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Our Soil, OurSelves: Ecotherapy for the Nurse, Patient, and Planet

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Our Soil, OurSelves: Ecotherapy for the Nurse, Patient, and Planet

by

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Our Soil, OurSelves: Ecotherapy for the Nurse, Patient, and Planet

Introduction

The nursing profession is concerned with the health and well-being of individuals and their physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs. Each need, or dimension, must be explored in isolation, as well as in relation to each other when providing complete holistic care to the individual, for each dimension influences the other. In addition, these dimensions are impacted by the individual’s connection to the natural environment via a sense of connectedness, their perception of their place in the universe, their level of exposure to organic versus artificial energy, etc. Like human bodies, the environment is a dynamic and open system that humans are intimately a part of, and as nurses it’s important to examine not only the individual human being, but that individual in the context of that greater body with which he/she is intimately connected (Lincoln, 2000). Ecotherapy is a useful tool for nurses to use in holistic practice as it stems from a paradigm that regards humans as active members of a greater body of living systems, and gears its therapeutic focus on utilizing a reciprocal nurturing interaction between human and environment to enhance health and well-being (Clinebell, 1996).

Many nurses are not aware of this therapy or paradigm because western medicine and modern health-care emerged from a time when bodies, and the world, were looked at as sums of isolated parts. Modern medicine is practiced by writing prescriptions for an isolated problem, because that is the worldview—the Newtonian-Cartesian perspective—that dominated all scientific, and therefore medical, schools of thought. Upon this theme Garman (1995) writes:
Western medicine developed from Hippocratic tradition, with its emphasis on the interrelations among the body, the mind, and the environment. The classical Greek approach was to assist the natural healing forces within the individual by providing the most favorable conditions for healing to take place. Although the Hippocratic oath is central to modern medicine, the holistic approach it implies is less evident today. Medical science, by adopting the reductionist model for its approach to human organism [sic], has not benefited patients overall. Capra suggests that this is the underlying reason why many of today’s major illnesses are not understood or cured (p. 59).

The above passage illustrates how modern medical science has lost sight of its holistic origins. What science is revealing today in “the new story of the universe” finds gaps in the Newtonian-Cartesian perspective and provides a more holistic understanding of the universe and the human role here (Swimme, 1996). Nurses are at a great advantage in their ability to synthesize this new paradigm as nurses already provide holistic care, and view individuals as more than just body parts with problems. The introduction of ecotherapy into nursing practice will help nurses deepen and enrich their scope of holistic care (Lincoln, 2000).

In addition to deepening holistic care, the principles behind ecotherapy advocate for an enriched existence for all who seek enhanced well-being, as ecotherapy promotes healthy lifestyle changes and critical examination of humans’ impact on the environment. This enriched existence can be in the form of environmental activism or simply heightened awareness. The principle lies in the fact that as humans nurture nature, they
in turn are being nurtured by nature (Clinebell, 1996). Cosmologist, mathematician, and co-author of *The Universe Story*, Brian Swimme (1996) weaves this principle into the human experience when he states:

My aim here is not simply to hand over information as if I were passing on a sheaf of papers from me to you. My aim is to present the birthplace of the universe in a way that invites you to participate in an inner transformation. It would be a great thing if a person learned the facts of the new story. But even greater would be to take the first steps into living the new story (p. 25).

*Identification of Phenomenon*

The phenomenon under study is human health and well-being as it is affected by healthy interaction with the natural environment. This phenomenon naturally includes perspectives on the human role within the natural environment. With respect to the themes of health, humans, nature, and the relationships within those themes, co-participants share ways in which healthy interaction with the natural environment impacts their health and well-being on a physical, psychological, social and spiritual level, as well as their perspectives on humans’ relationship with nature.

The principles behind ecotherapy come from the knowledge fields of cosmology, deep ecology, biophilia, ecospirituality, and energy. Each of these principles can be viewed individually and as mirrors of each other. The phenomenon of human healing in nature incorporates the basics of all of these, and will be explored later on in this paper.

*Type and Purpose of the Study*
The research method utilized for this study is the method of phenomenology. According to Burns and Grove (1999), “The purpose of phenomenological research is to describe experiences as they are lived—in phenomenological terms, to capture the ‘lived experience’ of study participants” (p. 340). This particular method is used because the philosophical orientation is one that views the person as “integral with the environment. The world is shaped by and shapes the self” (p. 340).

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the lived experience of human health and well-being as it is impacted through healthy interaction with nature. The study focuses on the four dimensions of human health—physical, social, psychological, and spiritual—as these are all areas that together comprise one’s health and well-being. These areas are thoroughly studied and assessed by nurses in order to provide competent and complete holistic care. By studying the impact of the natural environment on these dimensions, nurses might be able to extend their scope of holistic care, and those who seek healing might come to a better understanding of their health as it is affected by their interaction (or lack of interaction) with nature.

In addition to studying the impact of the natural environment on human health and well-being, this study also explores the lived experience of the overall relationship between humans and the natural environment. The human/nature relationship is studied as the assumption of their interrelatedness is a key element of the paradigm that is the vehicle for ecotherapy. It is here that study participants share their view of the human role as it relates to other living systems.
Identification of Study Questions or Aims

The primary question driving this study was, "How does interaction with the natural environment impact human health and well-being?" As investigation deepened, other questions arose. In order to look at the phenomenon of human health as impacted by the natural environment one must consider the relationship between humans and the environment—how are humans even part of the natural environment that they (and their health) would even be affected by it? With these questions in mind, this thesis aims to first explore what ecotherapy is through the literature review. It then explores the manner by which the principle of interaction with nature enhances human health and well-being on a physical, social, psychological, and spiritual level as revealed through the findings extrapolated from phenomenological research. Finally, the study explores how and why the nursing profession would use ecotherapy in holistic practice.

Significance of the Study

According to Burns and Grove (1999), "Significance of a study is associated with its importance to the nursing body of knowledge" (p. 332). As stated before, many nurses are not aware of ecotherapy, or the paradigm from which it stems. However, the philosophies behind the therapy are extensively congruent with holistic nursing perspectives. Lincoln (2000) illustrates this relationship between nursing practice and current paradigms by the following:

Holistic nurses concern themselves with the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of their clients. ...In addition, holistic nurses view the energy fields of humans and the environment as inextricably liked. ...As society
transitions into the 21st century, the dominant Western culture is shifting its foundational, philosophical assumptions away from secularism, control, dichotomy, and oppression and toward holism, diversity, harmony, and reciprocity (p. 228).

It is almost implied that the current paradigm is already in place in nursing practice. Knowledge of ecotherapy helps to expose that paradigm, and links the spirit of holistic nursing to the unfolding cosmology that supports the relationship between human health and the natural environment.

