An Exploratory Study of the Use of Metaphor in the Practice of Ecotherapy

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Statement

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the underlying mechanisms inherent to the interaction between human beings and the natural environment. Using an exploratory approach, the study aimed to uncover conceptual understandings of the Ecotherapy process.

As a platform for deeper investigation, the metaphor as a narrative symbol presented by participants was offered for interpretation. Using the transcript of an anonymous participant's experience during an ecotherapy trail, four trained ecotherapy facilitators from the National Peace Accord Trust provided open interpretations of the underlying mechanisms of the process.

From an analysis of selected excerpts presented by participating facilitators, key themes are introduced and discussed as source of interest for future research. Predominant themes that emerge from the study are the significance of symbolism, the notion of embodiment, the continuum in the process of connection as well as existence of a spiritual dimensions to the healing process in the natural environment. A number of the shortcomings of previous research, as well as within this investigation are discussed.

This study suggests that there is a definite need for further qualitative and emperical investigation of the ecotherapy process as a therapeutic intervention. The findings of this study are intended both as a platform for future research initiatives as well as a resource for ecotherapy facilitators and participants.

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die onderliggende meganismes inherent aan die interaksie tussen die mens en die natuurlike omgewing te ondersoek. Die studie het beaag om met 'n eksploratiewe benadering die konseptuele beginsels van die Ekoterapie proses bloot te lê.

As vertrekpunt is die metafoer, soss beskrywe deur die deelnemers, as narratiewe simbool beskou vir meer dieperliggende interpretasie. Die transkripsies van die deelnemers se ervarings gedurende die ekoterapeutiese staptog is deur vier professionele ekoterapeutiese fasiliteerders van die "National Peace Accord Trust" geïnterpreteerom die onderliggende meganismes van die proses te identifiseer.

As verwysingsbron vir verdere navorsing is die gereduseerde opsommings van die betrokke fasiliteerders geanaliseer, sentrale temas geïdentifiseer en bespreek. Sentrale temas wat uit die studie na vore gekom het, was die betekenisvolheid van simboliek, die besef van liggaamlikheid, die kontinuum in die proses van konneksie-vorming, sowel as die voorkoms van spirituele dimensies geduurende die helingsproses in die natuurlike omgewing. Tekortkominge van vorige, sowel as die huidige navorsing, is ook aangespreek.

Dit blyk uit die studie dat 'n defnitiewe behoefte aan verdere kwalitatiewe en empiriese navorsing rondom die ekoterapie proses as terapeutiese intervensie, bestaan. Die bevindinge van hierdie studie behoort te dien as 'n vertrekpunt vir toekomstige navorsing, sowel as 'n verwysingsbron vir ekoterapeutiese fasiliteerders en deelnemers.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1.   Foreground to this study

In a changing social and political climate in South Africa since the dramatic changes of the early 1990's, a re-evaluation of psychotherapeutic approaches has emerged. It has become increasingly obvious that cultural, linguistic, socio-political and socio-economic factors need to be addressed in assessing both the application and usefulness of current methods. As an adjunct, the need has surfaced for an approach to psychotherapy that is more generally relevant to the broader spectrum of South Africans. One such approach that has gained increasing attention (although still in its infancy) is the practice of nature-based therapeutic interventions, known alternatively as Wilderness Therapy or Ecotherapy. According to Some (1998)

> ...within nature, within the natural world, are all of the materials and tenets
> needed for healing human beings. Nature is the textbook for those who care
> to study it and the storehouse of remedies for human ills... (p 7)

Internationally, and especially in the United States of America, the increase in the practice of, as well as studies concerning, the therapeutic use of wilderness, indicates the growth in awareness of this modality. Russell (2001) suggests that despite over 200 studies, wilderness therapy is still viewed with much trepidation because of loosely defined treatment approaches and inconsistencies in research. This image has serious consequences at a time when the industry is searching for recognition from government, accreditation agencies, insurance companies and mental health professionals.

Patterson, Williams and Scherl (in Moore & Russell, 2001) suggest that the current body of research places too much emphasis on expected outcomes. In contrast, these authors suggest that a meaning-based approach to research may provide a valuable alternative, which is founded upon a pragmatic valuation of the benefits of research.

As an Ecotherapy facilitator for the South African Ecotherapy Institute over a period of three years, the researcher took individuals from many contexts into wilderness. The aim of these wilderness experiences was the facilitation of psychological healing.

The Ecotherapy Institute (formerly, the South African Wilderness Therapy Institute) was formed in 1999 as a division of the National Peace Accord Trust (NPAT). It was developed as an expansion of the NPAT's Wilderness trail and therapy project, which began in 1996. The original wilderness project emerged as a reaction to the lack of success encountered in conventional western ways of dealing with trauma amongst militarised youth in the Kathorus region of Gauteng Province. Drawing on his wilderness therapy experience at a school for youth with behavioural and emotional problems, the current director of the institute, Gavin Robertson, developed a programme in which the physical structure of the experience could be used to correct maladaptive psychological effects and processes. The programme was then adapted to the needs of militarised youth (Schell-Faucon, 2001).

Following on the numerous successes with militarised youth, the wilderness trail concept was expanded and led to the establishment of the South Africa Wilderness Therapy Institute. This approach to wilderness healing was subsequently applied to various other traumatised groups in need of psychological intervention, such as physically and sexually abused children, rape survivors, survivors of political and criminal violence, children orphaned by HIV-AIDS, and homeless people. (Robertson, 2000)

As a division of the NPAT, the Ecotherapy Institute is funded through and managed by the Trust. The NPAT is a Non-Governmental Organisation mandated to facilitate healing and reconciliation in South Africa. The National Director, Maggie Seiler, manages the Trust from its head office in Gauteng. Programmes are currently being run in Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, the Free State and the Western and Northern Cape Provinces.

Through facilitation of a variety of trails, and through the researcher's own process of supervision, as well as information-gathering from participants, it became clear that individuals made use of metaphors relating to nature, in order to describe and make

sense of their experiences on the trail. After numerous discussions with colleagues, and through the researcher's involvement in the training of facilitators, I became interested in investigating whether the use of metaphor is both present in, and an important factor in the process of healing.

Loos (1997), in her analysis of wilderness rites of passage, makes reference to the process of metaphor making and its relevance in the ecotherapeutic setting: "As I have engaged with the stories that people bring back from their encounters with the natural world, it appears as if the psyche makes use of metaphors in nature to disclose something about its own nature as well as to mirror consciousness…" (p.47).

The goal of this study is to explore these metaphors as participants present them, and in so doing to contribute to a theoretical understanding of the nature of the interaction between the natural environment and psychological healing. It is assumed that a deeper understanding of the relationship between the earth and the human psyche will contribute to establishing more effective strategies in utilising this interaction for the mutual benefit of humans and the natural world.

1.2. **Structure of this thesis**

In the following section of this chapter, the core terminology to be applied in the text will be defined as it relates to this specific context. In chapter 2, a literature review will be presented, examining the theoretical and research initiatives regarding the use of nature in psychological processes. In addition, the use of metaphor in psychological healing will be briefly reviewed. In chapter 3, the exploratory goal of this research and the qualitative methodology used to this end, will be substantiated. In chapter 4 of this study the case material under study will be presented and analysed. Finally, in chapter 5, some significant themes gathered in this investigation will be discussed in the light of existing theory. Relevant concluding thoughts as to the potential significance of metaphor within nature based psychological interventions will also be considered. Lastly, shortcomings of the present research will be discussed, and suggestions for further research provided.

1.3. Terminology

This section explores the concepts of ecotherapy and metaphor as they are used within the text. The purpose here is to provide a working definition of the concepts, as they are understood within this study.

1.3.1. Ecotherapy

Ecotherapy is defined in this context as the application of principles of Ecopsychology, where 'Ecopsychology' is the term most commonly used for the synthesis between Psychology and Ecology (Roszak, 1995). The term was first publicly defined by Theodore Roszak, in his book, "Voice of the Earth", although many of the central ideas were presented in Roszak's earlier work, and that of Paul Shepard (Scull, 1999). As a synthesis of Ecology and Psychology, Ecopsychology incorporates the study of the relationship between an organism and its environment, with that of behaviour and mental processes (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, Bem & Hoeksema, 1996). The synthesis of these two approaches becomes a study of the behaviour and mental processes in the relationship between the subject and its environment, or as Hill (in Scull, 1999, p. 14) states, "It encompasses the human psychological relationship with nature, in both directions." Gorrell (2001) suggests that the increased reliance of people on technology and the co-joined disconnection from roots within the natural environment instil feelings of restlessness and alienation that can potentially, undermine emotional health. Ecopsychology thus surfaces as a response to the crisis of the environment, and the related human crisis of the alienation of the psyche from nature.

Beyond an awareness of the impact of environmental decline on the individual and society at large, most Ecopsychology practitioners foster a belief that the reconnection of human with the natural environment requires a physical shift to facilitate a mental one (Gorrell, 2001). Cohen (in Gorrell, 2001) suggests that one cannot reconnect psychologically with an abstract idea, it is necessary to actually make contact with nature. It is at this point that Ecopsychology becomes Ecotherapy. Ecotherapy can thus be understood as a practice based on the principles of Ecopsychology, in the same manner that Psychotherapy is a practice based on the principles of Psychology. Ecotherapy, as the practice of Ecopsychology can therefore be defined in this context

as a therapeutic approach to psychological healing based on the principle of a dynamic relationship between the person and nature.

1.3.2. Metaphor

Metaphor is defined as, "A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is implied to an object or action that it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance". (The Collins Paperback English Dictionary, 1986, p. 531) or the "application of name or descriptive term or phrase to object or action where it is not literally applicable" (The Pocket Oxford Dictionary, 1984, p. 461). According to Aristotle, metaphor is the application to one thing of a name belonging to another (Aitchison, 1994).

Bosch (in Paprotte & Dirven, 1985, p.48) offers a more succinct description of the true function of the metaphor in the following statement: "…sometimes we want to point out a particular cluster of properties of a particular object, a cluster that has, as such, no label in our language but is present in a particular stereotype on some subordinate level whereas the top layer of properties in that stereotype, the well entrenched ones, are not applicable and even counter-indicated for the object we are talking about". Bosch explains how the metaphor is used to provide meaning where no linguistic label exists. The meaning stems from a cluster of properties that occur on some subordinate level, where the top-level properties would denote the actual object or action. For example, the phrase, "The man is a fox" is not intended to imply that the subject is in fact a fox, or has the primary physical characteristics of the four-legged relative of the dog. Rather, the similarities between certain stereotypes of the fox's character are applied to the man, for example, to be cunning or sly.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of this review is to present a background to an understanding of Ecotherapy and its practice, and subsequently to expand upon the notion of metaphor, in its application in psychotherapy, and specifically in Ecotherapy. The theory can thus be categorised into two sections, Ecotherapy, and metaphor. These categories should, however, not be viewed as distinct and will therefore not be presented as such. The relationship between metaphor and Ecotherapy is a complex one, and one that has received little attention in current literature. In the context of an exploratory study, the purpose in this review is to provide the elements for the building of a bridge between an understanding of metaphor, specifically from a psychological perspective, and a theoretical understanding of the Ecotherapy process rooted in the symbolic process.

2.1. Relationship or interface between humankind and nature/Ecopsychology

Ecotherapy, as the application of Ecopsychology, is essentially rooted in an understanding of the interaction between the person, and the natural environment. This section will explore this relationship with reference to diverse psychological theories.

Lucretius, a disciple of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, describes the experience of nature:

> We find that the requirements of our bodily nature are few indeed, no more than is necessary to banish pain, and also to spread out many pleasures for ourselves. Nature does not periodically seek anything more gratifying than this, not complaining if there are no golden images of youths about the house who are holding flaming torches in their right hands to illuminate banquets that go on long into the night. What does it matter if the hall doesn't sparkle with silver and gleam with gold, and no carved and gilded rafters ring to the music of the lute? Nature doesn't miss these luxuries when people can recline in company on the soft grass by a running stream under the branches of a tall tree and refresh their bodies pleasurably at small expense. Better still

if the weather smiles on them, and the season of the year stipples the green grass with flowers (Lucretius in De Botton, 2000, p.69).

Ecopsychology is the term most commonly used for the synthesis between psychology and Ecology (Roszak, 1995). It is a discipline that encompasses the human psychological relationship with nature, the study of the relationship between the human psyche and the natural environment (Nussbaum, undated). Ecopsychology is based on the principle of "Biophilia", which implies a basic need of human beings to interact with the living world of which they are a part (Gorrell, 2001). Although this need extends retrospectively to the earliest human beings, the importance of the relationship between humans and their environment has been highlighted by increased concerns regarding the depletion of natural resources. The alienation of humans from the environment seems to have led to this situation. Ecopsychology surfaces thus as a response to the crisis of the environment, and the related human crisis of the alienation of the psyche from nature.

2.2.   The foundations of Ecopsychology

Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) point out that the relationship between people and the natural environment spans a wide range of concerns. Each explanation of the relationship is a reflection of a specific perspective, chosen by the observer, investigator. In addition, Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) stress that the way in which individuals experience the wilderness setting and the meaning that they associate with it is highly subjective.

2.2.1.   Three levels of wilderness experience

Kaplan and Talbot's (in Miles, 1987) extensive investigations into the effects of wilderness on people present a cognitively based orientation with certain elements of systems theory. Their research reveals three effects of wilderness experience that come progressively. Firstly, wilderness frees people from "fatigued voluntary attention mechanism" (Miles, 1987, p.45). In wilderness, the individual experiences joy and safety at being able to attend freely to a novel environment, or as Harper

(1995) explains, the basic modes of perception are dulled in order to survive in the urban world. In contrast, within the wilderness environment one sustains a continuum of mindfulness. The focus is thus not singular, but rather on the stream of awareness. There is a lowering of conscious directedness and critical attention in the silence of the wilderness environment (Blow, 1989).

Greenway (1995) refers to a dualism in terms of the culturally reinforced reality that occurs in constantly making distinctions. In this cultural reality, one uses the distinctions between things to provide a simpler understanding of the conscious reality. It is the dominance of the distinguishing function of the ego that produces alienation from the self and the subservience to a "need crazed egoic process" (p.132). He expresses the opportunity for self-realisation in entering natural environments in terms of a shift from the culturally reinforced "dualism producing reality" into a more non-dualistic mode. This occurs where the conscious mind has the opportunity to encounter a "simpler "nonegoic" awareness" (Greenway, 1995, p.132).

The second effect that Kaplan and Talbot (in Miles, 1987) report is an increase in self-confidence and tranquillity due to an easing of the need to control the environment. They suggest that because it is unnecessary and impossible to control the wilderness environment, individuals realise that they are safer in responding appropriately to environmental demands. By giving up the illusion of external control, the individual gains internal control. In relation to the extent to which people can exert control over their environment, Altman (1980, p.77) refers to the notion of privacy, defined as, "the selective control of access to the self". His model of privacy explains the development of individuality and self-identity through the perception of personal control over the regulation of boundaries, which is reflected in the statement: "if I can observe the limits and scope of my control, then I have taken major steps toward understanding and defining what I am" (Altman, 1975, p.50, in Altman, 1980). Altman (1980) views the need for privacy as culturally universal, and suggests that the well-being of groups and individuals is reliant on the successful management thereof.

This effect is also witnessed through the notion of "natural consequences" (Kimball & Bacon, 1989; Russell, Hendee, & Phillips-Miller, 1999), or immediate and concrete

feedback (Powch, 1994, in Russell, 2001). This notion refers to the learning that occurs through direct consequences that emanate from the environment rather than from authority figures. The environment is not perceived as being unfair or inappropriate in the consequences that stem from it. The participants learn that they have more control over the consequences of their actions because they are natural occurring. The personal responsibility for actions increases because the consequences are direct and unbiased (Kimball & Bacon, 1989). Individuals thus have an increased perception of personal control because consequences stem directly from actions.

