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ECOTHERAPY: AN INTRODUCTION

Joe Hinds and Martin Jordan

The use of nature to affect positive change in the well-being of people has been around in many forms for many years (e.g. Metzner, 2009). An emphasis on the healing of the split between nature and human nature has long formed part of some psychological traditions (Jung, 1989; Sabini, 2008; Searles, 1960). More recently, however, there has been a growing interest in, and development of, ecopsychology as an explicit field (Roszak, Gomes and Kanner, 1995). This has largely been orientated towards the 'greening of psychology' such as developing a human identity with, and compassion for, the natural world (Roszak, 1995, p. 16), alongside the recognition that human psychological distress is bound with the ecological destruction inflicted by humankind upon the natural world.

A strongly related concept that has adopted some key features from ecopsychology is ecotherapy (Buzzell and Chalquist, 2009). Although both approaches have drawn on a number of different disciplines and perspectives in their development, particularly psychology, a central aspect to both is developing a reciprocal relationship with nature to ensure both psychological and environmental well-being. Whereas ecopsychology is about the psyche and the greening of psychology, ecotherapy focuses on the total mind–body–spirit relationship (e.g. Clinebell, 1996).

Clinebell (1996) first coined the term *ecotherapy*, positing a form of 'ecological spirituality' whereby a holistic relationship with nature encompasses both nature's ability to nurture us, through our contact with natural places and spaces, and our ability to reciprocate this healing connection through our ability to nurture nature. Recent developments, particularly in North America, tend to describe ecotherapy as 'applied' or clinical ecopsychology, just as psychotherapy can be described as applied or clinical psychology (Jordan, 2009). Ecotherapy is positioned as healing the human–nature relationship and includes a range of therapeutic and reconnective practices such as horticultural therapy, 'green' exercise, animal-assisted therapy, wilderness therapy, natural lifestyle therapy, eco-dreamwork, community ecotherapy and dealing with eco-anxiety and eco-grief with others (Buzzell and Chalquist, 2009).

Ecotherapy may be seen as an umbrella term for nature-based methods of physical and psychological healing representing a new form, or a new modality, of psychotherapy that enlarges the traditional scope of treatment to include the human–nature relationship (Chalquist, 2013; Hasbach, 2012). Traditional

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therapy approaches have not tended to explicitly recognize these relationships with the other-than-human world (Totton, 2011; i.e. living things such as animals) as an important part of how the client's story and healing intertwine (Hegarty, 2010).

However, amid this variety, there remains a question concerning what 'nature' is. For this collection of essays on therapeutic and psychological effects of nature, we take the position that nature is both material in its form and a historical construct. Moreover, given that we as a species are part of nature, 'mind', in the form of interiors, and 'nature', in the form of an exterior, are not so easily separated. Nature can be understood through its processes and forms as a biotic and ecological system of interaction and also as a historically contingent understanding. Furthermore, nature and people (although fully acknowledging that this is a false dichotomy) may be viewed as spiritual entities that are undeniably connected (e.g. Macy, 2009). Nature has emerged historically through its articulation in the natural sciences (Latour, 1993) and through the practices and economic developments of modernity (Bluhdorn, 2001) as well as through ancient indigenous practices, beliefs and rituals (e.g. Abrams, 1996), and therefore it is impossible to situate nature as a singular entity (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998). In these merging and emerging movements, we do not find a distinct 'mind' coming into contact with a distinct 'nature'; both are in a relational process. And undoubtedly these perceptions, and indeed changes in perceptions, of both nature and self are part of the therapeutic journey. The following collection of essays seeks to explore the relationship between humans and nature and the effect both have upon one another as an emerging and relational process.

Moreover, we are not advocating an anthropocentrism here in that nature is perceived as merely a 'resource' to be exploited for therapeutic ends. We take the position that the large majority of ecotherapy practices, including those in this book, fundamentally represent and practise a reciprocal relationship with nature, one that promotes and enhances sustainable practices (psychological and ecological). For some chapters (notably Buzzell, chapter 5), this is in the foreground, and for others it is less so; nonetheless, it is the relational and reciprocal aspect of ecotherapy that we wish to acknowledge here that is genuinely healing for both people and the planet.

