration and Verification section, para. 6). Specifically, my research addressed three factors that, together, made this study worthy of new, flexible and open-minded exploration; each young adult I interviewed met the conditions of being a former youth in care, coming from a rural and remote community, and who have been displaced as a result of their coming into care.

Ethical Concerns

As an employee of the Ministry of Children and Family Development for over thirteen years, I acknowledge that I have a great deal of experience and accompanying bias when working and interacting with youth in care. This has undoubtedly influenced my research as my practice and the work that I do exists within the system that I am investigating and critiquing. I have witnessed the emotional and psychological effects that youth in care experience and have been vicariously affected by those relationships and interactions. My perspective on the issue has been influenced by my involvement. I have addressed these realities by keeping a comprehensive journal of my thoughts and feelings throughout the process, as well as seeking regular and consistent supervision with my graduate supervisor, Dr. Joanna Pierce in order to ensure that I was clear and transparent throughout the steps in my research. As Ungar and Nichol (2002) so eloquently state, "Just as, ethically, the

practitioner must not purposefully impose his or her values on clients, so too must the researcher account for his or her pre-determined biases or perceptions" (p. 139). Additionally, I remained actively aware of my dual role as researcher and social worker. In the initial interview, I explained my role to the participants, emphasizing that I will be asking questions and providing support to the participants as a researcher, and not as a social worker. I was clear that in my researcher role, I was not able to offer direct support/counselling to the participants and that if needed, I could refer participants to a community agency. I provided contact information on available counselling services and crisis lines, as well as emergency services through the University Hospital of Northern British Columbia.

For this research study, I interviewed (open-ended, semi structured interviews) young adults who have had experience within Ministry care. They are considered part of a vulnerable population who discussed experiences that, in some cases, were triggering. To address those concerns, I provided contact information for counseling services in the community that was included in the Information Letter & Consent Form (Appendix A) that each of the participants read and signed. "To be ethical, clinical research must be valuable, meaning that it evaluates a diagnostic or therapeutic intervention that could lead to improvements in health or well-being..." (Emanuel, Wendler, & Grady, 2000, p. 2703). This particular article goes on to mention that attention should be paid to selecting participants with the lowest level of risk of vulnerability. My direct supervisor at the Ministry as well as the Ministry's Strategic Policy, Research and Engagement Branch were made aware of, and approved, my research and had discussion about the possible ethical concerns of working with this population. As a result, to avoid any potential conflict of interest, I limited my

potential participants to young adults, aged nineteen to twenty-six, who did not have any current involvement with, and were not receiving any services from, the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Amongst participants who responded and were interested, I ensured that the potential risks associated with the interviews were detailed in a clear, concise, and candid way so that each potential participant could make an informed decision about whether or not to be involved in the study. Additionally, in order to give participants a chance to reflect on the original questions, answers, and atmosphere of the interview, I informed participants that they could contact me at any point after the interview if they had any questions or would like to discuss anything as a result of their involvement. The rationale for a follow-up process is that it allows for the filling in of missing pieces of information and assures the interviewee that their words and experiences were adequately and ethically depicted (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

The qualitative research I conducted involved one-on-one interviews with a focus on, and interest in, the personal lives of the people being interviewed. The participants risked a certain level of exposure, both emotionally and socially, which could have led to self-esteem issues, loss of employment, relationship strain, and/or embarrassment. Those ethical considerations were treated sensitively, respecting the relationship between myself as the researcher and the individuals being researched as "a disclosing and protective covenant, usually informal but best not silent, a moral obligation" (Schwandt, as quoted in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 140). Any risks to participant's well-being was epitomized by watching for signs of concern and taking as much precaution as possible. During the initial interview, participants were informed again (in addition to the information contained in the Information

Letter & Consent Form) about the process for individual support, including access to counselling services in the community. To mitigate participant risk throughout the interview, participants were also informed of their access to immediate assistance in the form of helpline services and access to emergency contact through the University Hospital of Northern British Columbia, if required. For example, if a participant was to have a reaction to the questions asked or had a triggering memory of an adverse time in their childhood and were unable to continue in the interview, the participant would have been given the number to the 24-hour crisis line where they could have spoken to someone immediately or could have been taken to the emergency department at the hospital. Participants entered into the study knowing the supports available as they moved through the interview process and knew when that process was complete, and the participant could return home. The services available were easily accessible – the crisis line is a free service available 24 hours a day as are the counselling services mentioned in the Information Letter & Consent Form (Appendix A).

As a component of member checking, each participant was given the opportunity to receive a draft of their transcribed interview, containing what was quoted, and how it was interpreted to avoid any misrepresentation of their experiences. Due to some of the participant's potential transiency and the constraints of confidentiality, I asked each participant how they would like to receive the transcripts/data and made plans accordingly. I felt, after the first interviews with each participant, that a second interview was not necessary given the amount of information initially received as well as the clarity of the responses. My contact information was provided to each participant. Confidentiality and privacy were maintained to protect the data being discussed.

Research Design and Procedures

I recruited eight young adults that met the following criteria: they were at least nineteen years of age, and no older than twenty-six. I secured an interview with seven females and one male, six of which were representative voices of Indigenous heritage. They were all former wards of the Ministry – they were all in care under a Continuing Custody Order (CCO) and spent considerable time in care (at least one year). The Definitions section on page v explains this term in detail. I chose to exclude potential participants whose legal status was a Special Needs Agreement (SNA) as there may have been a potential conflict in terms of cognitive understanding of research implications and the related questions. All the participants had lived in a Ministry approved resource (i.e., foster placement, group home, residential care setting, etc.) and were 'absent without leave' (AWOL) from their approved resource, spending time in an unapproved setting. As the research focused on youth from rural and remote areas, I sought to find and recruit young adults from a community smaller than Prince George – preferably one that met the rural and remote definition, as defined on page *v* and *vi*, but is also more than 150 kilometers from Prince George and has a population under ten thousand people. The community is where the child resided when they were removed from the care of their parental caregiver(s). In regard to confirming the participant criteria, six of the eight participants self-reported and confirmed this data.

In order to effectively distribute information about the research study, I communicated with community care providers and supports to share my contact information with any former youth in care they happen to be in contact with; in turn, the former youth identified were elicited to help me contact other youth who would be interested in my research and would be willing to participate. This process ensured I would have a wide

variety of participants. Additionally, I distributed recruitment posters around community agencies and over social media that had my contact information included as well as details of the proposed research.

I utilized Exponential Discriminative Snowball Sampling, whereby "subjects give multiple referrals, however, only one new subject is recruited among them. The choice of a new subject is guided by the aim and objectives of the study" (Dudovskiy, n.d.). By utilizing this form of sample selection, I was able to recruit participants I did not know and have not worked with. The rationale for this method is that the young adults I spoke with were able to refer more than one person, but in order to mitigate sampling bias (people tend to nominate others they know well and share similar characteristics and personalities), I resolved to only choose one potential person to be included. This particular method was successful in obtaining three of the participants.

As mentioned previously, I interviewed eight young adults. Each interview ranged from approximately half an hour to almost two hours in length. Although the recruitment poster did not detail specific interview length, participants were given as much time as they needed due to the importance of allowing each person's personal experiences to be told. Participants were asked ten interview questions that focused on the primary research question; "How does displacement influence a youth's sense of identity?" As stated on page 5, "I examined the concept of place and how it is given meaning by the youth's connection to various places and, consequently, how that connection or disconnection instils emotional significance through the experiences of those meanings". In designing the questions outlined below, I was cognizant of the participant population and their needs around sharing sensitive and potentially triggering information. In the social work discipline, and especially when

interacting with children and youth in care, asking questions and addressing experiences in a direct and straightforward manner is crucial in obtaining concrete details, as well as allowing participants to own their feelings around certain experiences and to have those feelings honored by the interviewer; in this case me, as the researcher. This is common practice and the language used is specific and relevant to the discipline's work. By asking questions that "elicit illuminating information concerning the client's experiences" (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, & Strom-Gottfried, 2016, p. 152), the participant is able to move "from generality and superficiality to greater depth and meaning" (p. 156). Concrete responses that come from focused questions support participants to talk about interactional sequences that detail circumstances, thoughts, feelings, and consequences.

The questions were as follows:

1. Can you tell me about your experience of coming into care? How old were you?
2. What do you wish could have been different about that experience?
3. Prior to coming into care, what was your home life like? What did you like about your house?
4. Tell me what you liked about your childhood places. Where did you live? What did you like about where you lived?
5. What do you miss about your home or home community? Describe the place you lived in before you came into care?
6. How many homes did you live in while you were in care? Tell me about those spaces.
7. What made you leave the resource/home you were in while in care (any one of the placements will do)? What were you thinking when you decided to leave? What influenced your decision?

8. When you stayed at any other residence (other than your approved one), what did you like about it? Was there anything you didn't like? Did those things prompt you to leave? If not, why did you stay or keep coming back?
9. Tell me about how living in care has influenced your experiences with places – how would you define connection to 'place'?
10. What does home look like for you now?

All the data and information were obtained directly from individuals through personal interviews. The information was digitally recorded with permission and used for research purposes only and in the development of my final thesis which outlined themes that emerged from the analyzed data. Research participants all signed the Information Letter & Consent Form (Appendix A) and were told how the data would be used, including that their interview would be transcribed and that some of the information may be quoted by me, the researcher. I reiterated that the information was to be kept confidential and that no identifiers would be used in the final report. Each interviewee was contacted before the interview took place and the potential participant was asked where they would like to be interviewed. Each participant asked that we meet in a private setting to ensure confidentiality, which we did. Participants were given space, asked if they were comfortable, and were allowed to ask questions before the interviews started. The interviews were designed and structured to facilitate a conversational dialogue, encouraging the participants to ask questions at any time and allowing the process to be more participatory. As a result, an open and relaxed discourse was created in each interview.

Research Reflections

As a novice researcher, I went into the study with certain expectations or assumptions about how the entire process would be conceived and undertaken. After detailing my recruitment poster and distributing them in the community and posting them on social media sites, I expected a variety of potential participants to be identified in a short and reasonably quick amount of time. The process took longer than I expected; potential participants responded to the call for recruitment but a number of them did not meet the requirements. Most of the people who contacted me regarding potential involvement were over 30 years of age and had been out of care of the Ministry for quite some time. Others who contacted me were too young and still in Ministry care, or either current or former clients of mine. Of those individuals, a few of them communicated that they were struggling with a number of issues as a result of their experiences in care and they were given the contact information for community support systems that could assist them. Even though this did not assist my research, it did support the supposition that former children in care still feel the effects of being disconnected and displaced.

The process of connecting with potential participants was not achieved in the way that I expected. Potential participants contacted me, we set up an interview time and place together, and I prepared my interview questions in anticipation of the interview. On more than a few occasions, individuals did not attend at the agreed upon meeting time – some individuals did not respond when contacted further and others simply apologized for not meeting and asked to do the interview at a later date. Some of those individuals neglected to show up for any further interviews. The entire process of setting up interviews (including re-scheduling) and actually completing the eight interviews I desired for my research took me

almost four months to accomplish. I assumed, and hoped, that more potential participants would have come forward and that the process of interviewing them would have been completed in a more timely and linear fashion.

