In a ‘Talking Point’ article this time last year (‘Life and our role in it’, Counselling Psychology Review, Vol. 22, No. 2), I pondered a curious phenomenon. Like most people, I had become aware of an enormous number of public discussions about humanity and its relationship to the natural world – they seem to happen everywhere – on TV, the radio, scientific institutions such as the Royal Geographical Society or the Natural History Museum, Parliament and on the internet. Ground-breaking television series such as Planet Earth became weekly water cooler talk, international agreements (or disagreements) in relation to the emission of greenhouse gases were on the radio, television and in our newspapers and a former US President even made an Oscar-winning movie about this relationship and won a Nobel Prize.

In looking at this it became apparent that people from all walks of life were involved in this debate – not just the traditional participants, who used to be referred to as ‘tree huggers’ and ‘bunny lovers’, but experts in ecological and environmental sciences with all the formal scientific training needed to make them mainstream and respectable. In fact an unauthored article in the January, 2008, issue of The Psychologist reports on research by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that concludes that being ‘environmentally conscious, is beginning to be seen as the social norm’ (The Psychologist, 21(1), 2008).

It is evident elsewhere too. Hollywood stars such as Leonardo Di Caprio are publicly discussing the need to conserve rainforests; the former Prime Minister referred to environmental issues as ‘the greatest challenge facing the planet’ and TV audiences spent money on their SMS text votes to save animals in far away places. We even had a global concert related to it in the summer of 2007. And the BACP and UKCP journals have had articles related to climate change and to ecology (Brayne, 2007; Prentice, 2007). At times it was such a prominent focus that it seemed to be everywhere …

… everywhere that is, except in my counselling psychology networks. It was there with colleagues when we met socially, but not often when we were in supervision. It was there when we announced our holiday plans, but not in the published content of the conference. It was there in personal reflections on our core values but most disturbingly, it was absent from every single contributor’s account of their everyday working lives in the special issue of Counselling Psychology Review (Vol. 22, No. 1) that focussed on the working lives of counselling psychologists. This did get me wondering – is it really only me that gets to spend a day at the zoo consulting on issues of well-being for individuals and families and negotiating access to research samples? Have I stopped being a counselling psychologist when I work like this?

Maybe the absence is fine. It doesn’t feel fine but maybe it is. Maybe it is perfectly appropriate. After all, why would I consult...
my dentist, accountant or pilates teacher on matters of climate change, conservation or the damaging effects of rampant consumerism. Why would we need to think about this matter at all? Or if we think about it why would we need to comment on these issues?

So as one does when we are pondering things, I started to ask around – both in professional contexts and when abroad on sabbatical – and it became apparent that others were aware of this sense of being split – our values from our practice, our theory from our feelings. Time spent in Africa was an eye opener, as not only is the natural world so much more apparent and accessible, but it provided time away from the political preoccupations of a Westernised profession fixated on matters of habit and empire building. Many of the people we met embodied a sense of the ‘individual-in-relation-to-the-planet’ rather than the disembodied, self-contained individuals that I am used to meeting (and being) in London. This created the context where I could assess my assumptions and values from afar.

I also came across a rather straightforward assumption from other people about our profession. I was called to respond to the fact that as psychologists we profess to know things about people and human nature, we claim skills and competence in matters of relationship and we spend much of our time helping people manage difficult changes, and, therefore, ought to be involved in any issue that affects people and their well-being. In fact it was suggested that we would not only be ‘two-faced’ if we did not contribute to the full range of debates that affect the physical, social and emotional well-being of people on the planet … but it would also be unethical to not participate appropriately.

Some people have gone further and suggested that rather than simply limiting our professional skills to an anthropocentric focus of ‘what’s in it for me’ (where ‘me’ = ‘humanity’) – we should also be thinking of how we can contribute to the well-being of the other constituent parts of our planet – especially when defending against the damage that our own practices do to the other inhabitants of the earth.

So a year later I find myself asking the same question I did in 2007 – in matters related to the wider world, what exactly is my role as a counselling psychologist? I have seen the argument made by rural African villagers and the natural historians alike and can find no real reason why we are not present, formally present, in these debates.

What I have also become aware of is another dilemma and that is, when faced with such a set of persuasive arguments and calls on us, how do we get involved? Would it be an extension of our existing roles and skills or might this call require some kind of radical change, maybe to abandon our sense
of identity and take on very different new roles – consultancy to the Minister of the Environment? Mediation between telecommunications companies and conservationists concerned about the tearing up the Congo rainforests so that we can have shiny new phones? Or supervising research projects of those wanting to explore environmental psychology topics? These events, both cultural and personal, led to an idea of this special issue of CPR as a way of creating a forum for us to start to think about this issue.

So here it is. This special issue is an Indaba – a community discussion where we start to think about the questions and our responses. It is an attempt to bring a debate on this important topic out into the open so we can clarify our thoughts and make our way to an idea of whether we should avoid it or whether we should get involved (and of course, in that case, in what ways). This issue contains ‘top of the head’ responses in the ‘vox-pop’ that you will find throughout, as well as more elaborate and considered responses from people within the profession and from without. I am particularly pleased that from within our profession contributors include trainees and qualified counselling psychologists and long-standing members of the profession. I am equally delighted that the contributions embody a debate between counselling psychology and those from within zoology, Jungian analysis and environmental psychology.

In the pages that follow you will hear what the formal, theoretical and empirical literature says – and does not say – about our relationship to the natural world (Higley & Milton). Other articles contribute by offering insights from disciplines or people who have information we might find useful, for example, information from environmental psychology (Gaterslaben), those that work with animals (Owen) or those that have direct experience of sustained contact with the natural world (McCallum & Scott). The Indaba culminates in two practitioners’ eye view of what it is like to try to draw on this fundamental relationship in everyday practice (Shillito-Clarke & Rust).

So … this Indaba is an attempt to begin a discussion on this important topic, the start of a journey maybe. It is not the final word. As well as conferences and research projects, it is hoped that CPR will receive letters and articles debating the ways in which psychological knowledge can (or maybe can’t) be used to enhance our relationship with the natural world. I hope you enjoy this issue.

**Dr Martin Milton**
University of Surrey.

**References**
THE SPECIAL GROUP IN COACHING PSYCHOLOGY

1st European Coaching Psychology Conference
17th and 18th December 2008

To be held at the University of Westminster, Regent Street Campus, London, UK

Putting the Psychology into Coaching

The conference where the European Coaching Psychology community will come together in 2008. This event gives you the opportunity to deepen your learning, enhance your skill base and to network.

We know you will enjoy taking part in this warm and stimulating event.

Building on four successful conferences to date, we are putting together an exciting and topical event examining the latest theory research and practice in Coaching Psychology with keynote papers, masterclasses, research and case study presentations, skills-based sessions and round-table discussions.

Established and emerging speakers from across Europe will be invited to present and discuss the latest developments in the field. In addition, a carefully chosen suite of Masterclasses is being prepared to provide you with advanced coaching skills and a deeper understanding of coaching theory and practice.

Call for papers

We would encourage you to submit posters, papers, and symposium proposals for inclusion at our conference. We would also welcome you to send in details of research you are conducting as we can provide space for a number of research projects to be profiled at the conference.

Deadline for individual submissions: June 15th 2008

For further information about the conference and details regarding exhibitor and sponsorship opportunities please see the SGCP website: http://www.sgcp.org.uk/conference/conference_home.cfm or email sgcpcom@bps.org.uk

The 2008 membership fee to join SGCP is £3.50. SGCP membership benefits include membership rates at our events and free copies of the 'International Coaching Psychology Review' and 'The Coaching Psychologist'. Join now and obtain the discounted conference fee.
Environmental issues are receiving a lot of attention right now, what are your thoughts on the ways in which the psychological professions should or should not engage with the ‘biggest issues to face mankind today’?
I think we should: (a) because we are of those issues not something apart – they are the context of our lived experience; and (b) because as scientists we are able to challenge the popularist superstitions and power of the ‘super-natural’ including GWB.

If clients were to refer to environmental issues, what response would you feel would be appropriate from a psychologist?
Interest, curiosity, respect. I do not see it is appropriate to impose my beliefs on my clients but I am happy to direct their thinking towards their ways of being in their wider world and to debate with them what meaning such issues have for them.

How might psychological expertise influence understanding of environmental issues?
We are supposedly experts on change. We could (should?) be using our expertise to address issues such as denial of responsibility, creating attitude change and behavioural change at both individual and organisational/governmental levels.

Can personal views of the natural world influence the ways psychologists understand people and practice?
My experience of being in the natural world has influenced my practice – not so sure about understanding people... Having more to do with the natural world has elaborated personal constructs re: self-others, diversity and discrimination; enhanced awareness of context and interconnectedness with environment; greater appreciation of ways of being in other parts of world beyond Western technology, therefore, what people are capable of.

Are there any health benefits from contact with the natural world? Under what conditions?
Yes. Getting away from concrete jungle, pollution and mechanistic/production focus and pace to more natural rhythms and pacing – more time to look outwards not inwards, therefore, more sense of interconnections, less narcissism – more spirituality (?) Conditions? Everything from the back garden and local park to the wilds of the world. Beware Malaria and tick-borne encephalitis though!

We share over 90 per cent of our genome with the other mammals. What kind of relationship do you think we should foster with animals?
RESPECT and RESPONSIBILITY – animals are not goods/accessories, and are not to be the subject of anthropomorphic sentimentality either. Management with care for them not us – e.g. culling, not introducing new species to old environs.
In recent years the idea of ‘eco-therapy’ has been seen in the literature and in the media. What are your thoughts about such a concept?

Oh God not another therapy! (I don’t know what eco-therapy actually is but…) I am worried that the world we all live in and are part of should be seen as though it is a commodity – a remedy for some individual/corporate ‘dis-ease’ rather than a wonderful playground full of incredibly precious and complex treasures to which we all have privileged access and an enormous responsibility to protect. If people can be helped to become more personally interested and involved committed to caring for then that is good, but ‘therapy’…?
Vox-Pop: Dr Colin Hicks

Dr Colin Hicks
Chartered Counselling Psychologist

Environmental issues are receiving a lot of attention right now, what are your thoughts on the ways in which the psychological professions should or should not engage with the ‘biggest issues to face mankind today’?

I think psychological professions have the potential to have an important role in engaging with environmental issues. As people I think one of the most important relationships we have is with our natural world – both with other natural living creatures and the living planet itself. Psychologists have the potential to be able to make a difference. However, when environmental issues become politics which they inevitably do this adds another dimension to it – should we become as conscious of the environment as we do of racism, homophobia etc.

If clients were to refer to environmental issues, what response would you feel would be appropriate from a psychologist?

I think my appropriate response would be to explore their environmental issues in an interested, non-judgmental way considering the importance they have for each individual client. I don’t feel the need to value them more or less than other issues the client makes reference to.

How might psychological expertise influence understanding of environmental issues?

I think psychological theory has the potential to provide an understanding of why world issues arise – the psychology of capitalism, the acceptance of the rape of Gaia, our ability to ignore global problems until we cannot ignore them any longer. In the development of an understanding of these problems hopefully we can understand how to change.

Can personal views of the natural world influence the ways psychologists understand people and practice?

I guess I would say yes given I am acutely aware of the way in which therapists personal views on all sorts of things can have an impact on the therapy.

Are there any health benefits from contact with the natural world? Under what conditions?

Absolutely. Definitely. We all have contact with the natural world to a greater or lesser extent and whether we recognise it or not this link exists. People often describe some of their most peaceful grounded times when they are ‘at one with nature’. When they are able to stop their frenetic activity preoccupation with the tasks ahead and just be, in that moment, in that place. I think it can have important implications for our sense of self experiencing a true connection with the world around us..

We share over 90 per cent of our genome with the other mammals. What kind of relationship do you think we should foster with animals?

A relationship based on respect, love and understanding would be a good start. Animals have more intelligence then we ever give them credit for and possibility a greater sense of instinct/attachment, etc. For example the work involving animals with children with disabilities is incredible. I work with an autistic lad whose relationship with my two dogs is vastly different to any other relation-
ship they or he has. They seem to understand each other in a unique way, watching them sleep on top of each other in the shade of a tree is a sight of true connection.

In recent years the idea of ‘eco-therapy’ has been seen in the literature and in the media. What are your thoughts about such a concept?

Although I have heard anecdotal information about ‘eco-therapy’ it is not something I am particularly familiar with. Living in the countryside on a farm I wonder if I get a daily dose of ‘eco-therapy’. I wake up and remember to look outside at my beautiful home, I notice the trees, birds, shapes of the clouds – many things I think few people get chance to see. For me this gives me a sense of connectedness to my world, a relationship and a sense of belonging. In our ever stressful lives, I think a greater awareness and interest in our natural world and our relationship with it can only be a good thing. Whether this is packaged as eco-therapy or integrated into more generic models of therapy I think it is probably the one relationship most ignored in therapy.
Recognised Modular Programmes

Advanced Certificate in Cognitive Behavioural Approaches to Psychotherapy and Counselling
Diploma in Stress Management – a cognitive behavioural approach

Primary Certificate Courses (2 days unless shown otherwise)

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<th>Course</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stress Management</td>
<td>17–18 June; 23–24 Sept</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupational Stress Management</td>
<td>6–7 Oct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy</td>
<td>31 July–1 Aug; 10–11 Nov</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem Focused Counselling, Coaching &amp; Training</td>
<td>25–26 June; 21–22 Oct</td>
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<td>Assertion and Communication Skills Training</td>
<td>29–30 Oct</td>
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<td>Relaxation Skills Training</td>
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<td>Multimodal Therapy</td>
<td>3–4 July</td>
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<td>Trauma and PTSD</td>
<td>27–28 Oct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy Skills</td>
<td>(3 days) 2–4 June; 29 Sept–1 Oct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy Skills</td>
<td>(3 days) 8–10 Oct</td>
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Other Courses

- Certificate in Cognitive Behavioural Therapies
- Certificate in Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapies
- Correspondence Course in Stress Management

Centre for Postgraduate Studies and Research Ltd

Primary Certificate in Cognitive Behaviour Therapies & Hypnosis/Certificate in Cognitive Hypnotherapy

A two-part modular programme

Part 1: either
- Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy
  - 31 July–1 Aug; 10–11 Nov
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy & Training

Part 2: Primary Certificate in Cognitive Hypnotherapy
- 17–19 Nov

Courses held in London unless otherwise stated.

Trainers include:
- Professor Stephen Palmer PhD
- Michael Neenan
- Kasia Szymanska
- Liz Doggart
- Irene Tubbs
- Nick Edgerton

Courses recognised by the Institute of Health Promotion and Education as a Centre of Expertise
The environment is no longer the exclusive discourse of physical scientists or activist eco-warriors. It has become one of the major social issues of our time (Mayer & Frantz, 2004). The scientific evidence from most quarters (e.g. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2001) now supports the view that we are facing significant and unprecedented environmental problems on a scale that will have powerful repercussions for our current ways of life (Gore, 2006) and psychological well-being. As the originators and potential agents of change of these problems, humanity’s largely unhealthy and unsustainable relationship with the planet is being called into question. It is becoming clearer that, as Evernden puts it, ‘we are not in an environmental crisis, but are the environmental crisis’ (1985, p.125). One might expect a field such as psychology to be playing an essential part in helping to understand and change these detrimental patterns, however, some argue that so far, its impact has been limited (e.g. Kidner, 1994). This paper contends that counselling psychology may be particularly well placed to help deal with this destructive relationship even though mainstream psychotherapeutic thought has traditionally ignored this dimension, seeing the environment as simply a backdrop onto which the more important human interactions play out (Swanson, 1995). Although therapeutic focus has widened from a purely intrapsychic perspective to incorporate the ‘other’, the family system and the social, there is still little move towards expanding our awareness so as to encompass our larger context or to consider the importance of that relationship.

It may be argued that the external environment of non-human things is out of the range of a discipline concerned with ‘human’ nature; that we should leave that to ecologists, environmentalists, or at best environmental psychologists; and that nature’s impact on humans is as far as our profession’s remit stretches. Yet, it is exactly this separation which has lead to many of our current psychological, social and environmental problems. Many psychologists and thinkers have called for a paradigm shift in how we view our relationship to the planet (e.g. Hillman & Ventura, 1992; Roszak, 1993; Rust – this issue). They query whether we
can really achieve well-being separate from the well-being of the earth and wonder if therapy is simply ‘shuffling deck chairs on the Titanic?’ (Seed, 1994, p.1). As a profession focused on ‘the relationship’, are counselling psychologists neglecting a fundamental one?

The paradigm shift discussed here centres on the notion of the ‘self’, the re-conception of our traditional understanding of who we are, psychologically, philosophically and experientially to embrace a wider more ecological sense of self. The possible consequences of this shift, both for our well-being and the restoration of our relationship with the earth, will be examined. In order to tackle a topic as wide as this it is necessary to take a multi-disciplinary perspective, to draw on work from ecology, philosophy, feminism and physics for example. Counselling psychology has, in other areas such as gender (e.g. Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1998, cited in Kagan & Tindall, 2003) and schizophrenia (e.g. Hayward, 2003), gained valuable knowledge from thinking outside the discipline. The emerging field of ecopsychology (e.g. Keepin, 1991; Roszak, 1993; Shepard, 1982), which is both a psychological field of enquiry into the human-planet relationship and a post-modern political and social movement, has much to offer, critically, theoretically and practically in this respect.

The dominant paradigm and its critics.

Until relatively recently humans lived in close communion with the natural world and it was acknowledged that well-being was intimately dependent on a balanced relationship with nature (Sampson, 1988). With the dawning of industrialisation and the enlightenment period, this understanding shifted and narrowed. In order to exploit the earth’s natural resources and to foster the importance of economic progress some sense of disconnection from that which was being exploited needed to occur in the cultural psyche, a collective dissociation of sorts. Out of this social and cultural ontology, modern psychology emerged and positioned itself, within the paradigm. Consequently, the Cartesian notion of a disembodied, autonomous individual, distinct and superior to nature, is most commonly assumed. Within therapy, individuals are traditionally seen as ‘an individual psyche that contains both its own suffering and the means of its own recovery’ (Smail, 2001, p.8). This subject/object distinction has led to ‘uprooted humans’ (Langer, 1990, p.117) alienated from their wider planetary niche. Nature has been positioned as the ‘other’, a distant and in the extreme, dangerous place, which needs to be dominated and controlled.

Situated within this scientific paradigm, Fisher argues that mainstream psychology has not granted the natural world psychological status in its own right as ‘ensouled others’ (2002, p.8). In maintaining this arbitrary and potentially illusory distinction between individual human being and the external environment have we lost sight of the bigger picture; of the whole tree as we focus on the individual leaves or at most, branches?

Some factions of psychology are branching out to critique the dominant paradigm and can offer counselling psychology insights into our relationship with the environment. Feminist psychologists (e.g. Keller, 1986) have made huge advances in criticising patriarchal assumptions within Western psychology. Although traditionally centred on human relationships, it does not seem far-fetched to extend this thinking to our relationship with the
planet, particularly considering that in many cultures, nature has been defined in feminine terms (e.g. the archetype of Mother Nature). We are inherently dependent on the earth for our survival and yet it seems that our patriarchal society with its value on the ‘masculine’ traits of autonomy and independence has ignored this bond and consequently, devalued the ‘feminine’ traits of interdependence and care. Thus eco-feminists such as Gomes and Kanner (1995) propose that the unequal ‘rights of access’ and hierarchy of men to women can equally be translated to humans over nature, with Western society’s need to dominate and control nature in direct comparison to the subordination of women.

Similarly, constructionist approaches are of value in understanding our relationship to nature. In these accounts, the notion of self is not seen as an individual, independent entity but rather as ‘constructed in and through connections and relationships with others’ (Bragg, 1996, p.99). In this respect social psychology has opened up the boundaries of self to encompass a more contextual view. However, as this context is mainly seen as social and political, Kidner points out that ‘in place of the decontextualised individual we thus have the decontextualised society’ (1994, p.364), with humans still displaced from our wider natural world. This is not to downplay the importance of social psychology in the human-nature debate. For if the self is to expand to encompass the ecological then it must also be in the domain of the social, as our modern social conditions often make a ‘depersonalised’ rather than transpersonal self more likely (Fisher, 2002).

Systems theory, particularly Bateson (1972), also has implications when thinking about the human-planet relationship. One of the basic tenets is that the whole is larger than the parts and so any attempt to reduce analysis to one individual in isolation from the whole would invariably lead to a partial or distorted picture of that person. In psychology, systemic therapy has mainly focused on the family as the whole under observation with each family member being ‘interconnected, in that what one member of a family does affects the other members of the family’ (Bor & Legg, 2003, p.263). Deep ecologists have expanded these ideas to talk about an interconnectedness of our global family with each member in a symbiotic relationship to all others. The pioneering Gaia hypothesis (Lovelock, 1979/2006), the view that the earth is a coherent, self-regulating system is relevant here too. If we as psycho-
logists restrict ourselves only to the connections within our human family we may indeed be only seeing a portion of the bigger picture and may reduce global problems to individual symptoms.

So, despite the predominantly individualistic view maintained by mainstream psychology, there are areas of the discipline that are working to open up the notion of who we are. Even in psychodynamic models, an area traditionally focused on intrapsychic processes, there have been moves towards a more relational approach to the self (Stolerow et al., 1997; Winter & Koger, 2004). In traditionally reductionist fields such as cognitive behavioural therapy, the therapeutic relationship is now acknowledged as an important aspect of well-being (e.g. Josefowitz & Myran, 2005). Thus we are no longer simply seen as islands unto ourselves but as beings ‘in relation’. Bringing our relationship with the planet into the mix does not mean disregarding these existing fields or becoming environmentalists, leaving the equally valid quest for understanding of the individual, the interpersonal relationship and the family behind. We do not need to supplement one level of explanation for another but can look at ‘the-individual-as-part-of-community-as-part-of-environment’ (Hillman & Ventura, 1992, p.76). This seems to be an important and timely next step in the evolution of our discipline.

Within mainstream psychology, environmental psychology has added valuable insights into the impact of particular environmental factors on human efficiency and health (e.g. Quehl & Basner, 2006) and the restorative effects of nature on many aspects of human well-being (e.g. Berto, 2005; Kaplan, 1995; Williams & Harvey, 2001). While the findings support the importance of taking the environment into account when thinking about clients’ issues, the discipline is primarily situated within an anthropocentric framework that, this paper argues, has a limited benefit in getting to the more holistic root of the human-nature relationship. Winter and Koger comment that demanding that wilderness heal us is ‘limited and anthropocentric’ (2004, p.150) as we can never hope to have lasting well-being on a sick planet. Similarly, adjusting to environmental stressors may be ‘putting band-aids on deeper problems, helping people cope and adapt to the unhealthy environmental conditions of our lives’ (Swanson, 1995, p.50). Some environmental psychologists are attempting to address this anthropocentrism and are investigating people’s implicit,
emotional connection with nature. Mayer and Frantz (2004) found that individuals’ felt-connection with nature was a predictor of well-being and ecological behaviour. Schultz et al. (2004) found a similar relationship between emotional connection to nature and behaviour, the connection being posited as unconscious and implicit.

This is promising in that environmental psychology is attempting to deal with a similar notion of an ecological self, an implicit connection to nature that is at the heart of ecocentric disciplines such as ecopsychology. However, the methodology is mainly quantitative and, Fisher argues, still set in the dominant framework. Thus we ‘discover little as to ... what it means to be a human being on a living earth’ (2002, p.33). Counselling psychology may be interestingly placed to help bridge some of the gaps with its ability to draw from traditional psychological theory and research, its psychological rigour, its potential role not just in the therapy room but in policy making and political debate and its inclusion of more qualitative, phenomenological methods and thought.

A need for radical change?
As practitioners we have an obligation to ‘consider all contexts that might affect a client’s experience’ (British Psychological Society, 2005, p.7). As stated, the natural context affects our lives and our well-being in profound ways as we affect its well-being, a dynamic that is inextricably linked. Therefore, it is already a discourse that warrants attention not just within health and environmental psychology but from a discipline arguably most focused on relationship and experience. It may be that a more radical approach is required than some of those discussed above in order to more fully get to grips with the crisis we face, a crisis as much ‘of consciousness and culture’ (Adams, 2005, p.269) as of the environment.

Neo-Jungian James Hillman calls for therapy to take up its potential role as an agency of change and for the ‘consulting room [to] become a cell of revolution, a means to change not only oneself but one’s world’ (Hillman & Ventura, 1992, p.viii). He believes that our current therapeutic models are actually limiting the potential of people, that in turning the problems inwards towards the ‘parts’ rather than the ‘whole’, therapy de-politicises and de-activates those who may be experiencing the pain and anger of a situation that is inherently unhealthy. Instead therapy internalises these potentially galvanising emotions, pathologising them and dissecting them to their historical origin within the person. He does make clear that going inward and reflecting is of course important but states that by doing so we are also ‘maintaining the Cartesian view that the world out there is dead matter and the world inside is living’ (Hillman & Ventura, 1992, p.12). It is important to reiterate here that paying attention to the outer world does not necessarily mean disregarding the inner world. In fact one of the main ideas of this paper is just that, in taking a holistic view we are able to see both the internal and external, in ‘relationship’.

