

Editorial: Leading Ecopsychology

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We begin from the insight that all systems and institutions that become large enough to inhibit our growth as persons endanger the planet as well. If, then, we work to deepen people's sense of personal worth, strengthen their natural instinct for spiritual growth, augment their citizenly need to participate in the institutions that govern their lives, then they will find within themselves the most delicate gauge of ecologically intelligent scale.

(Roszak, 1978, p. 37)

The Personal and Planetary

Ecopsychology holds the promise that the promotion of human potential and healthy ecosystems can coexist and pairs self-discovery with ecological responsibility. In fact, a synergy is seen between personal and planetary health: development at a scale that promotes human health, promotes the health of the natural environment and our kindred species (Roszak, 1978).

As I attest with my recent call for “second generation ecopsychology” (Doherty, 2009), the person/planet connection is not simply an abstraction, romantic ideal, or countercultural concern. It is a reality, worldwide. There is a consensus on humanity's physical connection to the biosphere, whether through restorative effects (Kahn, 2001) or health threats such as those posed by endocrine-disrupting chemicals (Diamanti-Kandarakis et al., 2009) or global climate change exposures (IPPC, 2007). There is growing acceptance of psychological impacts of global environmental issues whether through the stress of continuous exposure to representations of global issues in electronic media (Stokols, Misra, Runnerstrom, & Hipp, 2009) or the loss of security and well-being associated with a disrupted sense of place (Connor, Albrecht, Higginbotham, Freeman, & Smith, 2004). The ideal of an ecologically intelligent scale underlies the global movement toward sustainability.

Thinking Like an Ecopsychologist

The person/planet connection does remain an abstraction until it is understood in the context of a person's lived experience. When talking with people about environmental issues or the proper state of human and nature relationships, I draw on

frameworks from ecopsychology and a number of associated disciplines such as environmental psychology and education. I begin with the assumption that each person will have a unique construal of their self in relation to nature, or an “environmental identity” (Clayton, 2003, p. 45), whether it is articulated or not. They will further vary in their awareness of ecological patterns or scale in their home range and how this relates to their life, or what Thomashow (2002, p. 122) calls “biospheric perception.”

I know that concerns about environmental quality have long been a worldwide phenomenon, though people tend to differ in their estimation of future risks and assume that things are worse elsewhere (Dunlap, Gallup, & Gallup, 1993; Gifford et al., 2009). I recognize that emotions of environmental loss or anxiety are difficult to articulate and their impact tends to be underappreciated since they operate on varying levels of consciousness and lack recognition in traditional scientific or economic frameworks (Kidner, 2007; Macy & Brown, 1998; Maiteny, 2002). Furthermore, in the United States, and even in my eco-conscious community, other issues may be more pressing, including having a job, access to health care and education, and being safe from crime (Pew Research Center, 2009).

Finally, I can predict that individuals' values and beliefs, and their culture, will shape their personal obligations for environmental action (Stern, 2000a; Opatow & Brook, 2003). Those who feel more interconnected or committed to the environment will likely report they engage in more proenvironmental behaviors (Davis, Green, & Reed, 2009). Even those who consider themselves to be green operate within a system of constraints, such as costs, community rules, available technology, and their access to specialized knowledge about sustainable choices (Stern, 2000b).

Speaking With *Ecopsychology's* Editorial Board

I was thinking of this during two recent conference calls with members of the editorial board of *Ecopsychology*. We had a total of 23 individuals involved speaking from Australia, the UK, Venezuela, Canada, and across the US (due to technical glitches, one editor was listening in).

In terms of environmental discourses (Dryzek, 1997), you would expect ecopsychologists to favor radical and imaginative solutions to environment issues. But, to assume that the editors of *Ecopsychology* think alike would be a mistake. They speak from the perspective of their cultures, life experiences, and their roles as therapists, researchers, academics, and environmental thinkers. They have their values and beliefs regarding theory, methods, practices, and priorities, which leads to their norms—what they see as the important work—and their thoughts about the direction for the *Ecopsychology* journal.

Despite their diversity, I believe that the editors of *Ecopsychology* are all drawn to the promise of ecopsychology and see themselves as developing social, economic, aesthetic, and psychological forms that promote person/planet connection and health. I must tell you that such diverse gatherings are rare, if not unprecedented, and I am honored and proud to be a part of it.

