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Ecopsychology and race : an exploratory study

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ABSTRACT

While ecopsychology has brought critical attention to the relationship between the natural environment and the human psyche, very little has been written about how race and racism shape our experience of the natural world. This qualitative study asked the following central question: How are race and racism relevant to ecopsychology in theory and practice? Twelve semistructured interviews were conducted with a racially diverse group of ecopsychologists, environmental justice activists and spiritual leaders. Interview data emphasized the importance of employing a broad definition of ecopsychology that encompasses not only the relationship between psyche and nature, but the relationship between psyche, nature and society. The findings also suggested that in order to address race and racism in practice, applied ecopsychology should not focus on an individual therapy model, but instead turn to group and community level interventions such as urban agriculture and green jobs. The study's findings point to a need for ecopsychology to critically examine its own whiteness, expand its analysis on how racism and white supremacy are linked to the ecological crisis, and to ally itself with people of color working towards similar goals.

ECOPSYCHOLOGY AND RACE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Introduction

This study sought to explore how race and racism are relevant to ecopsychology in theory and in practice. While ecopsychology has brought critical attention to the impact of the natural environment on the human psyche and spirit, very little has been written about how race and racism shape our experience of the natural world. Meanwhile, the environmental justice movement has increasingly highlighted the differential health impacts of environmental degradation on communities of color and poor communities. However, ecopsychology and environmental justice frameworks have yet to come together to create an ecological, psycho-spiritual theory and practice grounded in principles of social justice. This study asked the following central question: How are race and racism relevant to ecopsychology in theory and practice? Additional areas for inquiry included the following sub–questions: 1) How could ecopsychology incorporate an explicit critical race analysis; 2) What might ecopsychology grounded in an antiracism framework look like in practice with individuals, groups and communities? 3) How could ecopsychology and the environmental justice movement better support and contribute to one another? The study will yield ideas and practices with implications for ecopsychology theory and practice, as well as for environmental justice work.

As a field, social work prides itself on looking beyond the individual human psyche and into a person's social context. However, this person-in-environment perspective has rarely taken into account the natural, or ecological, environment. This study contributes to social work theory and practice by both expanding our understanding of “environment” and bringing social work's social justice values to the growing field of ecopsychology. In addition, this study explored the ways that incorporating an ecological, anti-racist perspective can inform clinical

work.

While there are many definitions for the term, *ecopsychology*, it is generally understood to be a synthesis of ecology and psychology. Ecology studies the interrelationships among all forms of life and the physical environment, while psychology studies the human mind and soul as it feels, thinks, and acts. These two come together in ecopsychology to place the human psyche within the larger systems of which it is a part (Conn, 1998).

Ecopsychology has been criticized for ignoring the social context and oppressive social structures that are connected with and perpetuate the exploitation of nature. The field of *ecofeminism* has been particularly vocal in this critique. Ecofeminism applies a feminist power analysis to issues of the natural environment, and connects the domination and exploitation of women with the domination and exploitation of nature. Ecofeminists argue that ecopsychology focuses too much on psychological and metaphysical themes and lacks meaningful social analysis (Fisher, 2002; Salleh, 1993).

The *environmental justice* movement, which has been led by people of color, has also provided insightful critique of ecopsychology. Environmental justice activists agree that there can be no lasting solutions to environmental problems without addressing systemic racial injustice (Bullard, 1993; Anthony, 1995; Stein, 2004). Anthony (1995) discusses the ways that ecopsychology is limited by its Eurocentric perspective. For example, he argues that the way ecopsychologists talk about alienation from nature is from the white experience of a subtle, long-term, psychological process. This overlooks the violence and coercion that led to the separation of some people from nature, particularly people of color.

Very little has been written within the field of ecopsychology about issues of race and racism. However, there is some literature outside of the field that does explore the intersections

of race and ecology, and to a lesser extent, mental health (Glave, 2010; Hall, 2007; hooks, 2011; Manos, 2009; Mapp, 2012; Smith, 2012). This study applies the analyses of ecofeminism and the environmental justice movement to ecopsychology and seeks to build on the existing literature both within and outside of the field.

Because there is so little literature on ecopsychology and race, this study employed an exploratory research method and an inductive qualitative design. A total of 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with ecopsychologists, spiritual leaders, environmental justice activists, and others working at the intersection of ecology, psychology and race. The sample was not limited to ecopsychologists, because it sought to elicit diverse perspectives that would push the boundaries of the field. The open-ended interview guide posed questions that explored the following themes: 1) Whether and how issues of race and racism are relevant to the field of ecopsychology; 2) Whether and how ecopsychology could learn from the environmental justice movement; and 3) How ecopsychology could explicitly address issues of race and racism in practice.

This study offers the small but growing field of ecopsychology an important analysis that has been previously missing from the research and literature. It also provides a bridge between the ecopsychology and the environmental justice movement, which have a lot in common though there had been few opportunities for dialogue. Last, this study offers concrete ideas for how ecopsychology can take an actively antiracist stance as it sorts out its practical application.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore how race and racism are relevant to ecopsychology in theory and in practice. Ecopsychology centralizes the relationship between the psyche and its natural environment, the healing potential of nature, and it considers the psychological aspects of the current ecological crisis. This literature review will summarize the contributions of ecopsychology theory as well as empirical data. I will then place ecopsychology in its historical context as a new field of Western psychology that draws on the wisdom of ancient indigenous spiritual traditions, and I will briefly review its roots in the fields of deep ecology and living systems theory. Next, the practical application of ecopsychology, known as "ecotherapy", will be considered.

The field of ecopsychology has been dominated by white males and has unfortunately failed to connect racial justice issues to ecological issues. This study seeks to forge these connections in theory, as well as to consider how ecopsychology could address race and racism in practice. Therefore, I will turn to the literature of ecofeminism and the environmental justice movement and their critiques of ecopsychology in order to understand how psychology, ecology and race intersect in the existing literature. Finally, I will explore the initial steps that have been taken toward developing a "cultural ecopsychology" theory and consider what work lies ahead.

Ecopsychology Overview

While there are many definitions for the term, *ecopsychology*, it is generally understood to be a synthesis of ecology and psychology. Ecology studies the interrelationships among all forms of life and the physical environment, while psychology studies the human mind and soul

as it feels, thinks, and acts. These two come together in ecopsychology to place the human psyche within the larger systems of which it is a part (Conn, 1998).

The field of ecopsychology has been developing over the last 20 years, and is increasingly relevant. It is becoming more difficult to ignore the mass extinction of plants and animals, frequent and devastating extreme weather events, massive nuclear accidents and oil spills, and increasingly poisoned water, air and food. Ecopsychologists believe that the human psyche is necessarily impacted by these events:

> What humans do to the outer world, they do to their own interior world. As the natural world recedes in its diversity and abundance, so the human world finds itself impoverished in its economic resources, in its imaginative powers, in its human sensitivities, and in significant aspects of its intellectual intuitions. (Swimme & Berry, 1992, p. 242)

The field of social work has made a strong case for looking beyond the individual psyche to the social context in which it operates. Ecopsychology takes this a step further, arguing that human well-being is impacted by and inseparable from the larger ecological system, of which humans are a part. This represents a radical departure from traditional Western understandings of both mental illness and mental health. Ecopsychology connects epidemic human psychopathology with the ecological crisis by identifying that both result from the life denying modern industrial capitalist growth system (Fisher, 2002; Glendinning, 1994). Macy (1998, p. 16) explains that this "Industrial Growth Society" encourages people to relate to the earth as little more than a supply house and a sewer, and it relies on accelerating consumption and ever-increasing waste in order to continue to grow. Our collective dysfunctional relationship with the earth parallels the numbing and abuse we express and experience in our private lives.

Glendinning (1994) uses the language of post-traumatic stress disorder to describe what she views as "the underlying condition of the domesticated psyche" (p. xiii) as a result of our separation from the earth.

Ecopsychology asks how humans can maintain our sanity in an insane world, and challenges mainstream psychology's understanding of mental illness as a primarily individual or private problem. Fisher (2002) explains this difference in approach:

> I have…wondered at the absurdity of lining up the wounded at psychotherapist's office…while the everyday social forces that violate our nature, and guarantee a steady supply of crippled souls, go for the most part unquestioned—and while the same general forces continue to go about their business of tearing down the biosphere. In a critical sense, then, ecopsychology is for me an effort to understand the social links between these two areas of violence, between the violation we recognize as the ecological crisis and the violation we recognize as human suffering. (pp. xiii-xiv)

As the global ecological crisis escalates, more and more psychologists and social workers are taking note and seeking to understand, on a psychological and spiritual level, how it is that human beings are allowing this to happen, how it affects us, and what might motivate us to change. In the last few years, psychologists have been paying particular attention to the impact of climate change on mental health (Fritze, Blashki, Burke, & Wiseman, 2008; Riemer & Reich, 2011; Swim, Stern, Doherty, Clayton, Reser, Weber, Gifford & Howard, 2011). Environmental organizations are also beginning to research this link and make recommendations on how the mental health system can prepare for the effects of climate change (National Wildlife Federation Climate Education Program, 2012).

While there is not a lot of empirical research in the field of ecopsychology, initial studies

provide a growing body of evidence pointing to the relevance and efficacy of eco-therapeutic practices. A detailed description of the evidence is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, Chalquist (2009b) offers a thorough overview in his article "A Look at the ecotherapy research evidence". He highlights the mounting evidence that psychological well-being is directly related to factors such as exercise, noise, crowding, light, the built environment, and air quality. Eco-therapeutic interventions such as wilderness excursions, animal assisted therapy and horticultural therapy have been proven effective in treating a range of psychological disorders. On the other hand, studies also show that environmental degradation is associated with higher levels of stress, increased marginalization, and challenges with problem solving and support seeking (Van Haaften & Van de Vijver, 1999).

Researchers have also explored why, despite extensive evidence of the threat of ecological crisis, there is still widespread denial and resistance to taking action around it. One study concluded that this resistance was due to a motivational tendency to defend and justify the status quo (Feygina & Goldsmith, 2010). Another study found that when people believe that their group is responsible for harming the natural world and that the damage can be repaired, collective guilt will elicit behaviors to repair the harm (Ferguson & Branscombe, 2010).

While the empirical evidence for the need for and efficacy of ecotherapeutic practices is strong and mounting, some ecopsychologists question how relevant a scientific, quantitative lens is to a field dedicated to promoting a more holistic view of the world (Chalquist, 2009b; Fisher, 2002). Chalquist (2009b) cautions that scientific research shares the same blindspots that ecopsychology seeks to address:

> At their worst, ['objective' research methods] also carry their religious/scholastic legacy of obsessive ritualism, adherence to canonical sources, prizing of proper form over

> creativity or relevance, worship of control… and fear and hatred of subjectivity. It could be argued that unchecked empiricism is itself a kind of trauma, a defensive intellectualized retreat from encountering the world's richness on its own terms. (p. 6)

Despite emphasizing the shortcomings of positivist scientific inquiry, Chalquist goes on to argue that ecopsychology should not altogether abandon empirical, quantitative research. Rather, he contends that ecopsychology should take a balanced, holistic approach that includes multiple perspectives and ways of knowing, and holds the human relationship with nature as neither purely subjective nor purely objective.

Origins of Ecopsychology

While ecopsychology has primarily been developed by Western psychologists, activists and thinkers, its main principles are not new. Spiritual traditions and practices from around the world have centered on human beings' interconnectedness to all other life for millennia (Macy & Young, 1998; Parham, 2009). For those who are still connected to and practicing earth-based spiritual and cultural traditions, ecopsychology may appear redundant or even irrelevant. However, for those of us who have become disconnected from our ancestral indigenous cultures and disconnected from the earth as a result of the relentless rise of the "Industrial Growth Society", ecopsychology offers a way to reconnect.

Some ecopsychologists are considering how this reconnection can happen in a way that honors the ancient roots at the source of ecopsychology, as well as the many earth-based cultures still alive today. Leslie Gray (2004), a Native American psychologist, encourages ecopsychologists to look toward these ancient earth-based spiritual traditions for theoretical and practical models. At the same time, both Gray and Glendinning (1994), who is white, point out that there is some tension between white, non-indigenous people who seek reconnection through

Native American religions, and members of Native American communities who feel that this represents cultural appropriation at best and exploitation and cultural theft at worst. While there is some literature exploring this topic, ecopsychology as a field has not yet taken it on whole-heartedly.

The theory and philosophy of ecopsychology is also rooted in the field of *deep ecology*. Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, coined the term in the 1970s when he argued that solving environmental problems would require looking beyond symptoms of environmental degradation to their source: capitalist industrial society. The central concept of deep ecology is the importance of developing an 'ecological mode of consciousness' or 'ecological self', in which the self is so interconnected with all life on earth that it transcends narrow, biographical definition. With this ecological consciousness, everything is experienced as being part of an interdependent whole. Deep ecologists contend that shifting to an ecological worldview is necessary to address the ecological crisis because it allows people to see that the boundaries of their self-interest extend beyond their physical self to include all life (Fisher, 2002; Macy & Young, 1998). Deep ecologist, John Seed (1988), describes how experiencing an ecological self has transformed his own environmental activism:

> "I am protecting the rain forest" develops to "I am part of the rain forest protecting myself. I am that part of the rain forest recently emerged into thinking." What a relief then! The thousands of years of imagined separation are over and we begin to recall our true nature. That is, the change is a spiritual one, sometimes referred to as deep ecology. (p. 20)

This is the sort of shift in consciousness that ecopsychologists seek to encourage, because they believe it may be a key to turning the ecological crisis around.

Living systems theory has also informed both deep ecology and ecopsychology. Emerging simultaneously, the Industrial Growth Society and classical science privilege an analytical and mechanical worldview, in which individual parts are thought to contain meaning independent of the larger system. This worldview has permeated Western culture, as science and technology are praised as objective and essential to progress.

In contrast to reductionist thinking, living systems theory looks at the larger pattern of a system to find meaning and is interested in the way that parts within a pattern interact. It has been described as a "way of seeing" (Macy & Young, 1998, p. 40). In shifting their way of seeing, living systems scientists have discovered a number of principles by which life self organizes. For example, they have found that each system in nature is a whole that cannot be reduced to its parts, and the interaction of these parts generates "emergent properties". Consider that water cannot be reduced to hydrogen and oxygen; combining the two creates something unpredictable and irreducible. Living systems are also self-regulating, forever seeking homeostasis and compensating for changing conditions. When a living system's survival is threatened, it will adapt and evolve.

What does living systems theory have to do with ecopsychology? The ideas may seem abstract; however, the theory is extremely relevant in thinking about human response to ecological crisis. Deep ecology and ecopsychology both draw on the principles of living systems theory, viewing the earth as a living system, and placing human beings back into that system (Macy & Young, 1998). Ecotherapy seeks to inspire a shift in consciousness that puts these principles into practice.