After each interview was concluded, I spent some time reflecting on the process and documenting my thoughts and feelings. My initial observation was the differentiation between my role as researcher and my job as a social worker. Throughout the interviews, I found myself wanting to ask additional questions around the well-being of the participant, defaulting to a social work interview style that I learned during my investigative interview training. As a helping professional, my desire to support and comfort individuals can be, at times, instinctive and reflexive. Keeping focused on my role as a researcher was, as a result, challenging during the process of participant engagement. I was, nonetheless, able to stick to my role as researcher and understand that the quality of the research depended on working within that context. In a way, that researcher strictness allowed for more consistent data collection and should, in the future, help guide policy that will provide a better life for children in care.

What I found specifically helpful in reading the transcribed interviews was looking at the pacing of the words used when I asked questions, the time allowed for silence and reflection, as well as the structuring of my questions themselves. In particularly, I found that some of the questions I asked were wordy and unnecessarily long, which could have potentially confused participants as well as losing valuable information due to a lack of clarity – when two questions were asked together, the participant asked me to repeat the question or stated that they did not quite understand what I was asking. Learning to pace myself and be patient with the flow of questions was an important learning opportunity for

me. Answers that were supplied of an emotional nature, and where the participant seemed somewhat distressed, caused some internal struggle for me as a researcher. My instinct was to stop the questioning and support the participant through counselling techniques. It was challenging during those times due to the fact that I felt as though I was wearing “two hats” or struggling with sticking to my role as a researcher. Ultimately, I asked each participant if they wanted to continue or if they needed to stop the interview. None of the participants opted for the discontinuation of the interview and continued after a short break. At the end of the interview, each participant was asked if they needed community support and/or assistance receiving such help. None of the participants asked for any support and I reiterated the support systems available to the participants detailed in the Information Letter & Consent Form (Appendix A).

In summary, a qualitative exploratory approach supported the methods I used to carry out the research. The explorative, open-ended questions used were invaluable in eliciting information that was experiential, allowing participants to say as much as they needed or wanted to while telling their individual stories. It was in this manner that participants felt heard and valued and, in turn, were able to suggest further participants who they thought would be ideal candidates for research involvement. This process became fluid and natural, leading to a rich, detailed level of information gathered from emergent themes.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

The method I used to analyze the data was thematic analysis, as it is very applicable for looking at people's experiences, views, and perceptions. Thematic analysis is a foundational method for use in qualitative analysis. It is a flexible approach, allowing for unaccounted themes in the data to be explored. It "is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis not only describes data in detail, but it also interprets it, allowing for themes or patterns to emerge. As a constructionist method, thematic analysis reports the meanings of individual's realities and specific experiences as they are realized in societal context. As a novice researcher, I chose thematic analysis (as opposed to phenomenological approaches and grounded theory) because it "is suitable for researchers who wish to employ a relatively low level of interpretation" (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013, p. 399). The authors draw a lot of their research understanding from Sandelowski and Barroso's methods of meta-synthesis (analysis of data similar to thematic approaches), as do Thomas and Harden (2008) and Ludvigsen et al. (2016).

Analysis occurred as I moved "back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analysing, and the analysis of the data that (I was) producing" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). It was a recursive process, designed to discover any themes that emerged as I moved through the data sets. It is worth noting that as I moved through the data, I identified my assumptions, values and biases and recognized how they might influence the research itself (Hannes et al., 2015, as discussed in Twining et al., 2017, p. A7), a term called reflexivity. Aguinaldo (2012) speaks to the concept of reflexivity, and

how thematic analysis works against reflexive analysis by ignoring “the contributions of the interviewer in the production of the data” (p. 771). Additionally, “credibility and trustworthiness can also be enhanced through analytic processes such as participant checking - giving participants the opportunity to comment on transcripts and emerging findings” (Tong et al. as quoted in Twining, 2017, p. A7).

The process defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) presents an appropriate way of analysing data, realized through the flexible use of six steps or phases. The writing of ideas and patterns took place throughout all those phases as the data was analyzed. The phases are outlined below:

1. Familiarize yourself with your data – reading and re-reading data, taking notes on initial ideas, and transcribing data if necessary.
2. Generating initial codes – coding interesting features of the data systematically over the data set and collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes – collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes – checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1 – checking for patterns) and the entire data set (Level 2 – validity of themes and data set as a whole), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes – ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

6. Producing the report – selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis to the research question and literature, and producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

As I approached data analysis, my analytic framework was influenced by authors such as Morgan (2010), Zapf (2010), and Tuan (1975) who all speak to the inherent nature of place attachment, and how our identity is shaped by our connection to and within place. I began by gathering together all my notes, transcripts, and additional thoughts I had generated during the course of the research. Following that, I read and re-read the interview transcripts and any notes I had made during the interviews. I went through each transcript next, highlighting the various themes found throughout by colour-coding significant or noteworthy words and phrases that I found. After each transcript was searched, the colour-coded words and phrases were collated and set into groups, with four distinct themes emerging from that process. My analysis was also done with the support of my supervisor Dr. Joanna Pierce. I was in regular and consistent communication with her, who looked at the analysis and coding as an additional screening process and part of the iteration of constantly examining the data. As well, my work benefited from an ongoing different perspective as I was immersed in the work with this particular population.

Theme Emergence

Analyzing the data systematically over all the interview transcriptions resulted in the emergence of four separate and distinct themes. For coding and theme development, I considered latent content in the data analysis, looking at what realties could be created by the information collected as well as any themes that could be discovered that underpin the data; themes becoming an “expression of latent content” (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013,

p. 402) as opposed to the categorization and descriptive level that is an expression of manifest content. Latent analysis goes beyond the literal or logical content and looks at the underlying conceptualizations of the data in relation to the "ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Themes are defined as "coherent integrations of the disparate pieces of data that constitute the findings" (Sandelowski & Leeman, 2012, p. 1407). Whether or not a theme is considered relevant is dependent on "whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). The four themes that emerged from my research were a direct result of the integration of the data and the subtle interplay between the significant words and phrases identified.

Another characterization of data analysis that I used in my thematic analysis was a thematic map. Again, this was a recursive process by which visualizations of "themes, codes, and their relationships, involving a detailed account and description of each theme" (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013, p. 403) is presented. Data from the interviews was physically gathered into groups of themes that emerged and their relationship was "mapped" visually on a board to see how the themes related to each other. Each theme told its own story as well as contributed to the broader story I am telling about the data in relation to my research question. I kept a detailed research journal that includes thoughts, notes, and questions about the data which was coded as well. Although I did not use my journal entries as part of my data analysis, I found it to be a useful tool in allowing me to reflect on my role as a researcher. Following each interview, I wrote in my journal to help me remain clear about my research process.

Theme Definition

The four themes that emerged from the research were: displacement (displaced), connection (disconnection), place, and home. Understanding that I defined the themes using the four words noted above, I did not expect the participants to use that specific wording. What initially struck me as important and critical to understanding how these former youth had been affected by displacement, was that multiple participants referenced the word 'home' and how the spaces they were living in were not seen or defined as a home environment. The questions that those statements were the result of did not reference the word home, nor did the questions imply anything specific or directed. The participants were asked an open-ended question about what the spaces they lived in were like and the lack of a home environment was referenced a few times by different participants. The four themes that emerged were similar across demographics; neither the age nor the gender of the participants seemed to have an impact on what was reported or the way in which the specifics of the themes were experienced. What follows is a detailed description and expansion of each of the four themes identified:

Displacement.

I was eager to discover what led the former youth I questioned to stay in spaces that most would consider unsafe, dirty, hazardous, or even unlivable. Youth create their own realities (as do we all) and there are reasons for those choices. I desired to know why those choices were made, so that my future social work practice could properly address those decisions in the context in which they were chosen. My hope was that the quality of the findings would offer new insights into place attachment study, would increase understanding, and inform social work practice.

Of the eight participants interviewed, all of them spoke about displacement or being displaced in one way or another. Of the four main themes identified, displacement became the principal theme, emerging as the one with the most data (input by participants). Understanding that most children who spend time in the care of the Ministry have reported experiencing various levels of disconnection, the fact that all the participants interviewed suggested feeling displaced was not surprising. This fact was most clearly evident in discussion about each participant's experience of coming into care – that transition from living in one's home to being placed, or forced, into the space of another person. All eight of the participants reported that this experience was a negative one, or at least one that could have been different. Overall, the feelings experienced by all participants were, again, negative. Feelings of confusion, sadness, and anger were all identified, and an overall sense of helplessness permeated the answers given by the participants. Specifically, five participants reported feeling confused about what was happening, why they had to leave their home, and what was going to happen to them. Twelve separate statements were collected indicating feelings of confusion, sadness, and a lack of understanding of the process of coming into care. Not being able to return home and being forced to live in an environment that you do not 'know' (feel comfortable or connected in) and with people who are strangers caused, as participants reported, further displacement and disconnection from caregivers.

As one participant stated about the process of going to a foster placement, "I just kind of get disturbed easily when it's a stranger's house and stuff like that, so I didn't sleep well the first night and it took me a little bit to adjust" (Participant 01, personal communication, July 9, 2018). The experience of being in a stranger's home followed by this new instruction of being compelled to "adjust" to a new space with no familiarity further heightens feelings

of being detached and displaced. This experience, that affects all too many children coming into care (and all the research participants), substantiates Morgan's (2010) claim of an incorporation between human and place attachment where a child and an attachment figure (caregiver) explore and interact with place. The cyclical pattern of exploration-assertion and attachment-affiliation is crucial to how place attachment is developed and strengthened. In cases where an attachment figure has been removed and the environment has changed (as in the above example), this cycle is in danger of being delayed or broken altogether. The disparity between feelings of relief and fear coupled with displacement leave young people reluctant to engage in the process of exploration-assertion and attachment-affiliation. Navigating the unknown can be an intimidating and worrying process, as participants in this research reported, and re-establishing Morgan's cycle of qualitative discovery is an integral part to rebuilding a connection to place. It was also interesting to note that three participants all expressed conflicting feelings of not being able to return to their childhood homes, even though they knew that it was better for them to not be living there any longer due to the abuse they were suffering by their parents; "I had some relief that I didn't have to go through that [abuse from mom] and was also real scared 'cause I didn't want to be away from my mom in that sense" (Participant 06, personal communication, September 13, 2018). Arguably, children who struggle with these conflicting feelings may have had the cycle of qualitative discovery that Morgan talks about, interrupted significantly enough that they desire to return to their attachment figure.

Five of the participants, though they described the process of coming into care in various ways, agreed that the process could have been different and wished that more time would have been taken with them and that they would have had some input in that decision.

Participant 08 stated, “I wish they would have spent more time trying to connect, I guess. You know, like, full conversations, trying to actually get to know the people” (personal communication, August 15, 2018). Participant 04 simply wished that the process had been “more planned out a little bit ‘cause I didn’t really have no say in any of it” (personal communication, August 28, 2018), Three participants reported feeling informed and felt like they knew what was going on; one participant recalled that social workers required her to first live in a group home before she could live independently while in care of the Ministry and she was not given a reason as to why this was necessary. Required to live in a group home with then another break in placement, seemingly unnecessary, only heightens the state of disconnection and displacement already felt by young people coming into care. The physical place and its potential importance in terms of connection and identity is overlooked by social workers as they quickly move through legislative process and move young people to different locations. This confirms what Zapf (2010) states when he offers an explanation to this inattention or undervaluing of place importance; physical places are seen “as separate from ourselves, as an objective thing” (p. 35). As I stated on page 2 of my research, place is consistently devalued and detached from people’s (in this case, young people) lives. As was expected, participants spoke about being in a home with “strangers” and how being in an unknown place provoked feelings of fear and discomfort. Those feelings of fear and apprehension were made more acute and the displacement more critical when the participant was required to adjust to living in the new space, be it a foster home or group home (or in two cases, a youth shelter) without explanation. Additionally, as one participant remarked, “just because the person [social worker] is gentle and is nice and caring, it doesn’t mean that it makes it any easier” (Participant 06, personal communication, September 13, 2018). The

process itself of being removed (displaced) and made to unexpectedly start living in a strange, unknown environment is traumatic and uncomfortable, regardless of the demeanor of the social worker involved in the transition. Displacement and feelings of placelessness are not, therefore, mitigated by attempts at emotional influence or management.

