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## Making secret hiding places: An occupation of childhood

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### ABSTRACT

Place-making refers to the emotional attachment people have to a place and has been adopted as a concept in occupational science. In this paper, Relph's perspective on place-making is associated with how place-making has been discussed in occupational science. Relph's viewpoint serves as a basis for understanding secret hiding places from children's perspectives. During data collection for a study investigating children's perceptions of inclusive playgrounds (Wenger et al., 2021), secret hiding places were a recurring topic. This paper aims to explore secret hiding places from the children's perspective, with a special focus on place-making. To accomplish this, a literature review was undertaken and findings combined with data from two previously conducted studies using qualitative content analysis. From the analysis three categories were developed describing the making of secret hiding places, the purpose of secret hiding places, and play occupations that children do in secret hiding places. The findings suggest that place-making can be seen as an occupation of childhood, related to the physical construction of the secret hiding place itself and the formation of attachment to the place through occupations that are shaped by social interactions and result in meaningful experiences.

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Occupational science; Place attachment; Place-making; Children; Play

“At the heart of any attachment is a story” (Rishbeth, 2020, p. 142), for example, the story of a childhood memory of a favorite hiding place or a child's story of an afternoon spent building a den with friends or siblings. Experiences like these create meaningful bonds with a specific place. Having a meaningful bond with a place, for example, through an occupation, a special memory, an experience, a regular visit to the place or through interactions with other people in that place, is something that most people are familiar with. This meaningful emotional bond

with a place is also described in the literature as place attachment, place-making, topophilia, or place identity (Altman & Low, 1992) and referred to as place-making in this paper. It describes the meaningful connections people have with a place, which, as explained by Cresswell (2020), is determined by the meaning they attribute to it.

Place-making as a concept has been taken up in various disciplines, including geography, sociology, urban design, and environmental psychology (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2020). Historically, critical foundations for the conceptual

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development of place-making were laid in the 1970s (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2020). At that time, understanding shifted from conceptualizing space as merely a physical location to an emerging more nuanced understanding between space and place. In this newer understanding, place is viewed as “a particular location that has acquired a set of meanings and attachments” (Cresswell, 2020, p. 117), such as through memories, doings, or the social meaning of place. Such meanings and attachments unfold and are practiced through people’s everyday doings in places (Cresswell, 2020).

The concept of place-making has been embraced in studies in occupational science, for example, older adults aging in place (Heatwole Shank & Cutchin, 2010), aging and migration (Johansson et al., 2013), migration as a process (Huot & Laliberte Rudman, 2010), retro perspective for the course of a life time (Rowles, 2008), an event in the life of an adult (Shaw, 2009), the meaning of an outdoor environment in a local recreation area for a community (Manuel, 2003), and concerning occupations in general (Delaisse et al., 2021; Zemke, 2004). However, in occupational science literature place-making has not been discussed from the perspective of children or the making of secret hiding places.

### **An Occupational Perspective on Relph’s Understanding of Place and Placelessness**

In 1980, geographer Edward Relph published a book entitled *Place and Placelessness*, describing a phenomenological understanding of place strongly linked to human experiences, activities, and identity in and of places. Looking into Relph’s perspective on places and place-making, the first author identified parallels to how place-making has been described in the occupational science literature, and therefore selected Relph’s work to frame this discussion.

For Relph, the meaning or identity of a place arises from the transaction of “the static physical setting, the activities, and the meanings” (Relph, 1980, p. 47). Relph also understood place-making to be closely linked with identification, that is, how someone feels in a place and relates to it. He connected a person’s feeling of identifying with a place to a feeling of, what he named,

‘insiderness’ which corresponds to a sense of belonging. The opposite of insiderness is ‘outsiderness’ which refers to the feeling of having no connection with the place. Relph described a dualistic understanding of the insiderness and outsiderness of places, whereby belonging or not belonging are attached to characteristics of the geographical, landscape, or built environment. Examples of outsiderness of places relate to “an environment of few significant places,” “a meaningless pattern of buildings” (Relph, 1980, p. 117), or an environment that lacks identity. Furthermore, Relph saw the person as being at the center and determining whether they experience themselves as an insider or outsider in the space.

