



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

An ecofeminist critical analysis of work, nature experiences and mental health in the capitalocene.

Taylor, Louise

Award date:
2023

Awarding institution:
Queen's University Belfast

[Link to publication](#)

Terms of use

All those accessing thesis content in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal are subject to the following terms and conditions of use

- Copyright is subject to the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988, or as modified by any successor legislation
- Copyright and moral rights for thesis content are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners
- A copy of a thesis may be downloaded for personal non-commercial research/study without the need for permission or charge
- Distribution or reproduction of thesis content in any format is not permitted without the permission of the copyright holder
- When citing this work, full bibliographic details should be supplied, including the author, title, awarding institution and date of thesis

Take down policy

A thesis can be removed from the Research Portal if there has been a breach of copyright, or a similarly robust reason. If you believe this document breaches copyright, or there is sufficient cause to take down, please contact us, citing details. Email: openaccess@qub.ac.uk

Supplementary materials

Where possible, we endeavour to provide supplementary materials to theses. This may include video, audio and other types of files. We endeavour to capture all content and upload as part of the Pure record for each thesis. Note, it may not be possible in all instances to convert analogue formats to usable digital formats for some supplementary materials. We exercise best efforts on our behalf and, in such instances, encourage the individual to consult the physical thesis for further information.

**An Ecofeminist Critical Analysis of Work, Nature Experiences and
Mental Health in the Capitalocene**

By

Louise TAYLOR

(B.Soc.Sc., MA)

Supervisors: Prof. John Barry & Dr. Peter Doran

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, School of History,
Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen's University. Belfast, UK

Contents

Acknowledgments

Dedication

Statement of Originality

List of Figures

Abstract

Chapter 1

Nature, Ecofeminism and the Planetary Emergency

Chapter 2

Ecotherapy interventions in a time of Planetary Crisis

Chapter 3

A Qualitative and Ecofeminist Methodology and Research Design

Chapter 4

The flow of the research journey: the relationships between participants, nature and mental health

Chapter 5

Discourse Analysis and prominent themes: An ecofeminist critical analysis of nature experiences, health and wellbeing

Chapter 6

Work, Self-Care, Activism and Flow in the Capitalocene.

Chapter 7

Staying healthy while the biosphere burns: An impossible venture or a revolutionary opportunity?

Appendices

References

Acknowledgments

To all those who engaged and contributed and to those who did not, I would like to extend my gratitude. Without research participants, we cannot do this work and this study could not have happened. I would like to thank the disability services for their support and namely Ciara Beattie and Sarah Seawright, these women showed kindness, tenacity and compassion and those are admirable qualities that helped me through difficult times when coming to terms with my neurological diagnoses throughout this PhD journey.

I would like to thank the Graduate School and all the students I have met and been motivated and supported by on this journey. A special thank you goes to my revolutionary buddy and one of the kindest and smartest men I have ever met, who is just as obsessive and committed about creating meaningful and radical social change as me and is also great craic (added bonus), cheers Calum McGeown, you are a good 'un. Thank you to Dr Amanda Slevin for inspiring me and being a force of nature, an intellectual powerhouse, and a brilliant person and feminist (in an often hostile, unforgiving and unappreciative environment). Dr Peter Doran for helping me to get this work over the line and completed and for your academic brilliance, intellectual ingenuity and patience. I am very grateful that he stepped in to help at such a difficult and important point in my Ph.D. journey.

And to Professor John Barry my overworked and incredibly disciplined and dedicated primary supervisor. I have never met a more committed and hard-working person. I am grateful for the wisdom, enthusiasm, generosity, kindness and patience he exhibited throughout this project. I am appreciative of him for being discerning and tolerant of my many and varied rants and ramblings throughout the years. Completing this Ph.D. journey has been life-changing for many reasons, and I want to thank Professor Barry for navigating me through an intense and difficult process. I have been both humbled and inspired by his dedication and care. If there were more people like him, the world would be a much better place.

Lastly, I want to thank my lovely family. Juno and Daisy, thank you for making me feel like a superhero every time I take you on a walk. Thank you Kyla for being an endless source of entertainment and curiosity and for tolerating me as your rescue Mum. And to my beautiful children Pillow and Lucia. Thank you for your patience, your kindness, your brilliance and your wisdom. Thank you for keeping me grounded

throughout this process and for being such wonderful people. You are my *reason why*.

“Nothing has a stronger influence psychologically on their environment and especially on their children than the unlived life of the parent.” C. G. Jung

DEDICATION

To the trees, the bees, the flowers, the clouds, the cats, the cliffs

To the lakes, the sheep, the streams, the moon, the insects

To the dogs, the bushes, the moths, the ivy, the stars

To the land and the sea

To the earth and all else

To the underestimated, the unheard and the uncared for,

this is for you (and me).

Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that all the work described within this thesis is the original work of the author. Any published (or unpublished) ideas and/or figures and documents from the work of others are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices.

Louise Taylor July 2022

List of Figures

Figure 1- Code Red for Humanity

Figure 2- COVID19 strengthens our connection with nature

Figure 3- The Great Acceleration

Figure 4- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Figure 5- Freud's Model of the Psyche

Figure 6- Jung's Model of the Psyche.

Figure 7- Assagioli's Model of the Psyche

Figure 8 – The Egg Model is Psychosynthesis.

Figure 9- The Inclusion of Nature in Self Scale.

Figure 10- A screenshot of an article from the Guardian on Eco-anxiety and young people.

Figure 11- Conditions for nature connection.

Figure 12- Flow diagram.

Figure 13- The Tipping Point.

Figure 14- Screenshot of article on The Arrestables in Extinction Rebellion.

Figure 15- A World Map of the effects of Climate Change

Abstract

While it is undeniable that nature connection and ecotherapeutic interventions can have positive effects in terms of wellbeing and promoting environmental awareness and pro-environmental action, they are limited if the social and economic inequalities within which they take place, are not highlighted and especially placed in the context of the planetary emergency. Ecofeminism strives to highlight the inequitable and harmful forces that impact social and environmental relationships through the critical lens of patriarchal capitalism. Based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 23 people living in Northern Ireland together with a critical review of relevant psychological, political and political economy literature, this thesis argues that environmental activism and self-care are forms of labour that are fundamental for keeping people and the planet healthy in an era marked by environmental devastation and climate collapse. In this era – which some have called the Capitalocene - health is not guaranteed and wealth and privilege strongly influence the relationships people have with the natural world, particularly in capitalist countries that prioritise economic growth as a marker of success. While Nature Connection and Ecotherapy practices appear to be becoming increasingly popular, there is a gap in the existing academic literature that analyses them from explicitly political perspectives that consider the influence of intersectional injustices (class, race, gender), and the wider socio-economic and socio-ecological contexts of ecocidal capitalism. Capitalism and the Capitalocene are terms used to describe the forces that exist where production, profit, consumerism and capital accumulation dominate politics, culture and the media, and also the everyday lives and choices that most people make. What we do for a living and how our lives are organised will impact how we structure our schedule and what we spend our free time doing and how much we enjoy our lives. Nature experiences, wellness activities and ecotherapeutic practices can serve as locations where people heal, find a sense of flow and pleasure and maintain balance in their lives or they can be perceived as spaces that represent freedom or an escape from the pressures of everyday, modern living. In this study the findings draw attention to how gender, age and income impact how individuals use nature experiences for mental health purposes and how they find fulfillment and contentment in their day to day lives. This work argues that to stay well in this era we must reframe and reconsider how we understand self-care and activism and how they are both important for maintaining wellbeing and staying healthy during the climate crisis. To

live a good life where there is balance and harmony in a time of increasing ecological and climate breakdown requires new ways of existing and thinking about health, joy, pleasure, love, life and connection. For nature connection and environmental behaviours to be most beneficial to more people in the Capitalocene, the economic, ideological and governance structures and practices that create and maintain socio and economic inequalities, compel individuals to seek formal employment, and cause 'actually existing unsustainability', must be identified, addressed and transformed. We also need to consider and prioritise practices that bring happiness, pleasure and contentment into our daily lives and relationships.

Chapter 1

Nature, Ecofeminism and the Planetary Emergency.

While nature-based experiences are often promoted by mental health organisations and public health agencies, much of the dialogue around these mental health positive nature experiences ignore the climate and ecological crisis we are facing (Mind, 2021, World Wildlife Fund UK & the Mental Health Foundation, 2021). This is interesting as the climate crisis and the sixth mass extinction is arguably the largest threat to planetary health of modern times (Scranton, 2015, Chomsky & Pollin, 2021). Much of the current research on nature-based therapies adopts essentialist and reductionist positions, assuming nature and experiences of it are always healthy that brings wellness into our lives and hence often romanticises our environment and neglects or ignores the planetary crisis we are currently facing (see Literature Review in Chapter 2). Many of these empirical studies isolate and systematically separate individuals and their nature experiences from the wider political and economic contexts within which both people and nature exist. As a result, the social, political and economic drivers of the crisis are ignored, and discounted as either irrelevant and impersonal or unimportant. This study will shift the focus politically and culturally by considering nature-based activities as social events and interactions which are inherently, and ‘always already’ political and economic and will do this in the context of Northern Ireland, a country with a troubled and complex political landscape and history. This work will deconstruct these experiences and describe them intellectually through an intersectional feminist and environmental position. This ontological standpoint will describe how these interactions are being used to maintain health and wellness in this era.

‘The personal is political’ is a well-established feminist dictum that originated from the second-wave feminist movement of the 1970s (Rogan & Budgeon, 2018). This research is rooted in ecofeminism, more specifically intersectional ecofeminism, a political and ontological positioning birthed from third-wave feminism and strongly influenced by intersectional feminists such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks. By adopting an intersectional ecofeminist perspective this research will highlight the various ways that our personal circumstances are impacted by social and cultural constructs and variables. This ontological stance allows the data to be reviewed by considering how gender, class, disability, age and economic income impact on our health and wellness

and relationship with the natural world. The dictum more suitable for this era is “*The environmental, the psychological and the personal are political*”. The climate crisis is a political, psychological and personal issue as we are completely interdependent on the world around us to live, survive and function (Lent, 2021). Therefore, the analysis advanced in this thesis is rooted within the larger, global climate and ecological era in which we find ourselves, which will be commonly referred to in this work as the *Capitalocene* (Davis et al., 2019). This places capitalism as the root cause of the climate crisis as opposed to humans in general and ecofeminism adds the patriarchal dimensions of the crisis into the critique (Federici, 2012, Federici, 2020, Moore, 2016). The reasoning behind choosing the term, the Capitalocene rather than the more commonly used term the Anthropocene, is that all humans are not equally responsible for climate change and ecocide and this is important when considering the vast inequalities and injustices that accompany the climate crisis and disasters and catastrophes relating to the emergency (Guerrero, 2018).

This research will critically analyse how work, mental health and nature experiences affect individuals and their ability to function and remain healthy at a time of climate and ecological collapse and uncertainty. The conceptual and theoretical lens that will be used to examine and critically analyse the findings that emerge will be ecofeminism, this allows inequalities and injustices along intersectional lines to be considered more urgently. This ontological position argues that patriarchal capitalism is the dominant system that is responsible for the violence and oppression faced by both women and nature and therefore highlights the significance of work, work practices and financial independence as determiners and influencers of these nature based experiences (Salleh, 2017, Federici, 2012, Mies, 1999). This work aims to identify and articulate how we may understand the use of nature-based practices and experiences to promote health and wellbeing. This is significant currently as our environment is becoming increasingly hostile to life on earth because of capitalism, consumerism and the burning of fossil fuels (Barry, 2020).

The lifespan of this study occurred in tandem with the publication of three damning and worrying IPCC reports in 2018, 2021 and 2022. The 2018 report stated that climate scientists were concerned about the rising temperatures in relation to fossil fuel consumption and climate breakdown. It was estimated that if fossil fuel usage which is the main root cause of global warming is not addressed swiftly and radically, we will experience climate catastrophe with the repercussions being devastating for humanity

(Chomsky et al., 2020). For example, burning of fossil fuels is responsible for one in five premature deaths globally (Vohra et al., 2021), and these numbers are likely to intensify as the crisis strengthens and rapid global, political action continues to be delayed (Milman, 2021).

Figure 1- Code Red for Humanity.



Source: McGrath, 2021.

“The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on 1.5°C global warming (SR1.5)(IPCC SR1.5-IPCC 2018) suggests that achieving the 1.5°C goal as stipulated by the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC 2015) will significantly reduce projected risks and further rises in observed climate change-related impacts compared to current warming of 1.1 °C above pre-industrial global temperature. These risks and anticipated impacts include increases in the frequency and/or intensity of heavy precipitation, high temperature, heatwaves, and sea-level rise, and are expected to lead to continuous and widespread impacts on human, natural, and managed systems.” (Mechler et al., 2020, p1246)

The IPCC report published in August 2021 has been widely referred to in the media as a ‘Code Red for Humanity’ (see Figure 1) and clearly and unequivocally stated that widespread and immediate action was required to avert climate catastrophe. This report declared that the planet was experiencing a global crisis that urgently needed

international cooperation and transformative changes. A key recommendation from the 2018 report was that “*rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society*” will be needed to stay below a 1.5 degree increase in global average temperatures i.e., massive, transformative, revolutionary changes needed. Both reports advised wide scale changes and they were produced by leading climate scientists who make up the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) with some commentators suggesting this was scientific evidence for moving beyond capitalism (Saltmarsh, 2021).

In late 2019 and early 2020, the world was shaken by the emergence of a new supervirus which became known as COVID19. The first global pandemic for 100 years changed the way multiple populations lived and related to their communities, their families and their places of work. This pandemic thrust large sections of the globe into a state of paralysis, economic inertia and collective shock, as the levels of contagion began to emerge, and deaths began to be reported. Terms that entered the vernacular of the population at an incredible rate were ‘*lockdown*’, ‘*social distancing*’, ‘*quarantine*’ and ‘*self-isolation*’. The medical advice and governmental messaging were that to care for each other we must, paradoxically, stay away from each other. The ability to connect with family and friends was compromised and a new normal came into existence with such speed it may be difficult to fully understand the depth of societal and behavioural changes until many years have passed.

In a paper written by John Barry in April 2020 ‘*This what a real emergency looks like: what the response to Coronavirus can teach us about how we can and need to respond to the planetary emergency*’, he compares the speed and effectiveness of the governmental responses to the pandemic with their response to the climate crisis. This article highlighted effectively how governments can mobilise and implement emergency strategies if necessary. And while different levels of governments across the United Kingdom (and many other countries across the globe) declared a climate emergency and biodiversity/ ecological emergencies, their responses have lacked clear affirmative action and expedient solutions to the planetary crisis. Barry also articulates how modest the adaptations have been by our governing bodies and how the ability to act is always an option, but that the desire and political will and determination to adapt and take concise and strong action is lacking (Barry, 2020).

The impact of COVID19 on this research was not insignificant; however, the obstacles and issues presented by the pandemic were not insurmountable (see Chapter 3 and 4 for more information on the impact of hurdles posed by the health crisis were

relatively easily identified, navigated and overcome or mitigated. With minor amendments to the research design and adjustments regarding how data was collected, the work was able to continue and data collection conclude with minimal time delays. However, the impact on the participants is reflected within the findings and influenced how they engaged with the topic and area of interest. The interviews commenced before COVID₁₉, and they were concluded in the summer of 2020 when the pandemic was well established and there had been alarming numbers of deaths within the population.

This work argues that our individual health, both physical and mental, are political and societal concerns; the pandemic highlighted this point beautifully. Research does not occur in a vacuum and this study was conducted at a crucial and dramatic time in history when global health became a pressing political issue. Consequently, the reader should be mindful of the impact of the pandemic and how it added another health and social dimension to the study. COVID₁₉ was an unrelenting and transformative factor to an already complex and sophisticated area of research. This virus changed everything, including how this study evolved, developed and concluded. For many people nature experiences became a new regular and daily occurrence because they were unable to freely do other things such as going to the gym, the cinema or out for meals. Shopping trips, holidays and most indoor activities were restricted. Being in the open air and outside of the home was allowed under certain conditions and daily exercise was encouraged in the form of going for a walk, run or collecting supplies and necessary items. COVID₁₉ changed how people related to each other and their environment and it seemed that nature connection was viewed as one of the positives to emerge because of the pandemic (Collier, 2020).

Figure 2- COVID-19 strengthens our connection with nature.

COVID-19 strengthens our connection with nature

As new *BBC Wildlife Magazine* research reveals, the natural world is more important than ever to our wellbeing.



By [Jo Price](#)

Published: October 21, 2020 at 4:30 pm

Source: Price, 2020.

This research offers a critical analysis of the experiences of individuals and their beliefs and opinions on the relationship between mental health and wellbeing and the natural world. In this work, the objects or external material being related to will often be referred to as the ‘*more-than-human*’, ‘*other-than-human*’ or ‘*non-human*’ world (Pettersson, 2020, Totten, 2011, Fenske and Norkunas, 2017). These terms and ideas are to accommodate and demonstrate the scale and diversity of the multiple species which are encountered during these interactions and to accommodate academic positions and arguments which move away from anthropocentric and human-centred frameworks. These relationships will be considered from an Ecofeminist and Ecocritical perspective which scrutinise and critically deconstruct and analyse work, production, reproduction, labour and gender, and how these (and the relationships between them) impact nature experiences in the Capitalocene (Hanson & Salleh, 1999).

Our environment is arguably the biggest determiner of health and wellbeing in our lives. The idea of nature experiences being therapeutic and healing in a time of climate and ecological breakdown is worth scrutiny and reflection, particularly from a stance that is critical of existing hegemonic structures, discourses and systems that are complicit in the destruction of our ecosystems, the life supporting systems of our planet. Nature-based interactions and experiences are affected by these dominant systems and processes on both a micro and a macro level; however, this narrative is rarely considered in politics and the media (Natural England, 2016). Humans exist in relation to social, economic and political forces, and these influence all objects and interactions, be they material or immaterial, living or not. This work will explore interviewees' reflections on their inner worlds (mind/mental health) and the connection with outer worlds (external events/ processes) through a Critical Ecofeminist Perspective. Fundamentally, this work is about relationships: our relationship with our planet, with other living things, with our health and with ourselves, and how all of these are impacted by social and political forces which are rarely considered, articulated or challenged.