The topics we discussed in our calls included feedback on *Ecopsychology's* first issue (uniformly good it seems), and things that would help the editors to be more effective in their work (such as a way to share information among themselves). There were a number of ideas about moving the journal forward, such as inviting student participation and commissioning special issues to explore key topics. Some feedback was pragmatic: continuing to explore definitions of ecopsychology and clarifying the journal's target audiences, while remaining attentive to gender, diversity, and international perspectives.

There was much interest in inclusion: of other kinds of psychology (e.g., developmental, comparative, experimental, transpersonal); underrepresented mental health disciplines (e.g., social work); other disciplines (e.g., environmental studies and education), as well as perspectives from the arts, literature, and music; and grassroots initiatives like the Transition Movement.

The journal was seen as taking a lead on issues that impact human and environmental health such as environmental toxins, consumerism, global climate change, and the peak oil transition. It was seen as important for *Ecopsychology* to publish data-driven studies and innovative dissertation abstracts, and to link ecotherapy with evidence-based approaches in traditional and alternative health care. There was also an idea of reprinting important

articles or studies that lacked exposure without an integrative forum like *Ecopsychology*.

Ecopsychology and Adaptive Leadership

During my conversation with the *Ecopsychology* editors, I reflected on what leadership they and I could provide, what role the *Ecopsychology* journal will play, and what leadership ecopsychology as a concept and a transdisciplinary field offers to society. The challenges presented by global environmental change and person/planet health impacts are adaptive challenges in that they require new—or at least expanded—ways of feeling, thinking, and behaving. The notion of adaptive challenge applied in the realm of environmental concerns is, as Nicholson (2002) notes, “one that will require us as a society and a species to learn and change and be transformed” (p. 163). This requires what Ronald Heifetz in *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (1994) describes as adaptive leadership: mobilizing activity in the service of the learning needed to meet the adaptive challenge.

The concept of adaptive leadership holds lessons for the field of ecopsychology in its self-reflective and pragmatic tasks and offers strategies to ensure the health and development of the new *Ecopsychology* journal. Adaptive leadership distinguishes between leadership and authority and recognizes that an individual or group can exercise leadership without having formal authority or power (e.g., in the tradition of Martin Luther King or Margaret Sanger). This is very much the case for ecopsychology, which has traditionally operated outside of mainstream therapy or academia.

Other important tasks of adaptive leadership are to create a holding environment for the stresses of change, to pace the work and—especially when operating beyond formal authority—to modulate the provocation to the system in order to maintain a focus on the adaptive challenge and “stay alive” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 234). In this model, the leader and community work together on a solution and an important task of leadership is to keep the locus of work in the community.

In terms of its editorial vision and policies, *Ecopsychology* will demonstrate adaptive leadership by directing attention to ripening issues such as innovative practices and research rather than stress reducing distractions (e.g., scapegoating other belief systems or externalizing a corporate or political enemy). In service of developing ecopsychology as a transdisciplinary endeavor and social movement, the journal will retain a broad editorial scope and nurture diverse voices and dialogue—thus giving the work back to the people.

What does it mean for the field of ecopsychology now that it becomes more authoritative, now that it is looked to by the media and the public, is covered in conferences and graduate school classes, and has a forum like this peer-reviewed journal? How will the definition of ecopsychology evolve; what will we make of it? These are the adaptive challenges for ecopsychology as a field and these are the questions that I hope to see answered in the pages of the *Ecopsychology* journal.

The Second Issue of *Ecopsychology*

The second issue of *Ecopsychology* continues to showcase diverse perspectives that provide a nuanced understanding of the psychology of human-nature relationships. We begin with an in-depth interview with environmental psychologist Joseph Reser that recovers an important dialogue between ecopsychology and environmental psychology, which began with his seminal 1995 review article “Whither Environmental Psychology: The Transpersonal Ecopsychology Crossroads,” and continues with his thoughts about opportunities for ecopsychology today. We also discuss the implications of Dr. Reser’s recent work intervening in Australian bush fires in the context of adaptation to global climate change.

In “*A Look at the Ecotherapy Research Evidence*,” psychologist Craig Chalquist provides a passionate and engaged review of research that supports the efficacy of ecotherapy. Dr. Chalquist discusses studies of horticultural therapy, wilderness excursion work, animal-assisted therapy, and techniques to address time stress management. As Chalquist notes, ecotherapy is a relatively new field with ancient roots and an impressive set of preliminary research findings. Practices of reconnection with nature work across mental health treatment modalities to alleviate psychological symptoms and also bring a larger capacity for health, self-esteem, self-relatedness, social connection, and joy.