Another factor associated with feelings of disconnection and displacement is the distance involved in the transition between places, primarily from the participants childhood environment to their first in-care placement. Five of the participants were moved from their home communities (smaller rural and remote communities) to Prince George. All five of those participants stated that they missed at least one aspect of their home community and spoke about place being important to them during their childhood years at home. The number of placements each participant lived in during their time in care ranged from three to twenty-five, comprising mostly of foster placements or group homes. It is interesting to note that a few participants could not remember how many placements they lived in while they were in care, and just remember having lots of different people in their lives as well as being in many different homes. Participant 01 said, “As far as I know… I’m *told* three different homes” (emphasis added, personal communication, July 9, 2018). Those experiences were compounded by the fact that participants who had siblings who were also taken into care often were separated from them, instilling additional feelings of disconnection and displacement from what was left of their family. Five participants reported being split up from their siblings as they were brought into care. Three of those five participants stated that prior to their removal by a social worker, their siblings were their strongest connection and those relationships were all they had growing up in their childhood places. They all added

that either visiting their siblings or eventually being placed together was a priority for them and something they urgently desired. As one participant stated:

> showing the twins where their rooms were and then me and my little brother were trying to figure out where our rooms were and they told us that we didn't have a room there and that we were getting sent to a different home. (Participant 05, personal communication, August 30, 2018)

The participant appeared distraught at the memory of this incident (which occurred roughly ten years ago) and apologized for taking a moment to compose herself. It is these and other disconnections that play a role in how participants connect, or fail to connect, to places and establish feelings of home. Two of the three participants in this case recounted how they were eventually reunited with their siblings and how that helped them connect to places and feel like they could establish a home environment. The third participant appeared quite discouraged and frustrated when relaying that he was not given a chance to visit his sisters while in care and was not told why; "I would ask them [foster parents] if I could just say hi to them once in a while 'cause I don't know why but we barely seen each other" (Participant 04, personal communication, August 28, 2018).

Life for participants in their respective Ministry-approved placements was described as predominantly negative, with noted concessions from two of the participants. Although they did have a positive experience at *one* of their placements, the others (mainly group homes) that they lived in were also wrought with negative experiences. Consequently, all eight participants detailed one or more negative experiences about being in care and living in a space that was not their home. In all but two of the participants' experiences, the group home placement setting was the source of those negative experiences. One participant

elaborated, saying “I wanted to be free. I just didn’t want to stay. I didn’t want people prying into how I was feeling, what I was doing… the bed checks were intrusive, and I didn’t feel comfortable” (Participant 06, personal communication, September 13, 2018). Living in an environment that is systematized through government licensing and strict policy only further reinforces already present feelings of displacement and alienation that young people face as they move from their childhood places to various placements while in care. This was especially true for the participants who spent time in group homes – five of them detailed living in what felt like institutions (two of them used the word institution). Doors to rooms were locked, as were fridges and cabinets. Meals were prepared and served at a specific time – missing that designated time meant missing the meal and having to eat other food (mostly fruit and vegetables) instead. The office was locked as well and, as one participant described, “the office was like behind like plexiglass, um, it kind of looks like an, like institutional more” (Participant 07, personal communication, September 21, 2018). Personal belongings were stolen if you didn’t keep them locked up, staff came and went under a regular and consistent rotative schedule, and there were different rules depending on the staff who were working. Participants stated that, all the while, they also had to share this space with other individuals they did not know and who, it can be assumed, were experiencing similar struggles in connecting to place. Although the restrictions present in group home settings were different than those in foster placements, some participant’s experiences were similar. Stories of being locked in your room or not allowed in certain areas of the home were present in the research. Participant 03 talked about how her first foster placement wasn’t positive; “Um, she just treated us different… like she’d just make us stay in our rooms. Like you stay there and don’t come out sort of thing” (personal communication, July 13, 2018). Even with

subtle differences, all the participants noted that neither group home nor foster placement felt like home and, like stated earlier in this research, that they were frustrated with the lack of choice in where they were being made to live. As one participant so powerfully stated, “It just felt like a place that I’m sleeping at until I go home” (Participant 05, personal communication, August 30, 2018). As mentioned earlier, and corroborated here, the structural aspects of group home settings may be contributory to youth’s feelings of placelessness and loss as their “home” environment is seen as a ‘depressing place’ (Korpella, 2001). This, in turn, affects young people’s ability to form healthy attachments to their current ‘places’; the term “attachment implies closeness, both physically and mentally. In the case of an ‘imprisoned’ state of being, a person is tied to a place against his or her will” (Minami, 2009, p. 213).

Three participants who had lived in three or more placements during their time in care, expanded in more detail the transitioning from one to another. They shared memories of being “bounced around’ and going “back and forth” between in-care spaces and even back to their parent’s care. Throughout the entirety of their interviews, two participants stated that they exhibited some behaviours that staff and caregivers found challenging and it was this conflict that caused them to be moved. Participant 06 commented that staff at the group homes “would have enough of my behaviours and enough of the challenges I displayed, and I would get placed in the next group home… my memories are of being bounced around” (personal communication, September 13, 2018). Their memories of staying in those various places are comprised of experiential displacement, of being anxious and in a state of anticipation of the next move. Moving along this continuum of spaces causes individuals to view each space as a temporary rest stop in a long line of anxious and apprehensive

transitions. “It’s kind of made it hard a bit being connected to one single place ‘cause you’re sort of used to kind of everything just constantly changing and just not being stable” (Participant 01, personal communication, July 9, 2018).

The statements given by the participants, realized within the overall negative impression left when discussing the participants’ time in care, confirms and supports corroborating research. As stated earlier (see p. 19), this is evident in Erikson’s work on identity development. When asked about their experiences living in group homes and foster placement, the participants’ memories and immediate experiences that Erikson talks about are predominantly detrimental, which speaks strongly to the importance of a healthy connection to childhood places. The opportunities for self-development that Erikson proposes become restrained and reduced as a result of, in the case of my research, the participants’ consistent (and sometimes constant) displacement and the consequent inability to connect meaningfully to any of their childhood places.

Ironically, the process of children and youth coming into care and being displaced caused them to run away and become further displaced. When we link this research information to prior authors who have studied displacement, it comes as no surprise that the participants in my research all reported being affected by multiple instances of displacement. As I mentioned earlier, people become the place in which they attach. Alternatively, if they fail to attach, it undeniably affects their identity. As Lerner (1992) maintains, the person and the environment simultaneously influence one another. All the participants spoke to how leaving their Ministry-approved placements was something they wanted to do. In total, there were fourteen individual statements made by various participants detailing why they chose to leave their foster placement or group home setting. Responses ranged from the ambiguous to

very definite reasons why participants did not want to stay and chose to leave. Feelings of discomfort at their current placement, as well as having too many restrictions imposed (those that participants mentioned earlier on pp. 56-57) or not liking certain staff were all identified as possible reasons for leaving. Participant 07 stated, “I mean some of the staff tried to make you feel like it was a home but, and then there was other staff that didn’t at all” (personal communication, September 21, 2018).

Speaking again to how feelings of displacement affect conceptions of identity, five participants talked about the emotional implications of running away or leaving their placements in favour of something *they* themselves chose. One participant stated that even though she did not run away, she thought about it (from her adoptive home) but feared what they would do to her if she did; “I could never bring myself to do it [run away] ‘cause I feared my mom and I feared what would happen” (Participant 01, personal communication, July 9, 2018). Another participant did run away in an attempt to be with his sisters in another city but was found and got into trouble for leaving. Interestingly, three participants reported that when they left their group home or foster placement, they ended up in spaces that were unsafe, unclean, and potentially dangerous. They all wanted to be somewhere “better” and, in examining the responses to questions of why they left, that definition of what it meant to be better was the option to choose the place they lived in – even if that place was one which would be categorically defined as unhealthy. Whether the participant went back to a caregiver, to a partner or to a “flop house”, each participant stated that they were looking for something more than what they were currently experiencing in a group home or foster placement. As one participant remarked about what made her leave the group home she was living in, “I knew nobody would come looking for me except when they had to; I just knew

that I could just do whatever I kind of wanted. I just wanted to be away" (Participant 06, personal communication, September 13, 2018).

Children and youth who have the experiences detailed by the participants are deeply affected by displacement, to the point where they are unable to move completely through Morgan's cycle of qualitative discovery (see p. 18); they are forced into the exploration-assertion phase through mandatory moves but are incapable of returning to an attachment figure for cycle completion in the attachment-affiliation phase. Without a consistent caregiver and a connected place, as was the case with all the participants I interviewed, individuals lose the ability to attach and the cycle becomes fractured and possibly broken. Children and young people are left carrying that disconnection from childhood places with them as they move through the rest of their life. The experience of displacement and disconnection can be felt past adolescence into adulthood and influenced how participants connected to places now that they are out of the care of the Ministry. Participant 05, when asked about how her experiences in care influenced how she connected to places presently, simply remarked, "I don't think I really connect to places" (personal communication, August 30, 2018). As I will discuss in later themes, her particular assertion that she is unable to connect to places is bound with feelings of anxiety and depression and a struggling sense of identity. Of the eight participants interviewed, only two spoke about how living in care had made a positive influence in their life. They both remarked that there were caregivers (one in a group home setting and one in a foster placement) who never gave up on them and who taught them things that carried into their adult lives. Other participants stated that as a result of the constant and compulsory moves while they were in care, their preference as an adult (now responsible for their own choices) was to remain in one place. Participants elaborated

that they began to think, while in care, that everywhere was temporary (the places and the people) and that that made it hard to connect to places later in life. “It’s [living in care] kind of made it hard a bit being connected to one single place ‘cause you’re sort of used to kind of everything just constantly changing and just not being stable” (Participant 01, personal communication, July 9, 2018). This same participant added that she switched into a survival mode of sorts and the focus became learning to survive as opposed to any real connection to place.

Constant changes established in each participant an expectation that their living arrangements would forever be temporary and transitory. Strange caregivers and inconsistent expectations produced feelings of discomfort and uneasiness. Confusion about the process of coming into care and the lack of input and choice created an atmosphere where not knowing was commonplace (multiple participants stated that they found certain answers hard to explain). All these factors produced, in at least six of the eight participants, a strong correlation between being in care of the Ministry and the ability to develop and build healthy place identity. In the case of my research, the more moves each participant was forced to endure while in care, the more disconnected and displaced their adult lives became. The two participants who had the most transitions both stated that they felt like nothing was going to stay constant in their lives, whereas the two participants who reported positive experiences while in care both had the least number of moves. One participant who moved around a lot as a young person while living in care reflected that it was hard to connect to anywhere she lived because, “there’s nothing that’s going to stay constant… because it’s always changing” (Participant 06, personal communication, September 13, 2018).

