Caring for place? Possibilities for a *compassionate sense of place* among environmentalists

(from *Developing a Compassionate Sense of Place: Environmental and social Conscientization in Environmental Organizations*,
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A place-conscious ethos of care - what I have called "a compassionate sense of place" - was co-explored with people involved in environmental organizations in a specific geographic locale. Data was collected through ethnographic methods and interviews using "living in place" and "caring" as heuristics. Both place and caring are practice-based logics that challenge universalizing tendencies in modern discourse. Environmentalist discourse and practice attempted to extend the discourse of "social" relations beyond social space, that is, to the socio-ecological entirety of "place" (understood here to be socially constructed but distinctly material, the site of the performance of practice and experiences, with porous boundaries and multiply scaled). Caring was conceived as deeply authentic and disposed to action, yet was considered discursively and politically ineffectual. Nevertheless, if caring can be politicized, as recent theorists have argued, a compassionate sense of place could serve as a logic to orient contemporary practice in an ecologically embedded society.

Northwestern Ontario is a sweeping land of rocks, trees, lakes, scattered mines or timber cuts and equally scattered collections of people. Hundreds of kilometres from other urban centres, nestled on a protected bay of sparkling Lake Superior – the largest freshwater lake in the world – sits Thunder Bay's gritty buildings, roads and 110,000 people engaged in resource extraction, transportation between rail and ship, government business, and other activity befitting the central hub of the region. "The city of Thunder Bay is three sides trees (and rock), one side water" said one resident.

Many works of writing in environmental studies begin or are based upon personal recollections and anecdotes about meaningful places, linked with concepts of caring. The basic argument of this literature is that knowing one's place includes understanding what is required for its ecological integrity, and for taking action to maintain that integrity. David Orr, the environmental scholar and educational theorist, also argues the centrality of place attachment, for regionally based economies, and decentralized politics. Orr (1994) says, "I do not know whether it is possible to love the planet or not, but I do know that it is possible to love the places we can see, touch, smell and experience" (p. 146). The environmental answer for Orr "is to rediscover

and reinhabit our places and regions, finding in them sources of food, livelihood, energy, healing, recreation and celebration" (p. 147).

The two concepts – "place" and "caring" – are tightly woven in this approach to environmental awareness. This paper seeks to investigate their meanings and practice among environmentalists in one locality, that of Thunder Bay, Ontario. Elsewhere, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), I have stressed the doxic character of the habitus and how inculcation of ecologically-sound tacit and routinized practices must be part of the move to environmentally appropriate societal structures and lifestyles (Bell, 2004). That theoretical underpinning will be assumed in this paper. Here I explore a place-attentive ethos of care – what has been called a compassionate sense of place (Curthoys & Cuthbertson, 2002; Cuthbertson, 1999; Haluza-DeLay and Cuthbertson, 2000) – inquiring as to whether it can orient contemporary environmental praxis and be a means of facilitating further transformation in existing logics of practice.

Placing the Researcher: Methods in the Field

Thunder Bay's history spans centuries of inhabitation, as a hub of east-west travel at the "head of the lake," where rivers and railroads come from the west to Lake Superior. It was one of the important sites of the fur trade with European settlement, which means that Aboriginal-White relations have been socially, economically, and politically entwined for three centuries. Aboriginal peoples are conspicuously absent from environmental groups – despite being between 7-15% of the local population – although not from government and industrial discussions on land and resource management. Finns, Italians and other ethnic groups have become other significant portions of the otherwise highly British-descended population. The city depends on primary resource extraction for its economic livelihood; the "three sides trees" has considerable impact on its culture (Dunk, 1991, 1994).

The Thunder Bay region presents an interesting field site for a project in environmental awareness. The region has a long resource extraction history, but it is also a large urban centre. A variety of community-based environmental groups operate in the area, such as EcoSuperior and the Thunder Bay Field Naturalists (TBFN). Organizations such as EcoSuperior focus on what

might be considered "lifestyle" issues, while TBFN and others address land management. Other organizations involved in the area include the provincial-scale Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON, of which TBFN is an affiliate although FON also has independent projects in the area), The Wildlands League (the provincial division of the national Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society), and the international World Wildlife Fund and Lake Superior Bi-national Forum. Recent campaigns, such as the Living Legacy, have created new provincial parks and protected areas. Outdoor recreation is a significant industry with numerous hunting and fishing lodges scattered in the region. Snowmobiling is also common, as are cross-country skiing and camping.

Northwestern Ontario is connected through tourism, transportation, government services and resource extraction to global capital flows, but still feels isolated and peripheral to the core in southern Ontario. At the time of this research, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH), and the Northern Ontario Tourism Outfitters (NOTO) had been embroiled in public controversy over the cancellation of the spring bear hunt that was spurred by environmentalists based in southern Ontario, reinforcing the sense of marginality of the North (Dunk, 2002). The issue contributed to the labelling as environmentalists as "from the South." Dunk's previous ethnographic work showed how working class alienation was partly a reaction to perceptions of being peripheral and marginalized by the dominant classes in business and government in southern Ontario (Dunk, 1991).

Since the intent of this research was to examine the *potential* (rather than current actuality) for a compassionate sense of place as a logic of practice for environmental sustainability, this research followed a process of analytic ethnography rather than a process of ethnographic "thick description" (Lofland, 1995). "Analytic ethnography seeks to produce systematic and generic propositions about social processes and organization" (Snow, Morrill, & Anderson, 2003, p. 182).

Fieldwork occurred between May and December 2002, but I had lived in the city of Thunder Bay for nearly three years previously. While there were about 20 non-profit, non-governmental groups that could be labelled environmental organizations, most are small with few meaningful meetings or events. People also came together in ad hoc association over particular matters. During the fieldwork I increased my level of participation with environmental groups by attending public gatherings, as well as private meetings and personal encounters. During this time I

was also involved with other community groups, particularly related to follow-up of a well-publicized study of racism (Haluza-DeLay, 2002, 2003).

Forest issues and water and land management were the most prevalent issues labelled as "environmental" issues during the research time. Some mobilization began around a proposal for a new power station utilizing "pet-coke" (a byproduct of Alberta tar sands oil production, and disallowed as a fuel by Alberta law). There were some groups dealing with "lifestyle" issues of energy conservation, recycling and consumerism. These latter foci tended to be very local in character. On land management issues, especially forestry and protected lands designations, several provincial or national organizations were involved, but with relatively little local involvement other than specific well-recognized individuals.

I went to every publically advertised environmental event or meeting that I could attend during the period from May to December 2002. Field notes were written by hand, during or as soon after events as possible. They were later typed and additional recollections added at later readings. Observations faced constant analysis (Creswell, 1998; Lofland, 1996; Spradley, 1980). Such constant analysis directed further data collection. I initially focused on environmental organizations, attempting to discern the terrain. Environmentalism is a complex mix of community, provincial, national and transnational actors, primarily organizations (Brulle, 2000). It is exceedingly difficult to get a handle on numbers of either organizations, or persons involved with them (Andrews & Edwards, 2005; Kempton, et al., 2001). Furthermore, philosophical orientation and goals of organizations that may be considered environmental differ widely (Brulle, 2000: Kempton, et al., 2001). During the fieldwork, I simply defined an environmental group as one that sought to protect the environment, choosing to attend to a representation of environmental approaches in the region.