Burns and Grove also state that “A very significant study has implications for one or more disciplines in addition to nursing” (p. 332). Lincoln (2000), author of “Ecospirituality: A Pattern that Connects”, draws the connecting lines between ecospirituality and other “disciplines in addition to nursing.” The same may be applied to the connections between ecotherapy and those same disciplines. She states: “The concept of ecospirituality is present explicitly or implicitly in many disciplines and movements, such as spirituality, bioregionalism, deep ecology, Eastern philosophy, ecological philosophy, ecopsychology, ecofeminism, and the holographic worldview” (p. 229). Some of these disciplines, such as deep ecology and ecospirituality, will be explored further in this paper.

Literature Review

The goal of ecotherapy aims to promote enhanced human health and well-being through interaction with the natural environment. Understanding this phenomenon entails an understanding of the founding principles and philosophies of ecotherapy. This
literature review will explore the principles of cosmology, deep ecology, and biophilia, in addition to the concepts of spirituality and energy. These themes weave together the fabric of ecotherapy, which will be summarized at the end of the literature review.

**Cosmology**

> Fifteen billion years ago, in a great flash, the universe flared into being.  
> (Swimme and Berry, 1992. p. 7)

Thus begins the universe story—a story whose authors are mathematicians, astronomers, physicists, and other scientists who have looked at the world and stars with a sharp probing eye, and who have shared their discoveries with human civilization. Thus, one could almost argue that the universe is the author of its own story that scientists have simply transcribed over their years of study. In *The Universe Story* by Swimme and Berry (1992) we read:

> We are now experiencing that exciting moment when...our new story is taking shape. This story is the only way of providing, in our times, what the mythic stories of the universe provided for tribal peoples and for the earlier classical civilizations in their times. The final benefit of this story might be to enable the human community to become present to the larger Earth community in a mutually enhancing manner (p. 3).

“In our times”, cosmology provides a highly technical, poetical, and sophisticated perspective upon the great “flaring forth” of all beings and life on Earth. It asks new questions and challenges old patterns of thought. Swimme (1992), a mathematician and cosmologist, illustrates the nature of cosmology as follows:
Mathematical cosmologists look about themselves and see the stars and galaxies and ask, “What is the nature of the fireball that could enable the development of these structures?” Out of the very discoveries they have made, [traditional cosmology is] emboldened to extend such questioning: “Given the existence of mountain wildflowers, what is the nature of the flaring forth at the beginning of time?” (p. 23).

Cosmology surges forward with new waves of information that add depth to the scientific perspective through which we have understood the clockwork of creation. Such a study as cosmology draws the connecting ties between that which happened out there fifteen billion years ago, to life here, as people know it today, breathing and seething with energy. It ties energy on earth to the energy of the sun, the soil of the earth to the flashing particles of the galaxies, and people’s own bodily composition to cosmic origins. Understanding these ties is at the heart of cosmology, for “cosmology aims at articulating the story of the universe so that humans can enter fruitfully into the web of relationships within the universe” [italics added] (Swimme, 1992. p. 23). Swimme (1996) extends this notion of the “web of relationships” in his book The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos. He writes, “Our natural genetic inheritance presents us with the possibility of forming deeply bonded relationships throughout all ten million species of life as well as throughout the nonliving components of the universe” (p. 34).

Despite the fact that cosmology is scientifically based, the idea that “we are stardust” (Mitchell, 1970), might seem romantic or far-fetched. Even the great scientists
who paved the way for the universe story to unfold were not prepared to conceptualize the depth of their discoveries. In the case of Einstein we read that,

To everyone alive at the time, his equation would appear to be just some letters and a few numbers scrawled onto the page. But to Einstein they revealed something unbelievable about the universe as a whole.... Einstein was stunned into bafflement by what he was seeing” (Swimme, 1996. p 71).

Indeed even Swimme, upon sharing the information of the universe, was asked if he was using mind-altering drugs. But Swimme (1996) wisely points out that:

Some discoveries, precisely because they reveal an immense truth, are difficult to transmit (p. 4). ...I am not now suggesting a return to formal primitive life-styles, nor a rejection of technology, nor a romantic back-to-nature fantasy about abandoning the cities and living in communes. The first step is simple awareness. What we need is just the simple recognition that as we deprive ourselves and our children of direct contact with the numinous powers that fill the universe, we are choosing a diminished existence (p. 46).

Einstein’s amazement at his own theories and Swimme’s challenges in transmitting the new story of the universe exemplify the difficulty of comprehension at hand. The facts are available, but what they suggest might be somewhat unbelievable, just as they were to Einstein. But, unbelievable as they were, Einstein’s theories have carved crevices into many schools of scientific thought. Brian Swimme is not on drugs, but is simply expanding a crevice of perspective so that humans might become more aware, and thus more deeply connected to the essence of existence.
“What good can come from knowing our relationship to the universe?” asks Dr. Robert C. Fulford, (1996). Indeed, the theme seems like a stretch when attempting to connect concepts of the cosmos to, say, constipation. However, Fulford, an osteopath, illustrates the ties between knowledge of the universe to human health. He states that “Once we understand how nature functions, we appreciate it more, and a higher appreciation of nature leads to a better comprehension of our place in it, which in turn can only lead to a fuller understanding of our health” (p. 21). This holistic perspective of the universe, as presented through cosmology, is central to ecotherapy which strives to deepen and strengthen the connections between humans and the surrounding environment in an effort to enhance health and well being.

*Deep ecology*

Deep ecology is another branch of science that, like cosmology, has expanded upon this crevice of holistic scientific perspectives. Ecology itself “emerges from the biological sciences of natural environmental systems. It examines how these natural communities function to sustain a healthy web of life” (Adams, 1993. p. 13). This “healthy web of life” implies interconnectedness—a linking of one part of the web, or system, to another. This can be expanded through the concept of “systems thinking”. Capra (1996) states that,

According to the systems view, the essential properties of an organism, or living system, are properties of the whole, which none of the parts have. They arise from the interactions and relationships among the parts (p. 29).
This is a key concept to deep ecology where the focus lies in the “interactions and relationships among the parts”. The term “deep ecology” was coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess who made a clear distinction between shallow ecology and deep ecology (Capra, 1996). Capra describes the distinction between the two ecologies as follows:

Shallow ecology is anthropocentric, or human-centered. It views humans as above or outside of nature, as the source of all value, and ascribes only instrumental, or “use,” value to nature. Deep ecology does not separate humans—or anything else—from the natural environment. It sees the world not as a collection of isolated objects, but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life (p. 7).

The fundamental principles of deep ecology harmonize with those of cosmology in that both emphasize a core of connectedness—a break away from dichotomies between living systems to an integrated, related, and connected understanding of all living systems.