In “*Exploring Our Physical Connections: The Role of Magnetic Fields and Restorative Environments*,” British psychologist Paul Stevens examines research on the effects of electromagnetic fields on human psychology and physiology, in particular on attention restoration and place attachment. Stevens’ innovative research illuminates the subtle connections with place that underlie our more obvious visual cues, subjective expectations, memories, and associations. Stevens’ work is also a positive reminder of our embeddedness within the natural environment: whatever our psychological state, the physical connections we have with the rest of the natural world are always there and cannot meaningfully be broken.

In “*Youth Civic Action: Going Green, Going Global*,” Laura Johnson, Julie Johnson-Pynn, Shawn Sweeney, and Christina Williams

discuss outcomes of the Jane Goodall Foundation’s Global Youth Summit, an international program in which youth and emerging adults from 28 nations participated in a week of environmental and humanitarian education, service, and action planning. The authors analyze quantitative and qualitative outcome data on variables such as community service self-efficacy, environmental identity, leadership, and multicultural competency. Insights from the study include the importance of knowledge of culturally diverse leadership and communication styles in international environmental programs for youth. Johnson, et al.’s work also provides an example of outcome and program evaluation studies that are crucial to expand the reach of innovative environmental education programs.

Studies in archetypal and depth psychology have developed a sophisticated language to describe the power and resonance of earth metaphors. In “*Aphrodite and Ecology: The Goddess of Love as Nature Archetype*,” Laura Shamas explores the natural and therapeutic associations of Aphrodite/Venus, a central goddess figure in the Greek and Roman pantheon. As Shamas illustrates, Aphrodite has origins and parallels in many cultures and retains a primordial relationship to nature symbology through her associations with fertility and regeneration, gardens, the ocean, and the seasons. Shamas describes examples of how the image of the goddess of love suggests therapeutic applications as an object of meditation on fertility and beauty, an in-depth symbol for the liminality of environments such as the ocean shore, and an inspiration for nature restoration.

In this issue, we begin a review feature that will discuss notable work related to ecopsychology. We will survey environmental studies and philosophy and the spectrum of psychology, mental health fields, and related disciplines, as well as arts, media, and literature. My Portland colleague Jeffrey Noethe reviews Bob Doppelt’s *The Power of Sustainable Thinking* and I have the honor of reviewing Daniel Goleman’s *Ecological Intelligence*.

In *The Power of Sustainable Thinking*, Bob Doppelt provides an accessible application of basic psychology principles drawn from cognitive psychology, rational emotive therapy, and the transtheoretical or stage of change model. As Noethe’s review notes, the stage of change model provides research-based insights and strategies regarding change processes that can generalize to a number of environmental behaviors. In addition, Doppelt describes how common cognitive thinking errors can impact motivation and self-efficacy and illustrates strategies for applying a stage model of behavior change at individual, group, and organizational levels.

In *Ecological Intelligence: How Knowing the Hidden Impacts of What We Buy Can Change Everything*, psychologist and science journalist Daniel Goleman draws on Howard Gardner’s theory

of multiple intelligences to propose an ecological intelligence. Goleman provides initial insights on the construct of ecological intelligence and applies this in the marketplace with a description of industrial ecology and the new possibilities for transparency regarding the health and environmental impacts of the products people buy. Goleman envisions a world in which shoppers can use point-of-purchase ecological comparisons to guide their purchases and shift market share to healthier and more socially and environmentally friendly products. As the review notes, Goleman's work raises important questions about the correlation between intelligence, as traditionally defined, and ecological knowledge. Future work can also clarify how the construct of ecological intelligence relates to ecological identity, environmental ethics, evolutionary perspectives such as biophilia, and other frameworks for environmentally significant behavior.

Looking Ahead: *Ecopsychology* Issue Three and Beyond

Upcoming articles in future issues of *Ecopsychology* include a range of qualitative, quantitative, expressive, and critical perspectives. Authors will explore topics including themes and myths in the ecopsychology literature, ecotherapy perspectives drawn from Eastern European shamanism, and environmental psychology research on household recycling and overcoming barriers to behavior change regarding environmental toxins. We look forward to a special issue on emotional well-being and sustainable behaviors and the launch of our student article feature. Upcoming reviews include *Deep Economy* by Bill McKibben; *Ecotherapy* edited by Linda Buzzell and Craig Chalquist; the New World Wildlife Foundation publication *Meeting Environmental Challenges: The Role of Human Identity* by Tom Crompton and Tim Kasser; and the *Ecology of Wisdom*, selected writings by environmental philosopher Arne Naess, cofounder of the deep ecology movement.

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