In the occupational science literature, place-making is clearly linked to transforming a space or physical environment into a place through the meaningful occupations people do in that place (Delaisse et al., 2021; Huot & Laliberte Rudman, 2010; Johansson et al., 2013; Zemke, 2004). Occupations in this sense are the everyday things that people “want to, need to, or are expected to do” (Wilcock, 1993; World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2017, p. 4). Play occupations are essential to the life of every child as an individual and in their community. Occupational scientists have explored many characteristics of play, such as the process of doing; array of experiences; the opportunity to create, to hope and to dream; resources that promote or hinder play; cultural aspects; the context within which it takes place; and the pure joy and creativity of children as they engage in imaginative play. With respect to place making in general, the relationship between an occupation and the environment is understood as iterative (Mewes et al., 2017). Delaisse et al. (2021) specified the situatedness of occupations in space and how space is interrelated with occupations. Some authors have suggested that the subjective meaning one experiences is an essential element for transforming space into place (Huot & Laliberte Rudman, 2010; Pierce, 2001; Zemke, 2004). Others focus on the importance of social interactions with others as part of the person, place, occupation, identity iteration to place-making. Thus, in occupational science the relationship between space and occupation is most aptly described as “the individual in her or his interactions with others that actively works to create

a sense of place that is personally, and socially, meaningful” (Johansson et al., 2013, p. 115).

In summary, there is an understanding of place-making such that places become meaningful through the occupations that take place there and can contribute to a person identifying with a place. This interaction creates a strong connection between a person and a place. The following section describes how children form meaningful connections to places and secret hiding places as examples of places for children.

### **Place-making and children**

Hart (1979) and R. C. Moore (1986) were amongst the first authors to recognize that children develop a special relationship or attachment to their environments and specific place. Chawla (1992) described that the places children are attached to depends on their age. While younger children have a closer bond with their caregivers and therefore spend more time at home or in their immediate surroundings, school-age children expand their range of mobility to outdoor areas within walking or cycling distance from home.

Research on children’s place attachment seems to agree that the areas and places children are allowed to go to are often determined by adults (Chawla, 1992) and that the adults’ perception seems to prevail in relation to the child place-making (Koller & Farley, 2019; Rasmussen, 2004; Simkins & Thwaites, 2008). For example, Rasmussen (2004) noted that adults often create “places for children” (p. 171) but children do not necessarily develop attachments to these places because they do not see them as their own. In contrast, children develop their own “children’s places” (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 171) to which they are attached and are meaningful to them. The attachment develops over time through experiences in this place, such as social interactions with other children, memories, feelings, and meaningful occupations.

Research on children’s place-making seems to agree that safe and engaging environments, opportunities to shape the environment, the presence of nature, a welcoming social atmosphere, and social interactions contribute to children’s place-making (Chawla, 1992; Koller & Farley, 2019; Simkins & Thwaites, 2008; Weir et al.,

2023). Furthermore, Weir et al. (2023) identified the importance of opportunities to play and child-friendly environments for children’s place-making. Another outcome of the research into children’s place-making is a growing understanding of the importance of children’s own perspectives on place-making in the planning of places (Koller & Farley, 2019; Rasmussen, 2004; Simkins & Thwaites, 2008), which is underpinned by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) giving children the right to a voice and participation in all matters that concern them.

Secret hiding places are a particular form of place. During data collection for a study investigating children’s perceptions of inclusive playgrounds (Wenger et al., 2021), secret hiding places were a recurring topic in the interviews. This caught the attention of the first author to understand secret hiding places from the children’s perspective and from the perspective of occupational science. Therefore, this paper aims to explore secret hiding places from a child-centered perspective, with a special focus on place-making. While there is increasing discussion about the situatedness of occupation and awareness of occupational possibilities, that is not the focus of this article.

### **Methods**

This paper explores secret hiding places from a child-centered perspective and includes a literature review and secondary analysis (Sandelowski, 1997) of two previously conducted qualitative studies. The literature review explored children’s perspectives on their secret hiding places, hereafter referred to as the literature review study. The two previously conducted studies were a qualitative study on children’s perceptions of playing on inclusive playgrounds, hereafter referred to as the interview study; and a meta-ethnography study on children’s experiences of environmental characteristics contributing to play value and inclusion on outdoor playgrounds, hereafter referred to as the meta-ethnography study. In both these studies secret hiding places had been identified but were not the focus of the original studies, leading to the secondary analysis of relevant data in this current paper. The first author played a central role in the collection and analysis of the data in these studies.