Counselling psychologists have started to consider the need for change. In a special edition of The Counselling Psychologist, George Howard puts forward the case for the profession to get involved with the environmental crisis. He posits that ‘counselling psychologists are uniquely well positioned to contribute to the reversal of troubling ecological trends’ and calls for us to ‘supplement our careers … with projects that might alter the trajectories’ (Howard, 1993a, p.550). His attempt is a bold and useful one, considering the limited discourse on the topic. However in focusing on our potential ability to make ‘pro-ecology perspectives part of our classroom teaching, therapy, consultation, social discussions…and the like’ (Howard, 1993b, p.573) he appears to be trying to add a new mission to the profession whilst not addressing the underlying problems in ontology. Whilst not problematic in themselves, his suggestions do become somewhat framed as things we ‘should be doing’ which is an exhausting task for any
busy professional and one that, as Roszak, (1995) says has burnt out countless environmentalists. Commentators on his articles argue, ‘counselling psychology cannot become, and should resist proposals to become, all things to all people. It should concentrate on what it is good at and let other fields deal with other issues’ (Ford, 1993, p.622). Seen in the light of the current dominant paradigm, this is a fair statement. However if we shifted our view of human nature towards that of a more interconnected, ecological being, we would not need to ‘add’ anything extra into the profession’s remit. It would simply be a part of our already existing skill-set of being able to attend to ‘relationship’, help the disconnection from our emotions and from others and understand ‘the capacity to care and the ability to be destructive’ (Milton, 2007, p.39).

Ecopsychology – theories on the current problems

It is in the discipline of ecopsychology that we can find some deeper thinking about the problems arising from our current relationship with nature. Inherent within its position on the fringe come potential problems in academic rigour and scientific credibility. However, when dealing with big shifts in consciousness it is often essential to look to the less mainstream fields for inspiration and fresh perspectives albeit to do so with a critical eye.

Theodore Roszak, one of the forerunners, notes that ecopsychology ‘commits itself to understanding people as actors on a planetary stage who shape and are shaped by the biospheric system’ (Roszak, 1995, p.14). Much of the work here centres on the notion of a psycho-cultural pathology in our separation with nature and many authors draw from psychodynamic models of pathology in their explanations. At its extreme, our destructive and dysfunctional behaviour and our modern industrialised living are seen as a kind of ‘collective madness’ (Shepard, 1982), although in some respects this angle is problematic as the use of medicalised language conjures up notions of intrapsychic problems overlaid onto society, thus rooted in the paradigm it purports to dismiss. That being said, the underlying ideas of these writers are intriguing.

In the seminal book, Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind (Roszak et al., 1995), some of the leaders in the field attempt to chart the area. Glendinning sees one of the fundamental causes of the current environmental crisis, that of our urban-industrial society’s pursuit for technology and our consumerist culture, as being parallel to addiction. She says that the ‘hallmark of this process is the out-of-control, often aimless compulsion to fill a lost sense of meaning and connectedness’ (1995, p.46). She proposes a number of symptoms of the addictive process that can be related to our current condition. First a society-wide denial that the problems are real and that our lives will change which, despite more awareness, still seems deeply rooted. Next, the addict’s obsession with control characterises our ways of being with the world, our desire to gain ever-increasing domination over nature. Finally, Glendinning argues that we as a society have ‘undergone an untenable violation: a collective trauma … the systemic and systematic removal of our lives from the natural world’ (1995, p.51). Thus we have become dissociated as we restructure ourselves to survive in a profoundly different world to that of the vast majority of our species. This way of being is often not seen as a problem because our notion of pathology is tied in with our cultural norms, yet just because many of us do it still doesn’t make it ‘healthy’. Although there is little empirical research to support these claims, their suggestions are compelling. Glendinning’s analysis of our unhealthy relationship with the earth as addiction-based is promising in that we, as counselling psychologists, know something about addictions and could, therefore, start to explore the applicability of those psychological understandings and processes with clients (and with ourselves).
Many authors talk of an existential emptiness at the root of our destructive habits. Adams states ‘the ego experiences an anxious sense of lack not only because it feels separate from the rest of the world, but because it’s very existence is ultimately ungrounded’ (2005, p.279). Existentialists, Fisher argues, have turned our feeling of isolation into a fact of existence and have not connected that to our ‘despiritualised and denatured historical condition’ (2002, p.125). Thus our lack of meaningful connection with our natural world could be a root cause of our current problems. Deep ecology and phenomenological philosophy are two areas that can help us to understand this more fully and notably, have been at the forefront of developing and conceptualising the notion of an ecological self, something that has implications in altering the current state we are in.

**The ecological self**

Deep ecology is a philosophy of nature introduced by Naess (1973) that stands in opposition to the dominant ‘reform environmentalism’ – a discipline that predominantly views solutions to the environmental problem as coming through technology or legislation and takes an anthropocentric stance in its reasons for protecting nature, similar in epistemology to mainstream environmental psychology.

Instead deep ecology examines the underlying world-views associated with the crisis and sits well with ecopsychology. The central arguments focus on the notions of the instrumental versus intrinsic value of nature and of anthropocentrism versus ecocentrism. Fox (1994) states that our current relationship with nature lies mainly on an anthropocentric spectrum from ‘unrestrained exploitation’ to ‘preservation’. The problem with these, he says, is that they arbitrarily place human beings at the centre of a system that science shows they are not, ‘that biological evolution represents a luxuriously branching tree, not a linear scale … of increasing developmental perfection’ (1994, p.209). Deep ecology holds the ecocentric belief that the world is a web of inter-related parts and that as we damage strands of that web we ultimately destroy ourselves (Seed, 1994).

It is worth noting here that a possible tension arises in bringing this debate into the domain of counselling psychology, which is primarily focused on the human being in practice and theory and is, therefore, quintessentially anthropocentric. It could be argued that we have chosen to specialise in a
field focused on a specific part of the web and indeed there is nothing essentially wrong in that. Furthermore it could be argued that it is a flippant concern to talk about ecocentrism because, when all things are considered, we will go back to focusing on humans and what helps them. However, embracing a view of an expansive sense of self does not negate the importance of human suffering; it simply places it in a wider context which could ultimately aid the system not just the part. A popularly assumed tenet of counselling psychology is ‘to see human beings in a holistic manner, rather than as a collection of psychological parts’ (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2003, p.3). The question, therefore, may be how wide or total a holistic view are we willing to take?

This expanded sense of self is not new to psychology. Maslow spoke of ‘a sense of self that extends beyond one’s egoic, biographic or personal sense of self’ (1968, p.iv) and in transpersonal psychology the notion of connectedness and expanded consciousness is intrinsic to the discipline. Naess refers to the ecological self as ‘that with which this person identifies’ (1988, p.22) and he focuses on the process of identification as being the central point in developing this wider sense of self, a state he calls ‘self-realisation’. This sense of realisation differs, however, from the self-actualisation of Maslow and the like, for he is not talking of ‘self’ in an individual sense but instead refers to the essential realisation of the ‘self’ as ecological and connected. In this state of identification he says we naturally and spontaneously react to the ‘other’ as if it was oneself and we would be naturally motivated to defend and care for the other. As Bragg (1996) identifies, these experiences of an ecological self include an emotional resonance with the other and a phenomenological sense of empathy that is connected with a more perceptual sense of identification. So, in Naess’s view, identification elicits empathy and enhanced connectedness.

These ideas have been criticised for what has been seen as idealistic and naïve psychology (e.g. Bragg, 1996) for many of us do not even care for our ‘individualistic’ self. Self abuse and self destructive tendencies are widely evident and thus, would identifying with the other make us care for it better when we struggle to properly care for our own individual well-being? Conversely, if ecopsychologists are correct in their assumptions that it is the disconnection from our widest sense of self that is at the heart of our destructive behaviour both to ourselves and
our world, then perhaps in expanding our sense of self we would be able to appropriately care not just for the natural world but also paradoxically for ourselves. So it seems that shifting the boundaries of our self-construct to include the natural world could be a mutually beneficial experience.

Naess and other deep ecologists’ belief ‘in the essential oneness of all life’ (Naess, 1988, p.25) does not, however, need to be translated in the spiritual sense or seen as a return to ‘monism’ (Dillon, 1983, p.368). In order to overcome our deeply held isolation, we need to expand ourselves to be in communion with the other, i.e. to feel a sense of commonality wherein I identify with and emotionally experience the forest as part of me whilst maintaining that we are also apart. Herein lies perhaps the ultimate dichotomy: that we can experience ourselves as separate, as Fox states ‘relatively autonomous’ (1990, p.82, italics original) and yet at the same time also ‘one’, interconnected with the whole.

The phenomenological philosophy of writers such as Merleau-Ponty (1962), Heidegger (1993) and Abram (1986), can aid in understanding more of this construct. Much of their thinking centres on deconstructing the Cartesian perspective and replacing it with an intimately connected, embodied sense of ourselves in relation to nature. They suggest that the separation of our inner and outer world is an illusion (Fisher, 2002) and that there is really no inner world distinct from our relations and contact with that which is around us. Merleau-Ponty said ‘there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself’ (1962, p.xi).

The centrality of the body as the vehicle through which we experience that contact, that sense of being-in-the-world, is a key notion and is something that has been repressed and denied though both the scientific mechanising of the body and the religious denunciation of the sensory body (Fisher, 2002). Thus it could be argued that the systematic desensitisation and dissociation of the painful feelings associated with our destruction of our planetary home, in order to cope with daily life as we have set it up, has caused a fundamental disconnection from our bodies and thus with the body of the earth. Laing posited, only by ‘the most outrageous violation of ourselves have we achieved our capacity to live in relative adjustment to a civilisation driven to its own destruction’ (1967, p.64).

The theory and practice of Gestalt therapy also carries this importance of embodiment and is thus inherently ecologically minded (Roszak, 1993; Swanson, 1995). Perls view of the ‘self’ was what he calls the ‘organism-as-a-whole-embedded-in-environment’ (1993, p.5). Fundamental to Existential and Gestalt ideas is Buber’s view of the I-Thou relationship (1971). He suggests that this is not simply an interpersonal mode of relating but can be extended to how we relate to the non-human world. Similar to Naess’s theory of identification with nature, changing our cultural mind-set from an I-It to an I-Thou relationship with nature could help expand empathy and connectedness. Gestalt theorists believe that relationship between I and Thou is experienced at the ‘contact boundary’. Thus as Fisher says, ‘our skin … is less a part of ourselves than it is an ‘organ’ of the relationship between organism and environment’ (2002, p.66). Our bodies are therefore a way to experience this I-Thou relationship with the natural world. Many theorists argue that this direct sensory experience of the here and now, our ‘perceptual literacy’, has been deadened in numerous ways through, for example, our modern, technological, disembodied lives (Sewall, 1995) and the primacy given to the development of our language skills over other senses (Swanson, 1995). We defend against the fear of what it would mean for our busy, technological lifestyles if we really listened and attended to what our bodies are telling us about the state of our natural world, the food we eat, the air we breathe, etc. Gestalt therapists (e.g. Cahalan, 1995) suggest that by focusing on
the here and now and our embodied sensory experience, our full ecological self will emerge.

**Practical directions**

Thus far theoretical dimensions of the ecological self and its possible implications have been discussed. However, the question arises as to how to link these ideas into practice. How do we actually help people gain more connection with their wider world and start to live more ecologically balanced lives?

Alongside the techniques of Gestalt therapy, it is in the field of ecopsychology where most of the therapeutic and experiential techniques for enhancing our ecological selves have emerged and these practices can potentially offer much to therapeutic work in general. Despite epistemological tensions, some of these ideas may be transferable to counselling psychology practice and so will be briefly discussed.

Direct experiences in nature are seen as important, either through wilderness journeys (e.g. Harper, 1995), 'vision quests' (Fisher, 2002), conservation (Milton, this volume) or environmental activism and restoration work (e.g. Gomes, 1998; Sharpiro, 1995). This last one can be engaged with in urban environments and is thus perhaps most useful in this debate. Sharpiro says that 'environmental restoration work can spontaneously engender deep and lasting changes in people, including a sense of dignity and belonging ... This art and science of helping the web of life in a particular place heal and renew itself can serve as a mirror and an impetus for individual and community renewal’ (1995, p.225).

To open up and make real ‘contact’ with the world could be an emotionally overwhelming experience of shame (Fisher, 2002) or pain (Macy, 1995) as well as connectedness. Ecopsychologists have developed experiential courses and practices that aid people in dealing with and overcoming the ‘psychic numbing’ (Lifton, 1967) we have created in order to deny or repress our underlying ‘pain for the world’ (e.g. Macy & Brown, 1998; Seed et al., 1988). Experiential and self-development courses are amongst the services that counselling psychologists offer to a diverse range of people, so perhaps some of the techniques used in the field of ecopsychology are transferable to this domain.

The problem remains that many people do not want to wake up from the collective ‘trance’, that ‘it is not necessarily pleasant to be awake at this point in history … if you are awake and aren’t able to act on your perceptions, you can make yourself sick’ (Gomes, 1998, p.223). So for those people already more ‘awake’ to the crisis, some form of action could be a useful tool and something that could be encouraged as a way of expressing their personal pain. As the environmental problems become more present we may also need to be equipped to deal with those who are being ‘forced’ awake. As counselling psychologists though, we may well see more people who are disconnected from their wider context as a way of avoiding distress. Yet, as argued, it may be more painful to suffer with the ‘ontological insecurity’ that being separate from nature can create. As Fisher states ‘by staying numb, we stay stuck’ (2002, p.14).

Other therapeutic fields have techniques designed to expand our sense of self. In transpersonal psychology, certain meditative and mindfulness practices (e.g. Gomes, 1998), earth-based ritual and Shamanic counselling (e.g. Gray, 1995) have all been found to elicit a widened sense of self. Although perhaps difficult to integrate into a largely secular profession, Macy warns that ‘unless you have some roots in spiritual practice that holds life sacred and encourages joyful communion with all your fellow beings, facing the enormous challenges ahead becomes nearly impossible’ (1991, p.185). Most psychotherapeutic approaches already acknowledge that the experience of connectedness and expansion of self are vital for well-being in some capacity (Conn, 1998), as counselling psychologists regularly do when working with couples/families.
So, it could be possible to expand our skills to embrace the human-planet relationship.

Ecopsychologist Sarah Conn (1998) speaks of the importance in practice of exploring both the inner and the outer worlds of the client’s story and experience fully. This involves, Conn says, ‘learning to hear, see, feel the ‘earth speaking through’ the symptom and developing ways it might be pointing towards the symptom-holder’s fuller, more mindful participation in the larger community’ (1998, p.182). Through therapy, we could help clients explore their ‘individual’ distress whilst helping them claim their ‘unique part in the whole’ (1998, p.184). Notably, in our assessments, we could expand our exploration of the client’s relationship patterns to include the natural world and its impact on them. Dealing with this topic in the therapy room brings boundary challenges as none of us are immune to the causes or effects of environmental problems; thus it may involve a larger level of therapist participation (an issue recently considered by Spinelli (2007)). How these issues are managed and what it may mean for our profession needs evaluating, yet it seems not so distinct from the ‘transparent therapist’ (Jourard, 1971) of humanistic psychology.

This is a challenging time for our global community and one that we can not afford to downplay for much longer. As a profession focused on the relationship it may be time to widen our scope of interest and entertain the idea that our unhealthy and dysfunction relationship with the earth may be an important factor in our clients’ problems. We as counselling psychologists are agents of change and whilst for some of us that will stay at the level of the individual, it is argued that it may be time to think wider, to expand our own identification towards a more holistic perspective, to embrace and step into a more social and political role and take the lead from social and feminist psychologists. Bragg states ‘academic psychology is based upon and embedded in the ‘indigenous psychology’ of its surrounding society and culture’ (1996, p.94). Thus as our society wakes up to the importance of our relationship with nature so psychology may well have to follow – but why wait?

Counselling psychology is in a good position to do this because of the value placed on inter-subjectivity, phenomenology and the importance of lived experience and our expertise in relational work. Finally, as O’Connor eloquently wonders ‘Isn’t it strange that we supposed experts and healers of human relations give but passing notice to our extraordinarily unhealthy relationship to the planet as a whole, a relationship that will ultimately undermine our work completely? ... What is the responsibility of a therapist on a dying planet? Physician, heal thyself.’ (1995, p.155).

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References


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Humans and nature: Ten useful findings from Environmental Psychology research

Birgitta Gatersleben

It is now generally accepted that human activities are damaging the natural environment we live in and the natural resources that we depend upon. In the long run this development can have severe consequences for the quality of human life, by depleting the natural resources necessary to sustain our material welfare, but also by damaging the quality of the natural environment (air, water, nature) in which we live. The presence of sustainability and global climate change on the political agenda has led to an increase in academic research on the relationship between people and their natural environment.

Environmental psychologists study the interaction between people and their physical (built or natural) environment. This paper presents 10 findings of environmental psychology research on people and their natural environment. ‘Nature’ in this paper refers to any non-human living environmental features including plants, trees, water features, but also animals. However, the majority of research in this area focuses on green nature, i.e. the presence of plants and trees in the environment. This paper shows that most people are drawn towards natural environments and that passive as well as active exposure to the natural world has beneficial effects on the health and well-being of individuals (for overviews see Frumkin, 2001; Kahn 1997; Maller et al., 2005; Ulrich, 1993). The paper will also show that although there is a lot we know, there is also a lot we don’t know, particularly in relation to the psychological processes which underlie the interaction between people and the natural environment. This is just one of the potential areas upon which environmental and counselling psychologists might collaborate.

1. Living near nature has beneficial effects on well-being

People who live near nature report higher well-being and life-satisfaction than those who have no nature nearby (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 2001; Leather et al., 1998). Kaplan (2001) showed that reported well-being was higher for people who can see nature (trees, grass and shrubs) from their windows compared to those who have a view of an urban environment or the sky. Natural views also appeared to have a positive effect on neighbourhood satisfaction. Wells (2000) examined the cognitive functioning of low income urban children before and after they had moved to an area with increased vegetation. She found that the greatest increases in ‘greenness’ of the living environment resulted into the highest levels of cognitive functioning after the move. Wells and Evans (2003) found that nearby nature has an important beneficial effect on the well-being of rural children. The psychological effects on children of stressful life events (such as family relocation, punishment at school, bullying) were less amongst children who lived in areas with high levels of nearby
nature (plants in the home, view from the window and in the back garden). It would be interesting to know whether – or how – counselling psychologists consider the health impacts of the natural environment when hearing about depressed clients’ homes or neighbourhoods or when planning and maintaining their consulting room?

2. Contact with animals has beneficial health effects
Contact with animals has positive benefits on human beings (Frumkin, 2001). Watching an aquarium has been shown to lower blood pressure (Katcher et al., 1983) or reduce stress in patients waiting for oral surgery (Katcher et al., 1984). In a study with nearly 6000 patients in a cardiovascular clinic, Anderson et al. (1992) found that pet owners had better health (lower blood pressure and cholesterol) than non pet owners. A nature programme including animals appeared to have a more positive effect on children with hyperactivity/attention deficit disorders and conduct disorders than a program without animals (Katcher & Wilkins, 1993). Friedman et al. (1983) found that children had lower blood pressure during an experimental study if a dog was present.

Researchers have proposed many reasons as to why people may be drawn to animals (see Vining, 2003). It has been suggested that the effects are based on emotional mechanisms (Vining, 2003), where animals can provide a sense of support and comfort. Others suggest that animals help humans connect with nature and this, of course, has an evolutionary advantage (Wilson, 1984). Wilson (1984) proposes that humans have an innate emotional affiliation with other living organisms: the Biophilia Hypothesis. The fact that there is a strong similarity bias in our attitudes towards animals (Kellert & Westervelt, 1983; Plous, 1993) supports this idea. We are drawn towards those animals which are positive to our survival (providing food or being indicative of food resources), but we are ‘disgusted’ or fearful of animals which are associated with danger, for example snakes and spiders (Öhman & Mineka, 2001).

In light of this research it is interesting to think about how counselling psychologists consider the role of pets and animals when talking to clients.

3. Exposure to natural scenes has positive effects on physiological arousal and health
It might be interesting to consider what kinds of emotional experiences clients describe when talking about specific natural and built environments in which they work and live, as research from environmental psychology has shown that exposure to natural scenes has significant positive effects on physiological arousal and health.

‘Environmental restoration’ is the term given to a process whereby the physical environment influences the speed with which people recover from mental exhaustion and negative mood. Within the area of environmental psychology many studies have been conducted to examine this effect and the processes which may underlie it. Most of this research tends to be experimental or quasi experimental in nature and it aims to ‘prove’ the existence of these effects in (semi) controlled environmental conditions (Bodin & Hartig, 2001; Hartig et al., 2003; Parsons et al., 1998; Ulrich et al., 2003).

In one of the most well known and often cited studies in this area, Roger Ulrich (1984) examined hospital records of 46 patients recovering from gallbladder surgery, over a period of nine years. Half of these patients had a view from their hospital bed of a small stand of deciduous trees, the other half had a view of a brick building wall. Ulrich found that those who had a view of a natural scene had a shorter post-op stay in hospital, took fewer painkillers and received less negative comments in nurses’ notes. Ulrich provides a psycho-evolutionary approach in explaining the process underlying environmental restoration. As others,
Ulrich suggests that people are biologically drawn towards nature and natural elements. According to his Stress Recovery Theory (SRT) exposure to nature indices positive emotions in people which suppresses negative emotions and can, therefore, help recovery and may even help to build a buffer against future negative emotional experiences (Ulrich, 1983).

Ulrich et al. (1991) exposed 120 people to a stressful movie and subsequently showed them videos of different outdoor environments. Using several physiological stress measures they found that stress recovery was faster and more complete when people were exposed to natural rather than urban environments. Hartig et al. (2003) found that after a stressful or cognitively demanding task blood pressure of respondents declined more rapidly when they were seated in a room with a nature view as compared to those who were waiting in a room without a window. It further declined during a walk through a nature reserve but not during a walk in an urban environment.

Ulrich et al. (2003) found that blood donors had lower blood pressure when they had been waiting in a room with a television showing nature scenes compared to those who had been exposed to urban scenes. Parsons et al. (1998) found that students who were shown a nature-dominated drive recovered more quickly from a stressful event than those who were shown an artefact-dominated drive and they showed greater immunisation for a subsequent stressful event (see also Cackowski & Nasar, 2003).

This research may have a bearing on the environments in which counselling psychologists locate their practice. Do counselling psychologists consider the impact of the consultation room on the emotional expressions of their clients?

4. Exposure to nature has a positive effect on cognitive functioning

The Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) refers to environmental restoration as a cognitive rather than an
affective process. A range of studies have shown that exposure to nature can help recovery from mental fatigue (Hartig et al., 1991; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1990). Observing nature can restore concentration and improve productivity (Leather et al., 1998). Stark (2003) showed that pregnant women who participated in a nature based activity programme (involving 120 minutes of nature based activities a week) for 13 to 64 days performed better at an attention task then women who had participated in a non-nature based programme. Research in work environments suggests that plants in offices can improve productivity (Fjeld et al., 1998; Heerwagen & Orians, 1986), although too many plants can be distracting and detrimental to performance (Larsen et al., 1998).

According to Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) an environment is restorative if it firstly, allows people to distance themselves from attentional demands (being away) and secondly demands effortless attention – the concept of soft fascination (see Herzog et al., 1997). A third characteristic is that it enables sustained effortless attention (extent) and fourthly is compatible with an individual’s inclinations and desires (compatibility).

An important difference between the Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) and the psychoevolutionary approach, described in the previous section (Ulrich et al., 1993) is that Ulrich suggests that affective recovery is an immediate and short term process, whereas Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) suggest that cognitive restoration takes place in stages; clearing the head, restoring directed attention fatigue, facing accumulated matters, and reflection on life goals. A study by Hartig et al. (2003) showed that both processes can take place simultaneously and that affective restoration is indeed more rapid.

In light of the research that shows the health benefits of the natural world, it might be useful for counselling psychologists to reflect on their own views of nature based therapy and how they engage with this.

5. People prefer natural scenes over man-made environments

Many studies show that people tend to prefer natural over man made environments (e.g. Hagerhall, 2000; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1992). In studies where people are asked for their preference and beauty ratings of a range of urban and natural scenes
and Heerwagen (1992) found that people from a range of different natural environments (US, Argentina, Australia) consistently prefer prototypic savannah scenes. Other studies, however, suggest that environmental preferences vary between individuals and are related to experience. Bizerril (2004) showed that 11- to 17-year-old Brazilian students who had more contact with their regional (savannah) landscape showed more affection for it. Kahn (2007) showed that tundra and coniferous forests received more positive evaluations than desert or grassland scenes.

Despite inconsistent findings in support of the savannah hypothesis, most studies do find that people consistently prefer half-open-park-like landscapes, rather than dense wild nature (e.g. Newell, 1997; Herzog et al., 2000; Parsons, 1991). Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) found that people prefer tranquil waterscapes and relatively smooth ground texture. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) suggest that in judging landscapes people are evolutionarily drawn towards environments which afford survivability (Ulrich, 1984; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Wilson, 1984), these are typically half-open, park like environments, environments which provide food and shelter. Appleton’s (1975) prospect-refuge theory suggests that preferences for environments are strongly related to the extent to which such environments provide places for prospect and refuge. Herzog (2003) found that two factors were highly related to preferences for different environments: visibility (e.g. visual access, mystery) and locomotor access (e.g. refuge, movement ease).

Koole and van den Berg (2005) suggest that people prefer cultivated (park-like) rather than wild nature because the latter is unconsciously related to awareness of human mortality. Terror management theory suggests that the human-nature relationship is influenced by the development of self-awareness in human beings. To manage awareness of mortality people build a worldview that creates symbolic immortality though a variety of cultural practices.
(driving a car, eating with a fork) which serve to separate humans from nature (Koole et al., 2005). They supported this hypothesis by showing amongst others that people are more likely to think about death in wild nature.

It is interesting to consider whether the literature might benefit from reflections on therapeutic practice, for example do clients talk about death in relation to nature? Or what meaning does nature and natural environments have for people with fear and phobia?