Green Political Economist John Barry argues that the 3 Cs- Carbon, Consumerism and Capitalism- are the most dominant and environmentally destructive forces that exist. These energy sources and social and political processes are largely responsible for the environmental and ecological disharmony we are experiencing, and they have become normalised and widely accepted. This era which is often referred to as the Anthropocene has created a situation where the natural order of inter-species relations has become unbalanced to a catastrophic extent (Barry, 2021, Klein, 2015, Wallace-Wells, 2019). Some writers and theorists argue that we have passed a point whereby widespread civilisational disaster is inevitable (Read, 2018, Bendell, 2018). While many climate and environmental academics and activists are trying to alert the world to act immediately before it is too late (McIntosh, 2020, Chomsky, 2020, Albrecht, 2019, Macy & Johnstone, 2012). What is widely accepted within the academic community and increasingly with the general population is that the world we currently live in is no longer living in a condition of homeostasis or ecological and sustainable balance.

Ecofeminisms

The emergence of ecofeminism as an academic discipline is attributed to the third-wave feminist movement which can be traced to late 1990s and early 2000s (Gillis et al., 2004). The leading thinkers of this era were post-structural intellectuals such as Judith Butler,

radical black feminists like bell hooks and transdisciplinary Ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva (Butler, 2002, hooks, 2000, Shiva & Moser, 1995). These scholars were interested in issues of intersectionality and challenged traditional mainstream/malestream epistemological positions on social and political issues such as sexuality, race, gender, environmentalism and knowledge production. Many feminists claim most knowledge in western, colonised countries is rooted in patriarchal and oppressive systems which historically discounted, oppressed and marginalised women (Federici, 2012, Mies, 1999, Salleh, 2017).

The term ecofeminism or ecological feminism is widely attributed to the French theorist and scholar Francoise D'Eaubonne and their publication *Le Feminisme ou la Mort* in 1974 (Mellor, 2006). The emergence of the Ecofeminist movement is often linked to the works of Carol Merchant and Val Plumwood, who highlighted issues relating to pollution, destruction and environmental neglect inclusive spaces and locations, which is the central criticism directed at Liberal Feminism. These theorists both argued that women were closer to nature in their work which critiqued how humans related to other species (Merchant, 1980, Merchant, 2006, Plumwood, 2002). Aristotle argued that men were closer to God and women were closer to plants in terms of their divinity and sovereignty; see his theory on the Great Chain of Being. Theorists such as Plumwood and Merchant argued in favour of '*the feminine principle*' as a theory which could help to understand how to counter environmental destruction (Plumwood, 1991).

The central criticism for many green political theorists and scholars towards ecofeminism relates to the essentialist assertion that women are closer to nature by virtue of their gender. Intellectually this concept is problematic on several levels, most notably that it relies upon a premise that seems ontologically and conceptually ambiguous. It is the Embodied Materialist Ecofeminists who move away from romanticised and reductionist terminology and towards a discourse embedded in

critical and robust discussions on green political economy. It is this perspective which will be incorporated to critically analyse the data and findings in this research project. While much of the work of leading Ecofeminists is rooted in the premise that women and nature are subjugated and controlled under, within and through patriarchal capitalism, many Ecofeminists disagree with biological determinist assertions around gender-based qualities and attributes. While the disagreement amongst theorists may be difficult to navigate and succinctly articulate academically, this may arguably be a sign of the rich intersectional and pluralistic qualities of this critical ontological and political movement. The disagreement and intersectional nature of the position makes it difficult to easily define as noted by Niamh Moore in their work.

“In the emerging and overlapping academic and activist literature in the 1980s and early 1990s, it was common to describe eco/feminism by stressing the diversity of the movement. More specifically, perhaps eco/feminists often pointed to the very impossibility of characterising the movement in any simple way, precisely because of its pluralism.”
(Moore, 2011, p6).

Being critical and subversive is a fundamental necessity of ecofeminist authorship and it stands to reason that the debates within this discipline would be enthusiastic and passionate. The views of Plumwood and Merchant have been critiqued by scholars for being essentialist and reductionist. The discourse has been criticised as an over-simplification and romanticisation regarding how women relate to the more-than-human world. As Sherilyn MacGregor notes, *“When the feminine principle is asserted as a solution to ecological problems there is little left to talk about”* (MacGregor, 2006, p217). However, these ideas and theories did raise interesting questions relating to people and their environment and how they may be impacted by gender, race and socioeconomic factors. It is also worth noting that much of the environmental and peace activism of that era was performed and undertaken by women, with the Greenham Common Peace Protests being considered a symbol of female activism relating to planetary protection. The development of nuclear weapons, concerns relating to mass

deforestation and the threat to indigenous communities and their environment were all happening at a time when ecofeminism emerged as an academic and political response to ecological and nuclear threats. Women often lead grassroots activism and environmental protection. Some may say that while men are focused on earning and providing, women have been doing most of the other work and that includes many forms of activism. Activism is the political pressure to create change and this work is rarely paid but is often politically and socially powerful and impactful. Protest is political and women have had to protest often to make political gains, all three feminist movements were rooted in oppression and a desire for change and freedom.

Both ecology and feminism are inherently interdisciplinary and both are critical of hegemonic discourses and suspicious of traditional epistemologies. Both seek to deconstruct systems and processes that enable and facilitate oppression, injustice which are harmful to people and planet. Ecofeminism recognises that the struggle for environmental justice is rooted in the same concerns as the struggle for women's emancipation. Climate justice and social justice go hand in hand, as they prioritise equality and inclusivity, and reject androcentric and anthropocentric biases. According to the most prominent and influential thinkers in ecofeminism, both women and the natural world are exploited, oppressed and subjugated in similar ways (Mies, 2014, Shiva, 2014, Salleh, 2009). Many of the radical feminist thinkers that emerged at the end of the twentieth century understood how capitalism and patriarchy are intrinsically linked. They also identified both structures as depending on dominance and hierarchy to succeed and prevail.

“Although ecofeminists often make generalized statements that seem to refer to all men and all women, their specific focus is the pattern of dominance that arose in European society associated with the historical development of science, technology, industrialism, and capitalism.” (Mellor, 2000, p110)

Three strands of ecofeminism appeared to dominate the academic and intellectual discourse in this area at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The first

is cultural ecofeminism, the second is social ecofeminism and the third is material ecofeminism. Cultural ecofeminism could be summarised as focusing on the gendered qualities that may have been overlooked which are often attributed to women or suggested to be innate and uniquely 'feminine' or 'womanly' characteristics. One of the main criticisms of this ontological position is that it feeds into problematic binary thinking and is essentialist to the core. To argue that women and men are essentially different in fundamentally established and constant ways is to discount social conditioning and the constructive and divergent and complex ways in which women live in various societies and cultures.

"A materialist view connects some institutions such as labor, power, and property as the source of domination over women and nature." (Zein and Setiawan, 2017, p4)

Socialist ecofeminists generally do not believe there are essential and set ways of being a woman or how women experience the world and their relationships. They argue that the experience of most women is not homogenous nor uniform and to argue as such is problematic and damaging (Warren, 2001). They understand that both women and the natural world are oppressed and exploited and to understand we must deconstruct and critique the social processes and the conditioning which takes place in society. One of the most prominent social constructivist feminist theorists of our time is Judith Butler who was one of the first to state that gender was a construct and not a fixed and complete state (Butler, 2002).

Materialist ecofeminists are critical of power and political and economic structures that determined how much power, influence and freedom women and the non-human world have or do not have in society. The most prominent and well-respected of these thinkers would be Ariel Salleh, Silvia Federici, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies (Salleh, 2017, Federici, Shiva, Mies). These will be the scholars who strongly influence the academic and ontological stance of the researcher and this research project. For them, it was important to critically analyse the socialist movement and

Marxist theory how they perpetuated and amplified the exploitation of women. They argued that theorists such as Marx and Engels by disregarding the contributions of women and the amount of labour they performed in the home and particularly in relation to reproductive and care activities. Reproductive work is central to capitalism and economic growth and profit has been built upon the undervalued and ‘invisible’ work of women since patriarchy began with land rights and domination in terms of family systems, property relations and associated practices, norms and behaviours. Capitalism, which is not as old as patriarchy, was able to benefit from the subjugation of women and their labour by failing to recognise the economic and intrinsic value of domestic work and the cheap labour of women and children. It was ecological feminists, cultural theorists and historians such as Ariel Salleh, Silvia Federici and Mary Mellor who highlighted the exploitation of women in terms of production and the economy (Federici, 2021, Mellor). Federici openly criticises Marxist and socialist scholars in relation to their neglect of work that enables productivity.

“Since the Left has accepted the wage as the dividing line between work and non-work, production and parasitism, potential power and powerlessness, the immense amount of unwaged labor that women perform for capital in the home has escaped their analysis and strategy.” (Federici, 2012, p29).

For Salleh the domination of women and nature are the same. She believes they are rooted in hierarchies that as having greater power and therefore authority over both women and nature (see Aristotle Chain of Being, Figure 3). Salleh argues that because of this hierarchy and structure of domination, *“An ecofeminist response to ecological breakdown means finding ways of meeting human needs that do not further the domination of instrumental rationality.” (Salleh, 2017, p86)* In a review of Salleh’s work, Pellow states that Embodied materialism is about work and labour, and argued that there is a need to reframe and reconsider how we conceptualise work and what work is rewarded under the current systems that dominate and control how we live on this planet. As he notes, *“Embodied materialism focuses on the recognition of the othered*

labour produced by women, Indigenous peoples and peasants whose caring work and productive energies are discounted and minimized by the dominant economic and social system.” (Pellow, 2018, p479). This research will build on this idea of work and considering what work is valued and how we perceive work in the Capitalocene.

While many ecologists and political theorists do not see patriarchy as a central theme and cause for the climate and ecological crisis, ecofeminists consider it to be, alongside capitalism, an indispensable analytical lens without which one cannot fully understand and explain the causes, consequences or solutions to ‘actually existing unsustainability’ (Barry, 2012). The term patriarchal capitalism is often used to denote the linkage and interdependency between both systems and provides a linguistic framework that allows the relationship to be explored and critiqued. Salleh is one of the strongest and most influential thinkers of our time, and in her seminal work *Ecofeminism and Politics* placed the relationship between Capitalism and Patriarchy as the central reason why both our environment and women continue to be exploited, degraded and destroyed with rapidly on a global scale. Salleh argues that Patriarchy and Capitalism simply cannot be separated, nor can the climate and ecological crisis be adequately addressed and challenged without addressing the hierarchical, misogynistic mechanisms which continue to dominate and shape western societies.

Production, Reproduction, Care and Labour

“It is important for economists and ecological economists to understand how epistemological assumptions, indicators, measures, and assessment methods often reflect existing power structures. If these power relations are not transparent, then economic constructs will simply perpetuate the powerlessness of those who have been excluded from the knowledge-making process. Most commonly this is people-usually women- who are burdened with providing essential social functions. The inevitable result is that economists leave nourishment, care, stress recovery, waste assimilation, reproduction and restoration uncoun- ted.” (O’Hara, 2009, p188)

Federici is one of the most prominent Marxist/ Material ecofeminists of modern times and their work critiques Marx and emphasises the importance of placing modern practices in context. Federici is well renowned for theoretically and ontologically restructuring and reframing the hegemonic practices that were harmful and exploitative of women historically. Federici was one of the leading feminists of the 1970s and 1980s who acknowledged the unseen work of women in the home, and she was one of the radical feminist thinkers and activists who founded the 'Wages for Housework' campaign which was pivotal for politicising the domestic/reproductive sphere.

This research will look at various types of work and human labour and how these influence and shape (if not determine) how, and under what conditions, we relate to nature. One of the greatest critiques of Marxism by Material Ecofeminist is around his preoccupation with a male-centric view of labour, production and capital. Marx and Engels identified the exploration and subjugation of the working classes, but their work was androcentric and barely considered the vast amounts of work needed to keep workers healthy and produce the next generation of workers. Reproductive activities and domestic chores were not considered to be as valuable as the often physical and manual labour that was needed to sustain and maintain industry and the 'formal economy'. Without reproduction, there are no workers and without the systems of patriarchy capitalism would not exist and the proletariat would not profit. When critiquing these systems we must consider both paid and unpaid and this involves defining work in more egalitarian and gender-sensitive terms.

This research aims to explore the impact of work and work practices on how we relate to and interact with our environment and this is a topic that has dominated many social and political movements. Work is often understood through a patriarchal perspective, where work was considered significant and instrumental in survival and quality of life. Work, occupation and labour are often determining factors in terms of how our free time is spent, what home we live in and how our health is maintained (or not). In most western and capitalist societies work is something which is expected and the ability to work, contribute to society and provide for your family are all attributed to the qualities of a healthy and functioning human being, to thrive in these societies

resources are necessary and for this to happen the ability to work and produce is often required (Harari, 2014). This work aims to consider other activities as forms of work, namely political activism and self-care. Both of these activities are fundamental to life and health in the Capitalocene and both are generally unpaid and not valued as socially significant or as social labour.

Mies attempts to reframe and reimagine a way of thinking about work that moves away of thinking about it in purely Marxian and production terms with labour and the production of material goods being replaced by considering work from a more feminist centred position which prioritises the production (and reproduction) of life as opposed to the production of goods (Mies, 1999). This allows for often overlooked and undervalued formal of human labour to be viewed as work, and therefore to be considered through a different lens and perspective and one that considers time and space in a different way, not solely in terms of a working day or week.

“A feminist concept of labour has, therefore, to be oriented towards a different concept of time, in which time is not segregated into portions of burdensome labour and portions of supposed pleasure and leisure, but in which times of work and times of rest and enjoyment are alternating and interspersed. If such a concept and such an organization of time prevail, the length of the working-day is no longer very relevant. Thus, a long working-day and even a lifetime full of work, will not then be felt as a curse but as a source of human fulfilment and happiness.” (Mies, 1999, p. 217).

Many feminist scholars and activists made advances supporting women to gain access into previously male-dominated work environments and locations. This work is still ongoing and gender pay gaps and disparity continue to be a problem in most countries and industries, including academia. The struggle around re-defining and re-prioritising work has yet to be advanced or given consistent and significant attention intellectually and academically. The definition of what activities constitute work and which do not is central to this research, particularly in relation to personal and

ecological health. If work is about earning and being able to live and produce, what activities relate to this? What work do we have to do to enable us to work, function or thrive in the modern world in the Capitalocene?

If we are recovering from work, resting in preparation for work or taking a holiday from work, are all these activities not an offshoot of work? The expectation to work is felt from a young age and is one of the central aim of education systems in most countries, in preparing young people for financial and economic independence, to work and become the next generation of workers. The notion that we are not born to work is difficult to convincingly refute when so much of our lives, and particularly our childhoods and socialisation processes, are designed to prepare us for the world of work. This is against the backdrop that if we are not able to work for whatever reasons, the result will be poverty, and in capitalist countries, poverty is deemed to be failure (usually of the individual themselves). In this thesis the idea of self-care as a form of work and which is both profitable and demanding and largely falls as the responsibility of workers to maintain. The self-care, self-help and therapeutic industries have become highly profitable businesses that depend on dissatisfaction and which commodify and individualise wellbeing and health practices.

The importance and origins of nature-related words and terms

Language and words give meaning to relationships and becoming familiar with the etymology of words can be useful for tracing the core connotation and reminding us of the essence of a concept, word or idea being explored. In this research, words and discourse are important, as language is used to communicate how relationships understood, valued and experienced or enacted. Sometimes common and familiar words lose their meaning over time and become almost unrecognisable through historical and social changes. Words can become used and widely accepted to have a universal and inherent shared meaning, but those words and their meaning may evolve, and their core meaning/s may have altered unbeknownst to the user. The word '*nature*' is derived from the word *natura* which denotes birth in Latin (Duncarne & Couvet,

2020). Its origins lie within the notion and concept of birth, but birth or the process of birthing seems to only begin to define what nature may mean.

At one level nature signals birth, maturation, death and regeneration and everything in between. It is multi-layered, multifaceted, complex and omnipresent, but when we consider the global climate and environmental crises we are currently experiencing, the origin of the word becomes even more striking (Klein, 2016, Chomsky, 2020). The link to of 'birth' seems almost ironic considering nature and the epoch which we live in that is often referred to in environmental analysis and research as the Anthropocene, a period marked by death and extinction, not life and birth.