Twenty-three interviews with 27 people were conducted in November and December 2002. Arcury and Quandt (1999) described a "site-based procedure" for recruiting participants for qualitative studies. Modifying their procedure I generated a list of organizations that had become visible in the participatory phase of the study. Depending on the apparent diversity of viewpoints in the organization, I identified specific individuals to interview. The 27 people are reasonably representative of the field of environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) in Thunder

Bay. Although I selected the interviewees through their organizational involvements, the individuals were not consistently affiliated over the months of fieldwork. Involvement shifted for a wide variety of reasons.

It is important to note that these were environmentally-active people, not *activists* per se, if activist is meant as someone who seeks to visibly mobilize public opposition. Three of the interview participants would more fairly be described as "social" activists (anti-poverty, food security, housing), but had been involved in an environmental event. The youngest interview participants were in their late 20s; participants otherwise ranged across the ages into their 70s. Professions included doctors, foresters, biologists, a retired teacher, among others. Eight were actually employed – mostly part-time or contract – by environmental organizations. Most were volunteers. Eleven of the 27 were female. All were white. In fact, there were few linkages with Aboriginal organizations. Because there were few Aboriginal persons involved in environmental organizations none are included in this study. Unpacking the concepts and practices in the First Nations cultures of the region would have added a great deal of complexity to the study. Furthermore, the problematic use of research as a tool of colonialism was something with which I did not want to be associated (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

The interviews took between 45 minutes and two hours. Fontana and Frey (1994) described an interview as a "co-constructed encounter." Because of the effort to explore deep-seated, often unreflexive and perhaps unconscious, elements of the *sens pratique*, participants and I deliberately structured the interviews as conversations loosely guided by the question plan (see Appendix A). Interviews were tape recorded and converted to digital recordings. Transcription software was used to facilitate the transcribing process (Transana, 2004). This software allowed the typed transcript to be linked to the actual digital recording. Thus, not only were the words available for analysis, but so were the inflections, tone, and other vocal modalities that convey meaning. Full transcriptions were produced of the first dozen interviews; partial transcripts were produced after emerging categories became apparent and saturation of categories began (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Transcripts and field notes were imported into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software package (ATLASti, 2004). These documents were coded top-down by a rudimentary coding manual developed prior to analysis and added to during the hermeneutic cycle

that followed. A method of constant comparison involving saturation of categories was followed (Creswell, 1998). "Caring" and "place" and the notion of "a compassionate sense of place" served as heuristics. That is, the analysis pursued how people talked about or how their actions expressed what the literature means by caring or place, and this is used to describe a compassionate sense of place at the end of the article.

This research followed conventions of ethnographic work (Davies, 1999; Spradley, 1980, Thomas, 1993), but varied from them. Since the interest was theoretical (Lofland, 1996; Snow, Morrill & Anderson, 2000), the research was intended to guide understanding of the practical challenges of representing place and caring in everyday environmental involvements and in the quest for more effective logics of practice for a sustainable society. Many of the environmentally-active people involved in the project said that the things I was looking at were things they rarely thought about, but were fascinating. Envisioning of social and ecological alternatives requires different epistemological and ontological frames than those prioritized within conventional social scientific frames (Brady, 2005; Charmaz, 2005; Thomas, 1993). If social movements are contestations with hegemonic realities, then research in the service of social movements must be analytic re-imaginations or transformations of those realities (Gaonkar, 2002; Smyth & Hattam, 2000).

Placing the Research: Conceptual Background

Place

The literature on "place" is diverse and extensive. It ranges from phenomen-ological studies of "sense of place" (Casey, 1996; Preston, 2003; Tuan, 1977) to cultural analyses of place-meaning (e.g., Basso, 1996; Escobar, 2001), to detailed analyses of the political economy and political ecology of places and their roles in the networks of economic, multicultural, and ideational flows in national, regional and global systems (Burawoy, 2000: Escobar, 2001; Massey, 1997; 2004). Since the literature on "place" has been ably summarized (Ardoin, 2006; Cresswell, 2004; Hutchison, 2004; Massey & Jess, 1995), I simply assert an understanding of the concept, as does Escobar (2001). Place is

> the experience of a particular location with some measure of groundedness (however, unstable), sense of boundaries (however, permeable), and connection to everyday life, even

> if its identity is constructed, traversed by power, and never fixed. (Escobar, 2001, p.140)

Environmental scholars have taken up each of these styles of place-conscious analysis. While place is often conceived in terms of its social relations occurring in a material environment (Hay, 1998; Massey, 1997), environmentalist discourse and practice extends these relations beyond social space to include ecological processes and objects, and relations between human and other-than human (Bell & Russell, 2000). This includes breaking down the standard dichotomies of modernity, such as culture/nature. The human realm does not simply exist apart from the biophysical, but is integrally located within that realm while simultaneously organizing the material and symbolic ways by which cultural members understand and interact with that environment (Milton, 1997). This results in fluidity, interactivity and boundarylessness between environment and culture, realization of which has led scholars to begin to talk about hybrid formulations, such as "socionatures" which are more accurate depictions of the material conditions in which human societies are embedded (Braun & Castree, 2001; White, 2006). The processes of "place-making" combine political-economic, ecological, phenomenological, and cultural "forces, connections, and imaginations" such that even globalization is grounded in the local (Gille & O'Riain, 2000, p. 271). Escobar (2001) demonstrates that "culture sits in places." That is, people live in particular places that are affected by, but also recursively shape global connections, forces and ideas into particularized forms. Place is a "relational space understood as the matrix and product of social (and environmental) practices" (Smith, 2001, p. 210).

With such insights, Norton and Hannon (1997) proposed a place-based approach to environmental decision-making as the accumulation of many locally-based sustainable ethics. However, one of the difficulties of place-based approaches is to define the relevant place, even if "fuzzy" approximations are used (Meredith, 2005). Berthold-Bond (2000) finds this "elusiveness" of the definition of a place beneficial because it forces attention to the subjective and experiential aspects of place.

A criticism of place-based approaches is place-boundedness. This can be expressed as parochialism, that one place is better then another, or that certain senses of a place – usually historically privileged – are more legitimate than other constructions (Mackey, 2002). Places can be highly limiting, as evidenced by those who seek the anonymity of larger population centres

where social censure arising from tight relations is diluted (Young, 1990). Another problem with place-based approaches is that of the "Not in my Backyard" (NIMBY) syndrome, whereby place figures prominently in the opposition to undesirable uses, such as a hazardous industry. NIMBY opposition may lead to diverting the rejected project into another community with less resources to combat such siting. As a corollary to the parochial NIMBY ethic, Norton and Hannon (1997) added the more comprehensively place-conscious NIABY (not in anyone's backyard) ethic.