7. Favourite places are often dominated by natural elements

The majority of places that people consider favourite are natural places. Favourite places are places that fulfil emotional needs and enable people to develop and maintain their identities (Korpela et al., 2001). People visit their favourite places for affective and cognitive restoration and self-regulation; a process whereby one tries to control or regulate negative emotions and cognitive depletion (Korpela et al., 2001, Korpela et al., 2002). When asked how people feel in their favourite places most of them refer to cognitive and emotional self-regulation.

Favourite places are often places dominated by vegetation, although children are less likely to refer to natural places (and more to private places) than adults do. Korpela et al. (2002) interviewed 8- to 9- and 12- to 13-year-old Finish children about their favourite places and found that 20 per cent of the children referred to a natural place. Korpela et al. (2001) asked students to describe their most and least favourite place. Almost half of the favourite places (48 per cent) were natural places, whereas only five per cent of the most unpleasant places were natural places. Korpela and Hartig (1996) showed that students find favourite places more restorative than neutral or unpleasant places. Newell (1997) studied cultural differences in favourite places among respondents from Senegal, Ireland and the US. She found more similarities than differences in responses. Overall 61 per cent of the respondents preferred a natural place. Korpela and Ylen (2007) found that people with health problems were more likely to refer to natural places as favourite places and they were more likely to benefit from visiting these places.

Again our understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural world might be enhanced by reflections from psychological practitioners, for example on whether or not clients talk about places they visit to restore and escape and if so what kinds of places are these and what role does nature play in these places?

8. The restorative potential of natural environments serves as a frame of reference for preferences

There is a strong relationship between the perceived restorative potential of an environment and judgements of beauty and preferences for those environments. van den Berg showed people a frightening movie to induce stress and subsequently measured their emotional recovery while watching a natural environment. They found a strong correlation between the perceived beauty of these natural environments and the extent to which they helped to improve the respondents’ mood (van den Berg et al., 2003). Staats et al. (2003) found that when people are in need of restoration (imagining themselves attentionally fatigued) they are twice as likely to find a natural scene beautiful. Hertzog (2003) found that preference ratings of different scenes were strongly correlated to ratings of all four aspects of the Attention Restoration Theory: being away, extent, fascination and compatibility. Purcell et al. (2001) showed that people use the restorative potential of a scene as an implicit frame of reference when making preference judgements.
9. Spectacular nature is awe inspiring and can promote confidence and well-being

Most of the environmental restoration and preference research focuses on non-threatening natural environments. It seems plausible to assume that environmental restoration can only occur when one feels safe in an environment and that preferences are strongly negatively related to fear expectations. However, some studies have shown that environmental features which increase preference ratings may also increase fear ratings. For instance, mystery (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) is both related to preferences and to perceived danger (Herzog & Flynn-Smith, 2001; Herzog & Miller, 1998). Moreover, wilderness research has shown that threatening challenging wildlife experiences can have positive effects on people (e.g. Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Hartig et al., 1991; Milton – this issue; Williams & Harvey, 2001). Hartig et al. (1991) randomly assigned subjects to backpacking in wilderness, non-wilderness holidays (e.g. sightseeing) or no holidays and found wilderness experiences most beneficial for self-reported health and well-being. Williams and Harvey (2001) showed that the confrontation with wilderness can inspire thoughts of spiritual meaning and eternal processes. Talbot and Kaplan (1986) found that an outdoor challenge programme resulted into greater awareness, respect and confidence in those who participated. It is also evident that people report many positive experiences during outdoor activities (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1984). They suggest that confrontations, threats, and physical challenges can increase energy levels, confidence and inspire awe and wonder. van den Berg and Ter Heijne (2005) found that when people are asked to imagine themselves in fearful situations in nature (e.g. getting lost, being overwhelmed by a storm, coming face-to-face with a large animal) half of the respondents said it would be primarily a negative experience. However, the other half indicated it would be both a positive (fascinating) as well as a negative (fearful) experience.

It might be useful to consider the gap between traditional contexts and the findings of this research. Do counselling psychologists consider what role challenging outdoor experiences can play in the healing process of clients? And if so, are practitioners and mental health services clear on the ways to facilitate this?

10. Not everybody finds nature attractive

van den Berg et al. (2005) found that high sensation seekers were more likely to indicate they would find a fearful experience in nature pleasant (fascinating). Men were also
more positive than women. Action orientated people (who don’t worry but get on with things) as opposed to state-oriented people (who think and worry about change) are more likely to prefer wild nature (Koole et al., 2005). Zube et al. (1983) found that when middle aged people tend to prefer scenes dominated by natural elements. The presence of human-made elements in such scenes tends to lower preference rates. However, the latter is not the case for young children and older people.

Despite the well known benefits of contact with nature not everybody likes spending time in nature. In fact most of us spend the majority of our leisure time in built, indoor environments, even when we are in high need for restoration. Bixler and colleagues (Bixler et al., 1994; Bixler & Floyd, 1997) found that around one-fifth of the children who participated in a mandatory nature based school trip did not enjoy the experience at all and indicated they would much rather have stayed in their classroom. In a later study they found that those young people who have stronger fear expectations, disgust sensitivity and a desire for modern comfort were less likely to participate in outdoor leisure activities, to choose natural environments for recreational activities, future jobs or place for a biology lab experiment (Bixler et al., 2002).

This research raises interesting questions for the consulting room – and, of course, in relation to when clients express fear and disgust for nature and natural environments. Do counselling psychologists understanding the role of nature (or its absence) in disorders such as phobia?

Discussion and areas for further research
In the field of environmental psychology there is now a limited body of research which suggests that positive experiences with nature might be useful in promoting environmental concern and pro-environmental behaviours. For instance, the use of natural environments for restoration is positively related to environmental concern (Byrka et al., 2007), as is the perceived restorative potential of natural environments (Hartig et al., 2001). A better understanding of the processes which underlie these research findings may help promote environmentally conscious behaviour and, therefore, may help to contribute to dealing with the environmental problems which are facing our common future.

This paper shows that active and passive exposure to natural environments has a positive effect on the health and well-being of most human beings. However, it also shows we know little about why and how. The nature-nurture debate is active and ongoing. Most of the models and theories discussed here assume that the relationship between people and their physical natural environment has at least to some extent an evolutionary basis. Of course, there are others, such as Wyman (1982), who suggest that human beings do not have a biological need for contact with nature but that this need has been carefully taught. Vining suggests that we are currently finding ourselves in a paradoxical situation where on the one hand we understand that we are part of the natural world and on the other hand with continued technological development we find ourselves less dependent on our natural environment: ‘for many in the industrial world nature has become a sentimental luxury’ (2003, p.90).

There is a need for psychologists to better understand the psychological mechanisms which may underlie environmental preferences and the effects of natural environments on human well-being. Counselling psychologists can contribute significantly to the development of research in the area of human environment studies by helping to enhance a better understanding of the relationship between people and their natural environment. Most experimental environmental psychology research focuses on healthy young individuals. Manipulations of stress and cognitive depletion in these studies are short term. More in-depth research on the role of nature in the health
and well-being of individuals suffering from longer term psychological problems can provide valuable insight into the processes which may underlie environmental preferences and the restorative effects of nature.

References


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**ECOPSYCHOLOGY AND CONSERVATION: USEFUL WEBSITES**

The Centre for Human Ecology
http://www.che.ac.uk/index.php/
The Centre for Human Ecology is a network for ecological and social transformation.

Conservation Psychology
http://conservationpsychology.org/
A site devoted to conservation psychology, the scientific study of the reciprocal relationships between humans and the rest of nature, with a particular focus on how to encourage conservation of the natural world.

Ecotherapy News
http://thoughtoffering.blogs.com/ecotherapy/
The blog of the founder of the International Association for Ecotherapy.

Jane Goodall Institute
http://www.janegoodall.org.uk
The Institute is well known for its ground breaking research into chimpanzee behaviour in Tanzania, as well as our education programme. Roots & Shoots is the international environmental education programme which aims to increase the awareness and knowledge of young people; stimulate their compassion for the world around them; and help them to take positive action in support of animals, people and the environment.

MIND
The national mental health charity mind has commissioned research into the benefits and evidence base of ecotherapy and also has an upcoming conference.

World Wide Fund for Nature
http://www.wwf.org.uk
WWF works to ensure a healthy future for people, species and their habitats, addressing global threats like climate change and environmental degradation.
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Urban life is stressful

Urban living is stressful – we read about this in newspapers all the time, see it in government policy and hear about it in our consulting room everyday. There is abundant literature that addresses this, from environmental psychology (see Gaterslaben, this volume), clinical psychology and health psychology. Indeed, the pages of CPR are frequently filled with consideration of modern ills such as depression, anxiety and stress disorders all of which are significantly more abundant in our urban centres than they are elsewhere (Louv, 2006; Wells & Evans, 2003).

Despite all this debate and literature in other fields, there is a dearth of literature in the psychotherapeutic and counselling psychology domain and it seems that our profession, with its claims to relational expertise may be missing out on an important (or maybe crucial) relationship (see Higley & Milton – this issue). This paper looks at just one question arising from this absence – that is how do people experience the natural world? The paper highlights some of the experiences of people who spend a great deal of time in the wilderness whether that be as guide, scientist, tourist or conservationist. Their insights are wide ranging but due to the limitations of space and the specific focus of this paper only four themes can be reported. These are firstly, that even brief contact with the natural world provides relief from stress; secondly, that there are also longer term, more profound benefits to be gained through contact with the natural world; thirdly, that the natural world is not without significant challenges itself and finally, that a sense of balance is important. All of these seem relevant to us as professionals involved in an ongoing attempt to enhance the psychological well-being of those we work with.

Wisdom from the Wilderness

Martin Milton

‘It is very easy for us to get lost in the mundane world and forget about our connection to spirit. Yet without that connection we are basically the walking dead.’ Sobonfu Somé

1 The title is inspired by Gerald May’s wonderful book, The Wisdom of Wilderness.
Wilderness as a relief

It goes without saying that the natural world is different to the urban world in a multitude of ways, including shape, form, pace and sense.

This difference means that even brief contact with the wilderness provides a complete break from our everyday life and our habitual ways of being. This in turn, creates a distance from the stressors that affect urbanites so profoundly. And for some people the experience of relief happens very quickly, Villiers noted that ‘immediately a lot of things automatically disappear out of your life. A lot of stressful things.’ Squack talked about a stay in the UK and said:

‘I was in Leeds for a month [and] it was just like this constant pavement, miles and miles and miles of pavement, cars, and that really did get me down, and the minute that we stepped onto the bus and drove off into the country and saw the green grass and trees and everything, suddenly life looked a whole lot better, and that was an immediate thing.’

Squack also noted that somehow you cannot stay worried about your urban concerns in a more natural environment. Thinking about his life in Africa, he said:

‘You don’t actually have those [urban] worries on your plate. You’re out there, you’re part of [nature], and the biggest worry is, I hate to sound flippant about it, but is there an elephant around the corner or is there a lion around the corner? That’s your major worry.’

As well as the break from psychological stressors, contact with nature removes some of the physical stressors endemic to urban environments. This was a frequent reflection and Mpho said ‘... the smoke, pollution, the noise ... I think, health-wise [those of us who live in the wilds] get to stay healthier because we don’t get exposed to so many things.’

As well as the immediate relief from psychological and physical stressors, participants felt that there are beneficial experiences to be gained by more prolonged contact with the natural world.
Nature’s psychological bounty
Access to the wilderness appears to benefit us because of the array of things it provides and the effect that these have on us. Mpho noted that there is ‘... complete and utter quietness and peace [...] that’s healing in itself’ and Villiers pointed to the fact that in the wilderness ‘we’ve got fresh air which is good for you. You’ve got silence which is good for you’. He expanded on this and said:
‘You go out into the bush and it’s soft. Nature’s got trees and leaves and rivers and sand. There’s rocks but everything has a smooth softer feel to it. In the Kalahari desert it’s white and smooth [...] It’s soft on the eye, it’s clean, it’s just the way you experience it.’

Quietness, space and fresh air are often mentioned by visitors to the wilds and in natural history writing too (see Goodall & Berman, 1999; Owens & Owens, 1994; Packer, 1996). Jeanetta attended to one of these aspects, that of physical space, and said:
‘If you look at the majority of the people that work [in the bush], apart from when we actually hug or want to stand next to each other, look at the space between people. People … we’re never on top of each other.’

Squack had a powerful sense that the space available to us in the wilderness is good for people. He feels it allows us to develop a positive relationship with all aspects of ourselves.
‘I absolutely thrive on that isolation. It gives you plenty of time to think. It gives you time to slow down your mind and I guess, yes, it’s pretty healthy for you, that you come to terms with what you’re about, well, with your life I suppose, with everything in it, and you can’t really be unhappy with it.’

Jane Goodall (Goodall & Berman, 1999), Brian Jackman (1995) and the Douglas-Hamiltons (1975) have all commented on the importance of solitude as do many spiritual writings (May, 2006). There seems to be something important about solitude when in the wilderness. As well as his statement that ‘I love the isolation’, Squack notes how this is intrinsic to a sense of calmness in life. He said:
‘When you’re on your own, your responsible for yourself, and I guess I feel fairly comfortable with myself. [...] I feel comfortable in my own mind that I should be able to sort out something if something goes wrong, and that if something does go badly wrong, I feel fairly comfortable with my life the way it is.’
This is something very important to consider as not only do clients raise issues of solitude and tranquillity in the consulting room but it is something that urbanites struggle to find regardless of how they are feeling. Evolutionary research (Diamond, 2005; Dunbar, 2004; Lorenz, 2002; Smith, 2004) suggests that we are hardwired for optimal functioning in groups of up to 150 people and that unconsciously we work very hard to limit our contact to that number.

Evolutionary research (Diamond, 2005; Dunbar, 2004; Lorenz, 2002; Smith, 2004) suggests that we are hardwired for optimal functioning in groups of up to 150 people and that unconsciously we work very hard to limit our contact to that number.

Yet, life in the city inevitably means that we start our day knowing that we will have to expend energy engaging with many more people than this – even if it is simply avoiding them and their physical and chemical intrusion on the underground. On a recent trip to see friends for a movie and dinner I tested this out. I came within sight, touch or smell of at least 340 people – and that was in the space of about five hours. So solitude is hard to find in the city, but the question needs to be asked, does that matter? We are a sociable species after all.

Another theme that is mentioned a great deal when hearing about people’s experiences in the wilderness is that of self awareness which can be experienced in a very clear and powerful way in the wilderness. Squack and Jeanetta both thought so and said:

‘It gives you plenty of time to think. It gives you time to slow down your mind and I guess, yes, it’s pretty healthy for you, that you come to terms with what you’re about, well, with your life I suppose, with everything in it, and you can’t really be unhappy with it.’ (Squack)

‘You’re forced to actually... to introduce yourself to yourself. Being able to feel comfortable with yourself.’ (Jeanetta)

We are well aware that the separation of self, world and others is an arbitrary and problematic view of human experience. It has long been critiqued as an artificial human construction (Foucault, 1986, 1995; Spinelli, 2007) and in fact, self, world and other are all simply different aspects of the same world and the same experience. The bush provides opportunities to develop a greater sense of awareness to the world around us and the ways in which we are part of it. Louv (2006) argues that this is a function of our perceptual processes as the ‘busy-ness’ of the city requires ‘directed’ perception – whereas the wilderness draws on more free-floating perceptual processes. This is heightened the further one gets from the cosseted world of the urbanite. Jill talked of being on foot in the wilderness and said:

‘... it’s really cool to be on the foot safaris when you have to be really careful and alert, […] all your senses are heightened and you’re watching out for elephants and cape buffalo and hippos and I love that.’

This self-awareness includes the ability to focus in a way that is simply not encouraged by the rational and frantic nature of our

¹ 100 people minimum in the tube carriage (although the turn-over of individuals might take this up to a 1000 or more), 100 people minimum on the walk from the tube carriage to the cinema, at least 60 people in the theatre, another 60 in the restaurant, probably 20 at the garage we filled up with petrol and of course innumerable cars we had to be attentive to on the way home. That is at the very minimum, 340 people for my senses and psychological mechanisms had to monitor and evaluate with regard to competition, threat and sexual cues.
urban environment. It is an opportunity for all our senses to make themselves known and for us to respond fully to the world we are a part of. Squack described it and said: ‘When you’re in close contact [with nature], you’re attention is much more of a pinpoint focus.’ And it is interesting that this is not always a quiet, meditative experience – it also occurs when highly aroused.

‘If you’re on foot with the animals, particularly something like elephant or something dangerous […] it’s like an adrenalin high. You’ve got all these adrenalinics pumping through you and you’re sitting in close contact with these things.’ (Squack)

As a frequent visitor to Africa’s wilder and more remote areas, Jill seems to suggest that she too experiences a very specific sense of vitality when in the wilds. She said: ‘I feel like all my senses are heightened. I feel fully alive there. […] It just goes on and on. I think I just feel alive, really stimulated but also very calm, like it’s an internal calmness for me.’

A calmness that many therapy clients yearn for. Yet they find it hard to imagine – let alone find – in urban settings.

Villiers felt that there were other important aspects of the wilderness too and these allow for profound and enriching experiences. Villiers talked about a sense of awe: ‘Who would not have awe for a herd of 200 elephants or who would not look at those beautiful flowers and say – ‘it’s pretty amazing’. And I don’t know whether it releases certain hormones or what it releases in your body but it’s almost a spiritual experience. Maybe it brings you a bit back down to earth and a bit closer to what we probably all are.’

Self-awareness in the wilderness is, therefore, described as qualitatively different from that experienced in the hustle and bustle of the concrete jungle. The separation of experience and experiencer is exposed as being a very fragile construct. At times this spurious separation dissolves and it does so in very powerful ways. A difficulty that arises from this is a struggle to find a way to articulate this to others. Villiers tried to describe a special moment on top of a hill watching giraffes. He said: ‘… when you stand on the hill like yesterday on [the] koppie or wherever you are and you watch. I don’t know how to describe it. It’s in you; it’s sort of through you. How do you take yourself out of it?’

This is similar to the accounts by conservationists and natural history writers. After extensive periods in the Borneo rain-forests, Birute Galdikas writes about a powerful relationship with orang-utans.

‘I had been immersed in the world of orang-utans. Orang-utans are everywhere: […] The distinction between humans and orang-utans had begun to blur in my mind. I could rattle off a list of the differences. But I had lost that gut feeling, which is an integral part of Western intellectual consciousness.’ (Galdikas, 1995, p.311)

This is interesting as these views are reminiscent of those written by Jung many years ago when he noted: ‘At times I feel like I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am myself living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the process of the seasons …’ (Jung, 1967, p.252)

While signalling an attempt to translate profound experiences, the meta-physical experience obviously clashes with the hyper-rational discourse favoured by contemporary urbanites and Western cultural institutions. In fact, it is one way that environmental messages are ignored or derided. But counselling psychologists do not have to fall prey to these short-sighted and unhelpful assumptions. Counselling psychologists frequently discuss meaningful experiences with clients knowing full well that not everything that means something can be counted or articulated as if it were a rational, technical accomplishment. For those in the wilds, these profound experiences are not strange or
unusual – they just are. It is simply the way of the world. It is all around us. We are part of a unitary world, or what Jung termed the ‘Unus Mundus’ (Jung, 1963; see McCallum – this volume). When thinking about the world we are a part of, Villiers noted how self-evident it is that all aspects of the world are inter-dependent:

‘I see how much dependent [animals and plants] all are on each other. So leopards are dependent on impala, which are dependent on the grass, which we almost didn’t have so they would have been thin, which meant that they could sort of get eaten easily, etc., etc.’

The interdependence of life is something that others have thought or written about. Jonathan mused that:

‘If somebody with great wisdom understood our world and was looking from outer space, then I’m quite sure that they would see people as just another form of life. [...] somebody should actually have a chart or a physical photograph of every type of life and ordered according to complexities. [...] But I’m sure if you went from humans through to apes, and we look very much like them because we are closely related, and then down through the whole order of life, it would be so blindingly apparent that we are just different forms of the same thing, which is life.’

In a thought-provoking article about life on the edge of the Alaskan tundra, Streetley notes ‘I have to live with wildlife, not against it; I have to experience the beauty and the violence, I have to be part of the circle’ (2000, p.26).

As well as people’s own experiences, observation of others brings home how deep an impact the wilderness can have on people.

‘You see someone see their first lion or their first elephant or a baby elephant. Or baby giraffe. And they cry. It’s so powerful [...] ‘And this one lady, it changed her life. [...] the elephants that got her to that level. Yes, I think there must be something. It’s like convicts who get a responsibility of a pet. It works. It is therapeutic, it must be.’ (Villiers)

And Jonathan echoed this:

‘[These experiences] bring some people to tears. They see their first lion or they see their first lion and they are beside themselves with emotion and are probably thinking at that time, ‘I would do anything to try and make our world a better place.’

It was because of these experiences – his own and others – that Villiers is confident that this type of experience was available to us all regardless of the nature of the wilderness we had access to – the American wild west or the British west country. Jonathan speculated that:

‘You can take somebody, a street kid from Nairobi, no concept of wildlife at all, [...] you could take somebody who’s got all the money in the world, so you could take people from a variety of different backgrounds and, education, if you take them to somewhere like the Mara or to Antarctica, they are going to be moved because I think there is a part of us which is receptive to feeling a sense of wonder and a sense of joy [...] The sort of endorphin effect. The dopamine. Those peak moments that we know when we’re in the moment.’

And, of course, there is scientific evidence to support this view too. Even small increases of

4 The rains were non-existent in late 2006. They did not arrive till March, 2007.
access to the natural world provide benefits (Louv, 2006). This is important for psychologists to be aware of and to consider as our clients may not have access to the wide plains of Wyoming but they might be able to spend time in their gardens in Worthing; they may not get to spend weeks in Peru but afternoons walking in the park may allow some beneficial experience of nature. And if people are open to it, nature has a way of seducing people; ‘Nature has a way, no matter where you are, to grow on you. [...] you become part of nature.’ (Villiers)

So it is clear, there are significant benefits for those that do remember their connection to the natural world and take the time to engage with it.

**Challenges of the natural world**

As well as the positive experiences that the natural world provides, it can also be very challenging. Those that have contact with the natural world seem well aware of this – both the risks involves and also the way in which these challenges can enhance our sense of self and psychological well-being. And sometimes these are the exact same things! For instance, while solitude was described as being of great benefit above, it is also the case that ‘there are difficulties being alone’ (Villiers) – especially if it goes on for too long or happens at a problematic time. Squack said that ‘I guess sometimes that isolation can, if you’re out there for a long, long time, it can start to get to you’. He explained that:

‘If I’m on my own for probably longer than three weeks, I shouldn’t say I start to go batty, but I start to go a little bit over the other side, become I guess just a little bit tired of it and a bit ‘Bush mad’, I suppose you could say.’

‘Bush mad’ is a term used to refer to an experience which, amongst other things is characterised by emotional stress and negative rumination which, of course, can interfere with any potential benefit we might experience. Squack suggested that ‘it’s because I guess you’re lacking that stimulus to move onto new things, so when you’re on your own for too long, you start to dwell too long on certain things. Natural history writers have long written about this (Fossey, 1983; Galdikas, 1995; Goodall, 2000; Owens & Owens, 1994; Payne, 1998).

As urbanites well know, the experience of isolation does not always require physical isolation – we sometimes feel our isolation most acutely in the presence of others whether that be at work or in the high street. This is the same in the bush as oftentimes people will be there with an entire camp staff. The experience of isolation is related to the absence of shared values and experiences, companionship and a sense of intimacy.

‘… a lot of the camp crew guys that you’ll be working with [are] obviously coming from different cultural backgrounds as well, you won’t really be talking about things which would be of similar interest to both of you, so you have very limited conversation and very limited contact in that respect. You’re obviously with people but not quite the intimate contact, or not necessary intimate.’ (Squack)

This was something that Villiers had also talked about. He said:

‘there are all these special moments that we spoke about yesterday where be it a sunset or a sunrise or a leopard next to the vehicle, all these kind of sightings that you wish you had someone to share it with.’

Isolation is one challenge, but there are other challenges too. Even short trips to the wilderness can be physically and emotionally draining as Jill indicated when she reflected on a walking trip to a remote part of Kenya where she had to rely on others for her physical safety.

‘The Masai were really worried about us getting gored by Cape buffalo and I just thought, ’motherfucker, what have I got myself into?’ And all I could think of was, my dad is not going to fly in, in a helicopter and rescue me […] so I think it was huge, and by like the sixth, eighth day, I was popping Valium to sleep at night because I could not sleep.’
Jonathan reflected on a similar experience and said:

‘I [was then] going to walk however many kilometres, [...] down to the lake shore, and [...] there actually weren’t lions there but there were probably buffalo and there were certainly waterbuck and warthogs about, I was shitting myself, I tell you, as I went through the trees. [...] in my naivety I could have got flattened by a buffalo and had my comeuppance [...] it was quite an experience.’

These events could be experienced negatively or as a traumatic experience, a challenge gone too far. But Jill didn’t see it that way, she suggested that:

‘We’ve lived through some pretty rough stuff. That’s been really good for me, to just be independent and know that I can be uncomfortable, I can sleep on the ground in zero degree weather. I did that in Nepal for 17 days. I can do that and I can live through that, so there must be some survival thing in there for me. I had to prove to myself I could do a lot of this stuff.’

So sometimes these challenges are what allow people to experience the benefits of the natural world (see also Milton, 2003). Exposure to the aspects that people most fear allows people to gain some perspective (Atcheson, 2007). In addition it is important to keep things in perspective, people also note that the urban context is not without significant and ongoing danger. In fact Mpho said:

‘[in the cities] we have robbers lately, we have a … accidents, like car accidents and all that, the bomb [...] and the risks are verified there, while this side it’s much more safer. Though we have lions and leopards they’re not as bad.’