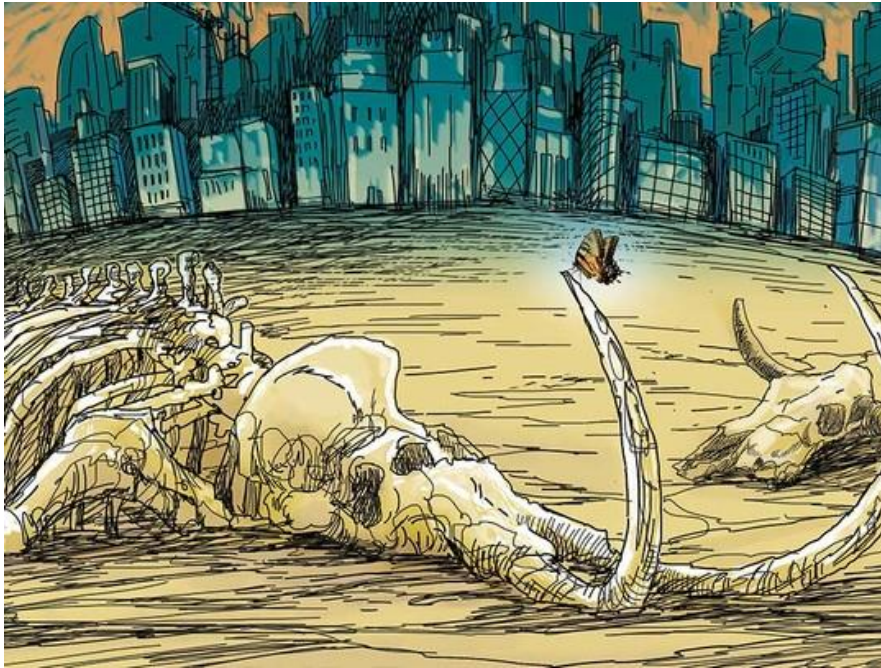
"A good short definition of the Anthropocene is the epoch where the human component of the Earth system is large enough to affect how it functions. When the scale of the human impact is that large, the corresponding solutions to major human problems will often end up being large, and so may have unintended consequences for the earth system and us." (Lewis & Maslin, 2018, p399)

The Anthropocene is the name many academics have given to the modern geological era in which we find ourselves, this epoch reflects the extraordinary times we are experiencing internationally and environmentally. This era has been estimated to have begun in the mid-twentieth century, a period often termed the 'great acceleration, and many scientific and empirical ecological studies and reports also suggest that we are at the beginning of the sixth mass extinction (Gorg et al., 2020, Steffen et al., 2015, McCallum, 2015). The continued exploitation of fossil fuels, destruction of land and seascapes of natural beauty, the devastation of ecological systems, extreme weather events and widespread loss of wildlife, mean that the relationship our species currently has with the planet is unhealthy, unsustainable and increasingly dangerous for ourselves and other entities (Barry, 2012, Kovel, 2007, Hulme, 2009, Klein, 2014). Youth activists such as Greta Thunberg have been calling for emergency action for several years now.

"Adults keep saying: "We owe it to the young people to give them hope." But I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to

feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.” (Thunberg, 2019)

Figure 3- The Great Acceleration.



Source: Ehrlich, 2017.

The popular use of Anthropocene appears to indicate that ‘humanity’ (understood as an undifferentiated entity) is responsible for the emergency we face and it suggests that responsibility is somehow equally distributed across humanity. This is where the limits and inaccuracies of the concept are brought to light and this is why this term has not been chosen for this research. While the planet’s geology has been altered by ecocidal practices, the generality of the term is not helpful when critiquing the macro forces which are responsible for this rapid, unplanned and dangerous transformation. A more fitting and accurate term for this research is *‘the Capitalocene’* as it identifies capitalism and not undifferentiated humanity for the planetary crisis. The capitalocene signals that the onset of capitalism and capitalist practices are the primary reasons for the environmental and climate emergency and traces the beginning of this epoch as occurring centuries ago. Capitalism as a hegemonic force permeates much of the critical, particularly Eco- Marxist literature (Brenner & Katsikis, 2021, Moore, 2021).

In any academic work the terminology and vernacular used is important when establishing the theoretical foundations upon which a study is based. The terms, concepts and phrases adopted in the area of interest all hold meaning and signal the evolution and development of vocabulary in particular academic fields. When dealing with the environment, the fields will traverse, and the lexicon and vocabulary may be interdisciplinary and influenced by various fields of interest and by academia and activism occurring alongside global events. What is noteworthy is the richness and diversity of the lexicon and the inherent and diverse meaning in concepts relating to the/our environment, nature experience/s, nature connection/s and human (and nonhuman) health.

Most environmental, ecological and climate scholars would concur that the world we live in is unbalanced and unhealthy and current patterns /modes of living threaten the survival of our, and other, species. The Anthropocene is a term that is widely used by many ecological and climate-engaged theorists, academics and activists. This term denotes that humans have impacted the earth to such an extent that human systems and activities have altered the planet and planetary wide systems. The term Anthropocene however holds humans responsible for the changes that have occurred, which suggests unilateral and equal involvement by all humans (Lewis & Maslin, 2018). This geological term depoliticises the crisis and focuses on human activity rather than the most significant and harmful forces that impact the climate and ecosystems. The apolitical nature of the term Anthropocene has been problematised by several theorists including the sociologist Jason Moore who first introduced the term the Capitalocene as a way of highlighting the political and systemic nature of the planetary crisis (Moore, 2016).

The language used to describe the crisis is instrumental in how the nature of the problem and concerns are understood and clarified. To suggest that all humans are equally responsible for the emergency implies that each person holds equivalent power and responsibility for providing solutions for the predicament we face. This premise mitigates and minimises the extent to which globalisation, imperialism, racism, sexism and the constant quest for economic growth and development are largely responsible for the situation. A small proportion of people on the planet profit from these political

and economic systems whereas almost all populations are impacted. Many of the people most impacted, particularly in the global south, have little or no agency or power over carbon emissions and large-scale environmental destruction and pollution (Klein, 2014). It is the Capitalocene that has caused the planetary crisis, and places the responsibility on the economic system, namely capitalism.

Eco linguistics and the disappearance of words

When beginning to engage with literature affirming the use of nature as a therapeutic device many terms connected to nature-based experiences are utilised. Terms such as *biophilia* (love of life), *soliphilia* (love and connection with place), and *shivelight* (rays of light that pierce a tree canopy) - all refer to positive nature-based experiences and imageries (Albrecht, 2019, Wilson, 1984). What has become increasingly common in the last few decades are phrases and terms that signal loss, grief and the unpleasant and negative psychological impacts due to the degradation of the natural world and the psychological processes related to the environmental crisis. Concepts such as *solastalgia* (a nostalgia and loss of connection with a place/ home), *ecocide* (the mass destruction of our ecosystems) and *eco-anxiety* (a fear of the future related to the climate emergency), all suggest a proliferation of unpleasant emotional and psychological responses to environmental issues and concerns (Albrecht, 2019, Coffey et al. 2021, Higgins, 2012).

Albrecht and Louv are ecolinguistic pioneers who have helped progress the philosophical and linguistic foundations of the field of ecopsychology through their seminal work relating to creating language to describe emotional and psychological experiences relating to nature. In Albrecht's work, *Earth Emotions* he argues that our experiences of the world are motivated or impacted by emotional forces at play. He refers to these as existing between two poles of responsivity - emotions connected to earth destroying tendencies- and at the other end earth creating responses, which he refers to as *terraphthora* or *terranascia* (Albrecht, 2019). Albrecht's desire to create a new emotional language between the earth and *homo sapiens* is rooted in the concern that an emotional death (which he discusses below) may suggest a detachment beyond

retrieval, as emotions are the energetic forces that inspire and sustain the action and preservation required to protect the more-than-human world and the life-supporting systems of the planet, our home as well as our habitat. This detachment or emotional death could also be argued to be a by-product of the metabolic rift mentioned previously, which occurred because of capitalism.

“The emotional death I am thinking about occurs when some humans no longer even react to the end, death, or loss of nature. There is no emotional presence to bear witness, as all remaining biota are ignored as irrelevant to the life projects of individual humans. With technological isolation from raw nature in the digital age, this form of emotional death becomes commonplace” (Albrecht, 2019, p67).

‘Nature Deficit Disorder’ is a condition coined by Richard Louv to account for the growing levels of alienation and disconnection between the younger generations with the natural world. His bestselling book *Last Child in the Woods* describes this loss and the impact it has on our young people. *“Our society is teaching young people to avoid direct experience in nature.” (Louv, 2005, p2)* He argues that this isolation and disconnection with the natural world will only result in further environmental loss and destruction and the loss of a healthy and pivotal planetary system for the generations to come. Spirituality is a theme in his work too and he introduces an argument that science has dominated the natural world and created pervasive social and environmental narratives that have removed people from their communal, respectful and mutually reciprocal relationships, within and with ecosystems, landscapes, specific flora and fauna or natural rhythms of the seasons for examples.

“The reconnection of spirit and nature is not solely the work of faith-based organizations. Many scientists argue that the practice and teaching of science must discover or acknowledge the mystery of nature, and therefore its spiritual aspect. In 1991, thirty-two Nobel laureates and other eminent scientists, including E.O. Wilson and Stephen Jay Gould, circulated an “Open Letter to the American Religious Community” expressing deep doubts about humanity’s response to the environment.” (Louv, 2005, p303)

In Morris and MacFarlane's children's book *The Lost Words: A Spell Book*, they focus on encouraging children to engage with nature through their awareness-raising of wildlife which is slowly being removed from our dictionaries and our environment. Words such as heron, heron, bramble, newt and fern are in danger of being lost within a few generations (MacFarlane et al., 2018). The disappearance of these words from dictionaries highlights and support the assertions of Louv and reflects how the language we use, and the commonality of words are directly linked to societal trends and cultural norms, both profoundly influenced by changes in the economic system. In an age of ecocide and discussions on mass extinction, words can also become extinct. Words and language reflect culture and our culture and inherited connection to nature, and when we lose words (and languages) connected to nature, the message may be interpreted as we are not only losing our natural world but indeed our desire and ability to communicate and discuss it. This loss may be missed by large numbers of people in the population as many people no longer live in close vicinity to wildlife nor may they have an awareness of the many species who are currently threatened with eradication. This is how Morris and MacFarlane begin their book.

"Once upon a time words began to vanish from the language of children. They disappeared so quietly that at first, almost no one noticed- fading away like water on stone. The words were those that children used to name the natural world around them: acorn, adder, bluebell, bramble, conker- gone!" Fern, heather, kingfisher, otter, raven, willow, wren... all of them gone!" (MacFarlane, 2018, p1)

Two other texts which consider the loss of nature and the reflections of language and culture are *Whittled Away* by Padraic Fogarty and *Thirty-Two Words for Field* by Manchán Magan. In these works, the authors make explicit the connection between species loss and language. These texts clarify how capitalism is rapidly destroying nature at a remarkable speed. These works could both be argued to be works that are bearing witness to the sixth mass extinction and document what we are losing and how we are losing it. Magan uses the Irish language to eloquently and simplistically illustrate how language reflects our attitude and respect for the more-than-human world. His work

explores how the Irish language was rich with words for nature and the non-human world, which the English language does not have. Both writers understand the need for local people to preserve nature and language and not politicians or major decision-makers.

“These people do what they do for the love of the outdoors and the love of the local area. They know instinctively that nature is more than just nice to look at, but essential sustenance for our lives and our wellbeing.” (Fogarty, 2017, p324)

This chapter focused on introducing some of the key elements and threads of the research project, namely the climate and ecological crisis and ecofeminism as the dominant political and ontological position of the work. The next chapter will explore mental health and therapeutic interventions and therapies which are emerging connected with nature experiences. There will be an analysis of how therapy emerged and developed historically and discussion on what many scholars and academics are presenting relating to mental health outcomes and nature-related treatments. Chapter three will introduce the methodology, the research design and draw attention to the three central research questions that were used to structure and analyse the data collected. The research questions central to the study were - How does our ability to work impact how we experience nature? How can nature experiences impact our sense of self? What may be the positive and negative impacts of nature experience on mental health and wellbeing in the context of the planetary emergency? These questions were specifically chosen to draw attention to the relationship between environment and self and address how the environmental is political and personal and how it impacts on psychological and emotional health and wellness.

Chapters Four and Five will present the findings, through critical discourse and thematic analysis, this will be done by briefly discussing each participant and their preferences and practices and then introducing broader themes aimed at addressing and considering the greatest and most substantial influences to the use of nature experiences being used for wellbeing in this era. Chapter six will discuss the findings and highlight the most critical and significant areas of interest relating to self-care, activism, community and interconnectedness. And the final chapter will conclude the research by proposing further areas of research, reviewing and evaluating the importance of intersectional feminist and ecofeminist enquiry and articulating the

relevance and importance of research that draws attention to the political and economic issues that impact how people relate to the natural world and how this relationship is synonymous with health and wellness.

This thesis aims to explore the relationship between nature experiences and mental health using an intersectional ecofeminist lens that encourages interdisciplinary enquiry and criticism by highlighting how inequity and injustice impact how we relate to the world around us and how our ability to stay healthy and well during times of personal, political and planetary crisis. Ecofeminism allows the researcher to consider the data with environmental and social inequalities and injustices at the heart of the work and the intersectional nature of this work allows the complexities and nuances of the situation to be considered through a more detailed and critical ontology. It is also important that the context of Northern Ireland as the location where the research took place is considered, particularly when considering the colonial and cultural history of the country and the relationship many of the population have with territory, safety, wellness and mental health.

Chapter 2

Ecotherapy interventions in a time of Planetary Crisis.

This chapter reviews some of the most up-to-date research from various disciplines on how nature immersion and nature-based activities have been promoted and advocated for physical and mental health benefits. This chapter will also discuss the development of therapeutic practices and the emergence of ecotherapy and ecopsychology and the link between these approaches and more traditional therapeutic and psychoanalytical approaches. There will be reference to the psyche and the self and how these models help to explain how people may become actualised human beings, this will be particularly relevant as one of the main research questions relates to the self and how that might be impacted nature experiences. The main theories linked to nature-based therapies will be examined alongside empirical studies, together with quantitative and qualitative research which have been expanding particularly within social care and medicine and there will be some discussion on ecofeminism and how the current crisis impacts emotions and requires consideration in terms of wellbeing, mental health and self-care. This central aim of this chapter is to inform the reader on nature based practices and interventions and the historical and current academic and empirical research that advocates and promotes these approaches as effective interventions, this will allow for these assertions to be critiqued and deconstructed from an Ecofeminist perspective in later chapters.

General development of therapy

“People are just as wonderful as sunsets if you let them be. When I look at a sunset, I don't find myself saying, “Soften the orange a bit on the right-hand corner.” I don't try to control a sunset. I watch with awe as it unfolds.” (Rogers, 1995, p30)

Therapy and therapeutic practices are primarily thought of as indoor activities and are often connected with counselling, coaching, group sessions, telephone helpline support and various alternative therapies such as reflexology, reiki or acupuncture. In traditional therapeutic approaches, the relationship between the client and the psychotherapist is of the utmost importance and is often referred to as the therapeutic relationship (Rogers, 1961, Perls, 1995). For therapy to be most effective, the psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytical disciplines are in general agreement that there must be trust, connection and there must be honesty (O'Brien et al., 2007). They also acknowledge that the therapist must be appropriately qualified, transparent about their limitations and knowledge, and be open to constantly developing their practice and updating their skills, and themselves received appropriate supervision and support (Culley et al., 201, Dryden et al., 1995). Therapy is often viewed as helping a person to help themselves; to fulfil this aim counselling should be viewed as a temporary process that aims to empower the client so they will eventually no longer require the assistance of the therapist. The main concern for all therapeutic support is to help the client and the objective of most psychoanalytical and therapeutic practices is for the individual to reach a place where they feel equipped and empowered to deal with their life and the issues presented and they ultimately become their own therapist (Nelson-Jones, 2002).

Carl Rogers is the founder of the most widely used and adopted therapy model known as person-centred or humanistic counselling. In this approach the client is considered the expert, holds the answers to all their problems and leads the therapeutic process (Mearns et al., 2013) In his theoretical work and his observations with clients, Rogers argued that for therapy to be most effective there must be core conditions present in the therapeutic relationship (Rogers, 1951). The core conditions are widely recognised as the foundation of this relationship and they are that all therapists must create an atmosphere that is based on; *unconditional positive regard*, *empathy* and *congruence* (Rogers, 1995).

Unconditional positive regard is to release judgment and to sit with the person completely as they are in that moment. This condition fosters trust and allows the person to be themselves and thus accepting of all their experiences in their entirety. Empathy is the effort to fully hear the person and their experiences, it is an attempt to understand their perspective and thus try to understand the experiences from the

perspective of the person and with this acceptance of their story, the hope is the client in turn begins to accept their life and all that has happened and thus moves in a future-orientated direction. Congruence is when the therapist is authentic and themselves fully, in this way ‘*congruence begets congruence*’ and this allows the client to be authentic in turn (Schmid, 1998, Maurer, 2020).

“Essentially, the individual needs to feel psychologically safe. In such conditions, no mental energy is devoted toward self-protection, allowing the energy to be allocated toward one’s growth process.” (Maurer, 2020, p2).

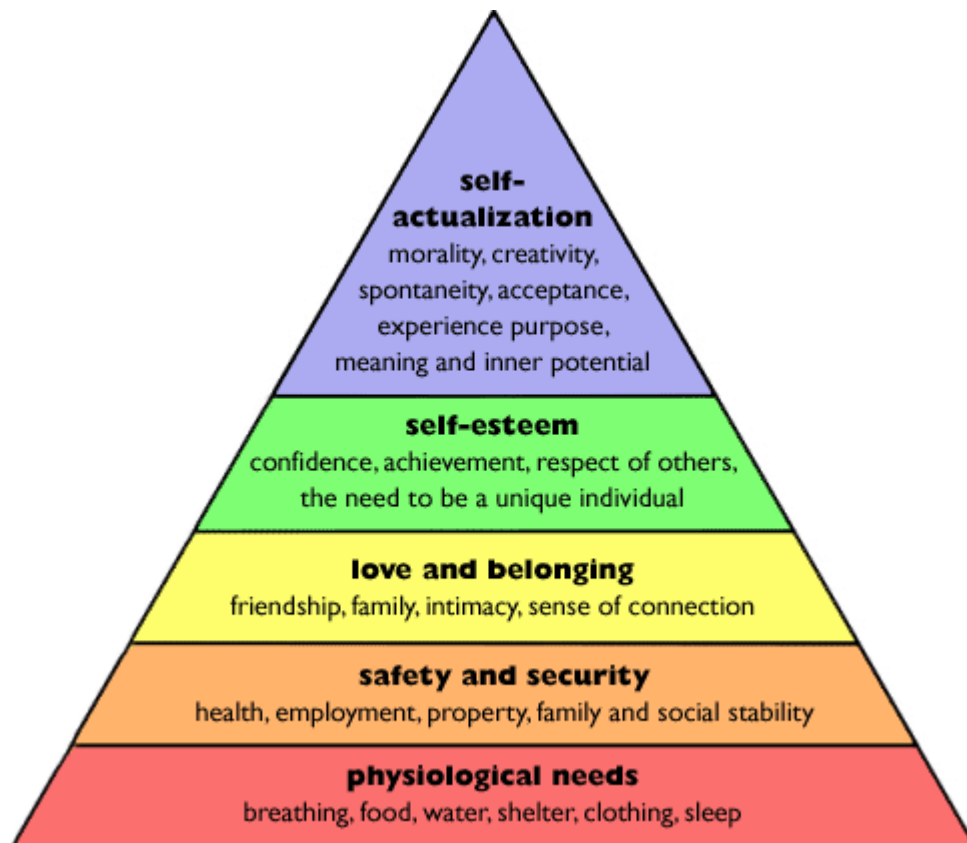
Rogers stated that when these conditions were present, clients thrived and naturally gravitated towards their ‘*best life*’ or as Abraham Maslow referred to it – ‘*self-actualisation*’ (Maslow, 1961). It is through such processes of deep self-understanding and self-acceptance that people can move on from difficult times and lead more meaningful and contented lives. The therapeutic relationship is considered pivotal and thus the comfort and emotional and psychological security of the client must be prioritised.