Ecotherapy

While ecopsychology is currently primarily a body of thought, there is a small but

growing body of literature from a range of disciplines that seeks to put ecopsychology's ideas into practice (Besthorn, Wulff & St. George, 2010; Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009; Clinebell, 1996; Macy & Young, 1998). The practical task of ecopsychology, its therapeutic application, is sometimes referred to as *ecotherapy*. Fisher (2002) asserts that the broad practical task of ecopsychology is "to develop psychologically informed practices… aimed at creating a life celebrating society" (p. 13). Examples of eco-therapeutic practices include horticultural (gardening) therapy, animal assisted therapy, wilderness excursions, and nature-based visualizations.

Ecotherapy is more than a set of practices; the ecopsychological worldview provides a unique way of understanding psychological problems. For example, rather than viewing psychological symptoms as primarily a product of individual experience and pathology, ecopsychologists view them as signals, or feedback from the larger living system as well. Thus ecotherapeutic practices aim to provide experiences that help people experience themselves as interconnected with life at all levels. Given the current global ecological crisis, this experience of interconnectedness may lead some people to realize that some of the grief and pain in their individual lives may at least partially be a natural response to the death of so many living beings and the ongoing degradation of the soil, waters, and air. For ecopsychologists, personal pain "may represent a signal, an opportunity for movement, or a call for participation in the larger system" (Conn, 1998, p.196). For example, Riebel (2001) makes a metaphoric and practical connection between the causes of eating disorders and the pathological traits at the root of environmental crisis, both of which involve dissociation from the body, emotional numbing, and misuse of natural resources to soothe distress.

A comprehensive collection of group-based ecotherapeutic practices is included in

Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown's (1998) book, *Coming back to life*. Macy is not a psychologist by training, however her work is foundational in the field of ecopsychology. A Buddhist scholar and long-time anti-nuclear activist, Macy has been leading workshops and group work for over 30 years. Her work helps people find solidarity and strength in the context of rapidly deteriorating social and ecological conditions. Macy's work is now known as 'Work that Reconnects', though it has also been described as "despair and empowerment work". Typically conducted in groups, the underlying premise of the work is that people usually try to hide their despair for the world and their own personal pain from others. In order to hide, people numb themselves psychically, making it difficult to process and respond to incoming information and hindering their creative response. Macy points out that it is just this creativity and responsiveness that we need in order to respond to the current global crisis. Traditional psychotherapy often treats these kinds of feelings as private neuroses rather than a healthy response to what is happening in the world. In contrast, The Work that Reconnects encourages participants to let go of defenses such as numbing, and trust their responses to the world, including their grief, despair, hope, joy and gratitude (Macy, 2007).

Critiquing Ecopsychology and Alternative Frameworks

Ecopsychology and deep ecology have both been criticized for ignoring the social context and oppressive social structures that are connected with and perpetuate the exploitation of nature. I believe that *ecofeminism* and the *environmental justice* movement offer frameworks that could contribute to building ecopsychology's social analysis. I will also look at *cultural ecopsychology*, which is a small but growing offshoot of the field of ecopsychology that explores the connection between place, culture, social identity and psychology.

Ecofeminism: Ecofeminism connects the domination and exploitation of women with

the domination and exploitation of nature, contributing a feminist critique of environmentalism and an environmental critique of feminism. It highlights several major conceptual themes. Feminists have long argued that when men cast women as 'other' or 'object', it becomes easier to control and dominate them. Ecofeminists assert that this dualistic power hierarchy that separates man and woman parallels the split between humanity and nature. For ecofeminists, critiquing oppressive power structures is the first step toward transforming modern society's oppressive human/nature relationship. Finally, like ecopsychology, ecofeminism grounds its philosophy in the concept of interconnectedness (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002).

The field of ecofeminism has been particularly vocal in its critique of deep ecology. More than just a set of theories, ecofeminism has also been described as a strategy for social action (Salleh, 1993).

The field of ecofeminism has been particularly vocal in its critique of deep ecology. Given ecopsychology's roots in deep ecology, these critiques certainly apply to ecopsychology as well. Ecofeminists argue that deep ecologists focus too much on psychological and metaphysical themes and fail to put forth meaningful social analysis (Fisher, 2002; Salleh, 1993). According to Salleh (1993), deep ecology is constrained by the political attitudes of the white, male, middle-class professionals who developed it. She argues that ecofeminism is more relevant than deep ecology to the reality of the global majority, who rely on the land not for aesthetic purposes, but for their survival. For the most part, ecofeminism's power analysis has focused on gender more than on other forms of oppression. Ecofeminist literature often makes brief mention of class and race oppression but rarely includes any meaningful race or class analysis.

Another critique of deep ecology is that it has not been inclusive of Native American worldviews. Nelson (2011) argues that many in the deep ecology movement share the racist and

colonial assumptions of those in the mainstream environmentalism movement who believe that Indians are anti-environmental because they want to draw resources from nature. She explains, "only recently has there been more acknowledgement that the pre-contact North American landscape was well cared for and highly managed by its original inhabitants" (p. 97). This 'people versus nature' thinking has little meaning for indigenous people, who view humans as playing a meaningful and essential role in an ecosystem.

While the fields of ecofeminism, ecopsychology and deep ecology have been dominated by white thinkers and have overall lacked meaningful race analysis, there are certainly people of color connecting the dots on issues of ecology, race, spirituality and psychology. The environmental justice movement has been led by people of color and leaders have provided insightful critiques of ecopsychology that should be used to further develop the field in theory and practice.

Environmental justice: The environmental justice movement emerged in the 1980s, challenging mainstream environmentalists to connect ecological destruction with issues of social and economic injustice. While the mainstream environmental movement continued to emphasize wilderness and wildlife preservation, which primarily appeals to people who can afford leisure time and travel expenses, environmental justice activists worked to expand the definition of "environment" (Bullard, 2000). They argued that the environment includes not just animals, trees and rivers, but anywhere that people live, work, play, and worship. As writer and activist, Cherrie Moraga (1993), so eloquently states, "for immigrants and natives alike, land is also the factories where we work, the water our children drink, and the housing project where we live. For women, lesbians, and gay men, land is that physical mass called our bodies" (p. 173). In other words, social and environmental issues are inseparable, particularly for marginalized

people and communities.

The environmental justice movement has drawn attention to the fact that communities of color and the poor suffer more from environmental ills than do whiter and wealthier communities (Stein, 2004). Research shows that people of color face elevated toxic exposure levels even when social class variables are held constant. Race has been shown to be an independent factor in predicting the distribution of air pollution, contaminated fish consumption, location of landfills, location of abandoned toxic waste dumps, and lead poisoning in children (Bullard, 1994). These kinds of statistics illustrate the real world intersections of race, class, and ecology.

The struggle for environmental justice goes much farther back than is generally understood. For example, in the 1960s African American neighborhoods had to fight to get decent garbage collection and sanitation services for their communities. Prior to the 1980s, these kinds of struggles were not identified as environmental problems. The movement's leadership has been primarily made up of people of color working in small organizations and relying on resources from the local community rather than government or foundation funding. For the most part, these organizations represent groups of concerned citizens who are directly impacted by some type of polluting industry or policy (Bullard, 1993).

Women of color have been at the forefront of the environmental justice movement since its inception. Currently, about 90% of active members in environmental justice organizations are women of color and working-class women (Stein, 2004). These women often become involved either out of a need to protect loved ones from environmental and social ills that threaten their families and communities. As they take on leadership roles in the community, their roles in the home and family often change. Therefore, though their goals may not be explicitly feminist, their work effectively breaks down traditional constructions of gender, race, and class (DiChiro,

1992; Kaalund, 2004). However, despite their courageous and groundbreaking contributions, the work of these activists goes largely unnoticed, particularly in academia. This is evident in the dearth of ecofeminist literature by and about women of color and ecology.

Environmental justice activists agree that there can be no lasting solutions to environmental problems without addressing systemic racial injustice (Anthony, 1995; Bullard, 1993; Canty, 2011; Stein, 2004). In his roundtable interview with Jeanine Canty (2011), Randall Amster explains this in terms of sustainability. He contends that poverty is not sustainable, racism and sexism are not sustainable, and that people must make the connection between social issues and environmental issues. In the same roundtable interview, Drew Dellinger (Canty, 2011) states that these issues are connected both in terms of cause and solution. If you look at the system that is poisoning the planet, it is the same system that created the United States through a process of genocide, colonialism, and oppression. As he puts it, "we have had 500 years of white supremacy, and now the planet is dying" (p. 239). Anthony (1995) connects mainstream white culture's inability to embrace and understand the complexity of ecology with its inability to deal with the complexity of racism. Similarly, Bullard (1993) sees the root cause of many environmental issues as linked to European American imperial ethics and glorification of the conquest of land. These arguments point to the need for the sustainability movement, including ecopsychology, to understand that historically and continuing to this day, struggles for social and environmental justice are inseparable.

While the environmental justice movement makes connections between social and environmental justice, not a lot has been written about how mental and spiritual well-being fit into the picture. There are some people of color writing about race and ecology in a way that incorporates spiritual and mental health, however they are generally not connected with the field

of ecopsychology (Glave, 2010; Hall, 2007; hooks, 2011; Manos, 2009).

Toward cultural ecopsychology: A small but growing group of scholars and activists are calling for a new ecopsychology that connects race, culture, and ecopsychology (Anthony, 1995; Canty, 2000; Gray, 2004; Soule & Anthony, 1998). In the most thorough exploration of cultural ecopsychology to date, Canty (2000) argues that ecopsychology must take a step beyond looking at the relationship between the human psyche and the natural world, and employ a cultural interpretation of the natural landscape. She argues for an expanded understanding of culture, placing it at the center of a living human system and arguing that it regulates how humans interact with the living world in terms of ethics, practices, and philosophy. Culture structures itself according to the living world around it. For example, a group of people living in the desert will develop a different culture than those living near the ocean. Until recently, human cultures have always mirrored the living world around them, from livelihood to spiritual beliefs and practices. In this sense, cultural history is a way of understanding ourselves as part of an extended ecological kinship network that encompasses all species in our environment (Salmon, 2011). Canty (2000) argues that in order for a culture to be sustainable, it must be responsive to changes in its larger living system. For example, historically if one fish species declined in population, humans would adapt their diet in response.

People have different relationships with the land based on their race, class, and immigration backgrounds. These relationships are based on the land and ecosystem where they live, as well as their unique histories of migration, their roles as colonizers and colonized, wars, and so on. Ecopsychology and deep ecology tend to universalize humanity as if all people share a common connection to the earth. While this is may be true and useful in one sense, it makes invisible the painful legacies of stolen land, genocide, displacement, and slavery. Anthony

(1995) discusses the ways that ecopsychology is limited by its Eurocentric perspective. For example, he argues that the way ecopsychologists talk about alienation from nature is from the White experience of a subtle, long-term, psychological process. This overlooks the violence and coercion that led to the separation of some people from nature, particularly people of color. It also does not include the experience of those who've been driven away from a place that was once their home, including some European Americans.

Similar to ecofeminism's analysis connecting gender oppression to ecological oppression, Anthony (1995) points out that in the experience of African-Americans, the domination and exploitation of nature occurred simultaneously with the domination and exploitation of black people. It is therefore logical that some African Americans experience alienation from nature and a fear of wild or rural places (Soule & Anthony, 1998). Bullard (2004), who is regarded as one of the fathers of the environmental justice movement, reminds us that the United States is founded on principles of "free land" which was stolen from Native Americans and Mexicans and the "free labor" of African slaves. Both Anthony and Bullard argue that it is therefore impossible to separate histories of ecological exploitation from histories of exploitation of people color.

Within the field of ecopsychology, there is almost no discussion of how histories of social injustice, colonization, and displacement might affect an individual's or community's relationship with the land. Fullilove (2004) introduces the concept of *root shock*, which could be useful to the field of ecopsychology. She describes root shock as "a traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one's emotional ecosystem" (p. 11). She explains that while this response requires immediate emergency attention, she emphasizes that these experiences also stays with an individual for a lifetime and can affect generations to come. For example, indigenous North Americans who were dispossessed of their land most likely experienced

traumatic stress reactions at the time, and their wounds live on in the experience of their descendants today. Fullilove (2004) extends her analysis beyond the individual and community level, asserting that:

> We—that is to say, all people—live in an emotional ecosystem that attaches us to the environment, not just as our individual selves, but as beings, and a single universal meta-consciousness anchored in small niches we call neighborhoods or hamlets or villages. Because of the interconnectedness of the net, if your place is destroyed today, I will feel it hereafter. (p. 17)

Though they do not use the term 'root shock', Canty (2000) and hooks (1999, 2011) emphasize a similar phenomenon in their analyses of the history of displacement of African Americans. Specifically, they explore the psychological impact of first slavery and then later, the migration of African-Americans from the agrarian South to the industrialized North. Both argue that despite the traumatic experience of Africans being forced into slavery on a new continent, the spiritual and psychological impact was mitigated by the slaves' ability to remain connected with the earth and continue a working relationship with it. The natural landscape of the South was actually not drastically different from that of West Africa, perhaps easing the transition slightly. Hooks (2011) argues that because of their strong connection to the earth, Southern slaves knew that humans could not control the forces of nature or spirit, and this meant that they knew firsthand that white supremacy was not a form of absolute power. This connection to the natural world was severed when Black people migrated to cities, totally altering their work life, as well as communal practices, relationship to the body, and relationship to the earth (hooks, 1999). Without space to grow food and connect with nature to mediate the harshness of poverty and oppression, there was a breakdown in cultural cohesion, knowledge,

and practices (Canty, 2000; hooks, 1999; hooks, 2011). This led to an increase in depression and substance abuse, making it more possible for black people to internalize white supremacist ideals, and to see white supremacy as all-powerful. Similar to Fullilove's (2004) concept of root shock, hooks (1999) calls this "culture shock and soul loss" (p. 55).

While the literature does make some reference to the experience of indigenous North Americans and African Americans, little has been written about the psycho-spiritual impact of displacement on European immigrants, many of whom left agricultural "old world" for urban North America. An area for inquiry could be to explore how disconnection from the land and the natural world helps to maintain white supremacy and social injustices. Many more recent immigrants to the United States from Central and South America and across Asia may also experience "root shock" as they leave behind traditional ways of doing things based on their natural landscapes.

To what roots can white Americans turn to guide them forward into new life-sustaining cultural models? It is important that white people seeking to reconnect with Earth-based spiritual traditions avoid simply appropriating practices rooted in communities of color. Each person has their own unique relationship to spirit and it is up to each of us to make that connection (Glendinning, 1994; Nelson, 2011). No matter where people's ancestors come from, including Europe, all humans are all descendents of traditional cultures that practiced earth-based spiritual traditions. Native American writers, in particular, have emphasized that white people who are interested in Native American spirituality should first learn about the colonial history of North America as well as current issues facing Native Americans, such as treaty rights, land claims, poverty, and health problems (Gray, 2004; Nelson, 2011).