*Biophilia*

Biophilia is a physical example of human connectedness to other living systems. As noted earlier, Swimme (1992) makes clear our natural genetic inheritance presenting us with the possibility of forming deeply bonded relationships throughout all ten million species of life as well as throughout the nonliving components of the universe. This
notion of genetic inheritance is at the root of the biophilia hypothesis as proposed by E.O. Wilson. In his book *Biophilia*, Wilson (1984) asks:

What is it exactly that binds us so closely to living things? The biologist will tell you that life is the self-replication of giant molecules from lesser chemical fragments, resulting in the assembly of complex organic structures, the transfer of large amounts of molecular information, ingestion, growth, movement of an outwardly purposeful nature, and the proliferation of closely similar organisms. The poet-in-biologist will add that life is an exceedingly improbable state, metastable, open to other systems, thus ephemeral—and worth any price to keep (p. 84).

This passage illustrates the components of that genetic inheritance—that "transfer of large amounts of molecular information". In another book called *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, this concept is expressed as a biological need (Keller and Wilson, 1993).

*Biophilia*...sought to provide some understanding of how the human tendency to relate with life and natural processes might be the expression of a biological need, one that is integral to the human species’ developmental process and essential in physical and mental growth.... The biophilia hypothesis proclaims a human dependence on nature that extends far beyond the simple issues of material and physical sustenance to encompass as well the human craving for aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive, and even spiritual meaning and satisfaction (p. 20).

The biologist says life is the self replication of large molecules. *Biophilia* suggests that through this self replication, humans have inherited a biological need to relate with life
and natural processes (Keller and Wilson, 1993). This is a real shift in perspective when considering the component of “environment” and how humans relate to it. Health care literature often refers to “safe environments” or “sterile environments”, but never as a branching of our internal chemistry that impacts our overall health and well-being. Biophilia suggests just this.

Medical doctor Howard Frumkin examined this concept closely in a research article he wrote called “Beyond Toxicity: Human Health and the Natural Environment”. He says that “From an evolutionary perspective, a deep-seated connection with the natural world would be no surprise” (p. 234). Frumkin (2001) provided evidence that illustrated how interaction with animals, plants, landscapes, and wilderness experiences function to enhance health. The biophilia hypothesis aids in understanding ecotherapy by illustrating the biological need that humans have for interaction with the natural environment.

**Ecospirituality and Energy**

The spiritual dimension of human health is one that cannot be treated by writing a prescription. Yet, because humans are spiritual and biological beings, the health of the spirit influences overall physical health. Clinebell (1996) states: “Humans have been described as a strange blend of animal and angel, of dust and destiny” (p. 26). The manner in which these two dimensions of being undulate with each other is not well understood—it cannot be measured or examined under a microscope. There isn’t a scientific explanation for spirituality, and yet it exists within the matrix of all living things. This section of the literature review is not a philosophical or theological inquiry.
about what spirituality is, but rather an acknowledgment that spirituality is a dimension of humanity that strengthens human's connection to nature. This concept will be explored through cultural perspectives and various scientific and spiritual approaches to spirit, energy, and earth, to be finally understood as an ongoing interaction between the three. In his book *Ecotherapy: Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth*, Clinebell (1996) quotes Thomas Moore:

> He declares: “Our soul, the mystery we glimpse when we look deeply into ourselves, is part of a larger soul, the soul of the world, *anima mundi*.... Ecology is not earth science, it is home science; it has to do with cultivating a sense of home wherever we are…” (p. 95).

The concept of a deep spiritual relationship between humans and nature is not a new-age notion, but rather steeped with history and culture. In some cultures, physical ailments are viewed as a direct result of spiritual disharmony. Registered Nurse Dorothy Kleffel (1994) touches upon Native American and ancient worldviews:

> According to the ancient Greeks, Mother Earth interacts with and nourishes all creatures. If we serve her well, she gives us good things in return. If we treat her poorly, the balance tips resulting in famine, disease, disaster and death (Hughes, 1982) (p. 90).... Traditional Native Americans believed in the kinship of all things in a type of universal relatedness which is part of the Great Spirit...it was believed that disease and calamity result if these reciprocal relationships and interactions do not take place (Booth and Jacobs, 1990) (p. 91).
These old beliefs still hold merit, even if not recognized by modern medical practitioners. It’s not a “Pinocchio-perspective” that suggests that if one sins they will experience an abnormal growth of the nose. Spiritual health is not a judge of character that reflects physical punishments for disobedience to a deity by any means. Rather it is a dimension of human health that asks the questions: “Is your life balanced between giving and receiving? Do you have hope? What is the source of your hope and strength? What is it that stirs your soul and makes your life meaningful?” In the above passage, Kleffel (1994) relates connections between health and one’s relationship with Earth. As seen from these examples, spirit is not separate from nature, nor body from spirit, nor nature from body. All three are known as aspects of the Self and swirl into the essence of breath and being, of growth and healing.

Parallel paradigms are seen in the traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, but these traditions also highlight a strong sense of an all-pervading energy that flows through spirit, body, and nature. Fulford (1996) writes: “Outside the West, this concept of vital energy has been accepted for thousand of years. The Chinese call it chi, the Japanese call it ki, and the Hindus prana. Unfortunately in America we really don’t have a name for it” (p. 27). Kalton (1998) offers a western counterpart for the East Asian concept of ch’i, “…in Greek it would be pneuma, in Latin, spiritus. Both pneuma and spiritus originally had to do with wind, hence air, breath, the breath of life, the force of vitality, and the power of feelings” (p. 88). In a sense, this vital energy or breath is a universal theme across the spectrum of cultural beliefs that there is an essence that stirs amid and within living beings, whether this be in the form of a Holy Spirit, vital life
force, breath of life, ch’i, etc. Through breath, humans are connected to energy, which is connected to nature, which breathes in its own way, through cellular respiration and photosynthesis. Cummings (1991) comments on this blending of soil, breath, and body:

To illustrate the extent to which life forms interdepend and even participate in one another biophysically, Ken Wilber explains: “Ninety-eight percent of our body’s atoms are replaced annually. Each time we breathe, we take in a quatrillion [sic] atoms breathed by the rest of the human race within the past two weeks... even while we live, we are constantly returning to earth, constantly engaged in a tremendous exchange, a cooperative partnership...” (p. 63).

To expand on this notion, We Ming (1998) states that nature,

...is the result of the fusion and intermingling of the vital force that assumes tangible forms. Mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, animals, and human beings are all modalities of energy-matter.... Forming one body with the universe can literally mean that since all modalities of being are made of ch’i, human life is part of a continuous flow of the blood and breath that constitutes the cosmic process. Human beings are thus organically connected with rocks, trees, and animals (p. 113).

To summarize, human spirituality flows along currents of energy—these gusts of ch’i, prana, quanta, breath of life, etc. These gusts swirl around and seep into the cells and elements of all things, thus engaging humans and nature in a creative and meaningful conversation of both spiritual and biological dialects. Joyce Rupp (2002) refers to this conversation as a “dance”: 
When I was young, I presumed that each element of the universe was isolated from the other... It was not until much later in life that I read the theories of great scientists such as Neils Bohr, Albert Einstein, Max Planck, Arthur Koestler, and others who developed the understanding that everything in existence consists of light and heat particles or waves that are constantly in motion.