The third benefit presented by Kaplan and Talbot (in Miles, 1987) is termed contemplation, and is made possible by a high degree of compatibility among, environmental patterns, inclinations of the individual and the actions required to feel comfortable in the environment. This compatibility is liberating because it allows for reflection, which leads to personal self-discovery, insight and integration. Due to incompatibility among these three elements at home, individuals will often be incapable of reflecting on their situation. In wilderness, however, attention is primarily focused on what one needs to know in order to act (Miles, 1987).

2.2.2. The Biophilia Approach

From an environmental psychology viewpoint, the effects of diverse environmental settings are evaluated in order to ascertain the responses that different settings may evoke. Bell, Greene, Fisher and Baum (1990) outline the effects of natural scenes as potentially possessing restorative powers. The Biophilia hypothesis explains the restorative powers of nature in terms of our ancestral, evolutionary development in nature being far longer than our time lived in cities (Ulrich, 1993). Our presence in nature is seen as an intrinsic need because being in nature is like being where we belong. The principle of "Biophilia" implies a basic need of human beings to interact with the living world of which they are a part (Gorrell, 2001). Although this need extends retrospectively to the earliest human beings, the importance of the relationship between human and the environment has been highlighted by increased concerns regarding the depletion of natural resources. The alienation of humans from the environment seems to have led to this situation. The notion of 'alienation from nature' suggests that the alienation between human beings and the natural

environment needs to be addressed in order to heal both the planet and the human psyche (Roszak, 1995).

Cohen's (1997) theory of the interaction between the individual and nature in terms of a dualistic process of the individual mind aptly illustrates this evolutionary orientation and the resultant disconnection that occurs in alienation from nature. Cohen's approach draws on the psychobiological discoveries of Roger Sperry, which illustrate the notion of a split brain, in which he recognises distinct areas of specialisation. Cohen suggests that the ability to learn how to register the meaning of a written word is a function of the new brain, the neocortex whilst the ability to register sensory experience as a distinct sensation is an inherent function of the old brain, the limbic mind: "The old brain directly senses and registers the environment; the new brain mediates old brain signals into reasonable language" (Cohen, 1997, para. 1).

Drawing on the distinction between the distinctive functions of the brain, Cohen formulates a technique using a combination of written symbols for particular colours either in conjunction, or in opposition to the colours that they represent. For example, one would symbolise the colour green with the letter G. Where the symbol, the letter G is written in green ink, the combination is referred to as GG. Where the symbol is contrasted by being written in another colour, for example orange, it is referred to as GO. Cohen further postulates that when the symbol and its represented colour are congruent (GG), then the person viewing them feels comfortable. When the symbol and colour are not congruent (GO) then the person feels uncomfortable (Cohen, 1997).

From this metaphor, Cohen explains our experience of nature. Cultural learning is accumulated by the new brain, which teaches us a large degree of separation from, and domination over nature. In contrast the old brain assimilates a non-verbal understanding of oneness with nature, from our connection with it at the time of our birth. When one comes into contact with the natural environment, the learnt assumptions of the new brain are not congruent with the understanding of the old brain. This incongruence is experienced as feelings of discomfort. Cohen suggests that the contact with nature leads towards a congruency in that the new brain learns

about the essential connection with nature and thus comes to congruence with the old brain, bringing with it an adapted sense of comfort (Cohen, 1997).

2.2.3. Spiritual dimension

On a spiritual level people report a sense of "one-ness and inter-connectedness to all things" in wilderness (Foster-Riley & Hendee, 1999). The spiritual and mundane seem to converge to a large degree in the context of natural environments. "Outside familiar cultural boundaries and within wilderness, there are noticeable and sometimes radical shifts in the perception of time and space" (Harper, 1995, p. 192). In the introduction to 'Sacred Nature: Ancient Wisdom & Modern Meanings' Adrian Cooper (1998) refers to a spiritual reconciliation with the "sacred inspirations" in the planet's remaining wilderness, as the greatest challenge facing each individual in the new millennium.

Frederickson and Anderson's (1999) investigation of wilderness as a source of spiritual inspiration refers to the expansiveness of the landscape as well as an awareness of the sheer power of nature as functions of spiritual inspiration for most individuals. Their qualitative analysis of interviews and self-reports highlights a sense of connectedness experienced within immersion in the wilderness environment. In addition, the authors found that specific physical features, such as the amount of topographic relief, elicited certain differences in the subjects' spiritual experiences of the environment. They mention the contrast between river experience in which the environment is experienced as more of an organic whole, and the canyon experience in which more emphasis is given to specific details in the environment.

2.3. Ecotherapy/ Wilderness Therapy: the practice of Ecopsychology

The term wilderness therapy stems from the combination of 'wilderness', meaning, "an uncultivated and uninhabited region" and 'therapy', "the treatment disorders or disease" (The Collins Paperback English Dictionary, 1986, p.899). From a psychological perspective, the combination of these terms refers to the potential healing that occurs when a person temporarily inhabits a natural environment that is

usually uninhabited (Robertson & Van der Heyden, 2001). There is, however, much speculation over the definition of this term in the literature (Russell, 2001). There does seem to be some agreement that the term 'Wilderness Experience Programmes' (W.E.P.) commonly refers to the broadest category of approaches using wilderness, or natural environments for personal growth, therapeutic healing, education and/or training (Foster-Riley & Hendee, 1999; Russell, Hendee, & Phillips-Miller, 1999; Russell, 2001). Within this broader category, Wilderness Therapy exists as an intervention focussed on personal growth and therapeutic healing.

The terms 'Ecotherapy' and 'Wilderness Therapy' have different roots and applications. 'Ecotherapy' stems from Ecopsychology, and finds its roots in an approach, or paradigm. 'Wilderness Therapy' stems from the application of a therapeutic intervention in a type of environment known as 'wilderness'. In common practice 'Wilderness Therapy' is used more often to denote a type of wilderness based programme, whereas 'Ecotherapy' would refer to the general practice of Ecopsychology. Thus, where Wilderness Therapy is an application of the principles of Ecopsychology, it can be understood synonymously with Ecotherapy.

The broadest category of description of programmes using wilderness is the Wilderness Experience Programme (WEP), which is defined as "organisations that conduct outdoor programmes in wilderness or comparable lands for purpose of personal growth, therapy, rehabilitation, education or leadership/organisational development" (Foster-Riley & Hendee, 1999; Russell, et al., 1999; Russell, 2001). In the relevant literature rehabilitative outdoor-based approaches such as "challenge courses," "adventure-based therapy," or Wilderness Experience programmes (WEP's)" are often used interchangeably to describe "Wilderness Therapy" (Russell, 2001) although the principles underlying each intervention are not always specifically stated. Due to the diversity of labels applied in the literature and the lack of a consistent definition, 'Ecotherapy' and 'Wilderness Therapy' are often used interchangeably to denote programmes that use wilderness and purport to have some sort of psychotherapeutic benefit for participants.

2.4.   Review of current research studies

Moore and Russell (2001) present the most comprehensive evaluation to date of studies based on the use of wilderness for personal growth, therapy, education and leadership development. This study is an annotation and evaluation of 247 pieces of research based literature, revised from research published in 1995 by Friese, Pittman and Hendee. Moore and Russell (2001) note that the research focuses on two primary effects on participants: the developments of various aspects of self-concept, and the development of appropriate and adaptive social skills. In addition, the researchers notice a growing trend between 1996 and 2001, of focus upon outcomes associated with programmes, related to participant's lives after the completion of the experience.

In a review of research concerning wilderness based challenge programs for adolescents, Kimball and Bacon (1989) affirm research outcomes that, wilderness therapy has, "a strong and reliable positive effect on emotionally and behaviourally disturbed adolescents" (p.39). Among the areas where they report positive results are: self-confidence, interpersonal competence, physical fitness, academic achievement and recidivism.

Russell et al. (1999), in an examination of four leading wilderness therapy programmes for adolescents, have found that common anticipated outcomes for these programmes include: strengthened self-concept, emotional development and the ability to be more appreciative and see personal problems in a different light. These authors also highlight the diversity in the definition, theoretical foundations and application of wilderness therapy programmes.

Russell (2001) stresses the diversity in defining wilderness therapy programmes. In an attempt to integrate the diversity in research and practice, he highlights the need for consistency in the application of terminology and practice. Although the diversity of programmes contributes to the growth and effectiveness of wilderness therapy, Russell suggests that consistency and standards are essential in promoting wilderness therapy programmes in the future. His attempt to supply an integrated definition also highlights the diversity in perspectives regarding theory and practice of wilderness

therapy programmes. Russell adds that in their search for recognition by state health agencies, the wilderness therapy industry needs to begin to address the uncertain image characterised by loosely defined treatment approaches and inconsistent research.

The studies presented above reflect the vast majority of research literature available at present. Moore and Russel (2001) indicate that there is a growing trend in the use of qualitative methodology in the investigation of wilderness therapy programmes. A feature characteristic of a number of these qualitative studies is the investigation of participants' personal evaluations of Ecotherapy experiences.

Foster-Riley and Hendee (2002) in a study investigating the benefits of a Wilderness Vision Quest programme conduct a questionnaire survey using 157 former participants. They report benefits on two dimensions, those relating to self and those relating to the other, and/or "a greater connection to the larger universe". These dimensions are seen to form a continuum. The continuum is described as, "Self Awareness leading to Empowerment leading to Connection with Other (Spirituality)" (p.4).

Patterson, Williams and Scherl (in Moore and Russell, 2001) explore meaning as an emergent property of the interaction between the participant and the natural environment. They outline a specific hermeneutic analysis for exploring the transactional relationship between participants and the wilderness setting. The authors also attend to the value of conducting a meaning based investigation as opposed to the majority of outcome-based research.

Using an organic approach to her doctoral thesis, Loos (1997) approaches her investigation of a Vision Quest, Rites of Passage experience using a narrative framework. Similar to Patterson et al. (in Moore and Russell, 2001), Loos (1997) takes a meaning based approach to understanding the processes of the participants. Although not as focus point, Loos integrates the notion of metaphors used by participants, within their construction of meaning. She suggests that through mirroring in council, these metaphors can be recognised, amplified and clarified interactively with the participants.

In a research report on the NPAT's wilderness therapy project with militarised youth in the Katorus region, Schell-Faucon (2001) found that the trails provided an "outstanding occasion to establish new connections with the environment, other and self" (p.33). As an evaluation of a broader community-based project, Schell-Faucon's study evaluates the wilderness therapy trail in the context of the holistic community approach. She found that the trail provided an encounter where the concerns about the past and the future could be addressed. It also provided a holistic approach and contributed to the shaping of community life. She also suggests that attention be given to: trail support and integration into the community; further empowerment of the community; and a holistic approach to understanding the complexity of conflict.

In the South African context, Conradie (2001) adopts a similar approach to Foster-Riley and Hendee (2002). Her study is a qualitative analysis of 'attitudes to nature' from interviews conducted with participants following a NPAT weekend Ecotherapy experience. Analysing the content of the interviews, Conradie (2001) found that one of the strongest themes to emerge was the absence of distraction that participants experienced in nature. This, she suggests, led to introspection and self-confrontation, which was significant part of the experience for them. Of particular relevance to this study, Conradie (2001) also noted that all of the participants drew some symbolic meaning from the physical features of the natural environment.

As the ecotherapy training director at the National Peace Accord Trust, Gavin Robertson has presented a number of academic papers concerning the theory and practice of ecotherapy in South Africa. As trainer and mentor to this author, Robertson's work, on both a practical and theoretical level, has had a significant influence on the current study. His papers have attended to: the processes in Ecotherapy (Robertson & Van der Heyden, 2001); using ecotherapy in dealing with trauma (Robertson, 1999a; 1999b); spirituality (Robertson & Van Zyl, 1999); and community-based ecotherapy interventions (Robertson, 2000). Robertson's work will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

2.5.   Symbolism in Ecotherapy

The use of symbolism as a feature of the NPAT ecotherapy experience is an important notion that closely relates to participants use of metaphors. In order to establish a frame work for understanding, firstly, the function of symbolism in ecotherapy, and secondly the relationship between symbolism and metaphor, the following discussion will explore the notion of symbolism as a construct and its application as a psychotherapeutic construct.

2.5.1.   Symbol

The Collins English Dictionary defines a symbol as something that represents or stands for something else, usually by convention or association, especially, a material object used to represent something abstract (The Collins Dictionary, 1986).

Peacock (1975) expands on this definition:

> Something that stands for, represents or denotes something else (not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion, or by accidental or conventional relation); especially, a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality or condition: a representative or typical figure, sign, or token... (p.1).

To elaborate on this definition, Peacock (1975) suggests that 'represents' is too mechanical in describing the relationship between the symbol and the 'something else' and prefers the relationship denoted by 'express'. He explains that 'represent' implies a duplication in the sense that the 'something else' is re-presented, whereas a symbol does not present the 'something else' but expresses the qualities of that thing.

Jung suggests, "a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning" (Jung, 1964/1978, p.41). It is essentially the most clear and characteristic formulation of a relatively unknown thing. He contrasts this with a 'sign', which he suggests is always less than the thing it represents. Here, the primary distinction lies in that the symbol expresses a relatively unknown thing, whereas the

sign expresses a known thing. This distinction is important in the understanding of the role of symbols in the expression of unconscious material, which is essentially 'inaccessible to consciousness' or 'ineffable'.

For Jung, there are two primary characteristics of a symbol. Firstly, it must able to mediate between the polarities of consciousness, and the collective unconscious. This is termed, the 'bipolarity' of the symbol. Second, there must be an element being expressed that is unknown. This relates to the distinction presented above by which, the symbol expresses something that is inaccessible to consciousness and is therefore unconscious (Jung, 1964/1978).

2.5.2. Symbols in psychotherapy.

The use of symbolism in facilitating awareness and conscious integration in the healing process has been explored in various applications of psychotherapeutic interventions. The therapeutic mechanisms of dreams and dream interpretation provide useful theoretical perspectives for understanding the value of symbolism in facilitating awareness of conscious issues and their resolution. What follows is an exploration of dreams and their interpretation in relation to the function of symbolism.

2.5.3. Dreams and dream interpretation

Dreams can essentially be understood as altered states of consciousness, or subconsciousness. There is thus a difficulty in undertaking scientific studies to understand the psychological functions of dreams, since there is no scientific way of measuring the subconscious. Sleep research, developed in the 1950's and 1960's began investigations of the physiological states associated with dreaming. The connection between the physiological state of Rapid Eye Movement (REM) and a sleep state in which dreaming occurs was first established by Aserinsky and Kleitman in 1953. These researchers noticed that when subjects were aroused from sleep during REM states they were mostly able to recall a distinct and vivid dream. Reports of dreams from non-REM sleep were far less frequent, and those that were reported tended to be less distinct and less dramatic. This leads to the assumption that the REM state is the primary dream state, in which most dreaming occurs. There is still

speculation as to the dream content and function in other dream states (Cushway & Sewell, 1992).

Research by Dement and his colleagues around 1960 was, however, able to suggest that dreaming, and not merely sleep, is a necessary element of the daily human cycle, that when deprived, will be compensated for (Cushway & Sewell, 1992; Meier, 1990; Murray, 1965). In addition, studies conducted by Cartwright found that dreaming led to openness to confronting negative emotions and possible outcomes in ways that were largely denied in stories after time spent in waking (Cartwright, 1978).

What these studies give support to is the notion that the mental processing that goes on during REM sleep can be understood as divergent thinking, which, is an openness to a wider range of possibilities through associations other than usual, which is the style responsible for creative solutions (Cartwright, 1978).