Ecopsychology encourages people to reconnect with the larger ecosystem that includes all living things. Cultural ecopsychology takes this a step further, placing our relationship to the earth in the context of our specific geographical place and cultural histories. A number of Black scholars have called for African-American communities to develop new cultural models drawing from their roots in African earth-based traditions (hooks, 2011; Canty, 2000; Riley, 1995).

> More than ever before in our nation's history, black folks must collectively renew our relationship to the earth, to our agrarian roots. For when we are forgetful and participate in the destruction and exploitation of the dark earth, we collude with the domination of the Earth's dark people, both here and globally. Reclaiming our history, our relationship to nature, to farming in America, and reclaiming the humanizing restorative power of living in harmony with nature so that the earth can be our witness is meaningful resistance. (hooks, 2011, p.187)

Canty (2000) echoes hooks (2011), arguing that if Black communities were able to successfully integrate into mainstream American society, it would only escalate the ecological crisis and reinforce a social system based on exploiting natural resources and human labor. Both hooks and Canty believe that African earth-based traditions are more relevant to Black Americans than ecopsychology, which is dominated by white people, and that this is where Black Americans should turn for wisdom and guidance as they move forward.

Riley's (1995) concept of Afrocentric ecowomanism expands on ecofeminism's gender-based power analysis, explicitly connecting race and racism to the ideology of domination that other ecofeminists discuss. She points out that Black people, and Black women in particular, have been portrayed as primitive and animalistic. In an effort to subvert this legacy's harmful impact, there is a temptation to try to sever the association of Black people with nature that has

dominated Western thought. However, Riley (1995) argues that instead what is needed is the transformation of everyone's relationship to nature by reconstructing gender, class, and race roles. Further, she exhorts other black feminists to centralize environmentalism in their work. She asserts that because people of color disproportionately bear the brunt of environmental degradation, this is not a matter of abstract thought, but in fact essential to the survival of her people (Riley, 1995).

Conclusion

Ecopsychology makes an important contribution to the fields of psychology and social work by highlighting the importance of the natural environment in influencing human psychological and spiritual well-being. There has been little discussion, however, of how racism and other forms of oppression intersect with ecology to affect the human psyche. The environmental justice movement and ecofeminism each contribute analyses that could be useful in understanding these intersections. The small amount of literature discussing cultural ecopsychology represents an exciting start to bringing these often divergent issues together.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Research Method and Design

This study explored the following central question: How are race and racism relevant to the field of ecopsychology in theory and in practice? Additional areas for inquiry included the following sub–questions: 1) How could ecopsychology incorporate an explicit critical race analysis; 2) What might ecopsychology grounded in and an antiracism framework look like in practice with individuals, groups and communities; and 3) How could ecopsychology and the environmental justice movement better support and contribute to one another? The study sought to yield ideas and practices with implications for both clinical practice and environmental justice work.

While ecopsychology has brought critical attention to the impact of the natural environment on the human psyche and spirit, very little has been written about how race and racism intersect with ecology and psychology. This gap in the literature justified the use of an exploratory research method and an inductive qualitative design, including 12 semi-structured interviews with ecopsychologists, environmental justice activists, and others working at the intersection of ecology, psychology and race.

The term ecopsychology is difficult to define because it refers to a set of concepts emerging from a variety of sources, including ecology, psychology, indigenous spiritualities, and living systems theory. For the purposes of this study, the researcher defines ecopsychology as a theory and set of practices that combines the systems view of ecology and the systems view of psychology to understand the human psyche in the larger context of earth as a living system (Conn, 2006). As such, ecopsychology provides a context in which to understand and address

the roots of current ecological crisis, as well as its impact on human psychological and spiritual well-being.

The term environmental justice emerged out of movements in the 1980s that challenged mainstream environmentalists to connect ecological destruction with issues of social and economic injustice. For the purposes of this study, environmental justice is defined as the concept that people have the right to a healthy environment, regardless of race, class or other marginalized status. The terms environmental justice and ecological justice will be used interchangeably.

As part of this study's inquiry into race and ecopsychology, it will explore the use of indigenous knowledge in the field of ecopsychology. For the purposes of this study, the term "indigenous" is used to describe a culture or group of people that continues to practice an intact tradition connected to a particular place. This includes but is not limited to First Nations or Native American people of North America.

Sample

Study participants included ecopsychologists, people involved with the environmental justice movement, and others working at the intersection of ecology, psychology and racial justice. These participants included academics, social workers, psychologists, environmental justice activists, as well as spiritual and religious leaders. I sought this sample because they are at the forefront of exploring intersections of race and ecopsychology in theory and/or practice.

Inclusion criteria for the study required that participants be 18 years or older, and self identify as one or more of the following: 1) an eco-psychologist, 2) an environmental justice activist, or 3) someone who works at the intersection of ecology, psychology and race. The study focused on ecopsychology and race in the United States of America, so study participants were

required to be able to address the issues particular to this geographic area. It did not focus on any specific region of the Unites States. I included screening questions in my recruitment materials. As I contacted potential participants, I went over the screening questions via e-mail or to determine whether they qualified to participate in the study.

The study utilized nonprobability sampling. I first used purposive sampling to find potential participants by sending a recruitment email to individuals that I identified by researching relevant organizations and literature, as well as through personal networks. The recruitment letter (see Appendix A) included pertinent information, such as a statement of purpose, my role as researcher, and the nature of the study. Organizations I contacted included: Movement Generation, Friends of the Earth International, Cultural Conservancy, Earth Island Institute, Urban Habitat, Navdanya, c-Integral, and the Holos Institute. I also identified participants through personal and professional networks, including people involved in Joanna Macy's Work that Reconnects, and people involved with permaculture in the Northeast United States.

In addition to purposive sampling, I used snowball sampling by asking study participants to recommend additional participants. This allowed me to reach further into networks of people working at the intersections of ecopsychology and environmental justice and in particular to reach more people of color. I also made an effort to reach a diverse sample by specifically researching organizations that are based in communities of color, and reaching out to them to recruit participants.

Because I used a nonprobability sampling method, the study sample was not representative of the population at large. There is inherent bias in the sampling method because many contacts emerged from personal networks, and because I hand-picked participants based

on my own sense that they would provide a meaningful perspective. This study's lack of generalizability is an inherent weakness. The results do not provide a picture of how any one group views racism and ecopsychology. Rather, the results attempt to draw a picture of the intersections of race, ecology and psychology from diverse perspectives.

The recruitment and sampling method was feasible because a number of potential participants were already in my personal and professional networks. It was also helpful that many ecopsychologists and environmental justice workers were eager to discuss this topic because it is cutting edge and extremely relevant to forwarding their work.

Data Collection Methods

Narrative data was collected through individual telephone and in-person interviews with twelve interviewees who met the selection criteria. Procedures to protect the rights and privacy of participants were presented to the Human Subject Review Board at Smith College School for Social Work before data collection began. Approval of the project (Appendix B) assured that the study was in concordance with the NASW Code of Ethics and the Federal regulations for the Protection of Human Research Subjects. An interview guide (Appendix C) as well as a consent form (Appendix D) detailing the risks and benefits of the study was sent to the participants prior to the interview. I requested that participants mail a signed consent form to me either by e-mail or snail mail prior to the scheduled interview. This proved to be difficult most likely due to busy schedules. Only four participants initially returned their consent form to me. After additional requests, I received consent forms from all but four participants. Two of the participants who did not mail back their consent forms did send an e-mail indicating that they had read the form and agreed to the terms. Two consent forms remain outstanding. However, I reviewed the consent form with each participant at the start of each interview and received verbal agreement from

everyone. In addition, prior to the interview participants were encouraged to inquire about the researcher, the study, and possible future uses of the data and were asked if they could be contacted again should further questions emerge.

The semi-structured interview guide provided an outline to ensure that the interview touched on the important themes of the study. However, questions were open-ended in order to elicit responses that described, in depth, the interviewees' perspectives and experiences thinking about, and working at, the intersections of race, ecology and psychology. The interview questions explored the following three themes: 1) Whether and how issues of race and racism are relevant to the field of ecopsychology; 2) Whether and how ecopsychology and the environmental justice movement have contributed or could contribute to one another; and 3) How ecopsychology has and/or could explicitly address issues of race and racism in practice. Because participants' experience varied so widely, I tailored each interview to emphasize the areas about which the interviewee was knowledgeable.

I collected background information for each participant around the nature of their involvement in ecopsychology and/or environmental justice, as well as involvement in anti-racism work. Demographic data collected included gender, race, age, and educational background. I asked the demographic questions at the end of each interview, as recommended by Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell (1996), in order to prioritize building rapport and momentum toward the beginning of the interview.

Interviews took place over the phone. With the subjects' permission, I recorded the interview on my laptop computer. After each interview, I transcribed the entire recorded interview.

I offered participants the option of keeping their information confidential, though not

anonymous. Given that some participants were known for their work in this area, the majority (n=10) preferred to be identified. Participants indicated on their informed consent form as to whether they preferred to be credited for their thoughts and ideas, or whether they wished to remain anonymous. To ensure confidentiality for those who desired it, each participant was assigned a code number to serve as an identification marker upon completion of the interview. In addition, any other identifiable information that could compromise confidentiality was altered. Signed informed consent forms were kept separate from the collected data in a safe, locked place. Data in professional publications will be presented in the aggregate without reference to identifying information in cases where participants requested confidentiality.

There was minimal risk anticipated from participating in the study. Participants may have become minimally uncomfortable recalling and reflecting on their work and discussing issues of racism and other oppressions. For those participants who requested confidentiality, all of their identifying information was held in confidence. I provided interviewees with a national mental health referral list in case they wished to seek out support after the interview (See Appendix E). Participants received no financial benefit for their participation in this study. However, they may have benefited from knowing that they have contributed to a better understanding of how a critical race framework can contribute to the field of ecopsychology.

Biases and omissions are inevitable. Though I was careful to keep my views separate from my interpretation of the data, I certainly brought my own strong beliefs about the intersections of race, ecology, and psychology. I strove to minimize biases by taking care to recruit a diverse sample of interviewees and by seeking ongoing feedback from key stakeholders throughout the process in order to bring attention to anything I missed in my research process or analysis.

Data Analysis

Once data gathering and transcribing was complete, I began the coding process. I used open coding, which involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and identifying concepts or "meaning units" (Padgett, 1998, p. 76). I documented this process, writing memos to note ideas and potential themes, as well as patterns that arose. These meaning units became categories. Using constant comparative analysis (Padgett, 1998, p. 77), I took the categories that emerged from initial coding, and then went back over the data to both see how it fit in these categories and what outliers existed. Through this iterative process, I was able to identify new codes that I did not notice upon my first reading. I completed the coding process when I began to see repetition and fewer outliers or new themes, suggesting that I had reached a "saturation" point (Padgett, 1998, p.79). Once I had created a set of codes from the raw data, I looked at the relationships between the codes, and began to formulate themes linking them to one another. This process allowed me to think more broadly and abstractly about the data, and also to consider how the data compared with the existing literature base. Demographic data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Introduction

This study sought to explore how race and racism are relevant to ecopsychology in theory and in practice. This chapter presents data collected from 12 interviews conducted with ecopsychologists, environmental justice activists and spiritual leaders. While ecopsychology has brought critical attention to the relationship between the natural environment and the human psyche and spirit, very little has been written about how race and racism shape our experience of the natural world. Meanwhile, the environmental justice movement has increasingly highlighted the differential health and economic impacts of environmental degradation on communities of color and poor communities. However, ecopsychology and environmental justice frameworks have yet to come together to create an ecological, psycho-spiritual theory and practice grounded in principles of antiracism and social justice.

Interview questions were organized around the following themes: (a) demographic information around race, gender, age and educational background, as well as participant background in ecopsychology and antiracism work, (b) race and ecopsychology theory, including points of intersection, gaps in the literature and use of indigenous knowledge, and (c) race and ecopsychology in practice, including existing or potential models as well as how ecopsychology could support movements for racial justice.

Participant Background

Research participants were given the option of participating confidentially or being cited for their thoughts. Of the 12 participants, 10 indicated on the informed consent form, via e-mail or

over the phone that they would like to be cited by name. Two participants preferred that their identity remain confidential.

Participant descriptions:

- Andrew Fisher, PhD is a practicing ecotherapist and author of the book, *Radical ecopsychology: Psychology in the service of life* (2002). White male, age 48.
- Bill Gardiner, DMin worked as a parish minister in churches for 25 years, then spent 15 years working with Unitarian Universalist congregations on how to develop effective social justice programs. White male, age 69.
- Brandon Leroy Lott, MA has worked extensively with urban youth of color and has a Master's degree in "Ecopsychology and Psychosocial Transformation". African-American male, age 40.
- Mateo Nube is co-director of the Movement Generation Justice & Ecology Project, which provides analysis about the global ecological crisis and facilitates strategic planning among organizers working for economic and racial justice. White Latino male, age 40.
- Raúl Quiñones Rosado, PhD is a social psychologist who has worked extensively in social services and leading anti-oppression trainings. He currently does leadership development with people who are "soulful activists". Latino male, age 58.
- Adelaja Simon is an urban farmer, environmental justice activist, and cofounder of Canticle Farm in Oakland, CA. African-American male, age 25.
- Phoenix Smith, MSW is program director of a large HIV services organization, a priest in the Lucumi Ifa Orisha tradition, and an ecotherapist. African-American female, age 44.
- Anne Symens-Bucher is a long-time social and environmental justice activist, assistant to Joanna Macy and cofounder of Canticle Farm. White female, age 54.

- Sarah Vekasi is an environmental justice organizer-turned ecochaplain currently working in Appalachia to support activists working to stop mountaintop removal. White female, age 33.
- America Worden, MFTi, MS is an ecologist and ecotherapist in the San Francisco Bay Area. White female, age 31.
- Participant A, MA, PhD is a professor of environmental studies and a leading scholar on issues of eco psychology and race. African-American female, age 44.
- Participant B, PhD is one of the foremothers of ecopsychology and a well-known scholar in the field. She currently works in clinical practice doing ecotherapy. White female, age 69.

Demographics. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 69. The median age was 44 and the mean was 46. The study included six European North American participants, four African-American participants, one Puerto Rican Latino participant, and one participant who identified as a white Latino. All participants based the majority of their work in the United States. Half of the participants identified as male and half as female.

All participants held at least a Bachelor's degree. The highest degree attained by four participants was a Master's, and five had attained a PhD. Two participants had more than one graduate degree. Participants with graduate degrees had studied social work (n=1), transformative learning and change (n=1), divinity (n=2), environmental studies (n=2), or psychology (n=5). One participant had a graduate certificate in ecopsychology.

Study participants were involved in a range of professional and activism work activities related to race and ecopsychology. While difficult to categorize, their work included: social or environmental justice activism (n=8), spiritual or religious work (n=3), academic writing and/or

teaching (n=3), and clinical psychology (n=3). Many participants were engaged in more than one type of work. Of the 12 participants, six considered themselves well-versed in the field of ecopsychology. The others were doing work relevant to ecopsychology and were somewhat familiar with the field, though they did not use that term to describe their work.