Some of challenges of the natural world are relational, this is evident in natural history writing and two of the participants also described the far reaching impacts of this relationship. Joy Adamson’s reflections after releasing Elsa the lioness back into the wilds, are informative and poignant. She writes:

‘I realised acutely how much I had become dependant on her; how much I had for nearly three years lived the life of a lioness, shared her feelings, interests and reactions. We had lived so intimately together that being alone seemed unbearable. I felt desperately lonely with no Elsa walking at my side, rubbing her head against me and letting me feel her soft skin and warm body.’ (Adamson, 1960, p.172)

Villiers talked about the profound connections that are possible with wild animals and how the magnitude of its impact took him by surprise. He described the death of one of his study leopards and said:

‘... my body shut down. I shut down. I cried, I couldn’t walk for about six hours, couldn’t stand up. I could stand up...’
from my bed and I would fall down. I just had sapped every ounce of energy. And that really made me realise how much I really did miss her. She had become part of my family. So I get more attached I think than I make people know.’

Jeanetta had also struggled with the deaths of animals she had known. She talked about her sorrow when an elephant needs to be euthanised.

‘When you have a bull or a cow that is so badly injured you can’t… you can’t save them. And that’s very difficult. And it’s difficult to make that decision [to euthanise]. Even though you know it’s the right decision it’s still a very, very difficult decision. [...] every time you have to shoot an animal I cry myself to sleep but, you know, it’s part of what needs to get done so…’

It is not just relationships with animals that are difficult – bush life can put stress on human relationships. When facing isolation and the death of several gorillas, Helen Attwater notes: ‘Mark and I were unable to talk about what had happened. Instead of uniting us, our sadness [about the death of several gorillas] alienated us from one another (1999, p.153). This is similar to Dian Fossey’s withdrawal from colleagues after Digit’s death (de la Bedoyere, 2005) and is also evident in the separate lives that the Adamson’s came to lead (Adamson, 1969, 1972, 1980; Cass, 1992).

The other stress that is important to note is the fact that oftentimes we have to tear ourselves away from the natural world and in doing so we experience a profound loss. Jill said ‘when I leave, when we fly out of Nairobi, I’ll cry for a half-hour on the plane.’

**Balance is crucial**

The fourth theme to consider is one that has clear relevance to the practice of counselling psychology in our towns and cities – and it relates to what our environmental and evolutionary psychologist colleagues are telling us – that we require both sociality and solitude. As the highly sociable species that we are, it is apparent that few of us will benefit by jumping urban ship and sailing away into some utopian sunset. The task seems to be to find a way to have enough time and contact with the natural world as well as living our urban lives. And this is a task that needs attention if we are to benefit from both of our worlds … or both aspects of the world.

Jeanetta explained the biggest challenge for her after being in the bush for an extended period of time is ‘marrying those two and being able to socialise again and actually forcing yourself to socialise and not becoming completely, you know, solitary individual’. Villiers agreed and said that ‘Life is not either this or that, it’s not black or white. Life is always about the balance.’
‘Balance’ is an interesting concept and may mean different things to different people depending on interest, experience and temperament. For Squack:

‘The way I am on a 50/50 basis, which hopefully some of the time will be spent in the Bush with [my girlfriend], is probably quite a good set up for me. I can come back and sit in my little house up on the hill in the bush and play on the computer, be in contact with people, and maybe two or three times a week, nip into town for half-a-day or something and then come back out again, and then the other 50 per cent of the time, you’re actually out in the Bush completely.’

While the urbanites may struggle to get away from all the pressures they face in town, people that do manage to spend time in the wilds suggest that it is getting easier to stay in contact with friends and families. ‘Nowadays things have improved, [with] e-mail availability, through VHF radio. Now you can have a satellite Internet system so you can actually be in real time touch with the rest of the world.’ (Squack)

Whatever the balance, Villiers suggested that greater contact with the natural world is likely to benefit people’s sense of well-being.

‘I believe everyone should at least get exposure to it at some stage of their life so that if you take your children to Hermanus every single year maybe at some stage just turn and go to Kruger. Just see how they experience it. And whether – at least when they do go to the coast it’s still sort of getting into nature to a certain degree.’

**Conclusion**

This paper has considered the experience of people that spend a significant period of time in the wilds. It has suggested that time in nature can provide immediate relief from the common stresses of urban life as well as profound psychological and spiritual benefits … if people can tolerate the difficulties that the wilderness challenges us with. The overlap between the views of these natural world ‘insiders’ and information from disciplines such as evolutionary psychology, environmental psychology, zoology and natural history raises a great number of questions relevant for counselling psychology as we endeavour to engage with our clients in a search for a meaningful way of being. We need to question how we enrich our formulations (about our relationship with self, others and the wider world), to our interventions (in the consulting room and beyond) and of course to our research efforts. How we utilise the insights others have provided? And how we contribute to the current and future debates – so that we can contribute to the well-being of our clients, ourselves and potentially our planetary co-inhabitants?

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References

A Blue Tit got me thinking ... Reflections on the therapeutic aspects of human–animal relationships

Jill Owen

As I was working with a very anxious client the other day, she suddenly noticed a Blue Tit in the bush right beside my window. She stopped talking for a couple of minutes while she watched it and then commented that watching such a beautiful creature at such close quarters had made her feel instantly calmer. I had followed her gaze and I too had experienced a positive emotional response. This calming impact of animals is not at all unusual and in looking at the therapeutic effects of the natural world, it is clear that animals can play a major part.

Many of us have experienced the restful effect of stroking a pet, the glee evoked by watching a playful kitten, the exhilaration of riding a horse, the awe-inspiring sight of elephants while on safari or the serenity associated with watching a shoal of colourful fish. Pet ownership is reported to have many psychological benefits (Serpell, 1990) and accounts of the therapeutic effect of animals for people who are struggling with physical and psychological difficulties are countless (e.g. Geisler, 2004; Barba, 1995). Animals are now being used as visitors in hospitals, hospices, care and nursing homes (e.g. Barba, 1995: Banks & Banks, 2002) and the charity Pets as Therapy suggest more than 100,000 people a week are comforted or cheered by one of the animals involved in their scheme alone (www.petsastherapy.org).

Watching animals allows the observer an alternative perspective on the world. Primitive priorities are highlighted and there can be a diversion from some of the stresses and strains imposed by the material world. Although animals prepare for processes in the future such as hibernation or nesting, most interaction between humans and animals takes place in the moment and does not involve discussion about concerns regarding the future. This may allow people to switch off while interacting with their pets or riding their horse.

As a horse-rider myself, I have noticed over the years that riding is rarely a pursuit that people engage in half-heartedly. Children who ride often become ‘pony mad’ and adult riders commonly share similar commitment. I have worked with a number of clients who have been struggling to retain function in most areas of their lives but their relationship with their horses remains intact. This may, to some degree, be the result of the requirement to care for the animal and the fact this encourages responsibility to adhere to a daily schedule (Oakley & Bardin, 2006). There would, however, appear to be
more to it than this. The relationship we have with horses appears to be extremely complex and involves the compliance of an animal that is far stronger than we are. The communication in riding a horse is subtle and intricate and the feeling of harmony is achieved when horse and rider are moving in unison. Added to this are the benefits of exercise and the extraordinary range of movements and speeds can add to the endorphin release. The sense of rhythm can be calming and the ongoing requirement to ‘listen’ to the horse distracting. On horseback, riders can cover ground quickly and immerse themselves in the benefits of the countryside. While on a horse riding safari in Botswana, we noticed that we could get much closer to the game than when we had travelled by jeep. The game seemed to barely notice the arrival of the horses and the feeling of harmony with nature was intense.

Some may say that humans’ relationship with animals sometimes borders on subjugation. Whilst sadly mistreatment of animals does occur, animals often appear to gain benefit from their interactions with humans. Lynch (2000) suggested that stroking a dog not only leads to positive physiological changes in the human, but the animal experiences similar benefits. Animals exhibit signs of pleasure when greeted by their owners and this is perhaps one of the most gratifying aspects of animal care.

**Empirical support**

Animals have been known to have a positive impact and provide valuable support for those recovering from illnesses such as breast cancer (McNicholas et al., 2001), heart disease (Friedmann & Thomas, 1995) and following surgery such as lung transplants (Irani et al., 2006). Research reported at the American Heart Association’s Scientific Sessions (Cole et al., 2005) found that a 12-minute visit by a dog improved heart and lung function, lowered blood pressure and reduced the release of damaging hormones as well as reducing anxiety in hospitalised heart patients. The apparent benefits also extend to children and the elderly. The presence of a dog during dental procedures (Havener et al., 2001) and during physical examination (Nadgengast et al., 1997) can reduce the stress for children.

Owning a pet can reduce feelings of loneliness (Zasloff & Kidd, 1994) and pet-owners are reported to have fewer minor health problems (Serpell, 1990). They also reportedly demonstrate better psychological wellbeing (Serpell, 1990) and have lower blood pressure (Friedmann et al., 1983). James Lynch (2000) described noticing that his 10-year-old daughter’s blood pressure fell by 50 per cent as she started to stroke her pet dog and this was the inspiration for his work in this area. He discusses how interaction and dialogue with others can lead to positive or negative physiological reactions in people, depending on whether the dialogue
is dysfunctional or helpful. He placed interaction with animals in the beneficial category that leads to calming effects such as a decrease in blood pressure. He maintained that people who generally respond to the world as if it is a threat experience an increase in blood pressure as soon as they start to talk. Lynch explained how speaking in potentially pressurised situations could lead to raised blood pressure, for example in children reading aloud. He found that this effect could be reduced by the presence of a dog in the room and suggested that the calming effect of the animal’s company has the opposite effect to the fight/flight mechanism that occurs in situations of threat (Lynch, 2000).

This leads us to the question as to what it is about animals that leads to such physical and mental health benefits. Interestingly, in explaining the fight-flight mechanism it is often an animal, an apex predator of its time, the sabre-toothed tiger that is most often given as an example of a threat. Many of the animals that evoke such positive emotions in us are the same that could also cause us extreme physical harm in the wrong circumstances, when we are nothing more than prey (Smith, 2004; Streetley, 2000). Perhaps it is the very fact that we often live in a respectful relationship with such animals that is positive and leads to a sense of well-being.

**Therapeutic relationships**

It is interesting that clients who report intense difficulties relating to human beings sometimes describe very positive relations with their pets or horses. They often cite the consistency and unconditional nature of their animal’s affection as the reason. It is true that animals do not judge a human being by their intelligence, achievements, status or attractiveness and this perhaps alleviates some of the perceived pressures in human to human interactions. Sometimes we categorise animals according to their pedigree or even enter them into competitions, but it is unlikely that they apply the same type of judgements to us.

It is also interesting that people who have developed negative beliefs about human nature are sometimes equally polarised in their view of animals. Whereas all human behaviour may become interpreted in accordance with their negative beliefs, excuses may be made for any disagreeable behaviour displayed by their pets. If they become more aware of the processes by which they interpret animal behaviour in a positive way, they may be able to experiment with applying similar measures to human actions. Imagining applying the negative criteria when evaluating interactions with animals may highlight the absurdity to the client of the way in which they think when relating to people. The criteria for judgement may relate to entrenched beliefs and past experiences, but an exploration of the client’s spectrum of responses may provide them with some insight.

There are a number of situations where the therapeutic role of the animal goes beyond a soothing presence, for example, blind dogs and rescue dogs. In such situations it often appears the benefits of the animal’s intervention go beyond the practical. There is something intense and positive in the relationship between the giver and receiver of help.

Often it is the appearance or soft feel of animals that gives their observer pleasure and this may contribute to the desire to care for them. The graceful movement (for example, of fish) and relaxing sounds (such as birdsong) may be other factors.

The defences we employ in our interactions with animals are also interesting. I know a family who regularly keep lambs as pets but then eat the meat after they are slaughtered. It seems the adoration of the pets and the enjoyment of the resulting meals are processes that are clearly segregated in their minds. It is not unusual for people to be both animal lovers and meat eaters, whereas for others the contradictions involved in this would not be tenable. It is also interesting that we can enjoy a sense of relaxation and pleasure from watching the
actions of beautiful but potentially dangerous animals (e.g. on safari) by avoiding focus on the potential negative. How people interact with the animal world may reflect or contradict the internal processes they employ in everyday life and this may be material that could be considered in therapy. There may be processes they adopt in relation to animals that could be usefully adapted to form coping mechanisms in response to other situations.

The practice of animal assisted therapy is established to a greater extent in the US than in Britain at the current time, although development is continuing here and includes related training courses, e.g. in Bristol at the University of the West of England. Publications have addressed animal assisted therapy in counselling (e.g. Chandler, 2005). It is unlikely to be appropriate or practical for most counselling psychologists to actively use animals as part of therapy, but given the evidence suggesting therapeutic effects of human–animal relations, there are many ways in which consideration of these may enrich our work.

Complex relationships
As with other aspects of nature, some people, of course, do not find animals a positive addition to their lives and may even be frightened of them. Therapy with such clients takes a different route. In such cases, it may be the negative belief allocation is reversed and they may interpret all animal behaviour in the light of their fear. There are some who are allergic to animals and for them the contact could be a very uncomfortable experience. Others may find the responsibility of looking after an animal overwhelming and the necessary routines constraining. The mess or smell some animals make may be construed as a nuisance by some people and the animal’s spontaneity could represent an unwelcome challenge to order. It would be unhelpful to assume that more contact with animals would be helpful to everyone. This may or may not render them immune from experiencing benefits of purely observing other species.

Implications for counselling psychology practice
In counselling psychology, with our awareness of the contextual factors in the worlds in which our clients live, we are aware of the kind of lifestyle factors that influence mood. We consider the mental health benefits of exercise, the effects of sleep disturbance on functioning and the impact of various types of food and drink. A client’s relationship with animals could also be considered, with the focus on the person’s subjective experience in terms of the type of experiences that could be added or expanded. In the same way as clients often resolve to make life-style changes or increase social activity, they could develop activities that relate to their interaction with animals. The relevance of this needs to be assessed in relation to the client’s requirements and questions regarding the presence of animals in the client’s life need to be appropriately broached so as not to make assumptions about what may be helpful. The counselling psychologist of course needs to be aware of their own relationship with the animal world and the potential impact of their related values on the therapeutic process, those that are potentially helpful and those that may hinder the work.

Questions regarding the salience of human-animal relationships in the client’s life may arise in relation to hobbies, relaxation time, pets or coping mechanisms and
such explorations may reveal avenues for useful work. In the course of therapy, the client may spontaneously describe their interactions with animals or other aspects of the natural world. In doing so they perhaps provide a wealth of information about their beliefs, values and the processes in which they engage. Consideration of a client’s relationship with the animal world in isolation would seem limiting but the exploration of this in relation to the overall context of their life seems to add an extra dimension of understanding. The client who noticed the Blue Tit in the bush experienced a brief but very important reprieve from her intense anxiety and many therapeutic opportunities arose as a result.

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References


Environmental issues are receiving a lot of attention right now, what are your thoughts on the ways in which the psychological professions should or should not engage with the ‘biggest issues to face mankind today’?

The environment (Umwelt) has always been an important concept in existential therapy. If you want to become more freely and fully embodied you need to be aware of your interactions with the physical world that we are a part of. People usually gain great strength when taking charge of their physical existence in a much more reflective way. Inevitably such awareness will link in with current environmental concerns. Therapy can be a time for personal reflection on how this affects you.

If clients were to refer to environmental issues, what response would you feel would be appropriate from a psychologist?

My clients often do refer to such issues. Many struggle with a sense of hypocrisy on how they live their lives: feeling on the one hand they would like to live more simply and more in tune with nature and on the other hand feeling hampered by the lifestyle they have evolved and which implies a lot of actions they might be bothered by. Certainly that paradox or that ambiguity or ambivalence is worth working with.

How might psychological expertise influence understanding of environmental issues?

An understanding of the importance of living in line with one’s deepest values and creating meaning makes a difference to how we view such things. So, rather than making it into a political issue the environmental concern is looked at in terms of personal responsibility, but also perhaps in terms of the contradictions experienced. So it may, for instance, become necessary to look at the way in which a person might feel compelled to either totally comply with or not go along with societal pressures to recycle or stop smoking or driving to work and help them figure out how they define their well being in relation to what they perceive as social expectations. My objective would always be to help a person retrieve their own freedom in thinking about these issues, in the context of wider ethical considerations.

Can personal views of the natural world influence the ways psychologists understand people and practice?

Absolutely. I observe this all the time with trainees and supervisees. Therapists make interventions based on their own outlook and steer the client towards considering certain issues rather than other issues, even though they may deny they are doing so. There is always a danger of imposing one’s own bias, especially if we consider this bias to be a generally accepted one and a virtuous one.
Are there any health benefits from contact with the natural world? Under what conditions?
We cannot live good lives without constant contact with the natural world. We breathe air and eat and drink natural products. Our own bodies are part of the natural world. It is, therefore, invaluable to understand better how all these interact with each other and what optimal functioning is. In a more concrete sense research shows that immersion in nature (walking, gardening, sailing, etc.) has tremendously positive effects on all human functioning. Interaction with other creatures, such as other human beings or animals ditto. Projects of horse riding for people with learning disabilities or the introduction of pets into mental hospitals have all proven extremely effective. I have been involved in both these kinds of things myself in the past and have found it uplifting and exhilarating to see clients’ response and participate with them in nature in this way.

We share over 90 per cent of our genome with the other mammals. What kind of relationship do you think we should foster with animals?
I don’t think there is any should about it, in relation to therapy or psychology. But since we are all connected together, as far as I am concerned the more I can be in harmony with as much of nature as possible the more space and openness I create for myself. This is clearly something I would keep in the back of my mind when working with people, but would not dream of imposing it on my clients if they felt otherwise.

In recent years the idea of ‘eco-therapy’ has been seen in the literature and in the media. What are your thoughts about such a concept?
Eco-therapy simply seems like a rediscovery of what people used to do 50 years ago. My own home is based in a converted psychiatric hospital in the Peak District which is surrounded by land on which the patients used to cultivate vegetables. They ran a profitable market garden. I have pictures of this and stories from colleagues who used to work with their patients in what is currently my garden. I have no doubt that integration with the natural world and a sense of belonging with it and being able to work in harmony with it is extremely life enhancing and gratifying. After a long day of therapeutic work I come home to my vegetable garden and regain much of my vitality from working in that wonderful environment and also from playing with my dog. It feels like a privilege, but it should really be part of ordinary living. Why deprive ourselves of the source of our existence?
Jeanetta Selier
Elephant Researcher

Environmental issues are receiving a lot of attention right now, what are your thoughts on the ways in which the psychological professions should or should not engage with the ‘biggest issues to face mankind today’?

Be objective but never forget that there are a lot of things we cannot measure. Scientists are reluctant to look or discuss these – for example, emotions in animals – anthropomorphism. Psychology is not as restricted on these issues and can contribute but must be careful not to take the issues too far. Psychologists can contribute to issues like ethics and morals when it comes to animals and the environment and what is acceptable and what is not.

If clients were to refer to environmental issues, what response would you feel would be appropriate from a psychologist?

Awareness of environmental issues is extremely important and this needs to be encouraged. It also depends on what why the client refers to issues. We can often blow things out of proportion as well and all environmental issues need to be seen objectively. A good question is what can I do to improve the situation?

How might psychological expertise influence understanding of environmental issues?

By understanding ourselves and understanding that we are part and not removed from nature and that we can influence nature as much as nature can influence us. That all things out there have a right to live.

Can personal views of the natural world influence the ways psychologists understand people and practice?

Yes.

Are there any health benefits from contact with the natural world? Under what conditions?

Yes – calmness, peace, contact with animals. Why do we use sounds of the ocean or nature in meditation? Makes you feel part of something a whole lot bigger than yourself.

We share over 90 per cent of our genome with the other mammals. What kind of relationship do you think we should foster with animals?

Respect for all other living things. This does not mean we cannot utilise animals, but we need to think how and why it is acceptable. Contact with animals is extremely important while growing up. Children need to understand and experience what it is to look after something – some animal that is completely dependent on you. Learn how to treat animals and how to react round animals. The type of relationship formed will depend on how and where we grew up and our previous experiences with the specific animal or with animals in general.

In recent years the idea of ‘eco-therapy’ has been seen in the literature and in the media. What are your thoughts about such a concept? I think it can work. There is nothing more therapeutic than watching and interacting with animals and nature.
In Conversation: Jonathan Scott

Jonathan Scott, Naturalist, Author and Television Presenter
in conversation with Martin Milton

Hi Jonathan, thank you for giving your time to help us think about the relationship we have with the natural world. Readers will know you from your television work (Big Cat Diary, Elephant Diaries and Bear Diaries to name just a few) and your books too. I wondered whether we could start by you telling us a little about how you developed such an affinity for the wilderness?

I always had a natural inclination towards the outdoors. I was born in London but brought up on a farm. [...] So, my upbringing was very much an outdoors upbringing and, like my dad who was an architect but also a very good artist, I could always draw. So, as a little person I was always fascinated by the outdoors. I was fascinated by everything that lived and moved and breathed and in a sense what I’ve ended up doing was a natural follow on of those early years. So, in a sense I never really had to struggle to find out what it was I wanted to do with my life and it’s been interesting, obviously meeting a lot of youngsters and having stepchildren myself, to see how that’s quite unusual.

So nature has been important for a very long time. Can you fill us in a little more about how you experience the natural world then?

When I got to Africa, I just felt so energised because I loved the climate, I loved the people, I loved the freedom. There was a sense of you being in charge of your life. England was so regulated. [...] I love the solitude of just being out there and immersing myself in the life of what I’m studying which is a leopard or a lion or a wild dog or whatever it is because then I can engage with my subject. But at the same time I’m very happy to chat to somebody about … ‘how’s Jonny Wilkinson and the World Cup?’ because I love to read and I love newspapers and I love knowing what’s going on in the world.

Now I would like to ask you some particular questions that might be of interest to psychologists. Firstly, environmental issues are receiving a lot of attention right now, what are your thoughts on the ways in which the psychological professions should or maybe should not engage with these?

It would be an area which would be worth looking at, to see what the psychologists can tell us from their understanding of human beings as to, for example, the importance of a connection to the outdoors, or in terms of making environmentalism part of a school curriculum; There are some very obvious things that could be done which governments should be engaged in, and things that we as individuals can do.

It would be good to actually know from psychologists, and engage psychologists in being leaders, in how we should be targeting environmental campaigns. I’m sure Al Gore must have perhaps engaged with people, friends who were psychologists, or maybe just professionally engaged psychologists as
to how to pitch his campaign. To think about ‘what is the best way to actually get people to sit up and listen?’

Psychologists could be more engaged as professionals as to how we can actually make our message most listenable to, how we can capture people’s attention, how we should package what we believe in, and make it most people friendly. But also, is there something the psychologists can tell us that we are not already aware of as to just how important the environment is to us? I would like to hear more myself, for somebody to open the charter on the role of psychology and what psychologists can tell us.

We share over 90 per cent of our genome with the other mammals. What kind of relationship do you think we should foster with animals?

I think it would be much healthier if we had a more broad based view of life. The first thing we can do is try not to make the division between ourselves and animals. It’s a useful division, but after all, it’s one we are creating. I would imagine if there was a higher being, that the higher being understood our world and was looking from outer space, then I’m quite sure that they would see people as just another form of life. That is very much my take on things. Wouldn’t it be amazing to have an illustration of life from a human through a gorilla to a chimp, if you had everything lined up in a continuum, wouldn’t that be amazing? So, I think we should do that. On the Internet, somebody should actually have a chart or a physical photograph of every type of life and ordered according to complexities. Again, this is obviously a human order, because who knows what order a greater being might find it? But I’m sure if you went from humans through to apes, and we look very much like them because we are closely related, and then down through the whole order of life, it would be so blindingly apparent that we are just different forms of the same thing, which is life.

So, that division that we make between us and other forms of life I think is one of the key things in actually developing a more compassionate and a more engaged and a more potentially healthy view of how we deal with our planet if we don’t take the present anthropocentric or egocentric view of ‘there is us and then there is them’. Obviously this can then lead into should the higher primates lead on human rights or primate rights, etcetera? Why do we even need to get into that kind of thing, because if we respect life and we respect our own lives, some of us, then just respecting life would give us a whole different way of dealing with our own lives and with our own species?

I think it was Konrad Lorenz, or somebody I think basically said, and I think this is probably true because again, it’s fairly obvious, people who are interested in the natural world, I think are probably more liable to be compassionate and caring and engaged with human life, although there are some people who very much just say ‘I love my dog but people just drive me crazy.’ The more we can feel part of a continuum, the more balanced we are, because unfortunately there are people out there who think well, ‘there’s bunny-huggers and then there’s real people.’ I am sure George Bush thinks that people are too sort of, what he considers engaged and soppy about wildlife and wildlife causes and environmentalism are just naïve. ‘Just get a suit, earn a million dollars by being an oil magnate.’ That is the difference between sort of serious people and the rest of us. I think it would be much healthier if we had a more broad based view of life.
When thinking of people now, are there any health benefits from contact with the natural world? Under what conditions?