Scientific research thus lends support to the notion that dream are a necessary part of the human daily cycle. Research also supports the idea that dreams may act as an alternative platform for creative solutions to difficulties within consciousness. Gestalt and Jungian Psychology both theorise that dreams serve such a purpose, but in a more interactive and complementary cooperation with consciousness.

The Gestalt Psychology of Fritz Perls refers to dreams as the royal road to integration (Corey, 1991). What Perls is meaning by his adaptation is that the dream functions in a cooperative manner with consciousness, as opposed to merely highlighting the unconscious content. He bases his dream theory on his concept of projection, by which every person and object of the dream represents a projected element of the dreamer. Understanding the elements of the dream aids the dreamer in learning about the different and often conflicting parts of themselves. The dreamer can learn to appreciate and accept inner differences and integrate opposing forces (Corey, 1991). The function of the dream is to both resolve unfinished situations and to integrate fragments of our personalities (Cushway & Sewell, 1992).

In Jung's account, the dream is a normal creative expression of the unconscious. The dream is also frequently an expression of an inner drive towards health and maturity.

This inner drive, Jung believed was one with which the conscious mind could cooperate. The conscious ego of the dreamer is represented within the dream. The function of the dream is to restore psychological equilibrium. An important element of Jung's dream theory is the role of symbols. He believed that symbols were the natural language of the unconscious. Through the symbol, the unconscious would thus communicate psychic facts to consciousness that could only partially be described in verbal and rational terms. (Cushway & Sewell, 1992; Jung, 1964/1978)

The dream uses symbols as a form of communication common to all mankind, yet individually different on all occasions, in order to communicate ideas from the subconscious to the conscious mind (Freeman, 1964/1978). The dreams function as a cinema for the meeting of the conscious and unconscious minds. The dream symbols are projected onto a dream canvas for interpretation by the conscious mind. The reason for interpreting dreams is to bring into awareness, the subjective interpretation of dream symbols in order to access the dreams message, presented by the subconscious to conscious mind. Each dream is presented not only for its own sake, but as a coded remedy, that it may be interpreted and integrated to the benefit of the individual process of individuation (Von Franz, 1964/1978).

Von Franz (1964/1978, p.163) states "It is the ego that serves to light up the entire system, allowing it to become conscious and thus to be realized" and "How far it develops depends on whether or not the ego is willing to listen to the messages of the self". It is thus from dreams that the individual learns from the Self. By interpreting the symbols, which are messages from the Self s/he proceeds in the process of growth, or individuation.

The dream will often play a "compensatory role" (Robertson, 1999a; 2000; Robertson & Van der Heyden, 2001; Jung, 1964/1978), by which the dream offers the conscious ego an opposing image of itself to one that it ordinarily presents to the world. The compensatory function of the dream aids the individual in balancing opposing images of him/herself.

The process of dream interpretation is an exercise in bringing subconscious material into conscious awareness. The purpose of dream work is thus to assist individuals in

becoming more aware of themselves, their thoughts, feelings, events in their lives that have not been recognised, or have only been partially recognised (Cushway & Sewell, 1992).

The process of bringing into awareness, the unconscious elements of the self is a key feature of the ecotherapy process. In a similar manner to dream interpretation, the wilderness experience is interpreted to bring to awareness, unconscious thoughts, feelings and events that may previously have gone unrecognised.

Another key feature of the ecotherapy process is the role of the whole body in healing. The interaction between the individual and the natural environment engendered in Ecopsychology is one that functions on both a physical and psychological level. The following section will expand upon the significance of the whole body in healing on both of these levels.

2.6.   The whole body in healing

2.6.1.   Body and mind

Kimball and Bacon (1993) state that physical fitness resulting from therapeutic wilderness experience may well have important implications in its relation to social and psychological success. The scientific world has recently begun to cast a new light upon the rift between body and mind that was created 300 years ago by Descartes. The notion of embodiment, by which a system of categorisation of conceptual notions is borrowed from the structure of the physical body, has become a central feature of recent discoveries. Cognitive scientists have found that conceptual thought as a whole is embodied physically in the body and brain. This embodiment is not meant to merely suggest that thought resides within the body, but that the structure of thought arises from the body and brain. Thought is thus dynamically linked to the structure and movement of the body (Capra, 2003).

Capra (1996) explains that it is the entire dissipative structure of the human organism that participates in the process of cognition. Recent research, primarily in the field of

psychoneuroimmunology, indicates strongly that in the human organism the nervous system, the immune system, and the endocrine system, which traditionally have been viewed as three separate systems, in fact form a single cognitive network. Furthermore, a recognition of the interdependence of process and structure has allowed us to heal the split between mind and matter that has haunted the modern era ever since Descartes (Capra, 1996).

Psychoneuroimmunology is a relatively recent field of enquiry, based on the proposition that the neurosciences, immunology, endocrinology, and the psychiatric/ psychological fields, although they developed separately, form part of a larger system in which there is an interactive communication. Research conducted since the early 1980's has brought increasing support for, and understanding of the dynamic interrelationship among behavioural, neural, endocrine and immune processes. The field of Psychoneuroimmunology has fostered increasing scientific explanations of the dynamic interactive relationships between all the major organ systems. These systems, or "homeostatic defence mechanisms" are subject to the influence of environmental and psychosocial circumstances as they are processed and integrated (Ader, Felton, & Cohen, 1991).

In Ecotherapy, there is a recognition of the interaction of body mind and environment as a dynamic process. This interaction is similarly represented in the symbolic relationship between body and psyche.

2.6.2. The body as symbol

The symbolic relationship between body and mind is not a new concept. Early psychiatric practices focussed on physical remedies to psychiatric complaints, disorders over many centuries. Psychoanalytic theory similarly viewed certain physical complaints as symbolic presentations of unconscious impulses (Shell, Pallio, & Smith, 1987). In the last century, the body therapies emerged as a group of psychotherapeutic theories and practices that focus on the physical body's significance within psychological functioning.

The emergence of the body therapies is commonly associated with the work of Wilhelm Reich. His theoretical and practical approach is based upon the concept of "armouring" (Totton, 2001). The physical "muscular armouring" is perceived to protect the individual from threatening emotional experiences (Gavin, 1988). This physical presentation parallels the "character armour" that performs the same function on a psychological level. Reich's style of therapy works by softening the individual's armour on both a physical and psychological level, through physical relaxation and freedom of movement, and through analytic free association on a psychological level (Totton, 2001).

Alexander Lowen, a follower of Reich's, expanded on this theory in his own method of psychotherapy, which he termed Bioenergetics. Lowen ascribed a 'character' to the body, which he viewed as patterns of behaviour determined by the controls imposed upon muscular activity (Gavin, 1988). He viewed the 'body character' as analogous to the psychological personality. The muscular tension experienced by the individual is understood to be subject to unconscious psychological controls (Gavin, 1988).

The Primal Therapy of Arthur Janov is a further derivative of Reichian theory. Janov distinguished Primal from Reichian Therapy primarily in terms of its practice. Where Reichian methods also focus on softening the physical armour, primal methods attempt to resolve the physical tension by delving into the events from which the tension results. The Primal Therapy patient thus expresses the physical manifestations of the re-experiencing of emotions previously suppressed into their physical manifestations (Janov, 1971).

Reich's contribution to the body therapies is most significant in terms of the influence that his work had on subsequent theorists and practitioners. Besides Lowen and Janov, Reichian influence is evident in: Biodynamic Therapy; Core Energetics; the Halomi Method; Leonard Orr's Re-birthing, Stanislav Graf's Holotropic Breathwork; and more recently, Nick Totton and Em Edmondson's Embodied-Relational Therapy. Fritz Perls was in analysis with Reich himself, and Reichian influences are evident in his Gestalt Therapy (Totton, 2001).

Gass (1993) suggests that the process of internal change in wilderness is facilitated through the utilisation of the physical body. As suggested above, psychological theory abounds with evidence for the relationship that exists between the physical body and the process of psychological healing. This relationship between body and mind has a twofold relevance to this investigation. Firstly, as an approach to therapy that involves the whole body, the connections of body and mind are intrinsic to the therapeutic mechanisms of Ecotherapy. Secondly, the body is often viewed as a metaphor for the functions of the mind. In the section that follows, the relationship between body and mind will be discussed with reference to the connections between body and mind as well from the perspective as the body as metaphor for the functioning of the mind.

The process of Ecotherapy is one that involves the whole body on both a physical and a psychological dimension. Recent research has shown that the physical dimension cannot be viewed in the absence of the psychological one. This relationship exists, however, on both a literal and a symbolic level, since the physical journey is mirrored by the psychological dimension, and thus the physical elements can serve as metaphors of the psychological (Robertson, 1999a). The structure as well as the functioning of the body provides a metaphor for the mind.

"Wilderness therapy engages the whole body in a completely related physical and psychological experience" (Robertson, 1999a, p.6). In viewing cognition as a process, ecotherapy recognises that there is an impact on cognition that results from the interaction between the body and the environment. Schell-Faucon (2001) notes that the physical route of the hike in wilderness therapy trails is designed with an understanding that the physical obstacles, challenges and achievements and their parallel psychological equivalents are part of the same process.

2.7. Metaphor

"Life constantly reaches out into novelty" (Capra, 2003, p. 47).

Following from the definition of a metaphor, presented in the terminology section of the previous chapter, this section will elaborate on the function of metaphor. As an element of language and thought that enjoys vast application, this section with focus specifically on the function of metaphor as a symbolic process rooted in language. In order to provide a contextual understanding of the symbolic value of metaphor, a subsection of this discussion will begin to elaborate on the similarities between these two concepts within the context of psychotherapeutic growth. Furthermore, the application of metaphor in the psychotherapeutic milieu will be explored as a relevant notion, which will be explored as supportive literature in the understanding of the relevant therapeutic value of metaphor use. This discussion will culminate in a review of current research literature that relates specifically to the use of metaphor in the ecotherapy experience.

2.7.1. Metaphor in language

The application of metaphor in language and thought in general is so vast that it is considered to be ubiquitous (Beck, 1987; Goatly, 1997; Paprotte & Dirven, 1985). Metaphor is commonly presented as a figure of speech that is a part of the larger framework of language. The metaphors that we use structure our thinking by hiding some features of the phenomena we apply to them and highlighting others. This occurs when a unit of discourse is used to refer unconventionally to an object, process or concept, or when the unit is associated in an unconventional manner (Goatly, 1997).

Language is constantly evolving over previously perceived boundaries, or as Miller and Johnson-Laird (in Aitchison, 1994) suggest, the lexical web is being stretched to cover more than it should. Metaphor is the function that serves to apply this extension (Shell, Pollio, & Smith, 1987; Goatly, 1997).

The functional mechanisms of metaphor are explained by Aitchison (1994) in terms of the application of non-prototypical words. A study by Eleanor Rosch (in Aitchison, 1994) considers certain words that are generally deemed more prototypical than others. For example, robins and canaries are generally considered to be more prototypically bird-like than flamingos and penguins. Aitchison states that metaphors

are primarily words or phrases with a broken typicality condition, that is, the meaning that is transferred from one word to another through comparison is not prototypical (Aitchison, 1994). Although the transfer of meaning is not typical, it is accepted and understood. The function of metaphor is thus the extension of meaning through non-typical, or uncommon associations or comparisons. When a metaphor is used consciously, items from different semantic fields, which share certain minor characteristics, are compared. This provides an extension, or bridge, between semantic fields. Through this function, metaphors also provide meaning where no linguistic label exists, as a bridge provides a solid base over a river (Bosch, in Paprotte & Dirven, 1985).

2.7.2. Metaphor in psychotherapy

As an element of language, metaphor is an integral part of all speech and writing and is thus used constantly in psychotherapeutic practice, with or without intention. When metaphor is used with intention, its effective use in therapy is said to contribute to the therapist's style (McLeod, 1997). Lynne Angus, developer of the constructivist approach to narrative therapy, emphasises the role of metaphor in bringing about narrative change. She suggests that the collaborative use of a core metaphor by both client and therapist can lead to reframing and understanding of new possibilities (Angus, in McLeod, 1997). Amira (1982) contends that successful therapies show higher rates of novel metaphor than unsuccessful ones.

In Theodore Sarbin's elaboration of the narrative approach, the creation of a metaphor is understood as the basic psychological act in the construction of meaning. Sarbin (in Botella, n.d.) states that:

> When a person confronts a novel occurrence for which no ready-made category or class is available, the occurrence remains uninstantiated, unclassified or unassimilated until a class or category is located or invented. The recognition of partial similarity on some dimension or construct provides the basis for analogy, and if linguistic translation is necessary, the partial similarity is expressed as a metaphor (para. 6).

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In Psychoanalysis, metaphor has been viewed along the lines of the 'freudian slip', as a surfacing of instinctual impulses. Arlow (1979) suggests that Psychoanalysis can be viewed as an essentially metaphorical enterprise. He says that communication between patient and analyst in metaphor is a necessary process of psychoanalysis, rather than an unfortunate hindrance.

Pallio and Barlow's (1975) investigations found that there was a moderate correlations between patients' use of metaphor and utterances judged to reflect insight. Two patterns of relationship were found, one in which there was a co-occurrence of novel metaphoric language and insight and another in which bursts of novel metaphoric statements alternated with literal statements expressing insight. Barlow (1973) similarly found that in long term psychoanalytic treatment, regions judged to contain insight, were either highly metaphorical, or highly literal. Regions that were highly literal were either seen to stand alone, or were explanations of prior metaphorical statements. The metaphoric regions form connections between past and present experience, or a stated general case. Novel metaphors are deemed to contrast diverse elements of a patient's life. These elements are portrayed in a form rich in implication, which is then worked out through a process of literalisation. From the metaphoric presentation, the patient thus not only gains a particular insight, but the capacity to use this process further to maintain a form of contact with his experience of himself and others. Barlow (1973) suggests that this process is not only key to understanding the relationship between figurative and literal language, but to the understanding of the process of psychotherapy in general.

In the context of ecotherapy, metaphor has not been given much attention in relation to its function in the healing process. This is not to say that it has not been noticed. An important notion in the Outward bound approach to Ecotherapy is that of letting "the mountains speak for themselves" (Gass, 1993c, p.221). This notion portrays the underlying awareness of the metaphorical significance of experience in nature. The primary significance given to metaphor in adventure programmes is that of the extension and generalisation of metaphors of self- care and natural consequences to real life (Russel, 2001a). Gass (1993c) suggests that in adventure programming, the metaphorical power comes from the conscious programming of the programme leader as well as the archetypal quality of the wilderness environment. The programme is

thus designed to provide certain metaphors for the participants. In ecotherapy, there is less conscious direction on the part of the leader, and thus the metaphorical significance is more directly located within the natural environment. Loos (1995) suggests that metaphors are drawn directly from nature and the psyche makes use of metaphors in nature that disclose something about nature itself as well as providing a mirror to consciousness. Essentially, what the psyche selects to attend to in the outer world is a mirror of the concerns of consciousness.

In the literature on Ecotherapy, reference is rarely made to the metaphorical significance of the natural environment. This notion is however presented in the form of the symbolic significance of the environment (Loos, 1995; Robertson, 1999a; 1999b; 2000; Robertson & van Zyl, 1999; Robertson & Van der Heyden, 2001). Here symbolism is understood in terms of the Jungian analytic concept of symbolism. In order to further elaborate on the significance of metaphorical presentation in the ecotherapy context, it is necessary to first elaborate on the connection between the notion of metaphor and of symbol.

2.7.3.   Symbol and metaphor

It should be stated from the outset that the intention here is not to imply that metaphor and symbol are synonymous, but rather to highlight the similarities in their use. This discussion will therefore begin with an elucidation of the essential parallels between these terms in order to clarify on what terms they are deemed to be similar.