Place-making is complex. Singular notions of what is the place may be presented, but should be seen as contestations over the making of place. Place-making projects are not free from domination, oppressions, or inequities. Place-making also seeks to position the specific place in relation to larger scales (such as provinces, regions, and nations) and in relation to other places. Constructions of place remain projects, that is, ever incomplete, advancing in bursts and stalls, and with contestation, especially as variegated actors employ their resources to make the place in their imagining. In Thunder Bay, to name just a few of the actions in the time period of this study, actors operated to protect the nature they valued, oppose or propose forest management schemes, build or oppose the park/Wal-Mart/energy-producing facility they wanted, or to wish for said development for employment or said forests managed for employment plus hunting for food and pleasure. Place-making, then, is personal and collective, discursive and material, social and ecological.

Since place meanings can be varied and actions toward places multifaceted, it would not seem that a consciousness of place alone would be an adequate basis upon which to presume an environmental or social ethos. Although a comprehensive concept of place would conceive it as profoundly relational with a mix of social and ecological processes operating across a variety of scales, a logic of practice appropriate for "living well in place" would seem to need direction within a relational context.

Caring

Caring as a potential direction for place-awareness is based on an ontological proposition that manifests sociologically and ecologically: that the autonomous self is a fallacy, and that we are fundamentally relational (Noddings, 2002; Plumwood, 2002; Whatmore, 1997). For environmental

scholars, these relations include social and ecological relations. This has profound implications for ethics, social policy and environmental understanding (Hankivsky, 2004; Noddings, 2002). If the nature of human reality is relational, then caring could be fundamental to environmental awareness and action (Bratton, 1992; Curry, 2002).

Feminist theorists have been at the recent forefront of conceptualizing an "ethic of care." However, Hankivsky (2004) positions "second generation care ethics" as moving beyond gendered formulations to establish care as central to human life, and working to link care and justice. However, it should be acknowledged that numerous traditional moral and religious systems position "love" (even of neighbour and enemy) and "compassion" at their cores.[1] These are not ethics so much as ethos, which constitute a practical sense of behaving appropriately and morally, rather than rule-oriented moral behaviour (Smith, 2001). Caring is not an ethical system but a dispositional orientation founded in the relational character of being human, that generates caring practices.

Feminist theorists assert that humans are fundamentally relational, decrying the inappropriate starting point of the autonomous individual. We are always dependent on others. "Our interdependence is part of the original condition and in no way part of some social contract" (Noddings, 2002, p. 234). Environmentally-minded scholars have pointed out that we are dependent upon natural systems also. Furthermore, the fundamental insight of sociological approaches is that we are inevitably moulded by our context. In Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice, society is comprised of interlocking social fields, each of which shapes the habitus appropriate for non-consciously operating in each social setting. Habitus, which becomes carried as bodily dispositions in a person, creates practical tendencies resulting in a logic of practice (or a "practical sense" – *sens pratique* in French) that functions effectively in the particular context. Bourdieu's is an explicitly relational approach; social fields do not exist apart from position-holders that interact and thus intersubjectively create the field. This corresponds well with the relational conception of place discussed above, suggesting that if place and field correspond, then "sense of

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[1] Evidence clearly shows that caring-for can sometimes be dogmatic, misapplied, lead to new forms of oppression, or maintain status quos in which power differentials and privilege are not scrutinized. Love or caring can be a disservice (McKnight, 1989, 1995).

place" and habitus have some correspondence as well (Hillier & Rooksby, 2002). Recognizing the verity of socionatures and adapting this construction to Bourdieu's social fields apparatus, ecological conditions would be considered as part of the core relations on the field. Smith (2001) notes that ecology has been seen as radical precisely because it challenges modernist principles to "recogniz[e] nature as an active participant in the production of self, society and our ethical values. Nature may be masked and find itself constantly subject to transformation and abuse but it has not ceased from being part of the dialectic" (Smith, 2001, p. 212).[2] An ethos of caring presents a different response to the complex relationships of a place, as caring emphasizes attentiveness and situated responsiveness to relations instead of normative and abstracted principles.

Most care-based thinkers postulate several facets of caring although they are loath to definitively describe it. Caring consists of those practices that are contextually appropriate in meeting needs of all parties. Needs can be expressed, but may also be inferred, which leads to the question of how to infer the needs of anOther [sic] when the communication is limited (Noddings, 2002; Russell, 2005). Thus, caring is *attentive* to the other(s), and to the quality of the relationship itself. Secondly, caring is *responsive*, consisting of action that responds to needs. Tronto (1993) adds that caring may also be *responsible*, in that it regularly considers what could or should be done for others, and *competent* so that the intentions to care are matched to the quality of the caring. Caring is not merely a form of sentimentality. Most care theory distinguishes between "caring for" face-to-face relationships and more distant relations that involve "caring about." This latter form of caring begins to be much like a form of action for social justice. Attentiveness even in distant relations requires listening to the expressed needs of others, rather than the application of pre-existent principles (Noddings, 2002).

From these descriptions, it is clear that "caring" is not an emotion. However, we should understand that "caring" is socially shaped so that caring practices, even in intimate relations, are part of the socially conditioned habitus. They are not essentialist components of persons, especially women with whom caring has most been associated. Held (2006) insisted that caring *is not*

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[2] "Nature" is meant here in a wider sense than the simple and limited cultural construct of nature as birds, plants, parks and so on. In this context, Nature refers to all material reality. Nevertheless, there is considerable discussion of the topic of the social construction of nature (Braun & Castree, 2001).

"dispositions of individuals," à la character or virtue ethics. Tronto (1993) also refused a dispositional approach to caring, insisting that "to call care a practice implies that it involves both thought and action, that thought and action are interrelated, and that they are directed toward some end" (p. 108). On the contrary, I assert that caring *is* dispositional – albeit not individual virtuous characteristics – in that dispositions are socially produced (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 107). The way that a Bourdieusian framework links the dispositions of the habitus with practice and the social milieu makes care an *ethos* – a practical sense of action that organizes reason, instincts and emotions (Reed-Danahay, 2005, p. 107) – rather than an *ethic* – which still conveys a rationalized process.[3]

Noddings (2002, 2005) has consistently pointed out the value of educating the caring response, and that a society of people who actively care (that is, draw on an habituated ideal of caring and respond) will move toward social policies of caring. Caring has often been relegated to the private sphere, leading McGregor (2006) to criticize its usefulness in orienting modern socio-ecological praxis. Recently, there has been an increasing effort to position care theory to guide public policy (Hankivsky, 2004; Held, 2006; Noddings, 2002) Caring results in action because, attentive to need, caring is responsive. This is as true on the societal level as on the individual scale. Furthermore, if we assume the field/place to include other-than-humans, as did Smith (2001) and Plumwood (2002), caring extends to ecological response also.