When asked about their experience with ecology and psychology, nine participants described having had a shift in awareness at some point in which they realized the psychological nature of ecological crisis. For example, America Worden explained, "I had been in restoration ecology because I thought that was the front lines, but then I switched my definition and started really thinking that the biggest problem we have in terms of the destruction of the natural world is psychological." Formerly an engineer, Andy Fisher also described how he came to ecopsychology. He asked himself "if the environmental crisis is not an engineering problem, then what is it? I just thought well, it's kind of like a madness. There is something psychological going on here."

A number of study participants (n=5) described a childhood experience with nature as a source of their interest in ecopsychology. Adelaja Simon recalled his mother's story:

> I remember in particular, her telling me stories from when she moved to this country because she left that wild beautiful habitat in search of the American dream like most people. And she told me that, you know she grew up in Haiti, she didn't understand English, she didn't have much money, she gets here, she gets to New York City, and she's hungry and she's desperate and she doesn't really have a place to stay or anything to eat, and she's looking around at all the trees, looking for fruit because that's what she's used to. And not finding any. So I remember her telling me that and really striking a chord – –

> why isn't there any food on a street? Why isn't there a web of support that's not hindered by the monetary system?

Simon explained that this memory and others from his childhood serve as an inspiration and a resource for his current work.

When asked about their background and experience regarding issues of race and racism, many (n=8) reported that they have done antiracism activist work, half (n=6) said that their professional work is race related, and two participants described personal experiences with having been the target of racism.

Race and Racism in the Literature

Participants were asked to comment on the absence of issues of race and racism in ecopsychology literature. Participant A commented that much of the ecopsychology literature focuses on our relationship with nature "often to the exclusion of other people, which is kind of ironic, because people are nature". While Phoenix Smith expressed gratitude for the work of white ecopsychologists, she also expressed frustration that the main texts in ecopsychology have included very few people color:

> It was just really crazy to me that you can have an ecopsychology book in the nineties and an ecotherapy book recently, and there are no people of color in the books. And you have white people [in the books] talking about Native American traditions. I'm like, really? You couldn't find any [people of color]? So I really think it's important to let people speak for themselves and to hear the wisdom that they hold from their communities.

Participant B, a leader in the field, acknowledged that she had not given a lot of thought to the intersections of race and ecopsychology:

> I'm certainly aware of racial issues in the history of this culture, but I haven't thought of them that much in terms of the ecopsychology work. You know, I haven't connected them. And I'm not sure why we haven't connected them. But, your questions have brought that up, that lack of connection. And I haven't spent enough time exploring it within my heart and mind to know what that's about.

Four participants attributed the lack of attention to race to the fact that the majority of ecopsychologists are white. Brandon Leroy Lott explained, "They're not forced to think about race on an everyday basis, because that's not part of their experience… It's just the unconscious, ongoing exhibition of racism". Phoenix Smith elaborated on this point:

> I think there is just the issue of privilege and the blind spots that come with privilege. Some white ecopsychologists, they just don't know or they just refuse to really look at [racism]. I think that many ecopsychologists that I've met, they really have a Western therapist framework. So many of them have never experienced or connected with social justice work or don't work in their therapy with people of color.

Similarly, Participant A commented that the environmental movement is a very white movement, as is the alternative psychology movement. It makes sense then, she explained, that when these two movements come together to form ecopsychology, it is also predominantly white.

Phoenix Smith emphasized that there are many people of color doing work that could be considered ecopsychology, but they do not necessarily use that term to describe it. As a result, white ecopsychologists often fail to see or recognize this work. By the same token, people doing environmental justice work are often unaware of ecopsychology or misunderstand its relevance. For example, Smith described a conversation she had with a Black environmental justice activist who did not believe ecopsychology was relevant to her work because ecopsychology "just

focuses on the birds and animals". Smith described a general lack of communication between communities:

> I think that there is a lack of awareness on both sides. I think there are people in the community, people of color who are doing social justice work, a lot of them now who are looking at it through the lens of nature, but they don't call it ecopsychology. Maybe they work with youth or do urban gardening… but they don't talk to people who are studying ecopsychology.

Smith said that there need to be more spaces created to bring ecopsychologists and environmental justice activists together to:

> …unpack this in a way that is not about blaming or fighting each other but is really saying, we only have one earth. So if everything is connected, then how can we connect better so that we can figure out a common language and a shared understanding to work together against the huge machine and corporations that are trying to destroy it for everyone.

Ecopsychology and Indigenous Knowledge

Participants were asked how they see ecopsychology currently relating to indigenous knowledge and how they think ecopsychologists can connect with indigenous knowledge in a way that is respectful of and accountable to the communities whose knowledge they are drawing from. Those who were not specifically engaged in ecopsychology or as familiar with the field were invited to comment more generally on the topic. It is notable that none of the 12 interview subjects identified as Native American.

Of the six participants who are active in the field of ecopsychology, five remarked that while not true for everyone, there is a tendency in the field for white ecopsychologists to rely on

Native American traditions to inform their work. They explained that these traditions are sometimes taken out of context. America Worden cited the widespread use of the medicine wheel by white ecotherapists as an example of taking one cultural tool out of its original context. She acknowledges that similar tools have been used across many cultures, however she has noticed that ecotherapists often present it as a Native American tool, which "carries a particular weight with people. Like oh, my therapist is using Native American tools." Worden also critiqued the widespread use of the term shaman by ecopsychologists and other practitioners. While the term is somewhat culturally universal, Worden said that "it is a position that requires a lot of learning and work and calling,… And then people go and take a weekend shamanic drumming workshop and they start practicing on clients." She believes that this is not only disrespectful to the cultures and communities that these practices come from, but it could also be dangerous for people to do shamanic work without enough training and information.

Worden attributes some of the issues that she sees arising in ecopsychology's relationship with indigenous knowledge and traditions as originating in different cultural norms regarding sharing and using information:

> We in the West, in the European West, we have this concept that information is free. Like you just deserve to get it. Like if you want it, you can get it. We've got laws in place [to protect it]. And in indigenous communities, it's storied, you earn it through experiences. And the way that we [white ecopsychologists] are treating that information as much more sort of "freedom of information" like, well, I got it in a class and now it's mine. Not like I earned it through relationship and experience.

She went on to say that while she believes this is a major issue for ecopsychology, she acknowledges that some white ecopsychologists have taken the time to apprentice themselves, build trusting relationships, and are careful to be respectful and accountable in their work.

Some participants (n=4) noted that at the same time that ecopsychologists borrow some cultural elements, they do not have in depth knowledge of the indigenous cultures they are borrowing from and they often neglect to sufficiently recognize indigenous knowledge. Brandon Leroy Lott described attending a talk by a prominent white deep ecologist who is very influential in the field of ecopsychology. The speaker discussed the history of science and traced it back to Greek scholars, never mentioning indigenous scientific knowledge that predates Greek science. Lott summarized the attitude he observes in the field, “We'll borrow the certain pieces that we like and enjoy and we will incorporate those things into our practice, but we are going to abandon a whole bunch of other stuff”.

Some participants (n=3) also noted a tendency for some ecopsychologists to suggest or insinuate that they have created a new, pioneering field without acknowledging its ancient roots. Mateo Nube stressed the importance of contextualizing the field as being both old and new, drawing on ancient concepts that are now being reworked for "a specific audience in a specific place because we have lost that relationship [with nature] and we are trying to rebuild it". Nube went on to describe how white ecopsychologists might be able to draw on this wisdom in an accountable way:

> There's nothing wrong with white academics or white folks trying to learn from another culture and trying to become a more whole person as a result. I think we do that all the time. It's part of the human experience-- inquiry and taking new information and blending it with our old information…. The question becomes are we doing it in a

> principled way? And being principled means being accountable and that takes many forms…at a minimum it means not invisiblizing folks who are already putting forth that knowledge right now. So… if I am a white ecopsychologist, and I preface my work by saying I am actually writing this in a long-standing practice and I am just reinterpreting it in this minor way, but I don't pretend to make it something new, then I think that is a start.

Respondents offered several more ideas about what accountability could look like as well as how to avoid cultural appropriation in the field of ecopsychology. Andy Fisher explained that he has learned to use a "bare-bones" approach that avoids appropriating from other cultures:

> You take elements that are universal or transhistorical, like sitting in a circle. You can't go anywhere on the planet where people don't sit in a circle. Another universal example is just knowing that the larger natural world has things to teach us. And, people from the beginning of time have spent solo time in the wilderness humbly and seeking illumination and spiritual renewal. So you can take some of these basic elements…and then creatively flesh it out from there, within your own experience and context. For us, we just do it very humbly, knowing that we are kind of in kindergarten with all of this, knowing that it is a long-term process.

Three participants emphasized the importance of ecopsychologists developing their own connection with nature and two suggested that white ecopsychologists look to European indigenous traditions to inform their work. America Worden observed that ecopsychologists sometimes rely on other people's cultures to such an extent that it "undermines our own experience. It's like we don't have the tools, so we go get them from someone else". Participant

A emphasized the importance of starting small and taking the time to practice. Similarly, Sarah Vekasi explained,

> You don't have to kind of steal [a cultural tradition] or even steal a fake one. I don't think people's ideas of Native American [traditions] are even actually coming from a specific place…. But every person alive here, we got here. That means somewhere in our genetic memory are people very connected to the land, because until very recently we had to do a lot of work to stay alive. And that meant knowing the natural cycles and it meant knowing when to plant your seeds, and it meant a whole lot of things that we can tap into again by asking our ancestors, or paying attention, praying… or meditating or whatever. Knowing ourselves, but in a way big way.

In summary, participants noted that on the one hand there is a lack of specific knowledge and recognition of indigenous traditions by ecopsychologists. On the other hand, participants observed that some ecopsychologists are taking indigenous cultural elements out of context, at times to enhance their credibility with clients. They emphasized the importance of placing ecopsychology in its historical context as a modern interpretation of old concepts, and encouraged ecopsychologists to draw on and develop their own connections with nature rather than relying on cultures other than their own.

Making Connections: Race and Ecopsychology

All 12 participants believed that race and racism are indeed relevant to ecopsychology. They commented on numerous points of intersection, which are described below.

Environmental justice. When asked to explain how race and ecopsychology are related, the most common initial response (n=11) was to point out that people of color are currently bearing the brunt of environmental degradation. Respondents gave examples of ways

communities of color are disproportionately impacted, such as proximity to toxic waste sites, uranium mining on Native American land, fracking, tar sands, nuclear weapons testing, poor air quality, and living in "food deserts". A

In addition to noting the ways that this impacts the physical health of communities of color, some participants (n=5) commented on the psychological and spiritual toll of environmental degradation. Raúl Quiñones Rosado spoke about what he observed in Vieques, Puerto Rico where the U.S. Navy had a bombing practice range and testing site for many years until it was shut down by protesters in 2003. He explained how environmental injustice becomes a part of a cycle of oppression:

> It is not only what it does to your body, but what it does to you in terms of internalized oppression, like "I'm not doing something right or I have to do something better because I'm doing it wrong…". It's hard to separate the psychological or even the spiritual, or measure those, but they clearly manifest when you look at the other more objective indicators.

Several participants (n=3) emphasized that race is relevant to ecopsychology because "the oppression of the earth and the oppression of people go hand-in-hand" (Participant A). They pointed out that historically, oppression and colonization are often at least partially driven by pursuit of natural resources. Andy Fisher explained:

> The whole planet is basically dominated by the system of capital, it dominates nature… and one form it takes is racism and colonialism. People of color, people who have been colonized, it generally happens because somebody is trying to come in and take your water or take your coal or take your uranium or take your trees or something. So it's always got that aspect to it.

(Re)defining ecopsychology. Several participants (n=4) noted that how you define ecopsychology affects how relevant it is to issues of race and racism. They believed that ecopsychology should be defined broadly so that it is not just about the human psyche and its relationship to nature, but should instead integrate psyche, nature and society. They argued that ecopsychology is about life, connection, and relationships in the broadest sense. Andy Fisher stated:

> It's about nourishing life, and protesting what is violating life, reconnecting with life. It's so simple, but once you start moving in that direction, then an issue like race is like okay, how is race an issue of the domination of nature? How is racism a violation of life? And it just becomes very visible and obvious how it needs to be a part of ecopsychology.

Participant A explained that she is excited about ecopsychology because its broad relevance provides insight into many psychological questions:

> It's really about relationships and reconnecting to our loved ones. When you actually get into the philosophical questions about why we're so disconnected, and why are so many people suffering from mental illness, and then if you're asking those deep questions, I think ecopsychology has so much to offer in terms of explanations.

Brandon Leroy Lott discussed his experience working with urban youth of color in San Francisco and Albuquerque. Though his work was not specifically about connecting with nature, he argued that ecopsychology is definitely relevant to them because human beings are part of nature and his work was around promoting community and connectedness. He explained, "healing happens when you connect with other human beings and reconnect with the land, or the larger community…when you're not feeling isolated".

Displacement. Many participants (n=8) also brought up the issue of displacement, whether voluntary or forced, as a major point of intersection between race and ecopsychology. Mateo Nube pointed out that a starting point is to remember that "in a US context, the craziest thing is that all of us that are not originally from North America are living on somebody else's land. And many of those folks are still here and alive, and we've completely invisiblized [them]". America Worden elaborated on this, remarking that ecopsychology should be more interested in the psychological impact of living on stolen land as well as the impact of so many people in the US having been displaced from their ancestral land at some point:

> It's just devastating how many people here are not from here and don't recognize the distraction that it causes in their internal space. I think you could go through kind of race by race and look at in general, how that happens to each group, or subset of the group…. Like what happens to each of our minds as they cross over here? And what sort of traumas were associated with that?

Nube explained that as industrialization and capitalist growth has accelerated, "many of us have either had to live in a place that has been toxified… or we've actually had to leave that place because (a) it was either destroyed or (b) it was seized from us". He said that he believes there is a severe psychic rupture when people are forced to leave their land due to slavery, environmental degradation, climate change or economic forces. This process often disconnects people and communities from their ancestral "ecological literacy".

A number of participants (n=4) pointed out that displacement has not just affected people of color. Whether or not they left their homelands by choice, white people living in the US are also displaced people. Nube remarked that further exploration should examine:

> How whiteness has been defined in the US and how that has been designed in a way that totally cut folks who identify as white off from their historical relationship to place as well. In many cases, it was pre-Christian culture that was grounded in place... I think that that imposes a huge level of psychic wounds, too, and then to add on to that layer now you have to identify as part of the master class in this country… and be the set of individuals, the culture rather, that took everybody else's land away.

Adelaja Simon believes that as a result of being disconnected from their ancestry and traditions, many people feel despair and loneliness. He argued that ecopsychology has the potential to help heal some of the wounds of displacement by uncovering our shared relationship with the earth:

> No one really has a history or ancestry behind the ground that they're standing on. Like I have Haitian ancestry, and I can say that, but I don't know where they came from before that. But we can all trace ourselves back to the earth. We can all step back into that space of connection with the earth and with the ecological systems that support us. I feel like that's the rewriting of history that we lost along the way.