In the definition of the metaphor presented in the terminology above, Bosch (in Paprotte & Dirven, 1985) refers to the metaphor as presenting a cluster of meaning that has no label in our language. Similarly, the symbol, in Jung's view, is the best formulation of a 'thing' that cannot be represented more characteristically (Robertson, 1998). It is the formation of a pattern, which comprehends and clarifies what might be vague, complex or diffuse (Shorr, 1983). This is the essential link between the metaphor and the symbol, the ability of each to express something for which there is no existing, or clear label in language. Although, the former can facilitate the expression of a known thing, whereas the later expresses the unknown, it is their

shared use of imagery to express that for which verbal labels are inadequate, that is the focus of this study.

Both symbol and metaphor are described in terms of their bridging function. Beck (1987) describes the metaphor as a bridge between separate domains. Looking back to the metaphor of "The man is a fox.", the purpose of the metaphor is to attribute certain characteristics to the man, that are best expressed by commonly held stereotypes of the fox. The existence of the metaphor allows the connection of two seemingly unrelated domains. The metaphor thus bridges the domains so that a concept can be further expressed where non-metaphoric language will have been limited. It is for this same reason the metaphor is commonly linked with creativity, because it allows novel forms of expression (Beck, 1987; Bosch, in Paprotte & Dirven, 1985; Verbrugge & McCarrell, 1977).

Similarly, Jung asserts that a symbol forms bridges between realities, bringing them together into something new (Jung, 1964/1978). The symbol is a creative response to the tension generated by opposites (Robertson & Van der Heyden, 2001), as metaphor is the creative response to the need for expression where language is limited. And, as Capra (2003) stresses, creativity, or, the generation of new forms, is a fundamental property of all living systems.

The core similarity between metaphor and symbol is their ability to convey meaning beyond the limitations of language. Each contains imagery suspended without fixed linguistic boundaries, that can be interpreted, imbued with meaning, and connected beyond the logical framework of linguistic structure.

2.7.4. Metaphoric transfer in Ecotherapy

As is suggested above, metaphor and symbolism are well documented in the theory and practice of psychotherapy. In this section, the focus turns to reviewing symbol and metaphor in the theory and practice of Ecotherapy.

Kimball and Bacon (1989) make the distinction between 'structured metaphoric transference' and 'spontaneous metaphor transference'. In structured metaphoric

transference, the likelihood that metaphoric connections will be made by participants is increased through active intervention on the part of the staff and leaders. In spontaneous metaphoric transference, the participant spontaneously and independently discovers connections between the experience in wilderness and other life experiences (Kimball & Bacon, 1989).

2.7.4.1.   Structured metaphoric transference

There are two differing perspectives on the emphasis that is placed on structured metaphoric transference in Ecotherapy. The distinction between these perspectives lies essentially in the type of influence that is exerted in the design of the process, or the structuring of metaphoric transfer. Bacon (in Gass, 1993a) suggests that, in the design of the programme, the leader establishes a set of experiences that serve as metaphors for the life circumstances of participants. By linking the metaphoric experience with personal challenges, the participant is able to experience positive outcomes in situations that mirror life experiences outside of the therapeutic programme. Gass (1993a) suggests that one of the central purposes of the metaphoric exercise is to develop a positive transfer of learning to the future lives of participants.

Gass (1993a) describes the metaphoric transfer in terms of the linking of "isomorphs" with therapeutic issues. Isomorphism refers to the overlay of different complex structures on to one another, so that the structure of one may serve to illuminate that of the other. The structured metaphors thus serve as structural overlays for re-conceptualising challenges faced by participants. Through experience in a metaphoric situation, the participants are guided towards more healthy ways of dealing with difficult life experiences.

Bacon (in Gass, 1993a) suggests four key components that affect the effectiveness of the structured metaphor in bringing about positive change. Firstly, the metaphor should be related with enough intensity to the life challenge at hand to hold the attention of the participant. Second, the metaphor should allow for a successful accomplishment of the task relating to the participants real life experience. Thirdly, the metaphor should be isomorphic, in that it shares enough structural similarity to the real life situation. Lastly, the metaphor should be similar in complexity and detail,

that it allows the participant to attach personal meaning to the situation. When these conditions are met, Bacon states that metaphoric transference creates positive change through substitution of dysfunctional behaviours with successful resolution strategies.

Essentially, the structural nature of this form of metaphoric transfer refers to its relationship with a specific task. The metaphoric relationship exists, or is created in relation to a task, chosen by the programme leaders or designers. The task is the removal, or substitution of a problematic behaviour with one that has a "successful ending" (Gass, 1993a, p. 247). Metaphoric transference is in this instance goal directed. It is focussed at a desired outcome, stipulated by the programme management, in response to the problem behaviour/s presented by the participants.

2.7.4.2.   Spontaneous metaphoric transference/ symbolic significance

In contrast to the structured focus, spontaneous metaphoric transference occurs without a specific planned outcome. The process of learning, or healing does however occur in much the same manner as stipulated above. The goal of the spontaneous variety emerges from within the participant, in relation to their personal healing initiative.

The following two quotes taken from interviews by Conradie (2001) illustrate the spontaneous use of metaphor and symbol by participants in ecotherapy:

> *Many of us… had symbols of like, animals or something that came along… like an answer to a problem that you've been… struggling with for quite some time now. For example the wind, it blows lightly, and it blows a little harder, like…your moods, some days it is calm, some days it is like the wind… You can understand yourself better* (p. 24).

The symbolic meaning that participants extract from certain features of nature, lends support to theories or approaches that work at the level of interface between the conscious and subconscious, and that draws on the symbolic value of nature (Conradie, 2001; Robertson & Van Zyl, 1999). The unmanipulated wilderness environment serves as a mirror to the individual. The lack of manipulation means

that, in psychological terms it is uninfluenced by the ego. Through a symbolic understanding of this environment, the individual has the opportunity to use the environment as a tool for self-realisation. This occurs through the projection of unconscious material onto the 'untainted' environment, from which it can be more readily interpreted without contamination. In the same way that within the dream, aspects of the self are played out on a 'dream canvas', the wilderness functions as a screen, onto which subconscious can project its symbols. The wilderness environment thus provides the conscious mind with a symbolic projection to view and interpret (Robertson & Van der Heyden, 2001).

Robertson (Robertson, 1999a; 1999b; 2000; Robertson & Van Zyl, 1999; Robertson & Van der Heyden, 2001) suggests that the route of a trail, or the setting of an experience is chosen with an understanding that the physical obstacles, challenges and achievements and their parallel psychological equivalents are part of the same process. The obstacles and challenges however, are not created, rather, they exist as natural features and conditions of the journey. Robertson (1999) states that the symbolic value of natural features can be incorporated into the healing process of the experience. The design of an experience thus recognises the symbolic value of the environment as well as the process. There is an awareness of symbolic value of the components of the experience and the environment; however these are natural and not culturally subscribed.

Loos (1997) proposes that the concerns of consciousness are mirrored in what the psyche selects to attend to in the outer world. Robertson (1999b) describes this function in terms of hooks, features that resemble projected material in some way. Projections almost always require hooks, and the wilderness, being an environment uninfluenced by the ego, facilitates the projection of the internal unknown, the unconscious.

Similar to the function of dreams, the wilderness environment can be seen as a cinematic canvas on to which the unconscious is projected. In dreams, the unconscious material is projected onto the dream canvas, so that the symbols within dreams may be interpreted by consciousness. In Ecotherapy, the wilderness environment, as the canvas, has hooks, or certain similarities to various elements of

the unconscious. The unconscious material is projected on to these hooks and can thus be interpreted by consciousness. Each feature serves as a symbol for its representation in the unconscious. Thus, unconscious material is linked with certain similar wilderness feature. To recognise, amplify and clarify this link in consciousness, it can be presented in narrative as a metaphor.

It is precisely this presentation of the link between the unconscious and its symbolic presentation in the wilderness that is of interest in this study. The purpose is thus, to investigate the presentation of these metaphors in the Ecotherapy, with a view to gaining a deeper insight into the processes at work within this context.

In the next chapter the methodological considerations of this study will be explained.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

3.1.   Introduction to method

This chapter comprises a brief overview of qualitative research methods, and a rationale for the use of these methods in this exploratory study. An aspect of these methods, the exploratory grounded-theory approach, will also be discussed. Key issues involved in the use of this method are presented and some attention is given to possible difficulties (criticisms) that may arise. The ecotherapy trail programme and the ecotherapy nature trails that are the setting for this study are also considered in more detail.

3.2.   Choice of method

The object of an exploratory study is the formulation of more precise research questions, in an area where little or no research exists (Neumann, 1997; Hedrick, Brickman, & Rog, 1993). In the researcher's experience, the appearance of nature metaphors in the language of ecotherapy participants began as a noteworthy experience at times when psychological change seemed evident. As these appearance increased, the researcher began to pay closer attention to them. In discussion with colleagues, the notion began to surface, that these metaphors had been noticed, and some facilitators had begun to use these metaphorical instances in the therapeutic process. Following a review of relevant literature, it became evident that although the use of metaphors had been recognised as an important element of certain psychotherapeutic approaches, the use of nature metaphors by participants in ecotherapy had not been specifically investigated.

With the emergence of nature metaphors as a focal interest, the question arose as to how these presentations could be appropriately investigated. In the absence of an adequate base of research or theory, it became increasingly obvious that an exploratory study would prove most suitable to this investigation.

Neumann (1997) notes that exploratory research emerges from the researchers initially "fuzzy" idea through social interactions with friends and colleagues. Through this process, he suggests, the ideas become clearer and more developed

through the research process. What emerges are, however, not the definitive answers sought by traditional research initiatives, but rather, an unfolding of the domain of interest. This unfolding is evidenced by the question that is answered, the question of "what is this social activity really about?" (Neumann, 1997, p.19). The logical basis inherent to this approach is, therefore, an inductive one, as arguments are presented through instances within the data (Van der Merwe, 1996).

Another feature of exploratory research that Neumann (1997) addresses is the "advantage of serendipity" (p. 19). This is the advantage of the unexpected factors that emerge in a creative research process that have larger implications for process of investigation, and therefore for the answers that emerge. Mouton (1987, in Retief, 1993) suggests that an important consideration in this research design is to follow an open and flexible research strategy. In this instance, the appearance of nature metaphors has emerged into this study as a process discussion and discover within the context of the ecotherapy environment, and particularly the shared experiences of trail facilitators. Through interaction with participant data and ecotherapy facilitators, this design allows for a communicative interaction between the presented metaphors and facilitators input and interpretation.

The themes and questions that emerge from this study are intended to provide areas for further investigation in the field of Ecopsychology and its practice in ecotherapy, and simultaneously to be of pragmatic value to the facilitators of ecotherapy experiences. This study is thus intended to inform not only researchers, but the practitioners, and consequently the participants.

Neumann (1997) suggests that exploratory researchers tend to use qualitative research since it is less wedded in specific theory or research. In the following section, the application of a qualitative method will be discussed further in relation to the needs of this study.

The central objective of the qualitative approach is to make sense of the phenomena in question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Smaling (1992) proposes several pragmatic issues that directly influence this choice of method in research: the context and identity of the researcher; the situation of the investigated subjects; the main aim and

the goals of the research; and the intended audience of the research. A number of these issues have already been discussed in relation to exploratory research and will be discussed further in relation to the qualitative approach to exploratory research.

Mouton (1996) suggests that the individual personality and cognitive style of the researcher plays an important role in the choice of research and the research activities. The researcher's position and experience as an Ecotherapy facilitator, within an organisation (Ecotherapy Institute) focussed on the development and implementation of this approach, is a primary feature in the choice of a qualitative methodology. The process of ecotherapy in practise is highly subjective and meaning based. Therefore, the context of my training and experience in such a milieu will naturally have played a part in the choice of a qualitative methodological approach to an understanding of the process. In addition, my decision to begin training and work in the ecotherapy environment is already suggestive of a meaning based orientation.

Another contextual influence of the choice of methodology relates to the logical processing of this research that has surfaced from my interactions and relationships with fellow facilitators and participants. Neumann (1997) refers to this process of logic formulation in the real context as "logic in practise"(p. 330). It is the wisdom that develops in the researcher's experience of the context and is characteristic of qualitative research.

Simply stated, the main aim and goals of this study are exploratory. In this approach, the qualitative method is viewed as more suitable as it tends to be more open to the use of a wide range of evidence, and to the discovery of new issues and questions (Neumann, 1997).

There are essentially two intended audience for this study. Firstly, it is aimed at providing a basis for future research in the area of ecotherapy and specifically in the presentation and use of nature metaphors. Secondly, this study is aimed at fellow facilitators and others interested in the manifestation of these metaphors, and the mechanisms of the healing function of ecotherapy, and nature based healing in general. As suggested above, the pragmatic value for facilitators is value for participants. A core feature of the ecotherapy process is to provide participants with

at least some theoretical background to their experience, even, such as with small children, at the most simplified level.

Thus, according to the pragmatic issues of the context and identity of the researcher, the situation of the investigated subjects, the main aim and the goals of the research, and the intended audience of the research are all suited to a qualitative approach. In the following section of this chapter, the grounded theory methodology will be discussed further in the light of the considerations discussed above.

Grounded theory is an approach to qualitative research used to discover new theories that are faithful to the data (Neumann, 1997). The theory evolves in research through the continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). It is the continuous interaction between theory and newly gathered data that is the essence and benefit of using a grounded theory approach.

In this study, the exploratory nature calls for a creative movement in the research to investigate new evidence that emerges in the analysis of data. The point of departure here has been to read through the various forms of metaphor presented in numerous types of data. This initial reading begins the process of stimulating new thoughts and directions to follow in eliciting new data. The Grounded Theory approach thus facilitates this flexible strategy so necessary to an exploratory goal.

In line with exploratory goal of this research, the research strategy adopted in the collection of data will be discussed in the following section.

3.3.   Research strategy and data collection

Since the goal of this study is to explore the role that nature metaphors play in the healing process of ecotherapy, a strategy was employed to allow a freedom to explore areas, which proved to elicit interesting ideas. Two data sources were initially reviewed for evidence of nature metaphors, video recordings of ecotherapy trails, and personal reflection exercises completed by participants. The next step that emerged was to gather as much material as possible presenting nature metaphors. In order to

maintain each facilitators responsibility for the confidentiality of materials gathered during trails, facilitators were asked to use their discretion in submitting examples of metaphor presented on trail or in feedback.

Following a review of this data, the researcher then began the process of attempting to coordinate and structure the data into a manageable framework from which a suitable means of analysis would emerge. During this exercise it became evident that in attempting to analyse data in terms of metaphors, much of the meaning associated with the experience of ecotherapy was being lost. The analysis was beginning to shift towards a semantic analysis and away from the foundations of the ecotherapy approach.

At this point the researcher was confronted with the "advantage of serendipity" discussed above. This accidental fortune came about in a discussion of the difficulties of analysis with an ecotherapy facilitator. During this discussion, it emerged that the link between the available data and an understanding of the ecotherapy process lay in the understanding that this facilitator was expressing during the discussion. It seemed that it was not the role of the researcher, to interpret the data. The facilitators were in the best position, as intermediaries between the practice and theory. The researcher thus began to explore the potential benefit of presenting some of the available data to ecotherapy facilitators. It was expected that this new element would provide more insight into the functioning of the ecotherapy process from the perspective of the facilitator.

At this point, it became necessary to select appropriate data for presentation to the facilitators. Having returned to the available data, with this approach in mind, it was decided that a segment of a videotaped participant experience would suitable for analysis would be most suitable for this exercise. A selection of available recorded experiences was then made on the basis of the auditory clarity of recordings for accurate transcription. From this selection, one particular experience was chosen that was deemed, by the researcher, to provide a conceptuality clear, as well as metaphorically rich account of a personal experience. The next factor that needed to be addressed was the ownership of the data. As mentioned above, the notion of confidentiality is a key feature of the experience. The researcher decided to request

permission from the selected participant to use their presented data. This would then be offered for interpretation by facilitators, as both written and discussion based interpretations. Having made contact with the participant in question, the research design and intentions were presented to her, as well as a copy of her experience. The participant in question subsequently agreed to take part in the study.