Several studies have pointed to compassion, love or caring as being linked to environmental involvements. "'Love' is a powerful fuel," report Kovan and Dirkx (2003) about their research with long-time environmental activists in Michigan. In their conceptualization, love is an emotion that helps to prevent burnout, and that can motivate and rejuvenate activists who are often engaged in draining campaigns. Investigating the ecological self-identity of people who attended a retreat on connections to nature, Zavestoski (2003) reported that even more important to these deep ecologists was their self-identification as "altruistic/compassionate." That a very high

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[3] That the habitus is socially conditioned is part of the reason that care has been constructed as a logic of practice associated with women. The denigration of both women and caring is a form of symbolic violence, that is a form of coercion imposed without physical force, and accepted as "normal" or "natural" (Bourdieu, 2001). In this book, Bourdieu even speculated on love, as a way of rapproachment, following previous work in which he called uncovering symbolic violence and oppression the sociologist's (expression of) "love" for members of society.

level of the men and women reported being in "helping professions" led Zavestoski to conclude that there must be some relationship between compassion and ecological identity. While both studies suggest that there may be some relationship, both studies also present caring/compassion/love as emotion, although resulting in reasoned action.

A different vein of research uses care theory to imagine alternatives to socio-technical systems. Whatmore (1997) showed how a relational analysis allows one to chart the milk-production system and conceptually apply caring in the diverse relations between farmers, cows, corporate industrial complex, regulatory institutions, and consumers. Curry (2002) applied care theory to pork production; while Millar and Hong-Key (2000) considered "love" in resource management. These applications to the public and policy spheres sought ways that systems could be redesigned, so that "bad caring" is not rewarded by the political-economic system of maximal efficiency, price competitiveness and instrumental value. In other words, caring was potentially but not currently in substantive use in these systems.

An emphasis on "caring" has been critiqued in several ways. Caring is usually considered to be about face-to-face interactions, and in the private sphere rather than the public sphere. Often, this assumption is based on the gendered division of caring work – for children, for family, for the aged, in schools and as counsellors, social workers, nurses and so on. Women remain predominant in such "carework." England's (2005) focus was on caring for human others; despite the article's promising title – *Emerging theories of carework* – there is no attention to ecological care or notice of the extensive discussions of care theory within ecofeminism. McGregor (2006) extensively evaluated the assignment of caring to the female sphere, simultaneously criticizing scholarship on ecological citizenship for its "gender-blindness" and the "ecomaternalism" of much environmental feminist thought. She suggested the need to "draw a distinction between caring as a set of material practices (i.e., to take care of something or someone as a form of labour) and caring as a disposition (entailing particular values or ethics)" (McGregor, 2006, p. 58). This concern is important. On one hand, caring could be an ethos for both men and women. On the other hand, sustainability practices are disproportionally performed by women, owing to their disproportionate position in domestic maintenance, interpersonal care-giving and community-organizational involvements within both overdeveloped and developing countries (Jackson, 1993; Oates &

McDonald, 2006). This allows caring to remain marginalized and associated with women. McGregor's interviews with female urban activists – who made few distinctions between environmental and quality of life activism – showed that none spoke of "caring for nature" and all conceptualized their work as "caring for people," all the while typically asserting that women care more than men.[4]

McGregor concludes that "care" needs to be politicised, as have other scholars (Curtin, 1999; Russell & Bell, 1995; Held, 2006). If "caring" is to be a meaningful form of environmental praxis, it cannot be gendered, domesticated, and privatized. Russell and Bell (1995) believed that a politicised ethic of care would be able to analyze the structures that create conditions of deprivation and oppression, such as homelessness or environmental toxicity. However, it remains to be seen how caring or compassion can serve in an environmental logic of practice effective for addressing the social field and not merely individualized relations.

Caring for Place? Presenting Data from the Field

With the above in mind, I was looking for ways that caring and place-attentiveness were associated by the environmentally-active persons in this study with their praxis. Nevertheless, it is impossible to observe bodily dispositions, except through specific actions (which could be interpreted in different ways by observers) and through people's reflexions. The discussion about "caring" came late in the interviews after considerable conversation about their environmental work, motivations, beliefs about paradigmatic or incremental change, and environmental strategies in personal and organizational efforts. In addition, I asked participants to compare "caring" to "respect" and "justice" in the context of their personal environmental concerns and involvements

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[4] Gynocentric assumptions are occasionally but rarely problematised, although often in backhanded ways, such as in the following footnote in McGregor (2006):

> I suspect women tend to dismiss men's forms of caring work as less valuable than women's, and in so doing tend to guard this caring work as something women do best.... [Doing so may preserve the] kind of power that women derive from being typically more competent at caring than men. If this is true... [it means] women will need to change.. So that men and women can share it more equally... (p. 264).

These are consistently gendered generalizations about caring. For example, new fathers' worries about the family finances with a new baby may be an expression of caring not captured by the focus on breastfeeding and bonding in mother-care. I have rarely seen such discussion in the academic literature, but men talk about it and such discussion of father-care is prevalent in parenting magazines.

with environmental organizations, and shared my own perspective, as many asked me to do. Their understandings of place and caring are interpreted in the context of this co-constructed, conversationally-inclined interview.

Elsewhere, I have presented the habitus of these environmentally-active people (*Habitus and cognitive praxis among environmentalists*). Some of its dispositions included trying to live in ways that matched their environmental awareness, but being faced with personal and collective contradictions due to the mismatch of an ecological habitus with the unecological fields that comprise modern North American society. This marginality of environmental activity led to reflexive self-awareness and social critique. Furthermore, in the face of this mismatch environmentally-active people worked to maintain their dispositions for environmental concern through a variety of techniques I called "self-disposing" to reflect their non-reflexive, tacit character. These included seeking natural settings, buttressing a movement identity, and projecting themselves to act on the basis of "caring" for the place or environment rather than from motives such as self-interest. Ultimately, caring had a variety of meanings, and was enacted in diverse ways, as shall be shown shortly.

Understandings of Place

In practice, Thunder Bay as a place was a container for enactment of a practical logic of environmental activity. Four facets about the role of "place" can be discerned. First, place was practical and performative, that is, a place in which participants could perform practices called for by the intersection of their environmental disposition and the conditions of their lives. Second, place was experiential – as corporeal beings, participants observed that specific places had been important in the past or mattered to them now. Third, places are linked with other places and "scale up." Fourth, environmental orientations produced movement from "place matters" to "place matters (environmentally)." To demonstrate these facets of the place-awareness in their complexity and contextual character, the following section will focus on one representative informant, and use interview quotations from other environmentally-active persons in Thunder Bay to show that these facets were more broadly present.

The multifaceted, and dynamic relationship between place and environmental practice were

expressed by Christoff. Beside involvements in several local environmental and progressive groups, Christoff had been heavily engaged in local and national Green Party politics. He first began by commenting that "place" did not matter.

> I don't think where I live has driven my opinions. And I don't think that if I lived in Malawi, London or Toronto, I would have a fundamentally different approach towards my politics. Maybe what I'm arguing is I don't know how much place matters to why people come to politics, or come to activism.

However, he soon observed that place mattered in some ways.

> So my sense of place drives specifics but my overall interest in politics, my overall interest in being involved in the political and the decision making process of society, I think, is a bit more fundamental to ME [with emphasis], as opposed to being to the location or the locale that I'm in.