These scientists referred to the light and heat of each piece of existence as packets of energy which were termed “quanta”. It is these energy packets that are alive, interactive, and interrelated to one another, always moving, always involved in a constant dance of existence. They may look like they are self contained in an animal, a human, a seashell, or a piece of metal but their patterns of movement can and do flow freely as in a dance. They can be changed or transformed by being in relationship to other particles in existence... Kentucky farmer and author Wendell Berry put it this way: “The world that environs us, is also within us. We are also made of it; we eat, drink and breathe it; it is home of our home and flesh of our flesh.” (p. 17).

With regard to energy, spirituality, and nursing Martha Rogers states: “...it should be emphasized that people are energy fields. They do not have them” (Barrett, 1990. p. 6). Thus, it is imperative that nurses assess a client’s spirituality and relationship with nature, as these all impact a client’s health and well being. This assessment process is a critical step in the practice of ecotherapy.
So far this literature review has explored the areas of cosmology, biophilia, deep ecology, ecospirituality, and energy, as these are the fields in which ecotherapy is rooted. From these fields the principles of connectedness, holism, biological instinct, spirituality, and energy fuel the principle of ecotherapy. Thus, ecotherapy aims to promote the health and growth of person and planet via reciprocal nurturing interactions between humans and the earth. This is achieved through the application of a functional model called the ecological circle (Clinebell, 1996). This summary will explore the ecological circle, and discuss the manner in which it can be applied in clinical settings. However, before approaching the dimensions of the ecological circle, it should be emphasized that ecotherapy first seeks to acknowledge the relationship between person and planet. Unfortunately, this relationship is often overlooked when assessing one’s health and well-being. Consider the following passage by Howard Clinebell (1996), author of Ecotherapy: Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth:

If a fish were able to develop a theory of fish existence, it probably would not focus attention on how being continually immersed in water influences everything else about “fishness.” In a similar way, the profound, lifelong human rootedness in the earth is so basic that people usually do not examine this crucial aspect of their lives critically…. Thus, our relationship with the earth, mother-father of all living things, is an often ignored but foundational factor influencing our overall wellness and the wholeness of our identity (p. 27).
The practice of ecotherapy aims to reverse this trend by acknowledging and celebrating the intimate ways in which humans are tied to Earth biologically and spiritually, enabling people "to accept their continual dependency on nature as crucial for the well-being of themselves and the earth" (Clinebell, 1996 p. 33).

The person/planet relationship is strengthened through the three dimensions of the ecological circle of ecotherapy. Clinebell (1996) summarizes the three dimensions of the ecological circle as follows:

The three dimensions could be called inreach, upreach, and outreach... inreach means opening ourselves to be more intentionally nurtured by nature. Upreach refers to the energizing spiritual awareness that can motivate and empower us to engage in the often difficult tasks of outreach. Outreach means participating with others in action that will help save the planet... Furthermore, earth-caring and people-caring are two sides of the same process in that together they may enhance wellness in ourselves, in other people, and in our living environment (p. 9).

To apply these dimensions in a clinical setting, one begins with an ecoassessment. The assessment might be in the form of a written evaluation, or through verbal open-ended questions in a therapeutic setting (see Appendix A to view a sample Ecological Wellness Checkup as designed by Clinebell, 1996, pp. 173-177). The goal is to acquire an overview of the client’s relationship with nature—internalized images, attitudes, and feelings about nature, as these areas impact how one relates with nature (Clinebell, 1996).
After completing an ecological assessment, a client may begin the ecotherapy process. Clinebell (1996) suggests five steps inherent to the ecotherapy process. These steps include:

1) Inviting people to tell their ecological story.

2) Helping clients to express both their painful and positive feelings about their natural environment.

3) Encouraging clients to strengthen their sense of organic connectedness with the natural world by intentionally opening themselves to be nurtured by nature more often and in more depth.

4) Encouraging clients to reciprocate by earth-caring actions.

5) Encouraging people to develop a self-care fitness plan that includes a robust earth-caring dimension (p. 177-185).

By following these steps, one is able to reap the benefits of the healing properties available through interactions with nature. The following rationales and suggestions pertain to the five steps listed above.

Steps one and two easily flow together but are important to examine individually.

By inviting clients to tell their ecological story, Clinebell (1996) states that this step:

…serves to throw diagnostic light on ecoalienation and ecobonding… The individual’s story may well begin with earliest memories of nature and how nature has influenced the person’s life at each subsequent stage including the present (p. 177).
The client might be able to engage in this exercise by writing their ecostory, or sharing it in small groups (Clinebell, 1996). Remaining aware of one’s feelings about the ecostory helps to clarify attitudes toward nature that affect one’s lifestyle. This also pertains to step two and the expression of one’s painful and positive feelings about their natural environment (Clinebell, 1996). Methods by which a client might be able to evaluate their feelings might be to take an “ecological wellness check-up” (again, found in Appendix A), or again through storytelling. The rationale behind this second step is provided by Clinebell (1996): “It is very important to validate people’s painful reality-based feelings as appropriate and also to affirm the inner strength required to face rather than simply ignore the present ecological reality” (p. 180). By telling one’s ecological story and by becoming aware of the feelings and attitudes related to that story, a client is provided with a solid base from which to better understand where one is coming from, and where one wishes to go with their therapy.

Step three strikes the central premise of ecotherapy: encouraging clients to be nurtured by nature more often and more in depth (Clinebell, 1996). By putting this step to practice, clients not only become reconnected with Earth, but expand that sense of connectedness and belonging to their surrounding communities, family, and self. Clinebell (1996) points out that “It is an important step toward healing when people become aware that a major source of their pain in living is their caring about the suffering earth and their own violated connection with it” (p. 180). There are many different exercises that promote such nurturing found in literature that pertain to medicine tasks,
nature walks, or vision quests, but this might also be achieved simply by spending silent time in the wild.

The circle of healing becomes complete through step four: the application of Earth-caring actions. Although on the surface this may seem to distract from the internal needs of the patient, it’s important to remember that one’s internal needs are connected to environmental needs. Clinebell (1996) extends the benefits of Earth-caring actions to the psychological realm: “Psychologically, loving anything—a person, a cause, or a thing—and actively caring for it are mutually reinforcing dynamics. Each enhances the other” (p. 182). With resources such as the World Wide Web literally at the fingertips of many, it’s fairly easy to find organizations that promote Earth-caring activities. A simple way to begin might take place right in the home, or at the work place, by recycling, conserving energy, walking or biking in the place of driving, or starting a garden, all the while keeping in mind that as one tends to the environment they are also tending to one’s internal needs.

Nurses are extensively familiar with the concept of step five as patient care—whether in a hospital, home, or community setting—revolves around the nursing process and care plans. Creating a care plan (step five) ties steps one through four together in a creative action plan where health and healing can take place.