In keeping with the principle of confidentiality the participant in question will henceforth be referred to as X. She is Caucasian woman, in her early twenties and was, at the time of her experience, a student of psychology in the Gauteng Province. This was participant X's first ecotherapy trail experience. She formed part of a group that was being exposed to the experience and process of ecotherapy, with the potential of further training.

Having received consent, a transcription of X's experience was presented to an ecotherapy facilitator, AG. Using an open-ended structure to the interview, the researcher then asked the facilitator to provide her own understanding of the presented experience. It was decided beforehand purposefully not to introduce the concept of metaphor, but rather to see what would emerge from the discussion.

Having undertaken and transcribed the interview with AG, the researcher then proceeded with an interview with GR, an ecotherapy facilitator and trainer. Using the same format of presenting the transcript of X's experience for an open interpretation and discussion, the researcher decided once again not introduce the notion of metaphor, but rather to leave this element until the final collation and discussion of the data. This decision was made because, having reviewed AG's discussion, it became evident that the metaphoric presentation interpreted and explored by the ecotherapy facilitator was seemingly grounded in an understanding of symbols, and the researcher thus did not want to influence the language presented by the facilitators.

At the same time, having requested participation in the study from two other ecotherapy facilitators, both based in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, a transcription of X's experience was sent to each, with a request to discuss in written format the presented text, as an example of an ecotherapy experience. Both were specifically

requested that they allow any themes or ideas that they experienced during the readings to flow freely, and suggested that they not attempt to provide any specific structured format for their discussion.

In the following section, the ecotherapy trail will be explained in terms of the key elements required as well as contextual variations.

3.4.   The Ecotherapy Institute Trail Programme

The ecotherapy trail experience is always planned in accordance with the participants of the trail. Characteristics of the participants include: presenting issue, age, number of participants, potential for physical activity, degree of psychological self-awareness and psycho-emotional. These characteristics will affect the choice of physical environment, length of the experience, physical activities, depth of presentation of theory, and the choice of auxiliary activities.

3.4.1.   Number of participants and facilitators

Each experience will consist of up to 12 participants and between 2 and 4 facilitators, or assistants. The number of facilitators depends firstly on the number of participants, and secondly on the needs of participants. When the participants are small children, the ratio of facilitator to participant will be 1 to 3 or 4, whereas will older participants this can extend to 1 to 6. Each trail should consist of at least one trained ecotherapy facilitator and at least one assistant facilitator. Often where more facilitators are needed, these will be assistants or in some cases volunteers or care-givers. A minimum of two facilitators is always necessary, since the experience will be significant for the facilitators and they will need physical and psychological support during the process. The facilitators sharing an experience should also have a trusting relationship so that they can access support from each other.

In every experience a number of key elements will always be present, although they will take on different forms dependent on the characteristics of the participants. The key elements are: departure; introduction session; featured experience; group discussion of symbols; reflection and exchange of experiences; and return.

3.4.2. Departure

The departure is an important element of the experience since the entire experience is conceptualised as a journey. The participant group will usually depart together to travel to the designated wilderness setting. Most often, the group will have met previously to discuss preparation for the journey. In some instances, prior meetings are not feasible and the point of departure becomes the first point of contact for the group as a whole. At this point, minimal introduction is done, preparation and packing is finalised and the group travels to the wilderness setting. There are certain situations where some members of the group travel and depart separately, but this practice is discouraged.

3.4.3. Introduction ceremony

Upon arrival at the destination, or the start of the hike, equipment is unpacked and participants are given time to arrange their affairs and settle into the new environment. The participants and facilitators sit together and introduce each other. The group usually sits in a circle, and Imphepho, African incense is burnt as a symbol for cleansing and the setting of intention. The facilitators then explain any relevant practical guidelines to the activities that may follow. During this process, the facilitators provide basic information, but an attempt is made not to divulge too much about the course of the following days. At this point, participants may engage in creative activities such as the carving and painting of journey sticks, or drumming and singing. These activities vary according to groups and the type of experience.

3.4.4. Featured activity

The general course of the experience is dependant on the needs and abilities of the group. The course and activities also depend on the available time and the physical setting. Although each experience is different, two categories of experience are most common on ecotherapy trail: the exposure trail and the hiking trail (the hiking trails with militarised youth are well documented in Schell-Faucon, 2001). The term 'exposure' refers to the introduction of participants to the ecotherapy experience. This type of experience is however not only used for first experiences, and exposure can also be viewed as an exposure to the environment, whether it is for the first time

or not. The key features of this experience are that it is located at one central base, from which activities can lead out and return. This type of experience also tends to be shorter in duration, between 3 and 5 days in length. The exposure trail will often incorporate shorter day hikes. The experience is also more suited to the solitary experience, which may serve as it central feature. This type of trail is designed in accordance with the participants and thus takes shape from the specific needs of the group. For example, an active day hike for physically fit adolescents may be substituted with a short walk to a significant natural site, or a solitary experience for an elderly group.

The solitary experience entails an individual experience within the natural environment. Whereas the trail involves an entire group, and most of the featured activities are structured around the group, the solitary experience, or 'solo' is an opportunity for each individual to spend a prescribed period of time on their own in the natural environment. Due to the absence of other people, the solo can be viewed as a more direct experience of the environment. The solo is presented as a central feature of the larger trail and preparations as well integration of the experience therefore form an integral part of the process.

In contrast, the hiking trail follows a particular route, over a number of days. The group takes all provisions with them. Much of this experience centres on the actual experience of hiking and the journey that is experienced. The hiking trail has tended to be longer, but such trails can also be done over 3 days. Naturally, these trails require a certain level of physical ability and are usually done with youth. The route of the hike is traditionally designed with an understanding of the physical obstacles, challenges and achievements, and their parallel psychological equivalents.

3.4.5. Presentation of symbols

The presentation of symbols or the concept of symbolism is a key feature of all ecotherapy experiences. The manner in which symbolism is presented is largely dependent on the group level of understanding, the context of the experience, and the orientation and choice of the facilitator/s. The essence of this presentation lies in providing the participants with the concept of a symbolic means of interpreting their

own experiences. Often this takes the form of an explanation of the circle of life, and the stages of the circle. Each stage is represented by a geographical direction (East, South, West and North) an element (air, fire, water and earth) and sometimes an animal and/ or colour. This presentation ranges in complexity from choosing personal animal symbols and stories, to abstract discussions of symbolism, myth and metaphysics. Once again the choice in form of the presentation is dependent on the orientation and training of the facilitators.

3.4.6. Reflection and exchange of experience

A period of time is usually set aside toward the end of the trail for sharing of experience and reflection. This occurs with the whole group gathering, usually in a circle. Each participant and facilitator has the opportunity to share and reflect on their experience in the company of the group. Loos (1993) describes the process of sharing as sitting in council. During this process, facilitators use reflection and mirroring strategies to augment the shared experiences. Mirroring, in this context, is a process that serves to highlight the potential symbolic meaning contained in literal references to activities and objects. For example, a participant may say that others in the group were walking too fast, and she was being left behind. The facilitator would thus attempt to find out more about this sense of being left behind, as a feeling relating to the action. Loos (1993) suggests that the mirroring of participants experiences during this sitting serves to augment and clarify their personal experiences. It is also during this process that many of the metaphors presented by participants emerge.

3.4.7. Closing ceremony and return

Similarly to the departure, the return is an important characteristic of the experience. It frames the end of the experience in much the same way that the departure frames the beginning. Prior to departure, a closing ceremony is held where each participant is given the opportunity for final reflections, as well as to thank others and say goodbye. This process is also marked ceremonially by the burning of Imphepho. The concluding ceremony usually occurs prior to departure as the group will often separate soon after arrival or will head in different directions.

3.4.8.   Auxiliary elements of experiences

The features of ecotherapy experiences mentioned above are all core elements that form part of a trail in some form or another. In addition to these features, a number of practices are also included to contribute to the experience. As each facilitator's orientation will vary, so will their capacity to introduce new auxiliary activities, thus the list is by no means exhaustive or inclusive. The auxiliary practices include:

- Icebreakers games
- Walks/ orientation to the environment
- plays/poems/song
- Bead-making
- Journey Stick making
- Drumming or other musical interaction
- Ritual burning or ceremony around negative aspects of life.

Having outlined the key and auxiliary elements of the ecotherapy experience, ethical considerations relevant to this research will be discussed in the following section.

3.5.   Ethical considerations

As Neumann (1997) states, ethics in research begin and end with the researcher. Ethical research thus depends on the integrity of the researcher. As discussed above, the major ethical consideration that has been accounted for in this research is the issue of confidentiality. Firstly, separating all names from the documents that were processed has safeguarded the anonymity of participants. Each facilitator is also accountable for the confidentiality of the trail information that is presented. When information is shared between facilitators, or with researchers or trainers, permission for the use of data must be obtained from facilitators and supervisors at the NPAT.

In the video material used, the NPAT policy requires facilitators to explain to participants that recorded materials may be used for training and research objectives. Subjects are told that the information will, however, remain confidential outside of these situations. In addition participants, are told that they may ask for certain information to be held within the group, or to stop recordings before they share.

These features regarding confidentiality surfaced in ecotherapy trails at an early stage, since the first trails were conducted with militarised youth, many of whom had committed crimes. In order to establish confidence in the process, a strict discipline in terms of ethical considerations was established early on.

Through a constant interactive approach to analysing data in conjunction with facilitators, the intention has been held to provide those responsible to participants, the facilitators themselves, with review opportunities. These reviews are intended to confirm the confidentiality of the data.

3.6.   Summary of method

In this description of the method, the goals of exploratory research have been explained in relation to this study. The qualitative methodology and the grounded theory approach were discussed in terms of their suitability to this type of research. Next, the research design in relation to the use of data has been explained in light of the exploratory approach. In the following section, the ecotherapy trail experience was outlined in terms of both core and auxiliary features of trail experiences. Finally, the primary ethical consideration in this study, that of confidentiality was discussed in light of the measures that have adopted in this study to insure its application.

In the following chapter, an analysis of the data will be presented. This will take the form of a presentation of selected excerpts from the transcripts of interviews. Each individual excerpt will also be presented in psychological language as an analysis of the presented data. The chapter will conclude with a summary of key emerging themes.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

4.1.   Introduction to the analysis

Working in Ecotherapy and noticing the impact of the ecotherapeutic experience on peoples' lives, the researcher became interested in attempting to "explain" and identify this impact. Through these experiences it was noticed that participants often presented their experiences in the form of metaphors, or symbolic verbal presentations. Therefore the researcher decided, using an exploratory approach, to look at how facilitators of the NPAT Ecotherapy Institute understood the core therapeutic procedures and components of the ecotherapy experience. It was hoped that this would allow for the construction of a clearer understanding of the metaphoric process, and its value in understanding the ecotherapy process. To this end, four open-ended interviews were undertaken with experienced ecotherapy facilitators involved in the Ecotherapy Institute trail programme. Each interview was structured around the interpretation of a transcript of a former participant's (participant X) shared experience during a trail. From the transcriptions of these interviews with the facilitators, it is the researcher's intention to attempt to identify and explain the role of symbolism and its narrative presentation in metaphor, as a core therapeutic component and process of the ecotherapy trail experience, as these are understood and made practicable by these very facilitators. Two of the interviews were recorded on audiotape and two were completed as responses through electronic mail.

Excerpts have been selected from each facilitator's transcript to reflect the relevant themes presented during the interview. The selected excerpts will be presented, accompanied by a brief description, to illustrate the manner in which these excerpts have been understood in the current context. In addition a brief introduction of each facilitator with regard to their ecotherapeutic experience is provided. The excerpts are listed by their presenting facilitator as well as a number for the consecutive excerpts by this facilitator for example GR2, XH2.

In order to contextualise the excerpts selected from the facilitator interviews, the transcript of participant X's experience is provided in section 4.2 as it was presented to the participating facilitators.

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4.2. Transcript of participant X's experience

The following transcription was made from a video recording of a group reflection opportunity during an ecotherapy trail. Participant X's reflections relate to a solitary experience on the day preceding her reflections.

...So we went up the path and Jos found a spot and I went higher and then I went off the path and I went off the path and I went further east, ya, then I saw two trees , their branches were interlocked and from where I was standing it formed a circle, so I thought okay well that looks pretty good , and I went, I went there, it looked fine, so I thought no well I'll stay there, I'll go there.

Then, the next day when I eventually got there I didn't feel at all ease, I just felt, I don't know, something just didn't feel right and I couldn't because what actually it was, was three trees altogether and there was bushes all around so it formed a circle as well so there was a circle in there as well and but I, I couldn't see anything and that bugged me because the reason I wanted to go up and I wanted a view. So, what I ended up doing was extending the circle of rocks and then sitting on the side but I still didn't feel right it just didn't I didn't feel connected. I actually felt like an intruder like that spot, that circle wasn't for me.

There were spiders but this that that didn't bug me and um I actually sat for a long time and this black huge black bug or beetle came in there and I watched it for a long time it was like making a home for itself right where I was planning on sleeping. Ja, it was actually, it wasn't a it wasn't a good time, I just sat there and a lot of the surrounding actually reminded me off someone so it also brought back a lot of bad memories and I had a bit of shade but as I was getting hotter and hotter and I was getting the most terrible, terrible headache and eventually I couldn't even move I was just stuck in this spot I couldn't even drink water so I think I was dehydrating as well. I just sat there and eventually I just couldn't take it anymore and there was bees, not bees flies and muggies continuously around my head so it was buzzing and I could hear the road at the bottom trucks going on the roads so it was just nothing felt right so I started

drumming for a while and I couldn't get a rhythm and I got more and more agitated and angrier and the pain in my head was just getting worse and worse.

So I decided and I tried to meditate but I just couldn't concentrate all I could hear was this thumping in my head so I did an inner child exercise and I got in touch with my vulnerable child and I just had this whole long conversation tried to work out a few things and I felt a bit better after that. And I looked around to where I was sitting and it actually took me back to when I was about three years old and I used to play under this tree in the mud in the sand and it actually didn't I didn't feel so bad and I just went back to sleep well not to sleep, I closed my eyes again and there was another butterfly that came later and then this so this went on and on and on, and then um I felt something move on my foot and I got such a fright and I kicked and I saw this black beetle who had made its home, it went flying. I felt really bad because I had kicked out of the circle and so it went flying somewhere but when I think about know I actually feel good because when I sat outside of that circle I felt like an intruder, I didn't feel at all connected but the fact that the beetle just walked over me as if I was part of the landscape actually makes me feel connected as if I was actually connected and the fact that the butterflies came into my circle as well and came very very close to me.

So looking back at it know its ja, but the, my circle where I was I couldn't see anything and so if I look at it symbolically it was, it was a space that forced me to look into myself and I don't think I was really ready for it and that why I couldn't actually when I first got there, I still wanted to sit outside cause I still had a view and I could look outwards and this headache, I don't know if it was me or what, why I got that terrible headache and why, but actually, if it wasn't for that I wouldn't have gone into the circle.

Ja so, and then it rained and I actually I enjoyed the rain and I prepared myself for the rain so I wasn't even unprepared for that and I felt really good and the nice thing about it is that while it was raining the beetle came back and it was also, it was struggling also to find a dry space so I kind of connected again with the beetle, ya it was in the same spot as I was and then it was okay about it. It

stopped raining I got up and then the sun came out so I put everything out in the sun to dry and I was actually feeling really, really good and the headache wasn't as bad anymore it was just it was, but then I heard thunder and I just, I just felt this sudden terror, absolute terror, I couldn't breathe, it was like I was choking, so I just packed everything and I was I was sliding all over the place, I just couldn't get out there fast enough. And then I walked down the path and then I saw Jos standing there and we just looked at each other and she had the same feeling and we both left.