As he talked, place – as in "the local" – became more important as a site of practice,

> At some level or another things are global and you have to address that, recognize that. But you also have to have some level of recognition that people locally have to deal with their issues.... And that's where the local driving the priorities is reality. I'm not saying it's perfect because there are certainly things where locally we may be well served by something that on a global basis is a bad idea. Or at least we may perceive we would be well served by it. But you have to at some degree focus on what you know and what you feel you can directly get your hands around.

He continued, observing that while places were linked, they were necessary as the site in which people could act.

> In all honesty, it's easier to communicate what you're trying to do to a local community, to people that you deal with and live with. So obviously, place is important because I can't influence the Sudanese government very easily, but I may be able to influence half a dozen neighbours.

More significantly, for other, less environmentally involved people, Christoff believed place mattered, in that they needed the impact of personal experience,

> I think they need to see a threat. Most people need to see a threat to what they're used to, to make the difference. I think people need to be able to say: this place matters environmentally because if we don't take care of it we can't live here; our children don't have a future here. Or, because we can't even drink the water.

Thus place had importance because it is the ground of experience where the circumstances of everyday life occur, and unless there was a change in the experiences, environmental awareness was unlikely to occur.

Repeatedly, when environmentally-active people like Christoff talked about what they do, they referenced it in the local and the specific, even if it regarded an occurrence that was in some other locale or at a larger scale (e.g., national, global). Thus, place was important as the site in which an environmental logic of practice was performed. The various logics of environmental practice were part of and had to function in Thunder Bay although they may include cultural, ecological, political and economic processes on larger scales. Other interview participants also described place in terms of these aspects of place. The narratives are lengthy, and complex, resisting simplification. Place was the site of environmental praxis, experiential, and linked. But place-attentiveness did not lead automatically to environmental attentiveness. These themes will also be visible in data presented later.

There was not a person in the interviews who did not draw connections between the local and the larger scales. Nor was there a single person who was acting at larger scales that was not also locally involved. Perhaps this was an artifact of the methods used, that is, by accessing individuals through organizational involvements, localized action was privileged. One further incident, near the end of the field time, was interesting. As recorded in my fieldnotes:

> Met this fellow at the Lake Superior Alliance meeting. He is a lawyer. Started 4½ years ago but as a career change. He came from Sudbury, had been writing Environmental Assessments. His interest is in government policy things–"place" doesn't matter much to him he said when I told him my dissertation topic.

I wish that I had followed up further. However, even this fellow was known to be involved in other local environmental activities, an informant said. And while others said that their environmental awareness was independent of the local place – that they would be environmentally-active anywhere – these people were also highly involved in locally-relevant issues.

In conclusion, that places are multifaceted, and that sense of place differs among persons appeared to allow and even necessitate a diversity of ways of operating environmentally in places. Nevertheless, people needed somewhere to act in, hence place was practical and performative. Place operated back on people in terms of being the site of experience. Any place was seen as linked to other places and to larger scales, thus places were porously boundaried. In Bourdieusian terms, Place can be considered as the experiential component of the field shaping the habitus, the locale in which the *sens pratique* must function. Finally, that environmental dispositions seemed to

be formed independently of the place in which they currently lived indicates that other aspects of personal orientation are also important.

Understanding of Caring

Like the understanding of place, caring was understood by the environmentally involved people of this study in ways that were practical, performative and experiential. Three primary attributes of caring were held by the interview participants. First, caring was perceived primarily as a deeply authentic but personal motivation. Second, caring led to the performance of action to care for things. Third, it was also associated with or viewed as an emotion. For these interview participants, the objects of care could include environmental actors or considerations. However, although deeply authentic and action-oriented, caring was not considered particularly valuable for the work of environmental organizations or the messages that they wished to convey. Both men and women talked about caring in ways that did not appear to show gendered differences.

Three Themes about Caring.

The three primary attributions of caring – deep authenticity, disposed to action, and perceived as emotional – were held consistently by the interview participants. These three attributes serve as a backdrop to consideration about whether caring can serve to orient the *sens pratique* of a more sustainable society. As in the understanding of place, I will use one interview as representative, in order to show the complex and contextual understandings of caring, and other interview quotations to show that these themes were more broadly present.

The various attributes associated with caring were shown in the following dialogue from an interview with two employees of one of the city's most respected environmental nonprofit agencies illustrates these points. Asked which of caring, respect or justice was more important to their environmental work, they replied,

Randy Which would you say sort of represents the sort of things you do – you don't just have to think of it just in terms of this specific organization – Respect for the environment or Caring for the environment?

Brian: I'd go with respect, I think caring is probably part of respect....

Mary: I'd agree with Brian. There's no hard and fast line between them, but you can respect something without necessarily– [pause, searching for words] loving it or

> feeling attached to it. But you still recognize that you need to respect it, whether or not it really directly impacts you. You can develop respect, or even be aware that respect should govern what you do. I think that we recognize in a lot of our programs that a lot of people really don't care about the environment. But they do respect the fact that there are impacts that need to be recognized. I think respect is probably more accurate.

Caring was seen as a deeper disposition than respect, but one which they felt many people would not possess regarding environmental concerns. After a bit more discussion, Mary concluded,

> Mary: [You] can't force people to care.
> Brian: You are seeing it as an end goal, so the person is beyond respect, and now they are *really* [emphasized] into it.
> Randy: You both are making it sound like respect is good, caring might be better.
> Brian: Ok [the] idea of the [TBFN – a naturalist group] bringing people up to see places– They seem to be going beyond the respect thing. 'We've got some beautiful places, let's bring them [people] up and connect them.' That's going to go beyond this or that lake or forest, go beyond the respect thing.
> Mary: Yeah, an emotional attachment. And I guess that would provide more commitment. And if you can do that on a broader scale – I don't know. I would think it would tend to provide more commitment to the environment. That's getting into the emotional side.
> Randy: So caring as emotional –
> Brian: Yes.

Several of the attributes associated with caring are present in this exchange. Caring superseded respect and might provide more long-term commitment. This form of commitment, involving caring and a sense of attachment, could be based in direct experiences although it could also transcend such experiences or specific place attachments. The two observed that caring might be more of a process than simply an end goal. Finally, caring was an emotion.

As the conversation continued, I suggested other ways of looking at caring. Brian and Mary continued to express a view of caring as an emotion, as did participants in other interviews. Earlier, Brian had talked about his own youthful experiences with Lake Superior. He described that sense of the lake and experience of the lake as providing a basis for being able to "connect with [others who] felt passionate about it." He also reaffirmed that caring had a role in connecting this passion with place:

> Brian: The Lake Superior aspect is a bit different – I think there is a fair amount of emotion there, even if you don't realize it. Some of the people you deal with – it would never come up , but I could name any number of people who are connected.

> Like the National Marine Conservation Area thing [a proposal for an extensive protected area along Lake Superior] – there was some real emotion. and that did get emotional. Some individuals started to scream. And that's because they are pretty closely connected to that body of water. And in normal situations you'd never be aware of that. But when you are around them a bit, you realize these guys are pretty closely connected with the lake. (Mary is agreeing.) There is an emotion and a caring aspect to it.