“When a person realizes he has been deeply heard, his eyes moisten. I think in some real sense he is weeping for joy. It is as though he were saying, "Thank God, somebody heard me. Someone knows what it's like to be me" (Rogers, 1995, p45)

Abraham Maslow developed the theory of self-actualisation to support the field of psychoanalysis. He aimed to develop a simple and easy-to-follow tool that therapists could use to support their clients towards leading rewarding and fulfilling lives (Maslow, 1962). He developed a model, ‘Maslow’s hierarchy of needs’, which he presented as a pyramid and argued that all individuals could be found on this pyramid at various stages (see Figure 4). The premise is that each person has basic needs and if these needs are met they can live good lives, this pyramid sets these needs into levels and illustrates how certain people may be unable to achieve self-actualisation through their circumstances and experiences. Various factors, be they social, cultural, environmental, economic and health, will all play a role in determining where a person may be placed

on the pyramid. Maslow affirmed that movement from one level to another was possible and all individuals can achieve the pinnacle of the pyramid, namely self-actualisation, or what is currently termed within positive psychology as “living your best life” (Seligman, 2002).

Figure 4- Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.



Source: Research History, 2012.

Both Rogers and Maslow believed that all human beings could recover from distressing and traumatic events and become self-actualised (Rogers, 1995, Maslow, 1962). However, they both asserted that certain conditions needed to be met for this to happen. With Roger’s theory the core conditions, discussed above, are paramount if a client is to reach their full potential, but in Maslow’s theory, there are additional factors to consider. These needs that must also be met to become an actualised person are represented in detail through his hierarchy of needs pyramid (Figure 4). This pyramid, along with most other psychoanalytical and therapeutic models fails to acknowledge

and account for oppression, discrimination, privilege and culture and how these can impact an individual and determine their ability to actualise. Most interventions and assessments do not consider the larger macro forces that affect an individual, their wellbeing and their ability to reach their fullest potential. Maslow's pyramid has come under increasing levels of scrutiny and criticism over the years but is still widely used and accepted within therapy and coaching services. Visually it is pleasing, and it conveys quite complex and sophisticated therapeutic principles in simplistic and easy-to-follow language and messaging.

“Maslow proposed that if people grew up in an environment in which their needs are not met, they would be unlikely to function as healthy, well-adjusted individuals. Research testing Maslow's theory has supported the distinction between the deficiencies and growth needs but showed that not all people can satisfy their higher-order needs on the job.” (Kaur, 2013, p1063)

When we consider the qualities that Maslow argues are that of a self-actualised person, we could reflect that these may be difficult if not impossible for many people to achieve within modern capitalist society, most work environments and throughout standardised career trajectories. The lives of most people are structured around working and are highly organised around expectations and there are additional obligations and norms relating to family, culture and society. The qualities of a self-actualised person require a rejection of these values to a certain extent. Some of the traits at the top of the pyramid, such as spontaneity, experience purpose and inner potential would be difficult to accomplish within most employment and formal education settings for example, as they may be considered counterproductive to the needs and requirements of the role or the employer. Many people cannot behave spontaneously when contracted or employed as they are financially compensated for behaving in certain ways and adhering to rules and procedures the creation and content of which that have little or no control (Barry, 2019).

Most social structures and institutions within modern capitalist societies are reliant on conformity, routine and strict timetables and schedules. The needs of the

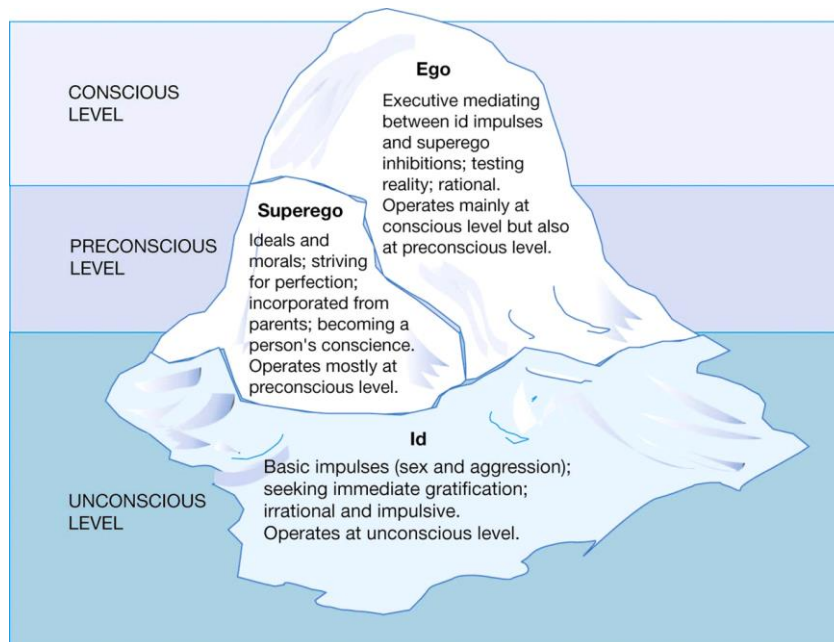
business or organisation are rarely concerned with the potential of the person, personnel are generally employed to fulfil fixed objectives and outcomes (Sternberg et al., 1995). This could also impact a person's reputation in the work setting and affect their prospects in terms of career progression, development, remuneration or promotion. Self-actualisation may occur when the full potential of the person and the requirements of the role match, this would be dependent on the person and their personality, ambitions, abilities, resources and health. Social structures and institutions, such as the education, health and political structures and organisations, do not generally cater to individuals on a personal level, and spontaneity within these structures could be considered inappropriate and possibly harmful to productivity, which is essentially how most work is measured (Brown et al., 2001). Staff within these structures cannot be spontaneous as they often have strict professional guidelines and codes of conduct to follow and are accountable to the organisations that employ them and financially recompense them. In this way both users and staff within these structures experience a disciplining or curtailing of their agency that may contribute to burn out, dissatisfaction and other unfavourably health and wellbeing outcomes. Ivan Illich is one of the most prominent and influential thinkers who wrote extensively on how modern institutions are dehumanising and dangerous to health and learning. He argued that our services must be de-institutionalised as these structures support modern economies and growth as opposed to the betterment, welfare and actualisation of people (Illich, 1971, Illich, 1976). That may lead us to conclude that self-actualisation within most structures and systems of modern capitalist society may be difficult to achieve for many of those who work within or who use and interact with them (MacLagan, 2003).

The development of psychoanalysis and psychosynthesis

Carl Jung was one of the first theorists to consider consciousness and shifts in consciousness as processes that facilitated personal and psychological growth and enabled a person to live a more fulfilled and meaningful life. Jung believed people were capable of remarkable personal transformation through psychoanalysis and the exploration of their inner world through self-reflection and self-exploration with

support from a psychoanalyst (Jung et al., 2018). Jungian psychology and Depth psychology are therapeutic approaches that focus on the unconscious and the impact it has on the thinking and behavioural patterns of a person. Jung was a student of Sigmund Freud who is considered the founder of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Jung and Freud's relationship is well documented, as is their eventual split and disagreement in pivotal areas in psychoanalysis. One of the areas of disagreement related to the personality or the psyche of each person. For Freud, the personality was pre-determined and fixed, while Jung believed in the development of the personality, so that processes which could transform the life of a person through shifting levels of consciousness and therefore altering thinking patterns and perceptions. Both Freud and Jung believed that large sections of the personality or the psyche were blind to the person and they referred to these parts as the unconscious, for Freud the id (Figure 5) was regarded as the seat of the unconscious and for Jung there was more to consider (Figure 6).

Figure 5- Freud's Model of the Psyche.



Source: Psyche- Mental Health Hub (n.d.)

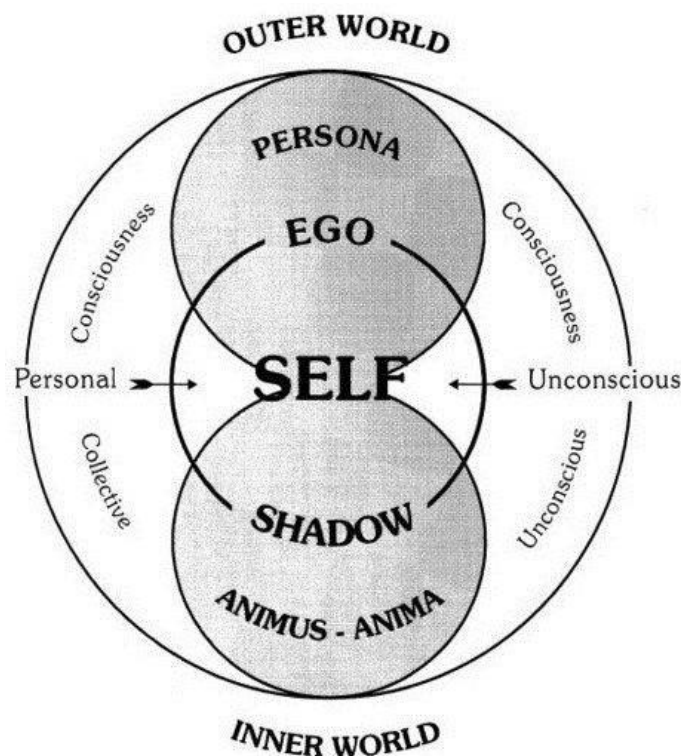
Freud would be considered relatively fatalistic and his theory on the personality split the mind into three components which he referred to as the id, the ego and the superego (Hall et al., 1957). He believed that these three components were often in conflict and our thoughts shifted depending on which aspect of the personality was dominant at any given time. Jung did not agree with Freud regarding his view that the personality was fixed and immutable and believed in the potential of clients to overcome their problems, evolve and thrive. He was positive and affirming in his belief that people were capable of significant shifts in the way they viewed the world and themselves about the world, and they were capable of remarkable and dramatic changes in terms of their beliefs and their thinking patterns (Donn, 1988). Jung was also the first theorist to move away from the idea that our lives are determined by our personality, and after moving away from his connection with Freud he began in earnest to explore the role of consciousness (Donn, 1998). Consciousness is basic terms that refer to awareness of external and internal events and how they relate to each other and how they influence the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of a person. The desire to understand the mind and the processes which occur internally is central to psychoanalysis and informs most psychological disciplines, including ecopsychology and ecotherapy.

Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy recognise and emphasise that traumatic events can significantly impact the way a person engages with the world, how they view themselves and how they consequently behave and think. Traumatic experiences can alter a person's ability to process information and stimulus in psychologically efficient and beneficial ways, and unchecked and unsupported this may lead to mental and psychiatric illnesses or a plethora of any number of psychological conditions and maladies. The development of psychoanalysis was an attempt to counteract and mitigate some of these distressing experiences or events through the introduction of psychotherapy or talking therapies as a way of trying to discover the root cause of the maladaptation. Jung came up with numerous terms and concepts to describe the psyche such as; the shadow, the ego, the persona and the animus and anima, all these were produced to understand the psychological balancing required to live well (Jung et al., 2018). He wrote extensively on how we are affected not only by the external world around us and our personal history, but the collective history of our species impacts us

on both an unconscious and conscious level, and similarly, our personal history impacts us on both a conscious and unconscious level.

“The fundamental mistake regarding the nature of the unconscious is probably this: it is commonly supposed that its contents have only one meaning and are marked with an unalterable plus or minus sign. In my humble opinion, this view is too naïve. The psyche is a self-regulating system that maintains its equilibrium just as the body does. Every process that goes too far immediately and inevitably calls forth compensations, and without these, there would be neither a normal metabolism nor a normal psyche. In this sense, we can take the theory of compensation as a basic law of psychic behaviour. Too little on one side results in too much on the other. Similarly, the relation between conscious and unconscious is compensatory.” (Jung, 2013, p181).

Figure 6- Jung’s Model of the Psyche.



Source: Hall, 1988.

Jung thought of the mind as holding many layers of consciousness, all of which will never be accessed in any one person's lifetime and that through self-analysis and self-reflection we can shift our consciousness, and therefore heal as well as learn from trauma and pain and live healthier and happier lives (Jung, 2005). He was the first theorist to consider psychoanalysis through a spiritual or transpersonal lens and to think of the person as an entity with a soul and individuation as the process whereby the essence of the person is realised, allowing them to live authentically and meaningfully. He considered people to be more than the sum of their parts and was the first psychoanalyst to consider that our thoughts and experiences were messengers, and we could transform our lives by decoding and deciphering these psychological indicators and living accordingly, he also did a lot of work on dream interpretations (Jung et al., 2018). When writing about the soul and consciousness he frequently discussed our connection to the natural world and a collection of his writings on this subject can be found in the book edited by Meredith Sabini, *The Earth Has a Soul* (Jung, 2005). It may be argued that Jung was the first ecopsychologist as he recommended the use of nature for therapeutic purposes and deep introspection.

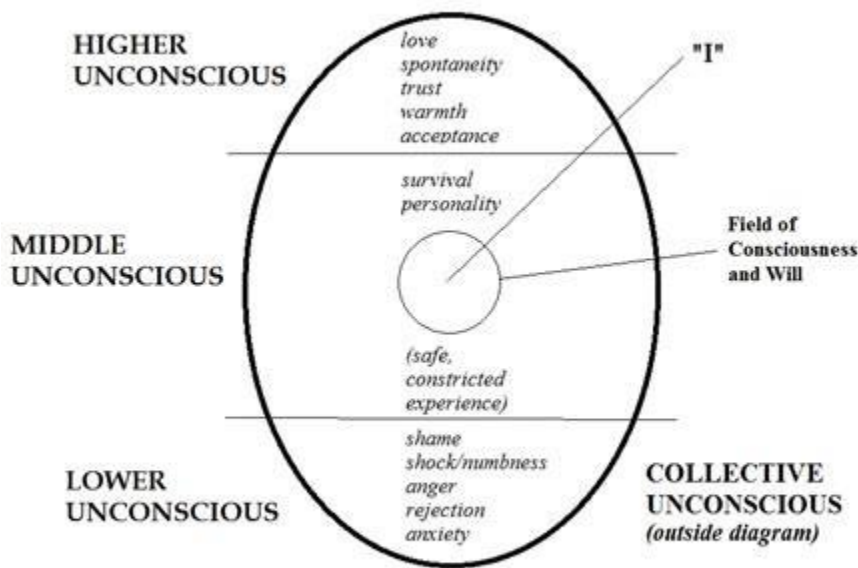
“At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am myself living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the procession of the seasons. There is nothing in the Tower that has not grown into its form over the decades, nothing with which I am not linked. Here everything has its history, and mine; here is space for the spaceless kingdom of the world's and the psyche's hinterland.” (Jung, 2005, p35).

Psychosynthesis is a relatively small field of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy that was founded by Roberto Assagioli, a student of Jung (Assagioli, 1961). This field of psychology was developed in the early twentieth century and is sometimes referred to as psychospiritual psychology which incorporated terms and ideas such as transcendence and developed the notion of the transpersonal self (Sorrell, 2011, Brown, 2004, Lombard, 2017). The idea behind the key and central theories in psychosynthesis is the premise that a person can synthesise all aspects of their lives and become whole

and complete through both personal and transpersonal development, much psychoanalysis and therapeutic practices consider the self as a separate entity while the more developed and esoteric and spiritual practices consider the self in relation with all life, humankind and the biosphere, these ideas are considered within deep ecology and depth psychology (Bateson, 2000, Fox, 1995, Fox, 2014, Johnson, 1986, Johnson, 1991). This discipline is also based on the premise of there being a transpersonal self and that to become actualised in with regards to the transpersonal self, a person must fully accept and integrate all parts of ourselves and accept that our lives require meaning, and one way of achieving meaning is to see ourselves as spiritual entities with the possibility of expanding consciousness, awareness and sensory capabilities and perceptions through therapeutic and personal development work (Assagioli, 2000, Johnson, 1991, Smith, 2007). The transpersonal self is often referred to as the 'higher self, this is the aspect of our psyche that may become spiritually awakened and in turn, the person may feel a deep desire and need to serve humanity through their deeds and actions. The transpersonal self relates to the idea of divinity, consciousness and serving a higher power which an individual be access through deep introspection, meditative practices and fully integrating all aspects of their personality, which allows psychosynthesis to take place and a person to live authentically and purposefully, shamanic practices are often considered to facilitate the process of individuation and transpersonal actualisation also (Francis, 2017, Wolfe, 1988). To connect with your transpersonal self is to connect with the highest levels of consciousness which will transcend societal and cultural projections and expectations. These transcendent qualities exist within each one of us by the theories and teachings of psychosynthesis (Sorrell, 2011, Ferrucci, 2014).