These personal accounts and lived experiences are, unfortunately, not uncommon. They are supported by Feld and Basso (1996) when they state unequivocally that "displacement is no less the source of powerful attachments than are experiences of profound rootedness" (as quoted in Kemp, p. 120). The literature supports the results of my research – contrary to what one might expect, displacement has affected the participants in that it has created a powerful connection (attachment) or association to being disconnected (detachment). Kemp (2009) discusses this displacement as "profound changes experienced by children who live in multiple foster homes" (p. 120) and adds that the importance of the impact and outcome has a great deal to do with whether the move was voluntary or not. Involuntary displacement, then, leaves individuals (research participants included) with a strong feeling of being detached from place. As children and youth endure multiple forced moves and experience constant change, they also suffer disruptions in development and "psychosocial functioning", a level of loss that Fullilove (2004) calls "root shock" (as quoted in Kemp, 2009, p. 121) – an involuntary displacement that causes grief and trauma through the loss of social connection and separation from place and place meaning. For participants, this loss of social connection and separation from place is discussed in the next theme.

Connection.

If place experiences, then, take up residence within the body and become part of the individual's sense of meaning and the formation of identity (Casey, 2001), then negative place experiences will have a comparable and as-powerful effect on individuals. This connection and accompanying disconnection to people and place was a constant theme throughout the research and evidently true for the participants I interviewed. In going through the data, I explored not only how participants defined connection (what it meant to *be*

connected), but also *how* they connected – this theme represents a connection to both people and place and the symbiotic relationship between the two. Every participant spoke to feeling a certain way depending on the placement or home they were in and expanded on their emotional situation and how it impacted place meaning and attachment.

As expected, participants reported a strong association between the ability to connect to a space (placement) and its relation to the connection developed with the caregiver. All but one of the participants reported feeling a sense of loss or disconnection with their parents or childhood caregivers as they came into care – feelings of missing family, community, and the memories of being attached to those childhood places were common. Even participants who knew they needed to be in care (as a result of the abuse they were receiving at home) still missed that connection to family and home (place association). Participant 01 understood that she needed to be away from her mother and reported the process of coming into care as a smooth one, but added, "I think what I missed the most was just family connection" (personal communication, July 9, 2018). For participants with siblings, having access to them in care (either placed together or seeing them regularly) was paramount to feeling connected wherever those participants were. Participant 02 was happy that as she and her sisters were removed from their parent's care they all went to the same place; "I like that they had us all together" (personal communication, July 13, 2018).

For example, in describing the process of coming into care, two participants stated that they wished they and their siblings could have gone to extended family instead of a foster placement or group home. The connection developed and strengthened between siblings that occurs in their attached place *before* coming into care is reminiscent of the process of place identity. It is the foundation of place attachment. This foundation is

subconsciously anticipated as both participants wished they could have gone to their grandparent's home (instead of a Ministry placement) where memories of affordances (what the participants benefited from within the environment; culturally-specific activities in these two cases) were recalled with enthusiasm. As referenced earlier, Heft (2003) identifies these affordances as a process of immersing ourselves in "situated doing and being" (p. 151). This was true for both participants and for, although less defined, four others who communicated elements of their relationship with family and the togetherness shared through "doing" in place. As Participant 05 stated when discussing why she would have liked to go live with her kokum and nimosôm (grandparents in Cree) instead of a foster placement, "I probably would have gotten taught a lot of things with my grandma and grandpa, like culture-wise" (personal communication, August 30, 2018).

While in care, therefore, participants were forced to begin that connection process anew. The familiarity and stability of whatever it was like for participants at home had been severed by the interruption of coming into care. During this traumatic experience, participants clung to whatever connection they had as they transitioned into unfamiliar spaces – first, it was wanting to be placed with family; second, as they moved into care, they wanted to be with siblings. Being together *when* placed and then together *in* place is critical. It is almost as if participants yearned to take with them that sense of sanctuary and self-assurance resulting from their relationship with others and the environment. Gustafson (2001) supports the importance of self, others, and the environment when he discusses meaning-making through the lens of personal experience and self-identification over time, adding that, "many respondents associate their place of residence with security and a sense of home" (p. 9). Participant 08 discussed at length what it meant for her to be connected to places; "I guess,

just being comfortable, knowing that you're safe, you know, there's nothing to worry about, you're not going to be harmed, or there's no reason to be scared, you're good, you're safe" (personal communication, August 15, 2018). As participants spent time in Ministry placements, their experiences varied depending on how they perceived the people and the spaces in which they were made to stay. Four participants discussed, to various degrees, the emotional sustainability of their placements. In cases where staff and/or foster parents were "nice", "approachable", or "tried to make it (the group home) feel like home", participants felt like they could connect to the spaces they were living in. For four other participants, however, the inconsistencies of caregiver attitude (impatience and judgement) and behaviour (trying to force a feeling of "home") and the need to have more freedom, caused them to leave for places *they* chose and to be with whom they wanted, whether that was a relative (sister and grandmother in two instances) or a friend(s). For instance, one participant light-heartedly stated, "I stayed there (the group home) a couple of nights just to make the social worker happy" (Participant 02, personal communication, July 13, 2018).

As participants were asked about feeling connected to places now that they were out of care and on their own, seven participants spoke directly about a renewed connection with family. Specifically, four of the participants described having family live with them or them living with family again. Two of those participants noted that, due to their experiences of displacement while coming into care, now have their siblings living with them or visiting often. Understanding now that they were living in unhealthy childhood homes has led to an awareness of how things could and should be different – three participants spoke about how they have taken the experience of being in care and embraced what they have learned (good and bad) and used it to work on themselves. For one participant, increasing her self-esteem

directly relates to her ability to attach to place – "Home becomes home because you're feeling good about yourself and vice-versa" (Participant 05, personal correspondence, August 30, 2018). Identity and place are caught up in one another in a state of what Casey (2001) calls "constitutive coingredience" or the power to give an organized existence to what Zapf (2009) refers to as "people as place"

Place.

Three sub-themes emerged from the main theme of place; participants talked about place in relation to the physical house or dwelling they were in and things they remembered about the home itself, the natural environment around the home or in the community, and the emotional and psychosocial impact that place has had on them.

When asked to describe what their homes or places looked like prior to them coming into care, only one of the eight participants had trouble remembering the physicality of the home he grew up in, but he did recall having positive experiences playing outside (natural environment) and stated he missed the community when he had to leave; "Uh, I visited family lots and did as much as possible to help them out and around their home and inside their home" (Participant 04, personal communication, August 28, 2018). Most participants described their home by talking about the layout of the building (how many bedrooms, levels, size, etc.) and what specific objects they remembered, whether it be toys, televisions, or things they enjoyed doing in the home. One participant spoke about a great big bay window with lavender curtains that she vividly remembers. Three of the participants referenced ownership in talking about their childhood places; they used terms like "my room", "my toys", "my own things". Having the 'right' to something physical seemed to create a sense of connection to the place – those participants talked about how they felt

comfortable in *their* places and how that physical connection elicited feelings of stability and predictability. Those factors allowed participants to exist more naturally; "Um, having my own room, I liked, um, the sort of a home atmosphere, it was family orientated that, you know, I woke up and it was safe 'cause I knew, I knew what to expect" (Participant 06, personal communication, September 13, 2018). Alternatively, that same participant stated that when she lived in a group home, she didn't feel the need to respect the physical space or the things within it and did damage while living there. She didn't put any pictures up in her room because she didn't feel like it was *her* space; "I didn't need to take care of it [my space] or I felt I shouldn't put on pictures on my wall because that's not my space" (Participant 06, personal communication, September 13, 2018). Another participant reported feeling similarly – she left the resource regularly because she didn't feel that the caregivers created an environment that she could be in and create bonds within. When discussing those relationships in environment, Participant 08 stated that in one of her foster placements, the caregiver "was a little bit focused on her job… I feel like she wasn't really in tune with the message [her role as a foster parent]" (personal communication, August 15, 2018).

When talking about the environment in which their childhood places were located, all the participants detailed multiple examples of experiencing positive interactions outside their homes and within their community. Responses ranged from having positive memories of being in a garden, playing outside with friends, swimming, exploring, riding bikes, as well as memories about the physical space around them (hills, lakes, rivers, trees, etc.). For six of the participants, the ability to engage with the environment *whenever they wanted* was something they missed about the community in which they grew up. Participant 01 stated that the best part of her childhood home was the greenbelt that was close by; "So, if I just wanted to go

play in the woods, I could… and not even get in trouble" (personal communication, July 9, 2018). Echoing Morgan's (2010) theory of place attachment through qualitative discovery once again, these participants were able to venture out of their homes (from their attachment figure) and into the world to explore and interact with place, returning and completing that cyclical pattern. One participant, in talking about her childhood places and the homes she grew up in, remarked:

> the only place that I can remember that I actually really enjoyed… was the only time we had a big property, we lived right on the river and we had, um, we had peach trees, we had apple trees, and, ya, I think that was pretty awesome. That's the only place that I can remember. (Participant 08, personal communication, August 15, 2018)

Although she stated having no memories of all but one of the places she grew up in, the only place she did remember was the one in which she had positive ties to the environment around her. Hung and Stables' (2011) geophenomenological perspective gives provision to the participant's place-meaning experience by positioning, as stated earlier, that certain places could have very different meanings to people; "this is not only for physical reasons but also for mental ones, such as intention, expectation, imagination or memory" (p. 195). For the participant in question, the presence of fruit trees in a backyard close to a river became the only positive memory of her childhood places and one that had powerful significance for her.

Relatedly, two participants specifically mentioned how memories of their childhood homes conjured up visions of a specific area in the home. When asked about being connected to those places, one participant remarked that he remembered certain spots in the house and that it helped him connect or feel connected to places, specifically the childhood home he

would eventually return to live in; “it brings memories of things that happened… you just get certain flashbacks and whatnot like in a certain spot in the house” (Participant 04, personal communication, August 28, 2018). The other participant, when asked about being connected to her grandmother’s home (her childhood place), stated that whenever she thought of her grandmother’s house, she would “envision her house; I can see exactly what corner it’s on” (Participant 01, personal communication, July 9, 2018). She appreciated the garden her and her grandmother spent time in and fostered that relationship within the place around them.

It is interesting to note that two participants who could not remember anything positive about living in their home community before coming into care (when discussing displacement) suddenly recalled aspects they liked when asked to describe the homes they lived in. One participant remembered one particular home that her family lived in (they moved a lot) that she had fond memories of. The home itself was big (lots of space) and there were things to do in the neighborhood – she remembered “that there was a lot of trees… you used to be able to play on the little monkey bars and there was always shade… I guess our childhood memory would always be going to the park” (Participant 05, August 30, 2018). The other participant began describing her home and ended up remembering that they used to go to the smokehouse outside their house and engaging in the cultural activity of smoking fish. She ended by saying, “Like I miss that, I would say that would be the only thing I miss” (Participant 02, personal communication, July 13, 2018).

The interconnectedness between people and place is not only apparent throughout my literature review, but also evident within the results of the research itself. Four participants discussed, in various degree, the emotional connectedness of being in a place. That connection, or lack of connection, seemed to have an impact on what memories were recalled

and talked about during the interviews. When discussing the concept of place connection, Participant 01 said:

> I think the most connected place I've ever felt was probably out in the foster home… with all of the trees and the river and just all the nature around you. It gets you in a different mind set… just think things through. (personal communication, July 9, 2018)

As the participants shared their experiences of coming into care, I also asked them what the physical spaces were like living in a group home or foster placement. The answers concerning place, once gathered into themes and analyzed, overlapped with the theme of displacement substantially. Naturally, there was a strong correlation between negative experiences in *place* and feelings of *displacement*. Therefore, the last sub-theme concerning place (the psychosocial impact of being in place) has been presented positively, as an antithesis to displacement.