Mary observed that caring was part of the private domain, therefore, important but not explicitly part of their organizational efforts.

> I think we appeal to people's sense of caring without openly stating that. It's sort of an assumption – that we've given you the facts, and if you care enough [you'll do something].

As represented by Mary and Brian, caring had attributes of being more deeply authentic than other potential motivations, being action-oriented, and being an emotion and individually private. Other interview participants also noted these attributes. Caring as a more authentic, deeper and better disposition was a commonly held view among these environmentally-active people. In a speech on environmental sustainability before a large crowd of teachers, students and community members, Kane described how compassion made him less strident, but no less committed. I summarized his message in my fieldnotes:

> Not only does [compassion] keep us from being strident or judgmental – even though being judgment or at least speaking to what we think is true is important – compassion can be a fundamental principle that can reorient our relationships with all the world. (Fieldnotes, October 29)

And Sam said in an interview that compassion "for those identified as the opposition" helped him work with them and oriented him as the kind of person he wanted to be. Interview participants consistently and repeatedly represented caring as leading to action.

> Jack: Well caring for something is self explanatory. Respecting – caring and respecting nature. Not creating such a large impact that it can't recover or function the way it was designed to function.
> Randy: Is it [caring] an emotion?
> Jack: No it's an action. I guess caring could be an emotion as well. Seems to be an action though.
>
> Stan: [What is more important to my work?] Caring. Because caring implies doing something about it. Respect is OK, but it's not doing anything. So what?
>
> Randy: Do you have any examples [of caring]?
> Roger: (rattled off several). I care for Lake Superior very strongly.... And I cared enough

to bring the two parties [together]. The government was getting nowhere and I did some secret negotiations with [name deleted] and [worked out a deal that helped protect the lake.]

Randy: And you said that's because you care about Lake Superior?

Roger: Right, if I didn't care – who cares? If I didn't care that it was a beautiful body of water and we have to get this crap out of the lake? And we did that.

Christoff: Care is having some willingness to consider giving one thing in return for something else. And being able to actually move yourself out of comfort.... That's how I distinguish care. If I care about something, I'm willing to say: I'd rather sit here and do this, but I'm going to get up and do that.

The interview participants appeared to perceive the general public as more motivated by self-interest or threats to their well-being. But the result was that caring was viewed as a concept that could not be effectively used in advancing environmental matters, since it would likely be understood in its form as an emotion and devalued.

Richard: [Some other approach] seems to make more sense than trying to say 'we must love the earth,' 'we must respect the earth,' 'we must care for the earth.'

Randy: Love your mother [Earth]. Nice—

Richard: That's exactly what it is. Nice and groovy. It's not a political motivator.

On the other hand, caring had effects on their own practice, in ways that other orientations would not. That caring was deeply authentic and led to action, but was seen as emotion-like, led to a conundrum in that caring was generally seen as ineffectual for the work of environmental organizations. This will be elaborated below, after assessing the objects of care.

Caring for Whom? Caring for What?

Caring was practical and performative, that is, attentive to specific concrete objects to which to respond with care. Many of the participants linked caring to past experiences of significant places or to family relationships. Respondents mentioned caring for an array of objects – kids, family, neighbours, backyards, creeks and specific places, trees, caribou, underprivileged persons, ecosystems, bacteria, Lake Superior, and communities. When asked what they do to show caring, people gave a variety of examples, describing specific actions done. For Maude, it meant developing a free bike program "for people who can't afford them." For Roger it meant getting people concerned about Lake Superior to work with governments. Stan planted trees. Stacey

secured grants to buy and protect small natural areas. But, as Arlette commented, caring meant different things at different times:

> The way I care for my family is very different from the way I care for my clientele. I'm much more sentimental in my personal life. However [in] my professional life, my caring is in a detached way.... It has to be, because if I get too sentimental or too attached to clientele, I will be dragged into their situation and maybe not be able to get out of it.... I think you can care about issues, about people, about problems in a detached sort of way and still be meeting a need and having it be meaningful to the need to the problem to the person you're working with. So what does caring conjure up for me? Yeah, different things for different situations. (Arlette, Interview)

Special places were important, with most of the interview participants telling stories about specific locales: Chrissy's rural property, Roger's place by the lake, Doug's mother's cabin on Lake Shebandowan and his fishing experiences on the Kam River all led to caring about these specific places, which were only somewhat transferrable to other specific places. Only a few of the interview participants mentioned experiences of special places related to early life experiences. However, many related it to families. Arlette expressed a common sentiment among the interviewees.

> Truly, it's my own backyard first. I will look after my own family I will look after my own community first. I will look after my own country next. I think that most people are typically like that. Do we need to change, yeah, we all need to be a little more sensitive to what our neighbours are going through but I choose to work within my level.

Similarly, Roger stated, "I live here all the time and you feel for the land and you say I want it to get better not worse."

Caring was specific, and caring environmentally involved specific places. However, this came with recognition that places were linked to other places. Recognition of this connection did not diminish the sense of caring as a disposition that could orient environmental praxis, as shown in the following exchange.

> Randy: Which is more important for your environmental work: respect for, or caring for, the environment?
> Roger: [Lots of thinking] Probably caring for. By caring for it you really do respect it otherwise you wouldn't really be caring for it. You only respect something that doesn't need fixing. Something that needs fixing needs care. If you have respect for people you go to a hospital and you care for them. That counts as caring.
> Randy: [Which is more important for your environmental work] Caring for the earth, or Justice?

> Roger: [Carefully said] Caring for the issues that affect the planet, the biosphere.
> Randy: So caring more about particular issues or caring for—
> Roger: [Talking over previous, speeding up] – You can't really look at the whole world, you have to pick something that contributes to the whole world. Anyone says they're going to look after the whole world – the question is how? There are millions of issues out there that but if anyone took on a few issues to care and to advance, then the whole planet is positively affected. You can't really say 'Well, I'm gonna save the whole planet.'[5]

Other people observed the ways connections – such as economics, or long-distance transport of pollutants, or even environmental ideas produced somewhere else – affect this place.

> I mean, in the longer term there are global issues, obviously, related to [forest management in the region]. But, the reality is that we will live immediately with the results of that here. Toronto won't live with the results of it anymore than, quite frankly, Toronto environmentalists have to live with the results of living in a rural community in northern Ontario. Just how much recycling can you do when it costs you $20,000 a truck to haul stuff back and forth and you don't have the volumes to recycle?... Forcing a recycling strategy on the north, and assuming that the blue box program works everywhere is – I don't want to say dumb, but it's naive. (Edward, Interview)

Caring could still be associated with locales linked to broader geographic entities, but the actions taken by these participants returned to the local place to be acted out in ways specific to the place.

