

Nature based therapy

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Introduction Nature based therapy is not a new concept, our well - being and association with nature is part of the never-ending human quest of who we are and just where is our place in this vast environment which surrounds us. In order to better grasp the topic of nature based therapy or ecotherapy, studies consulted were those pertaining to our connection with nature and our wellbeing. Just how does nature connectedness affect our experiencing of a good life is the subject of the first paper reviewed, by Howell, J. A. , Dopko, R. L. , Passmore, H. , Buro, K. (2011).

The second paper by Jordan & Marshall (2010) describes a the changes to the traditional therapy frame in a the uncertain environment of the outdoors. In taking therapy outside, we work with nature as one of the variables in the therapeutic relationship. The integrative, often experiential approach of nature- based therapy or ecotherapy, is gaining rapid ground in the field of counselling and psychotherapy. My final research paper aims at looking further into this growing field and how it can help those suffering from anxiety, burnout and depression. Article Review A Howell, J. A. , Dopko, R. L. Passmore, H. , Buro, K. (2011). Nature connectedness: Associations with well- being and mindfulness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 51 (2), 166-171. Howell, Dopko, Passmore and Buro (2011) delve deeply into the question of our connectedness with nature and how it can be measured as a reflection of our mental well- being. The authors, all from the Grant MacEwen University in Edmonton Alberta conducted two empirical studies evidencing this association with data demonstrating that connection to nature may be more beneficial to our emotional and social well- being that previously realized.

Drawing from the Biophilia hypothesis argued by Harvard evolutionary biologist E. O. Wilson in 1984, that human beings have an instinctive, emotional and genetic need to be in contact with nature, Howell et al. , thus hypothesize that " higher levels of nature connectedness would be associated with higher levels of well-being and with greater mindfulness. " Many studies have been conducted on the subject with various results. Howell et al. , describe a study conducted by Mayer and Franz in 2004 which showed a " significant correlation between trait nature connectedness and life satisfaction" (p. 66). They are careful to define the word trait and provide a seemingly thorough review of the qualitative variables in current literature, discussing the changes in definition of well- being by various theorists (Nisbert, Zelenski and Murphy, 2011). The team from Alberta builds upon current research by probing further into the question of the " whether trait nature connectedness was associated with feeling well ... and with functioning well ... as well as the relations among nature connectedness and a second index of positive mental health, mindfulness" (p. 67). Howell et al. , review a large amount of research, define terminology and uncover new holes in the theories, they then go on to pose the hypotheses: " are higher levels of nature connectedness associated both with higher levels of well being and with greater mindfulness? " Methodology Howell et al. , conducted two studies using quantitative methods. In the first study, data was collected from 452 university students, primarily female, with " 81. 1% identifying Canada as their country of birth" (p. 167).

Using a variety of questionnaires including Mayer and Franz (2004) 14- item Connectedness to Nature Scale, Keyes' (2005) 40- item, measure of well

being and Brown ; Ryan's (2003) Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MASS). In order to ensure objectivity of results, Howell et al. , balanced these scales by using Paulhus's (1994) Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding which serves to filter out " unintentionally inflated self-descriptions and impression management" (p 168). In the second study 275 students participated, all students of similar age and demographic as the first study.

Howell et al. , used a few of the same questionnaires adding the Allo-Inclusive Identity Scale (Leary, Tipsord ; Tate, 2008) as well as the Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale (PMS) (Cardaciotto, Herbert, Forman, Moitra, Farrow, 2008). In an attempt to provide consistency and validity to the results, Howell et al. , provide succinct definitions and examples for some of the questions on these scales in order that the reader better understand the subtle differences in the descriptive statistics of the variables.

Results Variables such as connectedness to nature, nature relatedness, allo inclusive identity, emotional well being, psychological well being, social well being, MAAS, PMS awareness and PMS acceptance showed correlations between nature connectedness and well being. Descriptive statistics were measured and then correlated among variables using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Howell et al. , also provided models with hypothesized correlations between nature connectedness, well -being and mindfulness.

In the first study " associations between nature connectedness and well-being and between well- being and mindfulness were significant; however, the association between nature connectedness and mindfulness was not" (p. 168). In the second study , correlations were significant with respect to psychological and social and emotional well being and with the added test

scores added to the soup, nature connectedness was found to be significantly correlated to mindfulness. Discussion Howell et al. are satisfied with their consistent findings and that most results of their two studies support their hypothesis and suggest that " nature connectedness is associated with the extent to which people are flourishing in their private, personal lives" (p. 170). Howell et al. do admit that some of the findings were inconsistent with their hypothesis and that future research could examine " moderators and mediators of the relationship between nature connectedness and mental health" (p. 170).

They go onto discuss future research possibilities and challenges, including how nature could be incorporated into other activities to produce maximum therapeutic results. Howell et al. , produced convincing research into the relationship between connectedness to nature and well being. They took into account multiple scales of affect in order to collect their results and carefully described their differences and their impact on the final results. I feel their downfall is in their sample size and demographic and suspect results may be different depending on age and culture.