This paper was developed in two phases: In Phase A, the literature review study was conducted and inductively analyzed, resulting in the identification of three categories: ‘making secret hiding places’, ‘purpose of secret hiding places’, and ‘play occupations taking place in secret hiding places’. In phase B these categories were applied by deductive coding to the parts of the findings from the previously conducted interview study and meta-ethnography study that relate to children’s secret hiding places. In continuation, the findings from phase A were combined with the findings from phase B to construct the findings of the present paper. [Figure 1](#) outlines the process of data analysis. In the following section, details are provided about the methods of conducting the literature review study, the interview study, and the meta-ethnography study. This is followed by presentation of the process of analysis and the findings of the present paper.

### Literature review study

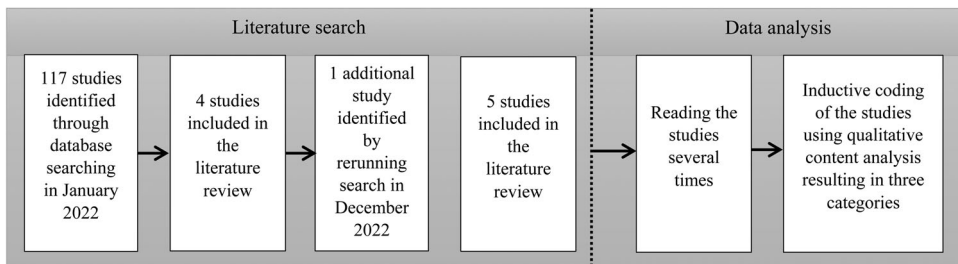
The literature search was conducted on the Web of Science database, chosen because it is considered a comprehensive database, as it covers literature from the humanities, social sciences, medicine, and natural sciences. The search was conducted in January 2022 and updated in

December 2022. For the search, the following search string was applied: (in-between OR hid\* OR secret OR retreat) AND place\* AND child\* AND play. The original search resulted in 117 studies. The titles and abstracts of these studies were screened against the inclusion criterion that studies had to address secret hiding places from a child’s perspective. Four studies were identified for inclusion. When the search was rerun in December 2022, one additional study was identified as meeting the inclusion criteria.

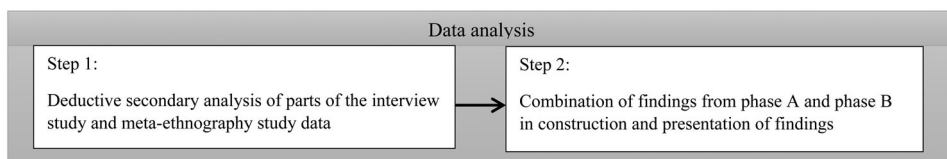
### Interview study

This study investigated children’s perceptions of playing on inclusive playgrounds (Wenger et al., 2021). For the study, 32 children (14 without a disability and 18 with various disabilities) aged 7 to 12 participated in semi-structured interviews and observations directly on playgrounds built to be inclusive, located in Switzerland. More details on the study context, participants, and data collection methods are described elsewhere (Wenger et al., 2021). The ethical commission of the canton of Zurich in Switzerland provided ethical approval for the study (Nr. 2018-00551). In interviews with five children, the topic of secret hiding places emerged and this data was therefore included in the present paper.

#### Phase A: Literature Review Study



#### Phase B: Deductive analysis of secondary data and construction of findings of paper



**Figure 1.** Outline of the data analysis process

Note: Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Mayring & Gläser-Zikuda, 2008).

## Meta-ethnography study

This study investigated children's experiences of environmental characteristics contributing to play value and inclusion on outdoor playgrounds (Wenger et al., 2023). To understand the literature and children's perspectives concerning play value and inclusion in outdoor playgrounds, a systematic review of qualitative evidence in the form of a meta-ethnography was conducted (Cahill et al., 2018; France et al., 2019; Noblit & Hare, 1988). The literature search was conducted in August 2021 and updated in November 2022 on the health, social sciences, and architecture databases. The search aimed to identify studies reporting children's views of playing on outdoor playgrounds. In total, 17 studies met the inclusion criteria. A detailed description of the study's methodology is described elsewhere (Wenger et al., 2023). Due to the study design employed, no ethics approval was required.