But I, I didn't really understand, I didn't yesterday when I got back, I didn't actually, I felt nothing. At first I was a bit disappointed that I left and I would have liked to have stayed, I actually wanted to stay but then I was emotional, so I felt no, I felt I would have gained nothing, it was just a terrible, uncomfortable experience, and that's how I felt all night and all today and until we came into the circle and we chose a card, and the card just kind of summed everything up for me and suddenly everything made sense. And I thought that the place that I chose was not right for me and the fact, and I couldn't, I could never leave that place, and although I was sitting outside of it everyone else has spoken about going to different spots and that, there was something inside of me that I couldn't leave, I just sat there, I couldn't go anywhere. And I think it was just really that it was time for me to look into the silence, look into myself, look into, deliver my sacred witness, as the card said, to find my cry within the silence in me and, ya. A lot of it as well, I mean, if you talk about the east sitting outside there I was dying, I mean I was going through terrible, terrible physical pain, I really felt at one stage I was dying. I was letting, and I had those terrible memories, it was almost as if those were dying as well, and then going into that circle was like a rebirth, an awakening. I don't know what it's awakened, I'm still not sure, in fact I'm going through a lot of turmoil at the moment. I feel since telling you about the circle, my heart's practically jumping out, I don't know what it is, I'm not sure, but ya. Yesterday, I could have said to you I experienced nothing and feel fine, but today I can actually say I did and mm.

4.3.   Selected excerpts

In this section, a brief background of each participating facilitator's relevant experience is presented, followed by selected excerpts from each interview.

4.3.1.   Facilitator A: GR

GR is an Educational Psychologist, and serves as the director of the Ecotherapy Institute and training director of the NPAT.   He has been involved in Ecotherapy within the NPAT since the inception of the Wilderness Project in 1996. GR has been involved in numerous trails throughout South Africa as a facilitator, trainer, supervisor and coordinator. He is currently also lecturer of Ecopsychology at the University of Stellenbosch.

Excerpt GR1:

> *I understand that what is operating in that kind of experience is predominantly a subconscious experience, and that the language of the subconscious is symbolism, so in order to understand the experience consciously it is easier when you look at the symbolism involved. So my understanding of this experience is simply through trying to understand the symbolism of what spot she chose, what happened during the time that she was there how she responded, what her understanding of the events were, the bug, the butterfly and what her understanding of these things were firstly, and what cultural understandings could be there and what the universal understandings could be, and through that coming to some sort of understanding of what her subconscious processes were during that time, and are while she's telling, relating her experience on the solo.*

GR states that the predominant experience for participant X is this situation is a subconscious one.   In order to understand consciously what this experience is, one needs to look at the presentation of the subconscious experience which takes the form of symbolism. He says that symbolism is the language of the subconscious.   Therefore

to look at the symbolism presented by X, one can better understand the subconscious process.

GR refers to the various symbolic presentations that he uses to understand the subconscious process in the transcript of X: the spot that she chose; what happened during the time that she was there; how she responded to what happened; what her understanding of the events were; the presence of the insect characters, bug and butterfly, and what these would mean to her, what they would mean culturally, and universally.

GR is describing here the process of interpretation of the experience of others and of personal experience at the core of the ecotherapy process. He explains that the process is essentially a subconscious one. In order to make conscious, both for facilitator and participant, as well as researcher in this instance, one needs to view the experience of X in the language in which it is presented. GR states that this language is a symbolic one, or rather the language is essentially symbolism. Thus by investigating the symbolic presentation of X's presented experience, she can better understand her own process.

The meaning that is attributed to the symbolism occurs on three levels, on a personal level for X, as a culturally relevant symbol, and as a universally recognised, or archetypal symbol. GR suggests that only X can provide the interpretation of the personal meaning that she associates with these symbols.

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Excerpt GR2:

> *... it's much more important what her interpretation of the experience is, much more so than what my interpretation is because that will resonate with her and she will be able to understand the symbolism much more clearly. Sometimes its useful to make suggestions to someone. Like what the symbolism could mean on a universal level or a cultural level, and from that they may be able to understand their personal meaning attached to it. So that's really just to use as an inspiration, possibility, but the most important association is her personal one.*

GR stresses here the primacy of importance of the personal interpretation of symbols for the participant in understanding her own experience on a conscious level. This is due to a resonance with the symbolism that may occur for the participant and a resulting clarity in understanding the underlying issues presented in the symbolism. GR suggests that offering cultural and universal interpretations of the presented symbolism may be valuable to the participant, but this is only of value in terms of suggesting possible meaning to inspire the participant in understanding her own true meaning.

Except GR3:

> *She may not have recognised that it was her process and that it was relevant to her in an urban environment, in a city or somewhere else she could have easily understood what was happening around her to be other people's processes, other things separate from her. It is much easier to feel disconnected, to feel completely isolated in a sense, or that one's process is completely one's own in that kind of environment because there's a lot of other dynamics, and other processes happening which one can separate from and feel that one does not belong to...I think that a lot of what one would encounter in an urban environment is the way it is because there is a specific intention. Buildings look the way they do because they've been designed in that way, by people with certain intentions and certain motivations. It is a much less neutral environment. its cluttered with a web of different motivations, intentions, designs, appearances, behaviours, and its much more the kind of environment where one can feel alone...When I say alone I mean that sense of loneliness. I think it's much easier to experience that in an urban environment because loneliness I think has got a lot more to do with how comfortable or uncomfortable one is with themselves as opposed to how many people they have around them. So I think that feeling disconnected in an urban environment is a far more lonely experience.*

There are two related themes within this particular excerpt. The link between the themes being the distinction between the natural and the urban, or city environment.

Firstly, GR refers to the difference between environments in terms of the intentions of others, or the influence of others within the urban environment. This stands in contrast to a wilderness environment, which is by definition limited in the influence by other humans. Secondly, GR refers to the loneliness that a person could experience in the urban environment. He refers to loneliness, not in terms of the physical presence of others, but rather in terms of a sense of connection with oneself related to how comfortable one is with oneself. In the urban environment, he suggests that the clutter of distractions and influences from the outside make one more uncomfortable, thus disconnected from the self, and more lonely.

The loneliness relates to a sense of disconnection with self that occurs as the individual experience personal discomfort. GR suggests that this sense of discomfort will be heightened in the urban environment because of the distractive influence of the encroaching intentions of the features of the manufactured environment. Because the urban environment is laden with the motivations and intentions of others, presented in the constructed environment, the individual may have difficulty in recognising their own self, reflected back from the environment. This confusion results in a discomfort for the individual, and it is this discomfort that is experienced as loneliness. The loneliness is therefore a disconnection from the self, due to distractions in the field of feedback from the environment.

In contrast to the urban environment, the natural environment lacks the distractions and encroachment of the intentions and motivations of others. Thus, the feedback that is received of the self, from the environment is clearer. In this sense, it is clearer because it is a more direct, unmanipulated reflection of the self. The direct feedback of self can result in increased comfort, which is a closer and clearer knowing of self, and connection to self.

Excerpt GR4:

> *My understanding is that the subconscious is located in the entire body, not just in the brain and therefore, any physical experience, or any way that we engage physically with our bodies, physically with the world involves the subconscious, but the subconscious operates in different ways to the conscious and it expresses*

itself much more directly and much more symbolically, or in the sense that it, it tries to be as direct as possible so whatever the physical experience is, or whatever one experiences physically through the body is very directly connected to what the meaning associated with that is. Even looking at different symptoms within the body, it's a physical symptom at one level, but it also relates to a psychological pattern or symptom at another level and its quite direct, so , a lower back pains a different pattern, or a different message to a headache or a problem with a foot or something like that, because during an ecotherapy experience, the behaviour, or what happens with participants can also be interpreted symbolically, so if someone injures themselves in some way, or has a difficulty with going through a particular landscape or dealing with a particular feature in the environment, the symbolic interpretation often lead to an understanding of what the psychological issue is. So my understanding is that there's a very direct and integrated relationship between the physical and psychological processes, and that understanding them is made easier by understanding the symbolism.

GR relates his understanding of the subconscious' presence in the entire system of the body. The symbolic communication that emerges as a direct communication of the subconscious is thus presented in the form and the language of the body. The presentation of physical ailments is thus a symbolic presentation of the subconscious processes.

This symbolic presentation through the entire body further relates to the body's interaction with the environment. The symptoms presented in interaction with the environment are once more presentations on a symbolic level of the subconscious process. The subconscious is thus not only presented symbolically through its own symptoms, and through projections on to the environment, as separate processes, but the interactions of the physical body and the physical environment are dynamically intertwined in creating a multidimensional symbolic communication.

GR explains that through an understanding, or simply an awareness of the symbolism presented through the physical body, the natural environment, and the interaction

between the two, one can gain an awareness of the underlying subconscious processes.

4.3.2. Facilitator B: AG

AG is an ecotherapy facilitator and the project coordinator of the Ecotherapy programme in the Western Cape. She first became involved in Ecotherapy as an intern in 2001, at which time she began her training as a facilitator. AG has been involved in trails throughout South Africa as a facilitator, trainer and coordinator. She is currently working for the Ecotherapy Institute on a contractual basis and has recently formed her own Ecotherapy trail organisation.

Excerpt AG1:

...the symbolism in there is almost obvious. It's the circular space that draws her and then not being able to step into it and the fact that she has such a hectic emotional, I mean, if it was just about moving into a space physically, why all this anxiety, all this fear, even the beetle, she could just kick it out and make herself comfortable in the shade, but there's on a deeper level there's stuff coming up and there's anxiety about moving into this circle which is not about her physical surroundings. So in a sense that already kind of provides the clue, so that we're not talking about, she's not scared of the beetle, she's scared of what the beetle represents, which seems to be kind of a shadowy thing. And it seems to be quite a big thing that she gets comfortable with it for a while and that she recognises that, she actually says that she felt a connection to that thing, whatever that would symbolise for her. She says that she doesn't know what it means, but it also seems that she doesn't actually, it wasn't a time where she actually went in and explored herself, it seems an experience that she actually just needs to go and see that it exists, that It's there, and there's stuff. And there's stuff to be dealt with, and that seems like a huge step.

AG suggests that the symbolism presented in X's account reflects a deeper process of experience. The emotional content that is presented in relating X's experience is suggestive that the physical presentations may be symbolic because of X's reactions

to them. AG asks rhetorically whether the physical presentations can be viewed solely as objective physical facts since they are accompanied by emotional connections to these presentations. Thus, AG suggests that the physical presentations could in a sense be presenting some connection between them and X's emotional meaning associations. This connection can be understood where it is accepted that the physical presentations are symbolic of the underlying emotional processes, or at least a link between the physical experiences and the emotions exists.

AG also suggests that X is not consciously aware of the underlying meaning of the presented symbolism, and she is also not ready to face the meaning on a conscious level. X is satisfied with making the initial connections with the emerging content. This initial connection is already a step that X has undergone in become aware of issues within herself. AG suggests that the emerging content associated with the presented symbolism may well have deep emotional significance, which X first becomes more comfortable with. AG infers that the initial step for X has been to recognise within herself that certain unknown elements or parts of herself have surfaced. Subsequently, she connects with them as a part of her, and becomes comfortable with this. She realises as well that these issues may need to be recognised more consciously, but does so without the pressure to address them in this particular moment.

Excerpt AG2:

> *There's always something about it, which is, that I haven't planned, that I hadn't conceptualised, which had nothing to do with something that can be explained, or that can be theorised. That whole thing about, you often find that it's exactly the right people that come on a specific trail, and then a symbol presents itself that's an ongoing theme and that is the core of everyone, of that thing that they need to deal with. And how that comes together, I can't actually explain. I don't know how to explain that. So yes, in terms of symbols and the unconscious and how that works, you can theorise about that, but there's another aspect of it that more unpredictable. And that you can understand by actually experiencing it. And I think even in your own process, not just in the group, but in your personal experience of what happens there, there's*

something, I don't know, there's something essentially spiritual. I'm using spiritual as something that cannot be explained. I don't know if that's fair. I'm even struggling to say it in words, which proves the point that you can't actually theorise about it. But there's no way that you could fully, not that you'd be able to ever fully understand, it would be really hard to understand the process without going through it. Which is about what experiential training is about. And it's always just engaging with your own process. And that's how you start to learn how other people experience their processes. Its like oh ya cool, I get that because I've experienced that.

AG reflects on the essentially unknown dimensions that form part of the trail experience. She suggests that there are certain elements that emerge without planning. The elements are reflected symbolically by the participants on the trail as well as in the central themes that emerge on the trail.

AG asserts that there is always a sense of elements that are unknown, and unknowable that emerge into the process. She says that although symbolism can be explained theoretically, there are certain elements that are difficult or impossible to describe. AG reflects that even in this process of attempting to describe them she cannot find the words, which she argues, is proof that they cannot be known. These elements that are unknown, she understands as being spiritual, with 'spiritual' being defined as not being 'able to be known'.

By extension, what AG thus suggests is that the process of understanding the experience of ecotherapy is one that develops through one's own experience of this very process, on a personal level, which is the value of the experiential training. The empathic understanding of the process that others relate is one that emerges through a personal experience. One therefore learns to empathically appreciate the process of participants through a heightened self-awareness of one's own personal experiences.

4.3.3.   Facilitator C: AH

AH is an Educational Psychologist, and works as an ecotherapy facilitator and project co-ordinator for the National Peace Accord Trust in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-

Natal. AG has been working as a facilitator, trainer and cordinator in the Ecotherapy project since January 2002 and is currently also working as a psychotherapist and lecturer.

Excerpt AH1:

An important part of ecotherapy is the use of metaphor. Metaphors in nature are taken to mean things for the client's personal internal dynamics, for example a battered white butterfly might represent the shameful or hurt parts of self, but that the self like the butterfly is still beautiful, etc. In X's case she feels like an intruder in the environment but is walked over by the beetle so becomes one with the environment, therefore experiencing belonging. I think there is a real experience here as well as the projected internal dynamics. I think as humans we are part of the environment, but have separated ourselves from it. Human progress and development has often alienated us from the environment as we feel we have dominion over it, and we forget we come from and are part of the earth. Being in nature in this therapeutic way reminds us of the interconnectedness of all life and all things. Giving us ultimately a feeling of belonging that our existence here matters. This experience is important too in that individuals tend to feel not so alone – a typical group therapeutic experience, which X expresses in coming back and hearing others experiences. Also the experience in nature reminds us not to be so self absorbed in some way, to feel this only happens to me, or to feel omnipotent – as we are reminded of patterns of nature and as nature continues regardless, for example with X, the beetle comes back to his home, despite being kicked away, and the paradox of this feeling of not being so omnipotent is that is welcoming and about belonging and acceptance and being part of – all of us need to feel belonging.

AH addresses the importance of metaphor in ecotherapy, as representations of participants' internal dynamics. The metaphor has the ability to hold seemingly conflicting feelings, shame and sense of beauty within one object, the butterfly with battered wings. AH suggests that human progress and development has led to a belief that humans hold dominion over nature and are consequently alienated from it. The connection with the natural world becomes a reminder of the interconnectedness of all

things, and therefore a reminder of the value of each individual's existence. AH claims that X's experience of the beetle is more than her projection of internal dynamics on to the environment, it is a 'real' experience. This real experience, AH describes as a sense of connection with the natural world. Participants thus use features of the natural environment to express internal conflicts. In addition, interaction with the environment forges a connection between person and environment, which arouses a sense of interconnectedness. The connectedness serves to replace the alienation and perceptions of dominion over nature that were developed through human progress and development.