I’m sure that’s got to be healthy for us. We must, as human beings, I think, respond to [nature by] feeling good and those kinds of experiences make you feel good. They bring some people to tears. They see their first elephant or they see their first lion and they are beside themselves with emotion and are probably thinking at that time, ‘I would do anything to try and make our world a better place.’ I think probably when we go out and we look at a water hole and we see the plenitude of nature and we see water, animals, trees, there’s that archaic response which is part of our genetics perhaps which is a connection to a need and a response which is adaptive. So, I think our connection to Africa and wildlife is actually innate in a sense. There’s a connection which is perhaps innate and that response of wanting to somehow nurture that is still there if we can expose people to it. We see it the whole time.

E.O. Wilson said some interesting things. For instance, why should people who come to Africa, and I believe they do, feel a natural affinity to Africa and to wild places? I believe you can take somebody, a street kid from Nairobi, no concept of wildlife at all, you could take somebody who’s got all the money in the world, so you could take people from a variety of different backgrounds and, education, if you take them to somewhere like the [Masai] Mara or to Antarctica, they are going to be moved because I think there is a part of us which is receptive to feeling a sense of wonder and a sense of joy and a sense of, ‘oh, my goodness, isn’t this...’ The sort of endorphin effect. The dopamine. Those peak moments that we know when we’re in the moment. To give an example, which we already know, which is how autistic children, or children who have had terrible trauma, so people who are not able to respond in the way that we would think of conventionally. The struggles with communication – I believe – have had huge steps, huge gains by swimming with dolphins or connecting to other forms of life. I can imagine some kind of people might have problems for instance with just connecting with other people, with communicating effectively.

Why do people love Planet Earth, the last big Alastair Fothergill series? Because it feels as if we want that. It’s healthy. Secondly, and I’m sure you’ll know something about this, and it seems so obvious when one states it, I think it’s been proven that if you have people who are recovering from some illness and you give them a window onto wildlife or a window onto a patch of green and some birds and some sounds of nature, they will probably heal a lot quicker than if they’re just in a sterile environment, if they don’t have a sense of connection to something which enriches us psychologically. So, to me a connection to our natural world... I mean, it’s so blindingly obvious. Why don’t we get it? But I can see why it is. It’s because we live in towns. The bulk of humanity, I imagine, is probably now more and more living in cities and is living separate from the force of life and the force of life is the earth.

That’s very interesting as it’s a much broader role than many psychologists consider. What about the consulting room? If clients were to refer to environmental issues, what response would you feel would be appropriate from a psychologist?

I can think of lots of ways where, if I was a psychologist I might well want to build in a large dose of connecting to the environment, connecting to other forms of life, which could actually bring great comfort to a disturbed person, or even to a non-disturbed person.

In recent years the idea of ‘eco-therapy’ has been seen in the literature and in the media. What are your thoughts about such a concept?

If one is looking at a holistic approach to health, then to me exposing people to wildlife, to wild animals, to the creatures that we share the planet with, helps. When I say...
creatures, it doesn’t necessarily have to be that you have to send them to Africa and show them a lion. You can send them to a zoo or you can send them to a safari park and expose them to captive wild creatures, or you can just take them to a beautiful spot in the country where there are trees, or the ocean, the sound of the ocean.

On behalf of our readers can I thank you for taking time out of very busy schedule to contribute to this Indaba.

Thank you.

Jonathan Scott can be contacted via his website at: www.jonathanangelascott.com

Dr Martin Milton is based in the Psychology Department at the University of Surrey.
Environmental issues are receiving a lot of attention right now, what are your thoughts on the ways in which the psychological professions should or should not engage with the ‘biggest issues to face mankind today’?

I believe that any profession which deals with mankind and its behaviour, needs and aspirations could be extremely valuable when it comes to environmental issues – because at the end of the day, they are only issues because we make them issues! WE! MAN, makes them issues – we transform nature and we think differently about the transformations we make, so if psychologists can have a positive influence on humans and how they resolve such issues and how they behave, I think they should be involved.

If clients were to refer to environmental issues, what response would you feel would be appropriate from a psychologist?

… this is where a sound knowledge of the environment and surrounding issues is valuable…

How might psychological expertise influence understanding of environmental issues?

… psychological expertise would always come in handy when sensitive and controversial issues like the environment and its conservation are addressed …

Can personal views of the natural world influence the ways psychologists understand people and practice?

There are so many similarities between humans and animals that a knowledge of the natural world, and especially the instinctive behaviour which seems to be so much more raw in nature, that a knowledge thereof might help one to understand the often suppressed instinctive behaviour of mankind. Suppressed is maybe not the right word, but disguise could also do. Those natural urges and needs that drive us will ultimately influence our decisions, but we hide behind so many everyday life ‘masks’ and lies in order not to expose ourselves. Nature doesn’t mess around – animals do what has to be done to survive…and might teach us a lot about ourselves. In nature animals have all adapted to fill specialised niches – developing unique behaviour and social structures to best exploit resources. If they don’t do this, they might go extinct. I think we can learn from this in practice! Find out what works and what doesn’t, adapt and succeed…and adapt again when conditions change.

Are there any health benefits from contact with the natural world? Under what conditions?

Apart from the obvious clean air and often active lifestyle experienced in nature,
I believe it all boils down to one thing – stress! … or rather the lack of it. Stress is a killer! It kills people physically, but it also ruins relationships and somehow we allow ourselves to be completely taken over by such a lifestyle! The other day I went to watch my best friend play action cricket. He had mentioned to me that the day at the office had been bad (‘stressful’) so he was obviously looking forward to the game. He unfortunately had a shocker and ended up being more stressed than before! Even then he was ‘complaining’ about the arrangements which were made for the rest of the evening – something about a poor venue … The point is – we allow it to strangle us! But in nature it is not so easy for stress to tackle you – things happen slowly and the pace of your life automatically reduces … to much healthier levels…

We share over 90 per cent of our genome with the other mammals. What kind of relationship do you think we should foster with animals?

Animals are animals and humans are humans. I believe we should be careful to personalise animals, because we then tend to make irrational decisions, emotional decisions, when it comes to their management – management which has become the duty (or maybe always has been) of mankind. Rather appreciate the differences in animals as ‘creatunalities’ and respect the fact that we are different. We should, however, remember that each and every animal has a role to play in nature and therefore our role or relationship should be that of a guardian. This does not mean that we can’t love them and learn from them, but it should be conservation with the head, not the heart …
Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to talk to us. Readers may know you as the author of *Ecological Intelligence*, as a Jungian analyst, as a medical doctor or as an environmentalist. How do you see yourself? I sometimes struggle with that one. I think, deep down, I see myself as an ecologist … and a fairly serious amateur naturalist. The notion of a web of life – that every living thing is connected – is very real to me. It is both science and poetry. This realisation has provided a great sense of meaning to my life and work. I don’t know how it is possible to be a medical doctor, let alone an analyst, without some kind of ecological awareness, not only of the external environment but of the ecology of the human mind.

In today’s world where certainty, rationality and a positivistic view of science have an almost fetishistic quality, you draw on Jungian and Evolutionary theories a great deal. Both of which seem to engage well with uncertainty and non-rationality. What are your thoughts on how these viewpoints can enhance our current need to engage with the natural world?

I think it is important to acknowledge that human beings are human animals, but animals with a difference – we are also symbolic animals – a species that looks for meanings in things. It is not enough that an animal, or a mountain or a tree be seen or understood in a purely empirical context alone. We experience them as well. They contribute to a personal sense of place, time, identity and meaning. These natural phenomena, in addition to their stand-alone, empirical value, are inevitably seen for what they represent. The fact that we can now point toward regions around the PAG of the brainstem as the convergent neurological centre for a sense of self (and possibly a sense of meaning) does not mean that the sense of representation and meaning can now be measured. To me, the sense of meaning is immeasurable. At the right time, I support any form of empiricism. What is important, I think, is that we genuinely embrace both approaches – the empirical and the representational. Why? Because I don’t think we have any choice. To see an animal, for example, as purely representational is to rob that animal of its intrinsic validity as a creature in its own right. It is to fail to understand the animal. To see it in a purely empirical light, however, is to rob oneself of what I believe is a deep evolutionary memory of one’s relationship and responsibility toward that animal – that we are part of a web-of-life.

What is it about Jungians, do you think, that means that they are more engaged, at least more vocal about linking the natural world to the human psyche than many of their therapeutic colleagues?

‘What is it about Jungians…? I don’t know if you are aware of this quote from Jung – “Thank God I’m Jung and not a Jungian.”’ I really like that. I can’t remember its exact source but back in the 1980s it helped to steer me in the direction of a career in...
analytical psychology. It remains an echo and a reminder of the importance of speaking for oneself. I certainly try to do that in the way that I speak and write about environmental issues. Meanwhile, I don’t know of any Jungian more vocal about the impact of the natural world on the human psyche than Jung himself. His writings on nature are considerable. Interestingly, a major turning point in his thinking came from a long sojourn to Africa in the 1920s. It was his exposure to the vast, open plains, animals and people of Africa that confirmed in him the notion of a two-million-year-old wild man/woman in all of us. He was talking evolutionary psychology. As for other vocal ‘Jungians’ in this field, the analytical psychologist James Hillman, has been another influential and vocal ‘wild man’ in my life. To me, he has been one of a few, genuine, original thinkers in depth psychology. Anthony Stevens is another analyst who is both vocal and eloquent in spreading the message of the human-nature link. As for the other therapeutic schools and their engagement in linking the natural world to the human psyche, I really can’t comment. I would be most surprised, however, if any of these schools denied the link.

Can I ask you about your work as an analyst? What relevance does the natural world have for this?

First of all, I would like to take a closer look at the second part of your question, namely the relevance of the natural world to my work as an analyst. Can you see what it implies? It implies that the natural world is separate from one’s work and one’s life … that it is something ‘out there’, irrelevant … a commodity that becomes relevant only when it is useful to us. This split between humans and nature, which I like to call an Origins Deficit Disorder, is one of the most undiagnosed conditions in modern psychiatry. It is another name for ‘homesickness’, a loss of a sense of place, of one’s element and ultimately a loss of a sense of continuity with our past. Hoodwinked by dogma and doctrines, we have forgotten our geological and biological origins. As the great writer and poet DH Lawrence puts it in his poem Elemental: ‘We are lopsided in favour of the angels … let’s get back to being a little more elemental.’ I wish I had written that.

For me, fundamental to analytical work is the recognition that all living things – plants, bacteria, insects, reptiles, birds, mammals – are involved in the same enterprise. It is called survival and the strategies of survival, while expressed a little differently from species to species, remain the same. They
include: competition, co-operation, risk-taking, opportunism, deception and sacrifice (including tolerance, altruism and in humans, delayed gratification). It shouldn’t take too long to unravel from a presenting history or complaint from a patient, issues pertaining to these strategies – too much or too little competition, co-operation, etc. There’s a mantra that I come back to from time to time – ‘Be kind, we are all fighting a fierce battle.’ It is a reminder to me of our shared enterprise of survival and of a need for tolerance and compassion for all living things. I believe we learn a lot about ourselves from the wild or as you put it, the natural world. And so we should, for we are a part of it. We are the human animal.

In particular, I wonder whether the concept of the ‘Unus Mundus’ is important? If so, how?
The Unus Mundus – the one and the same world and universe, the one and the same body of mankind – Yes, as an attitude to the world, to oneself and to others it is hugely important. The Unus Mundus is of course, a myth – not in the sense that it is make-believe or false but in its psychological definition as powerful carriers of truth and meaning for a group or an individual. We are shaped and guided by our myths and we shape them too. In my country there is an African expression ‘Umuntu – Ubuntu’. It means ‘because of you, I exist’. It is an acknowledgement of interdependency and of the significance of the other. Whether we can live up to this image or not is another matter.

Jung once described the interaction between the analyst and the patient as a chemical reaction in which both the patient and the analyst were changed. This is ‘umuntu-ubuntu’. It is the same thing as the Unus Mundus. It is an attitude of interdependency not only human to human, but to the wider community of animals and plants. As I see it, it is central to James Lovelocke’s Gaia hypothesis – viewing the earth as a living organism with humans (for the time being) functioning as a kind of reflecting cortex. Yes, it is idealistic, but not entirely so. To me, this kind of thinking has massive implications for the future of life, as we know it.
As well as theoretically, how do these ideas manifest themselves in your actual practice? Or how might they inform the practice of our readers?

To think in an evolutionary way is to bring the entire human history into the consulting room. It is to see ourselves and our patients as two-and-a-half-million-year-old survivors. It is also an acknowledgement that our animal and human ancestors are alive and with us. To me, our ancestors are in our genes in all manner of percentages and inheritance. As I alluded to in an earlier response, psychological problems are often problems surrounding maladaptive or inappropriate strategies of social survival. They are the same problems that our ancestors had to deal with. How often do we find ourselves dealing with issues of conflict and conflict negotiation around rank, dominance, approval, territory, independence, rivalry, in-groups, out-groups, etc? What has changed? This is ancient stuff, which means that these issues should not be unnecessarily pathologised. They are to be expected (I don’t like the word ‘normal’).

There are other examples of ‘ancestral’ conditions like the compulsions in OCD – checking, cleaning, counting, etc. Rather than a disorder of individual aberrance, it can mean a lot to these patients to know that their condition, albeit maladaptive, has an important adaptive component to it. In our history, it was critical that someone checked and counted and cleaned up. To see these compulsions in this light can often take the sting of hopelessness out of a patient’s self-image. Of course, not everyone is going to agree with this approach. I was recently criticised by a friend and academic who claimed that my ‘red-in-blood-and-claw’ philosophy (her words) was socially unacceptable. To me, it is intellectually dishonest to deny our animal nature but that does not mean that we are entitled to act out that nature. To do so is unacceptable. One of the important functions of a reflecting neo-cortex is to say ‘no’ to the brainstem drives. The brainstem ‘wants it all and it wants it now’. The neo-cortex says ‘hang on, cool it, wait a bit, this is not good for you or the group’. Thank heavens for the inhibitory function of the cortex. But thank heavens too, for the red-blood and the claw in brainstem which provides the energy and drives for survival.

Do you think that your analytic/therapeutic training and practice enhances your conservation activities at all? If so, can you tell us a little about that?

There is no doubt that my training has enhanced my conservation activities. For the past 10 years I have been involved as a specialist guide or facilitator, taking people into wild areas in southern and central Africa, to expose them to wild animals and to try and leave them with a greater understanding of animal behaviour. It should not surprise you that I focus on the animal-human interface – what we learn about ourselves from animals. What invariably happens is that the client begins to have an increasing sense of being on an inner journey and for some it is life changing. It cannot be prescribed, predicted or even adequately described. To me, this is what analysis is about – taking people into the inner wilderness of the psyche. The parallels can be quite striking. For example, the patient needs a guide (someone who knows the terrain, the animals, the weather patterns and when it is appropriate to proceed or withdraw). The safety of the client or patient is paramount. This requires a keen awareness and sensitivity to the fitness, endurance and resilience of the client. Personality types come alive on wilderness trails. This helps you to understand the different ways that clients perceive the natural world and so on. In a way, I have taken my work out of the consulting room into one of the great sand trays of the world – the Kalahari. Another area of interest is tracking. Teaching people the principles of animal tracking is a reminder that we are born to track and that our survival depends on it – we keep track of our friends and family, the weather, the news, the stock...
exchange, our personal lives and plans and so on. It’s a lot of fun, too. When someone remarks that they now see the wilderness and wild animals differently, what are they saying about themselves?

You are also a published poet and I know, from your book, that you have some thoughts as to the role of the poetic in bridging the gap between the psyche and the natural world. Can you outline your thoughts about this?

To me, poetry is a bridge between the rational world and the non-rational, the measurable and the immeasurable. When Carl Sandburg writes ‘There’s a wolf in me … fangs pointed for tearing gashes’ we know that there is not really a wolf in us, but we know exactly what he means and we know exactly who he is speaking to. The poet is in touch with a wild part of the human psyche, something that many of our patients long for but have forgotten, or cannot find a way of articulating. Once again, there is poetry for what it is and poetry for what it represents. The great poems, wrote Harold Bloom of Wordsworth, do not champion any cause or vision, except one – to know ourselves, sincerely, in our own origins and in what we still are. He is talking depth psychology. The hiding places of every person’s power, Wordsworth insisted, are ‘in his own past, and that our task is to find the natural continuities between our past and who we are.’ Is this not the poetry of analysis, of therapy, of the talking cure? Is it not one’s vocation that we ultimately long for, the forgotten voice of the wild poet, ‘the one who remains silent when we speak, who loves … sweet, when we hate, the one who will remain standing when we die?’ wrote Antonio Machado. To me, it is the wild poet in us that understands and voices our deep and generous continuity with nature.

What are your current thoughts about the challenges we now face – both as a global community and as individuals? And the way in which psychologists might be able to contribute to these challenges?

I think one of the greatest challenges we are facing as a global community and as individuals is in the way we come to terms with the realisation that we may be the apex predator on this planet but we are certainly not the
apex of creation. We did not arrive on this planet. We emerged. And we will vanish like every other species. I doubt that there is going to be any extra terrestrial relief of human suffering. Instead, it’s going to be up to us to own up to our personal contributions to our own suffering (intrinsic to analysis), to the suffering of others and to the huge debt that we, as a global community owe this planet and the non-human creatures that inhabit it. And then, we are going to have to get on with it, slowly, carefully and in the words of the poet, William Blake, with ‘a firm persuasion’. Whichever way we look at it, we are going to have to take charge of our own evolution. The challenge, as I see it, is intellectual, moral and spiritual, all in one, or if you prefer – a crisis of character – of being pulled on the one hand by one’s personal integrity and ethic and on the other by group loyalty and it’s sometimes, unliveable demands and dogma. The crucifixion is guaranteed. It’s how we hang in that counts.

And finally, are there any last minute thoughts about the relationship between counselling psychology and the natural world?
Yes. These days there is a lot of important talk about the human footprint on the natural world. What about the ‘footprint’ of the natural environment on the human psyche? I think it is up to us as psychologists to be aware of this footprint, to search for it in the presenting complaints and narratives of our patients and to honour it. Many of our patients are simply homesick. What a privilege to be involved in this work. Finally, an invitation – find out for yourself. Come on a wilderness trail.

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Environmental issues are receiving a lot of attention right now, what are your thoughts on the ways in which the psychological professions should or should not engage with the ‘biggest issues to face mankind today’?
Definitely should. I have been involved in many discussions amongst environmental and social psychologists who suggest that our research should be ‘value-free’ and we should, therefore, go nowhere near the subject. In my opinion it is not that simple. It is actually impossible, even those who avoid these subjects are influenced by their values. Academics as well as their respondents or clients are influenced by the physical and social world around them and rather than ignoring this we should aim to understand the relationships between people and their physical and social environment.

How might psychological expertise influence understanding of environmental issues?
In very many ways. By gaining a better understanding of the effects of different aspects of nature (including animals) and environmental conditions (air, noise, etc.) on affect, cognitions and behaviours. By understanding how people relate to and think about their natural environment as a broad concept. And by understanding how people relate to environmental issues on their day-to-day practices.

Can personal views of the natural world influence the ways psychologists understand people and practice?
Yes, I think this is unavoidable. In my view there is no such thing as completely value free science and this is not a problem as long as different views are represented. It is better to express and acknowledge your values than to ignore them.

Are there any health benefits from contact with the natural world? Under what conditions?
Yes. A range of environmental psychology studies have shown that exposure to nature (active as well as passive) can make people feel better, lower blood pressure, improve concentration levels, speed up hospital recovery and can help recovery from mental exhaustion. At the moment, we know very little about how this process works and under what conditions.
We share over 90 per cent of our genome with the other mammals. What kind of relationship do you think we should foster with animals?

One of understanding, respect and enjoyment. I do think this is difficult for many people though as they have been socialised in believing that humans can and, therefore, perhaps should, dominate over nature. We are constantly trying to protecting ourselves against nature and natural elements (most people (except young children) won’t go outside in the rain and would not even think of observing the behaviour of a squirrel, bird or insect in their garden).

In recent years the idea of ‘eco-therapy’ has been seen in the literature and in the media. What are your thoughts about such a concept?

Excellent idea. If it is true that contact with nature is beneficial for people, they should be made aware of this benefit, not only for their own sake but also for the sake of the natural environment which may then be treated with respect and protection.
Nature hunger: Eating problems and consuming the Earth

Mary-Jayne Rust

‘The principle task of civilisation, its actual raison d’être, is to defend us against nature.’
(Freud, 1961, p.15)
‘Nature is an incomparable guide if you know how to follow her.’
(Jung, 1975, p.283)

This issue of Counselling Psychology Review looks at humanity’s relationship with the natural world from a variety of different perspectives. In this article, a perspective is explicitly offered on practice. To do this the following questions are considered from the point of view of the therapist in action – how do we follow nature, how do we relate to nature, when we have grown up in a culture which has set itself against nature? This paper engages with these questions by exploring stories from the journeys of three women in recovery from eating problems. Each story highlights the complexities of our relationship with inner and outer nature in our modern lives.

Nina: I’m so hungry I could eat the world
After some months in therapy, Nina brought the following story from the cartoon film Madagascar:

‘A zebra, who has always lived in the zoo in New York, is dreaming that he is running free in the wilds of Africa. When he wakes up, he excitedly tells the other animals about his dream, and suggests a plan to escape. While some animals like this idea, the lion is rather attached to his life in the city, performing each day, being given steaks to eat. He feels important and he imagines that his life in the zoo is easier than living in the wilds.

Eventually they do all agree to escape and see what life might be like in Africa, their native land. After many adventures they are washed up on the island of Madagascar. As the lion runs free his hunger and his instinctive knowledge of hunting is awakened. But here there are no large mammals for him to eat. To his horror, he keeps seeing his friends as pieces of steak. One night he is dreaming of hunting and wakes only to find his mouth around the zebra’s bum. He is so distraught by his wish to eat his friends that he goes off into the bush to lock himself in a cage, away from hurting others. The zebra comes to find him, and tells him not to worry – he says they will all help him to find a solution.’

I feel very moved as I listen to Nina – the agony of a starving woman who cannot find satisfaction, who is so terrified of her all-

1 For the sake of confidentiality all details of women mentioned here are radically altered. I hope that what was communicated between us remains as true to life as possible.
I ask simple questions, such as: What is your stomach saying? How do you feel about your body? We explore her eating patterns, finding out what happens in great detail, before during and after a binge, so that her feelings can begin to surface from beneath the layers of palliative eating and vomiting.

I discover that Nina gets a great deal of pleasure from running and cycling, as well as walking in wild places. I ask her what happens to her when she spends time outdoors. She finds the rhythm of running or cycling to be comforting. She notices that when her body is engaged in a rhythmic way, she thinks differently. What may have seemed a pressing and insoluble problem can often solve itself because, she says, her mind is free to roam without goal.

She notices how her moods shift outdoors – she loves the woods and the open heath. The beauty and the smells of nature spark her imagination. She feels inspired and renewed; she describes walking across the heath on a misty morning, watching the light stream through the trees, catching a glimpse of blue as the kingfisher darts across the ponds. We talk about how these moments bring meaning to life, how a kind of ‘ordinary ecstasy’ can move us to tears, and make us feel part of something much larger, part of the great mystery of life. On arriving home she realises that her appetite seems more regulated when her body is looked after, and she is less likely to binge.

Discovering the animal self
In the early stages of therapy I search for the instinctive, intuitive part of Nina who knows what she needs. I call this her ‘animal self’. Her connection with this healthy part of herself has become severely disrupted by her early experience. It is also buried beneath layers of cultural conditioning that has told her that she cannot trust her body.

I encourage Nina to name the range of different hungers inside her, and to find ways of responding to her different needs.
As we explore what happens outdoors, we find useful metaphors for the psyche. Early on in the therapy she realises she can use her acute sense of ‘smell’ to sniff out what to do in situations, like an animal following a scent. She has a strong gut instinct, but she tends to blindly act on it, rather than being able to stop and reflect. She is very good at picking up emotional atmospheres, sensing who is to be trusted, which piece of work to go with, and so on.

Nina’s animal self is alive and well; it has simply been kept behind bars, not trusted. She is like the lion coming out of the zoo cage, finding the freedom to roam. For so many years she has tried to make decisions with her thinking mind about what to eat, when to stop, what to do in life. Gradually she explores how to use instinct, intuition and sensation together with her thinking mind – a potent mix of bodymind.

In this way, Nina is learning to trust her animal self, her own nature, as a guide. But there are many obstacles to this: the inner world is filled with many old voices, fearful of trusting herself, confused, terrified of trusting her relationships with others for fear of being hurt, and habitually turning to the quick fix of food for comfort. It is a long and painful healing journey.

Returning to native lands
Not long after Nina brought the story of Madagascar, she had the opportunity to return again to her father’s land and culture. She had visited her father as a teenager and this was complicated; he turned out to be a corrupt man whom she could not trust, and eventually she decided she could not continue any kind of relationship with him. Yet when she returned to his land, she found foods which suited her body, and a wholly different attitude to body image.

Nina grew up as a tall child with a large frame, inherited from her father, surrounded by her mother’s family of small people, in a culture obsessed with being thin. She always felt big and clumsy, both physically and emotionally. When she returned to her father’s land, she found herself surrounded by big, strong women who were proud of their curvaceous bodies. Being outside of the box of Western culture, Nina began to realise the many pressures that had led her to try and lose weight, and she decided to stop dieting. She began to love her body. She realised that if she simply followed her hunger and fullness signals, her body would settle at a ‘right weight’. Inevitably binges are still triggered, but this happens less and less.

Nina is slowly re-incarnating! In other words, she is coming back into her body, after many years of cutting off from unbearable feelings that she could not digest as a child. She is moving from a relationship with food to a relationship with life. How has this happened?

Central to this deep change has been the human-human therapy relationship which has given Nina a stable experience of maternal holding, a safe place in which she can explore her hungers and digest her feelings. But it is also her life experiences – her strong relationship with wild nature, and her return to her native land – both explored and digested in the therapy relationship – which have greatly helped strengthen her connection with her animal self.