In seven of the 17 studies, secret hiding places and the meanings children connect with these places were described. The studies were published between 2015 and 2021. Three of the studies were conducted in Scandinavian countries (Almers et al., 2020; Jansson et al., 2015; Jansson et al., 2016), two in Australia (Aminpour et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2021), and one study each in Africa (Bartie et al. 2016) and Asia (Saragih & Tedja, 2018). Three of the studies were conducted in urban school playgrounds (Almers et al., 2020; Aminpour et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2021), and the other four studies in community playgrounds, either in an urban (Jansson, 2015; Jansson et al., 2016; Saragih & Tedja, 2018) or rural (Bartie et al., 2016) setting. In total, 202 children, both boys and girls, aged between 4 and 12 years participated in the studies (one study did not specify the sample size). Table 1 provides more information on the studies' characteristics.

## Phase A: Literature review study

### Characteristics of studies included in the literature review study

The five studies included in the literature review all investigated children's perspectives on secret hiding places. Two studies were from the USA (Corson et al., 2014; Green, 2015) and one study each was from Australia (Moore et al., 2021), Russia (Adamian & Obukhov, 2019), and Portugal (Motta & Ferreira, 2022). Four studies were conducted with preschool children (Corson et al., 2014; Green, 2015; Moore et al., 2021; Motta & Ferreira, 2022) aged 2 to 6 years, and one study included children aged 5 to 16 years (Adamian & Obukhov, 2019). Two studies focused on children's secret hiding places in indoor environments (Corson et al., 2014; Green, 2015), and three on outdoor environments (Adamian & Obukhov, 2019; Moore et al., 2021; Motta & Ferreira, 2022). In three studies parents gave informed consent and children consented verbally to the study (Corson et al., 2014; Green, 2015; Moore et al., 2021), in one study children consented verbally to their participation (Motta & Ferreira, 2022), and one study did not report information related to participants' consent and ethical considerations regarding the study (Adamian & Obukhov, 2019). Table 2 provides an overview of the details of the studies including methods used for data collection and ethical considerations.

### Summary of studies included in the literature review study

Studies have shown that secret hiding places are essential for children and that their location and meaning are not necessarily known to adults (Corson et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2021). Corson et al. (2014) investigated the experiences of preschool children in their secret hiding places,

**Table 1.** Characteristics of studies included in the meta-ethnography study

Authors and year	Participants (age/n)	Country of data collection	Outdoor play context (urban/rural; play setting)
Almers et al. (2020)	4 years / 23	Sweden	Urban; School yards
Aminpour et al. (2020)	8–10 years / -	Australia	Urban; School yards
Bartie et al. (2016)	5–6 years/ 6	South-Africa	Rural; Community play spaces
Jansson (2015)	6–11 years / 141	Sweden	Urban; Community playgrounds
Jansson et al. (2016)	10–11 years / 16	Sweden	Urban; Community play spaces
D. Moore et al. (2021)	4–5 years / 6	Australia	Urban; Schoolyards
Saragih & Tedja (2018)	9–12 years / 10	Indonesia	Urban; Community play spaces

**Table 2.** Characteristics of studies included in the literature review study

Authors (year)	Participants (age/n)	Country of data collection	Environment of data collection	Data collection methods	Ethical considerations
Corson et al. (2014)	3-5 years / 17	USA	Indoors (classrooms, at home)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations and interaction with children</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews supported with arts material with children</li> </ul>	Study approved by university internal review board Parents gave informed consent Children gave verbal assent
Green (2015)	3-5 years / 31	USA	Indoors (classrooms, at home)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Puppet show for study introduction and relationship building</li> <li>• Children's book entitled <i>My Own Special Place</i> (specifically designed for the study) to introduce concept of special places and to stimulate discussions</li> <li>• Art works created by children (children could choose art material)</li> <li>• Home visits with children and their families including place tours led by children and informal interviews with parents</li> </ul>	Study was approved by an institutional review board for human subjects Parents gave informed consent Children gave verbal assent
Adamian & Obukhov (2019)	5-16 years / 14	Russia	Outdoors (village)	Visual anthropology techniques, including observations, video recordings, interviews with children and adults	No information
Moore et al. (2021)	4-5 years / 6	Australia	Outdoors (preschool play spaces)	Participatory methodology using the Mosaic Approach with children, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with children</li> <li>• Photographs</li> <li>• Child-led tours</li> <li>• Map-making</li> <li>• Drawing</li> <li>• Positioning wishing-stones</li> </ul>	Parents gave informed consent Children gave verbal and written assent
Motta & Ferreira (2022)	2-6 years / -	Portugal	Outdoors (preschool setting)	Researcher took the position of a companion in children's play, and collected data through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations of children</li> <li>• Informal conversations with children</li> <li>• Interviews with educators</li> <li>• Visual resources</li> </ul>	Children consented verbally