Our goal in this collection is to establish a grounding of ecotherapy in a theory-based understanding in order that this multifaceted discipline might grow further. We attempt to do so by developing epistemologies of a broad ecotherapy based on sound practice and coherent research. We are particularly interested here in how ideas from contemporary psychotherapy theory and practice interweave with ideas from the emerging fields of ecopsychology and ecotherapy, for instance, how conventional ideas regarding the therapeutic frame (e.g. the therapeutic hour) are challenged and managed by the practicalities of taking people into natural environments. Overall, we are keen to present

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and articulate the therapeutic effects of the natural world and our relationships to it from an ecotherapy standpoint while also acknowledging that this broad approach does not constitute a panacea: undoubtedly there are situations when ecotherapy will not be appropriate.

Nevertheless, the following chapters, we feel, are a firm step towards building a robust theoretical, experiential and practice-driven understanding of ecotherapy by bringing together a diverse and international array of researchers and practitioners, and thus drawing on a broad range of philosophies and positions. We recognize, however, that among the approaches presented some material will be at odds with certain readers' ideas of what constitutes evidence; on one hand, the richness of the more personal chapters may not be perceived as being part of an empirical evidence base; on the other hand, the phenomenological nature of these accounts may be seen as central to a depth understanding. Undoubtedly, this book is an endeavour that attempts to bring together both. They of course interact and are part of the holistic process of understanding: both the positivist and inductivist positions of this growing discipline are important, and we cannot be without either. Moreover, although we recognize that the preceding chapters cover and contain aspects of one or more of the book's key areas of theory, research and practice, we have made a judgement regarding the main components or aspects of each chapter and allocated them to the most appropriate section: some chapters are stronger in one or more of these aspects than others. Again, this collection attempts to both unify the field under the umbrella term *ecotherapy* while also recognizing the idiosyncratic nature of each contribution. Therefore, as with other aspects of human inquiry, how these various chapters both converge and diverge will be interpreted differently, and our aim is not to provide prescriptive direction here about these patterns of interrelation, but to provide, as far as possible, what we feel is an informed and deliberate attempt at buttressing the practice of ecotherapy. A brief synopsis of each chapter within its given section is outlined below.

Theory

An important epistemological basis for the practice and theory of ecotherapy is ecopsychology, and Thomas Doherty's chapter 1 introduces some of the fundamental tenets to the growing practice and theoretical understanding of how and why ecotherapy works. Starting with a definition of ecotherapy as intrinsically linked to psychotherapy, he describes the fundamental ecological focus of ecotherapy at the planetary, societal, group and individual levels. Outlining some of the fundamental dichotomies in ecotherapeutic practice, his chapter gives an in-depth exploration of the history of the field, the practice and the underpinning epistemologies that inform ecotherapy, and it sets the scene for what is to follow.

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In chapter 2, Caroline Brazier explores nature-based therapeutic practice from a Buddhist perspective, placing particular emphasis on the role of mindfulness in the therapeutic relationship outdoors. She discusses the therapist's own quality of mindful attention and capacity for role modelling this quality for the client. Caroline draws from her own unique model, which she calls an other-centred approach, that sees the troubled person existing in an isolated and alienated condition which is then explored through embodied awareness, addressing the conditioned mind and how this drives perceptions, thoughts and relationships. She presents a thoughtful and well-researched chapter which will be of use to those seeking to understand ecotherapy from a Buddhist perspective.

Joe Hinds describes in his chapter 3 an underpinning theoretical position which can account for the therapeutic power of human–nature connection. Drawing on the concept of eudemonia, in other words, attaining a good life and living well in accordance with one's own truth, he locates himself within humanistic and existential frameworks in order to explore how nature is central to promoting eudemonic well-being. However, within this philosophy, there is the recognition that experience of nature can promote fear, arduousness and suffering which may contribute to a more insightful shift in people's perceptions and understandings. This sense of 'terrible joy' captures something of the complexity of our relationship to nature in terms of holistic well-being and the challenges required to reconfigure world views to elicit psychological and therapeutic benefits.