Five of the participants recall having a positive association to place while being in care, either living in a group home or foster placement. Moreover, four of those same participants recall also having negative associations with place while in other placements during their time in care. In one example, a participant states that the "things" in the group home were different – they weren't personal and were therefore not respected by the young person and others who lived there; "I damaged things, I put holes in the walls, I'd act out and people would be like, 'No this is your home, it's a safe spot', but it's not…" (Participant 06, personal communication, September 13, 2018). Two other participants added that without a suitable environment (created by the caregivers) in which to attach and create memories, they were left with an 'emptiness' and no sense of connectedness. Those locations or homes held

no place meaning and become mere spaces as participants transitioned through them. Interactions in place environment are crucial – one participant stated that the main difference between her foster placement and her childhood home (with her grandmother) was that her foster home "didn't feel like an environment where she [foster mother] could be mom to me" (Participant 01, personal communication, July 9, 2018). Supporting this very powerful and perceptive statement, Heft (1989) points out that "the 'things' of our everyday environment have perceivable psychological value for us in terms of the possibilities they offer for our actions and, more broadly, for our intentions" (as quoted in Heft, 2003, p. 151). The environment held no value for that participant in terms of how she could be cared for, connected to, and parented.

For the five participants who had positive experiences with place during their time in care, the physicality of the spaces coupled with care providers who were willing to create connections allowed for a formation of place. Desirable features of a spacious home with lots to do and an interactive environment around the home seemed to be directly correlated to healthy, enriching relationships between the participants and their caregivers. Care providers who fostered a connection between the participants and the places in and around the homes in which they lived were remembered warmly and missed. Participant 01 went into detail about enjoying the physical location of her foster home in relation to the natural surroundings and her foster father taking her out to experience those places (through hiking, hunting, fishing, etc.). When she was headed to her foster placement, she remembered, "I got kind of really excited 'cause there's a river right out the back door… if I wanted to go for a walk I could" (Participant 01, personal communication, July 9, 2018). Being able to experience and appreciate the outdoors reminded her of similar positive experiences she had with her

adoptive father. People and place become interconnected in the environment where those interactions take place. As mentioned earlier, people become the place in which they attach. "The person and the environment simultaneously influence one another" (Lerner, 1992, p. 378) in a cycle of mutual engagement and subsequent support in creating a sense of identity.

Home.

Place attachment and identity is in no way more genuine and heartfelt than within the concept of home. As discussion of the other themes indicates, displacement caused a great deal of turmoil for the participants in their journey to find and create attachments. Participants reported a distinction between spaces and places, gauged by what all of them stated in one way or another as a "feeling of home", whether positive (the place felt like home) or negative (the space did not feel like home). Choices, comfort, security, freedom and family are what permeated the answers given by all the participants when asked what 'home' looks like for them now (as adults). Home is neither obligatory nor forced (like what group home settings and foster placements felt for many of the participants), and when participants were able to choose what their home looked like and felt like they had the freedom in that place, it *became* home. Experiences shared in the environment with people they connected with helped create place attachment and, for four participants, it is what helped define 'home' for them.

It is interesting to note that three participants who stated that a certain place either felt like or didn't feel like home, had a hard time explaining that feeling. The 'why' was something they could not clarify, only feel. When asked about what their definition of home would be, Participant 8 stated, "Ah, I would say, I don't know, a space where you're free, like you don't, you don't have to worry about anything, not only that, it's just I don't know

really, know how to…" (personal communication, August 15, 2018). For four participants, spaces they stayed in (Ministry placements) lacked a positive feeling of home. Those participants stated that because they felt scared or awkward and with so much change around them, they could not call the space (place making) a home. Only half of the eight participants remembered staying in places that felt like home, and only two of those places were Ministry placements (the foster parents in both homes created a "family home" and a "family environment"). The other two places were where participants ran away due to feelings of disconnectedness at the group homes they were supposed to be staying at. When asked if one of these places felt more like home than the group home, one of those participants stated, "Where you're comfortable and, honestly, for me it wasn't that I didn't like them (staff) and they didn't treat me bad or anything but honestly, for me it comes down to… *it wasn't home*" (Participant 03, emphasis added, personal communication, July 13, 2018).

For the participants, making a life for themselves after being in care meant creating a home. All the participants accomplished that in their own way, making their own choices and becoming independent and creating a sense of identity attached to the places they now live in and experience. "I have my own things, I have my own place, I am able to provide for myself, um, I have everything I need" (Participant 07, personal communication, September 21, 2018). Although all the participants talked about how having their own "things" made the place they lived in a home, three participants described what the interior of their home looked like, mentioning furniture and other things they purchased and brought into the home. Two participants spoke of having their own bed, one that was not slept in before (as was the case in her group home), as something that makes a home. Tuan (1975) talks about places within the home, stating that furniture is "known, intimately, through the more passive modes of

experience" (p. 154). The bed, he suggests, is a personal place and the centre of meaning. For these participants, the importance of their own bed, although maybe not understood in terms of experiential place attachment, was no less significant. One participant went so far as to describe the process of home-making, beginning with buying new furniture and painting walls (as a cleansing act after breaking up with her partner) and getting a pet (which she found and nursed to health). "I had to start over… there was a lot of things that didn't make it home, because like my old couches, say, those reminded me of him" (Participant 05, personal communication, August 30, 2018). She concluded this description by saying that she has written notes for herself and hung them throughout the home, as a reminder to do things that combat her depression and anxiety (from multiple displacements and little connection as a child) and make her happy. Place, therefore, personifies experience and "is a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning" (Tuan, 2002, p. 387).

Respecting Person as Place

During the process of the data analysis and theme development, certain statements made by participants stood out as particularly unique and distinctive. I have presented them here in a separate section as a way to honour the personal voices of participants in this study. The specific and subjective realities of experiential place attachment for each participant are important and valued as they relate to each participant's individual identity as, supported by Zapf within this research, "person as place".

In discussing what home looked like for him now, one participant described returning home as soon as he became an adult and was no longer in care. He elaborated on his connection to community by adding that he not only missed what he remembered about that

place but was disheartened that the community was different than when he knew it; “In a way, it’s like, it’s not as it used to be” (Participant 04, personal communication, August 28, 2018). He said that the community changed after he went into care and, if it was possible, would have liked it if it had stayed the same, primarily because he has always thought of his community as his home, regardless of where he was moved to while in care. He returned to live with his mother, supporting her in his childhood home and, when asked specifically what that looked like for him currently, he answered, “living with my mom and having the experience of being back in the same house and it kind of *feels like home now*…” (Participant 04, personal communication, August 28, 2018). For this participant, whether conscious or not, returning to his home community and the place of his childhood was something he felt drawn to do – possibly in an effort to reconnect with what he lost when he was removed as a child. He came full circle, driven by what Erikson refers to as the “enduring value of childhood places” (as quoted in Manzo, 2003).

In asking one participant why she was unable to connect to the various group homes she lived in, she said they felt like an institution, expanding on the coldness of staff rotations, everything being locked, and the constant changes between rules, expectations, and new youth coming and going. Those circumstances were not an uncommon reality for the participants who lived in group homes, but what was interesting was what this particular participant went on to say. She noted that, “it’s hard to explain, it’s hard to feel space and grounded and feel at home when there’s so much change around you”. She expanded, unprompted, by discussing how it was for her in the community:

> Um, and in a group home, the homes are *our last resort* and in society, um, society makes it well known so, um, when living in, living in a group homes you’re treated as

> such in a community as well. When you live in a group home and you want to go to school, you're categorized, you have to go to alternate schools. You're deemed as a troubled kid. You know, um, it's hard to (pause) for to feel normal like a home or… it's hard to explain. (emphasis added, Participant 06, personal communication, September 13, 2018).

This participant was aware of, and made a connection to, identity and self-esteem with displacement – specifically, being in a space that does not allow you to connect and is not seen as or felt like home carries over into the world around us. Displaced people are viewed differently, albeit unfair and harmful, and treated as individuals to be avoided. Ironically, this only reinforces feelings of disconnectedness as a result. Again, as Tuan (1977) points out, a "sense of place captures the deeply experiential process between person and setting; a personal and collective orientation to place (not always positive) that connects to identity and well-being" (as quoted in Kemp, p.119).

Conclusion

Associated with displacement, the act and process of moving around a lot in childhood before coming into care alongside reported moves while in care as well, was mentioned by all participants. One individual's experience of multiple transitory spaces through her entire childhood made displacement commonplace and even familiar; "We were used to being taken out, taken out [sic] of our parent's care and then put into a different person's care and then back and forth" (Participant 05, personal communication, August 30, 2018). Her story is not unusual when it comes to experiences of children in care of the Ministry, lending weight to the theory of what Casey (2001) calls the place-world – where people and places are influenced and transformed in a reciprocal relationship. Like any

meaningful and beneficial relationship, both the person and the place must co-exist and thrive in the place-world, growing and changing together; a process which takes time. As Tuan (1975) supports, “To know a place well requires long residence and deep involvement” (p. 164).

Foregoing that process and missing out on the importance of that relationship profoundly impacts an individual’s ability to connect to the attachments they establish, or attempt to establish, as they transition to adulthood and make their own places. As participants moved through various placements, they reported feeling, at best, like the spaces they stayed in weren’t “home-like” and, at worst, completely disconnected from not only the people (staff, foster parents), but from the place itself. Most participants left (without permission) these placements, seeking the support and connection that they experienced, even in some small way, in their childhood places while distancing themselves from the discomfort, awkwardness, and confusion of living in a home they did not choose. So, for some, they chose to stay in unsafe spaces, but ones in which they felt supported; “there was always somebody available if I needed somebody… I knew they couldn’t turn me away” (Participant 06, personal communication, September 13, 2018). For participants who moved through many placements, the effects of those displacements had an understandable impact on their identity. They struggled with developing a stable connection in an environment that they could call home and one in which they would ascribe meaning. As referenced earlier, this is realized in Erikson’s work on identity development; a “dynamic process that balances rootedness and uprootedness” (as quoted in Manzo, 2003, p. 52) continuing as the young person grows into adulthood. Any attempt at self-development or improvement is shaped by

memories and experiences in place, both past and present, cementing themselves in the body and becoming formative in how participants tell the stories of their lives.

As the participants moved forward and created new experiences and associated memories in places *they* chose, the places they have attached to become changed and transformed by their involvement within them. By the very nature of this relational integration, participants may slowly (and have in some cases) re-establish the place attachment experienced during childhood and begin to strengthen the concept of what "lived in" signifies, creating the home all of us desire and deserve.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In my work as a MCFD social worker, I have seen many instances and examples of the effects of displacement among young people who were removed from their childhood homes, taken away from their communities, and placed in Ministry care. The long-term consequences of this disconnection and loss of attachment coupled with an overall feeling of placelessness can be detrimental to a young person's sense of identity and their ability to give meaning to the places in which they live. Fullilove (2004) discusses the effects of this on a personal level; "displacement undermines trust, increases anxiety about letting loved ones out of one's sight, destabilizes relationships, destroys social, emotional, and financial resources, and increases the risk for every kind of stress-related disease, from depression to heart attack" (p. 14). In my fifteen years as a social worker, I have witnessed many of these effects and how they impact youth living in care, as well as how they affect youth who transition out of care and into adulthood. These circumstances are not uncommon, and neither is the fact that most social workers understand the complexities of them and struggle with ways in which to make things better for youth in care. In my conversations with other social workers it is generally accepted that children and youth will continue to struggle with disconnection and displacement throughout their time living in multiple Ministry placements and leave care with overarching feelings of depression, anxiety, confusion and, on a deeper level, a skewed sense of identity and self-worth.