The constructions of "place"among these environmentally-active people bears further consideration. Participants in the study showed some recognition of the multiply and indeterminately defined and experienced character of places among the diverse range of people that comprise Thunder Bay. This was uneven, however. For instance, there were a variety of social and organizational networks in Thunder Bay. For the most part, participants in the environmental groups did not overlap with other social justice networks, or the wider nonprofit sector, community development, or business networks. This positioning in the social field may have affected which components of the place they gave attention.

Arlette was one of the interviewees more oriented to social justice issues than environmental involvements. She frequently referred to her professional training as a social worker to explain why caring was an appropriate way to describe her efforts. With the permission of her employer, a housing advocacy agency, Arlette had attended a meeting of the Ontario

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[5] To make the context even more interesting, Roger was a financial planner, tied into global economic flows to the extent that he was checking stock quotes even as we talked in his office.

Environmental Network in Sarnia, a two day drive from Thunder Bay.

> I had talked to [my boss] about going to the OEN conference and talk about [housing issues] there and... he was quite fine with that.... He too agreed with me about the environment not being limited to trees, air and water. It's much more. (Arlette, Interview)

Arlette also participated in a small networking meeting of Thunder Bay environmental advocates. Yet she stated,

> If I was to consider the environmental groups locally, I honestly haven't had a lot of contact with a lot of them... I haven't had a lot of success working with a lot of environmental groups here. [pause] Whether it be because they don't see my concerns as being environmental issues or—. So, yeah, I haven't had a lot of connection with any of the groups. [Trailed off, seeming unwilling to speculate]. (Arlette, Interview)

Even the relevant members of the community was shaped by particular forms of awareness. At one meeting to develop a coalition for Lake Superior protection, the facilitator, an environmental activist from outside Thunder Bay, asked “Who’s not here that should be?” The group generated a list that included over a dozen other individuals and organizations that related to land or water management. But no one mentioned other community development groups nor First Nations groups being absent.

This is not to say that environmental groups or persons involved with them did not see social issues as unimportant. Groups like Trees Thunder Bay and EcoSuperior, and people like Edward and Roger were active with a wide range of involvements. The Food Action Network included some environmental concerns as well as health, nutrition, and food security. However, most of the environmentally-active people participating in this study attended to different portions of the range of relations that make up the place. As they described how caring operated in their environmental activities, place-awareness of many of the study participants appeared to prioritize ecological dimensions of the place as objects of caring.

> I don't know if I can tell you [how I use caring] without giving you an example. Like, for example, I'm concerned, you know, I'm concerned about the extirpation of caribou out of the Nipigon Basin. So I mean, I don't get any economic gains from that personally, but I care about the respect for other life forms in the world that we should be looking after, and ensuring that the way we are managing it is sustainable. So that's a degree of caring. (Jack, Interview)

> And it goes beyond that. Not only caring about the environment, about people, about ecosystems, about those that live and breathe, or don't breathe, the ecosystems, for

> example. It goes to the point where there's a harmony whether you see it or not. Like bacteria exert some role. We may not know it, but they exist. (Edward, Interview)

In conclusion, constructions of place had limitations as individuals attended to different portions of the place, which would affect practices of caring for place. As Sam said, "[It is] essential to know the social and environmental context in which you live... Knowing the importance of the forest industry to incomes in Northwestern Ontario moderates my perspective." Few of the participants discussed this at length. This observation demonstrates a potentially important role of organizations, as well as other institutions of society, in the construction of understandings of a place. Attention to environmental concerns would do well to avoid forms of social exclusion, and vice versa; these are the "full range" of social and ecological relations of a place, to which attention should be given and response is needed.

Caring as Politically Ineffectual

Despite the practical propensity to action generated by caring dispositions, caring was seen as politically ineffectual. To a large degree, this was because of the association of caring as emotion. Mary said they wished to use reason, facts, "logic and technical soundness" in their presentation of environmental issues, behaviour and solutions. They did so because this approach avoided emotionalism. "All in all, I don't think we try to appeal much to the emotional side of these issues. We try to keep it very basic," said Mary. Several interviewees believed emotion had been overly associated with environmental concerns.

> Mary: As an organization... we've avoided that term [environmentalist]. In a lot of ways, environmentalists are seen as emotionalists, and that is why we've taken a distinctly different tack, to try to keep things logical and so forth. Because the minute you get emotional, then it's personal. People are then either yay or nay.
> Brian: And it interferes with accomplishing a project.

"Facts" trump what is perceived as emotion. Emotions were seen as private and not a useful strategy for collective action. Caring as emotion, is not politicised.

On the other hand, many of the interviewees expressed that appeals to potential threat would be more fruitful than appeals to caring.

> Roger: A lot of people do many things and don't consider the larger picture, but... then they get pinched, and then you get action.
> Randy: So the difference between "place matters" and "place matters

environmentally”—

Roger: Is a pinch, that pinch.

It's not gonna happen until they are feeling the effects that it matters. I don't think it can happen until there is that direct link. (Interview, Jack)

Randy: What does it take for people to move from “this place matters”, you know, concerned about the local specifics here, to “this place matters environmentally, or sustainably”?

Cristoff: I think they need to see a threat. Most people need to see a threat to what they’re used to, to make the difference. I think people need to be able to say: this place matters environmentally because if we don’t take care of it we can’t live here; our children don’t have a future here. Or, because we can’t even drink the water.

One point is that experiences matter, and experiences happen in specific places. Another point is that this view may be linked to beliefs that members of the public needed to perceive a threat to what or whom (such as family) they cared directly about. As a form of “caring-for,” such caring is still private, but could be politicised. Conceptions of caring, and its practicalness (in terms of specific actions and objects of caring) is complicated.

The specificity of caring was often conceptualized as leading to direct involvement with objects in need of care. In this it fits the “caring-about” form. Finally, caring could be perceived as *too* specific, or focused on the “cared-for in front of me.”

Love/compassion has to take on structures or they are just emotions. (Sam, Interview)

All the caring in the world is great and we need to... But all the caring in the world is not what's going to be what changes it on a meaningful level. It’s our caring that creates these band aid solutions. I know OCAP (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty) ... believes that things like food banks are the band aid solutions. So they typically won't take part in that... They would really rather work on ‘Let’s change it so people don't need to go to food banks.’ And while I certainly am like ‘Yeah, it would be nice to not have to use the food bank again,’ I can't sit there and look across the table and say that ‘I'm sorry you’re so hungry but I'm gonna go out and protest for you today.’ That's not meeting your immediate needs. It's my caring that says ‘Here's some food’.... I think you do need to strike a balance between the caring work [and the justice work]... [But] does our caring drive the justice we need to seek or does the justice come first? (Arlette, Interview)

Most participants felt that justice or respect would better communicate with the general public, regardless of the perception that caring was more deeply authentic. In the words of another participant,

> "No, I don't think [describing environmental work as caring] will work because I don't think most people are there. You're talking over their heads or you're talking a foreign language" (Interview, Richard).

The conclusion of this analysis on the efficacy of "caring" is that participants believed it would not be effective as a framing strategy for environmental action. Reasons varied – caring was variously seen as too deep or too shallow. This leaves as an open question, whether caring can help orient the *sens pratique* of an environmental habitus. While caring was practical, performative, and experiential, led to action, and could be "ecologised" or extended to environmental considerations, it was also seen as privatized, emotional, and while effective privately, ineffectual on the collective level.