In chapter 4, Martin Jordan explores ecotherapy as a psychotherapy. He critiques the current notion of what ecotherapy is, particularly within the United Kingdom, where it is seen as more of an occupational therapy than a psychotherapy. He proposes that by understanding the place and process of early developmental experience in the aetiology of distress and trauma, and drawing in particular from the work of Donald Winnicott, we are better able to understand how space is felt emotionally in therapy. Martin concludes by locating nature as a 'third space' within which psychotherapy is conducted and which can be a holding and containing space for both therapist and client alike.

Chapter 5 offers a critical exploration of the role and position of ecotherapy, with particular reference to ecopsychology. Linda Buzzell makes a distinction between Level 1 and Level 2 ecotherapies. Level 1 ecotherapies are located within traditional scientific world views of human–nature relationships, where nature is viewed as a utility to be used by humans, thereby arguably continuing the psychic, social and emotional problems which underpin our current environmental crisis. Level 2 ecotherapies, in contrast, promote a reciprocal healing relationship between humans and nature. Drawing upon the work of several writers in the field of ecopsychology and deep ecology, she presents a multilevel version of ecotherapy in the service of healing both human and planetary distress as reciprocal circles of healing.

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Research

The following chapters focus on research carried out in order to understand the healing and psychological effects of contact with nature. In chapter 6, Deborah Kelly presents research which focuses on the area of palliative care and how nature can be used in working with this particular client group. Drawing upon Michael Kearney's work and the concept of Asklepian healing, the importance of symbolism and the idea that illness is a quest for healing, she articulates how nature represents a powerful space within which to explore the central issue of life and death in palliative care. Her research findings show that nature plays a central role in the healing and supportive work of palliative care and how it acts as a container for the work, in particular the rhythm of the seasons and the mirror of life and death reflected within these. Of special importance for ecotherapy practice and research is how nature can represent a sacred space through which rituals can be performed in order to make sense of life, death and illness.

Eva Sahlin presents part of her completed doctoral thesis research conducted within the nature-based rehabilitation programme in the Gothenburg Botanical Garden in Sweden. Her research is representative of the exciting and progressive work that is happening in Scandinavia, originating from the Alnarp Rehabilitation Garden research programme being conducted at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences near Malmo in southern Sweden. Drawing from existential ideas, she presents verbatim quotes from participants which articulate the psychological and emotional benefits of participating in a healing garden programme. One such is how nature provides helpful metaphors for people's expression of emotional conditions and promotes deeper spiritual connections which are experienced as profoundly healing. Her chapter presents clear and concise links between theory and practice, explaining how nature helps in the rehabilitation process.

Anna Maria Pálsdóttir also discusses research from Sweden's Alnarp Rehabilitation Garden project. Her focus is on how particular design aspects of the garden facilitate recovery in those experiencing mental health problems such as burnout and depression. Her chapter draws upon and further develops the significant body of research carried out in Sweden and Scandinavia into the healing effects of particular garden designs and spaces. She outlines how stages of recovery develop through a relationship to nature within the garden and describes a new and important concept of 'social quietness' which details a strong need to be alone in nature. This includes a profound non-verbal communication with nature which is not only a source of restoration but also seems to positively affect complex mental processes experienced by participants throughout the rehabilitation process.

Matt Adams and Martin Jordan discuss their research carried out with an organization called *Grow*, located in Brighton in the United Kingdom. *Grow* works with people experiencing mental distress and provides mental health

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support within a natural space. The project is unique in that it does not utilize horticultural therapy, but provides a safe, supportive group space in nature to aid recovery. The eight-week programme is evaluated in order to understand participants' experience of *Grow*. Although nature is articulated as an important context for recovery from mental health problems, this is contrasted with indoor mental health environments which are felt by some to be set up in ways that reinforce their symptoms and identity. Other important factors are the level of peer support found on the programme. The report highlights how a natural environment, in a socially supportive context, offers an alternative to the familiar routines and hierarchies of client's experiences of mental health services. In the right conditions, a natural environment supports the development of different and healthier identities, with the potential to aid recovery from psychological distress. Nature seems to play a role in this process, and this is explored in a discussion of the research.