For Ministry social workers involved with young people who exhibit these feelings and associated behaviours (aggression, self-harm, substance abuse, defiance, etc.), there are few avenues of support available. Counselling services and specific treatment options are available through community referrals but are limited in their efficacy due to their

compulsory and reactive nature as a typical Ministry 'fix-all'. For most young people struggling with the above-mentioned feelings and behaviours, they are not in a space to want to deal with their issues; getting young people to engage with services and cooperate with service providers is challenging to say the least. For Ministry social workers, as is the case in my own practice, case management and planning is a rote and reflexive exercise, one that is concerned with the symptomology and "fixing" undesirable behaviours and actions rather than dealing with the root cause of those indicators and addressing the real problem for children and youth who come into care. "When it comes to case planning, however, this information ['dirty houses'] is more likely to serve as a proxy for inadequacies in parental attitudes and behaviors than as a prompt for meaningful attention to environmental and structural factors" (Kemp, 2009, p. 116). The same holds true for young people in care – the focus of our attention as social workers becomes what we can see and the immediate presentation of personal inadequacies. Those difficulties in these young people's lives come from childhood experiences, often as a result of abuse, neglect, abandonment, and the consequent lack of healthy development. These circumstances are, at least in part, connected to and through place attachment and identity. As was reported by participants, they struggled in finding a meaningful connection to caregivers and being comfortable and feeling safe in the places they had to live. As such, they communicated stories of feeling anxious, lonely, and depressed and having no connection to a home environment in which to call their own, take pride in, and develop meaningful relationships with supportive individuals. All of these very important developments take place in places which hold meaning for individuals and help them identify who they are as well as give them a sense of courage and growing self-esteem as they go from their places into the world around them. The social and emotional

development and well-being of children is very important, both to social workers and to society in general. But *where* that development happens is equally as important. Places are linked, undoubtedly, to human experience, but people and places do not simply interact (which assumes separateness), but "person and environment interpenetrate" (Kemp, 2009, p. 117), reasoning that the two are inseparable and must be given equal value when both understanding the complex issues for children in care and how we, as social workers, help them develop healthy attachments to place and home.

Recommendations

For social work, the environment and the individual have largely been separated from each other when it comes to the practice of investigations, assessments, and the expectations placed on people by Ministry policy. The person, whether it be an adult/parent or young person, often becomes the focus of intervention, the issues and risks resting solely on the individual with expectations that change must come from an adjustment of behaviours and a willingness to do things differently. Problems are viewed as internal and, if anything, caused by interactions with other individuals with similar internal deficits. Recognition of the environment, including everything from the community, the land, the home, and favourite places, is seldom taken into account as a possible consideration for social work practice (assessment and intervention). Its place within assessment is relegated simply to serve, as noted by Kemp (2009), as a "proxy for inadequacies" (p. 116) – poverty-stricken locations or low-income neighborhoods within a community (or the entire community itself) are often seen as uncontrollable, dangerous and the seat of criminal activity. These inadequacies are often attached to all residents who live there – it is only in this way that the environment becomes a part of practice considerations for social work. But we know that places have a

much more important role in our lives and our personal environment is inextricably enmeshed in who we are as individuals and how relate to one another. How, then, can social work education and policy implement person-as-place considerations into practice in order to not only serve people more effectively, but honour the land (places) in which our narratives (Minami, 2009) are written and shared?

Education.

As mentioned previously, social work practice is, at best, inattentive to the role the environment plays in the lives of individuals save for character formulation or behaviour indication. It is, and has been, largely concerned with the psychosocial and emotional issues facing 'clients' and interested primarily in assisting those clients in the betterment of themselves through counselling, treatment, and therapy options. The same could be said for social work education. College and university level courses centre mainly on group processes, counseling techniques, human behaviour, ethics, and other person-centred learning. In my own learning, it was not until I began taking Masters-level coursework that I discovered place-based theories and the importance of the environment in social service work. During my four years of education in obtaining my Bachelor's Degree, I did not have the opportunity to explore place attachment, meaning, and how it relates to identity. I have worked for over fifteen years at the Ministry and am just now, as a result of my current educational pursuits, seeing the work I do through a different lens. Consequently, social work education needs to consider how the importance of place impacts the many varied and diverse individuals that students will be eventually working with after they finish their studies and begin work in the field. An achievable and respectful start to incorporating place-attachment principles into social work education begins with revitalizing those concepts

already held by the Indigenous peoples who have been practicing person-place oneness before Western, Eurocentric culture (read: colonization and genocide) took up space and competition against traditional values. Although most of us would agree that the environment needs to be protected, the land and its place in our society, when viewed in that Western, Eurocentric context, is something to be saved for its continued ownership and use (the word protection infers a certain amount of paternalism), whereas in Indigenous cultures the environment (the land) is 'person' – to be saved and cherished and to live in communion with, as one would another human being. Social work as taught through the Western lens of education, views the environment as separate from who we are; "It is little wonder that the treatment of spirituality in the social work literature has been limited to a narrow person-centred perspective" (Zapf, 2005, p. 636). If social work educators wish to bring to the forefront of our learning the personal and spiritual connection of person and environment, then we need not look further than Indigenous culture and traditional knowledge.

We are seeing the start of a change to something more resonant and inclusive of Indigenous wisdom, however. Social work studies at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) has expanded its educational contributions by offering Indigenous courses and an Undergraduate Degree with a First Nations Specialization. Two First Nations-specific courses are included in the coursework, as well as the course Northern and Remote Social Work Practice (UNBC, 2018). In honouring the foundations of place theory, social work education should include aspects of interdisciplinary knowledge, lending from geography and environmental psychology to include teachings from different, though overlapping, perspectives on the importance of place. By understanding how other professions view and incorporate place theory, social work education will not only be more

comprehensive in its knowledge of place and the environment, but also less focused on person-centred ideology and more emphasis placed on person-environment theories of being. For example, Hung and Stables' (2011) geo-phenomenological approach combines phenomenology and geography in an experiential theory of subject-environment interrelation. Expanding and enhancing the knowledge base of social work education will only serve to better equip future practitioners as they work collaboratively with other professional disciplines and with the benefit of multiple perspectives on what it means to exist in place.

These requirements should be mandatory for all future social service professionals, including those who take Certificate-level education. For place meaning to have any real significance in social work practice, *all* helping professionals in the field must understand what place is and how it is interwoven in the identity of the people being served. That undertaking begins with learning to see 'place' as Indigenous people see it - more than just a physical location or property, but where experiences and memories help shape identity and attachment to the land. A substantial amount of knowledge is to be gained from listening to stories and accounts of people's experiences in places and the results of my research support this - qualitative research is invaluable in that it shows us the importance of personal narratives and experiential points of view. In structuring course requirements, having Indigenous elders and community members speak to the importance of place in classrooms is critical to teaching environment-centred concepts. For many Indigenous children in care, their connection to place understanding has been severed and those key ideologies rest with elders and community members. Having those knowledgeable individuals teach social work students about the spiritual connection to land and place helps them learn how to work

competently in communities and at the same time, gives students knowledge on the complexities of placelessness and how to begin grasping the realities of displaced young people who come into care.

Additionally, community planning must be a requirement in social work coursework, because our thoughts and beliefs about the community in and around us govern our opinions about the people who live there as well – being exposed to places within the community that 'clientele' live in helps dispel preconceived ideas about environmental factors as an earmark of personal inadequacies (Kemp, 2009). Regular and consistent learning *in* the community, through field trips and local presentations, allows budding social workers the opportunity to challenge their own biases and assumptions *before* they start working in the field, as well as witness the strengths and challenges that face people living in those communities. Brown, Perkins, and Brown (2003) studied the impact of these challenges in relation to revitalization efforts:

> More specifically, in cases where neighbors are anonymous and do not stay long enough to develop any emotional connection to the place, they tend not be committed enough to improve their own home, or to work with their neighbors and local agencies to improve the whole neighborhood. (Manzo & Perkins, 2006, p. 336-337)

Herein lies a direct link between displacement and the ability to form bonds with and within the community. Young people who suffer multiple moves while in care are at a greater risk of not being able to develop an emotional connection to place. If we are to help individuals live in community and return children to live with their families in that community, we must focus on community development, enhancing place meaning and allowing individuals to attach holistically. In that way, the profession's assumptions of how individuals change in

healthy ways changes itself, moving away from person-centred interventions towards understanding person-place connections and relations. The environment, then, is seen as a place for reinvigoration or change, rather than simply a tick-box on an antiquated assessment. Understanding place attachment will help social work education and workers alike move from addressing symptoms of displacement to helping people form lasting, meaningful relationships with the community in which the live and flourish. Place must be examined, discussed, and honoured in our educational endeavors if we are to build strong, lasting communities of healthy individuals.

Policy and practice.

Although secondary to keeping children out of care and in healthy families and communities, addressing the effects of displacement and disconnection is a necessary stop-gap in our current child welfare model and political positioning. In order to move away from this reactive practice and into a more proactive way of thinking and structuring practice guidelines, social work policy must, maybe for the first time, acknowledge the importance of place as an equal partner to the individual and one that plays an equally important role in ensuring people develop and maintain healthy lives. Simply speaking, the social work profession needs to "translate emerging knowledge on the mechanisms and effects of person-environment transactions into practice theories and models" (Kemp, 2009, p. 117). Being that we do not have a working model of place attachment, anything that speaks to the emergence of place as integral in people's lives is an accommodating start. The work of informing social work policy has, in the opinion of many researchers, been done informally and continues to be re-communicated as studies substantiate the importance of place. It seems the social work

policy, however, has remained unchanged in its preoccupation with the individual and person-centred approaches to helping.

On a macro level, social work policy would be wise to examine the ways in which space is created in society, being that our connection to our communities is inherently political. Castells (1983) calls this "the 'production of space' or the ways in which the appearance, meanings, and uses of place are influenced by the larger sociopolitical context in which they exist" (as quoted in Manzo & Perkins, 2006, p. 339-340). Planning processes begin at the policy level – the sociopolitical milieu in which communities exist is as important as the social *work* done in those communities. And although the work is predicated in policy, it is undertaken by social workers through a very personal lens. At times, those two factors may be at odds, causing various levels of internal struggle. A solution to this incongruence is active participation by social workers in policy direction, beginning with an increase in personal political efficacy. Postulating Bandura's social learning theory, social work efficacy can be increased through learning and education; "people process, weight, and integrate diverse sources of information concerning their capabilities, and they regulate their choice behavior and effort expenditure accordingly" (Bandura, Adams, Hardy & Howells, 1980, p. 62). Understanding how policy is decided, the processes in which policy is created, and the factors that influence those determinations are all critical pieces for social work practice; social workers, therefore, need to be involved in local policy formation through instruction and training. Being separated from the policies that govern the work creates a distance from the creation of a sincere ownership of practice and the ability for it to be profound. Active and intimate involvement in not only practice, but policy that recognizes the ability and strengths of social workers in the sociopolitical context of the profession helps

not only the community and the people that social workers are involved with, but also helps strengthen the concept of place attachment and meaning within dominant social work discourse. Social workers, likewise, need to think in complex ways about the deep interconnections between "the way that experience is lived and acted out in place and how this relates to, and is embedded in, political and economic practices that are operative over broader spatial scales" (Merrifield, 1993, p. 517).

