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Ecofeminist Therapy: From Theory to Practice

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Ecofeminist Therapy: From Theory to Practice

By Alyson Pompeo-Fargnoli[1]

Abstract

This article establishes a basis for an ecofeminist approach to counseling and therapy by reviewing the roots, theoretical foundations, related conceptual frameworks, and context of ecofeminism. It suggests a rationale and guidelines for adopting an ecofeminist perspective in the helping professions, and describes how it can be applied in various settings with diverse client populations.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, eco-psychology, therapy

Introduction

Feminism has long been concerned with social injustices resulting from an entrenched patriarchal system that devalues women and other marginalized groups. *Ecopsychology* represents an attempt "to reexamine the human psyche as an integral part of the web of nature" (Brown, 1995, p. xvi), citing our separation from nature as a major cause of psychological disorders and human suffering. *Ecofeminism* is based on the premise that "both person and planet are threatened by the same enemy" (Roszak, 1979, p. 32)—a toxic mindset of domination and control that degrades both women and the environment. By offering an alternative theoretical framework that integrates the concepts and principles of ecopsychology with those of feminism, ecofeminism problematizes and seeks solutions to the critical issues that confront human beings personally and on a global basis. Ecofeminist therapy thus adopts and integrates perspectives, strategies, methods, and practices from ecotherapy (applied ecopsychology) and feminist therapy.

This work will provide a solid understanding of Ecopsychology and its historical background and context. Ecotherapy will then be detailed as it applies the insights and principles of Ecopsychology to the practice of therapy. It is also integral to include a Feministic perspective, as this can be found at the base of the entire Ecofeminist perspective. Within specific applications of such an Ecofeminist perspective, the relation to the practice of therapy will be discussed by focusing an in-depth look into Ecofemnist Therapy. Finally, a case study will demonstrate how identification with natural phenomena and the development of ecological mindfulness can lead to psychological breakthroughs in the course of Ecofeminist Therapy.

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Ecology, Deep Ecology, and Ecopsychology

"The first law of ecology is inexorable: everything is related to everything else" (Bernard & Young, 1997, p. 187). Ecologists see the world as a web of interconnected relationships, each thing affecting everything else, in large or small ways, whether we are immediately aware of it or not. This implies that a profound sense of responsibility should accompany our actions because, ultimately, whatever we do affects the web of life in which every living thing is embedded.

An influential movement called deep ecology (Devall & Sessions, 1985; Naess, 1973) considers humans to be co-equal with other living species in this web and argues for a biocentric ethic to replace the anthropocentric (human-centered) worldview that grants people a privileged status that is unwarranted and destructive (Scarce, 1990). The mistaken belief in the supremacy of human beings and their superiority to all other forms of life lies at the root of environmental exploitation (Roszak, 1992). In accordance with this belief, deep ecologists advocate a paradigm shift to biological egalitarianism—recognition of the intrinsic worth of everything in nature—in order to restore ecological harmony to the world (Salleh, 1984). The radical restructuring of human society on the basis of equality and biophilic mutuality (the interdependence of all living things) is a significant point of convergence between deep ecology and ecofeminist theory (Ruether, 1994 & 1995).

Ecopsychology represents a revolutionary departure from mainstream psychology as it seeks to redefine the self and sanity within an environmental context. Although Bronfenbrenner's acclaimed bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) takes into account many of the environmental dimensions that affect an individual's development, his model is limited to addressing the purely cultural structures called the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner's theory is a significant contribution to counseling in that it identifies and describes microsystems (such as family and school), the relationships among microsystems called the mesosystem, the exosystem which consists of indirect influences on development, and the macrosystem which includes the norms and attitudes of the larger culture. Thus, Bronfenbrenner confines his analysis to the interaction of human-created systems as a way of helping counselors to understand the intricate and complex cultural forces in their clients' lives.

Ecofeminist theorists similarly value and agree with the systemic emphasis of Bronfenbrenner's model but would argue that it omits the very system that is vital to human culture and the sustenance of life itself - the natural world. Furthermore, it is important to include nature in a systems model of development and counseling because an individual's physical, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being is greatly affected by a person's relationship to nature. Thus, an ecofeminist approach to counseling expands developmental theory by focusing on restoring the human-nature connection that is often disrupted.