AH says that the ecotherapy experience tends to lower the sense of aloneness, as well as to draw the individual away from self-absorption, and omnipotence. Nature seems to provide reminders of the patterns that occur within in it, as well as its continuation beyond the individual. This AH suggests is expressed by X's beetle returning after being kicked out. X is thus reminded that she is not omnipotent, but that she is connected with the environment. She can kick the beetle out, but it can return without her and through this she is reminded that she is connected with the entire environment.

Excerpt AH2:

> *I think that a very important part of ecotherapy is that the psychological experience or therapeutic experience is experienced in an embodied way. The participant (like X) feels the experience physically by having to sit in this uncomfortable place, by sitting through the rain. This has added importance in that we often experience ourselves as disembodied we forget the connection between mind body and spirit.*

AH refers to the embodied experience within ecotherapy as a key element within the therapeutic experience. The psychological experience is experienced physically, and the individual can thus physically experience the psychological experience as well as to physically enact its resolution. The connection that is made between body, mind and spirit, AH considers being a valuable one, since people are prone to forgetting this connection.

4.3.4. Facilitator D: XH

XH is a Counselling Psychologist. She has been involved in ecotherapy since November 1999 as chairperson, project coordinator and facilitator on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, based at Port Shepstone. She is also involved in private practice, dealing with adults and children, with a primary emphasis on trauma. Her basic stance is client-centered, although eclectic. She has been practising since 1997, having qualified in the United States of America, after which she did an internship at Pietermaritzburg University.

Excerpt XH1:

At the outset of the journey, the conscious mind is very much in control, questing, looking for the "right" spot, judging, imposing will. This sets up a conflict on finding the spot, as if, in a way, they are intruders there – possibly unwelcome. Again, defensive projection on to nature. A narrow focus on something in the natural environment (the beetle) allows the unconscious mind to roam and produce memories/make connections.

XH describes the process of entering the natural environment where the conscious mind seeks to control and impose its own will upon the environment. This is reflected in conscious decision-making process over the correct spot, or environment. There seems to be a conflict that occurs in this process as her unconscious discomfort is projected on to the environment to suggest the presence of intruders. The conscious mind therefore conflicts with the unconscious presentation of intruders within the chosen spot. This conflict resolves itself as the participant moves towards a narrowed focus of attention on an element of the environment, beyond the unconscious projection of fears. The unconscious projections are seemingly freed to travel purposelessly and in so doing, make connections with the environment, and with emotional connections and memories within it.

Except XH2:

> *Since the body is largely unconscious and cells carry memory, this may produce physical symptoms (headache, thirst, hunger), which shifts the focus to personal comfort/discomfort, and creates a need to manage that (self-care/nurturance/escape with whatever means they're accustomed to employing – distraction, meditation, prayer, movement). The adequacy/inadequacy of their responses/self talk to bring comfort generates a variety of emotions, which may or may not be projected on to the environment. The emotions trigger memories, creating a deeper connection with self, a form of processing, containment and perspective. This enables a space to reorient the self, to look anew at the surroundings, and connect with beauty and miracles of life, the beginnings of making meaning/connections and of learning deeper, simpler truths.*

XH suggests that hidden elements within the unconscious mind are brought to the fore by means of cellular memory that is triggered through connections made with a narrow focus on the environment. In response to the physical symptoms that reveal the unconscious connections, the individual resorts to characteristic means of either engaging or not engaging with the physical symptoms, and thus also the emerging connections.

The triggers within the natural environment serve to rouse memories, emotions that were unconscious elements, stored within the body. In response the individual begins to react to these awakened emotions, memories, using characteristic methods such as distraction, meditation, prayer and movement. XH suggests that these methods are used to create comfort for the individual where the arousal of repressed elements of the unconscious will have caused discomfort.

The adequacy or inadequacy of these applied methods to create comfort will in turn arouse new connections with hidden emotions, which the individual may project on to the external environment. These emotions in turn create deeper connections with the self. In essence, the process is a deepening of the connection with self through connections that arouse deeper levels of emotions and memories stored within the unconscious. XH thus suggests that in an attempt to establish levels of comfort that

were destabilised by the emergence of emotions, the individual becomes increasingly self-focused, and thus deepens the connections with self. This deeper connection with self facilitates the process of essential meaning making and an awareness of simpler truths for the individual. Having excavated through the levels of hidden emotions and memories, the individual comes into closer contact with an essential self, no longer so heavily fortified with protective layers. In essence, this process is one of discovering hidden connections within the individual, which lead to an internal place where, in the absence of the layers of distractions, a clearer knowing of the self can be attained.

Excerpt XH3:

Over this process, the environment is seen as welcoming, rather than rejecting – i.e., the self is acknowledged as part of the whole, embraced, as it were, without judgment. That hallowed space of just "be-ing" is where transformation takes place at several levels, rendering the process difficult to put into words, but with the knowledge that "something" has shifted.

XH explains that the resulting effect of deeper connection with the self places the perception of the environment in a more welcoming position. The individual recognises their position as an interactive part of the environment. Outward projections are recognised, accepting and she/ he takes responsibility for all that is perceived externally as parts of the self. In this connected space, the individual is immersed in the transformation that occurs on many levels. It may be difficult for the individual to comprehend their process as a whole and thus to present it consciously, but there is an awareness of at least some element within the person that is no longer as it previously was.

In the following section, the themes that have emerged as relevant to this study for discussion in the following chapter will be briefly outlined.

4.4.   Central emerging themes

From the above exploration of the excerpts selected from the interpretations provided by the participating ecotherapy facilitators, the core emergent themes will now be presented and outlined in preparation for their discussion in the context of existing theory in the following chapter.

As a central theme common in some way to all of the presented excerpts, and essentially common to all of the obtained data, symbolism emerges as the primary focus.   Symbolism is discussed by the facilitators as the primary means of communication of the experience of participants.   One participant refers to metaphor as a key feature of expression in ecotherapy.   In the discussion to follow in chapter 5, the role of symbolism will be discussed in light of understandings presented by the facilitators as well its status in current theory.   In relation to this, the role of metaphor will be discussed as narrative presentation of symbolism.   As subordinate themes, symbolism will be discussed as the language of the unconscious, as well as the various manifestations of symbolism as both projections of the subconscious on to the environment, and physical presentations within the body.   In terms of the interpretation of symbols, the discussion will address personal, cultural and universal symbolism, in relation to personal and external interpretation.

The second focus that is identified from the data is the notion of connection with self. The process of connecting with self will be discussed in terms of the process of reconnecting within the ecotherapy experience, as described by the facilitators. Additionally, the notions of connection and disconnection will be discussed in terms of the natural versus the urban environment.   This will be viewed in terms of loneliness as discomfort through disconnection in the urban versus the natural environment.

A final theme that will be explored is the notion of spiritual experience within the wilderness, both in terms of spirituality as an encounter with the unknown, and as a sense of connection with the greater whole.

In the following chapter, the themes outlined above will be discussed in relation to existing theoretical perspectives as outlined in chapter two. Suggestions will be made for attention in future research and the limitations of this study will be discussed. This study will be concluded with a review of the chapter focussing on the most pertinent discoveries made in this research

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

From an analysis of the data in the previous chapter a number of themes have emerged for discussion in the sections to follow. In the first part of this chapter, themes will be discussed under the headings of: metaphor, symbols and symbolism, embodiment, connection and spirituality. This will be followed by a brief outline of the perceived weaknesses of the study. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the emergent themes and relevant questions for future research.

5.1.   Discussion of themes

5.1.1. Metaphor

In line with the presented aim of this study, the first element of this discussion that should be addressed is the use of the term 'metaphor' versus that of 'symbol'. Of the four participating facilitators only AH referred specifically to metaphor, although all of the facilitators made numerous references to symbols and symbolism. This is deemed to be an important feature revealed by this study. It seems to represent the linguistic, and theoretical understanding that facilitators hold regarding the ecotherapy process, although not their conceptual understanding. As discussed in chapter two, little mention is made in the literature of metaphor in the ecotherapy process. This is seemingly reflected in the terminology presented by facilitators. It would not seem, however, that they ignore the significance of metaphor within this process. Rather it is suggestive that the metaphoric process is understood and presented using a terminology associated with symbolism. As AH suggests, metaphors are seen to mean things for the participant's internal dynamics. This is similar to AG's view that the symbolism presented by the participant reflects a deeper process of experience. In addition, GR states that the subconscious presentation in X's experience can be understood consciously by looking at the symbolism that she presents. He adds that symbolism in this way functions as the language of the subconscious. Therefore, it would seem that the difference in the term is not a reflection of a difference in understanding of the core notion of a subconscious presentation.

This suggestion, however, needs further attention. As was indicated in the discussion on the similarities between metaphor and symbol[1], these terms should not be viewed as synonymous, but rather attention should be given to their similarities. Upon closer investigation of the understanding of symbolism provided by the facilitators, it becomes apparent the function of symbols is integrated within an understanding of the presentation of subconscious content. This is a role, which is excluded to metaphor by definition, since its function relates to the provision of a means of description where an existing one is not adequate, and is therefore a conscious process.

Metaphor is thus seen as an integral part of the process of expression in ecotherapy, but its function is limited to this expression. In contrast, symbols function as a presentation of subconscious material, previously hidden from consciousness. This difference is highlighted in Jung's discussion of the two roles of symbols. Jung explains that the symbol must be able to mediate between the polarities of the conscious and the unconscious, and it must express an element of the unknown (Robertson, 1998). Metaphor partially fulfils these conditions, in that it mediates between polarities. In addition, metaphor can express an element of the unknown. However, metaphor does not express the unconscious, it merely provides a previously unknown bridge between seeming polarities.

Reflecting once again on the statements by facilitators, AH suggests that the metaphors 'mean things' for the participants' internal dynamics. Perhaps what she is suggesting is that it provides a means of expression for internal dynamics. Thus, participants are aware of the presence of internal dynamics, and the metaphor provides a means of expressing these. In a sense the metaphor may also provide a platform on which the experience can be maintained in a tangible format, to be drawn on and worked with in the future. In contrast, GR and AG seem to suggest that symbols express a deeper and unknown element of the participants' unconscious dynamics. The participants are thus only becoming aware of their internal dynamics as they recognise the symbols. The symbol thus reveals to them something that was previously not conscious, therefore, unconscious.

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[1] See section 2.2.3

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In light of this distinction, an important feature that has emerged within this study is the depth of the significance of symbolism. This is represented in the attention given to both the presence and the function that symbols seem to hold in understanding the ecotherapy process. It seemed at first that an investigation of the metaphors presented by participants would reveal much about the mechanisms of the ecotherapy process. What it has indeed revealed is the deeper significance of an understanding of symbols and symbolism within this process. Metaphor has in this way served as a beacon to highlight the multi-layered role of symbols and symbolism within the ecotherapy process. It is thus opportune to further explore the understanding of symbols presented by the facilitators.

5.1.2.   Symbols and symbolism

In chapter two, symbols, and their interpretation were discussed in the format of dreams and dream interpretation. The following discussion will centre around the symbolic projection within the natural environment.

In GR1, GR asserts that an understanding of the experience of X comes from an understanding of the symbolism presented in her account. The experience that X undergoes is essentially a subconscious one. He suggests that by looking at X's presented symbols one can gain an understanding of her subconscious processes. This occurs because symbols are understood as the language of the unconscious. Thus the presented symbols are the words or sentences that describe externally her internal process. Similarly, Jung describes this process as one in which the unconscious communicates psychic facts by means of symbols (Jung, 1964/1978).

Within the dream, the unconscious uses symbols to communicate with the conscious mind. This feature of the dream is understood to be common to all mankind. However, the communication is different within each individual (Freeman, 1964/1978). As GR clarifies, although one may attempt from the outside to interpret X's experience, the meaning of the symbols she presents are personal to her. One may hazard guesses through cultural and universal meanings associated with the presented symbols, however, X remains the expert of her own meaning associations.

The interpretation of symbols offers the individual significant insight into their own internal processes. This reinforces the importance of personal interpretation of the presented symbols. As Jung proposes, the unconscious presents psychic facts to the conscious mind, and these facts can only partially be described in verbal and rational terms.

AG, in AG1 says that an understanding of X's physical experience as a symbolic one is primarily evidenced by X's own reactions to the physical environment. AG proposes that X's emotional reaction to the beetle moving over her is an indication of an underlying emotional connection to this occurrence. Was the beetle merely a beetle crawling over her, X would not have had such an emotional reaction. AG is thus proposing that it is the underlying symbolism of this act that connects with and thus draws out X's emotional response.

In AH1, AH refers to this same account of the beetle moving over X's leg. For AH, there are two parts to this experience, the projection of X's internal dynamics, and what AH refers to as a 'real' experience. Essentially, the projection of internal dynamics would describe what AG suggests above, that the physical experience represents an inner dynamic of X. The other, 'real' experience represents an experience of connection with the natural environment. In this sense, the sharing of a physical environment with the beetle is seemingly indicative to X, that she and the beetle are participants within the same physical realm. Through the realisation that the beetle treats her as part of the physical environment, she is seemingly humbled into realising that it is not her environment, but one shared with the beetle. AH goes on to explain that the individual loses her sense of domination over the natural world in connecting with the environment. The connection with the environment moves the person from position of dominator to that of participant.

The primary role of the symbol that is identified within the data is one of revealing certain internal, unconscious dynamics. The revelation takes the form of symbols because these are the more direct language of the unconscious. This directness is the ability to express elements that cannot be expressed in ordinary verbal and rational terms. What the facilitators in this study, therefore, highlight is the essential role that symbols play in the process of learning about self, connection with self. As Von

Franz explains with regard to the messages of dreams, the communication that the language of symbols presents is not merely of value for its own sake, but it is of benefit for the individual in the process of individuation (Von Franz, 1964/1978). In the context of ecotherapy, the role of symbols can thus be understood in a similar manner to their role in dream work. As explained by Cushway and Sewell (1992), this role is one of assisting individuals in becoming more aware of themselves, their thoughts, feelings, events in their lives that have not been recognised, or have only been partially recognised.

In the following sections, the role of symbols will be discussed further in regard to the notion of embodiment.

5.1.3. Embodiment

The notion of embodiment is highlighted by GR, AH, and XH. GR expresses an understanding of the subconscious being located in the entire body. The expression of the subconscious is described as a symbolic one that emerges in the physical symptoms expressed by the body. He suggests that symptoms are symbolic expressions of the subconscious. What is physically presented by the body is an expression of its parallel psychological equivalent.

Within the discussion of the body as symbol, in chapter two, the body is similarly presented within the body therapies as a symbolic canvass for understanding underlying emotional dynamics.

In AH2, AH adds to this notion, suggesting that the participant feels her experience in an embodied way. Her experience is a physical one. AH proposes that the direct physical experience increases an awareness of the connection between body, mind and spirit. Using the example of discomfort, AH says that the psychological and the spiritual experience is felt in a physical way. As the psychological experience may be an uncomfortable one, so is the physical experience. Through a realisation that these experiences are parallel, the connections between body and mind are heightened.

In XH2, XH proposes that the unconscious is present within the memories of the cell. The unconscious psychological discomfort is therefore presented in physically experienced discomfort within the body. These may occur in the form of headaches, thirst and hunger.

The accounts of GR, AH and XH portray the significance that is given in the ecotherapy process to the role of the bodies presentation of underlying, parallel psychological processes. This role is understood from two varying although connected positions. Firstly, the symptoms of the body are seen as symbolic presentation of inner experience. Secondly, the connection between body and mind suggests that inner dynamics lead to physically embodied experiences. The first position presents the notion of the body as symbol suggested by the body therapies and primarily the work of Reich, Lowen and Janov as discussed in section 2.6.2. The second position brings to light the essential connection between body and mind that has been highlighted in disciplines such as Psychoneuroimmunology.