This summary has reviewed the basic goals of ecotherapy and the clinical methods that might be utilized in setting the ecotherapy process to motion. Literature pertaining to ecotherapy include the passages and thoughts brought forth in the literature review. By reviewing cosmology, deep ecology, biophilia, ecospirituality, and energy,
the fundamental principals of ecotherapy are inspired and understood: people and planet are inextricably linked (Lincoln, 2000), and thus one's health is woven into the greater health of the globe. By practicing ecotherapy, this link is realized, strengthened, and celebrated, and change is created in the journey toward enhance health for both person and planet. From the information shared in this literature review, and from the following data expressed in the following section regarding the phenomenological study as conducted by the researcher, it is the hope that both nurses and others interested in enhancing personal health might consider the benefits of ecotherapy, and feel equipped and inspired to use the ecotherapy process to reach this goal.

Phenomenological Study

The following is a presentation of a phenomenological study conducted by the researcher that examines the lived experience of six co-participants who share experiences of healing and connectedness with nature. These co-participants disclose information regarding physical, social, psychological, and spiritual health as impacted by interaction with the natural environment; beliefs regarding humans' relationship to Earth; and beliefs regarding possible connections between human health and environmental health. This section will cover methods and data collection, description of the researcher's role, analysis techniques, and limitations of the study.

Methods and Data Collection

The co-participants engaged in this study formed a purposive sample, as desired by the researcher. A purposive sample "involves the conscious selection by the researcher of certain subjects or elements to include in the study" (Burns and Grove,
The researcher invited six co-participants known to the researcher to have experienced extensive interaction with the natural environment, as “this sampling method may be a way to get some beginning ideas about an area not easily examined with other sampling techniques” (Burns and Grove, 1999, p. 242). All six agreed to participate in the study. The sample consisted of three women and three men ranging in age from their early twenties to late thirties.

Questionnaires were utilized to retrieve data from co-participants in this study. According to Burns and Grove (1999) “A questionnaire is a printed self-report form designed to elicit information that can be obtained through written or verbal responses of the subjects” (p. 272). The questionnaires were created and sent by the researcher to the six co-participants, from which the researcher received a response rate of one hundred percent. The questionnaires consisted of six questions pertaining to the ways in which interaction with the natural environment impacted their personal health and well-being, and elicited opinions regarding the nature of, or lack of, a human/Earth relationship. The questions were open-ended and co-participants were invited to be as thorough or brief as they felt necessary (see Appendix B for a complete sample of the questionnaire packet). Participants were ensured confidentiality and encouraged to contact the researcher if questions ensued. Completed questionnaires were then mailed back to the researcher for data collection and analysis.

**Description of the Researcher’s Role**

The researcher’s role in this phenomenological study involved three key practices that will be reviewed in this section. These include: maintenance of unbiased position;
application of rigor; and adhering to the three stages of analysis which are description, analysis, and interpretation.

Before the study began, the researcher spent extensive time exploring her opinions and feelings regarding the nature of the content to be explored through the processes of regular journal writing and through the guidance of a mentor. Mentor Valerie Lincoln PhD, RN, HNC, has over twenty-five years of clinical and leadership experience in healthcare, more than fifteen years of experience in holistic healing, and is the founder of the organization HealingWorks. The researcher’s goal was to remain unbiased when writing questionnaires and analyzing data. According to Burns and Grove (1999): “The term bias means a slant or deviation from the true or expected. Bias in a study distorts the findings from what the results would have been without the bias” (p. 188). It was the researcher’s aim to present true, undistorted findings from the co-participant’s data.

Rigor is an application that supports unbiased interference, and strengthens validity of research findings. In a qualitative study such as this, “Rigor is associated with openness, scrupulous adherence to a philosophical perspective, thoroughness in collecting data, and consideration of all of the data in the subjective theory development phase” (Burns and Grove, 1999, p. 372). Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained all of these criteria to the best of her ability, while enforcing this practice with an unbiased approach. She did this by spending adequate time collecting data, carefully considering all obtained data, approaching data from various angles, reviewing and re-reviewing data, and seeking clarification of all vague findings with co-participants.
The role of the researcher at the point of data analysis involved specific actions within the descriptive, analytical, and interpretive phases. During the descriptive phase, the researcher became familiar with the data by reading and re-reading responses multiple times to the point where the researcher felt immersed in the data. "In phenomenology, this immersion in the data is referred to as 'dwelling with the data'" (Burns and Grove, 1999, p. 360). In the analytical phase, the researcher continued to explore personal feelings and experiences that she felt might influence the study through the process of reflexive thought (Burns and Grove, 1999). With the results of reflexive thought, the researcher used bracketing to "avoid misinterpreting the phenomenon as it is being experienced by the participants. Bracketing is suspending or laying aside what the researcher knows about the experience being studied" (p. 362). Bracketing was achieved through journaling, objective approaches, and conscious self awareness (Burns and Grove 1999). This enabled the researcher to maintain neutrality throughout the analysis process. The researcher then interpreted the core information extrapolated from each co-participant, and any patterns or themes that arose among those responses through the following processes.

*Analysis Techniques*

Again, the researcher spent ample time exploring her personal thoughts and beliefs before, during, and after data collection. After "dwelling with the data," the researcher used a system of coding to identify themes and organize data. According to Burns and Grove (1999), there are several coding strategies:
One...is to use highlighter pens, with a different color for each major category. Another...is to assign each major category a number... Knafl and Webster (1988) suggest using colored markers, paper clips, index cards, or self-adhesive stickers to identify categories of data (p. 364).

Burns and Grove (1999) describe coding as, "essentially a way of indexing or identifying categories in the data" (p. 368). Because categories naturally emerged from the format of the questionnaire, the researcher coded categories within those larger sections as patterns appeared. Categories were delineated with the use of note cards and highlighter pens, and were later transcribed to computer organization.

Limitations of the Study

The limits of the study are seeded in the very nature of the study, and within the minimal experience of the researcher. The researcher is a novice in the field of qualitative research and does not obtain mastery of skill to execute a thorough study. Phenomenology explores the lived experience of participants. Therefore, it cannot be generalized to greater populations or realized as "truth." Another limit to the study lies in the type of sampling utilized. Purposive sampling "has been criticized because there is no way to evaluate the precision of the researcher's judgment" (Burns and Grove, 1999, p. 242). This limitation, coupled with the nature of the study solely captures a selected participant's experience, making the information unique to that moment of being-in-time.

Findings

The literature review explored human/Earth connections through the fields of cosmology, deep ecology, biophilia, ecospirituality, and energy. Within this
phenomenological study, co-participants shared testimonies of enhanced health and well-being as experienced through interaction with nature. Some responses echo the theses from the literature review, while other responses offer new insights. The Co-participants responded to the following categories as solicited in the questionnaire (see Appendix B): physical, social, psychological, and spiritual health as impacted by interaction with the natural environment; beliefs regarding humans’ relationship to Earth; and beliefs regarding possible connections between human health and environmental health. Co-participants were given space to expand on experiences, as well as time to thoroughly reflect upon and document such experiences. Some individual experiences are shared in this document, though the core of communication is focused on the collective experience—the common thread woven through each category from each co-participant. The first of these is physical health as impacted by interaction with the natural environment.