"If psychosis is the attempt to live a lie, the epidemic psychosis of our time is the lie of believing that we have no ethical obligation to our planetary home" (Roszak, 1992, p. 14) and that our separate, bounded, masterful selves are or can be disconnected from the earth. Thus, ecopsychologists trace the source of modern psychological discontent and distress to human beings' estrangement from nature: "When we forget that we are embedded in the natural world, we also forget that what we do to our surroundings we are doing to ourselves" (Suzuki, 1999, p. 179). Remembering, then, means understanding the self as ecological (*a part of* nature) rather than egological (*apart from* nature). For both ecopsychologists and deep ecologists, mental health is predicated on the development of an ecological consciousness, i.e., a new understanding of self as part of the entire biosphere.

Eco-Perspectives and the Well-Being of Children

Richard Louv's landmark book, *Last Child in the Woods* (2005), reinforces and amplifies the work of ecopsychologists by applying their ideas to children. Louv agrees that disruptions in humans' relationship with the natural world damages our psychological and emotional well-being as well as our relationships with each other and with ourselves, leading to presenting problems that counselors are so familiar with, such as addictions, depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. In fact, Part II of his book discusses why a connection to nature is necessary for not only youth, but everyone. Louv, however, posits that it is the children of this highly technological age who are affected by an even sharper disconnection from nature than was experienced by adults. He sees current generations pulling away from nature, drawing the demarcation line at the baby boom generation. In other words, people in their 40s or older, who grew up before the full impact of the technological-electronic revolution, had more opportunity to experience nature than subsequent generations, creating what Louv refers to as "nature deficit disorder" throughout the pages of his book (Louv, 2005).

Egan (2006) speaks to this loss by using sidewalks as a symbol of our detachment from each other and from nature:

> We've forgotten the joy of roaming and that driving our kids everywhere won't keep them safe...When I was little, no parade of mothers waited in idling automobiles to cart their kids' home...Sidewalks are becoming nostalgic artifacts of a time before three or four car families. To me, their absence represents disturbing changes in the way we connect to one another—and the habits, values and capacities we bequeath to our children (p. 21).

Louv identifies and describes several of those changes that have contributed to disrupting the child's bond with nature:

- fear fed by hyped, incessant media reports of crime (abducted children, murders, etc.), dangerous weather, natural disasters (tornadoes, storms, fires, etc.), and implications that nature is the enemy
- disappearing open spaces; enclosure of the commons
- addiction to electronic toys and TV which are perceived as safer than the outdoors where all manner of dangers lurk)
- structured play with purchased toys (objects)
- competition-driven early schooling and academic pressure

Nevertheless, a growing body of research is documenting the salubrious effects of spending time in natural settings and engaging in unstructured play: improved academic performance, engagement in learning, creativity, and a central element of executive function—self-regulation (the ability to control emotions and behavior, resist impulses, and exert self-control and discipline). Studies have revealed that exposure to nature helps protect the psychological well-being of children: enhanced body image, skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, and conflict resolution (Chawla, 1998; Kellert, 2002). Studies such as these, as well as parents' observations of their children's emotional, physical, and behavioral difficulties (obesity, juvenile diabetes, attention deficit disorders, depression, heart and circulatory problems, etc.), have

prompted movements to ameliorate the deleterious effects of "nature deficit disorder." Parents promoting "No Child Left Indoors," "Reviving Recess, the 4th R," and "Race to Nowhere" recognize that healthy and wholesome human development is inextricably linked to their children's relationship with the natural environment (Louv, 2005).

Ecotherapy: Applied Ecopsychology

Many of our problems—emotional, physical, economic, spiritual—arise from the fact that we do not live in harmony with the world. And this world includes not only the human world known as society, but also the natural world known as the environment—the biosphere and other species of living beings with which we share this planet earth, our only home. Ecotherapy applies the insights and principles of ecopsychology to the practice of therapy. "Ecotherapy seeks to heal persons by healing the earth—and vice-versa" (Clinebell, 1996, p. xxii). It is based on the premise that "as we learn to assault the natural world around us, we learn to assault our inner nature, and vice versa. The hurt from this assault feeds our disorders" (Cohen, 1997, p. 154). Sanity, the health of the psyche, is dependent upon our reconnecting with and caring for the natural world we are part of. And "because the relationship between self and the world is reciprocal,...as we work to heal the Earth, the Earth heals us" (Macy, 1991, p. xii). To be ecologically conscious means that one considers the healing of people and the healing of the planet as inextricably linked: human beings desperately need meaningful contact with nature just as the planet needs the reverential care of people. Such reciprocity becomes the model for other relationships in which we participate, replacing those based on dominance, control, and subjugation.