Relevance to Communities of Color. Several participants (n=4) remarked that there is a "pervasive image of environmentalism [and] ecology as white, middle/upper-class and urban" (Vekasi, S.). They also noted that there is a stereotype that connecting with the earth is a privilege that only wealthy white people can afford. America Worden said that this is very damaging, because it hides the fact that these issues are all interconnected, and that ecological, economic and racial exploitation and injustice go hand-in-hand.

Though they critiqued the stereotype that environmentalism is a white issue, six participants did point out that people of color are often dealing with addressing day to day survival needs which may take precedence over environmental issues. Bill Gardiner explained:

> You know, people are really overwhelmed right now, with the recession, which is a recession in the white community, but it's a depression in the people of color community. And all of the home foreclosures, which has been devastating in the people of color communities as a result of the collapse of the whole banking thing…. And then the loss of jobs, so people's daily lives are impacted in devastating ways, and that's understandably where people's energies and thinking are going. And climate change feels kind of remote and down the road when you've got these immediate things that you're struggling with.

In addition to these issues, Phoenix Smith remarked that many people of color are already dealing with so much trauma that it can be difficult for some people to take ecopsychology seriously: "It's like, you really want me to be able to connect my pain to the earth when my sons are being murdered by the police? There is so much unresolved grief that communities hold".

A few participants (n=3), all of whom identified as African-American, spoke about how some communities of color in the US experience alienation from nature. Adelaja Simon that many urban people of color rarely leave the city:

> They never get to stand in the middle of a redwood forest and feel completely like they're insignificant. It's almost like the natural world, the wild world is farther than it really is.
>
> So I feel like black people have less opportunities to experience it, to fall in love again.

Smith commented that this alienation is partly because people of color have legitimate reasons to feel unsafe in rural areas, and perhaps also a result of family legacies in which children of color

have not grown up spending time in nature. At the same time, Smith pointed out a number of counter examples. She mentioned a website called "Outdoor Afro" which has been very successful in nurturing and encouraging African-Americans' connection with nature.

In addition to discussing a pattern of disconnection from nature in communities of color, four participants, all African-American, emphasized that at the same time, there is a long history of people of color being connected to the land. Brandon Leroy Lott gave an example from his family history:

> You know, my dad was born here in Rivana in 1945, and their community was in the woods. They moved up here and they were given what were called allotments, which was basically land in the woods. That's always wear Black folks lived. But most [Black] people went to the city. So, it's really only a generation or so where that disconnection was drawn…. For me, coming from the country and when I got into the city, the city was toxic. It was like, oh my God! How do people live like this? And for other people to want to go out into the woods, they are like, why would I want to do that? (Laughing) Especially if you're black, and you see that a lot of white people do that… I'm not going camping or going hiking, that's what white people do! So there's just this whole psychological disconnect when it comes to, for black people, when it comes to going out in the woods, and connecting to nature.

Lott's example illustrates the dialectic that these participants were grappling with: many people of color in the US are alienated from nature, and yet at the same time many are deeply connected presently and/or have rich ancestral histories of connection to nature. Smith talked about her own roots:

> There's also the connection, for me, a long history of people of color who have always been environmentalists even though they may not use that word. From my own family, and the gardening that my grandparents and great grandparents did just to have food…. And obviously my ancestors that were enslaved and worked the land here in the United States for hundreds and hundreds of years. So that's how deep that I go back with it. For me, the connection is that I was born into it.

Participant B pointed out that ecopsychology related projects such as urban gardening often elicit these kinds of stories. Particularly as elders engage, they may share stories about a grandparent who was a farmer or some other ancestral connection to the land.

Whiteness: Some participants (n=5) discussed how whiteness and ecopsychology intersect. Three participants, all white, emphasized that a white way of thinking is at the root of the ecological crisis. Bill Gardiner also noted that for the most part, white people run the institutions that are responsible for climate change. Several participants (n=3) pointed out that while people of color bear the brunt of both racism and ecological devastation, racism also hurts white people and they have an important role to play in addressing it. Brandon Leroy Lott explained, "We are all wounded. Whether the wound on my end is from the historical abuses of racism or on the other hand of a white person who has been abused in a different way through the lens of superiority". Similarly, Mateo Nube insisted that we are all in need of healing, and white people need to heal from the wounds of racism as an essential step in the deconstruction of white supremacy.

America Worden said she has found that white culture is so individualistic that it can be difficult for people to grasp that they are part of a larger system that includes not only their families, but the entire planet. She explained that, "this idea that you are completely on your own

is such a white idea". However, she believes ecopsychology's emphasis on connection and interdependence could help address this individualism and help to heal what she described as an "epidemic of loneliness" among white people. On the flip side, Raúl Quiñones Rosado warned that at times when white people

> …make that leap from the self into that oneness, [they] do not want to see that race is very real. Race is a social construct, it was an invention, and yet it has very real impact. Not only historically, but now, today and tomorrow and the day after. Until we do something to transcend it, really, truly, collectively. I think that is a function of, in white people, internalized racial superiority, and it's supported by dominant white culture.

Quiñones emphasized that it is important that ecopsychologists are able to balance the truth of interconnectedness with the truth of racism.

Race and Ecopsychology Practice

Interviewees were asked whether they could think of examples where race and racism are currently being addressed in ecopsychology practice as well as to think of ways they could be integrated in the future. They were also asked how these practices might apply differently to communities of color versus white communities. In general, respondents had a difficult time with this question because, as they explained, people are still sorting out what ecopsychology looks like in practice in the first place. As such, participants were encouraged to do their best to answer the question, keeping a broad definition of ecopsychology in mind. Respondents who were less familiar with the field of ecopsychology per se were simply invited to think about practices that would integrate race and social justice with psychology and ecology.

Four participants said that they practice ecotherapy of some kind. Of these, two work primarily in an individual psychotherapy context. They said that very few clients come to them

specifically seeking ecotherapy. As a result, they work in ecopsychology themes by asking questions about issues such as "where you live, where did you live [in the past], what is going on in the place around you, and also what world events are you connected with" (America Worden). Similarly, Participant B said that while she encourages clients to connect more with nature, her main ecopsychological focus is "how to encourage and support their getting more involved in community, whether it is in their work, their neighborhood, [or] their spiritual life".

Two respondents asserted that they did not believe that individual psychotherapy should be the main place where ecopsychology gets put into practice. Andy Fisher argued:

> Western psychology is very much based on an individualistic model of psychology and we live in a world that is completely traumatized by war and ecological breakdown and colonialism. I think [ecopsychology] has to get out of the business of one-on-one private practice psychotherapy. It has to be much more of a cultural and social project. For me, this is the radical nature of ecopsychology. If it just reproduces the forms of psychological practice, which is largely psychotherapy, it's not going to be able to answer questions you're asking me [about race and racism]. It has to be much more of a collective decolonization process.

Fisher went on to describe a bit about his vision for ecopsychology in practice. He commented, "I am really interested in regenerating the kind of culture that could talk more broadly, outside the realms of therapy office, about the whole shape we are in as a society and culture". Fisher envisions ecopyschology supporting a cultural shift in which people would tend to the whole human life cycle, supporting people's transitions from childhood to adolescence and adolescence to adulthood. In particular, he imagines elders tending these processes. "Elders are people who need to think about shape the society is in and how things need to change, as well as listen to the

youth in their rebellion and what they are saying about our society", Fisher explained. He said that the kind of collective level process that he envisions will not be possible if "we are just lining people up one at a time at the therapist's office."

Worden also questioned whether ecopsychology really needs to take place in a psychological context at all, explaining "we tend to have [ecopsychology] locked up in psychology in this… academic room or this office… But I feel like a lot of the medicine of ecopsychology is reconnecting people, which does not need to be done in a psychological context". Worden works at an ecopsychology institute, which she says has difficulty attracting clients seeking individual ecotherapy. However, she said there is much more interest in ecopsychology–related groups. She believes this is because people generally think of therapy as a place to talk about issues in their personal lives, and they have difficulty consciously connecting their personal issues to larger systemic issues.

Ecopsychological models. Overall, participants saw individual ecotherapy as neither the ideal model for implementing ecopsychology, nor an effective place to address the intersections between ecopsychology and race and racism. However, they offered a number of examples of ecopsychology—broadly defined—in practice that are happening outside of the walls of the therapy office that work at those intersections. Participant A remarked that "any practices that get people reconnecting to the earth falls into ecopsychology, but it doesn't have to be called ecopsychology. Whether it's urban agriculture, permaculture, green building, green jobs, green health… those are really exciting and there's no loss of examples". Given a broad definition of ecopsychology, participants gave many examples of practical interventions that promote healing through ecology, including urban agriculture, Movement Generation, ecochaplaincy, green jobs, grief and despair work, ancestral healing and more.

***Urban agriculture*.** Half of respondents (n=6) mentioned urban agriculture as an example of an ecotherapy or ecopsychological practice that is relevant to communities of color and can address issues of race and racism. They commented that while some may not view farming or gardening as a psychological act, "it makes the place more beautiful and healthy, it makes people more beautiful and healthy, internally, externally. It is definitely an eco-psychological move" (America Worden).

Two respondents are currently involved with an urban community gardening project and intentional community called Canticle Farm in East Oakland, California. The project is in the beginning stages. Anne Symens-Bucher explained that their goal is:

> To know our neighbors, be of service to our neighbors, grow food with our neighbors… take down our fences and invite people in, and model that our security lies in our connection and our relationships with each other and not in our fences and our bars and our security systems…. We are grounded in sustainability, service, nonviolence and restorative practices.

Adelaja Simon is also involved with Canticle Farm. He explains the importance of creating wild spaces in the city:

> We are in a city where nothing grows... Where everything is covered up. Where we have this idea that we can tame it all. And we lose ourselves in that sense. If there's a space of wildness, it brings this connection back.

Simon described a recent visit to the farm by a nearby youth program. The youth are doing community organizing with their peers around military recruitment in schools. He described meditating with the youth and then taking them out into the garden to harvest and making salads together:

> They are 15 or 16-year-old youth, and it was the first time that they had done that. And they were saying, I need to take this home to my family because I feel so close to you guys from that experience, and I feel so nourished.

Simon went on to discuss with youth about how food choices are connected with the issues of military recruitment that they are passionate about, as well as broader issues of poverty, racism, and corporate exploitation. He explained:

> They are deeply connected…. I was sharing about the 700 military bases around the world and the depth of connection between that and trade and how a lot of the pesticides and herbicides are coming from military experiments. We live in a food desert here in Fruitvale. Another brother who works in an urban gardening project with people who have come out of prison, he said it's not a desert, it's apartheid, because it's not by accident. There are only liquor stores and corner stores here for people to buy what they need. And those products are inherently supporting all of the major corporations, all of the major industries that are supporting the legislation that's oppressing people, oppressing the people who live in the same neighborhood. So I was just trying to help them understand that piece as well. That in cultivating the land and caring for the web that is really supporting you, you are freeing yourself.

Related to urban agriculture, a number of respondents (n=4) talked about organizing around food justice as an important political strategy that also promotes community building and psychological well-being.

> We could go up and down the street and say you know, the oil economy is going to collapse, we need to grow our own food, we are going to be starving if we don't have any. We can paint the kind of picture that you and I have seen when we look at the scenarios

> of what climate change is going to continue doing. But we can also just start meeting our neighbors and growing food together and giving it away. And when we do that, we meet people, we have connections, we have community, we have beauty, and when we have all that, we have safety. So food is just like the icing on the cake. So growing food as a strategy is kind of an amazing way to go about things. (Anne Symens-Bucher)

As Canticle Farm grows, they are being intentional about drawing in people from their neighborhood, who are primarily people of color. Symens–Bucher explained that:

> We are really trying to operate out of more like a pull method than a push method, letting things happen organically, while also holding that there is a lot to be done and we want to step it up. So it's like we have to slow down because there is so much to do in that sense. So holding that paradox. We could easily offer workshops and fill them with the larger community, the larger extended community. So we have to kind of hold that back a little bit so that we make space for connections with the people in the neighborhood.

Ecological education for social justice activists. Two participants spoke about the Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project, a San Francisco Bay Area organization that works with racial and economic justice organizations to help them integrate an ecological analysis into their political work. Mateo Nube, codirector, asserted that "anybody who is doing organizing in an urban context at a minimum needs to understand how human settlement writ large stand to be affected by drastic reorganization of the planet's life systems". Worden said she is excited about Movement Generation as a model because it has been successful in reframing social problems. For example, she explained that by placing migrant workers' rights in the larger context of the global ecological crisis, it becomes a different problem with a different solution that she believes goes to the root of both issues.

The organization has a multifaceted organizing strategy that includes quarterly "Earth Skills Trainings" which Nube described as the "practical skills side of the work that we are trying to promote". They intentionally strive to make these trainings relevant to communities of color in terms of coursework, teachers, and training location. Most recently, they held a one-day event called "Restoring Health, Childbirth and Independence from Industrial Medicine", which featured a panel of women of color involved in various branches of healing work explaining the work they do and why they view their work as political. Nube said that it would be very easy for Movement Generation to

> Write a diatribe about how messed up it is that a lot of the folks who get a lot of play for alternatives to women's health are white, but that would be saying something that's already known and it's just not a useful politic to do that. So let's normalize and make visible the amazing work that women of color are doing and let's support that work.

Ecochaplaincy. Sarah Vekasi coined the term "eco-chaplain" and has made that her life's work. She was formerly environmental justice community organizer with various organizations including Earth First!. Though she helped organize a number of successful campaigns, she eventually burned out and then lived in a Zen monastery in Japan for two years. When she returned to the United States, she came up with the idea to create ecochaplaincy as a way for her to support the environmental justice movement in a role that would be sustainable for her and that would provide “support for activists, organizers and impacted communities, and people encountering all levels of resource extraction and social justice issues". She observed that "part of what got us into this crisis is the thought that we are separate from nature, separate from our bodies, separate from our neighbors, and separate from each other" and she saw an opportunity to bring spiritual principles of interconnectedness to environmental justice work.

Vekasi currently practices ecochaplaincy in central and southern Appalachia with communities impacted by mountaintop removal coal mining. She said she lives by donation; her only income is from donation from people who want to support her work, most of whom do not live in Appalachia. Vekasi is careful to point out that she is not an organizer, however she brings "facilitation, mediation, conflict resolution, and pastoral counseling into organizing spaces". When asked about how race and racism are relevant to her work, she described the nuances of race dynamics in the region where she is working. Vekasi sees it as part of her role to help address those dynamics in the group:

> It takes some concerted effort and some real heart stretching, mind stretching, humbleness, awareness to look at the race dynamics in the group and to try to change it or acknowledge it versus just letting it be. So as an eco-chaplain, one of my jobs is to bring that up over and over again basically. And then listen to people, process it out, talk about it.