observing them in their classrooms or homes and interviewing them at a university child development research center. During the interviews, the researcher provided art and craft materials for the children to express themselves and create their secret places. The interpretative phenomenological data analysis generated seven layers describing how the children see and experience their secret hiding places. The layers expand from places seen as special by the

children, but not necessarily secret (layer 1), to places where children want to be on their own (layer 3), to hiding places that the children keep secret (layer 5) or imaginative places for hiding (layer 7).

Green (2015) investigated preschool children's experiences and use of hiding places in their homes. Data were collected in participants' homes and schools using child-centered methods (e.g., reading a book about secret

places, creative material, and home visits with children and their parents accompanied by interviews). Data analysis identified places where children hide (e.g., in closets, under covers, under beds) and with whom they hide (e.g., siblings, parents, and friends).

Adamian and Obukhov (2019) explored children's hidden places in their villages. Researchers with anthropological backgrounds collected data by accompanying the children on their walks through the village. They identified three categories of places: open spaces controlled by adults, open spaces outside of adults' control, and spaces hidden from adults, and described how children used the spaces in relation to their age and what meanings they ascribed to those places.

Moore et al. (2021) investigated preschool children's perspectives about outdoor play spaces, drawing from the qualitative data of a more extensive mixed-methods case study. Data were collected in Australian preschools through, for example, drawings, walking tours, photographs, maps, and other child-friendly methods inspired by the Mosaic Approach (Clark, 2001). Data analysis revealed topics of agency, place attachment, and hiding, and showed that the presence of natural elements on a school ground created more opportunities for children to have agency. Place attachment was strongly connected to enjoyment, relaxation, feeling comfortable and natural elements, and hiding was connected to feeling happy, being satisfied, and controlling situations to a certain degree.

Motta and Ferreira's (2022) project investigated the interaction between children and nature. Data were collected over 8 months at a private preschool setting in Northern Portugal. Twenty-five children aged 2-3 years and 5-6 years old and staff members working in the preschool setting participated. Data collection employed an ethnographic approach using photos, interviews with staff members, observations, field notes, and conversations with the children. The overall project highlighted the significance of a bamboo forest as a secret (hiding) place for children, where they engaged in various occupations, such as playing, imagining, and interaction with nature. These occupations had different meanings for the children, such as

agency, being outside adults' control, and engaging with nature.

### ***Data analysis of the literature review study***

The inductive coding of the data of the studies outlined above was guided by qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Mayring & Gläser-Zikuda, 2008). First, the studies were re-read several times. Second, in an iterative process, the findings of the studies were coded inductively (Mayring, 2000), leading to the identification of three inductive categories. These were: 'making secret hiding places', 'purpose of secret hiding places' and 'play occupations in secret hiding places'.

### ***Phase B: Deductive analysis of secondary data and construction of findings of paper***

In Phase B, primary data from the interview study and the meta-ethnography study that included information about hiding places were reanalyzed, with the three categories derived from the inductive analysis of the literature review study used as deductive categories for the secondary analysis. See Figure 1. Measures taken to establish trustworthiness (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Öhman, 2005), such as credibility and dependability, were carried out for the secondary analysis as well as for the literature review study, the interview study, and the meta-ethnography study (see Wenger et al., 2021, 2023). To achieve credibility and dependability, the findings were critically discussed among the authors involved in the studies. In addition, the categories identified were illustrated with quotes from the participants.

## **Results**

### ***Combined findings from the three studies***

This section presents the combined findings from the three studies. Each category is described below and illustrated with quotations from all three studies.

#### ***Making secret hiding places***

This category describes the physical spaces where children make their secret hiding places. While these can be either indoors or outdoors,



secret hiding places could be visible or invisible for adults. For example, young children hide “in closets, under blankets, under beds, and behind couches” (Green, 2015, p. 327) in their homes, and use furniture and textiles to make their hiding places, such as piling up clothes to hide behind, or covers and blankets to hide under (Green, 2015; D. Moore et al., 2021). The following quote by a young girl illustrates this: “*I snuggle up in my bed underneath the blankets*” (Green, 2015, p. 330).