Ecotherapists direct their efforts at healing the alienations that produce damaging relationships at all levels—alienation from one's own body, from parts of one's self, from other persons, and from nature. Clinebell (1996) points out that Jungian ecopsychologists such as Hillman have proposed that therapists can help their clients restore union and harmony with the natural world by "prescribing nature" (p. 45) as part of therapy. Roszak (1992) agrees, claiming that a few calm hours in a natural setting can "restore the spirit and may produce more insight into our motives and goals than the best labors of the professional analyst" (p. 310).

Clinebell (1996) offers many examples of the methods ecotherapists use in their work: ecological consciousness-raising, story-telling, gardening, ecological retreats, imaging, dreamwork, eco-alienation resolution, eco-bonding, grief-work, wilderness therapy, pet and animal therapy, projective methods, rituals, restoration projects, and horticultural therapy. He proposes an ecotherapy model called "the ecological circle" composed of three dimensions: upreach, inreach, and outreach. Upreach, or "ecological spirituality," (p. 63) means becoming aware of the transcendent, spiritual quality and creative power inherent in nature. Inreach (being "nurtured by nature") is the opening of one's self to the life-giving, life-sustaining, healing properties of the biosphere and gratefully and intentionally allowing them to nurture us. Outreach (nurturing nature) refers to active involvement in efforts to heal the earth and care for its creatures.

Feminism(s)

The rich and varied body of feminist theory that has emerged over the last several decades clearly shows that "feminism is not a monolith" (Shulman, 1982, pp. 32-33) but "a mosaic in which many parts fit together to form a continuous whole" (Langer, 1996, p. 25). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate on the different types of feminism spawned by the women's

rights movement, it is worth noting how liberal feminism, radical feminism and feminist spirituality have influenced the development of an ecofeminist perspective.

Perhaps the most widely accepted notion of feminism arose from the stream of thought known as liberalism (Eisenstein, 1983, p. xv). "Liberal feminism endorses a highly individualistic conception of human nature" (Warren, 1987, p. 8) and is concerned primarily with securing equal rights for women and access to the same opportunities in society as men. By and large, liberal feminist objectives focus on eliminating discrimination so that gender does not prevent women from getting a fair share of the socio-economic pie. Liberation is seen largely in terms of success within the established order and can be achieved by removing the legal, social, and political barriers to full participation in the public sphere. In contrast to liberal feminism, radical feminism problematizes the culture at a deeper level. For radical feminists, true liberation for women is dependent upon obliteration of the patriarchal system that oppresses them (Tong, 1998). Their ultimate goal is not entry into the system, but transformation of the system. Metaphorically speaking, if the pie itself is poisoned, then getting a fair share of it only makes you sick. (Ecofeminists would point out that a literal parallel to the metaphor of a toxic society is the *actual* contamination of much of the environment.) Because it sees "all existing religions as irrevocably cast in a patriarchal mold" (King, 1989, p. 119) that marginalizes women, the feminist spirituality movement rejects traditional religious doctrines that locate the sacred in "some distant father-god" (Spretnak, 1993, p. 189) and seeks instead new forms of spirituality, rooted in a sense of the earth's sacredness, that will bring about peace, non-violence, and ecological harmony.

Ecofeminism can be understood in relation to these three versions of the feminist gestalt (liberal, radical, and spirituality). While it does not categorically reject liberal feminist goals of full and equal participation in society, it is like radical feminism in that it would use this access to bring about fundamental change in society's institutions and values. "The 'liberation of women' cannot be seen as simply the incorporation of women into alienated male styles of life, although with far fewer benefits, for this simply adds women to the patterns of alienated life created by and for men" (Ruether, 1994, p. 265). Although there is diversity among ecofeminists as to which aspects of feminist spirituality and radical feminism they choose to emphasize, it is clear that these two perspectives have "shaped both the political context and the analytical approach of ecofeminism" (Sandilands, 1999, p. 14) and that it incorporates major elements of both.

The unique contribution of ecofeminism is that *it enriches and extends both the ecological ethic as well as the feminist imperative* by elaborating upon the "interrelations among self, societies, and nature" (Birkeland, 1993, p. 18). By problematizing the male-centered or androcentric culture in relation to the entire natural world, *ecofeminism takes deep ecology beyond its critique of anthropocentrism and it takes feminism beyond the quest for social justice alone.* By doing so, ecofeminism is both deeper and broader than what we think of as either feminism (particularly liberal feminism) or ecology (even deep ecology). It shares with ecopsychology a robust and rigorous critique of the dysfunctional value system of androcentric society and a commitment to healing the wounds caused by humans' alienation from nature.