The two positions, the body as symbol, and the connection between mind and body are reflective of the two most clear threads that run through the data presented by participating facilitators. The body as symbol presents the symbolic nature of the entire experience of ecotherapy, essentially the experience of the natural environment. The connection between body and mind presents the levels of connection with self and with the other, or connection with the greater whole. Having already explored the notion of symbolic presentation, the following section will focus on a discussion of the notion of connection.

5.1.4. <u>Connection</u>

A seemingly significant theme that emerges from the data is the notion of connection with self. In the study conducted by Foster-Riley and Hendee (2002) of the benefits of the Wilderness Vision Quest Programme, the authors suggest a continuum from connection with self through to connection with the other. The connection with other is suggestive of more than connection with another individual, but rather a connection with the greater other, in terms of spirituality. The understanding is similarly expressed in the current data. The initial connection is presented by GR in GR3. He

claims that the disconnection that the individual often experiences in the urban environment is related to a disconnection from self. This disconnection with self, he explains, is essentially a feeling of discomfort in an environment crowded by external motivations. The urban environment, filled with the intentions of others manifested in the surrounding environment creates a confusing and thus uncomfortable experience. In contrast, the natural environment is a more simple reflection of self. That which is projected on to the environment by the individual can be more clearly recognised as personal projections. The individual experiences this clarity of feedback as increased comfort. This comfort represents a greater connection with self.

In AG1, AG relates how X becomes comfortable in recognising that the beetle is her own projection and thus symbolic of her own internal dynamics. This comfort is accompanied by X's own admission that she experiences an increased sense of connection. AG says that in recognising the emergence of unknown elements of herself, X connects with them, and can thus become more comfortable.

In AH1, AH claims that the experience of nature reminds the individual of their connection to the natural world. This connection is experience as a sense of belonging. Thus in experiencing a connection with the environment, the person become a part of a greater existence of within which they have a role. It is this sense of place, and belonging which AH claims is an essential ingredient in each individual's existence. The connection with nature thus assists the individual in making this connection and overcoming the alienation created through human progress and development.

Finally, in both XH1 and XH2, XH describes the process of making connections, initially with self, and subsequently with the other, and in this way, a deeper connection with self. The following are excerpts indicating this continuum in the words of XH:

> *... narrow focus on something in the natural environment (the beetle) allows the unconscious mind to roam and produce memories/make connections(XH1)...The emotions trigger memories, creating a deeper connection with self, a form of processing, containment and perspective.*

> *This enables a space to reorient the self, to look anew at the surroundings, and connect with beauty and miracles of life, the beginnings of making meaning/connections and of learning deeper, simpler truths (XH2).*

XH explains the process as initiating with a narrowed focus on some element of the natural environment, in the case of X, a beetle. This focus allows the making of connections within the unconscious. The beetle becomes the symbol, and in this case also the metaphor for X's internal dynamics. X is thus able to make connections within an internal, previously unconscious part of herself. These connections are evidenced by the emerging emotions relating to the beetle and its actions. This represents the initial connection with self. XH describes how the emotions in turn are related to memories, which further deepen the connection with self. XH describes this connection with self as a form or "processing, containment and perspective". This then becomes the opportunity for a novel experience of the environment. Having connected with deeper levels of the self, the individual is able to explore a connection with the environment that XH considers more true. The sense of truer connection is indicative of what can been viewed as spiritual experience. XH describes this emerging sense as one where miracles and beauty are recognised, as well as a learning of simpler truths.

Reviewing XH's description of the process of connection, one is able to follow a similar pattern as that suggested by Foster-Riley and Hendee (2002). Firstly, there is an initial connection with self through a narrowed focus on specific elements of the environment. This is followed by a sense of connection with the 'greater other' through a recognition of a internal dynamics as one's own, and thus a deeper sense of self. As suggested by Foster-Riley and Hendee (2002), this connection with the 'greater other' is indicative of a personal spiritual experience for the individual. In order to further explore this notion of spirituality, as expressed by the participating facilitators, the following section will draw attention to the notion of spirituality as suggested by the chosen excepts in terms of spirituality as a sense of the unknown, as well as a greater connection with the other.

5.1.5. Spirituality

In an investigation of the wilderness as a source of spiritual inspiration, Frederickson and Anderson (1999) report that the expansiveness of the landscape as well as an awareness of the power of nature seems to function as sources of spiritual inspiration for most individuals. Foster-Riley and Hendee (2002) suggest that a spiritual experience in the natural environment is presented as sense of 'oneness' or 'interconnectedness' to all things. It is in this sense that the notion of spirituality as an element of the ecotherapy experience emerges.

In the previous section, XH's explanation of the process of connection was explored. From this process of successively deeper connections with self, a sense of connection with a 'greater other' emerges. In a similar manner to the description by Foster-Riley and Hendee (2002) of a continuum of connectedness, leading to interconnectedness with the environment, XH's provides a similar account. It is however at the point attempting to explain this deeper connection with self, and the related connection with self, or oneness, that psychological language becomes limited in explaining what is being described. AG, in AG2, mentions this difficulty in providing adequate language to describe an element of the personal experience of ecotherapy. She uses the term 'spiritual' to indicate the type of experience. AG suggests at this point that she uses this term as an indication that the experience cannot be described, or is difficult to describe. She adds that is not sure whether this use is fair, but asserts that the intention is to highlight the difficulty in expressing the experience. In a sense, it would seem that AG touches upon an element of personal experience that is difficult to translate into psychological language, and similarly, to theorise about.

In AH1, AH refers to the personal discovery of connectedness with the environment. She indicates that the individual begins to experience a deeper sense to connection, and interconnectedness within the natural environment. This experience, she describes as a movement away from previously held feelings of domination over the environment to a dominion within it. With the sense of connection, the individual experience a sense of belonging within the greater whole. This is similar to an account presented in Foster-Riley and Hendee (2002) of the experience of a greater sense connection to the larger universe. It would seem that within this place of

connection, the great power of nature becomes more apparent. Thus, as Frederickson and Anderson's (1999) findings suggest, there seems to be a link between the spiritual experience within nature and the recognition of the power of nature. It is suggested by the facilitators here however, that it is only in experiencing connection with self, and with the other that recognition of the true power of nature emerges. It would thus seem that the spiritual experience in nature emerges with a deeper connection with self, as part of a continuum of self discovery.

5.2.   Limitations of the study

A discussion of the limitations of this particular study should begin with an understanding of the intended purposes of this particular investigation. This purpose can be stated as qualitative exploration of the ecotherapy experience. The intended means of investigation has been through the investigation of presented nature metaphors during the ecotherapy experience. Owing to the openness of the exploratory approach, the investigation has developed into a qualitative exploration of more diverse elements of the ecotherapy experience as presented by experienced ecotherapy facilitators, particularly symbolism.

The first and probably the most pertinent limitation of this study seems thus to be the lack of a succinctly defined research question. This, as it turns out is in fact not necessarily a limitation. As suggested by the exploratory approach to grounded theory, this study was at all times subject to the influences presented in the methodology, and to the 'advantages of serendipity'. The research question was therefore at all times essentially an open one. The guiding factor of an exploration of the process within ecotherapy would thus be a more accurate description of the purpose of this study.

What therefore emerge as the limitations of this study are characteristics inherent to many exploratory and qualitative studies. The first of these limitations is the lack of a clearly defined methodological approach. The procedure followed in this study, although presented in the methodology in chapter 3, would be impossible to replicate. This factor can be responded to in two ways. Firstly, the grounded-theory approach

calls for a specified methodological procedure for assimilating information upon which new theory, grounded in the data, can be developed. In this regard, the present study is obviously limited. The second perspective concerns the exploratory approach. As already suggested in chapter 3 and above, the exploratory approach is an unstructured one. There exists no clear definition as to how it should be approached. Its aim, as stated by Neumann (1997), is to move from an initially 'fuzzy' idea in the mind of the researcher towards providing answers to the general question of what a particular social activity is actually about. In light of the current research it would thus seem that this particular study matches more clearly the criterion set out for an exploratory study than that of a grounded theory approach. The question of the compatibility of an exploratory approach to that of grounded theory is however an intricate one and therefore beyond the scope of the present study. One point that does need to be made in this regard is, however, the importance of reflecting this study in terms of grounded theory. Since the investigation is intended to elicit new research questions, it is also focussed at presenting alternative conceptualisations of the ecotherapy process from the data presented. In this regard it undertakes the primary goal of grounded theory, that of developing new theory in interaction with the data.

A further limitation in the methodology has been the use of only one participant experience for interpretation by the facilitators participating in the study. It is suggested that by increasing the number of experiences for interpretation presented, more themes may have emerged. This limitation is once again an artefact of having purposefully adopted an exploratory qualitative design. Since the development of the method and the analysis of data were processes that were constantly unfolding, this type of limitation only became more obvious with hindsight. It is perhaps also a lack of research experience that contributed to this being overlooked. This does, however, provide a useful suggestion for future research, adopting a more structured qualitative approach.

Another weakness of this study is the lack of an objective approach to the selection of participants. Specifically in this study, the choice of a homogenous group of facilitator does not provide a diverse perspective. As stated above, this factor is at least in certain respects inherent to this type of study. The purpose of an exploratory

approach is essentially the assimilation of new questions for further research. In terms of this aim, the present study will have accomplished at least this. It is a difficult task to undertake an exploratory study, and especially a qualitative one, in a manner that can be viewed as objective. Perhaps what such a study would require is a greater clarity in terms of the ideas and procedures that were followed in deciding on and undertaking the collection of data. It would be of increased benefit for similar studies to, therefore, include elements reflecting the thoughts of the researcher during the process of data collection. In terms of this study, it is clear that there are many thoughts and ideas that have not been presented with regard to the process of data collection.

A further weakness of the study relates to the presentation of relevant literature. Perhaps the greatest need for an exploratory approach to this study has been the lack of relevant literature concerning the ecotherapy process. A correlate of this is the lack of clarity in the definition of ecotherapy type approaches. It would seem from the literature that the names given to approaches are often unclear and sometimes arbitrary. It is not suggested that the approaches be unified in name, since on many accounts, the different approaches are as different to each other as the psychological perspectives from which they emerge. What may be useful however is a categorisation of ecotherapy type approach in terms of the psychological theories that they are grounded in, as opposed to their target participants or the degree of their use of wilderness. In whatever manner this difficulty is addressed, it is certain that there is a need for more research to investigate the theory and the practice of ecotherapy. This need is greatest in the local South African context, where the field and the related industry is expanding far beyond the expansion of research. With an increase in local research studies, studies such as this one will be able to present a clearer literary exploration of the questions under investigation.

The terminology that has been used within this study has added to an extent to often seemingly unclear language. There are numerous terms that have been used in both the literature review and the analysis of data that would have benefited from a further exploration and contextualisation of their meaning. Within this study, terms such as wilderness, metaphor, symbol, unconscious and subconscious, have not always been clearly presented. This difficulty is primarily based on the differing understandings of

certain terms. Stemming from both educational differences as well as the desire for specification in the use of such terms, individuals tend to vary in terms of their use of the terms as well as their understanding of them. Where possible, especially in the data analysis, it was attempted to gain clearer understanding of the use of terminology from the context in which such terms were placed. This is however not a succinct manner of interpretation, and it is suggested that attention be paid to this difficulty in future studies.

5.3.   Conclusion

The purpose of this concluding section is to highlight certain key issues that have emerged within the current study and to contextualise them as suggestions for future research. In response to these aims, this section will present the primary issues that have emerged during the course of this study. This is intended to serve as a summarisation of the discussion as well as a conclusion.

A key feature of this study has been the use of an exploratory approach to research. The flexibility of this approach has allowed new insights to emerge from an openness to new information. The initial intention of this study was to elicit a deeper understanding of the process of ecotherapy through an investigation of metaphors presented by participants during the experience. Using open interviews with experienced facilitators in the field of ecotherapy, structured around the interpretation of a particular participants experience, it soon became clear that the metaphors that had initially served as the focus of the study, were merely highlighting a far deeper process and understanding, that of symbolism. The most significant theme that has emerged from this study is most certainly the depth and attention given to the presentation and interpretation of symbols in the ecotherapy context. It is recognised that the amount of attention given to this feature may have been related to the homogeneity of the group of facilitators that were interviewed in terms of their ecotherapy training and practice. However, the depth of understanding of symbolism that is presented through each of the interviews is indicative that at least in this particular approach to ecotherapy, symbolism plays a significant role. It is therefore suggested that further investigation of this feature may prove beneficial both to

understanding the broader application of notion of symbolism as well as its function in this context.

From the interpretation by facilitators, it emerged that, although interpretations of the experiences of others would not provide a thorough understanding of the personal symbolic experience, it does provide deep insight into the interpreters' conceptualisation of the underlying process and the symbolism presented. It therefore seems useful for future investigations to adopt such an interpretive qualitative investigation of the Ecotherapy process and the symbolic presentations of participants. Such an investigation would also benefit from a more structured methodological approach.

Following from the perceived value of a symbolic understanding, is the potential difficulty of interpretation. This difficulty is inherent to the personal symbolic nature of the experience of the participant. The facilitators in this study suggest that it is difficult to make clear and accurate interpretations of a personal experience of another. This raises the question of an approach to understanding the personal process of healing from an external perspective. A correlate to this question is the value of objectivity in the study of the personal healing process. It is suggested that future research may benefit from more personalised meaning based approaches to understanding healing on a personal level. Although there seem to be benefits to viewing healing as a generalisable phenomenon, the facilitators in this study tend to suggest that each experience is deeply personal. In order to understand the personal experience, more subjective investigations could prove more effective in gaining a deeper understanding. This suggestion is also in line with that made by Patterson, Williams and Scherl (in Moore and Russell, 2001), proposing that more attention be given to meaning-based approaches to the investigation of nature based therapeutic experiences.

A related theme that has emerged from the discussion of the symbolic value of the ecotherapy experience is the notion of a symbolic understanding of the embodied experience within the natural environment. As suggested within the discussion, there seems to be value in recognising the symbolic value inherent to embodiment. In terms of the relation between body and mind, it would seem that the interaction is bi-

directional, or interactive. The facilitators suggest the recognition of both the bodily presentation of symbols, and the influence of psychological processes on the physical body. As an activity that is based within an environment that emphasises the possibility of physical movement, further investigation of the interaction of body and mind in ecotherapy would be of value to a deeper understanding of the healing process.

A second significant theme emerging from the study is the suggestion of a process of healing inherent to the ecotherapy experience and potentially to alternative experiences within the natural environment. This notion is proposed by Foster-Riley and Hendee (2002) in an earlier investigation of the Vision Quest experience. It would seem that a continuum of connection with self, leading to connection with other, and greater other can be experienced within healing in the natural environment. This continuum as well as its parts may well benefit from future specialised investigations. Of particular interest within this continuum is the potential for a deeper understanding of the underlying processes and mechanisms within a nature based healing experience. In light of the lack of clear understanding of the mechanisms of healing in nature, this particular notion may well provide constructive inroads to a deeper insight into a phenomenon that is as yet not clearly understood.

As an element of the process of healing, the notion of spirituality has similarly emerged as an area that would benefit from further investigation. Although studies such as that conducted by Frederickson and Anderson's (1999) have begun to explore the notion of a spiritual experience, there is certainly a great need to further investigate the relationship that exists between spirituality and the healing process. Although it has been suggested in this study that certain elements of spirituality are potentially bound to the unknown, the underlying mechanisms of the process of connecting with spirituality would also provide greater insight into a deeper understanding of the ecotherapy process.

The final theme that has emerged from this study has been a personal one. The process of interaction with literature and with human beings, with theory and with practice, with what can be said and that which cannot has been a deeply significant one. As this study has been the reflection of an academic journey of discovery

through exploration, so this has been a parallel process within myself and in the lives of others. This study therefore emerges primarily of value to those whom it will serve in practice, myself, fellow Ecotherapy facilitators, and the participants that will benefit from this increased knowledge and increased awareness.

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