As far as the necessity for practice paradigms and models that deal with place meaning and attachment is concerned, the concept of *place* has an integral role in the social phenomena that social work practitioners deal with daily; the "processes of inclusion and exclusion, privilege and inequality, dominance and oppression, subjugation and collective action take place not in but *through* place" (emphasis in original, Kemp, 2009, p. 123). Every issue that social work actively addresses happens somewhere; it is, as Gieryn (2000) calls it,

> emplaced, as being constituted in part through location, material form, and their imaginings… place stands in a recursive relation to other social and cultural entities: places are made through human practices and institutions even as they help to make those practices and institutions (p. 467)

How, then, can social work not have some conception of place as a practice model? Social work practice must begin with, at the very least, a consideration of how stereotypes of certain people are reinforced in our collective perception of the places in which those people live. Often racialized, oppressed and segregated, those individuals become 'clients' and their homes and communities viewed through a reductionist and often judgemental lens. If we are to work with people who have internalized these stereotypes "that conflate negative ideas about places and ideas about people (Kemp, 2009, p. 124), we must first challenge those out-

dated conventions by exploring the nuances of places, uncovering the strengths and beauty of place meaning, and being genuinely curious how people have attached to the places in which they live. Place needs to be celebrated. The connection of people to all the places they exist within is rich and complex and our practice needs to be as genuine as people's experiences. Only then can we, as practitioners, understand how to help people where they are; supporting parents in *their* places, instead of removing their children and disconnecting them from the attachments they have made. Displacements further reinforce the idea (internalized stereotype), by government institutions, that not only are parents inadequate, but the places in which they occupy are just as inadequate. Models of 'place practice' need to incorporate this learning and work towards changing the processes that keep those negative courses of professional-client interactions fixed and entrenched. Place practice must equip practitioners to teach what place attachment is, from our experiences in childhood (for example, Morgan's [2010] model of exploration-assertion and attachment-affiliation motivation systems) to our multifaceted connections to our homes, communities and the places beyond. In doing so, social workers not only support place attachment and its understanding for people, but also "make visible 'different geographic stories'" (Kemp, 2009, p. 125) that challenge the aforementioned stereotypes and offer opportunity to turn places of historic inequity to sites of agency, resistance and power. Place practice does not work unless the engagement (for relationship building and intervention) and investment is genuine, deep, and transformative. Kemp (2009) adds that practice should be "grounded in local knowledge" (p. 126), a strategy that I would propose can be realized through in-community learning and education. Having an authentic interest in the neighbourhoods in which they work is crucial for social workers, not as an approach to interventionist, but from a real desire to spend time in the places that

have meaning to the people there. Being curious, asking questions, and uncovering truths about place attachments can be a very proactive exercise in identifying adequacy, access, and availability of local resources and their influence in the structural factors that shape family experiences and outcomes.

Gathering local knowledge within neighbourhoods would benefit from the spatial mapping of the realities of 'person and place' and how that relationship looks visibly in a typical day. When seen as a multidimensional network of movement between jobs, meetings, classes, visitations, and recreation, place takes on a more comprehensive significance as individual spatial experiences are viewed, quite literally, in the context of larger, influential spatial patterns (Kemp, 2009). A place practice model should have, at its core, a commitment to place exploration and a focus on how systems and institutions affect the spatial experiences of clientele. As genograms are used to map out family relationships and information, spatial mapping could be used to deepen an understanding of clients' lives, visually detailing an experiential picture of daily life for families, including celebrations and accomplishments as well as struggles and challenges. It can be useful for identifying ideal locations for foster homes and Ministry placements – balancing the need for familial connections and the requirement of service accessibility and attendance. A parenting program, for example, that is across town and in a space not familiar or comfortable for the client accessing the service only serves to further demoralize and frustrate parents.

Perceptions of places, neighborhoods and communities are important to recognize, comprehend, and dissect – not only for social workers and other practitioners, but for the people affected by those perception. Internal, negative conflations about the places in which people live often find their way into the sub-conscious, adding yet another dimension to how

place is viewed and, regrettably, where place identity becomes skewed. This is especially true for people living in poor, "lower-class" (although this is a hierarchical and meritocratic term grounded in Eurocentric ideology) neighborhoods who have been displaced themselves; particularly for Indigenous peoples either on reserve or in urban centres. Social work theory and policy, although philosophically anti-racist and anti-oppressive, only reinforce these internalized beliefs for individuals through institutionalized practices. A model of place practice must then start with a re-commitment to examine racism and oppression through a place-based position which should then, logically following, inform practice methods. I have spoken about the importance of social work practitioners identifying elders, long-term residents, and individuals in communities who are passionate about their neighborhoods and their collective involvement therein. Nonetheless, oppression and racism exist deeply inside people who have been affected by colonialization. Contextually, race has been given what Delaney (1998) calls "spatial expression" in the places that oppressed people live – 'race' is socio-politically complex and "is what it is and does what it does precisely because of how it is given spatial expression" (p. 18). Informed and mindful place practice addresses these issue "on the ground", doing most of their work/practice within the communities that clientele live. Residents should be supported in addressing these historical issues, under the umbrella of communicating place specifics to practitioners – knowledge informs practice and respectful practice comes from active listening and understanding. Interpretation of this 'data' can be used to assist the community in building skills and capacity for its members. The identities and behaviours of people are tied to their perception and understanding of their relationship to place. Strength and capacity building *in* place help build self-esteem and positive place identity and meaning.

It matters a great deal how social workers connect with Indigenous groups and how they view place and the land. It is not enough to simply work with Indigenous people (although that is certainly an important foundation), checking off requirements and policy directives as we move through a linear and largely distant and indifferent relationship with the people whose children we are caring for. Holism cannot be just a term, but a way of "doing and being" (Heft, 2003, p. 151), both in our education, our social work practice and, in being ingenuous and congruent with the concepts of place meaning, in our personal lives. We, as practitioners, are place as well and must confront the reality that our experiences with place have a profound influence on how we view place in others' lives. Beginning to understand the weight of place importance is a crucial step in doing the respectful and meaningful work we are tasked with. Let us not temper the truth when dealing with something as intimate and scared as our connection to how we became who we are in the places that nurture our identity.

Further research.

Research involving place (be it attachment, identity, meaning, etc.) is substantial, with various authors like Kemp and Zapf pointing towards a more inclusive relationship between place theory and social work theory and practice. As I mentioned above, a need for a model of, or at least a strong consideration for, place practice would be extremely beneficial to understanding people's experiences in and with place. Without a deep understanding of how spaces and places influence identity and meaning, social work overlooks the crucial and complex component of self and its dynamic role in the environment. When we neglect the sophistications of place's interconnectedness, interrelatedness (Hung & Stables, 2011), and interpenetrativeness (Kemp, 2009) with the environment we fall short of profound, holistic

practice. Research that examines placelessness and the effects of displacement, specifically within the context of structural social work (children coming into care, for example), is necessary if we are to deconstruct (and discard) person-centred approaches to 'helping' and acknowledge person-environment knowledge, wisdom and understanding. Further research conducted within the domain of social work education as opposed to the mainly external evaluations done by and through other academic disciplines (geography, for one) is essential for the social work profession to move forward collaboratively with Indigenous peoples and those who live more connectedly with the land and the environment.

Specifically, much could be learned from research on rural and remote practice, where practitioners are immersed in place, living and working in the same environments (neighborhoods and communities) that their clients live and work in. Their practice stresses place inclusivity and spatial factors and experiences are fundamental for both professional and client. Rural and remote social work respects local knowledge and understanding, leaning on place narratives and the validity of people's experiences in the environment. Social workers become, naturally, more attuned to the land around them and, "as people share the geographies of their everyday lives, some of the inevitable distance (social and spatial) between clients and workers is bridged" (Kemp, 2009, p. 131). Rural and remote social workers have moved (and continually move) deeper towards a praxis of place, relying heavily on the "phenomenological perspectives on place and space" which capture the lived experiences of people through "place, space, and time" (Kelly, 2003, p. 2281). Problems or issues described statically and assessed in a person-centred interventionist approach fail to see and appreciate the dynamic aspects of place and movement through the complexities of service-based involvement. By its very nature, rural and remote social work practice exists

within the realms of space and place and the journeys between them. “Such journeys, like identities, involve new configurations of place, self, other, and power that are negotiated in complex and emergent ways” (Kelly, 2003, p. 2281). Exploring more intensely those “configurations” and how they are negotiated in the lives of children and families would not only support rural and remote insightfulness, but also challenge conventional, urban-based social work theory and practice. Research that motivates and compels conservative social work to adopt more place-based understanding is vital, especially since it deals with the displacement of children from community and childhood places. Any model or practice consideration on place importance, therefore, must include a rural and remote perspective or, ideally, have at its foundation a reverent and inceptive body of knowledge and understanding of rural and remote life to use as an example for social work paradigms. The concept of place is understood and valued by the people who work in cooperation with the environment, and by those who have celebrated place-self complexities in their lives for generations.

As suggested by the results of my research, further exploration that explains more completely the effects of displacement on the development of identity is required to fully understand place attachment and the degrees to which place (and lack of place) informs how we work with individuals affected by the transitional disconnections of being in care. What causes individuals to return to their childhood places and others not to? What indicators exist, if any, that may point to how individuals affected by displacement re-connect with places? How is identity formed in place and what factors influence that formation? Do multiple moves before coming into care affect how young people connect to people and places while in care? Do those moves affect, and in what ways, moves (whether initiated by social workers or the young people themselves) made while in care? These are just some of the

questions and considerations for future research on place attachment, identity, and meaning as they relate to social work policy and practice. In conjunction with this information, research that then examines a more concrete form of practice model is essential. As I mentioned earlier, place practice models are essential to respectful and holistic social work; any substantial model, therefore, must have at its core the central theories of place models that already exist. Models of place importance suggested by Casey (2001), Gustafson (2001), Morgan (2010), Raymond (2010), Scannell and Gifford (2010), and others (Kemp [2009] and Zapf [2009] speak to that importance) need to be incorporated into any social work model of place practice. How might social work assessments and intervention look if we begin to acknowledge the importance of childhood exploration within the environment and how that requires a strong attachment figure with which to connect? How might social work begin to emphasize the significant and consequences of childhood identity affirmation in that environment-caregiver cycle? We will never know until we open our minds to the information already recognized and accepted by multidisciplinary academic fields and begin to incorporate that ideology into the very heart of what it means to simultaneously *do* and *be* social work.