Feminist Therapy

"Feminist therapy may be considered revolutionary for psychology because it insists that internal change is not enough" (Unger & Crawford, 1992, p. 605). Although consensus regarding what constitutes feminist therapy is still evolving, various writers have proposed key elements that they believe are essential to its practice. According to Hill and Ballou (1998), a collaborative stance

that shares power with the client is essential and can be accomplished by inviting clients to ask questions and give feedback to the therapist, by self-disclosing (when appropriate), and by explaining how therapy works. It is also important to acknowledge the external causes of distress and to distinguish them from psychic causes; to honor the reality of clients' experiences; to work for social change; and to make an integrated analysis of the various types of oppression that clients face (Pompeo-Fargnoli, 2017).

Israeli & Santor (2000) see four components as fundamental to feminist therapy: consciousness-raising; social and gender role analysis; resocialization and social activism; and the evaluation of therapeutic effectiveness. McLellan (1999) posits that feminist therapy revolves around four central issues: a social/political rather than a personal/individual philosophy; oppression as the cause of emotional and psychological distress; the need to demystify (recognize and name) the oppressive forces in clients' lives; and real and lasting therapeutic change that serves justice rather than merely helping clients adjust to the status quo.

Collins (2002) cites Brown and Brodsky's study (1992) that identifies six core principles that inform the work of feminist therapists:

- valuing diverse and complex experiences
- focusing on power dynamics in relationships (starting with the therapist-client relationship)
- attending to both intrapsychic and contextual factors
- relying on empirical data produced by feminist scholarship
- valuing both healthy autonomy and relational competence for all adults
- seeing therapy's goals as both intrapsychic change and changed perspective on the external (social/cultural) realities that affect clients' lives.

Worell and Remer (2003) suggest four basic principles to guide feminist therapy: personal and social identities are interdependent; the personal is political; egalitarian relationships; and valuing the female perspective.

Ecofeminism

D'Eaubonne coined the term ecofeminism, thereby giving a name, shape and form to a new brand of feminism that represents the coming together of the environmental, radical feminist, and women's spirituality movements, out of a shared concern for the well-being of the earth and all life that the earth supports (1981). Ecofeminism provides a conceptual framework that integrates and weaves together principles from these various movements into a coherent worldview, one that is crucial to the survival, in any meaningful way, of life on this planet.

Many people today are concerned about the damage we are doing to our earthly home, but may not make the connection between their own difficulties and distresses and the worsening condition of the environment. Nor do they suspect that a pernicious construct of beliefs and institutions underlies the many signs of ecological deterioration: toxins in the food chain, fish unfit to eat because of industrial and chemical pollutants, deforestation, species extinction, endangered wildlife, loss of wilderness and open space, over-development, congestion and sprawl, soil and ozone depletion, global warming, acid rain, dirty water and air, overfishing in polluted oceans, overpopulation straining the carrying capacity of the earth, non-sustainable growth, and more. "If we continue to pollute, burn, overfish, clear-cut, strip-mine, dam, drain, net, poison, dump,

exterminate, develop, fly, drive, and procreate at our current rate, we will inevitably precipitate a global disaster" (Hunter, 2003, p. 8).

Ecofeminism connects these alarming trends and the ecological calamity they threaten to produce to the oppression of women and the suppression of feminine energy and consciousness (Johnson, 1990). Its central point of analysis is the structure of patriarchal, male-centered culture. Based on domination and control, androcentric patriarchy requires the exploitation of women, abuse of the environment, militarism, destructive technocracy, and rampant consumerism. Ecofeminist theory emphasizes and, in fact, begins with what is seen as the inextricable link between the many and varied types of violence against women and the contempt with which humans treat the earth. "Ecofeminists believe that we cannot end the exploitation of nature without ending human oppression, and vice versa" (Birkeland, 1993, p. 19).

A central tenet of ecofeminism is that the personal problems women face and the degradation of the natural world must be seen in the context of a socio-political culture that denigrates both women and nature and subordinates feminine consciousness in favor of a masculine value system based on fear and aggression. It begins with the realization of the "parallel in men's thinking between their 'right' to exploit nature, on the one hand, and the use they make of women, on the other" (Salleh, 1989, p. 27).