Figure 7- Assagioli's Model of the Psyche

Roberto Assagioli's Egg Diagram of the Human Psyche



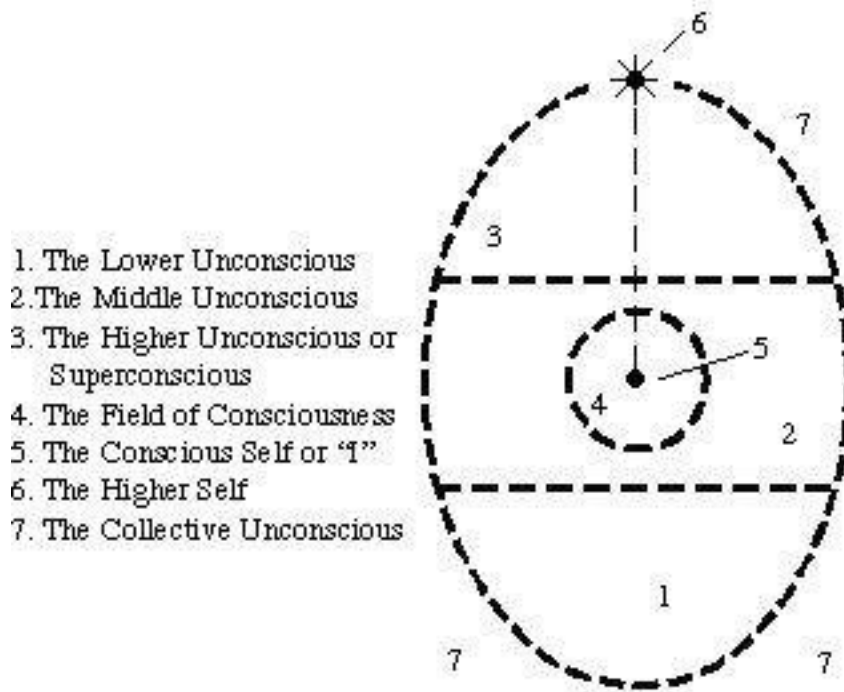
Source: Kiritsis, 2021.

The images used to describe the theories of psychosynthesis are often referred to as the egg diagram as they represent the psyche through this shape and have the various aspects of the personality and psyche divided along lines of consciousness and unconsciousness. The idea of there being a higher level of transpersonal consciousness which is the divine self, or the 'higher self' is represented in these diagrams at the peak or tip of the diagram/ psyche. The self is a key term used in both the work of Jung and Assagioli and how it is used is outlined by Lombard when he states,

"The Self as proposed by Jung ([1979](#)) is a fundamental transcendent archetype that expresses human wholeness and the union of opposites, most generally the union of the polarity of the conscious and unconscious. Jung's concept is strikingly different from Assagioli's concept of the Self in that, according to Jung, the Self (like all archetypes) cannot be directly experienced by the individual but is rather a guide and attractor through the process of individuation. In contrast, Assagioli believed that the Self is a reality that can be directly experienced by the individual and is the key part of the individual (as opposed to outside the person) that

connects the transpersonal with the personal and, hence, the personal with the universal.” (Lombard, 2017, p463)

Figure 8 – The Egg Model is Psychosynthesis.



Source: Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis, 2017.

Both Jung and Assagioli discuss the notion of the individual becoming whole and the idea of integration, Jung does this through his theories on the unconscious and the many layers it holds and discusses the idea of individuation, while Assagioli develops these ideas by introducing the idea of a Higher Self and the interplay between the personal and the transpersonal (see Figure 14). Jung argued that the first layer of our unconscious is our shadow, and it is when we integrate the shadow aspects of our personality that we can begin to become our true selves or become individuated (Jung, 1936). The shadow aspect of ourselves is that which we have been taught to hide or conceal because of becoming 'cultured' and socialised through familial and social settings, prevailing social norms and dominant cultural expectations. The shadow is what people reject about themselves, it could be related to desires to communicate honestly, to live in unorthodox ways, to go against the grain in terms of gender, race and age-related expectations. Depth psychology or Jungian psychoanalysis asserts that

only through integration of these aspects of ourselves, only then maybe begin to live in a more accepting, peaceful and actualised way.

“It is also astonishing to find that some very good characteristics turn up in the shadow. Generally, ordinary, mundane characteristics are the norm. Anything less than this goes into the shadow. But anything better also goes into the shadow! Some of the pure gold of our personality is relegated to the shadow because it can find no place in that great levelling process that is culture.” (Johnson, 1993, p7; emphasis added)

Jung believed that accepting the shadow within us was the first step to enlightenment and could potentially result in a shift in our consciousness and a heightened sense of wellbeing and understanding of ourselves and our place in the world (Jung, 1960). This would also support Roger’s assertion in his person-centred model, that only when we accept ourselves fully as we are, will we be able to make positive and significant life changes (Rogers, 1995). This process of acceptance and integration can be difficult for individuals, particularly in cultures with strict social conditioning and a relatively narrow set of societal expectations, and particularly in disciplined workplaces and learning environments that have limited opportunities for self-directed agency, spontaneity and creativity, or where these are actively dissuaded. Culture and society and rule-based routinised structures such as the modern economy and workplace, place a lot of value and pressure on and thus reward conformity and predictability. Modern mass society, complex economic divisions of labour etc. create structures and systems which are effective in managing and controlling extremely large numbers of people, dictating acceptable (and unacceptable) behaviour, and these externally imposed expectations can often clash with the innate knowing, preferences and desires of the individual. These cultural, social and economy structures and associated narratives change over time and vary between different countries. They are not fixed; they can be socially agreed upon or enforced through coercion and state control and can often be detrimental and damaging to individuals and their freedom and sense of self. Principles, morals and rules are frequently and generally thrust upon members of a population, as are the values that are associated with each of them.

“If we want to agree about so complex a question as good and evil we must start with the following proposition: Good and evil are in themselves principles, and we must bear in mind that a principle exists long before us and extends far beyond us.”
(Jung, 1960, p91).

Assagioli's theories also work on the notion of accepting various aspects of ourselves through his development of the concept of “subpersonalities” (Rowan, 2013). This theory asserts that most individuals play many roles in their lives and at varying times can appear to be adopting differing personalities depending on the circumstances and according to the relationships and expectations of others. For him, to become our true self these subpersonalities must be integrated, and this integration can occur through psychotherapy and the promotion of complete acceptance of all these aspects of ourselves. It is with the unconditional acceptance and integration of these fragmented subpersonalities that an individual can ‘self-actualise’ or ‘self-transcend’ (Sorrell, 2011). These theories and these scholars spent their lives researching the psyche and the individual and succinctly argued how internal processing could facilitate personal development and allow each person to actualise personally. However, these processes rarely focused on or acknowledged external oppressive and damaging social and political forces such as misogyny, patriarchy, racism, discrimination regarding physical and mental abilities, homophobia and educational discrepancies. The idea of self-transcendence and self-actualisation requires breaking limits, however, the boundaries, limits and forces working on each person will vary and will impede their ability to actualise enormously. These theories often assume equality between individuals by their omission of discussions and acknowledgment of the inequalities which exist between people. They also do not discuss gender expectations and requirements in terms of work, care and societal expectations and demands, these heavily impact how a person's life is organised and how their time is used, again these omissions could be argued to compound discrimination and complicity facilitate ongoing and outdated gender roles and expectations.

“Self-transcendence refers to states of consciousness and stages of development in which the sense of self is expanded beyond the ordinary boundaries, identifications, and self-images of the individual personality and reflects a fundamental connection, harmony, or unity with others and the world.” (Davis, 2011, p138)

In E. L Johnson’s work “Mapping the field of the whole human” (2013) they remark on the problematic notion of a personality and how the focus on theories based on the idea of ‘a personality’ means that a personality may be considered finite, unmovable and unchangeable (this echoing Freud’s problematic view as discussed above). This is unhelpful when considering personal development and growth. By viewing our personality as fixed we may conclude that certain aspects of our behaviour, our belief systems and our thinking patterns cannot be altered, modified or changed. This mindset could be damaging on many levels, since it reducing self-directed agency, it at the same time leaves the person without hope, can be detrimental to progression and negates the idea of lifelong personal development and improvement, which is ultimately the premise on which most therapeutic practices are based (O’Brien et al., 2007).

“One problem facing the field is its curricular organisation based on the historical development of personality psychology in the 20th Century, rather than on the actual phenomena of the whole human itself.” (Johnson, 2013, p145)

This notion of individuality and the essence of a person being innate and unique which is denoted by the term ‘soul’, pervades the work of Jung, Rogers, Assagioli and Johnson. However, in modern-day counselling and therapy training, the soul cannot be fully accounted for, since it is impossible to be quantified and measured. Hence the work is possibly undervalued and underutilised as it is not considered scientific or measurable. This would appear to be true in academia also, where recent developments in medicine and social care practices, prefer measurable and tangible outcomes with strong preferences to therapeutic interventions where results can be quantified. A good example of this is why Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is often adopted as the ‘go to’ therapy within health and medical systems for the treatment of a variety of forms of mental distress (along with its perceived lower cost than ‘talking therapies’ or long-term

counselling). This could alternatively be argued to be why there appears to be growing interest in nature therapy and ecotherapy as these emerging disciplines could be instrumental in filling important intellectual and therapeutic gaps in terms of psychotherapy, mental health and mental wellbeing. Philosophy, psychology and psychoanalysis cater to theoretical assertions and conceptualisations in ways that medicine and the natural sciences generally avoid. This could be argued to be a by-product of capitalism and the preference to measure outcomes along what can be readily observed in experiments and processes that can be replicated as opposed to theoretical and philosophical interpretations which allow for disparities, discrepancies, qualities and phenomena which may be sensed but remain unverifiable and scientifically and empirically ambiguous.

Ecotherapy and ecopsychology

Since the emergence of nature therapy, ecotherapy and ecopsychology it could be argued that in these practices nature itself becomes the therapist or healer, and the therapist is the facilitator or coordinator of this (Davis, 1998). Nature holds the space for a person to recover from trauma, mental ill-health and emotional distress (Scott, 2003, Stuart-Smith, 2020). When we consider this in terms of the core conditions (Rogers, 1951), which have been mentioned previously in this chapter, it could be said that when immersed in nature we can experience feelings of being accepted, feel a sense of empathy and compassion from our surroundings, and perceive that everything is exactly as it should be in any given moment. Natural spaces are locations that offer solace and comfort and can reflect processes such as life, death, development and the necessity and interdependent qualities of relationships. Nature can appear chaotic and inexplicable to many conditioned in western thinking and practices, in a similar way to traumatic and painful life events can feel the same way, yet in nature living and life processes continues and evolve around these life-changing and trajectory altering events and situations. When considering nature immersion in this manner and nature is often considered the therapist in these methods, it could be argued that nature would be able to provide the necessary conditions (i.e., the core conditions) that support people in their recovery from painful and distressing experiences and circumstances.

“In nature, in the wilderness, every one of us is a living creature among countless life forms. We are surrounded by plants and animals, mushrooms and microorganisms, which all have one thing in common: they don’t judge us or expect us to behave in a certain way. We are just present among them, interconnected with them in the all-encompassing network of life, and no one looks for mistakes to hold against us. No one tries to squeeze us into a straitjacket or demands a certain performance from us.” (Arvay, 2018, p33)

In Sarah Conn’s paper, “Living in the Earth” (1998) she argues that we must consider personal pain and emotional distress from a wider perspective. She states that individual health and mental illnesses, conditions and disorders should be considered from a societal and global viewpoint, as opposed to focusing solely on the individual, their immediate family relationships and other personal and highly personalised variables. She argues that as individuals we are greatly impacted by events and situations in the world around us and our agency is constrained and enabled by larger structures within the social orders within which we exist (as discussed earlier). This claim also taps into a wealth of research linking mental ill-health to political and economic systems that exert power and control over individual choices and freedoms and therefore constrain a person’s agency, such as the structures, norms and historical legacies and impacts of capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism and colonialism (Sakhai, 2018).

“Ecopsychological perspectives on health and psychotherapy invite us to rediscover ourselves as dwellers within the earth as a living system. When we consider the human psyche from this perspective, we can begin to view personal pain as both unique to the person and as a signal from the larger context, as “the earth speaking through us.” Exploring the inner and the outer landscapes within which we live, and the connections between them, we look for diversity, interconnectedness and flows of nourishment in the system of which the pain is a part.” (Conn, 1998, p196)

Theodore Roszak is considered by many to be the founder of ecopsychology and in his book *Voice of the Earth*, he argued that the way we conceptualise and practice therapy and the regulation of and coping with emotional distress needed to change. He argued that the growing mental health epidemics that many countries were experiencing (especially capitalist so called ‘advanced’ societies in the global north) could be attributed to what was happening globally in terms of the systematic degradation and destruction of nature, the resultant environmental crisis and our growing alienation from the natural world (Roszak, 2001). In this work he saw as positive the emergence of the environmental movement as a global response to this crisis, and he believed there was also a need to consider new ways of engaging with nature to support individuals experiencing emotional distress and mental ill-health. He called for a paradigm shift in terms of how we thought about the earth and our future and ecopsychology emerged because of his beliefs and theoretical observations. Roszak asserts in his work that what Jung refers to as the ‘collective consciousness and what Freud calls the ‘id’ he perceives to be the world i.e., everything that has ever been and that continues to be (Roszak, 2001). He believed the crisis of our time was the global environmental crisis and acknowledged the scale and enormity of the task at hand, in his writing.

“The pace of the environmental revolution will be faster than the pace of its predecessors. The agricultural revolution began some ten thousand years ago, the industrial revolution has been underway for two centuries. But if the environmental revolution is to succeed, it must be compressed into two decades.” (Roszak, Gomes and Kanner, 1995, pxv, preface)

The environmental movement is about protecting the planet, life and life supporting systems, and can be viewed as the only all-inclusive social and political movement to date. A movement where the welfare of all living beings is discussed, debated and contended in the various strands and sub-sections of this monumental international and intersectional campaign to save the planet and all who reside on it (Jordan et al., 2016, Roszak, 2001). The purpose of the movement is to protect our environment which means it encourages inclusivity and respect of all living things, moving from dominant anthropocentric discussions to embrace more ecocritical and ecocentric perspectives

(Fisher, 2013). These discourses value life and ecosystems over financially driven, profit-obsessed economic models and human narratives which are more widely recognised as westernised ways of living and are generally capitalism orientated (Shiva, 2020).

Despite the aims and objectives of the movement, it has been accused of using fear-inducing and fatalistic tactics to gain support and raise awareness and many extremist groups adopt radical and sometimes violent tactics (Taylor, 1995). These tactics are not new to environmental movements and have been discounted by prominent theorists such as Theodore Roszak who in his essay 'A Psyche as Big as the Earth' about the challenges and potential solutions to the global environmental crisis. In his writing, he recounted his multiple attempts to manipulate his audience into action by adopting shock tactics or guilt-inducing and alarmist narratives, evoking emotions and harnessing emotions are strategies that most advertising and activist campaigns use to get the public's attention. He argued that people were often overwhelmed by the scale and magnitude of the planetary emergency presented to them.

"I had a hundred examples of thoughtlessly harmful environmental behaviours to unload on my audience. It made me feel virtuous to stand before them, predicting the doom our way of life would soon bring down on us. But as time went on, I recognised that presentations like this were making less and less of a difference, and indeed I was growing weary of spreading gloom. The public that responded to scare tactics and guilt trips had been used up, and it was not the vast majority. Too many others were either not paying attention or just did not care." (Buzzell et al., 2009, p30)

There are concerns amongst ecotherapists and ecopsychologists that these tactics and techniques may have left people despondent, hopeless and feeling overwhelmed regarding the current state of our natural world and their capacity to adequately comprehend and generate sufficient agency to appropriately respond to it. (Roszak, 2001, Jordan, 2014). It is argued that this distress and concern may be something that most individuals are not aware of, but these concerns are buried within our unconscious and will begin to impact our general mental health more increasingly as the health of

the planet and the global population becomes even more compromised through the environmentally destructive and ruthless activities associated with capitalism and the relentless and unrestrained economic growth connected with it (Roszak, 2001).

“The growth of ‘green care’ over the last fifteen years is indicative of an emerging movement seeking to place our contact and engagement with nature as central to improved mental health. The growth in the importance of nature to wellbeing has given rise to the emergence of a new discipline: Ecopsychology has been central in supporting ideas within counselling and psychotherapy which position nature as fundamental to revitalising and reconnecting humans within a reciprocal healing relationship to nature.” (Jordan, 2015, p26).

Ecotherapy and ecopsychology may be able to assist in somewhat countering the fears regarding the planetary crisis, by bringing some balance to our current predicament by using therapeutic, sustainable and progressive approaches to therapy and supporting individuals to connect with nature (Bayley, 2019). At the same time, this is not to pay attention and recognise how capitalism, the burning of fossil fuels, the insatiable desire for consumerism, global travel and the commodification of our natural resources have all had a catastrophic impact on the natural world. It is also undeniable that many parts of the natural world are still intact and that is potentially why this need for connection, concern and desire to protect, and preserve our green and blue spaces is greater than ever (Williams, 2017).

What Roszak was confirming when he wrote about some of the tactics used in the environmental movement, was that when we scare people for a particular cause we may inadvertently lead to overwhelm in terms of emotional and mental health. This can generate a sense of paralysis and inertia and may also be traumatic for many people, this too can lead to a variety of often unhealthy and profoundly uncomfortable emotional responses and sensations. These emotions may not always be processed to support constructive environmental agency and support a movement, on occasion it can anger the public and turn them from engaging and supporting the cause, or as the person may see it, the root and reason for their emotional distress and pain. These observations and assertions may also be helpful when considering societal problems

such as addiction, self-harm, eating disorders, medication usage and suicide and how are coping mechanisms for many people, in what can be argued to be unhealthy and dysfunctional societies, where the stress levels associated with modern living have normalised the widespread use of drugs for leisure and self-medicating purposes. Ecotherapy and ecopsychology aim to gently encourage individuals to engage with the natural world without fear and to use the healing and therapeutic properties of green and blue spaces to improve their mental and emotional health (Kiell, 2016, White et al., 2021). A recent example of a protest which angered the public and was met with general disapproval was an October 2019 Extinction Rebellion action that disrupted tube stations in London which impacted how people got to their jobs, this was an instance where the action was greeted with widespread hostility and contempt and the general message regarding climate and environmentalism was not processed healthily or productively.