Discussing a Compassionate Sense of Place

It appears that "sense of place" alone would not be adequate to develop a concern for the place that incorporates the full range of social and ecological relations. Instead, dispositions of caring, and personal biography of environmental interest led to attentiveness to the environment. As one participant pondered, after describing how her own sense of place was intimately linked to caring for the earth,

> I've never really spent much time consciously thinking about this stuff. It's difficult... I can think of people who have a strong sense of Thunder Bay as being their home, their place, who are not at all environmentally active. So, I guess I would have to say, no, I guess the two [sense of place and environmental awareness] don't necessarily go hand in hand. Would the paper mill worker, who makes his living from Bowater, be an environmental activist when he perceives that it's something that threatens his job? Even though he strongly identifies with Thunder Bay as his place that he grew up in. His family is there and his kids have grown up there. You know. I don't know if the two are [trails off].... I guess all I was saying is that just because you have a sense of place doesn't mean you will be environmentally active. Possibly in order to be active you need to have that sense. (Chrissy, Interview)

Stan considered the same question, as I recorded in fieldnotes,

> Why does he [Stan] do this stuff? Is it because he is in Thunder Bay? He said, maybe he would do it if elsewhere. Also it's the stage in life [he's at]. His kids are grown. Maybe [he would do it] if elsewhere–. Then he said, "Sure, if I was in another community, if I felt a connection to the community and wasn't just a transient... hmmm, I can see the benefits of your labour." (Fieldnotes, December 19)
>
> The "benefit of this labour" was to consider if a place-conscious ethos of care could serve

as a practical logic for personal and collective environmental praxis. The data showed that "place matters." The characteristics of place derived from the interviews with these environmentally-active persons were similar to descriptions in the literature. Place is the experiential site wherein one acts, feels, thinks and otherwise conducts life, amongst the relations of the many actors and processes involved. Places are constructed by these many relations, including the individual's actions. One performs one's life in places, guided by a logic of practice, a *sens pratique*, that is, a sense of one's place, one's positions and one's practices in that place. The "place" was a container for enactment of the practical logic of environmental lives, thus addressing some of the diversities of being environmentally-active.

Places are also linked to other places, according to the study participants. Therefore, the place in which the *sens pratique* must make sense included extra-local components. Reed-Danahay (2005, p. 144) observed that Bourdieu's apparatus of the field, consisting of actors who interact, does not require being physically in the same place. These extra-local relations are among the social interactions that shape the habitus. The range of social relations and the presence of ecological ones – both affected by the extra-local reach of political, economic, cultural, phenomenological and ideational influences – make for a complex modern world in which to try to live in an environmentally sensitive way, particularly since we can only live in the place we inhabit. Attention to their environmental practice required reflexive awareness of these extra-local relations, which Massey (1997) has called a "global sense of place."

The characteristics of caring derived from the interviews with these environmentally-active persons commended caring as a possible guide to the logic of environmental practice, although not without reservations. An orientation to "caring " was seen as habituating a person in a way that is fulfilled by taking action. Caring was often grounded in experiences of personal relations and environmental caring included specific places and ecological knowledge in its orientation. But caring was often considered an emotion in a rationalized world, personal and not political, domestic and privatized when we need something public and collective to alter forms of social and mental organization that have created and maintain increasing environmental degradation (Bell, 2004). Therefore, caring was viewed as politically ineffectual, despite being perceived as a deeply authentic disposition. Still, many of the environmentally-active participants of this study expressed

care – personally and as members of an environmental organization – for and about the wide range of socio-ecological relations that make up a place. Dispositions of caring led to attentiveness to the environment, desire to maintain the ecological relations as well as appropriate social ones, and response to (action to care for) the socio-ecological place. Caring *could* be part of the solution, particularly coupled with a comprehensive place-conscious orientation.

This study sought to assess the potential for such a place-conscious ethos of care. I conclude that there is potential for such a "compassionate sense of place," but that these reservations need to be worked out. The route to a politicised ethic of care, as in all care theory, is attentiveness to specific care practices and relations/objects of care. These are the same things needed for an environmental praxis. What inhibits the flourishing of the cared-for or even the ability to act in a caring manner, must be confronted in a world wherein we are relationally embedded. The practice of caring action is dependent on specifics of who and what is perceived to be in a place. A compassionate sense of place attends to and responds to all the socio-ecological relations of the place, local and extra-local, human, nonhuman and nonliving, relations of power, flows of capital, and so on. Because some of these relations are not immediately obvious, a cognitive element – thinking about practice is necessary. This acknowledgement is supported by the research in *Habitus and cognitive praxis among environmentalists* about the habitus of these environmentally-active people; because their attention to environmental concerns was mismatched with the social milieu, a component of reflexivity was part of their logic of practice. Therefore, a compassionate sense of place is a field of care involving the intersection of self-awareness and practical attentiveness to the flourishing of socio-ecological relations. A compassionate sense of place consciously links self as inseparable from the entirety of one's relations in the broader world. It is a reflexive yet practical logic of acting in place, requiring one pay attention to and respond to the nonlocal and nonhuman components of one's place in specific ways that facilitate the flourishing of the complex of socionatures. Several of the interview participants found a degree of resonance in the term "a compassionate sense of place." The problem remains, however, whether care/compassion can be used in politically and symbolically efficacious ways.

While many contemporary environmental problems are global in scope, the local variability in their manifestation can be significant: global temperature rise, for example, is greater in northern

latitudes where ecosystems are also less resilient. Thus, resolution of environmental concerns must always take specific places into account. Specific places are affected by extra-local relations, but they also recursively shape these extra-local connections, flows, forces and imaginations into particularized forms. A compassionate sense of place involves attention to local particularities, and responds competently within them. Ultimately, such competence requires a politicised and ecological ethos.

Now that this research has added to the research showing the potential for a place-conscious ethos of care, more scholarship is recommended to make the case for caring as legitimate symbolic capital for environmental praxis. Better language to talk about caring is needed, and an expanded notion of caring beyond emotion (Noddings, 2002). And practice in caring is recommended to build such habituations (Noddings, 2002; Ortega & Minquez, 2001). Place and caring are practice-based logics. In their attention to particularity, they conceptually challenge universalizing tendencies in much of academia and the modern consciousness, and will seem out-of-place in modern rationalization. Because of the variegated places and interactions which occur across the expanding range of social and ecological relations, there can be no objectively normative way of living well environmentally – each place will have its specific needs. Combining the literatures, we need a sense of place and a *sens pratique* that seeks the flourishing of the full range of socio-nature wherein we live. What sort of ecological habitus would generate an effective logic of practice in the field? Obviously it must take account of the field, ergo, be place-attentive. Additionally, it must provide a direction for action. Plumwood (2002) has shown the failure of reason alone for personal and societal environmental benefit. Therefore, as an alternative, compassion may serve as a constellation of dispositions to orient environmental praxis.

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