Birkeland (1993) describes ecofeminism as "a value system, a social movement, and a practice, but it also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentric and environmental destruction" (p.18). She goes on to enumerate nine basic precepts that build upon both ecological principles and feminist thought. Among these are the intrinsic value of nature based on an ethic of reciprocity and harmony with ecosystems and awareness of the interconnectedness of all life. Social transformation from structures of domination and control to egalitarian forms of organization is necessary as well, as is the integration of false dualisms that separate, divide, and encourage exploitation and abuse. Also crucial is the disruption of patriarchal institutions by rejecting the hierarchical, mechanistic, power-based values upon which they are based and by rebalancing the masculine and feminine within them and in ourselves (p. 20).

The Influence of Ecofeminism

Although the term ecofeminism was coined by D'Eaubonne in 1974, the preponderance of publications about ecofeminism date from the late 1970s through the 1990s. Since then, there has been a paucity of research and published pieces on the subject. Several trends shed light on possible reasons for this lack of development of ecofeminist theory. Faludi (1990) thoroughly documents the backlash against feminism as a result of its success in changing many of the conditions which afflicted women in a male-dominated society. Similarly, corporate interests fuel public mistrust of environmentalists due to profit motives that are often at odds with environmental stewardship. Economic imperatives drive business decisions and advertising (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009). Thus, the word "feminism" has taken on negative connotations or become anathema to some people; ecology-minded citizens are demeaned and ridiculed with epithets such as "tree-huggers". Such memes may have had a chilling effect on ecological and feminist writing, the two theoretical branches of ecofeminism.

Another possible reason for the waning interest in ecofeminism in this century is that after the trauma of 9/11/2001, attention turned to the Middle East and more feminist writing was directed toward examining the status and treatment of women in other parts of the world where women's oppression was greatest. Feminism became more focused on global feminism and

ecofeminism was largely overlooked. Due to these various forces, ecofeminism lost momentum and ecofeminist theory has not developed as hoped.

Nevertheless, courses based in part or wholly on ecofeminist thought are being offered in institutions of higher education (Holloway, J.A., et. al. , 2014; Ludlow, J., 2010) and ecofeminist analysis has been applied to other fields of study such as marketing (Stevens, L, et. al., 2013).

A graduate counseling course on gender taught by an author of this article reveals how effective the backlash against feminism has been. When the mostly millennial female students are asked if they are feminists, no more than a few hands are raised, usually quite tentatively. But when asked how feminist principles coincide with their own beliefs, there is overwhelming agreement with them. Similarly, an assignment in this author's graduate course on ecotherapy requires students to interview counselors to determine how ecotherapy fits into their practice. Most students reported that the counselor/therapist they spoke with had no knowledge of ecotherapy. After hearing the students' description of ecotherapy, however, it became evident that they were indeed using many of the methods in their practice—mindfulness, nature walks, and one memorable technique co-created with a client who was grieving the loss of a loved one. This particular healing activity allowed the client to express her feelings and thoughts through letters to the deceased and to be comforted and connected to nature and new life through the planting of a tree over the letters (Freire, 2015). The therapist's collaborative approach and the fostering of the client's reciprocal, beneficial relationship with the natural world demonstrate an ecofeminist mindset that was the basis for effective counseling.

Ecofeminist analysis is useful in fields beyond counseling and that despite forces that impede the momentum of ecofeminist ideas, they still have taken root somewhat, though they are not always recognized or labeled as such. Students who proclaim "I'm not a feminist but..." and counselors unfamiliar with the term ecotherapy may have incorporated elements of both into their frames of reference.