Fears for the planet and fears about our futures (including for children, grandchildren or the next generations more abstractly) cannot be separated; this is one of the central themes and arguments with regards to ecotherapy and ecopsychology. To try and separate our mental health concerns and anxiety about the future from our concerns about the planet is counter-productive and potentially detrimental to both the world and the individuals residing within it (Roszak, 2001, Conn, 1998). One of the issues that activism and environmentalism have also highlighted is the importance of emotions with regards to our mental and physical health, alongside issues that many of the population faces regarding work, their everyday lives and the struggles they face. The latter makes engaging with the planetary crisis problematic emotionally and psychologically, and it can be unappealing to face and engage with this crisis as it escalates. In the face of a worsening climate and ecological crisis, denial and ignorance can feel comfortable and familiar, and for many people it is hard to think about the 'end of the world' as it were when they cannot think about getting to the end of the week. One of the central issues for ecotherapy, in particular, is how can the discipline continue to advocate nature as a therapeutic device whilst the biosphere becomes more disordered and increasingly more dangerous to us?

Wild Therapy

The concept of nature and the meaning of it as a word has proven to be difficult to pin down as highlighted in Chapter 1. When reflecting on etymology and the words connected to environmentalism. It could be argued that everything that exists in nature as it comes from this earth or is made by humans from resources taken from the earth so both are part of nature (Buzzell et al., 2009). However, other theorists and therapeutic practitioners argue that nature or ‘the wild’ is that which grows naturally without intentional human interference, and some see nature as all things that are “other than human” or “not human-made” (Totton, 2011). ‘The wilderness’ or ‘wildness’ is green or blue spaces that are generally considered to be untouched by culture or society; they transcend social and human-made constructs. There has been a growing interest and development in sustainable and regenerative principles such as rewilding, these practices and principles have been promoted and encouraged on individual, cultural and global levels (Hayward et al., 2019, Jepson et al., 2020).

“Powerful words have power through their complexity, which is to say, through their links with other words, their function as nodal points in a complex network of language, a web of subtle and shifting contrasts and affinities which gives rise to meaning as an emergent property.” (Totton, 2011, p9)

Totton’s book *Wild Therapy* (2011) states that ecopsychology and ecotherapy “welcome us back into emotional bodies, helping us experience our connectedness to self and other humans.” (Totton, 2011, p25). He, along with other ecotherapists (Jordan, 2014, Roszak, 2001, Buzzell et al., 2001), connects the current environmental crisis with individual emotional and mental distress, and argues that we have become ‘domesticated’ to such an extent that we have lost the essence of our commonality and our connection with the living world; and not just other species, but our own species too. Rewilding is about recalling and remembering this wildness that is innate in each of us and that has been lost as a result of many of the trappings of western living and highly domesticated, sanitised and highly technologised lifestyles which have occurred as a result of rapid industrialisation, widespread urbanisation and the structuring of many people’s lives and homes around capitalism and capitalist ideals which value private ownership and

control, and present consumption and technology as symbols of collective and individual success, progress and status. This remembering of our wildness is not solely a cognitive and intellectual experience, but a whole person experience where all parts of the psyche, the life, the body and the environment are engaged in a process of recalling the wildness within each of us that encourages connecting with our senses, authentic undomesticated parts of our self and the freedom associated with allowing things to be as they are. The call for rewilding is not a desire for humans to live primitive lives again, but more an attempt to acknowledge the speed with which our species has become domesticated, disorientated and dysfunctional in terms of how many of us relate ecologically, psychologically and spiritually to the planet we inhabit and upon which we are utterly dependent.

“Our species once did (and in small groups still does) live in stable harmony with the natural environment. That was not because men were incapable of changing their environment or lacked acumen; it was simply on account of a holistic or reverent attitude, but some more enveloping and deeper reason still. The change began between five and ten thousand years ago and became more destructive and less accountable with the progress of civilisation.” (Shepard, 1998, p3)

Totton argues that wild therapy is about engaging with our true selves, which is by nature wild, free and unoppressed. It is about exploring and retrieving a relationship that has been ruptured and fractured by a capitalist culture and economy that requires highly organised, regulated and managed lives via unchosen and externally determined, and at times, oppressive and psychologically damaging systems of production, reproduction and consumption. He argues that in the ‘wild’ or nature, we have an opportunity to reconnect with a more natural and authentic version of ourselves, which is often rejected or oppressed to function in modern society (Totton, 2011). Along with theorists such as Jordan, Roszak, Illich and Jung, Totton believes we have become increasingly disconnected from our natural state and the natural world due to rapid industrialisation and the institutionalising of almost all forms of provisioning and the meeting of human needs/interests, from health care, education, childcare to end of life care. We no longer trust nature to care for us as we did in the past for many complex

and varied reasons but mainly because of capitalism and carbon-based ('petrocultural') living that has created (for some) lives and lifestyles which prioritise formally paid work and economic production over family life, community and living sufficiently. To live eco-sufficiently, means to live according to needs being met and in accordance with sustainable economic, social and ecological boundaries, rather than focusing on consumption and amassing wealth, the priority is health, wellness and sustainability. For many people, their lives have become busier because of the demands of modern, high speed, highly mobile and intensive lifestyles and career trajectories and in turn, their time (especially their non-work 'free' time) has become precious and scarce. In this way, as that observer of early capitalism, Max Weber, noted, within capitalism time itself becomes a scarce resource, because 'time is money'. Weber went on to highlight the disciplining and constraining systems of modern capitalism within and to which the individual must conform:

"Today's capitalist economic order is a monstrous cosmos, into which the individual is born and which in practice is for him, at least as an individual, simply a given, an immutable shell in which he is obliged to live. It forces on the individual, to the extent that he is caught up in the relationships of the 'market,' the norms of its economic activity." (Weber, 2020, p13; emphasis added)

The more industrialised, consumer-focused and institution-laden our societies have become the less responsibility we have taken for our individual and personal care and health. We use services to educate, care and treat all illnesses (Roszak, 2001, Totton, 2011). Most people ask doctors for medicine to heal and would not consider or believe they could heal themselves as we have been taught that people play various professional roles and that all our institutions and public services are necessary and valid (Scott, 2003). Ivan Illich has also written seminal work critiquing the institutionalisation of our families, our health and our children's education in his books *Deschooling Society* (1971) and *Limits to Medicine* (1976). Both books argue that the institutionalisation of these services is a direct result of capitalism and is detrimental to the health and wellbeing of the population and the damaging effects are long-reaching, insidious and devastating to people, place and planet. As he puts it, "Modern medicine is a negation of health. It

isn't organised to serve human health, but only itself, as an institution. It makes more people sick than it heals" (Illich, 1976, p25). Roszak would share some of his concerns around the institutionalisation of our health services particularly in terms of mental health and psychiatric services.

"We look to psychiatrists to teach us the meaning of madness, but our dominant schools of psychotherapy are themselves creations of the same scientific and industrial culture that now weighs so brutally on the planet. Even those who dissent from Freudian orthodoxy remain narrowly focused on what Jung called "urban neurosis." They ignore the greater ecological realities that surround the psyche- as if the soul might be saved while the biosphere crumbles." (Roszak, 2001, p19)

Conformity and trust in such services and the professionals who run and manage them mean that very few people question either, and are less inclined to make complex decisions based on their own intuition alone. For critics of modern state-bureaucratic and corporate large-scale and impersonal systems, such as Illich, these systems systematically 'disempower' the individual, thus making them dependent on these systems and associated 'experts' for identifying and meeting their needs and helping them when they experience problems or distress. In modern society, many people trust institutions over their own judgment and thoughts and feelings, in part because they have not been socialised or educated to do so, and therefore have little experience of anything else. These institutions, which themselves are under immense stress and pressure, can often let people down or even damage them through misdiagnosis, by treating illnesses in isolation as opposed to treating an individual holistically, or failing to view individual illness and distress as a symptom of a failed and unhealthy social or economic order, as opposed to being the responsibility of the individual herself alone. In the case of the health care system (what some would call the 'illness system'), is oriented towards a 'medical model', and in so doing support big pharmaceuticals and profit-making corporations over potentially more environmentally sustainable, cheaper and effective person-centred alternative therapies and remedies. Whilst modern medicine has undoubtedly made incredible advancements and achievements in terms

of the health and wellbeing of large numbers of the population, there continue to be areas of tension when considering mental health and effective treatments, in many instances medication is the only viable option, and this discounts other treatments which empower and support the person without fostering a dependency on pharmaceuticals, and often simplistic, individualistic and deterministic models and understandings of human health and illness. Again, the widespread use of medication to treat mental health concerns could be argued to be another worrying by-product of an unhealthy, capitalist society, where illnesses are profitable for certain industries, such as pharmaceutical corporations. Not only does the capitalist system make people ill, it can also profit from this illness.

In ecotherapy and ecopsychology connecting with nature has been claimed to connect individuals with their intuition which is an innate ancient wisdom that has kept humans safe for centuries (Williams, 2017, Roszak et al., 1995). Historically we would have used natural remedies to cure medical issues, but our health has become institutionalised and our autonomy and power have been given to professionals in many fields (Illich, 1976). Intuition and self-care are no longer considered sufficient nor trustworthy and hence many people in the modern western world are not connected to this “innate wisdom” as many could argue that it would be irresponsible and negligent to listen to our intuition over an expert in a specific field (Sternberg et al., 1995). Pregnancy and childbirth have become highly medicalised and the rates of emergency caesarean surgery have also increased substantially over recent decades, these changes could be argued to be a positive consequence of the institutionalisation of almost all health-related matters, or it could be a sign of the ‘medical model’ transforming childbirth into a ‘illness’ i.e. something to be ‘treated’, a ‘problem’ in which women no longer trusted to know their own bodies and to birth without medical and technological intervention and support. The issue is not regarding modernity and the developments and safety measures that come with significant technological and medical advances. The concern is that rapidly the body is no longer considered trustworthy on its own and interventions have become normalised to such an extent, that they will potentially be considered normal and healthy over the next few generations, thus altering and reframing the entire pregnancy and birthing processes. The medicalisation of natural processes could be argued to be another form of

alienation, alienation from our true selves, our natural rhythms and our innate capabilities.

“We do not encounter nature on its own, but through our filters. With the concept of the world as a larger self comes the possibility of judgments, grasping, rejection and constriction-and all the characteristics of the “smaller”, egoic and dualistic self. This is the origin of the splits that lead to alienation and suffering.” (Davis, 2011, p144)

Jung was the first significant theorist to honour and place our connection with the natural world and the world outside of us as significant when considering our relationship with ourselves and our ability to live a good and meaningful life. When reflecting on the observations and the significance of nature as a therapeutic and important part of our lives, it is difficult to ignore the frequency and prevalence of the word “soul”. Nature therapy and ecotherapeutic practices have strong spiritual and philosophical dimensions and those are cited in almost all the texts relating to these areas, the relationship between nature and people is viewed by many within these disciplines as being fundamentally rooted in our existence and the metaphysical and sensory experiences are valued alongside those events, sensations and experiences that can be measured. The transpersonal, which relates to who we are outside of ourselves as an individual, play heavily in this literature. The concept of the transpersonal self relates to connecting with other species, other humans and the obligations, experiences and consciousness associated with those developments and that awareness.

“Spirituality has been part of the ecopsychology literature, though not without ambivalence or disagreement. For the most part, however, the transpersonal elements of ecopsychology have not been clearly articulated.” (Davis, 2011, p137)

Connecting with nature is also something associated with terms such as consciousness and mindfulness, which have become increasingly popular when thinking of wellbeing and mental health. The Mental Health Charity MIND promotes the use of green therapy as a wellbeing tool and refers to practices such as gardening, walking in nature and

camping as being beneficial for mental health. (MIND, 2021). The use of nature as a therapeutic and healing application is certainly by no means modern, however the growing emergence of these practices within psychoanalysis and therapeutic practices would suggest they are a counter-movement to the medicalisation and institutionalisation of most of our mental health services, including the growth of 'mental health experts' and associated 'expert' knowledge, which by definition is not possible for everyone to possess and therefore fundamentally non-democratic.

It is important to note that ecopsychology emerged as an intellectual and academic response to capitalism, imperialism, mass industrialisation, consumerism and rapid environmental decline. It argues that as we are naturally inclined to connect and have a relationship with our planet and the natural world, we will psychologically (as well as materially) suffer as our planet falls deeper into environmental chaos. Ecopsychologists critique and challenge mainstream psychology, particularly for not acknowledging the direct link between the health of our planet and the mental health of each person and place the health of the planet as a public health concern and an individual issue that impacts every person alive. The climate and ecological crisis will impact us on a personal level and therefore it would follow that our interventions or therapeutic responses to these concerns would involve nature and nature immersion as an attempt to restore balance and perspective on both a planetary and personal level (Scull, 2008). It seems strange that people would thrive as the planetary conditions become increasingly hostile and dangerous, and this discipline is interested in harnessing the healing of the individual to support the healing of the environment. *"Ecopsychology seeks to redress the balance."* (Roszak, Gomes and Kanner, 1995, pxvi, preface)

Psychology and psychological processes often centre on a concern for the individual, viewed in alienation from their social, cultural and the larger environmental contexts, with the premise that we must treat this isolated person so they can live a better and more fulfilled life. Therapy and therapeutic disciplines are designed to support the person to improve the quality of their life and move on from trauma, pain and turmoil and to help them to function and work in capitalist societies. In such societies work is how people are remunerated and often is the most significant determiner of their identity, status and quality of life, whether they are in paid

employment or receiving state benefits, both situations involve working. The omission of our environment in these assessments and processes is symbolic and relevant when considering how collective and cumulative behaviours, fixations and obsessions, under capitalism and neoliberalism, began to contribute to high levels of ill health and psychological and mental distress. The pathologising and medicalising of large numbers of the population has been happening at an accelerated rate with few exploring these persisting patterns and widespread behaviours from an ecological or environmental perspective. When the planet is in crisis and is potentially facing mass genocide because of the crisis, how can the population remain healthy? This is further problematised when considering health inequalities and disparities with regards to race, gender and class as well as other variables, suggesting that mental ill-health is both a political and an environmental issue, as opposed to being a personal and individual concern.

“My question is: why do men persist in destroying their habitat?” (Shepherd, 1982, p1). This is how Paul Shepherd began the book which threw the gauntlet down to other psychologists ignoring the environmental annihilation and growing environmental concerns of the time. Almost four decades later the question seems even more relevant today. Ignorance and lack of knowledge could be cited as factors for the lack of environmental movement in the early 1980s, but the same cannot be argued in 2021. Two main differences make a lack of awareness and knowledge less likely than in the early 1980s: the internet and science, and climate and ecological empirical research.

The theories and the research connected to ecotherapy

This next section of this chapter moves away from the emergence and development of ecopsychology as a counter discipline to traditional subjects and discuss the research that endorses nature-based experiences and practices as medical and therapeutic support for mental health concerns and issues. The remaining half of this chapter focuses on studies conducted in recent years and discuss the theories and hypotheses upon which they were built. The empirical evidence and findings will be presented to establish how the field has emerged and how outcomes have been measured, this will

hopefully aid the reader in understanding how these practices and this knowledge has been shaped and represent the growing interest in nature-based therapies.

The Biophilia Hypothesis

‘Biophilia’ means to love life and the premise of the bulk of empirical and theoretical work that has been conducted on nature therapies begins with the ‘Biophilia Hypothesis’ as the conceptual and theoretical foundation for all the studies that followed. The term Biophilia is Greek in origin and means to have “love of life or living systems” (Arvay, 2018, p. 2). In *Biophilia*, Wilson argues that all human beings have an innate and primitive desire and need to connect with other living species or the ‘more-than-human world’ or the ‘non-human world’.

“Now to the very heart of wonder. Because species diversity was created before humanity, and because we evolved within it, we have never fathomed its limits. As a consequence, the living world is the natural domain of the most restless and paradoxical part of the human spirit. Our sense of wonder grows exponentially: the greater the knowledge, the deeper the mystery and the more we seek knowledge to create new mystery. This catalytic reaction, seemingly an inborn human trait, draws us perpetually forward in a search for a new place and new life.” (Wilson, 1984, p10)

This hypothesis and these observations led to the development of the field of ecotherapy and nature-based practices. This ground-breaking, core text was an academic witnessing and paying homage through their reflections and intuitively following their intellectual curiosity and preferences. This is important when placing this hypothesis within this research, as it signals a time when the concern for the environment and ecology was emerging and this concern and interest was subsequently reflected in academic research. The development of disciplines linking our health with the health of other species and placing humans in an ecological context began alongside the

awareness of many scholars that our planet was being harmed and environmental destruction was an issue worthy of discussion and debate (Ward et al., 1972).

The philosopher and scholar Erich Fromm uses a definition that heightens the positive associations identifies the emotions linked with this innate and naturally occurring relatedness to the natural world and living things. In his work *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* he defines the concept as follows:

“Biophilia is the passionate love of life and of all that is alive; it is the wish to further growth, whether in a person, a plant, an idea, or a social group. The biophilous person prefers to construct rather than to retain. He wants to be more rather than to have more. He is capable of wondering, and he prefers to see something new rather than to find confirmation of the old. He loves the adventure of living more than he does certainty. He sees the whole rather than only the parts, structures rather than summations. He wants to mould and to influence by love, reason, and example; not by force, by cutting things apart, by the bureaucratic manner of administering people as if they were things.” (Fromm, 1997, p485).