The story Madagascar reminds us of our hunger to return to the source, to the origins of things. The root of the word ‘nature’ is to be born. Psychotherapy helps us to return to our origins of early experience, to make sense of where we have come from in human terms. But there are many other origins to be explored: what of our place of origin – the land of our birth, the lands of our father and mother, of our ancestors, and of our species?

Spending time in wilderness, from which we have all emerged, can offer a very powerful experience of reconnecting with our ancient past. Jung suggests that we must get to know the two-million-year-old self who is still present in all of us, who knows how we are all interconnected, who knows how to read nature as we might read our dreams. It is in these moments that we drop back into
what really matters in life. The clutter of consumerism falls away, and we are left with the simple tasks of ‘chop wood, carry water’. In Jung’s words:

‘Whenever we touch nature we get clean … People who have got dirty through too much civilisation take a walk in the woods, or a bath in the sea … they shake off the fetters and allow nature to touch them. It can be done within or without. Walking in the woods, lying on the grass, taking a bath in the sea, are from the outside; entering the unconscious, entering yourself through dreams, is touching nature from the inside and this is the same thing; things are put right again. All these things have been used in initiations in the past ages. They are all old mysteries, the loneliness of nature, the contemplation of the stars, the incubation sleep in the temple.’

(Jung, 1984, p.142)

But our relationship with nature is in crisis. In our long and complex history, western culture has set itself against nature. We consume the earth, frantic for material wealth, imagining this will provide us with security. Underneath our consuming of the earth lies a great hunger for nature – a hunger to find our own human nature which can guide us through life, as well a hunger for relationship with the rest of nature. We live in a giant eating problem! Is it surprising that we witness an increasing epidemic of eating problems and other addictions within this context of consumer society?

These ways of thinking about our relationship with nature are being articulated by the movement of ecopsychology (see Roszak et al., 1995, for an anthology on this subject). There are many practitioners in different parts of the world who recognise the healing powers of nature and who understand that the self is inextricably linked to the web of life. Indigenous cultures have always known this.

We’ve had 100 years of psychotherapy, a radical project which sets out to explore human nature, to listen to, and learn how, we live with our nature. Yet it fails to recognise our relationship with ‘outer’ nature, remaining caught in the split between inner and outer, between human and non-human. As Searles writes in 1960:

‘The non-human environment … is … considered as irrelevant to human personality development … as though human life were lived out in a vacuum – as though the human race were alone in the universe, pursuing individual and collective destinies in a homogenous matrix of nothingness, a background devoid of form, colour, and substance.’

(Searles, 1960, p.3)
We are all nourished and shaped by the web of life, as well as our human relationships. In turn, as in any mature relationship, we must be aware of, and concerned for, the other. What do we feel about the damage we are doing to our environment? Rather than consuming the earth, we must find out about our relationship with nature.

In the following stories I will describe how these difficult and painful issues have entered into the therapy relationship, and the struggles I have had in knowing how to respond.

Clare: ‘It’s Your Green Agenda’
Clare brings a dream: she is standing in the middle of lush rainforest as termites destroy the trees. Finally, she is left alone, all the forest has been consumed and its inhabitants are extinct.

We spend most of the session following Clare’s associations. She starts by making a link between the consuming of the trees and her own eating problem. The feeling of emptiness in the dream reminds her of her experiences of abandonment in childhood, left alone with a suicidal mother after her parents divorce. On an internal level the dream describes an apocalyptic wipe out, you might say, where everything in the world has been consumed; Clare was left alone with the earth.

I had been seeing Clare, a woman in her early 30s, for several years at this point, so my knowledge of her family history was detailed. I had witnessed her recovery from many addictions – eating, drinking, sex, work – as she gradually peeled off the layers to re-member her vulnerable self. Food had been her only friend in childhood.

As I listened to Clare, I was aware of my association to her dream: it brought to my mind the clear-cutting of rainforests. If we do not manage to turn around our environmental crisis we face a collective apocalyptic wipe-out. But Clare made no mention of this and I was unsure whether to raise it.

Since I had worked with Clare for some years, and she had talked on many occasions about various political matters, I eventually decided to share my thoughts. But she responded by telling me that I was bringing my green agenda into the room. I felt accused of bad therapy practice, of intruding upon ‘her’ world with ‘my’ concerns. I felt angry, and, in my swirl of intense feeling reactions, I could not find a satisfactory response. My thoughts ran along these lines: ‘The green agenda belongs to all of us. What about our Western cultural agenda that is in the room the whole time? It’s this agenda that we really need to be concerned about … this is the real work against nature …’

Clare’s comment had clearly roused me! For this reason, I decided it was best to sit and reflect on this. I wondered about her angry statement and my angry response: was she defending against her own guilt about the damage we all do to our world? Was I trying to push something before she was ready to hear it? Session time was almost up and I decided to let it go with no further comment, feeling uncertain how to respond. After all, I had been trained to interpret outer world issues in terms of the inner world.

Some reflections on working with inner and outer world issues
This was some years ago now, before climate change had hit the headlines. Thinking about our environment was not yet part of mainstream culture. With hindsight, I have some thoughts about this interchange which might have helped to open things up.
Firstly, I needed to recover my thinking in the face of quite intense feelings. The enormity of the global crisis, and all our feelings that arise in response, makes it difficult for us to think about the damage we are doing. It provokes a minefield of emotions. Our guilt can be so overwhelming, that it is easily projected out onto those who are trying to take environmental responsibility (see Randall, 2005, for discussion of this).

Following this, I now wonder whether voicing my association to Clare’s dream had made her feel accused by me of some environmental crime. As she recovered from her eating problem, and she became more successful in her work, she began to fly abroad for every holiday. Was she replacing one form of bingeing with another? Perhaps she felt guilty about this? Instead of owning this, she then projected her feelings into me, saying it was ‘my’ green agenda. In turn, I identified with her projection, feeling angry and guilty for bringing ‘my’ association into ‘her’ therapy space. What if I had made the following comment:

‘I wonder if your dream is saying something about our collective desire to consume as if there was no tomorrow?’

I am acknowledging, here, that we are all caught in something together, which challenges us all to think about our hungers. Perhaps this might have been easier for Clare to digest?

There are several points arising out of this session with Clare. Firstly, our ‘here and now’ feelings about our global crisis are not displaced from the past, nor displaced from the personal. These feelings need airing and unpacking as much as any other feelings about human relationships.

Secondly, the meaning within Clare’s dream is multi-layered; it speaks to her eating problem and her inner world, as well as to our collective problem with consuming. Each process mirrors and gives insight to the other, potentially healing to self and world at the same time.

Thirdly, sensitivity to this complex process within the therapy relationship, through timing and context, is crucial. Kleinian analyst Hannah Segal writes about similar dilemmas regarding the danger of nuclear weapons during the 1980s, pointing out the complexities of weaving together inner and outer world issues in therapy:

‘Even when patients do refer to nuclear issues, psychoanalysts remain faced with an ethical and technical dilemma. On the one hand … we must not collude with the patient’s denial of any external situation that we may guess at from the material and that the patient does not bring out in the open. On the other hand, we must also be very wary of imposing on the patient our own preoccupations and convictions … If we do our job properly in dealing with the patient’s basic defences, the relevant material will appear, because, in fact, below the surface, patients are anxious, even terrified.’ (Segal, 1988, p.56)

The following exchange is more recent. It reveals how our awareness of our environmental crisis has become more conscious within the last decade.

Rosie: ‘We’re completely fucked’

My client Rosie came into therapy because of relationship difficulties. She revealed after some weeks that both she and her partner spent their entire leisure time drinking heavily and taking drugs. She denies this is a problem and tells me it is the norm amongst her peer group of 30-somethings.

We explore the issues for some weeks, delving into early experience, parental and sibling relationships, childhood and teenage trauma, and current relationship issues. There are plenty of troubling experiences to be unpacked, yet I remain puzzled by Rosie’s story. Her ‘wipe out’ behaviour is quite extreme and I cannot find the despair and rage, within her personal story, to match.

In a moment of wild thinking I ask, ‘What do you feel about the future?’ ‘We’re completely fucked’, Rosie replies. I swallow a gasp at the almost casual way she assesses our demise and I ask her what she means.
She explains that we humans do not stand a chance, as we consume and pollute the earth, causing climate change and widespread destruction; our future looks so very bleak. After we explore this further, I tentatively ask if she thinks there is a connection between this and her drinking. ‘Oh definitely’, she replies ‘why not drink and do drugs? There’s no future. We might as well go out having a party.’

My first comment to Rosie is to acknowledge what a profound statement she has just made: ‘We’re completely f***ed’; this must have a huge impact on how she views her world, her life, her future. However, Rosie seems surprised that I should take this so seriously; she comments that people of her generation take this granted, and have done for some time. Initially, she does not seem to feel anything much about the statement she has made.

I add that it’s mind-blowing to think of a whole generation of 30-somethings who might be carrying inside them an image of a ‘dead’ future. No wonder there is mass wipeout behaviour in the form of binge drinking, drug taking and so on. How do we begin to have a conversation about these things? How do we dare articulate our feelings if we imagine that we cannot work this through and make things better?

I invite Rosie to talk more about her mixture of feelings about this complex situation. She feels angry with governments for not implementing policy, she feels hopeless about our capacity to change the way we live, she feels fearful about what might happen and when, she feels grief for those innocent creatures and peoples who have been so displaced and maltreated. All these feelings lie unexpressed inside so many of us.

Most poignant was the way in which Rosie sees our fate as sealed and concludes, ‘we may as well party.’ I asked what she might do in response to a terminal diagnosis, and we talked for some time about the different ways in which people respond to the approach of death; while some may watch TV, or drink for the rest of their days, others may use their time as an opportunity to sort out unfinished business, to live fully in the present, to spend time with those they love, in places they love. In this way, for some, the awareness of death can bring radical awakening.

I raised the question as to whether our fate is actually sealed. Yes, we are hanging by a thread, but the system is so complex, things may turn in unexpected directions. A glimmer of a smile appeared on Rosie’s face; she ended the session by saying that she would need to think about these things some more. We did not return to the bigger picture for some time.

**Bringing inner and outer nature together**

In the following sessions, some interesting parallels appeared between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ nature as Rosie talked more about her eating problem. She described how her thinking becomes jammed in the lead up to a binge. She goes around the same issues, unable to find a way out. Frustration then reaches fever pitch: a binge takes over and thinking stops. The food becomes a palliative drug, blocking unpleasant feelings as well as providing comfort.

It soon became evident, as we explored the internal drama, that an internal bully criticised her severely after every therapy session. This voice claimed she was unable to speak coherently, told her it was self indulgent to come to therapy and drove her into long working hours with impossibly high standards.

Rosie was also caught in a military style exercise regime, waking at 5.00 am every morning in order to run and swim. There could be no letting go; to expose her vulnerability in the face of this inner bully was very difficult. It was only when she was in my company that she could find a part of herself who could stand up to that voice.

Rosie searched for the maternal holding in food that her mother had failed to provide; her rigid regime of exercise and work also provided tight structure. If she missed just one day of exercise she feared she would become an amoeba-like jelly, incapable of anything.
This bully-victim internal dynamic is all too familiar within our culture. We are taught to respond to vulnerability by getting on and ‘doing’. ‘Being’, and feeling compassion for the wounded parts of ourselves, is seen as self indulgent. Our ‘nature’ is greedy we are led to believe, and it must be kept under strict control; desire and instinct lead us astray. Diets are about implementing regimes, they are not about listening to hunger and needs. But when hunger is not met it grows, it gets split off, and it can feel like an alien monster gnawing from inside.

Recovery involves listening carefully to what each part the self is saying. Like Rosie, so many people have spent a lifetime of overriding their bodily signals, trying to dominate and control their poor bodily nature with years of diets, and this takes time to unpick, to know which internal voices to trust.

Gradually, as she becomes more able to stand up to her internal bully, Rosie begins to follow her intuition, her instincts and her senses which lead her on long walks across the country. She discovers a passion for surfing. She is more in touch with her feelings through developing a relationship with water. She is more grounded and centred through spending time in the wilds of nature. Her soul is fed by this experience.

In these periods of time her eating problem falls away. Her rigid regime of exercise softens as she feels held by nature – an experience of connecting with the archetypal mother. Arising out of this feeling of being nourished comes a natural wish to give back. Rosie is put in touch with her despair for what is happening in the world on quite a deep level, and she decides to join a green campaign group.

Inevitably, the process of healing is not smooth. When Rosie returns to her hectic work schedule in the city, she returns to food for comfort. The vicious circle is back! She is thrown off balance. But her trips into the wilds of nature, as well as her journeys into inner nature, help her to keep finding her centre in her busy life. She dreams of building a less hectic life and no doubt this will happen the more she is able to learn how to follow nature.

Some final thoughts

When we eat too much, or when we get caught in the grip of consumerism, we are longing for emotional nourishment. Therapy helps us to move from food to human relationship. But we need to move beyond this, to recognise our profound need to relate with the rest of nature; we are all hungry for a relationship with land, with place, with our bodies. This is nature hunger.

Following nature in our modern lives is complex; we emerge from a culture fighting nature for thousands of years. Trusting ones body after years of dieting takes courage and practice. Like learning to walk, we fall over many, many times before managing to find our balance.

Spending time outside, whether it be in our back gardens or in the wilds of nature, is profoundly healing, and this can be a powerful ally in helping us to recover a relationship with our own nature. It also makes us aware of our need to take care of our environment, as part of healthy development.

If therapy is to extend its practice from being human centred, to recognise our relationship with nature ‘out there’, we need a
concept of self that describes how we are embedded within the web of life. Indigenous cultures have always recognised this, and their language to describe the self can inspire us to think outside the box of our culture. Take, for example, the words of Native American, Jeannette Armstrong of the Okanagan tribe of western Canada:

‘We survive within our skin inside the rest of our vast selves … Okanagans teach that our flesh, blood and bones, are Earth-body; in all cycles in which the earth moves, so does our body … Our word for body literally means ‘the land-dreaming capacity’ … The Okanagan teaches that emotion or feeling is the capacity whereby community and land intersect in our beings and become part of us.’


If we are able to re-conceive the self as interconnected with body, soul and land, we might just be giving ourselves and clients the tools to recreate a life where self, nature and culture are reconnected, and where we can begin to live more lightly on the earth.

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References
Dr Elena Manafí
Chartered Counselling Psychologist

Environmental issues are receiving a lot of attention right now, what are your thoughts on the ways in which the psychological professions should or should not engage with the ‘biggest issues to face mankind today’?

It is ironic that psychology as a profession continues to see human beings as individuals who are fairly disengaged from the ecosystem and, therefore, independent of it. At the same time it is a predictable dichotomy given the field’s persistence to view individuals as rational beings that are separate from the world and engage with it through mental representations. In my opinion this view needs to be challenged and human beings re-located in the world with other people.

If clients were to refer to environmental issues, what response would you feel would be appropriate from a psychologist?

I would unpack and explore the meaning of their reference as well as my client’s relation to the environmental issue. … I would be interested in clarifying their response and engagement with their concern.

How might psychological expertise influence understanding of environmental issues?

In the same way that it can influence understanding of psychological issues. As I said, we are beings in the world; our personal stance and well being is inextricably linked to all domains of existence (and I consider the environment to be part of our physical domain). Hence, understanding of the former inevitably strengthens our views and stance towards the latter.

Can personal views of the natural world influence the ways psychologists understand people and practice?

Absolutely! Therapeutic interventions are based upon such understanding. Seeing my clients as beings in the world rather than autonomous individuals influences my line of exploration of my client’s subjective world and experience.

Are there any health benefits from contact with the natural world? Under what conditions?

I wouldn’t ‘force’ my clients to experience ecotherapy however I would certainly make it explicit if I felt that they not reflectively engaging with nature. This is because personally I intentionally seek and benefit from my contact with nature especially when I feel overwhelmed by my urban style of life. I believe that contact with nature gives us perspective and make us recognise our position in the world and out connectedness with our habitat – an experience, which I find therapeutic.
We share over 90 per cent of our genome with the other mammals. What kind of relationship do you think we should foster with animals?
But hey we don’t like to think of that! We prefer to view ourselves as unique, at times omnipotent beings, who can use animals and environment as means to an end. As a result we have totally disengaged ourselves from our biological heritage and have ended up intellectualising and theorising our relationship to other mammals rather than learning from it.

In recent years the idea of ‘eco-therapy’ has been seen in the literature and in the media. What are your thoughts about such a concept?
Hooray!
Journey into the natural world of the counselling psychologist

Carol Shillito-Clarke

Point of Departure

Q: What has ‘The Natural World’ got to do with being a Counselling Psychologist? It is obvious that you have a personal interest in travel to wild places, in walking and in TV programmes about such things but isn’t counselling psychology about you in your room talking with clients and supervisees about their problems not your interests?”

A: ‘Yes’, except I see that as a very narrow view of human nature and what counselling psychology is about, you see…

All my work as a counselling psychologist is done from an integrative perspective. In practice this means that not only do I draw on a number of different theoretical perspectives, but I also see myself and my clients as essentially inter-related within the same world. The experiences that affect my clients can also affect me and vice versa, at individual and global levels. Even if it is not the focus of my clients’ concerns (and it rarely is) the natural world is the context in which we all have our being. In this paper, I want to explore how we not only live in the natural world but also are an integral part of it by virtue of our embodied existence and what that means for counselling psychology practice.

Our primary concerns as counselling psychologists are with the questions of what it means to be human – the quality of experience and well-being. But our professional context is one in which dualistic models of psychology and psychotherapy privilege reason over feeling and reinforce cultural and economic pressures that fragment experience, alienating us from our physical bodies and the natural world. Such alienation, often expressed as desensitisation and dissociation, contributes to emotional ill-health by disrupting a dynamic balance throughout our whole way of being. Gestalt and phenomenological/existential models of psychotherapy offer particularly valuable tools for conceptualising ways of repairing such disrupted contact. Increased awareness and openness to the holistic interconnections between our embodied selves and our wider ways of being may help us to work with our clients and support ourselves with greater sensitivity and effectiveness as well as leaving a lighter footprint on the natural world. In writing about some of my experiences, I hope that readers will feel encouraged to reflect on their own experiences too.

Humans are animals too

Homo Sapiens is fundamentally an animal belonging to the Hominidae family of primates. We share over 98 per cent of our genes with the chimpanzees (Dunbar, 2004; Goodall, 1996). Our existence depends on some very fundamental physical functions such as the continuous interaction between the central and peripheral nervous systems and the physical organs. Therefore, being
embodied as animals, we are of as well as having our being in the natural world. Throughout Western history this physical embodiment has caused problems for those wishing to perceive humans as essentially superior, if not different to other animals. The physical needs, instincts and desires (especially for sex!) have been perceived as degrading compared to our ‘higher’ mental faculties of consciousness, language, creativity and conscience. Although Darwin pointed out in the 19th century, that our brains integrated with our bodies, have evolved over millennia through natural selection this has often been overlooked. Instead, Descartes’ 17th century mechanistic concept of a separation between mind and body, where mind is reified over body, still underpins much Western thought. This has been particularly influential in medicine giving rise to the differentiation between physical medicine and psychiatry and the cracks are still discernable in psychology and psychotherapy (Damasio, 1994; 2000; Le Doux, 1998; Schore, 2003; Stern, 2004). Whether this will help heal the split in the future remains to be seen.

At a more parochial level, I have based my integrative approach on what I perceive to be the more philosophical and holistic approach of phenomenology, particularly existentialism and gestalt. These are ways of working that do not privilege mind over body and in fact value and pay significant attention to embodiment and balance in all our ways of being. By embodiment I mean what writers such as Merleau-Ponty (1962), Groth (2001), and Shaw (2003) describe as the ‘lived-body’ or the ‘body I have’ which includes the dynamic experience and subjective nature of existence: the ‘body I am’. In thinking about this paper, I have drawn particularly on the existential concept of four, equally important, interconnected worlds and the gestalt ‘cycle of awareness’ (Clarkson, 1989).

Emmy van Deurzen-Smith describes the existential worlds thus:

‘Crudely speaking, we are involved in a four-dimensional forcefield at all times. We are first of all regulated by physical, biological, natural forces. We are, secondly, inserted into a social, cultural network. Thirdly we are regulated by our own personality, character and mental processes. Finally we are modulated by our relationship to the overall framework of meaning through which we experience the world and make sense of it on an ideological or spiritual dimension.’

(van Deuzen-Smith, 1997, p.100)

Embodying in counselling psychology

Counselling psychology is also based on theoretical assumptions within a changing historical and cultural context that reflect different values and conceptions of the nature of the person. The dominant therapeutic zeitgeist in Britain and America is currently cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT emphasises the importance of an individual’s rational mental process over their more irrational emotional responses and behaviour. Like all the others, this approach still reflects a Cartesian dualism and privileges mental over physical processes. However, developments in neuroscience and technology in the last 10 years are changing our knowledge base. New and scientifically verifiable ways of understanding and demonstrating the interconnectedness of physical and mental activity are now informing psychology and psychotherapy (Cozolino, 2002; Damasio, 1994, 2000; Le Doux, 1998; Schore, 2003; Stern, 2004). Whether this will help heal the split in the future remains to be seen.
Gestalt similarly emphasises the interdependence of the person with their context – the figure/ground phenomenon in which each element requires the other for mutual definition. At the heart of gestalt therapy is the importance of awareness of and contact between the organism and environment.

‘Full awareness is identification with my experience and my process now: acknowledging that this is my experience, whether I like it or not, and that this liking or not liking is also part of my experience. The avoidance of unpleasantness and risk is both a reduction of my awareness and my alienation of my experience.’

(Stevens, 1971, p.34)

The cycle of awareness and contact starts with sensation. It is the sensation of a need that captures awareness and directs attention to meeting and satisfying that organismic need be it physical (food), psychological (fear), social (attention) or spiritual (meaning). Once identified by awareness, appropriate actions that will contact and meet the need can be initiated and carried though till it is satisfied. Once satisfied, the organism is free to become aware of and process the next need. Change is conceived of as a constant organismic process of adaptation to internal and external environmental events. So I want to explore how, by separating ourselves from our environment and desensitising or deflecting our actual experiences from awareness, we not only diminish our experience of being alive, as Stevens suggests, but also impoverish our choices for satisfying our needs and managing change. I want to suggest that by raising awareness of how we manage our embodiment, we can restore the dynamic balance of being across the four worlds that can benefit our clients, ourselves and the natural world.

**Coming to our senses**

As suggested earlier, as animals with highly developed brains, and some believe a soul, our existence is concentrated in our bodies. Our earliest experience, even before birth, is of embodiment. The way that is responded to creates the conditions for healthy neurological, physical, psychological and social development (Schore, 2003; Rothschild, 2000; Gerhardt, 2004). We are born sensual, sexual and gendered. Our senses are the primary means through which we interact with our world. As counselling psychologists, we are trained to pay great attention to what we see and hear of our clients and to how they might see and hear us. But how acute are our senses in everyday life and how much do we use them? Experiences of being in the world’s wilder areas have helped me become much more aware of how relatively limited all my animal senses are and how they are circumscribed by my environment. Without population pollution, visual and auditory spaces seem huge. Scents and sounds are sharper and more significant. Nights are brilliant with stars not street lamps. Such experiences have also demonstrated how much more vulnerable I feel because I lack both the sensitivity to cues that can help me evaluate danger effectively and also knowledge of the skills necessary for survival. For example, when in the domain of wild animals it can be hard to remember that although I feel very privileged and special, to them I am just another animal in their world – unusual maybe but not superior – potentially either a threat or a snack.

As well as the specific senses through which we interact with the environment, we have internal senses that contribute to a holistic sense of our physical self within our worlds – our sexuality, the space our bodies occupy, their movement and balance, and their natural rhythms – which may be very different from other more academic constructions. For instance, for me as a woman, my ‘monthly’ menstrual cycle has mirrored the lunar cycle more closely than the calendar ‘months’. Like all animals, the human body is an organism that is continually changing whether through ageing, varying states of health and reproductive experiences or the constant interaction with...
external requirements such as training, travel or the environment. We accommodate to most demands for adaptation without significant difficulty given a bit of time and perhaps grousing. For instance, I habituate to the increased weight of a backpack quickly but do not so easily adjust the mental image of the shape I become, and the different space I need in moving around people or under wire fences. Indeed, much of the time, our natural ways of being only become noticeable when they are challenged by unusual events. Most of us take the normal internal homeostatic processes such as breathing, sleeping and digestion as ‘givens’. Although anyone who has walked at high altitude or flown across several time zones knows how easily such activities can be disrupted.

However, some changes, particularly those that are uninvited, require greater adaptation than others. Disability, like disease, is the darker side of embodiment and the subject for a paper of it’s own. But the literature and the experience of other people I know testifies to the fact that any form of disablement requires frequent and often challenging readjustment on all existential levels for both the person concerned and those involved with them. Jean-Dominique Bauby’s (1997) autobiography The Diving Bell and the Butterfly is particularly poignant, describing a fully functioning mind ‘locked in’ to, yet communicating from, an almost totally paralysed body. While this might appear to support a Cartesian dualism, it is in fact a testimony to the indissolubility of the four worlds of mind, body, social relations and the importance of a meaningful existence.