In outdoor settings, natural elements appeared to enhance children’s possibilities to find places to hide (Adamian & Obukhov, 2019; D. Moore et al., 2021; Motta & Ferreira, 2022), including trees and “bushes and shrubbery” (Almers et al., 2020, p. 237). Children described how they were “hiding” and “nesting” and children showed “a spot on the hilltop where there was a depression in the ground and explained that it was their nest where they sometimes slept” (Almers et al., 2020, p. 237). Another illustration of the use of natural elements for secret hiding places was found in the data of the interview study, where children described having their secret hiding places under trees (illustrated in Figure 2) or behind a small hill on the playground. Bamboo forests were identified as places where children made their hiding places from the bamboo branches and leaves in the forest (Almers et al., 2020; Motta & Ferreira, 2022).

The studies also described the value of built elements, such as benches, under balconies and ramps, in tubes or playhouses, pillars, or between cars, to serve as locations for secret

hiding places (Almers et al., 2020; Jansson et al., 2016; Saragih & Tedja, 2018). For example, “*You know that little slide, you can hide under there*” (Jansson, 2015, p. 174). Similarly, the value of built elements for children’s secret hiding places was evident in stories the children told in the interview study. For example, they described the niche between a wall of a staircase and a building as one of their favorite secret hiding places (illustrated in Figure 2), or they wished that

*“somehow build something in there ... put a small room in there ... that would be cool!”* (Boy, 11 years old).

In summary, this category identified that children are making their secret hiding places indoors or outdoors. Regardless of their location, it is evident that children prefer buildable materials (e.g., blankets, leaves, sticks) or niches (e.g., formed by furniture, benches, tubes) to make their secret hiding places. Also, it can be seen that some hiding places are physically made, adapting existing spaces, while in other cases children use existing spaces without additional adaptations or additional materials.

### **Purpose of secret hiding places**

Secret hiding places serve different purposes, such as facilitating play, the making of a secret hiding place itself, and for social gatherings. One purpose was described in relation to facilitating play through using a hiding place to hide and eventually be found while playing hide and seek. Here children looked to have a very tricky



**Figure 2.** Making secret hiding places in natural and built environments (under a tree and in a niche between a wall and a building)

Note: Both pictures were taken during the data collection for the interview study.

hiding place where they are only found with difficulty (Corson et al., 2014). Another purpose that the occupation of making secret places has for children related to a sense of secrecy (the place may only be known to the children and is out of sight of others, which some children found exciting), autonomy, and control (Adamian & Obukhov, 2019; Green, 2015; Moore et al., 2021; Motta & Ferreira, 2022; Saragih & Tedja, 2018). The following quotes point to children's experiences of secrecy:

*Mom does not know that I am there.*  
(Green, 2015, p. 332)

*In the tent, no one sees you cos we zip up the zip ... no one knows we're in there.* (Moore et al., 2021, p. 946)

The data revealed that in these places the children do things that adults do not allow them to do, tell secrets to their friends, pets, or other objects (e.g., shoes), or hide their personal belongings from others, either on their own or as a group of children (Corson et al., 2014; Green, 2015). A quote from the interview study illustrates the sense of secrecy, control, and autonomy children find in a secret hiding place: “We hide so that we are alone, and the adults don't follow us” (Boy, 9 years + Boy, 11 years).

Another purpose related to secret hiding places becoming places for social interactions, including being a meeting place for the children. For example, Corson et al. (2014) described how some children like to go to their secret hiding places with other children they have invited exclusively. Adamian and Obukhov (2019) observed how a secret hiding place became a meeting point for children in the village. Furthermore, the data revealed that children went to the secret hiding places to be amongst other children, e.g. playing hide and seek or hiding with brothers and sisters or animals (Green, 2015) or doing tests of courage with each other (Adamian & Obukhov, 2019).

To summarize, from the children's descriptions, it emerged that the purpose of secret hiding places could range from facilitating play, to the making of one's own place, to a social meeting place. In particular, when children describe a

hiding place as a 'secret,' their experiences of control, agency, and privacy are foregrounded.