Chapter Six: Conclusion or Making Place

When we begin to look critically at the practice of social work in its relation to place engagement, we require a rational and unbiased approach to the evaluation of current practices and a consequent willingness to change. For government institutions and bodies, this may be a challenge, as bureaucratic ways of operation are more preoccupied with procedural concerns and conventional ways of doing things, rather than progressive and innovative ways of looking at the work. For example, the Ministry of Children and Family Development is currently in the process of re-engagement with Indigenous groups (and seem to perpetually cycle through various ways of doing this), albeit from a different conceptual perspective, driven largely from a reactive position and as the result of what may seem like poor or ineffectual practice. As governments change, so does the political discourse and all subsequent conversations and relationships with Indigenous groups. Real and meaningful change, however, cannot happen unless we:

> more closely examine the underlying, predicate question of what 'place' is, as the basis for more deeply considering the potential in place as a site where social work can in practice (as well as in theory) bring person and environment together. (Kemp, 2009, p. 115)

The implication that the information gathered from research participants will be used to improve practice with displaced youth in care is dependent on who will be utilizing the data and in what way agency policy allows that usage. As Flick (2017) states, in order for change to come about that honour place experiences, a critical, qualitative approach is necessary. By talking to individuals about their experiences and reporting those personal narratives, we have taken that qualitative approach – the logical next step is to make changes to practice so

that we honour place meaning in people's lives. Although subjectively, participants reported feelings of disconnection, confusion, and loss, they also found it difficult to explain their feelings around displacement, noting that various spaces they lived in while in care just didn't feel like home. It is equally as difficult to figure out and solve the problems surrounding displacement and placelessness when the individuals affected are not able to wholly explain what they need or want. Although it may be an anomaly when viewed through orthodox means and traditional forms of assessment and intervention, place is a fundamental and transformative part of who we are as people, one so uniquely rooted in our consciousness that we may not be able to completely explain the influential effects of place in our lives. This is the paradox of place. Systems require that everything be categorized, labeled, and referenced, while place is, at its core, a collection of intimate experiences that defy any straightforward definition. As research participates pointed out, most poignantly, home is a feeling. This point is not meant to stifle an active description or explanation of place. On the contrary, it is made to point out the richness and unique fullness of individualized place meaning.

Irrespective of those present challenges, it is imperative we include place in social work practice. Based on the research findings, and strongly supported by prior studies, there is a direct and conclusive correlation between the participants' initial childhood displacement (children being removed and placed in care) and their repeated transitions of forced relocation while in care. It is my sincere aspiration that now that my research is complete, my interviews conducted, my data analyzed, and themes emerged, that the information I am left with will be able to be incorporated into not only further research proposals, but to social work practice within MCFD. Place attachment and its importance to the development of

identity and security is a critical presupposition within my research. "People do form bonds with place and, in this sense, territory is vitally important to people and may serve as an integral component of self-identity" (Storey, 2001, p. 17). After engaging with the participants in this study, I am now able to share their stories through the research findings, since storytelling can be a therapeutic and non-conventional way to make your voice heard. Their stories are important and can help serve other youth in the future. "The 'story that each subject wants to tell' is never simply a straightforward given but is something produced (and indeed co-constructed) in particular circumstances to particular ends" (Kennelly, 2017, p. 9). These are the co-constructed stories I am sharing with social work practitioners and social work practice in general. With the research interviews completed, I have reached out to each participant and let them know that the study is complete and that a copy of the completed document is available to them – each participant is able to receive a copy of the results in the medium desired (electronic or hard copy). Further, I plan on holding a community forum in a culturally appropriate and supportive setting where I will share the results of this research with the participants and the community. The sharing of information with the community helps motivate change in individuals on a collective level:

> affective bonds to places can help inspire action because people are motivated to seek, stay in, protect, and improve places that are meaningful to them. Consequently, place attachment, place identity, and sense of community can provide a greater understanding how neighborhood spaces can motivate ordinary residents to act collectively to preserve, protect, or improve their community and participate in local planning processes. (Manzo & Perkins, 2006, p. 347)

The advantages to this type of research is that it not only can be used to inform social work practice, but also help guide scholarly and professional direction in community development. Place-inspired individuals, be they practitioners or individuals both benefiting from the knowledge of place research, are a benefit to their neighborhoods and communities; a component of practice, for example, may help or assist both neighborhood residents and future clients with identity and meaning as places are explored and displacement analyzed and examined. Impressions of place lie dormant in the body, "ready to be revived when the appropriate impressions or sensation arises" (Casey, 2001, p. 688). Unearthing the strengths of place experience with communities helps others find their 'place' and build upon individual and communal senses of place meaning.

As a result of my findings, and similar and supportive findings from other areas of research, my hope is that MCFD policy and resulting practice will be amended to reflect the critical importance of place attachment in the lives of children who come into, and are already in, the care of MCFD. Personal interview answers elicited as a result of this research offer a window into not just how social workers may better understand place attachment and meaning for clients, but also for people in general. Why clients leave group homes and foster placements and seek healthier and more stable relationships in 'place' is not a concept specific to those in Ministry care – it is the yearning of displaced refugees, people whose communities have been gentrified, and those who have been affected by natural disasters. Connection to place is a universal imperative, an interrelatedness so visceral and instinctive that people will go to any length to be *in place*, searching for that sense of home and deep rootedness that makes them feel safe, comfortable, and acknowledged by their experiences and relationships there. We need to embrace the assumption that people care about their

places deeply, that they are competent and able to accomplish place-making on their own, and that people and place are one, wrapped together and enmeshed as the whole of human experience. All of us are place holders, and we are all held by our places.

> To remain a place it has to be lived in. This is a platitude unless we examine what 'lived in' means. To live in a place is to experience it, to be aware of it in the bones as well as with the head. Place, at all scales from the armchair to the nation, is a construct of experience; it is sustained not only by timber, concrete, and highways, but also by the quality of human awareness. (Tuan, 1975, p. 165)

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Appendix A: Information Letter / Consent Form

Place and Displacement: Perspectives of Youth on Place Identity

1. **Who is conducting the research?**

Student Researcher: Flint Keil, Master of Social Work Student, School of Social Work, University of Northern British Columbia, keilf@unbc.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Joanna Pierce, Associate Professor, School of Social Work, University of Northern British Columbia, joanna.pierce@unbc.ca; 250-960-6521.

This research is being conducted as part of the requirements for a Masters in Social Work degree. The research will be a public document.

2. **Why are you being asked to take part in this research?**

- You are being invited to take part in this research because you have been a child in care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development in British Columbia.
- This research seeks to learn more about the impact on youth in care who have been moved from their homes and community.
- This research will help us to learn about how to better assist youth who come into care by understanding their connection to the physical places they grew up in.
- Participation in this research is voluntary; participants can refuse to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Any information provided up to that point will be removed and securely destroyed.

3. **What will you be expected to do?**

- Participation will involve a 1-2 hour interview.

- I will ask you about your experiences of being in care and what the process of being removed from your home was like for you.

4. **Is there any way that participation in this research could harm you?**

- Risks may include emotional or psychological difficulties.
- If, at any point in the research, you feel uncomfortable or upset and wish to end your participation, please notify the researcher immediately and your wishes will be respected. If you decide not to continue, any information collected up to that point would not be included in the research and will be destroyed immediately.
- You may disclose as little or as much as you wish about your experiences in the residences while you lived in care and the differences between them and your childhood home.
- The following list provides contact information for available support services:
    - **Brazzoni & Associates:** 301-1705 3rd Avenue, Prince George, 250.614.2261. This service is free to Indigenous people living in the area.
    - **Healing Centre – Native Friendship Centre:** 1600 3rd Avenue, Prince George, 250.564.4324. This service is free.
    - **Health and Wellness Counseling Program – Carrier Sekani Family Services:** 987 4th Avenue, Prince George, 250.692.2387. This service is free.
    - **Community Care Centre:** 1310 3rd Avenue, Prince George, 250.562.6690. This service is free.
    - **Northern BC 24 Hour Crisis Line:** 250.562.1214 (or toll-free at 1.888.562.1214 if outside Prince George). This service is free and operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There is an online chat function available through their Crisis Chat @ www.northernyouthonline.ca.

5. **What are the benefits of participating?**

- Your participation in this research will provide an opportunity for you to share your experience as a previous youth in care. Additionally, social workers and other helpers will benefit from what we learn from this research, allowing them to assist other youth in care in better ways.

6. **How will your privacy be maintained?**

- The interview will be audio recorded.
- Although anonymity cannot be guaranteed, your anonymity will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your

consent, unless required by law. Pseudonyms will be used in the final thesis and we will decide together on a name that will be used.

- Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed research.
- Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to these recordings.
- Recordings will be stored in a locked filing cabinet.
- These recordings will only be used for the purposes of this research.
- Research participants may request a copy of their transcribed interviews. Hard copies will be delivered to the participant personally. If requested by the participant, an electronic copy can be sent using secure data delivery (document password protected). Each participant will be asked if they are comfortable having the information in their possession as other people around them may have access to it (a physical copy of the information could be handled and read by other people around
- The participant and an electronic copy could be read if other people have access to the same computer, etc.). This will be done to maintain the participants privacy as desired.
- If requested, participants may have a follow-up interview to discuss the participant's review of the transcript and/or debrief the information. The follow-up interview will be held at UNBC unless the participant suggests otherwise and would feel more comfortable at an alternate location. Confidentiality and privacy will be maintained to protect the data being discussed.
- Five years following the completion of this research, the recordings will be destroyed. Any paper documents will be shredded and all digital files deleted.

7. Will you be paid for taking part in this research?

- You will be offered a $25.00 honorarium in appreciation for your participation in this research, which will be self-funded by the researcher.

8. Research Results

- The results of this research will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. A public presentation of the results will be scheduled upon completion of the final thesis.

9. Who can you contact if you have questions about this research?

- If you have any questions about your participation, please contact the student researcher or student supervisor. The names and contact information are listed at the top of the first page of this consent letter.

10. Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the research?

- If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this research, please contact the University of Northern British Columbia Office of Research at 250-960-6735 or by email at reb@unbc.ca

Consent

Taking part in this research is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate if desired. If you decide to take part, you may choose to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

I have read or been described the information presented in the information letter about the project:

YES NO

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this project and to receive additional details as requested:

YES NO

I agree to a follow-up interview in order to verify that the information I have given in the initial interview is correct and has been transcribed accurately as to reflect my intention. I understand that I may also choose not to participate in this second interview at any time during the process.

YES NO

I understand that if I agree to participate in this project, I may withdraw from the project at any time up until the report completion, with no consequences of any kind. I have been given a copy of this form:

YES NO

I agree to be recorded:

YES NO

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this research.

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date (Day/Month/Year)

_____

Printed Name of Participant

Appendix B: Research Questions

1. Can you tell me about your experience of coming into care? How old were you?
2. What do you wish could have been different about that experience?
3. Prior to coming into care, what was your home life like? What did you like about your house?
4. Tell me what you liked about your childhood places. Where did you live? What did you like about where you lived?
5. What do you miss about your home or home community? Describe the place you lived in before you came into care?
6. How many homes did you live in while you were in care? Tell me about those spaces.
7. What made you leave the resource/home you were in while in care (any one of the placements will do)? What were you thinking when you decided to leave? What influenced your decision?
8. When you stayed at any other residence (other than your approved one), what did you like about it? Was there anything you didn't like? Did those things prompt you to leave? If not, why did you stay or keep coming back?
9. Tell me about how living in care has influenced your experiences with places – how would you define connection to 'place'?
10. What does home look like for you now?

Appendix C: Recruitment Poster

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WANTED

Perspectives of Youth on Place Identity

I am looking for young adults aged 19 to 24 who were in care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development for at least one year and whose legal status must have been a Temporary Custody Order (TCO), a Continuing Custody Order (CCO), or under a Voluntary Care Agreement (VCA). I am looking for young adults who were removed from rural and remote communities smaller than Prince George. The young adult must have lived in a foster home or group home setting and was AWOL from their approved resource. I will be interviewing potential participants about the homes they resided in and the spaces they stayed at during various periods during their time in care.

If you are interested, please contact me at 250.649-8554 to set up a meeting to discuss potential involvement. This Request for Research Participants is good for one month following the date stamp of this poster.

This research is being conducted through the University of Northern British Columbia and in accordance with the standards and regulations of the Research Ethics Board.

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