She also strives to help the groups she works with to "constantly hone in our intention" so that it is "greater than a particular issue or campaign that can win or lose. [Making it] stronger, like the liberation of all beings, or the liberation of this region from a mono economy."

Green jobs. A few participants (n=3) mentioned green jobs as a possible ecopsychological intervention. Phoenix Smith said that her vision would be to go beyond things like solar panel installation and actually create accessible, viable careers in ecotherapy. Her idea is that people would not need to get a Master's degree or PhD, but that they could be trained in a certificate program of some kind to work in their community doing organizing or healing work. Smith presented the work of Jarid Manos, founder and president of the Great Plains Restoration Council, as an example of what this could look like:

> [Manos] created a nonprofit where he is doing ecotherapy work. He doesn't have a psychology degree or a social work degree. He saw a need in his community, he saw how what we are doing to the plains and the Buffalo, we are also doing to black men and black women and Latino men and Latina women. He saw connection through his own life and he created a nonprofit where people who would not be able to get jobs because they have a criminal record, they work the land. They are restoring the prairies and are able to get skills and also heal themselves at the same time.

Grief and despair work. Participants were asked if they were familiar with Joanna Macy's grief and despair work. Those that were familiar with it were asked if they could see ways that it could be applied to address some of the intersections of race and ecopsychology. Bill Gardiner responded that he believes some of the rituals around grief and despair could be very powerful for both white people and people of color to process and come to terms with their pain around racism. He acknowledged that it may be important to break into caucus groups to do that work, as people of color may prefer to have their own space. Adelaja Simon talked about how when people hide or suppress their pain it prevents them from facing and challenging racism and other oppressive forces in their lives. He is quoted at length in order to capture the connections he made between some seemingly disparate issues:

> I feel like it's part of the culture, there's this whole piece about not acknowledging the pain that you're in, not acknowledging that history that you have. It's almost like not seeing yourself perpetuating the systems that have brought you so much pain…. It seems like even the people who kind of have a feeling that there something more than the life that were walking through, the popular culture life that were walking through… those are the ones that are driven towards alcoholism or abuse of some sort. There's almost no

> place [to talk about our pain]. I used to work at four or five different bars, from bartender to cook to doorman. And people I encountered were just so in search of something deeper, and a lot of them were people of color. And a lot of them just had no sense of community, no sense of destination, almost lost in this void, this haze of alcohol. I feel like giving people a space to even speak about what is that is…driving them to addiction, to abuse, driving them to whatever it may be. Giving people a space to enter that grief when our culture doesn't can help us to reach our strength and really change the situation. Do not rely on a source of alcohol that's what brought us here to begin with. Like my mother, she's from Haiti, where the whole landscape, all the forests were devastated in order to grow sugarcane. I know that's not where all of the alcohol is coming from, but that's where a lot of that industry began. And even something that's so simple for most people as, "I'm going to go drink away my sorrows", is perpetuating what brought our ancestors here and enslaved them to begin with. So [grief and despair work] gives people a voice or space to step into grief instead of trying to cover it up, which can offer us a lot of strength for the future.

Ancestral healing. A number of interview respondents (n=4) believed that doing spiritual healing work with ancestors is an important place where race and ecopsychology intersect in practice. It can provide a place for both white people and people of color to both heal from the wounds of racism and also connect with their ecologically literate ancestors. Adelaja Simon believes ancestral healing is important because "so many black people in this country have no idea at all where they came from. Not even a generalization. They are just like, well, I have a grandmother and that's about it. And there's no way to find out". He explained that this can be

very painful and also results in people feeling very alone in the world. Phoenix Smith explained that connecting with her ancestral roots is important to her because:

> [It is] one of the ways that I'm able to reclaim or know about stories. Many of the stories always had some kind of a nature's focus in them. I mean, I am African American, so part of my ancestors, they were slaves. So there was this really close connection to the land. So when I would talk to my mother or my family members, they always will go back to stories of gardening, stories of spending time on a farm, spending time out on the grange as they called it.

Smith works as a program director at a large HIV services organization. However, she is also a priest in a traditional African earth-based spiritual tradition called the Ducumi Ifa Orisha tradition. In the latter capacity, she does spiritual healing work with individuals and groups. Ancestral healing is a significant part of her work:

> I do work with people around connecting to their family ancestors, but also to connecting to nature as ancestor. So the redwoods are our living ancestors…. So making the connection between our connection with our family, our blood ancestors, but then we will also go out on the land and have conversations and talk about, well, we are sitting here on land in the East Bay that is Ohlone territory, and the Ohlone ancestors, their presence and their spirit is very active here. Or the redwoods, they are some of the oldest living things on earth.

Additional models: Participants mentioned a number of other examples of practices that integrate social justice and ecopsychology. Andy Fisher offered the example of Reevaluation Counseling, which is also known as Co-counseling. This is a peer-based counseling model in which participants take turns counseling each other and are trained both in counseling and in

anti-oppression concepts. Fisher believes that ecopsychology could look to this type of model as an example of an alternative to the Western psychological framework because it operates without professionals and without the exchange of money. Two participants mentioned that nonviolent communication and restorative justice practices are also relevant to ecopsychology and race. Adelaja Simon explained, "I feel like addressing conflict in the way that restorative justice holds, we end up addressing our larger systemic issues, and that can bring us into the ecological awareness that I feel is crucial, our next moment as humanity".

Several participants (n=4) discussed ecopsychology related workshops such as Joanna Macy's The Work that Reconnects. They noted that these types of workshops are primarily facilitated and attended by white people and speculated that this was likely due to lack of time and money, as well as a lack of effort on the part of white organizers to connect with communities of color. Participant A said that she wasn't sure these workshops were relevant to people of color anyway, saying they are "basically designed for white people". Three participants said that a concerted effort should be made to make these kinds of workshops more relevant and accessible to people of color. Anne Symens-Bucher is personal assistant to Joanna Macy, founder of the Work that Reconnects. Symens-Bucher explained that Macy has never promoted the work, instead allowing it to grow organically. She explained that "it tends to be one of those things where whoever shows up, those are the people who invite her to do the next thing". As a result, the work has mostly attracted white people. However, Symens-Bucher said that they are currently changing their strategy and making a conscious effort to bring in more people of color. For example, they have increased scholarships and have started to seek out workshop venues that are based in communities of color. She is hopeful that as more people of color become involved they will bring the work into their communities.

Ecopsychology and social justice movements. As part of putting ecopsychology into practice, participants were asked how ecopsychology could support movements for environmental and social justice. For the most part, participants (n=6) responded that ecopsychology could offer opportunities for these movements to broaden the discussion as well as give activists a new framework or way of understanding their work. Mateo Nube remarked that integrating mind, body, spirit, and politics is essential as we struggle to transition to a new way of life:

> I think whether it's ecopsychology, whether it's permaculture…any space right now that is actively trying to fit all those pieces together, and is advocating to folks, hey, as we wrap our heads around this really crazy reality, we've got to do this in a very nuanced way that calls heart and soul and mind from all of us. So it's got to be spiritual, and political, so I say thank you to any practice that's trying to do that.

Specifically, four participants noted that the practices of ecopsychology, such as from the Work that Reconnects, can provide emotional and spiritual support to activists. Anne Symens-Bucher described how an ecopsychological perspective has helped her in her work:

> I used to be really torn up… thinking I had to do all of it at the same time. And I have a lot of relief in thinking about how everything is interconnected and interdependent and whenever we are choosing one thing-- and we can only do one thing at a time anyway-- but whatever we are doing, it all goes out there and affects the web of life for better or for worse depending on what we are choosing to do. And all these issues are connected, they are not separate issues, we only think they are separate.

Two participants asserted that in their view, ecopsychology should be focused on learning from social justice movements rather than vice versa.

Ecopsychologist role. Given that many of the ways participants identified that ecopsychology could address race and racism in practice take place outside of the realm of psychology per se, a new question arose during the study: what is the role of an ecopsychologist? Two participants said that in these kinds of contexts, an ecopsychologist would serve primarily as a facilitator. Phoenix Smith explained:

> It's not just, you feel better after working the land or going on a hike, but then you have someone that can facilitate a discussion, like, what is happening to you? Maybe you can relate to what is happening to the land and have the full circle discussion.

America Worden also said that while the therapeutic effects of connecting with the earth arise organically, it can be helpful to have someone to point it out and help to explore it. In contrast, Participant A did not think ecopsychologists were entirely necessary. She argued that "anything that brings sustainability and more nature practices within urban communities is ecopsychology. I don't think that we necessarily need white privileged ecopsychologists going into these areas. People are doing it without that base".

Moving Forward

When asked what areas they believed ecopsychology could explore further, three participants remarked that there is a need for more concrete research on the psychological and spiritual impact of ecological crisis on communities of color. Participants recommended interviews and surveys that ask people of color "how they experience the natural world and how they experience what is happening to it" (Participant B) as well as how they "make the connection between their own personal healing, community healing, and healing the planet" (Smith, P.). Participants (n=2) also expressed that this research should examine the traumatic psychological impacts of environmental degradation in communities of color from things like

displacement, extreme weather events, and living in a toxic environment. Andy Fisher believes that eco-socialism could provide an important lens for future research and analysis in ecopsychology:

> Carl Anthony talks about the whole history of slavery and migrations of people of color, and how the relationship between mind and nature has so much been shaped by historical events…and also much oppression, mistreatment and forced alienation of people from the land. So, I think Anthony is very good at flagging that, as are eco-socialists. They are very interested in concrete histories of people and their relationship with land and how the landscape was shaped through the forces of capital….I think that would be a very important direction for ecopsychology to pursue. And obviously the whole question of race would figure very centrally in that whole exercise.

Like Fisher, four other participants also brought up Carl Anthony's work to encourage ecopsychology to address race and racism, though one mentioned he had not been active in the field of ecopsychology in a number of years.

Four participants responded that given that the ecological crisis disproportionately impacts people of color, it is critical that ecopsychology prioritize centralizing their voices:

> I think the important thing is to, in our political practice, is to prioritize what we would call frontline communities: folks who have historically been hit the worst by this continual theft of resources and land, and continual displacement, and who are now not coincidentally suffering the consequences of ecological wear and tear. Those are the communities that should lead the way in defining what our way out of this mess should look like…. It becomes a question of political leadership, and whose leadership we are affirming.

If this does not happen, if ecopsychology does not "get much more diverse and focused on critical theory…it's really going to just become ecotherapy or wilderness therapy" (Participant A). Phoenix Smith, a queer-identified African-American, stressed the important contributions more diverse voices can make to the field:

> We need to hear from queer people, from Black people, from Latino people, Native American people, and Asian and Pacific Islander people in their own words and in their own voice…I think we have a lot of wisdom around what it means to be other and what it means to be stigmatized. And, there are a lot of obvious connections that can be made between our experiences and what's happening to the environment.

Bill Gardiner commented that moving forward, it will be important for white ecopsychologists to be willing to examine their own racism and core assumptions. He explains that:

> I think that those of us who are white are blinded to our whiteness. It's very hard for us to see our whiteness because the system works for us and to our advantage every day. And we don't know what it is to experience it not working to our advantage…. The other thing is that we are so imbued with white superiority that we think that we as whites have the answers to all of life's questions, and that we're the ones who should be defining what the core issues are.

As white ecopsychologists grapple with their racism and internalized superiority, Gardiner believes they should pursue questions such as "how do we make connections with people of color communities who have similar interests? And, how do we develop some measure of accountability to those communities?". Nube and Gardiner both emphasized that if structural racism goes unaddressed, it will only be further strengthened as communities continue to fight for increasingly limited resources and the marginalized become even further marginalized. As a

result, the work being done now could have dramatic long-term implications. Gardiner believes this raises an important question:

> So, when you pick up the pieces on the other side of the cataclysm, what is that like? Is it just going to be white people gathering in a bunch of enclaves? Which is pretty much the way things are now. Or is it going to be multiracial communities struggling with the aftermath?

Two respondents, both white, asserted that communities of color possess coping strategies that white people could learn from as the ecological crisis escalates. Bill Gardiner suggested that ecopsychology explore how religious communities, Black religious communities in particular, have helped their communities deal with extreme adversity. Similarly, America Worden said that she believes that because of having had to struggle to get by, communities of color have developed important skills such as "creativity with scarcity, sharing, problem solving….Really creating solutions out of what is currently available". Worden pointed out that white communities are "really behind on those skills" and should learn from communities of color in order to prepare for the challenges that will likely arise due to climate change and other ecological problems.

Four participants emphasized that ecopsychology should connect more with faith-based communities around points of intersection. Two pointed out that while there is often a lot of understandable resistance to Christianity and other organized religions, there are good reasons to include them in the ecopsychology conversation. Phoenix Smith commented that there is "ancestral wisdom" in those traditions and that "especially in the Black community, [religious leaders] are gatekeepers around healing for their community".

Conclusion

As participants consider new directions for the field of ecopsychology, several (n=3) commented that it is still a very new field with a lot of room to grow. For example, Sarah Vekasi has studied extensively with ecopsychology elder, Joanna Macy. She explained that Macy and other founders of ecopsychology have created an amazing foundation, and it is now time to build and expand upon it. Similarly, Phoenix Smith expressed gratitude for those who have laid groundwork for the field of ecopsychology, while also emphasizing that it is still emerging and it is critical for diverse communities to come together to shape it in an antiracist way. This chapter sought to present and organize the findings of this study. The chapter that follows will place these findings in the context of the existing literature, and discuss implications for ecopsychology theory and practice.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how race and racism are relevant to the field of ecopsychology in theory and in practice. Additional areas for inquiry included the following key research questions: 1) How could ecopsychology incorporate an explicit critical race analysis; 2) What might ecopsychology grounded in an antiracism framework look like in practice with individuals, groups and communities; and 3) How could ecopsychology and the environmental justice movement better support and contribute to one another? Interviews were conducted with 12 ecopsychologists, environmental justice activists and spiritual leaders to examine these questions and yield ideas and practices with implications for both ecopsychology and environmental justice work. This chapter will reflect on the findings of this study and consider what they reveal in answer to the research questions. It will also compare the findings of this study with the existing literature, consider strengths and limitations of the study, and present implications for future theory, research and practice in the field of ecopsychology.

Race and Racism in the Literature

The field of ecopsychology, which emerged in the 1990s, has drawn increasing attention over recent years due to the mounting ecological crisis. However, it is still a relatively undeveloped field with only a small body of literature to its name. While there are a handful of books and articles about ecopsychology practice, or ecotherapy, ecopsychology as such is currently primarily a body of thought. This study's literature review revealed that ecopsychology has yet to address race and racism directly. As the field was first emerging, Carl Anthony (1995), an African-American scholar and well-known environmental justice activist, critiqued white

ecopsychologists for being more interested in connecting with animals and nature than in connecting with people of color. He also provided important analysis connecting the exploitation of nature with the exploitation of people of color. The current research suggests that most ecopsychologists are familiar with Anthony's work, which was published in one of the field's seminal anthologies (Roszak, 1995). However, based on the literature reviewed for this study, it appears that his call for ecopsychologists to take on issues of race in the field has been largely ignored. This study's participants noted and expressed frustration about this omission:

> It was just really crazy to me that you can have an ecopsychology book in the nineties and an ecotherapy book recently, and there are no people of color in the books. And you have white people [in the books] talking about Native American traditions. I'm like, really? You couldn't find any [people of color]? So I really think it's important to let people speak for themselves and to hear the wisdom that they hold from their communities. (Phoenix Smith)

Participants attributed this blind spot to the fact that the majority of the ecopsychology literature has been written by white people who have not been involved with social justice work and who "don't have to think about race" (Brandon Leroy Lott) because they are not the targets of racism.