Practice

In prescribing nature, Patricia Hasbach discusses the pragmatics of conducting ecotherapy outdoors as a therapist within a one-to-one relationship. Beginning first with the intake interview, which, among other things, explores the client's history and relationship to nature, Hasbach talks about the role of imagery and metaphor in the ecotherapy process. Giving examples from practice, she discusses how, between weekly therapy sessions, homework can be assigned in order to promote the healing potential of nature. She gives particular attention to 'nature language' and how this can be used in the therapeutic process, and she discusses, as others have, some of the unique challenges that affect the therapeutic frame outdoors and the ethical implication of conducting ecotherapy.

Hayley Marshall's chapter outlines the roots of her understanding of nature-based psychotherapy from her own experience as a participant in therapy outdoors and from the perspective of transactional analysis and body psychotherapy. Drawing from both theory and case study examples, she positions the importance of the 'body' and embodied processes in nature-based therapy. Employing a range of contemporary psychotherapy theory, her chapter will be a welcome addition to the growing body of work trying to articulate how therapeutic processes can be understood in a natural environment.

Vanessa Jones, Brian Thompson and Julie Watson bring an important perspective from the National Health Service in the United Kingdom to show how nature is being integrated into service provision for recovery from an acute mental health crisis. The authors address the following question: How does a shared experience of being in nature support recovery from acute mental health crisis? Weaving together experiences of both facilitators and participants, the

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chapter describes how sessions were conducted, with a particular emphasis on mindfulness and art therapy processes. The chapter will be of immense interest to all those working in services in terms of understanding how ecotherapy can be carried out in statutory services.

Ronen Berger presents his version of ecotherapy called 'Nature Therapy', an approach that is firmly embedded within arts therapies and in particular drama therapy. Berger sees Nature Therapy as a unique approach both related to ecotherapy and ecopsychology, but a further development of these. He outlines the theoretical underpinnings of nature therapy as an approach that draws upon creative processes as a therapeutic method with nature positioned as a central partner in the process, and presents ideas and practices from shamanism and dramatherapy. Using case examples firmly embedded in practice, he illustrates the praxes and processes in relation to a hexagonal six-point model which incorporates the therapist–client–nature relationship with the group, art and the spiritual dimension on the six points of the star. Seeing Nature Therapy as a development of dramatherapy and other creative expressive therapies, his contribution firmly establishes the centrality of the link between ecotherapy and creative arts therapies.

Ecotherapy is not just about our relationship with the natural environment but also concerns our relationship with animals and their positive effect on our mental health. In chapter 14, Joe Hinds and Louise Ranger discuss equine-assisted therapy (EAT). Positioning EAT as a unique form of animal-assisted therapy, they outline some of the important epistemological issues that underpin their understanding of this approach. Turning to the work of Prouty (2001), they show how his idea of pre-therapy may be seen as an important dimension to better understand how animals such as horses act as a therapeutic 'bridge' in determining psychological health. Human–animal relationships can provide a non-linguistic, cooperative connection that helps to define 'self' in reference to 'other'. These unique therapeutic associations also utilize transpersonal ideas to show how the relationship with a horse can provoke a sense of awe, enabling the horse to act as a transitional object to facilitate movement from one pattern of human relating and behaviour to another. The chapter represents an important step forward in developing knowledge about the therapeutic processes that come into play in this form of ecotherapy.

Recent decades have seen the growth of ecotherapy in different areas in the United Kingdom with the publishing of the Mind reports (Mind 2007; 2013a; 2013b), which set forth a version of ecotherapy linked to green exercise and horticultural therapy. In the United States, we have seen the promotion of ecotherapy as a new form of psychotherapy (Buzzell and Chalquist, 2009), and there is very interesting research coming out of Europe, in particular Scandinavia (Stigsdotter and Grahn, 2003). Our aim in compiling and editing this book is to bring these emerging strands together to provide a snapshot of ecotherapy at this time in history. In outlining the theoretical, practice and research strands of

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ecotherapy, we wish to show the important aspects of an emerging, vibrant field of practice that will only grow in relation to mental health treatment and the unfolding environmental crisis. We hope you enjoy the book.

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