**Separation from sensory experience**

Young animals of every species appear to engage fully with their environment, curious to explore their new sensory experiences and learn about their embodiment in their world. As we grow up, it seems to be a natural human response to distance ourselves from full contact, particularly with those stimuli and experiences that we find difficult in some way and with which we do not want to engage fully. This may be a conscious choice of self-protection such as perceiving a threat of being emotionally overwhelmed by another’s expressed rage or sadness when I am feeling vulnerable. Or it may be an unconscious reaction for instance; intellectualising my client’s distress when it touches something of my own that I have chosen to disallow or avoiding the tension of not-knowing and feeling out-of-control, by prematurely jumping to a theoretical conclusion. Such unconscious distancing may take the form of desensitisation, denial or even dissociation. Distancing oneself in counselling psychology is not necessarily a bad thing but if it is done without awareness it can affect the therapeutic relationship, which is one reason why we insist on both personal therapy and supervision.

Cultures further determine what physical experiences we will deny or detach from our experience as well as how we will respond to those we do acknowledge. What is of concern here is the unnecessary and potentially harmful devaluation of contact with the world and what one is experiencing. As Adams suggests, ‘When we are alienated from nature, we are dissociated from an essential dimen-
sion of our very being’ (Adams, 2005, p.276). In the West, we live in a world where bodies have been commodified; our natural sensations and responses are heavily manipulated in the interests of commerce and politics. For instance: supermarkets mislead our palates with prepared and processed foods enhanced with salt, sugar and E numbers, and unseasonal fruits, that have been ripened unnaturally rendering them tasteless; clever advertising persuades us that even washing products are better with perfumes mimicking natural scents not to mention unnecessary artificial air ‘fresheners’, ‘body sprays’ and after-shave lotions. Opening the window is not an option with air-conditioning and anyway, both indoors and out, increasing levels of air pollution are affecting our ability to breathe properly.

Our senses are greatly affected by where and how we live. The pressure to live in greater physical proximity to others seems paradoxically to have increased emotional separateness. The emphasis on independence as a sign of mental health contradicts our fundamental need as social animals for contact with others. Touch, one of the oldest senses and means of communication, has been hijacked by fears of sexual abuse, as has the freedom of children to play outside unsupervised. Space and silence have become scary particularly if you have habituated to the rush, crush and noise of the city. Although the interstices in daily life are easily filled with surfing the internet and music from i-Pods and public address systems; and, of course, one is never alone with a mobile phone!

Although television offers fantastic opportunities to view otherwise inaccessible aspects of the natural world and other ways of being, it also distorts that ‘natural’ experience through editing of viewpoint, time and space. From the news and the rise of ‘soundbites’ to ‘reality’ shows and documentaries, action is manipulated and concentrated to stimulate and hold attention within an economic and politically acceptable time-span. The passing of time and its effects on the body are also distorted and signs of ageing are avoided at all costs with hair colourants, Viagra and plastic surgery. The inevitability of death, the end of embodiment and the greatest example of unending space, time and separation, is generally resisted. People with degenerative conditions often have to fight to be allowed to die naturally and comfortably without life-prolonging interventions: euthanasia is a criminal act. Being a part of the natural world is hard, unpleasant and downright terrifying at times, as both we and our clients know. But having the courage to stay with and face up to the reality however challenging, is what good therapy is about.

**Staying with the discomfort**

A sense of physical discomfort in the natural world is a signal to attend to what one is doing and do something different. Desensitisation and dissociation employed without choice and awareness both restrict our ability to manage change within the physical domain as well as the psychological, social and spiritual domains. They also cut us off from meaningful contact with others and other important elements in our world thereby increasing any sense of isolation. My clients bring problems that relate to a wide variety of changing human experiences. Many of them have learned to cope with their life-difficulties by desensitising themselves or withdrawing from contact with a physical world that experiences such discomfort as too disturbing. Their embodiment may or may not be a significant factor for them at the beginning of therapy but inevitably it is involved and I believe needs to be brought into awareness as part of the rebalancing therapeutic work. Like the man who was so far removed from his physical world (a source of discomfort in many ways) he wore shoes a size too small for most of his adult life without being aware of it. It was only when he started addressing his physical and social worlds as opposed to his psychological and spiritual worlds, did he pay the necessary attention and become able to make appropriate changes.
Playing with oneself
I have found that by holding the four domains in awareness through the therapeutic process, clients begin to rebalance themselves and their lives. When it becomes clear to me that a client’s intellectual or spiritual world is dominating their physical way of being, I may encourage them to experiment with the ways in which they routinely live their lives. I may suggest they pay close attention to everyday behaviours such as how they are breathing, how and what they are eating or drinking, what they choose to wear, when they light a cigarette or take other ‘drugs’; what it is they are seeking and what else they could do that would be more satisfying. I may ask a client to ‘play’ with their physical symptom exploring what a painful shoulder or stomach ache or sore throat does and does not allow them to express, perhaps to give it a shape or a colour or a texture. Dialoguing with the experience is a classic gestalt projective technique to elicit and re-integrate feelings and thoughts kept out of awareness. Attributing human qualities to inanimate objects is another way of gaining insight. Dorothy Rowe’s question: ‘If your (cigarette/bottle/packet of biscuits, etc.) was a person what sort of person would they be?’ is a very powerful one. I think of more than one client for whom the awareness that the bottle of wine represented a seductive and soothing companion when they returned to an empty house was a significant step in regaining control of their drinking. Re-sensitising themselves by such means often allows clients to become aware of how and why they have separated themselves from the deeper and more difficult concerns they need to address.

Embodiment at work
For most of us in the industrialised and commercial Western world, employment is not directly related to the natural world. Indeed, many would see them as very separate with work as having paramount importance and nature relegated to leisure. Work in the guise of providing for physical needs (food, mortgage, etc.) is a wonderful excuse for denying natural needs (rest, space, digestion, etc.). It also gives a social status and means of relating that helps to avoid a feared loneliness or meaninglessness. Under pressure to meet performance targets and succeed, it is easy to neglect leisure and contact with the natural world although these may be a necessary counterbalance that is essential for health. I have seen many clients suffering anxiety and depression for whom therapy provided an essential space to ‘get off the treadmill’ and reflect on the balance of ‘Doing’ and ‘Being’ in their lives. As a result of our work, one harassed executive chose to spend more time in the garden instead of slumping in front of the TV with the gin bottle after work. For him, grubbing up weeds, tending plants, hunting slugs by torchlight, getting his hands dirty and rain down the back of his neck gave him a sense of peace and connection to the natural rhythms of the world that was more meaningful than his high-pressured business world and lifted his depression more effectively than any amount of talking.

I also think of a client for whom the sudden ending of important and onerous work precipitated serious depression and agoraphobia. The work we did included looking at what positive experiences he had lost because of work that he could now own. Fishing was an adolescent interest that had long been given up and to which he chose to return. The apparent physical inactivity, the quietness and relative wildness of the riverbank was immensely difficult at the start though help from caring others, an i-Pod and self-permission to listen and respond to his own physical impulses facilitated adaptation. In the end, even the i-Pod was left behind and the unexpected and feared ‘space’ became an important healing ingredient.

Working and walking
Relaxing does not have to mean ‘doing nothing’ or sitting chanting ‘Om’. Humans have evolved to use their hands to work with tools...
for some 500,000 years (think of the amount of somatosensory and motor cortices that are taken up with hands and feet), and many people I know claim that gardening, cooking, fishing, wood-working, hill walking and other such activities are all the relaxation and therapy they need. I think this may be not only because they involve physical as opposed to intellectual activity, but also because they require an interaction with and movement at the pace of the natural world. As Solnit says: ‘Walking shares with making and working that crucial element of engagement of the body and the mind with the world, of knowing the world through the body and the body through the world’ (Solnit, 2001, p.29).

Taking one’s own time, listening to one’s organismic needs, learning to manage the feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, trusting that space and absence of artificial stimulation are not annihilating, are all part of being embodied. ‘Mindfulness meditation’ (Kabat-Zinn, 2005) is the current incarnation of the age-old process of paying attention to one’s sensory experience without intellectual deflection, analysis or evaluation. While rejoicing in its new popularity in the hope that it will encourage more holistic and healthy ways of being, I am concerned that mindfulness is already being sold as the latest ‘quick-fix’ group treatment without reference to the wider issues in the individual’s life.

**One size does not fit all**

Counselling psychology is currently struggling to uphold the value of different ways of working in health providing services that are dominated by an ideology that extols the provision of one, easily manualised, short-term therapy which can be offered by large numbers of people with relatively little training on the grounds that it is ‘evidence-based’. (Goldstein, 2007). The drive to efficiency, calculability, predictability, the control and use of non-human technologies, and the irrationality of rationality – or ‘McDonaldisation’ (Strawbridge, 2002) is hard for counselling psychologists to avoid, particularly if they are employed with the label of Scientist-Practitioners in industry and education as well as the NHS. While it is important that we offer the best service to our clients, it is questionable that such a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach will in the longer term, be as effective and efficient as fundholders hope. We may try and speed up the natural processes with artificial stimulation but most healing, both physical and psycho-
logical, takes its own time. Although some treatments such as Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) appear to be offering surprisingly rapid relief for some deep and complex problems, many such as bereavement or learning to trust another, cannot be rushed. Indeed we must be careful that the therapy we offer does not have an iatrogenic effect. For instance, I have talked with several people who were left feeling inadequate and doubting the validity of their natural feelings and experiences because they thought that, having had the allotted sessions of therapy, they ‘should have sorted’ their problems. I also question what effect such practise requirements have on the integrity and sense of self-worth for practitioners. As Martin Milton also suggests, ‘the technologisation of existence has distanced us, not just from poverty, unnecessary illness and the like, but also from core, meaningful and rewarding aspects of our being’ (Milton, 2003).

Counselling psychology: a reflexive practice
I want to propose that to be of real value to others (and ourselves) as counselling psychologists, we need to be aware of our own physical experiential processes and practice reflexively. We need to be as mindful of our client’s physical embodiment as of their psychological, social or spiritual ways of being, and our own embodiment as much as that of our clients. As practitioners we are adept at paying attention to the non-verbal aspects of our clients’ presentations and how they behave when with us. We may even be adept at listening to our own physical experiences as we resonate with their experiences. But how good are we at listening to ourselves at other times? There is evidence that mirror cells in the brain resonate with others’ behaviours and experiences whether we are aware of it or not and that unless we take active steps to relieve our own bodies of the stresses we build up, we increase the probability of our own burn-out (Rothschild, 2006; Shaw, 2003; Wilson & Brynn Thomas, 2004). A colleague who practices Tai Chi suggests that the true energetic embodied ‘shape’ that expresses our essential physical, emotional and spiritual nature may easily be distorted with significant consequences. If we over-reach or over-stretch we leave ourselves feeling unbalanced and exposed, and conversely if we under-reach we feel tired and over-controlled (Brian Simpson: personal communication). So for the sake of everyone’s health, we as counselling psychologists need to argue for the time and space and physical conditions we need to make a good assessment, work with a client to a ‘good enough’ ending, give ourselves space between sessions and meetings to clear the tensions we have absorbed, and revive our creativity and energy for caring.

Journeying hopefully
I have found that by increasing my awareness of my physical self in different contexts I feel I am more of my ‘true shape’ and more balanced. I am more aware of manipulation and have more choice in my response. I experience a greater sense of myself, and my interdependence with my natural world; be it a desert or mountain, or my back garden and I am more aware of our mutual vulnerability. Of course not everyone wants to experience such things as wilderness camping: sleeping in most of one’s clothes under the stars, cooking over smoky wood fires, washing in a glacial stream and pottering off with a spade to find a secluded place to ‘poo’. Not everyone finds it fulfilling to suffer blisters, cracked lips, insect bites, aching muscles or unreliable bowels. And it is not necessary to go to such extremes in order to appreciate your embodied self in your natural world. Try this as an experiment now:
Go out of doors.
What do you feel? – warm, cold, wet, silly, curious, etc.
What do you see? Is it light or dark? If it is light, enjoy the shadows; if it is dark enjoy the light.
Notice your breathing and feel yourself wanting to expand or contract.
Look closely at the plants - the colours, shapes and textures, how the leaf joins it’s stem, etc.
What do you hear if you really listen?
What can you smell and taste?
If you want to make a noise, notice why you don’t – do it!
Imagine what it would be like to take a different perspective – to be very small, or up high, to be a cat, or a dog with very different sensing abilities.
Move around being aware of the fineness of your balance and the interplay of muscles. Is the air still or moving and how and where do you feel it? Imagine the air parting as you move through it and flowing together behind you.
Do you encounter other people or animals? Notice the spaces between you, and how your body feels in encountering them – do you reach out or withdraw and how do they react?
Each time you distance yourself from the experience with ‘This is silly’, ‘This isn’t what counselling psychology is about’, ‘I have to make a call/read an important document’, etc., just let the thought go and refocus on your physical experience.
When you are sated, return, relax and reflect.

Carol Shillito-Clarke is a Chartered Counselling Psychologist and BPS Registered Psychologist Specialising in Psychotherapy.
References

Environmental issues are receiving a lot of attention right now, what are your thoughts on the ways in which the psychological professions should or should not engage with the ‘biggest issues to face mankind today’?

Psychologists should be more aware of the inter-dependent relationship between ongoing psychological well-being and a positive future for the natural world. An awareness of environmental issues should be integrated and incorporated into all that we do to a greater extent.

If clients were to refer to environmental issues, what response would you feel would be appropriate from a psychologist?

The response would depend on the individual and whether they are expressing fear, guilt, anger with others or positivity about their relationship with the environment. It could be appropriate to challenge views or behaviours that are destructive to them or the environment depending on the issues involved and the level of engagement in therapy.

How might psychological expertise influence understanding of environmental issues?

There could be a greater understanding of the processes by which we respond to environmental concerns such as denial that leads to under-activity and catastrophisation that results in panic.

Can personal views of the natural world influence the ways psychologists understand people and practice?

The way someone interacts with the natural world and responds to environmental issues may reflect their general way of being, e.g. their coping mechanisms, defences, view of the world and the degree of responsibility they take in life. The therapist can observe this while taking into account their own related processes.

Are there any health benefits from contact with the natural world? Under what conditions?

The benefits are numerous but the specific nature of these will depend on the individual. In addition to being calming, energising or pleasurable, interaction with the natural world can bring about a change in perspective that distances us from the stresses the material world can impose and emphasises primitive priorities.

We share over 90 per cent of our genome with the other mammals. What kind of relationship do you think we should foster with animals?

Respect for animals and concern for their welfare should be prominent, regardless of the role they take in our individual lives as passive dwellers, pets, working animals or food providers. Mutual benefits are ideally gained from our control and protection of animal life and exploitation should be avoided.
In recent years the idea of ‘eco-therapy’ has been seen in the literature and in the media. What are your thoughts about such a concept?
I have only limited knowledge of this but there would seem to be a number of potential benefits, depending on the individual. Addressing ongoing applicability would seem important in order to sustain the benefits and looking at ways of integrating eco-therapy ideas with other therapies would be interesting.

**Dr Jill Owen** is a Chartered Counselling Psychologist and can be contacted at drjillwen@btinternet.com
So there you have it. *Counselling Psychology Review*’s first sustained and public engagement with the issue of our relationship to the natural world. On a personal note I have to say that setting out to edit a special issue of *CPR* is always a nerve-wracking experience. Is there anything to write about? Will contributors be willing, or able, to say anything worth reading? But I am sure that you will all agree, this issue was worth it. It does what we expect of our Divisional mouthpiece, it draws on up to the minute data and information in an effort to attend to a crucial aspect of contemporary and future life – and throughout this keeps a very close eye on the psychological well-being of those we work with and for. The contributors rose to the challenge and surpassed what I had hoped for. I am thankful to them all for starting our debate in such a fulsome and open manner.

As a first step the contributors and I hope that you will agree with some of our thoughts, want to challenge others and feel empowered to experiment with others. In essence we hope that you find some of them provocative and feel moved to respond. I look forward to hearing colleagues’ views on the fact that all of these contributors have concluded that there is no clear cut reason to avoid this topic. Indeed, contributors have demonstrated that in many ways we have a role, potentially a number of significant roles, to play. I also look forward to hearing about the creative applications of this relationship whether that be in our formulations, psychological intervention, consultancy and policy debates. I am, of course, interested in any
views that colleagues have on how we might think about and engage with one of the most significant relationships that exists.

This inter-disciplinary Indaba has highlighted that we do not need to re-invent the wheel and that we can rise to the challenge that Rosemary Rizq put before us in the November, 2007, issue when she asked us to be open to thinking across disciplines. As embodied in this volume, there are colleagues working in a range of disciplines to connect with — including those from outside of the profession. Collaboration and dialogue is what is being suggested here. The contributors of this issue have not decided yet the ways in which we should act on these thoughts, the shape of counselling psychology consultancy to conservation agencies, methods of mediation or research methods best learnt and used. They have simply done us the great honour of kick-starting a process by generating ideas and offering us prompts which we can use to consider these things further — there is plenty of scope for these ideas to be developed by members of the profession. In other words, as readers will recognise, this is a call for us to do what we do so well. Stop. Think. And engage with the range of issues and meanings that are apparent in the relationship with the natural world so that when we do act, we can do so in an ethically purposeful way, drawing on the most comprehensive set of knowledge we have.

Asante Sana!

Dr Martin Milton
University of Surrey

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Wilderness

Have we forgotten
that wilderness is not a place,
but a pattern of soul
where every tree, every bird and beast
is a soul maker?

Have we forgotten
that wilderness is not a place,
but a moving feast of stars,
footprints, scales and beginnings?

Since when
did we become afraid of the night
and that only the bright stars count?
Or that our moon is not a moon
unless it is full?

By whose command
were the animals
through groping fingers,
one for each hand,
reduced to the bug and little five?

Have we forgotten
that every creature is within us
carried by tides
of Earthly blood
and that we named them?

Have we forgotten
that wilderness is not a place,
but a season
and that we are in its
final hour?

Ian McCallum

Cape Town: Africa Geographic Publications.
Joint Conference of the Divisions of Counselling Psychology 2008
The Psychological Society of Ireland & The British Psychological Society
20–21 June, Trinity College Dublin.

WHEN ENDINGS ARE BEGINNINGS

The fantastic city of Dublin will place host to the first Joint Conference of the Divisions of Counselling Psychology from The Psychological Society of Ireland and The British Psychological Society and we hope you will join us for what is sure to be an exciting event.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

We are delighted to announce our two keynote speakers who will contribute enormously to the event.

Professor Irvin D. Yalom, Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry, Stanford University School of Medicine - Via Live Video Link.

Patricia Mathes Cane, PhD, founder and director of Capacitar International.

REGISTRATION

For a registration form which includes all fees please visit one of the conference websites:

REGISTRATION DEADLINE 6th JUNE 2008.

The full conference programme is available. Please visit www.bps.org.uk/dcop2008 or www.psihq.ie/DcoPconference.asp

For any further questions or queries please contact one of the teams below.

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Are connectionist models useful in counselling psychology? An opinion piece

Tony Ward

This paper argues that whilst connectionist models may appear reductionist and over simplified to many counselling psychologists, they have the potential to stimulate theoretical thinking and debate. The argument is illustrated with reference to a model of person centred client processes. It is concluded that such simulations can lead to novel predictions and make important suggestions relevant to practice. Furthermore, it is suggested that they can be an important tool in thinking about theoretical integration.

Keywords: connectionist neural network person centred client processes.

Connectionist neural networks (CNNs) are a form of artificial intelligence modelling which came to prominence in the mid 1980s (Rumelheart & McClelland, 1986a, 1986b). They have been used extensively to model cognitive processes (e.g. Plaut & Shallice, 1993; Gibert & Shallice, 2002; Ward, 2004).

The technique involves connecting layers of simulated neurons together, and then training the network so that given inputs evoke particular outputs (see Figure 1). Such models are often constructed using principles of modularity and feedback, (Bechtel, 1993; McCloskey, 1991), which allows the development of complex models.

An important point to grasp about connectionist models is that they are simply another way of describing theoretical propositions. Given the complex techniques outlined above, there is no reason to suppose that any cognitive style of theory could not be implemented as a neural network model. Thus neural networks are very good ways of implementing information processing representational systems.

Figure 1: A simple connectionist neural network.
Already, in reading a description of this approach, it is likely that many counselling psychologists will be feeling uneasy. The method seems highly reductionist and simplistic. Indeed, some may feel that it is antithetical to the values of counselling psychology. In fact, these kinds of criticisms of neural networks have been posited in all areas of the discipline where they have been proposed (see the chapter on neural networks in Ward, 2004, for a critique of their application within neuropsychology).

To be worthwhile, therefore, this form of theorising must add something sufficiently useful alongside other types of theoretical representation to be worth pursuing despite the limitations.

I will shortly move on to make the case that CNN type models can advance theory in counselling psychology by looking at a specific example, but first it may be useful to consider to what extent this kind of work is already established within the field.

Carey et al. (2006) have suggested that it would be useful for counselling psychologists to examine the processes of change which our clients undergo, in order to understand and improve on therapy. Carey et al. point to the connectionist paradigm as one way of moving this agenda forward. They cite Tryon (2005) as an example of how this might be done. Tryon (2005) gives an outline of how connectionist simulations might help us to understand what happens in specific techniques such as desensitisation.

There have been other attempts to use connectionist approaches to further understanding in psychotherapy. For example, Stein and Ludik (1998) contains several examples of using connectionist models to simulate psychopathology, whilst in the same volume Caspar (2003) considers how connectionist models can further understanding of psychotherapy. As with Tryon outlined above, Caspar's formulation appears to be a work in progress rather than a fully matured piece of work.

Thus there have been recent attempts to apply connectionist simulations to further our theoretical understanding in psychotherapy and counselling. Harre (2002) suggests that such methods are central to the future psychological enterprise. According to him they offer an interface between the biological molecular level on the one hand and cognitive phenomenology on the other.

Clearly the approach is gaining ground in the psychotherapy sphere. However, previous attempts to apply the approach in this domain have not been very convincing about the possible benefits to the field. The question still remains as to what can be gained by such an approach?

In considering this question I will focus on the example of person-centred theory. Many counselling psychologists subscribe to the notion that the ‘core’ conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence are important in the way they work with their clients (Gillon, 2007).

Rogers (1951) describes how these conditions were formulated through his years of client work, and he later went on to outline a theory of psychological functioning which could explain why these conditions are ‘necessary and sufficient’. A comprehensive review of the theory was provided in the form of the 19 propositions (Rogers, 1951).

Given that the efficacy of the core conditions is justified by the personality theory, it would be useful in advancing this approach within counselling psychology to further our understanding of this aspect. As Mearns (1997) points out, there have been times when the development of the theory behind person centredness has been stagnant. Furthermore, the majority of practitioners that owe some allegiance to the person centred approach do not profess to use it exclusively, instead it forms part of an integrative stance (Kirschenbaum & Jourdan, 2005). It would, therefore, be useful to further our understanding of this approach in relation to other approaches current within counselling psychology, such as the cognitive. Given the current trends towards integration evident in such works as Hubble...
et al. (1999), it would be useful to be able to answer questions like ‘Why does the person-centred approach seem to work well with some clients, but not with others?’ and ‘Are there some clients with issues for whom other approaches might be better indicated?’

There are undoubtedly many ways in which the theory underlying person-centred practice could be advanced. For example, proposition number six relates to the role of emotion in accompanying and facilitating goal directed behaviour. Rogers (1951) does not go into extensive detail on this point and clearly there is much more to be said about the issue. How is emotion experienced and differentiated? To what extent is our perception of emotion dependent upon early formative experience? Do different ways of experiencing emotion dictate different processes and outcomes in therapy? Another term used by Rogers which would benefit from further explication is ‘symbolisation’. At times this concept seems close to ‘consciousness’, but also has an element of representation.

We could further elucidate these concepts through definition and refinement and collection of empirical evidence. These steps will undoubtedly be necessary. In terms of the initial step, one form of attempting to define and refine concepts is connectionist modelling.

One of the advantages of connectionist modelling is that it forces the theorist to be very clear about the concepts they are using. Thus to implement a model of Rogers’s 19 propositions, we will immediately need to make decisions and assumptions about key terms. For example, how will emotion be represented in the model, and how will ‘symbolisation’ be achieved?

This process can be very useful as it stimulates thinking and highlights where further precision and specification would be helpful in our current conceptualisations.

Another useful aspect of such models is that they are dynamic, and how they can change over time needs to be specified. This is a very useful property where we are trying to model client change processes. What is it about the interaction with a counsellor which induces change in client processes, and how does this change come about?

One attempt to model client change processes based on Rogers’s 19 propositions is illustrated in Figure 2.

It should be pointed out immediately that this is a very simplistic model, which was developed to illustrate the approach and its possible application. Whilst such attempts could be criticised on their simplicity (and they often are – see Ward, 2004), as a theoretical device they should be judged on the extent to which they explain the data and lead to new insights and predictions which can be followed up by further research.

In the model, the clients environment is perceived, in particular messages from significant others. This external environment comes to shape internal representations, some of which come to be differentiated as the clients self structure. These representations, along with emotional and organisimic processes then drive behaviour. With particular types of input from the counsellor, i.e. where the core conditions are implemented, the client can examine these self structures and allow the organisimic processes to come to the fore and induce change. In the model, the core conditions are implemented by a constellation of counsellor behaviours, including verbal content, and non-verbal aspects of behaviour.