Biophilia signals an affection and an affiliation with all living things, life itself and life-sustaining ecosystems. The key and most significant aspect of this hypothesis relate to all organisms that are living, breathing and growing in the biosphere. Death is a part of life's cycle, the natural world and seasons and biophilia is a term that has been coined and created to realign us with our nature through reconnecting and realigning with the natural rhythms and processes of living, as opposed to the unnatural and damaging processes often forced on us by capitalism, where our time and productivity is central to how we arrange our lives and our daily/ weekly/ monthly routines. This hypothesis strongly identifies the vibrancy of life and growth as the desirable and prominent narrative that should dictate our lives and our relationships. However, it may also assist with death and help those in the last stages of life to die well and to die in a state of peace and calm which biophilia and nature may assist with.

“Our sense of hearing is the last thing to go during the dying process. In other words, of all our senses, our hearing remains active the longest before death. For dying people, soundscapes are important. They are what accompany them to death. While soothing sounds may be important in healing gardens, they are essential in hospice gardens. Natural sounds can calm and relax us. Many people who use hospice gardens toward the end of their life would like to consciously die there if they could- in the garden and not the hospital bed.” (Arvay, 2018, p171).

Much of the research and studies that explore the concept of biophilia examine it through the lens of therapy and healing, it lends itself well to self-care and transpersonal narratives and interventions which focus on connectedness, community support and bringing meaning to our lives through serving other living things (. This is a theory that states that we are genetically predisposed to seek connection with the natural environment. It argues that our wellbeing and sense of fulfillment can be found relationships with the natural world, this desire to connect and live in harmony with other species is inbuilt in us and ever-present. Wilson acknowledges that these desires and urges are not as obvious to or easily accessed by many people as our ways of living have been dramatically altered over time and perceptions about how we should live and even our desires have changed over time, notably in and through large scale systems and institutionalised ways of meeting our needs.

“Everything is riddled with ambiguity; the middle way turns hard and the general formulas fail with dispiriting consistency. Consider that a man who is a villain to his contemporaries can become a hero to his descendants. If a tyrant were to carefully preserve his nation’s land and natural resources for his personal needs while keeping his people in poverty he might unintentionally bequeath a rich, healthful environment to a reduced population for enjoyment in later, democratic generations. This caudillo will have improved the long-term welfare of his people by giving them greater resources and more freedom of action. The exact reverse can occur as well: today’s hero can be tomorrow’s destroyer.” (Wilson, 1984, p123).

The need to place ourselves within larger temporal and physical contexts is a prevailing theme and narrative of Wilson's core text. It is rich with global examples of conservation and practices which place ecosystems in the middle of farming and environmental practices. It opened the discussions and led to the argument that we are a species amongst many species in a huge, interconnected, complex and fragile web of living systems and we are part of it, but many of us are unaware or not conscious of this relationship, this constant feature of our lived experiences. *Kinship affects emotion in other, unexpected ways.*" (Wilson, 1984, p120). This theory was developed by Wilson in 1984 and is cited in many academic texts and was one of the first theories presented that made the connection between humans and the restorative and therapeutic importance of nature.

Stress Reduction Theory

Roger Ulrich's 'stress reduction theory' (1991) states that time spent in nature significantly reduces stress and feelings of overwhelm and emotional and mental distress. Stress is a phenomenon that is difficult to measure and quantify. It is not considered a medical disease however it can be described as an experience or a sensation that is believed to have emerged because of modern living i.e., within consumer-capitalist, industrial and increasingly urban societies and has been considered a significant social issue in the last century (Huany et al., 2020). It is a well-known and popular term, which is widely used within the general population, but it is subjective and personal to everyone experiencing the phenomenon. Things that can produce stress in one person may not have the same impact on another, hence why the definition and measurement of it are still problematic.

Stress Reduction Theory (STR) is one example of how ecotherapeutic practices and nature-focused activities can be used to support capitalism and promote the health of the populations by using the properties of nature to aid recovery and resilience. In Ulrich's study, hospital patients were shown nature scenes and images and results demonstrated that these images helped speed up the recovery of inpatients and minimised the stress associated with post-operative procedures (Andrade and Devlin, 2015). This study helped develop the theory which promotes the rejuvenating and

healing powers of nature in clinical and medical environments and has more recently seen studies exploring the use of Virtual reality in this context (Browning et al., 2019). The very source of the wellbeing and health benefits is the same resource and commodity that is being systematically destroyed by our ecocidal, carbon-fueled societies which continue to fail to make the radical and urgent adaptations required for new environmentally sustainable ways of living. The relentless pursuit of profit and endless economic growth is the same political economic system and ideology (i.e., capitalism) that leads to the destruction of our habitat and climate, which is ironically still able to offer stress relief and rejuvenation through the beautiful imagery and evocative feelings that occur from admiring scenes of natural beauty. STR demonstrates that nature immersion activities using imagery and pictures can offer therapeutic benefits and that those benefits can be felt in any location including indoor settings.

Attention Restoration Theory

A theory that is built on Wilson's (1984) hypothesis is the Attention Restoration Theory (ART) which was created by two scholars in the 1990s (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1995). This theory asserts that time spent in nature has a relaxing and therapeutic impact on the mind and body. Time spent in nature works similarly to a reset button on a device or piece of technology and a summary of the findings may be to argue that nature experiences can bring us 'back to base', they can be grounding, relaxing and soothing (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1995). It can serve as an antidote to the fast-paced and often stressful lives many of the population are experiencing within the modern world, through pressures of work or the education system, our caring responsibilities, and other social and personal obligations. ART is established on the premise that attention can be restored because of spending time in natural settings, thus rejuvenating people and preparing them to return with revitalised attention and less stress. Nature experiences seem to aid productivity, and in many instances help make better and more attentive workers, thus ironically aiding the very economic system which is responsible for the demise and destruction of our air and many of our natural spaces.

“In a nutshell, ART states that nature’s soft fascinating characteristics (i.e., the independent variable) can lead to a recovery of directed attention (i.e., the dependent variable), and this effect is driven by the capacity of fascinating (natural) environments to trigger bottom-up involuntary attention (i.e., the mediator).” (Joye et al., 2018, p7)

The focus of this theory was on the cognitive impact of nature-based experiences and the benefits of restoring our attention if the latter has become depleted. The theory states that the qualities of natural settings and green and blue spaces offer a cognitive experience that is regenerative as opposed to debilitating mental and psychological processes. This concept states that time spent in nature can be used to improve attention spans and helps the mind restore when feeling overwhelmed or struggling to focus (Kaplan, 1995). Again, this theory which was developed in the 1990s and is widely cited in recent empirical research studies (Meredith et al., 2020, Hicks et al., 2020) and is another ecotherapeutic finding which can be used to benefit industry, institutions, businesses and workers, as it quantifies what is needed to restore the attention of people if it diminishes. The use of nature to increase productivity and output of workers is something that illustrates how the research could be beneficial to work and work processes as opposed to the intentions of other therapeutic and particularly psychoanalytical schools of thought, which encourage actualisation and self-awareness. Both theories, SRT and ART, have produced generalisable assertions which could be directly applied to large numbers of people and they incorporate simplistic and overarching concepts and ideas, both of which conclude that nature experiences have beneficial mental and psychological consequences in certain conditions and environments.

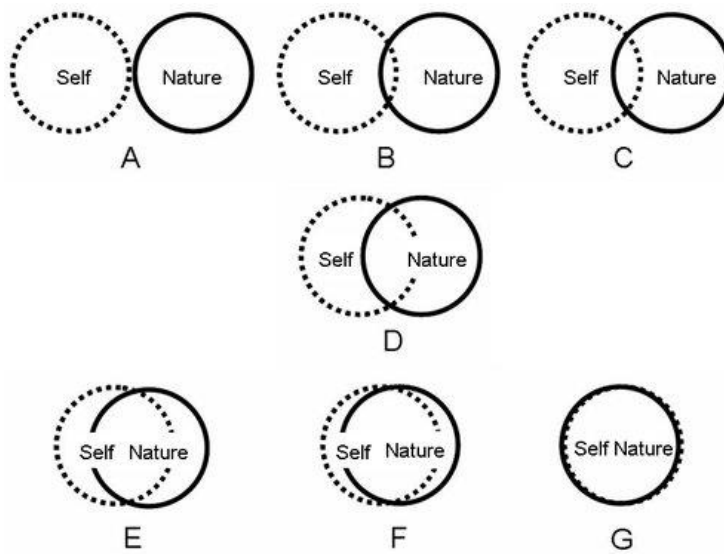
Nature Connection

The basic premise of nature connection, nature connectedness and nature connectivity relate to the assumption and belief that nature is an entity with which we can connect. Nature connection is an idea that is often used in the context of public health and individual self-care practices. The belief that we can connect and disconnect with nature

is a widely accepted and understood belief and is something that has also been examined in academia in the last few decades (Barrable, 2020, Louv, 2005, Louv, 2011 Yerbury, 2020). Levels of connectedness or connectivity can vary from person to person and attempts have been made by researchers to measure levels of nature connectivity and how these levels impact the thinking/thought-processes, behaviour and conduct of individuals. Nature connection and connectivity are generally accepted to be a process that involves being immersed in green or blue spaces. This abstract idea and the intuitive term is often considered an absolute when the belief is that nature is an entity that we can connect with and thus we can become disconnected with also, thus alienating ourselves from nature on a psychological level as we electively see ourselves as frequently inhabiting spaces where nature connection is believed to not occur.

The link between nature connectedness and pro-environmental activities has proven to be empirically significant and research shows that high levels of nature connectedness correlate to caring for the planet and wanting to protect. In Louv's book *The Nature Principle: Reconnecting with Life in a Virtual Age*, he claims that "*Recognizing the mind/body/ nature connection will be one of the most important actions that a revitalised environmental movement can take*" (Louv, 2011, p257). Louv argued that high levels of reconnecting were one the most important tasks if we are to have a thriving and healthy relationship with nature on individual, community and planetary levels, the key was that nature was included in services, in education, in health and the home. The use of nature immersion practices indicates a psychological calling to re-engage, reconnect and redefine us within the natural world, which is supported by the Biophilia Hypothesis also. The practice of regular nature connection and the reported benefits for people has been growing in popularity within academia and the general population (Cleary et al., 2020, Richardson et al., 2017). The idea of nature being an entity or space to connect with and the prevalence of such terms and beliefs strongly signified the extent and depth of the rupture between humans and all other living beings. This dichotomous and dualistic thinking and narrative permeates all levels of society and holds significant weight within the knowledge base and academic institutions. Ecopsychology challenges this dichotomy, while medical and many social care practices accept it.

Figure 9- The Inclusion of Nature in Self Scale.



Source: Liefländer et al., 2013.

Environmental and Climate illnesses

In recent years there have been increased attempts to consider the impact of ecocide and ecological concerns using terms such as climate anxiety and ecological grief. These terms have emerged as growing numbers of people are describing the psychological impact of climate change on their wellbeing. In Richard Louv's work, *Last Child in the Woods*, he coined the term "Nature Deficit Disorder" to account for the widespread, increasing and persistent levels of disconnection to the natural world experienced by children and young people (Louv, 2005). By referring to this as a disorder he was attempting to medicalise a term that was rooted in the environmental rupture and chaos we are currently experiencing. Research shows that many people are fearful of nature and some have argued that children, in particular are suffering conditions such as "Nature Deficit Disorder" as a result of this loss of connection and the concern and anxiety there is for many parents about their children spending time in nature. Climate anxiety is associated with the existential threat of the climate emergency and is considered a distressing, however healthy and normal psychological response to the research that continues to emerge regarding species loss, climate change and environmental devastation as the planetary emergency continues to unfold, so will the

language and the new words and conditions which describe the emotional responses and illnesses that may exist with the crisis.

“Over the past decade, a small group of researchers has begun to document the denaturing of childhood- its multiple causes, extent, and impact. Much of this new territory; the criminalization of natural play, for example, which is both a symptom and cause of the transformation, is occurring without much notice.” (Louv, 2005, p31)

The theorists and ecological writers who are beginning to discuss the issues and conditions that are emerging because of climate breakdown are challenging the hegemonic and essentialist discourse that medical issues are personal issues as opposed to being linked to socio-economic and socio-political issues relating to the environment, poverty, pollution and gender. The emergence of conditions such as ecological grief, nature deficit disorder and eco-anxiety are examples of how our environment and wider planetary issues are determinants on health, this has been widely ignored and is rarely acknowledged in many of the empirical and theoretical research which explores nature experiences and mental health outcomes and effects. There are growing numbers of academics and theorists who are challenging the status quo and bringing attention to how essentialist and reductionist modern medicine and health care are in failing to consider factors such as race, gender, geographical location, class and socio-economic injustice, exclusion and inequality (Taylor, 2022, Davies 2022).

We are living in an extraordinary time where the tension between medicine, health and the environment becomes heightened and the actions of professionals highlight these tensions and illustrate that new ways of thinking about these relationships are urgently required. While researching this project a coroner confirmed that a child in London Ella Adoo-Kissi- Debrah had died because of pollution, and a Canadian doctor diagnosed a female patient with climate change (Laville, 2020, Mishra, 2021). Both of these decisions by professionals in this field are ground-breaking and systemically challenging as they highlight some of the issues around advocating nature practices for health purposes. In a time when one-fifth of all premature global deaths

are attributed to air pollution, it seems for many getting some fresh air to clear their head or reset their attention or de-stress is not an option (Al-Delaimy et al., 2020).

The Stanford study and “Shinrin Yoku” (forest bathing)

Forest Bathing (or “shinrin yoku”) is an activity that has seen substantial academic research and is promoted within mental health agencies. The Idea of forest bathing has been around in Japan for decades, but quantifiable research wasn’t conducted until recently (Takayama et al., 2014). Research looking at the benefits of ‘forest bathing’ compared groups of people who spent time in urban environments with those who spent time in forests. This research found that time spent in nature or more specifically forested or wooded areas, reduced stress, improved mood, had a positive effect on individuals. Researchers also found that forest bathing increased feelings of vitality, which meant there was a surge in feelings relating to energy levels and feelings of alertness. These findings demonstrate that not only does forest bathing have a restorative impact, but it can make individuals feel revitalised, rejuvenated and reenergised (Takayama et al., 2014).

Stanford University completed a study on nature immersion and mental health in 2015 that has received significant academic and non-academic interest (Bratman et al., 2015). This research focused on the difference between individuals walking in urban areas and walking in green spaces and natural environments. The researchers recorded levels of rumination and prefrontal cortex activity, by completing interviews and recording blood flow results. They noticed significant improvements for those walking in nature and they concluded in their research that the increase of mental health issues and urbanisation are arguably strongly linked, with urbanisation being a direct result of capitalism and the push for workers to live closer to factories historically and cities are now hubs of productivity (Bratman et al., 2015). Research which juxtaposes the cityscapes with the green spaces is another indication that city life or urbanisation, which is a direct outcome of capitalism, is often associated with stress and mental ill-health. Whilst urbanisation is a by-product of and central to modern globalised capitalism, it can also be argued that stress and many mental health issues and concerns

are also inevitable by-products of that same system. Thus, these nature therapies can be understood as attempts to reconnect and resume a relationship that is pivotal for people's wellbeing, physical and mental health and for being productive workers and consumers.

Blue and Green Spaces

'Blue mind science' is a term used to describe research carried out exploring the therapeutic impact of water and being in and around blue spaces (Nichols, 2014). The concepts of blue space and green space break the idea of nature and nature immersion down even further and there is some research on how different natural settings have different effects (Callaghan et al., 2021, Wyles et al., 2019). Whilst blue space research focuses on the therapeutic benefits of being immersed in aquatic settings, many of these theorists also support the research and evidence that all-natural settings can have positive effects on mental health and wellbeing and many blue and green spaces offer the same regenerative and rejuvenating experiences (Nichols, 2016).

A study by Wyles et al. (2019), addressed the difference in the therapeutic impact of a variety of spaces and they considered both blue and green space. They concluded that the quality of the space was what impacted the participants the most. They found spaces that were not compromised and that were valued as places of outstanding beauty were the most beneficial in terms of restoration and enjoyment. Their study would support the assertion that not all areas that may be considered natural spaces would have the same mental health benefits, wide-open spaces would have a different impact on wellbeing, than urban, confined green spaces or gardens. This study concludes that it is the quality of the environment that people spend time in that may have a greater effect on health, as opposed to the differences between blue and green spaces (Kayleigh et al., 2019).

Stress and nature therapy

The stresses of "urban" and "modern" day living were cited or mentioned in nearly every study that was reviewed. These studies were often framed taking into consideration the

complexity and uniqueness of the time we live in and the modern world, however, they rarely directly addressed inequalities, discrimination, oppression and other factors which impact stress levels and are by-products of a global economic system that values production and profit above all else. Many looked at these mental health concerns, such as stress, as an indicator of more global and societal health issues and whilst they reflected on the era we live in and strongly correlate these issues with extreme and rapid industrialisation and urbanisation (Gidlow, 2016, Iwata et al., 2016, Shanadan, 2016, Sidenius, 2017, Takayama, 2014), few mentioned the word capitalism and none directly held capitalism and capitalist practice accountable for these stresses.

“Many stressors of urban life are increasingly driving humans to seek some form of stress relief [1]. In modern urbanized societies, acute and chronic stress and insufficient recovery from stress are well known as increasing problems and causes for long-term effects on health [2,3]. Stress is an important public health interest that is related to mental health problems, such as burnout syndrome, as well as cardiovascular, gastroenterological, immunological and neurological diseases [4]. This suggests that stress control is a vital issue in maintaining good health and preventing stress-related diseases in urbanized societies. “(Takayama, 2014, p2)

Research conducted in Denmark on stress looked at how it is not perceived as an illness but has many diverse and varied mental and physical medical impacts on people (Sidenius, 2017). In this research the participants engaged with a ‘Nature Therapy Garden’, which is a space designated and designed for therapeutic purposes (Sidenius, 2017). This space was used by the participants for an extended period and the data was collected through semi-structured interviews. In their findings, they put forward the idea of “wholeness” and how participants had become aware of destructive thought patterns and behaviour because of this therapeutic intervention. Being in nature led to a sense of openness and acceptance that was not present in other environments. These qualities were significant in terms of stress reduction and positive mental health.