The interview data and literature review conducted for this study reveal that while ecopsychology has not addressed issues of race, there is ample literature in ethnic studies, environmental studies and other disciplines that explores various communities' of color relationship to nature (Glave, 2010; Hall, 2007; hooks, 2011; Manos, 2009; Mapp, 2012; Smith, 2012). This research suggests that ecopsychology could learn from, engage with and support this work being done outside of the field that directly pertains to ecopsychology and race.

(Re)defining Ecopsychology

An unexpected theme that emerged from this research was how to define ecopsychology. Prior to each interview, study participants were told that for the purposes of this study, ecopsychology was being defined broadly as "an umbrella term referring to work that synthesizes ecology and psychology" and that it "could include relevant literature or practices from other fields". They were also instructed that, for the purpose of this study, "anyone working at the intersection of ecology, psychology, and spirituality" could be considered an ecopsychologist, even if they were not a psychologist by training. Employing a broad definition was a strategy to ensure that the study included people who were not necessarily ecopsychologists but could offer an important perspective on how race and ecopsychology intersect. Defining the terms broadly also encouraged participants to be creative and think outside the existing confines of ecopsychology.

Surprisingly, participants argued for an even broader definition than the one put forward by the researcher. Their comments suggested that ecopsychology is essentially about life, connection and relationships in the broadest sense. Because ecopsychology encourages us to view human beings as part of nature, participants argued that ecopsychology is relevant to everything from urban youth empowerment work to green jobs.

Interviewee Andy Fisher explained how this broad definition of ecopsychology encourages and even necessitates incorporating an analysis of race and racism:

> It's about nourishing life, and protesting what is violating life, reconnecting with life. It's so simple, but once you start moving in that direction, then an issue like race is like okay, how is race an issue of the domination of nature? How is racism a violation of life? And it just becomes very visible and obvious how it needs to be a part of ecopsychology.

The definition of ecopsychology supported by this research differs only slightly from definitions found in the literature. Theodore Roszak, who is considered one of the founders of ecopsychology, defined ecopsychology as:

> 1) The emerging synthesis of ecology and psychology. 2) The skillful application of ecological insights to the practice of psychotherapy. 3) The discovery of our emotional bond with the planet. 4) Defining "sanity" as if the whole world mattered (Roszak, 1994, p. 8)

While the first two elements of Roszak's definition are specific to psychology, the third and fourth are actually quite broad. So, while this study does support defining ecopsychology more broadly than the literature does, perhaps more importantly it sends a message to the field to take this broad definition to heart and flesh out its implications.

While it may not be necessary for ecopsychology to arrive at a single, fixed definition, how the field is defined does matter. A narrow view of ecopsychology is likely one reason why the mostly white field has yet to connect with its many potential allies in communities of color who are doing similar work by different names. A broad view of the field is also necessary given the historical context of racist systems such as slavery and colonialism, in which white people portrayed themselves as somehow separate from nature, while people of color were viewed as part of nature (Riley, 1995).

Addressing the Research Questions

How are race and racism relevant to ecopsychology? As expected, this study highlighted numerous points of intersection between race and ecopsychology. Not surprisingly, nearly all of the study participants' first response when asked how race is relevant to ecopsychology was to discuss environmental racism and environmental justice issues. Their

comments echoed research showing that people of color face a myriad of environmental hazards including elevated toxic exposure levels, air pollution, lead poisoning, contaminated fish consumption, and proximity to landfills and toxic waste dumps (Bullard, 1994). This was an expected finding, and it confirmed the assertion put forth in the literature review of this study, that the environmental justice literature could provide ecopsychology with a framework for understanding the intersections of race, ecology, and psychology.

There is a gap in the literature with regard to the psychological impacts of environmental injustice. There are some people of color writing about race and ecology in a way that incorporates spiritual and mental health, however they are generally not connected with the field of psychology (Glave, 2010; Hall, 2007; hooks, 2011; Manos, 2009). Likewise, study participants had difficulty identifying psychological impacts of environmental injustice. However, study participant Raúl Quiñones Rosado said that he believes environmental racism reinforces a cycle of oppression, in particular because it is common to blame oneself for health and other problems even when they are caused by outside forces:

> It is not only what it does to your body, but what it does to you in terms of internalized oppression, like "I'm not doing something right or I have to do something better because I'm doing it wrong…". It's hard to separate the psychological or even the spiritual, or measure those, but they clearly manifest when you look at the other more objective indicators.

Similarly, another participant said he believes that environmental racism leads people to feel despair, hopelessness, and disconnection because they feel that society does not care about them.

This study revealed that the issue of displacement, whether voluntary or forced, is a major point of intersection between race and ecopsychology. Participants raised the point that in

the United States, with the important exception of Native Americans, most of us do not have an ancestral connection to the place where we live. This is true for both white people and most people of color in the United States. Participant America Worden discussed the psychological toll that displacement can take:

> It's just devastating how many people here are not from here and don't recognize the distraction that it causes in their internal space. I think you could go through kind of race by race and look at in general, how that happens to each group, or subset of the group…. Like what happens to each of our minds as they cross over here? And what sort of traumas were associated with that?

The theme of displacement has been addressed only minimally in the ecopsychology literature (Anthony, 1995; Canty, 2000; Soule & Anthony, 1998). That said, displacement, ecology and race have been explored quite a bit outside of the field of ecopsychology (Fullilove, 2004; Glave, 2010; hooks, 1999; hooks, 2011; Manos, 2009). It is beyond the scope of this study to offer a thorough review of the literature on this topic outside of ecopsychology, however these findings do identify an opportunity for ecopsychology to add its unique perspective to this literature.

This study's findings highlighted an interesting duality regarding some people of color's relationship to nature. On the one hand, slavery and other histories of oppression have understandably led some people of color to feel alienated from nature and more comfortable in urban environments. In the United States, many African Americans migrated from the agrarian South to Northern cities to escape lynching and pervasive racism, hoping for a better life. However, this migration cut many African Americans off from a source of strength and livelihood, a separation that some view as traumatic (Canty, 2001). African Americans' history

of having been forced to work the land may also play a role in a cultural pattern of alienation from nature. Research participant, Brandon Leroy Lott, explained how he sees this playing out:

> Especially if you're black, and you see that a lot of white people do that… I'm not going camping or going hiking, that's what white people do! So there's just this whole psychological disconnect when it comes to, for black people, when it comes to going out in the woods, and connecting to nature.

In addition to feeling alienated from nature, study participant Phoenix Smith remarked that many people of color are already dealing with so much trauma that it can be difficult for some to take ecopsychology seriously: "It's like, you really want me to be able to connect my pain to the earth when my sons are being murdered by the police? There is so much unresolved grief that communities hold".

At the same time that this research describes some people of color's disconnection from nature, this research also reveals rich histories of environmentalism and "ecological literacy" (Mateo Nube) in communities of color. These findings are aligned with new literature that reflects an emerging interest in exploring these kinds of apparent contradictions. Again, this is primarily been explored outside of the field of ecopsychology. One example is Glave's (2010) book, *Rooted in the earth,* which traces the history of African-Americans relationship with the environment. Another is *Outdoor Afro,* a web-based community that helps African-Americans to connect with nature and with each other (Mapp, 2012). The *Black/Land Project* gathers and analyzes stories about black people, land and place (Smith, 2012). These are the kinds of projects that ecopsychology is in a position to highlight, support and learn from.

The history of race and racism in the United States is such that people of color are "racialized" while white people are often seen as "raceless" or somehow operating outside of the

social context of race. This myth of racelessness is part of what has allowed white ecopsychologists' lack of attention to race to go, for the most part, unnoticed and unchallenged. The researcher was careful to ensure that this study addressed whiteness as a critical piece of examining where race and ecopsychology intersect. Consistent with the literature, this study's findings linked the root cause of many environmental issues to European American imperial ethics and glorification of the conquest of land (Bullard, 1993; Canty, 2011). One participant noted that for the most part, white people run the institutions that are responsible for climate change. Another participant said he believes whiteness has been constructed in the United States in such a way that "cuts white people off from their historical relationship to place", which he said imposes severe "psychic wounds" (Mateo Nube). If what Nube says is true, than if ecopsychology is concerned with healing people's relationship to the earth, then an important area to look at is how to help white people in particular heal this connection. Given the historical and current relationship between whiteness and the natural world, some participants posited that dismantling racism and white supremacy is a necessary part of addressing the ecological crisis.

Finally, in exploring how race and racism are relevant to ecopsychology, this study's findings revealed tension around ecopsychology's relationship to indigenous knowledge. Ecopsychology is a mostly white field that draws on ancient wisdom and traditions from a range of cultures, often from communities of color. In the United States, ecopsychologists often look to Native American traditions. While participants in this study insisted that there is nothing inherently wrong with learning from culture is other than one's own, they observed that some ecopsychologists have taken certain cultural elements out of context and lack a sophisticated understanding of their meanings and proper usage. Glendinning (1994), who is white, discusses this issue in her article "Yours truly from Indian country". She points out that in the early 1980s,

the American Indian Movement (AIM) issued resolutions condemning non-Native use of Native American spirituality. For many Native Americans, spiritual and cultural appropriation by white people is just the latest in a long history of theft and exploitation. One white interview respondent commented that she has learned that there is a cultural difference between how Whites and Native Americans understand and relate to information sharing. White ecopsychologists are operating from a "freedom of information" principle, whereas many Natives cultures have the understanding that you earn information through relationships and experiences. Glendinning (1994) makes a similar point, connecting these issues more broadly with global capitalism:

> In the context of the mass marketplace we are led to believe that it is our basic right to get anything so long as we have the means to put it in the store, the passion to devour it, and the cash to buy it. (p. 5)

While no Native Americans participated in this study, Native American writers have emphasized that white people who are interested in Native American spirituality should first focus on educating themselves about Native American history and current struggles and finding ways to be of service (Gray, 1995; Nelson, 2011).

This study's findings supported literature encouraging white people interested in earth-based spirituality to develop their own connections with the earth rather than relying on Native American traditions or other cultures based in communities of color. Glendinning (1994) quoted Seneca educator John Mohawk: “I don’t want people to adopt Indian rituals, because I want them to own their own rituals…. Then I'll come and celebrate with them". Interview participant, Sarah Vekasi, also encouraged white ecopsychologists to draw on their own inner resources rather than on Native American culture:

> You don't have to kind of steal [a cultural tradition] or even steal a fake one. I don't think people's ideas of Native American [traditions] are even actually coming from a specific place…. But every person alive here, we got here. That means somewhere in our genetic memory are people very connected to the land, because until very recently we had to do a lot of work to stay alive. And that meant knowing the natural cycles and it meant knowing when to plant your seeds, and it meant a whole lot of things that we can tap into again by asking our ancestors, or paying attention, praying… or meditating.

The current research also encourages white people to explore indigenous European spiritual traditions as a way of drawing on their ancestral wisdom.

How could ecopsychology incorporate an explicit critical race analysis? This study's findings point to a need for white ecopsychologists to look deeply at their own internalized white supremacy (?) and racism, to challenge racism operating within the field, and to address race related issues in the literature and in practice. The results suggest that ecofeminism, ecosocialism and the environmental justice movement each offer a lens that could support the field in developing a strong race analysis that connects social and economic justice issues. In particular, ecopsychology should work to further understand, from a psychological perspective, how the domination of nature is related to the domination of people of color both historically and in the present.

What might ecopsychology grounded in an antiracism framework look like in practice with individuals, groups and communities? This research provided an exciting and surprisingly broad range of examples and ideas for how ecopsychology could address race and racism in practice. An unexpected finding was that a general critique of Western psychology's model of individual level psychotherapy emerged. The study results suggest that individual level

ecotherapy may not be the ideal place for ecopsychology to be put into practice, particularly if it hopes to address race and racism. Several respondents who work with clients individually as ecotherapists said that most of their clients do not come specifically seeking ecotherapy. They explained, however that there are many ways to help people to both connect their personal issues to larger systemic issues, as well as to find strength in connecting with nature. These ecotherapists as well as other respondents said that rather than emphasize individual psychotherapy, ecopsychology should instead focus more on collective processes, including group level and even cultural level interventions, which do not necessarily need to take place in a psychological context. While the ecopsychology literature does discuss group level interventions (Macy & Brown, 1998), for the most part it does not critique the individualistic Western psychological model. One exception, however, is Andy Fisher's book *Radical ecopsychology* (2002), in which he points out that psychotherapy does not get at the roots of people's problems:

> I have…wondered at the absurdity of lining up the wounded at psychotherapist's office…while the everyday social forces that violate our nature, and guarantee a steady supply of crippled souls, go for the most part unquestioned—and while the same general forces continue to go about their business of tearing down the biosphere. (pp. xiii-xiv)

Fisher also participated in the current study as an interview participant and made a similar argument.

Interviewees identified a number of interventions and practices that address the intersection of ecology, psychology and race. Interestingly, none of the examples that emerged take place in a traditional Western psychological context. Instead, they take place at the group or community level. In fact, the study found that an ecopsychologist is probably not necessary in most of these examples, though they could play an important role in facilitating people making

connections between the practices and the mental health impacts they experience as a result. The following is a list of some of the eco-therapeutic interventions participants identified as addressing or having the potential to address race in practice:

Urban agriculture. This research positioned urban agriculture as an ecopsychological practice that is relevant to communities of color and can address issues of race and racism. Growing food was believed to be an effective strategy because it prepares communities for the impacts of climate change while also supporting a healthy diet, building community, and making urban neighborhoods more resilient. The findings are supported by the literature. Chalquist (2009b) provides an overview of numerous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of horticultural or gardening therapy in treating everything from stress to obesity to alcohol addiction and substance abuse (p. 5). While the ecopsychology literature has not discussed race and horticultural therapy, the food justice movement, which is closely related to the environmental justice movement, is connecting access to local, healthy food with issues of racial and economic justice (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010).

Green jobs. This study found that green jobs could be considered an ecopsychological practice. This was an unexpected finding, because it emerged from a more broad definition of ecopsychology than was previously understood by the researcher. Research participantPhoenix Smith presented the work of Jarid Manos, founder and president of the Great Plains Restoration Council (GPRC), as an example of what this could look like:

> [Manos] created a nonprofit where he is doing ecotherapy work. He doesn't have a psychology degree or a social work degree. He saw a need in his community, he saw how what we are doing to the plains and the Buffalo, we are also doing to black men and black women and Latino men and Latina women. He saw connection through his own

> life and he created a nonprofit where people who would not be able to get jobs because they have a criminal record, they work the land. They are restoring the prairies and are able to get skills and also heal themselves at the same time.