### ***Play occupations taking place in secret hiding places***

This category describes different play occupations children engage in in secret hiding places. Following the definition of Lynch and Moore (2016), play occupations are defined as “a subjective experience of joy and fun, that comes from engaging in freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, self-directed meaningful occupations” (p. 519). Play occupations taking place in secret hiding places were identified across all studies. Children reported playing in their secret hiding places, such as integrating natural materials in their imaginative play outdoors, or nature contributing to inventing their own stories (Adamian & Obukhov, 2019; Corson et al., 2014; Motta & Ferreira, 2022) or with toys when indoors (Green, 2015). Secret hiding places offer children opportunities for different types of play occupations, illustrated for example, in a quote from the interview study where a boy speaks about different types of play, including imaginative play:

*In the secret hiding place, I do building, playing. I still want a TV for gaming (laughs). And I also made a robot for flying. And play Monopoly, Mario [a computer game]. And I still want a lift. And otherwise, I eat snacks.* (Boy, 10 years)

Lynch and Moore's (2016) definition of play occupation includes quieter pastimes such as “daydreaming or watching others play” (p. 519), which was also identified in the studies. For example children described that they daydream about things, imagining scenarios or making up fantasy worlds in their secret hiding places (Adamian & Obukhov, 2019; Corson et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2021; Motta & Ferreira, 2022). Other examples referred to how they make up stories and places that may not exist or are not yet accessible to them as children, but exist through imagination (Corson et al., 2014; D. Moore et al., 2021). Also, children used their secret hiding places to relax (D. Moore et al., 2021), for reading or resting (Corson et al., 2014), and for talking to friends, being by

themselves, sitting and resting (Almers et al., 2020; Jansson, 2015).

To summarize, this theme presented play occupations children described doing in their secret hiding places. It was found that children often did several play occupations while being in a secret hiding place, such as imaginative play, daydreaming, or quieter play occupations.

## Discussion

This paper explored secret hiding places from the children's perspectives, with a special focus on place-making and so contributes to understandings of the occupations of childhood. The analysis suggests that place-making or *making place*, especially secret hiding places, could be considered an occupation of children. The analysis suggests that this occupation results from an iterative process between the making of the secret hiding place and the occupations (usually play occupations) carried out there.

The iterative nature of the process refers to a dynamic process with numerous inter-related factors (Mewes et al., 2017). This creates an ongoing process of making and remaking the place, reflecting Zemke's (2004) definition of place-making as "the act of creating and maintaining places" (p. 613). Thereby the occupation seems to be part of the 'making' of the place but also what happens in this place; children are physically making their hiding places through their occupation. Thus, the hiding place is 're-made' as a hiding place by the children, each time they engage in occupation with it. These findings also suggest that the children's physical construction of the place is related to the development of an emotional connection with it. That connection could arise from the special meaning children find in occupations contributing to forming an *attachment to places*, which could also contribute to a child's experiences of belonging or insiderness of place (Relph, 1980). Children's attachment to their secret hiding places may also be expressed through the words 'secret' or 'special'. Many children described their hiding places as their favorite places (Corson et al., 2014). In addition, children describe how the places comfort them when they are sad or upset (Corson et al., 2014; Green, 2015).

One aspect may be that a special meaning arises because hiding places are hidden from adults' views, allowing children to be on their own or to hide their favorite belongings from others (Corson et al., 2014; Green, 2015). Skånfors et al. (2009) proposed that the possibility to withdraw to a secret or hidden place and the experience of secrecy contributes to a child's understanding of the world, self-perception, and autonomy. More recent studies affirm that children derive a feeling of agency from the fact that only they know where the places are, and deciding who is allowed to access those places gives them certain power and control over adults and other children (Adamian & Obukhov, 2019; Corson et al., 2014; Green, 2015; Moore et al., 2021). Hinchion et al. (2021) also identified hiding as one of the elements of risky play, and similarly asserted that children's wish to break adults' rules and to do things out of their sight, for example in secret hiding places, contributes to the development of children's autonomy and agency. Thus, it might be important that children have environments to create secret hiding places, with adults respecting their need for secrecy, shifting our understanding in occupational science of how we can promote such childhood occupation.

Likewise, the social interactions associated with occupations (Johansson et al., 2013; Zemke, 2004) may contribute to the emotional experience of place attachment. While children sometimes prefer to be on their own in hiding places, findings from the paper also report the importance of social interactions in relation to hiding places. It was found that children often went to their secret hiding places together with other children, or the hiding place became a meeting point for children. The social interactions and relationships built in a secret hiding place might even be of greater importance than the physical location of the place itself (Altman & Low, 1992).