Ecofeminist Therapy and Counseling

An ecofeminist perspective is highly compatible with the helping professions and is probably even essential to authentic healing. In short, ecofeminism is a holistic value system in which "values and action are inseparable: one cannot care without acting" (Birkeland, 1993, p.19). When applied to the work of counselors and therapists, "acting" means adopting a therapeutic approach that can serve and support caring. Dinnerstein (1976) provides a compelling rationale for the development of an ecofeminist approach to counseling and therapy: "There is, in fact, some basic pathology shaping our species' stance toward itself and nature, a pathology whose chances of killing us off quite soon, if we cannot manage to outgrow it first, are very good indeed" (p. 4). Despite the urgency of changing our attitudes and actions regarding nature, humans do not seem to be rising to that challenge, as noted by other authors: "Nevertheless, polls indicate that most people at the turn of the 21st century would appear to be largely in denial about the scale and seriousness of the ecological damage being done right now...Denial was, and is, somehow still in vogue" (Hunter, 2003, p. 5). Related to denial is the phenomenon of "psychic numbing" (Lifton, 1979) in which individuals exhibit zombie-like reactions to events. With their senses dulled and their understanding of reality impaired by patriarchal thinking, people are able to tolerate and even participate in activities that place their own emotional and physical well-being in jeopardy and hasten environmental collapse. Thus, "the environmental crisis is unlike the myriad of natural disasters for it is a crisis of the maladaptive behavior of people" (Pilisuk, 2001, p. 35). If this were

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so, it would be unethical for counselors and therapists to ignore how their clients' problems and actions could be connected to the plight of the earth.

The task of the ecofeminist therapist/counselor, therefore, is to expose and free ourselves of malignant mindsets that underlie a plethora of psychological problems, physical ailments, addictions, disorders and dysfunctions that threaten the health and well-being not only of our human clients but of the biosphere itself (Roszak, et al., 1995). Ecofeminist counselors can help clients to make the interconnections among their personal suffering, the suffering of the planet, and social oppression. They can help them to work through the emotions that block the energy needed to take creative action in the world and begin the processes of their own healing and healing the earth.

At the heart of ecofeminist therapy is a concern with disturbed relationships of all kinds: among humans, between the sexes, with the natural world, with one's self, and with the spiritual realm. It seeks to foster relationships that are egalitarian, respectful, caring, reciprocal, responsible, and compassionate. Because the human relationship to the earth is replicated in other relationships, an ecofeminist approach to counseling and therapy helps clients to recognize the connections between their own personal problems and the problems of the planet, and the distorted thinking that feeds both. Crucial methods include power analysis and sex role analysis that problematizes relationships based on dominance and control; consciousness-raising about androcentric assumptions and their effects on the earth and people's lives; validation of female experience and valuing female perspectives; reframing that focuses on the strength and resilience of feminine energy; and developing reciprocal nurturing practices, beginning with nurturing and being nurtured by the natural world.

Ecofeminist therapists, for example, might view obesity, anorexia, and bulimia as consumption disorders resulting from a corporate consumer culture that promulgates a multitude of pathological attitudes about women's bodies, female roles, the use, distribution and waste of the earth's resources, and the most essential processes that sustain life, both physical and spiritual. Ecofeminist counseling and therapy would focus on exploring these aspects and connecting the individual's behaviors with forces in a society that tolerates and even encourages eating disorders and other addictions (Pompeo, Kooyman, & Pierce, 2014). "Strategies for restoring a healthy sense of self, body and relationship to others" would include developing alternative nurturing behaviors such as pet therapy, gardening, land restoration, composting—activities that heal "the earth's body as a parallel to healing one's own" (Reibel, 2001, p. 51).

Guidelines for Ecofeminist Counselors

An ecofeminist approach to counseling and therapy could be considered a necessary, perhaps urgent, response to the problems confronting humanity as well as the non-human world. Ecofeminist theory offers the conceptual assistance to help counselors reframe their practice just as ecotherapy offers its orientation and methods to engage in an effective helping relationship. The human, social, and ecological problems of the 21st century require that counselors expand their scope of understanding to include these eco-perspectives in their therapeutic work. Furthermore, psychotherapeutic professionals have a special responsibility in our time to shape new criteria of sanity and mental health (Roszak, 1995). The old criteria of sanity and mental health was presupposed to be accurate, even when it was fabricated in a society where our male children are strongly pulled towards imaginings of conquering land, women and other nations. They are told that in order to be great, they must be separate from others. In fact, it has been noted that man's

push to be separate can be traced back to the beginnings of life (Chodorow, 1997). The belief of finding wholeness and self-healing apart from our planet mirrors androcentric ideals and undoubtedly lies at the root of our environmental dilemma (Roszak, 1992). A new criteria for mental health and sanity must be drawn. As such, the following guiding values are presented as suggestions for consideration as a springboard for future development:

- The personal is political and ecological. Connect personal problems to political structures and systems of domination that exploit the environment and oppress certain groups of people
- Exposing and challenge androcentric cultural assumptions and the effects of the technoconsumer culture on human physical and mental health and the health of the planet
- Reframe pathology to show the adaptive aspects of clients' behavior
- Distinguish external/sociocultural from internal/psychological causes of distress
- Value, model, and foster reciprocal, egalitarian relationships through appropriate self-disclosure, power analysis, and demystifying the counseling process
- Value multiple female perspectives and women's diversity
- Validate women's experience and strengths
- Encourage ecological spirituality and transcendent experience
- Value the natural world through reciprocal nurturing and healing
- Care for nature and be receptive to the healing and nurturing powers of nature
- Transform feelings of anger, pain, grief, and despair into personal and collective/community action for cultural change

Case Study
    The case study demonstrates how identification with natural phenomena and the development of ecological mindfulness can lead to psychological breakthroughs in the course of ecofeminist therapy.

Fostering Relationship Connections
    Emma, a bright 20-year-old Hispanic college woman, presented for counseling with self-described family and relationship problems. Emma also suffered from low self-esteem, depression, and anger-management issues. Living in a large urban city with her mother, father, and younger brother, she described her relationship with her family as rocky and reported that she was "always angry at them." Her romantic relationships were also constantly being shattered by her anger. She usually could not even remember what the fights were about, but knew that the amount of anger that seemed to "explode" from her and onto them was not healthy. Emma also had difficulty talking about her feelings and emotions and instead had developed the unhealthy coping mechanism of lashing out to others when she felt painful emotions.
    From an ecofeminist perspective, Emma's counselor worked with her to bring about awareness of how society was impacting her. Emma was able to find her inner voice as she realized that most of her anger was based in her feelings of invalidation for her struggles as a woman. Within her family and society, Emma felt that she was devalued compared to males. She also felt resentment that her family expected her to follow traditional and cultural feminine roles, such as

cooking and cleaning within the household. From there, she expressed her anger that these expected roles were also the least valued roles, based in a masculine value system. The impacts of this had been causing Emma psychological stress and anger. Finally allowing herself to express these inner emotions and receive validation for her feelings within the session, was cathartic. Emma and her counselor began to work towards ways that Emma could express her inner voice within her life and expand her identity beyond the roles that society expected her to maintain.

As Emma had a history of unstable relationships in her life, her counselor also worked to create an atmosphere of stability and safety within the counseling session. Building this counselor-client relationship was an integral part of therapy, so that Emma could trust her counselor enough to open up about her feelings and emotions. The counseling session began to serve as a microcosm of the outside world so that Emma could begin to feel what it was like to trust someone.

Emma also gained the awareness that she had been causing relationship disconnections in her life as a defense to prevent relationship pain. By operating from an ecofeminist perspective, Emma's counselor knew that many women come to counseling burdened by their defensive disconnections that may have previously served them well in navigating a patriarchal culture. From a Relational-Cultural Therapy perspective, Emma's counselor helped her to realize the importance of relationships and how women define themselves through their relationships. Therefore, working to identify healthy and growth fostering relationships, and maintaining these connections, were additional key component of her therapy.

To further support Emma's work regarding her relationship trust issues, her counselor employed nature as a tool. Emma responded very well to analogies brought forth by her counselor that involved nature and trust. One particular analogy that Emma connected with was that of a local park in which Emma's counselor described a place where over time the squirrels had learned to trust people enough so that as patient people sat holding out peanuts, the squirrels would come up to them –albeit cautiously—and take the peanut from their hands. It was also described how this trust of the squirrels developed slowly, and in steps over time. The relationship had healthy boundaries and was mutually satisfying. Emma connected with this example and was able to relate to how the squirrels originally felt (cautious, scared) but also how she desired relationships.

As healing progressed, Emma began to describe her own metaphors connected with nature. She described her feelings just prior to one of her "anger explosions," comparing her feelings to what a "volcano in nature must feel like before it explodes." This connection with a force of nature proved to be a significant insight, setting a new path for her therapy: her emotions became a part of her that she could better understand and begin to work toward understanding. She realized that within herself, like this volcano within nature, had pressure building up, and the outcome was disastrous to herself and her relationships. Creating this connection with nature allowed her to have a better awareness and understanding of her own emotional journey and the consequences of her negative coping strategies. She realized that for years she had been burying her feelings of low self-esteem and depression. Layers upon layers of hurt deep within herself had erupted like a volcano based in her anger towards society's devaluation of women and the horrific treatment of nature, which she witnessed examples of every day in her urban city.