*Physical Health*

The domain of physical health is subject to the physical body and the systems that comprise it: the cardiovascular system, respiratory, gastrointestinal, nervous systems, etc. Co-participants shared ways in which their interaction with the natural environment impacted their physical selves. Themes that emerged between varying participants include: increased physical exercise and strength in the outdoors; decreased appetite; increased relaxation; and a general feeling of being more alive/healthier. Two participants offered an opposing report of decreased requirements for sleep, and a feeling of drowsiness.
Three co-participants reported increased strength and exercise, and a general feeling of being more alive/healthier in the outdoors. Regarding the topic of exercise, the question arose—does one exercise in the outdoors in order to feel stronger/healthier, or does one exercise outside because they feel stronger/healthier outside (as opposed to exercising in an indoor gym). One co-participant stated: “I find that when I work and live and relax more closely with the earth my whole well-being is improved. I feel cleaner, my lungs feel clear and fresh, my mind less cluttered, my heart strong, my skin healthy...” This co-participant illuminates the experience of enhanced well-being through her closeness to the earth.

A decrease in appetite was reported by two co-participants. One explained this as a way of “deleting” over consumption. She states:

Animals in the wild don’t tend to ‘over’ eat or sleep. The whole system keeps itself healthy and in check. Experiencing that as a human has had a huge impact on my physical health, my bodily rhythms are closer to that of the day, the stars and planets, the seasons... etc.—when I’m in nature. I am fed by the beauty around me and not by the compulsion to consume.

The above statement intertwines aesthetic experiences that have physical consequences, which is an important factor to consider when assessing one’s physical health. One then questions, how much of remaining physically healthy is more a chore than a joy, and what scenario helps one maximize the joy and benefits from physical activity? From the above passage, the ideal scenario for this co-participant is “in nature.”
“Relax” was a keyword expressed by two co-participants. One stated: “I notice deeper breathing, generally more relaxed and my appetite decreases.”

Another co-participant shared an experience of an accelerated healing of a sprained ankle after sleeping in the outdoors. She states, “I woke up and my ankle had shrunk by almost half after over a week of being the same size and bigger. Was it the natural environment? If not, it was a lovely coincidence!”

The topic of environmental pollutants was addressed by one co-participant who stated: “In a negative way, overly-chlorinated water and polluted air has affected my well-being physically…” This too, is an important area to consider when assessing physical consequences from outdoor activity. Exposure to environmental pollutants also impact one’s degree of ecobonding, and overall attitude toward the environment. If the environment is not healthy, it’s difficult to feel personally healthy.

**Social Health**

On the topic of social health, the dialogue spoke of both the blessings and burdens that interaction with nature provoked. The common sentiment among various co-participants included feelings of disconnection with society after spending time in nature, to feelings of rejuvenation for community and relationships.

Half of the co-participants reported relationships that had been strengthened by spending time together in nature. One co-participant stated,

Some of my best relationships with friends have been formed in the outdoors. I feel that it is one of the best settings to connect with people...free from distractions, lots of stimulation from the vibrancy of plants, trees, and grasses, as
well as exciting interaction with birds and animals... Hiking or walking has been one of the greatest facilitators for processing and communicating with friends, lovers, family, etc."

This feeling of strengthened relationships was coupled with a feeling of disconnection with other relationships when it came time to "come back" or "get back home."

Although co-participants reported feeling disconnected, they also reported a feeling of rejuvenation, enhanced ability to communicate, gained perspective, and an overall enhanced ability to interact with society after spending alone time in nature.

Another dynamic dialogue was found in the space of nature as a form of escape from society versus a place to strengthen society. Nature was considered a place to retreat "from oppressive social systems," or a great place to "regain perspective on community living." For some, the time spent in nature helped to reduce stress, and facilitate a "more 'open' ability to communicate," therefore improving relationships within the work place and at home. Two co-participants extended this sense of society to the "non-human" society, being nature itself. One combined enhanced physical health with enhanced social health. This is very appropriate as a holistic approach examines the ways in which each dimension of health impacts the other—this study simply includes the natural environment into that approach.

**Psychological Health**

Psychological health is another area in which the multi-layered dimensions of health influence the other. Within the psychological realm, two-thirds of the co-participants reported a feeling of liberation and release. Half related this release to levels
of stress. No doubt, stress is a potent force in daily living that can be both healthy and detrimental. Co-participants addressed the more detrimental stress and shared ways in which interacting with nature helped them to cope with their stress. One co-participant writes: “When I have stress in my life and I am intentional about having positive interactions with my environment and society, my stress level generally is reduced or is more manageable.”

Perhaps related to reduced stress levels was the reported sense of enhanced clarity and gained perspective. This was reported by half of the co-participants who related that time spent in nature helped to clarify mental perspective, current and past events, and stimulated dreams for the future. Accompanying this sense of clarity was a sense of humility—it was humbling, refreshing, and liberating to be in the outdoors.

Another dimension of psychological health that was enhanced by two co-participants was the dimension of self-esteem and self-confidence. One co-participant pointed out that when in nature “it is such a pleasure to have nothing to depend on but me and my own two feet and to be surrounded by nothing but reflections of perfect beauty and balance.” The physical challenges faced when interacting with nature gave them a better appreciation for their bodies, their abilities, and their sense of connectedness versus isolation with the rest of the world.

Although these examples have shown benefits of interaction with nature, it cannot be ignored that such an activity can pose threatening as well. One co-participant shared an experience in which she felt intense anxiety and fear of potential danger in the wilderness:
Recently I have had a traumatic experience in the wilderness—a sleepless night spent in fear of large animals heard but not seen. I definitely felt a lot of anxiety (albeit irrational) and fear. I can only hope that I will have enough future experiences that are affirming psychologically so that my memory of that experience will fade.

*Spiritual Health*

This is the realm of health and well-being in which the essence of universal connectedness is rooted. This concept was explored in the literature review, and was shared in the experiences of five out of the six co-participants. This sense of connectedness fostered a sense of belonging among co-participants to the rest of the natural world that they were experiencing. One referred to nature as an “immense quiet and natural order of perfection” where they were able to feel “the greatest sense of connection to all of creation.” Another felt the connection to “all the elements of this earth” whereas another felt the interconnectedness “of all living things.” One expressed it this way:

...I think I’m pretty close to experiencing God as my own Self when I’m connected in any sense. When I’m connected and my thoughts and thinking are clear, as often happens in the natural environment, I see that I am everything and everything is me and we’re all God.

Embedded within this feeling of connectedness, three co-participants commented upon an absence of human limitations within the natural environment, such as greed, malice, judgment, etc. One co-participant stated that her belief in God/a Creator was
affirmed in part by her sense of “other creatures who are not aware of greed and so many other human ailments.” Another reported: “In nature everything in my experience is based on freedom and non judgmental patterns. A bear doesn’t have the same self image patterns as a human, and that is a ‘kind’ possibility to me.”