It does not make sense to talk of this model in terms of whether it is an accurate representation of Rogers’s nineteen propositions. The propositions themselves are too imprecise to permit this kind of modelling, and all kinds of decisions and assumptions have to be made, e.g. to decide how emotion will be represented. Such assumptions need to be examined to see to what extent they are plausible and satisfactory, and to what extent the resulting simulation is informative.
It is the current author’s view that such simulations can be very informative. For example, in this case it suggests that Rogers’ view of personality can be implemented in an information processing representational framework. This is in accordance with, and at the same time adds further credence to, established positions which have previously been articulated (e.g. Rice, 1984; Greenberg et al., 1993). Such an implementation makes explicit the possibilities for theoretical integration. For example, it could be argued that a large part of the current simulation could be seen as synonymous with the concept of cognitive schemas (Young et al., 2006). This concept is being used to extend the boundaries of cognitive therapy and there is a lot of resonance with Rogers’ notion of self concepts. Moving on, there are aspects of the current simulation which chime with other theoretical views. For example, it makes very explicit how the characteristics of a counsellor can lead to transference like processes, i.e. the activation of schematic representations associated with past experiences and situations. It leads directly to predictions about transference like processes which could easily be followed up, and which have important implications for practice. For example, the model would predict that where the activation of difficult schemas by a counsellor is strong, working with that counsellor on that issue might be challenging or even counter indicated. It is interesting to note that these observations arise from an attempt to model person-centred theory, with no deliberate attempt to capture transference like processes. They arise from the structure of the model and observations of the model working dynamically, i.e. schemas being activated to a greater or lesser extent depending upon the characteristics of the counsellor. Furthermore, the structure of the model and the way in which current
processes and representations impact upon perceptions of the environment suggest that it can also encompass the notion of defence mechanisms, again without any deliberate intention to capture this aspect of client interactions.

Other implications which arise from considering the simulation are that the clients history and how this has impacted upon their representations is crucial, and that this learning history is completely individual. This observation seems to reinforce the person centred position that it is absolutely necessary to fully appreciate the clients frame of reference (Rogers, 1951). This seems a far from trivial observation in this age of increasing manualisation, and again there are many predictions which can be made from this which could easily be followed up in further research. This latter point, that client histories are unique and an important variable in therapy, chimes very strongly with some current trends within the field (e.g. Duncan et al., 2004) and could be used to support the notion of client driven integration.

Of course, there are many possible criticisms of the model and approach outlined here. In particular this model is restricted to client processes, whereas counselling is a dynamic interaction between people. Non specific factors, including what is often referred to as relationship, are the major determinant of outcome (Wampold, 2001). Attempts to capture such factors will need to look at the complex and dynamic situation of the counselling context, rather than the one sided examination of client processes presented here. In terms of the connectionist paradigm, some might say that the technique is a very long way off being able to capture the complexity of human relationships, and the current author would be highly sympathetic to such a view.

This paper has argued that connectionist simulations can be useful in counselling psychology. Even a highly simplistic attempt to encapsulate Roger’s 19 propositions leads to many interesting observations and suggests avenues for further research, as well as highlighting some possible implications for practice. Counselling psychologists should resist the urge to recoil from this kind of analysis prompted by the apparent simplification and assumptions. Instead they should evaluate it in terms of the predictions and observations which eventually arise. The current author is not proposing that this is the future for theorising in counselling psychology, simply that it is another tool in the chest which can help us examine theory. The apparent power of such an approach for integration is however intriguing. The fact that a very simplistic attempt to model Rogers’ personality theory in a connectionist framework immediately leads to observations strongly reminiscent of other traditions is interesting. It suggests an underlying unity in the phenomena of human experience which is simply reflected in different language by the various traditions. Thus simulations such as this could play a role in the increasing drive towards integration within the psychotherapeutic arena. Whilst many of us would agree that the connectionist paradigm is a very long way from capturing the complex subtleties of the counselling relationship, nevertheless it can be useful way of exploring client representations.

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Dr Tony Ward’s background is in health and neuropsychology, and he has more recently moved into the counselling sphere. He is Head of Psychology and Counselling at Newman College of HE (recently awarded university college status), and regularly counsels in a primary care setting, using an integrative style heavily based on person-centredness.
References

Notes from the Chair
Malcolm Cross

Counselling Psychology in Scotland
I was extraordinarily pleased to be invited by the Scottish Branch of the Division of Counselling Psychology to visit and meet members in January, 2008. This hardworking and forward looking group showcased their significant achievements with a warmth and cohesion that typifies what is great about our division. This group has reason to be proud. In September, 2007, the first cohort of students on the new DPsych in Counselling Psychology, run jointly by Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of Strathclyde Counselling Unit commenced. This was the first Counselling Psychology programme in Scotland and potentially represents a welcome advance further ‘North’ in the taught route for profession. Although not yet accredited (programmes must be up and running before they can apply for accreditation), the programme has been designed around the core competencies necessary for Chartership as a Counselling Psychologist. The programme is distinctive and takes a unique stance in promoting, as its core psychotherapeutic model, the Person-Centred/Experiential Approach. This core focus derives primarily from the expertise of programme staff such as Professor Robert Elliot (the founder of Emotion-Focused Therapy), Professor Mick Cooper from the Counselling Unit at the University of Strathclyde, and Dr Ewan Gillon (Glasgow Caledonian University), who recently published the first introduction to Person-Centred Therapy written explicitly for Counselling Psychologists (Sage: 2007).

As a context for its focus on Person-Centred/Experiential Therapy, the programme promotes a pluralistic stance highlighting the range of interventions and models available to the Counselling Psychologist. In particular, it offers trainees an in-depth exploration of Cognitive-Behavioural Approaches as well as introducing them to the opportunities offered by different modalities such as groupwork. Research too is a particular emphasis on the course, and trainees will be encouraged to develop research links with both Strathclyde and Abertay University Counselling Research Clinics, and to attend the regular scientific meetings of the Scottish Consortium for Research into Counselling and Psychotherapy (SCOTCON). However, the Scottish context of the programme is not forgotten and specialist topics such as alcohol and addictions work are given considerable attention, reflecting the prevalence of these problems in the local area.

Although the programme is still in its infancy, the year-one cohort was 21 trainees (derived from over 400 enquiries) and is testament to the interest in Counselling Psychology in Scotland. I think you would want to join with me in congratulating this group on their initiative and efforts in promoting the growth of our discipline in the Scottish context.

The Division responses to proposed response to HPC
I would like to extend my thanks to so many members of the Division who have taken time from their busy lives to provide feedback on Society responses to proposals for our discipline to be regulated by the Health Professions Council. The turn-around times and deadlines for responses has been very tight and we have collated many thoughtful contributions in our various responses.

What has been interesting has been the emergence of some key areas where we depart somewhat from the Societies proposed responses in tone and in practice.
In particular, some members have expressed concern over what was perceived at the unnecessarily combatitive tone of the response when it was suggested that collaboration may lead to a more successful outcome for all concerned. In addition we were at odds with the societies proposed position regarding the question of weather we think it appropriate to postpone regulation until standards are agreed for other ‘talking therapy’ professions. There are vast differences in the levels of training that some receive (many only at diploma level) and to attempt to regulate all at the same time risks devaluing the significant level of training and experience of a chartered counselling psychologist. Our expressed view was that it would be to our members’ advantage to be regulated ahead of the other professions, particularly those working in the statutory sectors (NHS, HM Prison Service).

We further expressed the view that we are supportive of HPC as a regulator for psychology for the following reasons:

- We consider it will be to our members’ advantage (particularly those working in multidisciplinary teams in the statutory sector) to share a well-known and recognised regulator with whom their employer has relationships and experience.

- Regulation is about standards of competence and personal conduct/fitness. Competence will be assured from significant input from psychologists and the Society. Regarding conduct/fitness, these are generic issues that are amenable to investigation for the most part by non-psychologists. There is, therefore, no reason why HPC (assisted by counselling and other applied psychologists partners) would not be fit for purpose in this respect.

- HPC will gain experience from the psychologists who become involved, and it is the case that many other allied health professions, e.g. Occupational Therapy or Physiotherapy have a ‘psychological’ component, which may at present be being overlooked.

We expressed the view that we did not agree with the Society’s conclusion that regulation of occupational/business psychologists should not proceed. It is a known problem that in business many are working with individuals who are poorly qualified to do so, unsupervised, and are therefore a risk to those members of the public who often have no real choice whether to receive their services when those practitioners have been brought in by their organisation. However, buyers, e.g. HR departments are increasingly sophisticated, and the existence of statutory regulation will in our view over time set a standard that will change buying behaviour. Organisations will not want claims from staff who believe they have been damaged/inappropriately treated due to buying practices that fall below a standard of care that could reasonably have been expected. We consider that this issue is of particular relevance to counselling psychologists many of whom work in the organisational/EAP field. For these reasons we strongly believe that business/occupational psychologists should be regulated. They have considerable potential to cause harm, e.g. through personnel selection processes where they assess individuals either through psychometrics or personal psychological profiling that could be damaging to a vulnerable individual; in coaching where an individual could be vulnerable or have a mental health problem that is not diagnosed or treated; also in training or team relationship work where individuals could be left vulnerable as a result of inappropriate or harmful interventions.

I should be clear that we were in agreement with much of the Society’s proposed position and do sincerely value the vast contribution of colleagues both paid and voluntary working on the Society’s behalf.
Mutual recognition of counselling psychologists with the Psychological Society of Ireland

The Division Committee has been asked to consider a proposal for mutual recognition put forward by Irish Division of Counselling Psychology for IPS Recognition and Society Chartership. The Society and the PSI are both long-standing organisations with excellent reputations in promoting the science and practice of psychology. However, there has been a long standing issue between the Republic and Northern Ireland in relation to employment and recognition. The issue of the border between the Republic and Northern Ireland means that counselling psychologists cannot practice interchangeably in each jurisdiction. Those in the north require Society chartered status, while those in the south require Registration with the IPS. This is problematic as there is currently no accredited training route in Northern Ireland, while those who choose to go south to train will face challenges in employment should they seek to return north to practice. Interestingly our Welsh colleagues have been helpful through their willingness to take up the role of co-ordinators of training for the Society’s Qualification leading to chartered status – and our thanks should go to them for this initiative. The division is very supportive in principle of this development; however, it will not be possible for this to be a solely divisional agreement. The IPS and the Society as a whole will need to find a way forward. For this reason we have expressed to our Irish colleagues our support but will have to wait until the implications of HPC regulation are ironed out. This stretches the timeframe for developments into a year or two rather than months.

Best wishes.

Dr Malcolm Cross
Chair of the Division of Counselling Psychology.
RECENTLY ATTENDED the Divisional Committee residential weekend, in which I represented your views in discussions regarding this year’s Divisional activities. I’m pleased to report that I was very encouraged by the commitment demonstrated by the Committee in their efforts to understand and meet our needs. I left the residential in the knowledge that we are a valued and integral group within the Division, and that our views are welcomed and taken seriously. I therefore strongly urge you to continue to contact me with your ideas of how the Division can best serve you during your training.

We are particularly interested in ascertaining your views about the Masterclasses, and keen to know if you have found the topics covered so far relevant and helpful to you in your training. In order for the Division to plan future Masterclasses with trainees in mind, please contact me with your suggestions of topics you would like to see covered, either practice or theory focused.

The use of cognitive assessments is a subject that I would still like to hear your opinions on, particularly in light of Hamilton Fairfax’s stimulating article in November’s CPR. I’m interested to know your views on whether the administration and interpretation of cognitive assessments (such as the WAIS-R) should be undertaken by counselling psychologists, and, therefore, a compulsory module taught on all training courses? Has the lack of training in such assessments hindered you in an NHS placement? Or do you think using them in some way conflicts with counselling psychology practice, and their use should not feature in our training?

As you are all hopefully aware, the Society continues to negotiate with the HPC regarding statutory regulation. The proposals will of course affect us all, and so the opinions of trainees are equally as valid and sought after – I encourage you to keep abreast of the proposals and contribute to the debate through the DoCP and the pages of CPR.

In the spirit of supporting and encouraging trainees, Heather Sequeira (CPR Editor), has requested that you continue to submit articles for publication (details of how can be found on the inside back cover of this issue). As always, qualitative research is welcomed, however, particular encouragement goes to those who wish to submit quantitative research articles. We are trained to use quantitative and qualitative methods, and it would be a testament to our diversity as researchers if both approaches were submitted and published by trainees within CPR. If you think that the article will be of interest and benefit to others, please send an electronic copy to Heather Sequeira (heathersequeria@onetel.com).

Lastly, I would like wish all of those who are about to qualify (including many of my colleagues) all the very best in your careers. Good luck out there!

Jeremy Rowe
Representative for trainees on the course route
E-mail: rowejf@roehampton.ac.uk
DCoP Scotland welcomes new trainees

Anna Karczewska

THE AGM of DCoP Scotland, January, 2008, was followed by a celebration to mark the arrival of a new Practitioner Doctorate course in Counselling Psychology, offered jointly by the School of Life Sciences, Glasgow Caledonian University and the Counselling Unit, University of Strathclyde.

Malcolm Cross, current Chair of the Division of Counselling Psychology and Course Director of the City University, addressed DCoP Scotland members and students on the course. He presented video clips of interviews with clients about their experiences of counselling/psychotherapy sessions with therapists. This was enlightening for both new and experienced practitioners.

Ewan Gillon, Director of the new course, presented an outline of the course and his vision for future developments. The students nearing completion of their first semester had a chance to meet with members of DCoP Scotland.

Peter Glissov (Chair) welcomed members and students to DCoP Scotland and talked about the significance of the new course for Counselling Psychologists in Scotland. He was happy that the Doctorate course is well under way and hopes for a symbiotic relationship. Much work remains to be done to raise the profile of Counselling Psychology in Scotland and with the enthusiasm of members, this promises for some exciting times ahead.

This is great news for Counselling Psychology in Scotland bearing in mind that the branch was only established in 2006 and the first AGM held in 2007. Today there are 35 registered Counselling Psychologists in Scotland. Further information about DCoP Scotland can be found on the website (insert)

Anna Karczewska
Announcing a new resource for UK-based counselling psychologists

www.copsy.org.uk

This website has been setup as a resource for UK-based counselling psychologists. It is hoped that in time it will come to encompass a wide range of material, including interesting links, discussion pieces, conference reports, book reviews, etc.

In particular, the site is linked to a forum. This will allow counselling psychologists and trainees to discuss issues of interest to them. Registration on the forum is restricted to UK- and Ireland-based counselling psychologists.

A part of the forum has been set-up to facilitate an attempt at online collaborative CPD. The aim here is for a group of individuals to collaborate on CPD activities, where one member of the group agrees to lead a particular sequence. This could be the discussion of a recent journal article, professional issue, hypothetical case, etc. The hope is that in this way colleagues will be able to develop a portion of their CPD work through stimulating interaction with colleagues in a non-commercial setting.

The site and forum has been initially set-up by Dr Tony Ward, Head of Psychology and Counselling at Newman, a university college in Birmingham. Colleagues wishing to get involved in helping to develop the resource are welcome to contact a.ward@newman.ac.uk.
Dear Editor,

Following my previous letter (published in the November, 2007, edition of *Counselling Psychology Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4), I thought I would take this opportunity to update you as to the responses I received and a number of mixed experiences regarding my search for employment in the NHS.

Firstly, after my letter was published I received a number of supportive e-mails from those who could relate to my experiences of ‘discrimination’ in searching for employment (much appreciated). Indeed, it seems that this is actually quite a common experience faced by Applied Psychologists, with relevant training/experience, but professionally called ‘other’ than Clinical Psychologists. It also seems apparent that there is much uncertainty as to ways to tackle this issue either at an individual level or through one’s division.

Secondly, I have spoken to several Clinical and Counselling Psychologists about the issues I raised in my original letter and have encountered a variety of impressions as to whether the ‘discrimination’ I highlighted actually occurs – and possible reasons why, and in some cases why it should occur! I feel that such mixed views often not only reflect individual uncertainty about the qualities of the qualifications of others, but also the uncertainty in the ‘job market’, either perceived or actually experienced, by a number of psychologists over the past months.

Finally, in the past months I have contacted a number of Consultant Clinical Psychologists regarding posts advertised solely for Clinical Psychologists. To summarise my experiences here, it seems that the ‘discrimination’ I alluded to tends to occur primarily at an individual level, one based on a lack of knowledge as to what Counselling Psychology is and what Counselling Psychologists actually do. For example, I was told by one Consultant Clinical Psychologist that they wanted to employ a Clinical Psychologist because they work with complex cases. I explained my training and experience of being a member of a CMHT to no avail and was told that my profession was more suited to primary care! Another Lead Clinical Psychologist agreed that a post advertised for a Clinical Psychologist was actually suitable for both a Clinical and a Counselling Psychologist and they re-advertised as such – I had an interview and gained this position. So very different outcomes!

It seems to me that given the current situation, and weather one uses the ‘D’ (Discrimination) word or not, a job of the Division of Counselling Psychology should...
be to actively promote Counselling Psychology as a profession, and to try to combat any misconceptions/ignorance about the abilities of its practitioners among other allied professionals. With this said (and I welcome Yvonne Walsh’s words in the letters section of *Counselling Psychology Review* in May, 2007, Vol. 22, No. 2), I do also feel that at an individual level the discussions I have had with a number of Clinical Psychologists regarding my skills and employment have been mostly positive, and indeed directly led to me gaining a position initially advertised solely for a Clinical Psychologist. I can only say that I would encourage others in my position to actively discuss why some positions are ‘closed’ to certain professionals with the advertisers (named contact persons), explaining the skills/experience that make them suitable for a role. I would hope that this ‘questioning’ of attitudes/policies at the grass roots might lead to a change in approach both at an individual and institutional level and consequently promote/benefit our profession (if only at times to educate about our skills/competencies and keenness).

I would lastly like to thank again those that have offered support and advice over the past months – it has been most valuable.

**Dr Terry Boucher**  
Chartered Counselling Psychologist.  
E-mail: terenceboucher@hotmail.com.

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**Dear Editor,**

I have just received my copy of *Counselling Psychology Review* and read the trainee column by Jeremy Rowe. This has inspired me to respond to the thoughts about psychometric assessments being included in training. First let me introduce myself. I’m on the Counselling Psychology course at Surrey, in my third year, and currently working within an adult CMHT (having done placements in primary care GP surgeries, and in a psychodynamic NHS department previously).

At the Surrey course we do not receive a formal training in the use of psychometric assessment, although we do have a workshop designed to inform us about their epistemology, use, design, and issues. I am aware that at present it is the opinion of the course team that formal psychometric assessment training will not be included on the course timetable.

I am also aware that many of my peers (past and present) would agree with your desire to include psychometric assessment in our training. Many of them cite similar reasons to you, i.e. the need to be competitive with Clinical Psychologists, and the ability to use these as tools in our work.

I have to say, however, that I strongly disagree with the formal inclusion of psychometrics in our training. I agree that psychometric assessments can inform our work (but don’t agree that necessarily means it should be counselling psychologists who do them). I am less anxious (perhaps naively) about my marketability and employability without these skills. I am aware that all of the cohort who graduated in September who wanted work are already employed (without formal psychometric qualifications). I believe that the training I am receiving at Surrey already makes me very employable, with experience and knowledge that is different and lacking from Clinical Training, i.e. they have their area of specialism (breadth of client group) and we have ours (depth of working relationally with adult clients).

I object to the inclusion of formal psychometric assessment training, on philosophical and theoretical grounds. When I was deciding to undertake my counselling psychology training, one of the things that attracted me to this area of psychology, and in particular to the Surrey course, was the respect paid to the client’s subjective humanity, as opposed to objectifying the client and trying to ‘squeeze’ them into diagnostic categories or models even when they
didn’t fit! I felt that for too long historically, the medical model and psychology had treated people in this manner, but that this wasn’t really appropriate anymore. It raises questions of power and pathology that disadvantaged our clients.

Psychometric assessment, however, makes assumptions that aspects of our humanity can be ‘measured’ objectively. Whilst I agree that generalised tests can be helpful in some contexts – I disagree that it is the work of counselling psychologists to do this. In fact I see my role as one that recognises my clients’ subjective experience, often in cases where their experience has been severely objectified and invalidated early on in life. I am concerned that psychometrics would simply be counter to this aim.

I was under the impression that counselling psychology itself developed as a reaction away from methods that seem to objectify clients and ignored the relational implications of this. I believe that introducing psychometrics would be a move backwards.

I don’t believe that we should make counselling psychology ‘more like’ clinical psychology in order to compete. I believe this would have the opposite effect. We should be selling ourselves based upon our strengths – not simply trying to turn ourselves into ‘second rate’ clinical psychologists.

I did not undertake this training in order to end up doing psychometric assessments on clients – I would have done clinical psychology if that’s what I wanted to do. I undertook this training because I believed that working towards a meeting of human being with human being was therapeutic – and this is what I have focused on in my training. I don’t want to ‘avoid’ such a meeting by hiding behind a ‘test’.

The long and short of it is that if psychometrics become compulsory in counselling psychology, I wouldn’t really want to work that way – I would have to consider training in another profession – so what would be left to me? Private practice? Psychoanalytic training? I feel that it would be a loss to the profession and to the clients if this were the case. Where would our clients go to avoid being objectified?

I would appreciate it very much if you would consider my objections before addressing this within the Division.

Roly Fletcher
Trainee Counselling Psychologist, University of Surrey.
**Networking**

If you are interested in networking with other Counselling Psychologists within your area of specialty or geographic area, please send exact details that you wish to be published to the Editor, Heather Sequeira, by e-mail to: heathersequeira@onetel.com.

**REGIONAL NETWORKING**

**North West Branch:**
Sylvia Dillon is looking to establish a North West branch.
Contact: sylviadillon@tiscali.co.uk

**Central England Counselling Psychology Forum:**
E-mail: jonathancole@tiscali.co.uk

**Contacts in East Midlands (Nottingham/Derbyshire)**
E-mail: michelle@mewickes.co.uk    Tel: 07770 752377
E-mail: jennifer.gatt@ntlworld.com    Tel: 01159703526

**Contacts in South East (Kent):**
Tim Moore is seeking networking contacts near Hastings.
E-mail: Tim.Moore@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk

**Contacts in South West (Hampshire/Dorset):**
Steve Barton: E-mail: bartonpald@yahoo.com

**Private Practice in Northamptonshire:**
Richard Alexander: Tel: 07876 386141

**CAMHS North West/Preston Area:**
Suzanne Jones. Tel: 07947 232175
NETWORKING: FIELD OF WORK

Personality disorder, vicarious trauma, sexual abuse and energy psychology
E-mail: michelle@mewickes.co.uk    Tel: 07770 752377

Dissociation, primary care, private practice, abuse issues, depression
E-mail: jennifer.gatt@ntlworld.com    Tel: 01159703526

CAMHS North West/Preston Area:
Suzanne Jones. Tel: 07947 232175

Research Study: Attachment and Relationship to Psychotherapeutic Outcome
I am currently exploring the interaction of patient and therapist attachment style and its relationship to establishment of therapeutic alliance and psychotherapeutic outcome. This research forms part of a top-up doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City University. The research component is being supervised by Tirril Harris, Socio-medical Research Group, Institute of Psychiatry, London.

If you are interested in participating and would like further information, please contact me at Jo.McKay@slam.nhs.uk

Are you a qualified counselling psychologist? Do you work with individuals who self-harm?
I am a counselling psychologist in training at the University of East London completing my doctoral thesis. I am interested in hearing from any qualified therapists who provide therapy for individuals aged between 13- to 19-years-old and who self-cut. I would like to interview you for approximately one hour at a place of your convenience about your understanding of self-cutting and the therapeutic relationship with young people who harm themselves.

This could be an opportunity for you to express your thoughts and opinions on this complex phenomenon that may have a significant and important impact on our future practise.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Amy Bloxham, by telephone on 07932 664643 or e-mail: ajbloxham2000@yahoo.co.uk
Notes for Contributors

Counselling Psychology Review

Submissions should conform to the guidelines below.

Academic Papers: Research, theoretical papers, critical literature reviews and in-depth case discussions. Approximately 3000 to 4000 words. Abstract of no more than 250 words. Longer papers occasionally considered. Subject to anonymous peer review.

Issues from Practice: Approximately 1000 to 3000 words, that discuss and debate practice issues. Can include anonymised case material, and/or the client’s perspective. Abstract of no more than 250 words. Subject to anonymous peer review.

Newsletter and Other Submissions: News items, reports, controversial perspectives, letters to the editor, book reviews and details on forthcoming events. Not refereed but evaluated by the Editor.

Submissions guidelines:
1. The front page (which will be removed prior to anonymous review) should give the author(s)’s name, current professional/training affiliation and contact details. One author should be identified as the author responsible for correspondence. A statement should be included to state that the paper has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration elsewhere. Contact details will be published if the paper is accepted.
2. Apart from the front page, the document should be free of information identifying the author(s).
3. Authors should follow the Society’s guidelines for the use of non-sexist language and all references must be presented in APA style (see the Style Guide, available from the Society).
4. Graphs, diagrams, etc., must have titles. Written permission should be obtained by the author for the reproduction of tables, diagrams, etc., taken from other sources.
5. Submissions should be sent as e-mail attachments. Word document attachments should be saved under an abbreviated title of your submission. Include no author names in the title. Apart from front page, authors should remove all self-identifying details including those set in document properties. Please add ‘CPR Submission’ in the e-mail subject bar. Indicate whether your submission is submitted as an Academic Paper, Issue from Practice or Newsletter/Other Submission. Please expect an e-mail acknowledgment of your submission.
6. Proofs of accepted papers will be sent to authors as e-mail attachments for minor corrections only. These will need to be returned promptly.

Deadlines for notices of forthcoming events, letters and advertisements are listed below:

For publication in  Copy must be received by
February       1 December
May           1 March
August        1 June
November     1 September

All submissions should be sent to:
Dr Heather Sequeira. E-mail: heathersequeira@dsl.pipex.com

Book reviews and books for review should be sent to:
Kasia Szymanska (CPR Book Reviews Editor),
Centre for Stress Management,
Broadway House,
3 High Street,
Bromley, BR1 1LF.
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