From the finding that children are physically constructing their secret hiding places through the occupation of *making place* the importance of the physical environment also emerged. As shown by Moore et al. (2021), the physical environment can either facilitate or hinder the occupation of making places. They found that

young children playing in an environment with many natural elements developed a greater sense of place and were more attached to the place than younger children playing in an environment with more concrete and fewer private spaces. This was also evident in the findings of the present paper, where children often were found to use a whole range of materials to make their hiding places, reflecting contemporary ideas around incorporating loose parts in play (Lee et al., 2022). Outdoors, loose parts were mostly related to natural elements, and indoors to textiles, such as blankets, cloths, or covers.

In occupational science, play has been recognized as a prominent occupation in the lives of children (Lynch & Moore, 2016; Parham, 2008; Yerxa, 1990). The present paper has looked at one aspect of play that has received less attention so far. It specifically contributes to occupational science in exploring a particular occupation of childhood, that clearly positions the child in an iterative relationship with their socio-spatial context. It highlights the ‘world’ of childhood, with its own occupation incorporating places, opportunities, emotions, communication, autonomy, imagination, and creativity. In particular, the occupation of making secret hiding places is one of few occupations which is done and told by children. Future research will be important in further illuminating such occupation.

### **Limitations and future research**

This paper has several methodological limitations. One limitation is the unconventional design of the study using secondary data. The original interview and meta-ethnography studies were not designed to investigate the meaning and purpose of secret hiding places for children. However, it emerged from the data collection of these two studies that secret hiding places are important places for them. According to Laliberte Rudman (2002), secondary analyses of qualitative research are appropriate for exploring other aspects of the data to inform occupational science. In conducting the secondary analysis, we followed some of the recommendations described by Ruggiano and Perry (2019) in that some of the authors (IW, HL, CS) were involved in both the data collection and analysis of the

interview study and the meta-ethnography study, and authors with specific expertise in relation to occupational science (SK, JJ) joined the team for the secondary analysis. In addition, consent was obtained from the children participating in the interview study and their parents for further use of their data in secondary analysis. Another limitation is that we deductively applied the three categories derived from the analysis of the literature review study to the data from the interview study and the meta-ethnography study. This may have limited the extent of the secondary analysis and potentially missed further findings.

As this paper primarily focused on children’s experiences of creating secret hiding places, a useful focus of future research could be to consider wider contextual and structural elements (for example shifting availabilities in children’s free time, impact of adult safety concerns or urban environment on children’s possibilities for play). In addition, future research could investigate children’s experiences about negatively experienced hiding places, as the present paper only identified that children related hiding places to positive occupations. Although there is recent research on place-making from a child’s perspective (Koller & Farley, 2019; Ploner & Jones, 2020; Weir et al., 2023) and in relation to participatory research methods (Derr et al., 2018; Simkins & Thwaites, 2008), place-making has mainly been studied in relation to adults. Future research in occupational science could contribute to a better understanding of children’s place-making in different domains and contexts of life and the role of meaningful occupations and the environment. For example, research might focus on exploring children’s perspectives on secrecy, including the discovery of a secret hiding place by others, especially adults, and how secrecy impacts the meanings they make of those places. Also, children’s occupations in and use of secret hiding places, the social meaning of secret hiding places, and how place-making develops over time.

### **Conclusions**

This paper has contributed to the occupational science literature on place-making by focusing particularly on children making secret hiding

places and highlights the interrelatedness of doing in the context of place making. In general, place-making is found to contribute to the well-being and quality of life of children (Chawla, 1992; Weir et al., 2023). Even for adults, childhood memories about secret hiding places and their play occupations can be still vivid because of the meaning of those special places (Cooper Marcus, 1992). Findings suggest the importance of this play occupation, one in which children create the place physically and emotionally through ongoing occupation. It suggests the importance of children having freedom to access a range of environmental elements (built and natural, including loose parts), beyond adult control, enabling them to build their own special, secret places. It is essential to understand the occupation of place-making from children's perspective and how they engage in the occupation of making places to construct meaningful play experiences alone or together. Place-making in children's secret hiding places can contribute to their well-being (Moore et al., 2021) and identity development (Green, 2015). The findings also highlight the importance of listening to children and supporting their participation in occupations that may not be obvious from an adult perspective. In addition, the paper shows the importance of a physical environment that provides opportunities to find and make secret hiding places.

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