With regard to a sense of connection with a higher power, two co-participants expressed a deeper sense of dialogue with, or a presence of God in the natural environment. One felt that he was better able to communicate with God “when in a natural environment. It is easier for me to listen of the answers to my prayers when I can get in touch with nature.” Another stated that he “discovered the presence of God (god, goddess, creator) the most profoundly in the wilderness.” This reflects much of what was discussed within the literature review and speaks to the core of ecotherapy—that essence which ties humans to Earth in a “deep ecology” or deep rootedness—a feeling that one is coming home.

Beliefs Regarding Human’s Relationship to Earth

Pervading themes among half of the co-participants were those of giving, respect, and change. It was felt that humans carry an attitude of control, that humans use resources irresponsibly, and that human’s relationship with the earth “needs to change drastically for the survival of us and the earth.” One co-participant suggested: “our fear must be rooted out from within if there is ever going to be peace, harmony and anything resembling a sustainable co-existence.” Fear was accompanied by the issue of disrespect that humans have for themselves and the earth. Participant’s responses transmitted beliefs that humans need the earth and its resources, but that “the earth would probably be
better off without homo sapiens!” Opinions of “hubris and self-centered fear”, feelings of control, and disrespect were voiced as deterrents within the human/nature relationship which needed to be changed.

*Opinions Regarding Human/Environmental Health/Ailments*

Four of the six co-participants conveyed connectedness between humans and the earth. They linked ailments within the earth as directly connected to, if not caused by human ailments. Three alluded to human’s disproportionate place within the human/environment relationship. One co-participant explained:

The interconnection of suffering is all around us. We are hurting inside—spiritually, physically, and emotionally, and this suffering is caused from our lifestyles—our lifestyles come from capitalism and overconsumption [sic]—this deals with taking more from the earth than we need, from creating hierarchy over nature.

Another echoed this feeling of a disproportionate relationship with nature: “I already feel like I’ve been more the recipient than the giver of nurturing.” These participants convey a sense of cyclic suffering between earth and humans—as humans disrespect and abuse, so the earth suffers and is depleted of its resources and is further unable to sustain human life. Another co-participant explains this, but also points out the nurturing cycle that can take place:

Our earth is in crisis right now, as is the human population—it’s all connected, with the oil spills, wars, starvation, pesticides. Caring for each other means caring for the earth and vice verse. Similarly, when we “nurture the environment”
by eating low on the food chain, and organically, not driving, using alternative, renewable energies, and so much more, our bodies and minds and hearts are nurtured as well. Experiences in nature (hiking, sitting on the beach, planting a garden) feel good and lead us to make more effort to care for the earth. It’s a cycle.... la!

Another also offered a note of hope: “I do think that since we are part of nature we can have a mutually beneficial relationship with it.” The responses provided from these co-participants resonate with the information found in the literature review and pertain to the essence of ecotherapy in that there is an overall sense of connectedness between humans and the planet that can lead to either decreased or enhanced health and well-being.

Conclusion

The wonders of creation have been boiling for billions of years. In this present scientific era, curiosities have probed into this story of creation, disclosing truths from thaumaturgical events—extrapolating decibels from song, cells from skin, atoms from air, all in attempts to understand the phenomena of life. Information has pushed the bounds of knowledge deep into the matrix of being, far beyond what many can’t even imagine. One thing is certain, and is becoming clearer as science continues searching, which is the undeniable dependence humans have upon the natural environment. Fundamentally it is clear—humans need air to breathe and nutrients to grow, but science is discovering that this dependence is rooted deeper, extending the family tree of homo sapiens to the very matrimony of elements and the rise of Aries, the first living cell (Swimme & Berry, 1992), helping humans better understand the world in which they
dwell every day. "The gift of the scientific venture is the capacity to see what was here all along. The birthplace of the universe, where existence first sprang forth, is fifteen billion light years from the Earth" (Swimme, 1996). Fifteen billion light years later, ecological investigations are bringing humans "home": "The word ecology itself points to this: the Greek root oikos (from which eco is derived) means home" (Clinebell, 1996, p. 56).

Thus, ecotherapy might be considered "home" therapy—a family reunion of sorts that nourishes the body and rejuvenates the spirit. Labyrinthine lifestyles of the twenty-first century have led humanity around bends and curves of modern conveniences that have farther removed humans from that which is most fundamental—the earth. Ecotherapy aims to realign meandering modern lifestyles with the healing and enriching resources of the natural environment, so that both person and planet might experience enhanced health and well-being. The information generated within the literature review, and the testimonies of the six co-participants in the phenomenological study explored in this paper support this goal and call for such an exercise. Ecotherapy can be utilized by nurses within the realm of holistic care as therapy both for clients, and for themselves. Not only does the practice of ecotherapy embrace a holistic paradigm, but it actively re-integrates humans with nature in spiritual, social, psychological, and spiritual levels. As a nursing student, the researcher feels that the human/Earth connection is a vital component to consider when assessing the health and well-being of clients. The practice of ecotherapy creates a space to examine such a relationship, and offers creative interventions that promote health and well-being. It is the researcher's hope that
ecotherapy might be explored further by health care professionals and therapists, and that both professionals and patients might embrace the experience of “coming home.”
Appendix A

An Ecological Wellness Checkup
An Ecological Wellness Checkup (Clinebell, 1996, p. 173-177).

Instructions: In front of each item write one of three initials:
E: I am doing Excellent in this area.
OK: I am doing OK but there is definitely room for improvement.
NS: My life and lifestyle definitely Need Strengthening in this area.
Ignore those items that do not seem relevant to your situation.

I love the natural world and feel a deep connection with the wonderful network of living beings of which I am a tiny but significant part.

I find healing energy and sometimes joy in getting close to plants, animals, and beautiful places in nature.

Being in forests or mountains, or by unspoiled rivers, lakes, oceans, or in wilderness places, brings me refreshing renewal.

Being in wild nature or near wild animals does not arouse inappropriate anxieties in me. Rather it stimulates my inner connection with my own creative inner wildness.

I know how to open myself to be nurtured by nature, even when I am in a city, in a park, garden, or near a tree or growing plant or a blooming window box.

I feel stirrings of pain in my body-mind-spirit organism when I'm in a polluted place dominated by environmental ugliness.

I know how to protect myself from the violence of nature—for example, tornadoes, floods, or earthquakes—without being paralyzed by fear.

I know how to "ground" my body and my grief and pain, when these occur, in awareness of the dependable supportiveness of the earth.

I like to share the enjoyment of nature with the people I love. Sometimes we experience our love being deepened by such sharing.

I am aware that my own and my family's levels of wellness, at any given time, are inextricably interwoven with the level of wellness of our place in the natural world, as well as the wellness of the society around us.

I regularly examine my lifestyle and the values that guide it, and make changes to enable these to express more fully my loving respect for the health of the environment. I often make such changes even when they require sacrifices.