In his autobiographical book, Manos (2009) discusses his personal journey and also the work of the GPRC. He explains that the youth of color who participate in his programs "not only learn new technical skills but also introspection, stamina, value of work, faith in work, faith in self through work, altruism, conflict resolution, [and] tools for cleaner diets and healthier lives". He describes how working to restore nature affects the youth:

> It's a dug-in process, and no miraculous change occurs overnight, but partnering with [the youth] through place-based education, service learning, and skills training in a trust and motivational environment, all in service of the ecosystems which give us life, allows them to improve their life outcomes, developing into leaders in life rather than bystanders or helpless victims, and have fun too. This is the 'Body and Earth, Soul and Soil' approach to prairie restoration.

Grief and despair work. The literature has emphasized the importance of allowing ourselves to feel the pain of our separation from nature (Glendinning, 1994; Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy, 2007), however it has not specifically discuss applying these practices to the pain of racism. This study found that grief and despair work could be very powerful for white people and people of color to acknowledge and transform their pain around racism.

Ancestral healing work. This study identified spiritual healing work with ancestors as an important place where race and ecopsychology intersect in practice. It can provide a place for both white people and people of color to both heal from the wounds of racism and also connect

with their ecologically literate ancestors. This was an unexpected finding that has not been discussed in the ecopsychology literature.

Other models. This study's findings revealed a number of other directions ecopsychology could take to address race and racism in practice, including: (a) eco-chaplaincy, in which a person provides spiritual support to social justice organizers as well as insights on group dynamics, (b) explore alternative counseling models, such as Reevaluation Counseling or Co-counseling, (c) supporting the integration of ecologically-relevant healing practices into existing social justice work.

How could ecopsychology and the environmental justice movement better support and contribute to one another? While this research question did not generate a lot of specific responses, the ideas generated around ecopsychology practice share many points of intersection with social justice issues and movements. That said, this study did find that ecopsychological principles and practices are already being used as a resource for activists and that this could be expanded upon. Study participants believed that ecopsychology should learn from the social and racial justice analysis of the environmental justice movement. Most importantly, the study points to a need for these two fields to come together and create more venues for dialogue and mutual support. This finding is supported by the literature (Soule & Anthony, 1998), which points out that ecopsychology and social justice movements share many principles and challenges.

Implications of this Research

Ecopsychology is currently at a crossroads. It can continue to be a white-dominated field promoting various ecotherapies, or it can take an actively antiracist stance, ally itself with movements for social justice and follow courageously where that leads. There is overwhelming evidence that the global ecological crisis has been shaped by race historically, and that people of

color are currently bearing the brunt of the worst devastation. If ecopsychology does not face this reality head-on, it will continue to reinforce white supremacy rather than challenging it and in so doing, will fail to truly address the ecological crisis. This study calls for ecopsychologists to embrace a broad definition of ecopsychology and put it into action.

Though it is currently a primarily white field, ecopsychology should not simply seek to recruit more people of color to join its ranks. Instead, ecopsychologists should look for ways to connect with and ally themselves with people of color working towards similar goals, regardless of whether they are familiar with ecopsychology. This could include getting involved with environmental justice and food justice activism and events, building relationships with faith-based communities, and inviting people of color who may or may not identify with ecopsychology to contribute interviews or articles to ecopsychology anthologies and journals.

This study points to the need for more concrete research on both how people of color experience nature as well as the psychological and spiritual impacts of environmental racism. This research should explore basic questions about how various communities experience the natural world as well as their strengths and coping skills. It should also consider whether a trauma lens would be appropriate for understanding the impacts of environmental degradation from things like displacement, extreme weather events, and living in a toxic environment. Ecopsychology should also explore white people's experiences with nature, and how disconnection from the land and the natural world helps to maintain white supremacy and social injustice.

The results of the study suggest that ecopsychologists need to think even further outside of the confines of mainstream Western psychology. Research participant Andy Fisher explained, "I am really interested in regenerating the kind of culture that could talk more broadly, outside

the realms of therapy office, about the whole shape we are in as a society and culture". These kinds of discussions are happening in various branches of alternative or radical psychology. For example, In their book, *Toward psychologies of liberation*, Watkins and Shulman (2008) explain that they have "found it necessary to reorient psychological theory so that universalism, Eurocentrism, sexism, and racism can be challenged and disrupted in order to realign psychology's work in this century with pressing needs for individual, community, ecological, and cultural liberation" (p. 7). This reorientation and realignment is exactly where ecopsychology needs to focus its energy if it wishes to meet its full potential. While it has challenged some aspects of Western paradigms, this research suggests that its next step must be to actively address sexism, racism, white supremacy and other forms of oppression in its theory and research, and to support the development of new community level and cultural interventions to put this into practice.

Ecopsychology might also connect more with the field of social work and draw on its history of joining psychology and social justice. One study participant, the only social worker in the study, said that she believes the field of social work is the place where race and ecopsychology could most effectively be put into practice. As a field, social work prides itself on looking beyond the individual human psyche and into a person's social context. However, this person-in-environment perspective has rarely taken into account the natural, or ecological, environment. This study contributes to social work theory and practice by expanding our understanding of "environment". At the same time, the study brings social work's social justice values to the growing field of ecopsychology.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This research study was successful in answering the overarching research question about how race and racism are relevant to ecopsychology. Some of the data was expected, for example connections to environmental justice. However, the study generated a more creative and broad interpretation of ecopsychology theory and practice than was expected. The subquestions posed by the researcher were also answered. Participants did not have as much to say about connecting ecopsychology and the environmental justice movement as expected, however many connections can be implied based on their ideas for addressing race in practice. For example, participants argued that urban agriculture and food justice work could be considered ecopsychology practice, and these are closely related to the environmental justice movement.

The study's sample was not limited to ecopsychologists alone because (a) this would have made it difficult to reach a diverse group, and (b) given the lack of attention to race in the field, insiders to the field may not have had a lot to say about its relevance. Therefore, the researcher sought a racially diverse sample that was also diverse in its background and experience, and prioritized interviewing people who had some background in antiracism work. The sample reached included academics, activists, spiritual leaders and various kinds of psychologists. As a result of the small sample size, and the fact that the interviewees did not represent any specific group, the data generated from this study is not generalizable. This is an inherent weakness of the study. However, conversely, a strength of the study's design is that it allowed for a diverse group of people to critique ecopsychology and generate new thinking from both inside and outside of the field.

A challenge that arose as a result of using a sample with such diverse and divergent backgrounds was that not everyone was able to answer every interview question. As a result,

each interview was tailored to draw on the strengths and experience of each participant. For example, about half of the participants were not familiar with ecopsychology literature, so they were not able to answer questions in that area. On the one hand, the resultant variance in interview material created a less focused, more diffuse data set. On the other hand, participants' diverse backgrounds allowed them to generate rich data that pushes the boundaries of the field.

This research elicited a number of ideas for how ecopsychology could address racism in practice. However, because the respondents generally did not think that individual psychotherapy was the most effective way to address ecopsychology and race in practice, the data do not provide information or tools for clinicians seeking to address these issues in clinical practice with individuals. This could be viewed as a limitation of the study, though it also represents an important finding that points ecopsychologists toward group and community level interventions instead.

The participant sample interviewed during this study was relatively racially diverse, including half people of color and half white people. There were no Asian, Pacific Islander or Native American interview participants. Half of the sample identified as male and half identified as female. Given that ecopsychology is dominated by white males, this sample represents a wider breadth of perspectives than currently exists in the literature. However, the data would have been even richer if more people of color had been interviewed. In particular, given that this study examined ecopsychology's relationship with indigenous knowledge and cultures, it is a weakness of the study that the data collected lacked Native American perspectives.

Conclusion

Ecopsychology has a choice to make. It can continue to be a primarily white field gently pushing the boundaries of a Western psychological framework. Or, it can create a new

framework for a new moment in history, building on ancient principles of interdependence while addressing the psychological and spiritual challenges of the modern social context. Creating a new framework will take hard work, a willingness to look deeply at ourselves, our relationships and our histories, and an unwavering commitment to social justice. Specifically, the results of this study demonstrate that an antiracist ecopsychology must (a) critically examine its own whiteness as well as how white supremacy and the domination of nature are related, (b) prioritize the leadership of those who are most impacted by the current social and ecological conditions, in particular people of color, poor people, women, and queer people, and (c) ally itself with communities of color working towards similar goals.

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Appendix A

Title: Ecopsychology and race study seeks participants

Hello,

I am a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. For my thesis, I am conducting a study to explore how race and racism are relevant to the field of ecopsychology. I am currently seeking interview participants, including ecopsychologists, people involved with the environmental justice movement, and others working at the intersections of ecology, psychology and racial justice. The interview should take approximately one hour and can be conducted either by phone, Skype or in person in the New England area.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me via e-mail or phone. I would also appreciate any suggestions for other people to interview. My contact information is below. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Luke Woodward
Class of 2012
(personal information deleted by Laura H. Wyman, 11/30/12)

Appendix B

School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

February 15, 2012

Luke Woodward

Dear Luke,

Thank you for your revisions. You are all set to go and your study approved! Nice job.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your research project.

Sincerely,

David L. Burton, M.S.W., Ph.D.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Claudia Bepko, Research Advisor

Appendix C

Interview Guide

- Introductions
- Confirm timeframe
- Permissions to record
- Review consent form

Definitions *(Review with participant)*
For the purposes of this study:

- **Ecopsychology**: An umbrella term referring to work that synthesizes ecology and psychology; could include relevant literature or practices from other fields.
- **Ecopsychologist**: Anyone working at the intersection of ecology, psychology, and spirituality. This may include academics, social workers, psychologists, shamanic practitioners, or people who facilitate workshops on topics related to ecopsychology and/or environmental justice.

Participant background

1. How would you describe your personal or professional experience as it relates to issues of ecology, psychology or both?

2. Please tell me about your involvement surrounding racism, if any.
    - If you have not been involved in this work, have you thought about doing it?
    - What draws you to want to do it and what are the barriers?

Theory

3. How do you think issues of race and racism are relevant to the field of ecopsychology?

4. Race and racism are largely absent in the literature on ecopsychology.
    - Why do you think that is?
    - Can you think of examples where race is addressed in the literature?
    - What are areas or questions that you think should be explored further in the literature?

5. Ecopsychology draws on the teachings of many indigenous cultures and spiritual traditions. How can ecopsychologists from different backgrounds honor these traditions without co-opting or appropriating?
    - (*Possible follow up*) Given that ecopsychology is a very white field, how do you think white ecopsychologists should approach this?

Practice

6. Can you think of any examples in which race and racism are being explicitly addressed in

the field of ecopsychology in practice (ie individual counseling, group work etc.)?

- Can you think of new ways that ecopsychology could address race and racism in practice?

7. How might ecopsychology/ecotherapy apply differently in working with communities of color versus white communities?
    - What communities do you work with? Do you see ways that ecopsychology is supporting or could support their healing?

8. Are you familiar with despair work in ecopsychology? If so, do you see ways that this is being used or could be used to address the intersections of ecopsychology and race?
    - Please give examples from your own work, work you are aware of, or ideas you have for what could be done.
    - How might this differ in work with communities of color versus white communities?

9. Do you think that some of the practices of ecopsychology could support the environmental justice movement and other social justice movements?
    - If yes, why?
    - If not, why not?
    - *(Possible follow-up)* Can you think of examples from your own or others' work where this is already happening?
    - *(Possible follow-up)* How can you envision this happening?
    - *(Possible follow-up)* What could ecopsychology learn from the environmental justice movement?

Demographic data

- Race/ethnicity
- Gender
- Age
- Degree
- Description of work/organization

Can you recommend additional participants?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix D

Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Luke Woodward and I am a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am writing to ask for your participation in my research study, which will explore how race and racism are relevant to the field of ecopsychology. The study will aim to explore your personal and professional views and experiences on the topic. The data from my interviews will be used for my thesis, which is part of the requirements for the masters of social work degree at Smith College, and possibly for future publications and presentations.

I am interviewing ecopsychologists, people involved with the environmental justice movement, and others working at the intersections of ecology, psychology and racial justice. These participants may include academics, social workers, psychologists, members or staff of environmental justice organizations, shamanic practitioners, or people who facilitate workshops on topics related to ecopsychology and/or environmental justice. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete and will take place in person in the New England area when possible, and over the phone when necessary. The interview will be audio recorded with your permission. I will personally transcribe the interviews.

The interview will include questions about your demographic/personal information (gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, and educational background, and a brief description of any relevant organizations you are a part of). I ask these questions so that I will be able to describe study participants accurately. I will also ask a number of open-ended questions about your perspectives and experiences in the area of psychology, ecology, spirituality and social justice, with a special emphasis on race and racism. At your request, I can provide you the interview guide in advance.

The potential risks of participation in the study are that you may feel uncomfortable talking about sensitive issues, such as race, racism and other injustices. Unfortunately, I am unable to provide financial compensation for your time. Although you may not benefit directly from participating, your participation could contribute to a better understanding of how a critical race framework can contribute to the field of ecopsychology.

You will be given the option of either keeping your identifying information confidential or being identified and credited for your ideas. If you choose to request that your identifying information remain confidential, it is possible that you will still be identifiable based on your ideas or the nature of your work. Participation is voluntary and you are free to refuse to answer any questions. In addition, you may withdraw from the study at any time prior to April 1, 2012. If you decide to withdraw, I will immediately remove and destroy all data pertaining to your participation. If you agree to participate, all of your information, as required by Federal Guidelines, will be kept securely locked in a file for three years after I complete my thesis. After that time, provided I do not need access to the information, all data and audio recordings will be destroyed. My thesis advisor will have access to the data after I have coded all the narrative data and disguised all identifying information for those who requested confidentiality.

If you have additional questions or are concerned about your rights or any aspect of this study please contact me at **(personal information deleted by Laura H. Wyman, 11/30/12)** or the Chair of Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Thank you for your time and consideration. You may wish to keep a copy of this form for your records. Thank you for your participation.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY.

Participant's Signature: Date:

Researcher's Signature: Date:

Would you like your identifying information to be kept confidential? Please initial below to indicate your preference.

_____Yes, please keep my identifying information confidential.
_____No, please do not keep my information confidential. I would like to be cited for my ideas.

Researcher contact information:
Luke Woodward
Faculty & Staff Assistance Program
(personal information deleted by Laura H. Wyman, 11/30/12)

Appendix E

Referral Resources

National Association of Social Workers
www.naswdc.org
Tel. 202-408-8600

National Mental Health Services Information Center
1-800-789-2647

International Community for Ecopsychology
www.ecopsychology.org

Environmental Justice Resource Center
www.ejrc.cau.edu