Emma realized that her healing needed to occur through change. As such, it was Emma's idea to explore ways that she could serve as an advocate for other women and for nature. Through her own healing journey she felt compelled to speak to the strength that each woman possesses, understanding that while this power may be suppressed, subordinated, or ignored, she nonetheless had it within herself to alter the course of her life.

Bringing Clients into Nature

Bringing clients in*to* nature is illustrated by the following brief example as to the "why" and "how" a therapist may choose to physically bring the session into nature.

Julia, was a 22-year-old college senior and star lacrosse player who sought help at the college counseling center following her father's sudden and unexpected death. Having had a close and positive relationship with her father, Julia was having difficulty accepting his death, and struggling with her feelings of loss and grief.

Her father's absence at the lacrosse games he had faithfully attended was particularly painful for her; remembering his "cheering for me the loudest and always sitting in the same seat on the bleachers" brought back bittersweet memories for Julia. Although the sport and her fellow team members were a great source of comfort and support in her bereavement, Julia had avoided looking at the now-empty bleacher seat that her father had occupied.

After struggling academically and socially following her father's death, Julia realized that she needed professional help. Julia and her counselor worked together for months to help her through the grieving process. Some sessions involved Julia realizing that she did not need to hide her emotions in order to appear strong and to be her mother and brother's sturdy "rock." Julia realized that she too, deserved to mourn. Some sessions involved Julia simply having a safe place where she could let her emotions—sadness, anger, loss, fear—out without fear of embarrassment or judgement. Julia and her counselor worked together for months. One specific therapeutic piece that Julia was working on outside of the session was that of a photobook/journal of her and her father. Working on this, which included photos of her and her father with private messages to him scattered throughout, was very therapeutic for Julia.

As the one year anniversary of her father's death approached, Julia's counselor chose to incorporate ecotherapy into the session, as she asked Julia if she would like to schedule her weekly counseling session on that specific day and then meet outside, on the lacrosse field. Julia happily agreed, welcoming the support of her counselor on that difficult day and to have a session in a place that was so special and memorable for her.

When the day came, it was a beautiful, sunny day. Julia and her counselor arrived at the empty lacrosse field at the same time and smiled to one another—as their mutual knowledge of the progress Julia had made throughout counseling was conveyed between them without a word spoken. Julia had also brought the completed memory book that she had made for her father. Sitting on the ground in the middle of the quiet, peaceful field, feeling the warm May breeze, Julia allowed herself to be comforted and nurtured by nature in an outdoor space where she felt closest to her father. She shared the memory book and her written words to her father, with her counselor. She shared pictures of her father and began to tell humorous stories about him, laughing for the first time since she had been in counseling. Then, she paused and her eyes moved from the pages of the book to the stands of the field. For the first time since his death, she was able to look up at the seat her father had cheered from many times. Being outside, in this natural setting, was extremely cathartic. After taking a deep breath, Julia smiled, seeming relieved and peaceful. At that moment, a colorful butterfly landed two feet away from where she was sitting. In this moment, nature brought her a kind of spiritual comfort. Julia then expressed the healing power of nature in these words: "I miss my dad, but I know it's going to be okay."

Conclusion

The healing professions have an important role to play in shaping the psychological paradigm of the twenty-first century. Many of the problems that clients present in counseling are indeed linked to a dominant worldview responsible for defiling the earth and degrading women. Ecofeminism and ecotherapy offer a compelling alternative paradigm that values and fosters harmonious relationships—with self, with other humans, and with the natural world. A therapeutic approach based on ecofeminist principles can help to raise consciousness about the socio-political roots of problems, both personal and planetary, and bring about profound cultural change. By embracing this challenge, counselors and therapists can contribute greatly to preserving the life and health of the planet and its inhabitants, but the task requires a fresh look at the counseling profession and a shift in the therapeutic paradigm within which it functions.

As counselor educators continue to instill the skills needed in a new generation of counselors, bringing an awareness of new forms of therapies and new client issues is crucial. Teaching counseling students about alternative approaches such as ecofeminism and ecotherapy will only better prepare them with a full "counseling toolbox" of strategies. As each client is different, and comes to session with unique histories, diversity, and concerns, being equipped with a multitude of approaches is vital. Furthermore, counseling supervisors should have awareness into these modalities as they support, train, and oversee novice counselors. As clients will continue to present with new concerns, we must be prepared to meet them where they are—by counseling with new awareness, knowledge, and skills in an ever-changing world.

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