

# *Ecopsychology* and Environmentally Focused Psychologies

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*"In an age of extremes, the middle may be the new edge."*

– Rowland Russell

**A**s I compile the eighth issue of *Ecopsychology*, the American Psychology Association's special interest division focusing on environment and population debates its name. If students and the general public are sometimes unclear how to characterize what psychology has to offer regarding contemporary environmental issues, sustainability, climate change, and the like, they may find some consolation in knowing that the experts don't always agree either. Well meaning attempts to delineate the disciplines and content areas of environmentally focused psychology—environmental psychology, conservation psychology, population psychology, ecopsychology, human ecology, etc.—often founder because they focus on analysis (viewing these as separate elements) versus synthesis (understanding them in combination). More problematic is imposing hierarchy or even competition. In reality, their content areas very nearly overlap. All assume that psychological questions (e.g., of mind, emotions, behavior, experience, states of disease or flourishing) have an environmental or ecological context. As variations of human experience, these intellectual enterprises are mutually dependent, often acting as shadows of one another. You can best differentiate these kindred endeavors by what they privilege.

For example, environmental psychology, as a well-organized subdiscipline of scientific psychology, pursues basic knowledge about the inter-relationship between humans and their surround (both built and natural). Conservation psychology, while sharing with the former an empirical approach, introduces an ethic of care, in particular for other species, and engages directly with issues of biodiversity, stewardship, and collaboration with other conservation disciplines. Ecopsychology as an endeavor is harder to encompass,

being more of a social theory or movement—with outposts in academe, grass roots environmentalism and popular culture—that focuses on articulating the subjective, lived experience of human-nature inter-relationships and the synergies between the human psyche and environmental problems. In many ways, ecopsychology has served as a container for what goes missing or under-recognized in the anonymous, at-arm's-length nature of the scientific enterprise: emotion, personal meaning and transcendence, mystery, mysticism, despair and empowerment, critiques of the status quo, and ecocentric visions for a different kind of society all together.

There are still other species of environmentally focused psychology – the psychology of sustainability, ecological psychology, human ecology—all with unique backstories and reasons for being. Much depends on what scale you approach the subject. For newcomers, these may all look like variations on “psychology + environment” or “psychology + ecology,” just as for some, a red wine is a red wine. But, for a master of wine or viticulture, a syrah is a not a cabernet is not a pinot is not a merlot. Like a naturalist with a favorite piece of land, a connoisseur of environmental psychologies experiences meaningful differences and a pleasurable sense of extent—and may find within this fragmented intellectual terrain, an ecology. As a publication, the journal *Ecopsychology* serves as an interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary forum for all of these varied approaches. The challenge of this middle path is holding the creative tension between different environmental discourses, ways of knowing, and approaches to science and action. To paraphrase one of the authors whose work is reviewed in this issue, the *Ecopsychology* journal aspires to speak, not only to the head, but also to the heart and to the whole.

## Our Current Issue

In our interview, *Coping with the Deepwater Horizon Disaster*, *Ecopsychology* Editorial Board member Susan Koger of Willamette University and psychologist Deborah Winter, her collaborator on *Psychology of Environmental Problems* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.) share personal and expert reactions to the largest accidental marine oil spill in history. In the original article *Trust Mediates Conservation Behaviors*, Patricia Winter of the USDA Forest Service and George Cvetkovich from Western Washington University review four studies that explore the role of trust in the public's engagement in conservation behaviors—in particular, social trust prompted by citizens' perceptions of having shared values with governmental agencies. The authors' findings suggest that best practices for conservation-related and nature resource agencies include a consideration of trust building and trust maintenance in the development of strategies to address environmental issues and accompanying behavior and social change.

In *An Exploratory Study of a Wilderness Adventure Program for Young Offenders*, Michael Walsh of the Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Keith Russell of the Outdoor Behavioral Health Care Cooperative at Western Washington University evaluate the benefits of a 21-day wilderness adventure program for young people served by the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Results found that the Wilderness Endeavors program was associated with increased self-efficacy and hope and that youth with higher levels of hope were less likely to have repeat legal offenses. The authors survey the emerging research literature on therapeutic wilderness interventions and provide recommendations for conducting outcomes assessment in real-world juvenile justice settings.

Nicolas Gueguen and colleagues from the Université de Bretagne-Sud, Lorient, France, describe field tests of two persuasion techniques in a door-to-door program designed to encourage the sorting of household wastes for composting and recycling. In *The Combined Effect of the Foot-in-the-Door Technique and the "But you are Free" Technique*, the authors found that either an explicit statement offering subjects freedom to take part or decline participation in the study or completion of an initial, small request were both associated with further compliance in the study, and that a combination of the "But You are Free" and "Foot-in-the-Door" technique were associated with still greater compliance. The authors note that the results do not only have theoretical interest for social psychologists but also have practical ramifications for fostering sustainable behaviors.

Graduate study across the range of environmentally focused psychology and therapy is a growing interest of students and educational institutions worldwide. To further this development, Rebecca Macy, a student and colleague of mine at the Lewis & Clark Graduate School of

Counseling and I compiled *An Annotated Guide to Graduate Education in Environmentally-focused Psychology and Therapy in the United States, Canada, & Mexico*. As noted in the introduction, results of this relatively informal survey indicated a number of graduate programs featuring substantive course work in the areas of ecopsychology, environmental psychology, conservation psychology, and human ecology across a variety of program types, practice settings, and regions. I look forward to additional work that adds an international focus, and further clarifies program types, philosophies, enrollments and outcomes in terms of employment, credentialing, and professional practice.

In a narrative essay, Jordan Shapiro challenges cultural representations of food, particularly in the guise of gourmet cooking and fine dining. In *The Eco-Gastronomic Mirror: Narcissism and Death at the Dinner Table*, Shapiro recounts his rites of passage in the masculine hierarchy of restaurant kitchens, reflects on supermarkets' role in promoting humans' imagined separateness from nature's feeding cycle, and wonders "what food would look like, taste like, and feel like were we to take it for what it is: neither the villain in a post industrial corporate economy nor the local sustainable solution in an impending environmental tragedy."

We feature several entertaining reviews in this issue. Depth psychologist Lori Pye provides an eloquent overview of the equally compelling novel *Anthill* by naturalist E.O. Wilson. Melissa engages with marine biologist turned film-maker Randy Olson's humorous and practical treatise *Don't Be Such a Scientist: Talking Substance in an Age of Style*. Scholar George Howard of Notre Dame University explores the Fast New World embodied in *American Mania*, a study of the cultural and biological underpinnings of consumerism by psychiatrist and neuroscientist Peter Whybrow. Finally, pioneering Canadian ecopsychology practitioner John Scull reflects on his experience reading *Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy* by Peter Brown and associates, a volume on ethical interactions drawn from recent initiatives of the Quakers (Religious Society of Friends), based on the principles embodied in the international Earth Charter ([www.earthcharterinaction.org](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org)) and in turn mapped on contemporary economic, political, and ecological systems. As Melissa Payne notes in her review, Randy Olson challenges scientists to engage with people not only in the head, but also in the heart, the gut, and (in terms of power and sex appeal) the groin. This collection of readings illustrates a number ways to achieve this varied message.

This issue brings Volume Two of the *Ecopsychology* journal to a close. I would like to offer thanks for our readers' attention and support; for the collective efforts of our contributors, publisher, and subscribers; and for the ecosystem services that make this amazing twenty-first century electronic dialog possible. Be well.

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