I know that there are no individualistic solutions to the societal causes of the ecological crisis. So, in addition to my personal ecological changes, I work for political and economic justice. I choose to be politically involved in efforts to help heal the planet—for example, by voting only for candidates who favor strong local, national, and international programs of justice and earth-caring.

I have a solid support group of friends, family, and others who share my passion for loving the earth by caring for it individually and collectively.

My spiritual life is enriched with aliveness both when I open myself to be nurtured by nature and when I engage in action to help save a healthy earth for all living creatures. I often experience the lift of spiritual awe when I become aware of the mystery and wonder of nature and of the eon-spanning process of continuing creation called evolution.

My sense of partnership with God in working for a world of wholeness is a source of hope, challenge, and serenity in what is sometimes frustrating earth-caring work.

I practice ways of enhancing the love of life that is at my spiritual core, making this love the primary energy source for planet-loving work, rather than guilt or fear.
I am seeking the continuing growth of my spirituality and value commitments to make them more bridge-building with those in different faiths, nations, races, languages, and cultures. I cherish the awareness that they are sisters or brothers in one species, the global human family, and much-needed potential partners in saving the biosphere.

People-caring and earth-caring are interdependent and mutually reinforcing processes for me, beginning in my home and community, but reaching out to the larger national and international levels. I experience a sense of caring, compassionate relatedness with both people and nature when they are suffering.

I know that the dream of saving a viable planet can only be realized by mobilizing broad international, intercultural, and interreligious collaboration.

My ways of expressing my love for and loyalty to my own country do not contradict my more inclusive love for and loyalty to the well-being of the biosphere and of the whole human family. I know that my nation's long-term wellness can be protected and enhanced only if the wellness of other nations also is protected and enhanced.

I try to stay current and knowledgeable about the complex, rapidly changing global ecojustice crisis and the creative ways being developed to help resolve it.

I am aware that earth-caring and peacemaking are two interdependent sides of the same earth-healing process.

I am actively involved in working in and/or supporting financially some local, national, and international groups committed to healing and protecting the natural environment.

When I observe or see photographs of violence against women, children, nature, or animals, I experience intense feelings such as anger, grief, guilt, and commitment to help prevent such violence. And I use these feelings to motivate me to engage in constructive geojustice and peacemaking action.

I am aware that among the social causes of escalating damage to the whole planet's environment are the widening chasm between rich and poor nations, the population explosion, most pronounced in poor countries, lifestyles of unfair consumption in affluent countries, and the tragic resource waste of the planetwide arms race.

I recognize that violence against Mother-Father nature and against persons socially defined as lesser, weaker, or "other"—for example, women, children, minorities—is rooted in some of the same psychosocial causes, injustices, and inequities of power, prestige, and property.

The nurture I receive from nature is healing and valuable in itself, it also provides energy for preventing burnout and sustaining earth-caring and peacemaking when the going ahead is difficult.

Whenever I experience feelings of despair, denial, and powerlessness concerning the enormous, complicated ecojustice problems, I use methods for transforming these numbing feelings so as to recover the hope and energy required to do effective earth-caring and justice-making.

I often use my sense of humor and laugh with my earth-caring and peacemaking partners as a pressure release valve and an energy renewing method for ecoaction.

I am practicing parenting and friending for peace, justice, and eco-logical wellness in my family, extended family, and other close relationships.

I am finding ways to practice earth-caring, peace-nurturing, and justice-making in my work, my social life, and my faith community—ways that enable me to think and act both locally and globally.
I am seeking a hopeful image of a transformed future of eco-wellness for the planet. I sense that this vision lures me toward such a future and helps energize and guide my ecojustice action.

I resist taking long checkups like this one, particularly if they threaten to increase my guilt for not doing more for a cause in which I believe fervently. (If so, welcome to the club! If you avoided taking the checkup, let me encourage you now to quickly scan the list and note the items that seem especially important to you.)

**Instructions for using your findings:** To gain the most from what the checkup has enabled you to discover, follow these steps. The slash mark (/) means to pause while you do what has been recommended.

1. Be aware of how you felt while taking the checkup and reflect on what you have learned from the experience. /

2. Scan the initials you placed in front of the checkup items and get an overall impression concerning the well-being of your lifestyle as it relates to the health of the environment and society. / Discuss what you learned with a friend, family member, therapist, teacher, or group member, depending on the context in which you are using the checkup. /

3. Affirm yourself for items that you honestly scored E. / Write two lists of items you scored either OK or NS (Needs Strengthening). These are areas in which you and the earth can benefit most from your constructive changes. / Now select not more than three items that seem particularly important to you and to your "place" on the earth. / Beside these items, jot down your thoughts concerning what you need to do to enhance your wholeness in these areas. This is your "to do" list. /

4. Write out a Self-Earth Care Plan responding to the items you have selected. / In your imagination, picture yourself implementing your plan effectively, in spite of resistances within yourself, in other people, and in institutional structures. / Share your plan with a friend, family member, teacher, therapist, group, or class to receive critical but friendly feedback and suggestions for improving it. /

5. Implement one part of your plan, keeping notes about what you learn in the process about caring better for yourself by caring for the earth. If your efforts fail, waste no time with self-punishing guilt feelings and post-mortems. Instead go back and redesign the plan to make it more workable. / Be sure to reward yourself for each step you take toward implementing your plan. /

6. After implementing one part of your plan, repeat these steps with another item on your "to do" lists.
Appendix B

Co-participant Questionnaire
Appendix B

Questionnaire utilized in phenomenological study:

1. How has interaction with the natural environment impacted your PHYSICAL health and well-being (ex: your respiratory system, heart rate/cardiovascular system, digestive system, musculoskeletal system, etc.)?

2. How has interaction with the natural environment impacted you SOCIAL health and well-being (ex: relations with your community, family, friends, co-workers, support systems, etc.)?

3. How has interaction with the natural environment impacted your PSYCHOLOGICAL health and well-being (ex: life stressors; normal coping patterns; thought patterns; feelings of fear, anxiety, guilt, depression, etc; moods; sleep; sense of control; use of mind altering substances; outlook on life; self-esteem, body image; etc.)?

4. How has interaction with the natural environment impacted your SPIRITUAL health and well-being (ex: source of strength and hope, concept of higher power, individual perception of faith, feeling of connectedness/a common bond, religious spiritual practices, meaning of life, etc.)?

5. What are your beliefs regarding human’s relationship to the earth (for example: “I believe the earth is here to meet all of human’s needs…” or “I believe humans and the earth need each other…” or “What Earth?” or “Earth is our life source…” etc.)?

6. Do you see a connection between ailments of the earth and human ailments? And on the flip side, do you see a connection between nurturing the environment while also being nurtured by the environment? If so, could you describe/explain the connection you see?

Thank-you for your time and shared words. Below please write any questions, concerns, comments, suggestions, or further contacts/resources that might aid in this research process.
References