Perhaps new rating scales would need to be developed in order to reflect these differences. Essentially, nature can benefit us all and regardless of the outcome being present within a natural environment will help you learn to experience the moment and perhaps even a renewed vitality in life. Article Review B Jordan, M. , ; Marshall, H. , (2010). Taking counselling and psychotherapy outside: Destruction or enrichment of the therapeutic frame? *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*, 12 (4), 345-359

We all know that nature can help us feel better, but just how can we take a traditional therapeutic frame outdoors? What would be the challenges and what is the potential of this upcoming field of ecotherapy? Ecotherapy represents " a new form of psychotherapy that acknowledges the vital role of nature and addresses the human nature relationship" (p. 354) Martin Jordan and Hayley Marshall use relational therapy concepts in order to investigate mutuality and asymmetry and how they may be experienced differently in the great outdoors.

Both Jordan ; Marshall are practicing registered psychotherapists and by using their own experiences, they explore both the successes and challenges to the traditional framework of a therapeutic session. Jordan ; Marshall address many fundamental questions including how confidentiality would be addressed in public settings and how timing or the therapeutic session is affected by practicing counselling and psychotherapy outside. They believe that the challenges to the traditional framework could be sorted out between client and therapist and in fact become part of the process .

A flexible contract could be drawn up, one open to change. Jordan ; Marshall are careful to provide several definitions of a therapeutic frame, from the uber- conservative " Psychotherapy should be carried out in a soundproof consulting room, in a private office in a professional building" (Langs 1982), to " being seen as a transgression or a dual relationship for the therapist" (Zur 2001). But there are others who believe that the therapeutic boundary should be a dynamic process (Hermansson, 1997) or that the flexibility in the frame is an opportunity for " deepening the therapeutic work and relationship" (Bridges, 1999).

Jordan ; Marshall seem to be covering all bases with their own summary of a therapeutic boundaries," Working outdoors can throw new light on these traditionally more fixed ideas concerning boundaries and invite an increasingly flexible perspective on issues concerning power and mutuality within the therapeutic relationship" (p. 347). They examine the changes in client therapist relationships and how mutuality must not be equated with equality in terms of the therapeutic relationship. Jordan ; Marshall are not prescribing a recipe for therapy outdoors nor are they saying therapy is better outdoors.

Their goal with this paper is to present their experiential findings and observations regarding the challenges various forms of outdoor therapy impart on the traditional therapeutic frame as well as on the relationship between therapist and client. Methodology The qualitative method devised to learn more about the impacts of taking the therapeutic frame outdoors was simple. Jordan ; Marshall began to hold sessions outdoors with their existing clients. They used two types of interactions outdoors: 1. taking the traditional therapeutic frame of one hour into ' nearby nature' and 2. taking clients on excursions where the frame is extended to over a weekend or more. Relational theory concepts were used in order to better understand how the traditional frame of psychotherapy elements such as " confidentiality and timing of therapeutic work, weather, containment and power dynamics" (p. 347), would be challenged by unpredictable natural environment. The variables of mutuality and asymmetry were also studied in terms of the expanding boundaries in the client - therapist relationship.

One case study (in two parts) is presented in order to better grasp the challenges and potential of nature-based therapy.

Results Jordan ; Marshall found many potential challenges in taking the therapeutic frame outdoors. In particular, they found that the boundaries between client and therapist, could become challenged. The outdoors provided a neutral environment which fostered mutuality but maintaining some asymmetry in the relationship could be difficult. In taking this frame outdoors, Jordan ; Marshall also found that the structure of the frame itself may need to be reshaped and become more flexible; perhaps the frame becomes an open process, rather than an ultimate set of rules.

They also found that sometimes the unpredictability of the environment created more anxiety, both in the client and the therapist and that the establishment of a therapeutic container or the 'building of a home in nature' (Berger, 2006) was successful in overcoming some of these obstacles.

Discussion The purpose of Jordan ; Marshall's paper was to provide information on the potential and challenges of taking traditional therapy practice outdoors. Jordan & Marshall consulted a vast reference list including one of the founders of nature-based therapy, Ronen Berger and this provided interesting insight into this emerging field.

At times the paper felt disorganized and the case presentation split in two halves was confusing. Results were scattered throughout the paper and the methodology was vague and seemingly structureless. Nevertheless, Jordan & Marshall got to the gist of the subject and were honest with their results, reporting their own struggles with mutuality and asymmetry when taking clients outside of the traditional hour long frame; " both clients and

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therapists can experience a blurring of the boundaries between what is therapy and what is social space" (p357).

Jordan & Marshall did not however, provide much data as to how many clients they had seen and under what circumstances. Their observations are keen and easily related to when thinking about the traditional therapeutic frame, nevertheless a concrete chart or model, using the relational as well as other theories or approaches, would have been welcome and interesting.

Conclusion

Overall I found both these articles fascinating and extremely pertinent to my final research paper. Simply being present within a natural environment can help us feel better. Perhaps when taking therapy outdoors and as nature becomes a dynamic third in the therapeutic relationship, the traditional frame will come alive with an emergent creativity and mindfulness nudging us all towards our own true nature.