“The participants’ overall development can be described as an increasing self-awareness leading to an improved ability to act by their current experienced bodily and mental capabilities and needs.” (Sidenius et al., 2017, p13)

A study carried out by Staffordshire University (Gidlow et al., 2016) compared psycho-physiological responses to walking in urban and natural environments. The researchers concluded that walking in all environments, urban and natural had positive effects, however, walking in natural environments had greater stress reduction results and improved cognitive functioning. This research suggests that on a physiological level there may be little difference between urban and natural environments but on a subjective and personal level the individuals were impacted (Gidlow et al., 2016).

Theorists such as Shanadan et al. (2016) concluded that the amount of time spent in nature was significant and that it would impact the quality and therapeutic value of the experience. They stated that the length of time was significant, however, there would be a threshold whereupon there would be no substantial impact after that time (Shanadan et al., 2016).

“The results here suggest that nature experiences in urban green spaces may be having a considerable impact on population health and that these benefits could be higher if more people were engaged in nature experiences. Specifically, our results suggest that up to a further 7% of depression cases and 9% of high blood pressure cases could be prevented if all city residents were to visit green spaces at least once a week for an average duration of 30 minutes or more.” (Shanahan et al., 2016, p3).

Thinking skills and nature therapy

Some of the research looks at nature as an antidote to technology and the increasing disconnection many of the population have to the natural world (Atchley, 2012). Research conducted in Kansas builds on the Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1995) but went further and established a connection with increased problem solving and creative thinking (Atchley, 2012). In this study, they argued that nature and

natural settings were ‘counter-environments’ to the technology-rich, stress-inducing, attention colonising and artifice saturated spaces of the modern world. It is in these ‘technology-rich’ settings that we are often required to problem solve and think creatively, possibly for professional reasons, but these environments can overload the senses and minimise our cognitive and creative thinking abilities.

“One suggestion is that natural environments, like the environment that we evolved in, are associated with exposure to stimuli that elicit a kind of gentle, soft fascination, and are both emotionally positive and low-arousing. It is also worth noting that with exposure to nature in decline, there is a reciprocal increase in the adoption of, use, and dependency upon technology. Thus, the effects observed here could represent either removal of the costs associated with over-connection or a benefit associated with a return to a more positive/low-arousing restorative environment.” (Atchley et al., 2012, p2)

Nature therapy and mental ill-health and mental disorders

Increases in labelling and mental health diagnoses in the general population and amongst children is argued to be related to a general lack of connection and involvement with the natural world by many theorists (Roszak et al., 1995, Jordan et al., 2016). Children are spending less time in nature than at any other time in history and several pieces of research make the correlation between mental ill-health in young people and the lack of time they spend in nature or natural surroundings (Birch et al., 2020, Guisti, 2019, Warber et al., 2015).

“Evidence on nature exposure and autism is scarce, but studies have illustrated how exposure to nature can reduce symptoms for children with other developmental disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or attention deficit disorder (ADD). Children with ADHD who took a walk in a park had elevated attentional performance, compared with children who walked in a built space (Faber Taylor and Kuo, 2009). Compared to a visit to town, a visit to the woods produced a better attentional performance for children with ADHD

(Vanden Berg and Van den Berg, 2011). Parents reported that their children manifested fewer symptoms and functioned better after activities in green space (Taylor et al., 2001). “(Dongying et al., 2018, p2)

In a study in Finland, they not only considered attention restoration and stress recovery, but they researched the concept of ‘vitality’ and how contact with nature may increase energy levels as opposed to just rejuvenating depleted energy reserves (Ojala, 2018). This strongly echoes and supports the findings of the forest bathing research in Japan (Takayama et al., 2014). This study’s findings asserted that due to rapid urbanisation there was a real need for more green space in our towns and cities to promote, preserve and enhance the wellbeing of the urban-dwelling population (Ojala, 2018).

In other research, it was found that restoration was greater in environments that had been given conservation or ecological status and that nature connection and therapeutic advantages were greater in areas that were graded more favourably in terms of the natural surroundings. They also found that activities carried out in small-scale farms or nature activity centres weren’t as therapeutically beneficial as when there was full nature immersion in completely natural surroundings. This research concluded the significance and importance of the natural setting and environment when considering nature as an intervention (Wyles et al., 2019).

In a study carried out by academics in Utah and the subjects were war veterans and the objective was to establish if adventure programmes could alleviate psychiatric symptoms amongst this group (Bettman et al., 2018). Veterans were chosen to be researched due to the prevalence and high rates of mental ill-health amongst this section of society. The Outward-Bound Model was adopted for this research and the results concluded that these activities had a positive effect on the mental health of the participants. This study was short-term and confirmed and concluded the need for more research to establish how effective this approach may be as a long-term intervention (Bettman et al., 2018).

Bergen has completed significant work in the field of ecotherapy and has conducted several research pieces based on a grounded theory approach (Bergen, 2006, Bergen, 2008a, Bergen, 2008b and Bergen & Tiry, 2012). In one of his papers which

examined how nature could be used therapeutically for children with learning difficulties, he argued that whilst using nature could often bring new and interesting challenges when working with these groups, such as exposure to uncertain events and a lack of control, he argued that the benefits outweighed the costs significantly (Bergen, 2006).

“There is no doubt that this ‘permission’ and the supportive elements of nature are connected with the atmosphere and emotional space which was created, held and maintained by the group facilitators, yet it seems as if there was something additional that made this special satisfaction possible. It can be explained perhaps by the difference of the space, inviting people to leave their prejudices about themselves and others, arriving fresh and open to nature, allowing alternative narratives to be expressed and developed. It may also be that there is something in the environment itself, perhaps the spiritual and emotional wisdom of good old Mother Earth that provides a feeling of contentment and freedom.” (Bergen, 2007 p142)

Ecofeminism and health

Ecofeminism challenges the hegemonic patriarchal –capitalist discourses that shape how we relate and connect with our environment on every level- personal, cultural, and global. Leading ecofeminist thinkers and scientists such as Vandana Shiva critique and challenge those who benefit the most from capitalism, such as the wealthy elite, and a billionaire class. Shiva argues that the relentless pursuit of profit by this class of wealthy oligarchs, such as Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg, are threatening the biosphere and seriously impeding the capacity for humans to connect and collaborate in mutually exclusive and beneficial ways. In this work, she is advocating mobilisation and agency in the name of diversity and hoping for a transformative and revolutionary way in which people engage with natural resources and agricultural and productive methods and labour processes.

“The power of violence and destruction comes from separation- from nature and each other. Our nonviolent power comes from interconnectedness and oneness. This is why seed by seed, a farmer by farmer, plate by plate, we are sowing an alternative based on intelligence and science, responsibility and awareness, care and compassion.” (Shiva, 2019, p167).

Multi-disciplinary and decolonial ecofeminist scholars and activists such as Shiva are unanimous in their concerns regarding the planetary crisis and the practices and behaviour of those who have power and who hoard extreme levels of wealth. The common theme is inequality is dangerous for people and the planet, as it opposes the natural and harmonious balance required, which are ecologically focused and sustainably focused systems. These are the antithesis of what dominates our global and international relationships and negotiations which Shiva refers to as “hyper-anthropocentrism.” This is the opposite of the life-sustaining aim of environmentalism.

Contemporary feminist scholars and theorists such as Rebecca Crowther, argue that our wellbeing is inextricably linked and embedded in our natural landscapes and in the world around us (Crowther, 2019). In her work, *Wellbeing and Self-transformation in Natural Landscapes* Crowther links the relationship with how we encounter and relate to the natural world to be associated with virtues, values and principles and how we live our lives and conduct all our relationships. Our sense of self and belonging is impacted by how we connect to nature impacts how we view ourselves and what we consider to be good and appropriate behaviour. In her work Crowther noted that all participants considered their nature-connected activities to be good and therefore morals and goodness were something that many people associated with nature connectedness and spending time in the natural world.

Capitalism, work and work processes are deeply embedded in the consciousness of the population, even those who are considered to live on the peripheries or to be considered alternative or ‘other. Capitalism is inescapable and most people are unaware that it ultimately controls what we think, and how we behave and relate to the world, from birth until death. Just as a fish does not know or realise it is living in water, the same is true for many people living in (and for) capitalism – it is the omnipresent context that ‘hides in plain sight’. Such is its ubiquity and general acceptance and support by people, it can now be considered as ‘capitalist realism’, so much so that many people living in capitalist societies cannot even imagine a different social order. (Fisher, 2009). It is this that helps us understand why for millions of people it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

We are political agents, and we are supporters of capitalism by the simple fact that we have no choice but to participate in this system. There are attempts made by

individuals to live in ways that run counter to capitalism and that explicitly seek to challenge it, such as people who live ‘off grid’ or in ecovillages and are considered to be living outside of the system. However, these too could be seen as a product of capitalism, because there is a certain level of education and privilege that is required to be aware of the issues with the economic system and to choose to live beyond or outside it, and this is generally unattainable to many of those living in poverty in developed or developing countries. When survival is a priority the notion of choosing to disengage with an unsustainable, exploitative and unethical economic system may not be the primary concern for a person trying to sustain their family. Work seems to be a primary concern for many people and that was reflected by this sample and research.

Work and working seem to impact and influence beliefs, education and levels of consciousness. Levels of awareness and consciousness are central factors regarding how the natural world and relationships with it can impact wellbeing. What does the natural world do for the person? Does it make them feel better? Is it part of the job and how do they earn a living? Is it a source of anxiety? Is it messy, unkempt, and out-of-control? Or is it something that is just there, neither good nor bad, it just is? Each person will view the world through their lens and that lens will be unique to them.

The danger with psychology and inquiring on psychological issues and concerns is that the focus is often on the individual. Society generally places the impetus on each person to stay healthy and to remain healthy. Our ‘health system’ is generally only used when a person has poor health or health concerns, the rest of the time health is seen as a personal issue. This is another point of concern when considering Capitalism, human health and wellbeing. The modern health system, which widely adopts the medical model in terms of mental health, is positioned to place the individual as an agent or entity that when healthy will function well and positively contribute to society. The onus is on the person to be made well or healthy to fit a simplistic and rigid set of markers and variables. This system is a product and reflection of culture and will be used to assist and affirm the dominant and pervasive social and political narratives, which in the case of Northern Ireland, where this research was conducted, is that health is being financially, socially and physically independent.

To be “healthy” is to be a good capitalist, a good worker and consumer- to own a home, a car and be able to provide for yourself and your family and adhere to dominant societal norms and expectations. For example, we can argue that the formal education

system from primary school to university is designed to support this deeply entrenched and widely accepted and unchallenged cultural storyline. The idea of working hard to attain your goals and dreams and provide a secure and comfortable home is what many people perceive as living a good life. For those who are unable to do this, the impact can be harmful to them psychologically, socially, economically and on health grounds. Culture and society are powerful and if the culture heralds wealth as success, to be counter-cultural requires education, tenacity and courage. These admirable traits, but to expect them off vulnerable people is unfair and unrealistic.

Ecofeminism, love and nature

One of the most influential and highly quoted and recognised eco-philosophers about ecology and love is Joanna Macy. She has written for decades on the climate and ecological crisis and how we can process the situation we face. Macy and those with whom she co-writes, such as Chris Johnston and Molly Brown, go to lengths to embrace the crisis we are facing and offer support and advice on how environmentalists, ecologists and activists can face the challenge and be driven to act, as opposed to surrendering to despair and inertia or being overwhelmed and unable to act or react. Macy believes that love, revolution and hope can merge and, in line with Buddhist thinking, believes that embracing our suffering is the root of our collective salvation (Macy, 2021). There are few scholars, who whilst being clear on the severity and scale of the catastrophe facing us, are willing to beautifully articulate with great clarity how we can collectively preserve and overcome from such a strong stance of loving-kindness and deep compassion towards others loving. Capitalism creates dissonance between altruism and accumulation, they are incapable, yet even the most altruistic in society are regularly perceived as charity donors as opposed to community workers and those who dedicate their lives to helping others. Macy argues that Buddhism and Buddhist practices can offer a discourse that facilitates the necessary systemic and cultural

changes required to have a consciousness shift and a more sustainable and ecologically sound future.

“What ways of thinking can help us come home again to the physical world? Marxism, capitalism, and classical science offer little help in healing the separation because their materialism gives no weight to subjective experience.” (Macy, 2021, p67)

Macy encourages activists and environmentalists to honour their grief and embody the pain they feel around the current collapse of ecosystems and the environmental devastation that is upon us. Macy has dedicated their career to holding therapeutic and empowering sessions and workshops and she places Buddhism central and the ethos and guiding principles of Buddhist teachings as central to the work which is ultimately calling for a consciousness shift and the active pursuit of a new ecological and environmental age. Macy’s most notable work relating to environmentalism and activism is *Active Hope*, which describes in detail the situation we find ourselves in and how radical transformation is necessary and possible.

“The Industrial Growth Society generates great suffering worldwide. Buddhist social thinkers see that what is at work here are institutionalized forms of the three mutually reinforcing poisons at the root of all human suffering: greed, aggression and delusion. Consumerism can be seen as institutionalized greed, the military-industrial complex as institutionalized aggression and state- and corporate-controlled media as institutionalized delusion.” (Macy et al., 2014, p3).

The work of Joanna Macy is often considered to fall within Buddhist philosophy and occasionally she may be referred to as an Ecofeminist, but largely her strength and work would fall under environmental philosophy and deep ecology, as would other ecofeminist work (Kheel, 1990). Even though Macy has been a stalwart activist and writer since the 1970s, her most prominent and widely cited work would be *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We’re in without Going Crazy*. This seminal book was co-authored with Chris Johnstone and is widely acclaimed and highly cited in environmentalism

activism circles and conversations (Macy & Johnstone, 2012).

The crux of the work centres on the unfolding planetary catastrophe and how to promote agency and action in a time of despair and profound loss, and to avoid the potential for many to slip into despondency, despair and depression. In this work, the word 'hope' is considered to include both a sense of optimism and desire (Macy et al., 2013). It is to acknowledge where we are whilst facing the direction of potential and desirability. This is what the text hopes to evoke and inspire, action, agency and adventure. In this work, the authors refer to '*the Great Turning*' as being a potential narrative and movement which could affect change and create results and change through collective action enabled by a process of grieving and acceptance regarding the climate crisis. Her book explores the tension and heightened emotions experienced by those who are conscious of the climate and environmental crisis. One of the main criticisms of this work would be around how Eurocentric and the vast privilege that accompanies an ontological stance from mainly white, western scholars who are not facing the full wrath of the climate crisis. This book was written several years before Extinction Rebellion was created and before Greta Thunberg rose to fame through her Fridays for Future school strikes. The authors express the grief and unpleasant emotions of those doing the work as normal and as sensations and experiences to explore and honour.

"There are taboos in normal conversation that block the discussion of anything considered too depressing. When we feel dread about what may lie ahead, outrage at what is happening to our planet, or sadness about what has already been lost, it is likely that we have nowhere to take these feelings. As a result, we tend to keep them to ourselves and suffer in isolation." (Macy et al., 2013, p65)

Macy purports and argues that love is the solution and her work is focused on holding space and time for those to grieve to acknowledge their trauma, loss and fears, integrate them and act. This process could be argued to be a healthy and constructive way of processing trauma, it encourages remaining open-hearted and hopeful in the face of almost unfathomable adversity. Love permeates the words and vernacular used when addressing this issue and suggests the solution is to love more, never less. Love is argued to be an action, verb and political force for change by Macy and her collaborators. Love is the emotion or quality that is most associated with intimate inter-personal relationships. It is often considered to be a private matter and romantic notion. Many of those interviewed spoke of their love of nature and reflected on their feelings around it in loving and compassionate ways. One of the issues and problems with this loving and love-rooted narrative is that it seems to create a romanticised and unrealistically positive version of nature and nature experiences. Macy often writes about the world with romantic and emotive linguistic and conceptual ideals.

“To choose life in this planet-time is a mighty adventure. As people everywhere are discovering this adventure ignites more courage and solidarity than any military campaign. From high schools students restoring salmon spawning, to inner-city neighbors creating community gardens on vacant lots, from First Nation peoples blocking oil production and pipelines on their ancestral lands to village women bringing solar and water-purifying technologies to their communities- numberless people are organizing, learning and taking action.” (Macy, 2014, p4)

Figure 10- A screenshot of an article from the Guardian on Eco-anxiety and young people.

'Eco-anxiety': fear of environmental doom weighs on young people

Although not a diagnosable condition, experts says climate anxiety is on the rise worldwide



📷 In September children and young people around the world, including Glasgow, took part in protests against the climate crisis. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Source: Gregory, 2021.

Kovel refers to capitalism as a 'cancer on nature', and when reflecting on those who reap the greatest rewards to a system like this, such as billionaires, we can begin to view the absurdity of their choices, their actions and their politics. In 2021 Elon Musk declared that he had a solution for climate change, and Bill Gates went as far as to write a book in 2021, misleadingly titled- *How to avoid a climate disaster: the solutions we have and breakthroughs we need*. The title suggests we can avert climate disaster and states that the breakthroughs exist, none of which presented will call for the widespread dismantling of the oppressive and environmentally devastating system upon which Mr. Gates's entire multi-billion-pound empire is built. Countering Gates' status quo supporting and comforting narrative, Shiva and Shiva point out how those who hoard extreme wealth, such as Gates and Musk, are the cause of the negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of other people. As they note:

“1% is not just a number, it is a system, an economic system shaped by the rich and powerful, where unbridled greed and accumulation are seen as virtues to be rewarded by society, instead of aberrations which must be kept within limits through social and democratic processes.... The rise of the 1% embodies a will to exclude, an urge to exterminate. Its inevitable consequences are ecocide and genocide.” (Shiva & Shiva, 2020, p34)

One of the fundamental issues with billionaire businessmen or oligarchs presenting themselves as potential saviours and environmental leaders, is while they have greater resources and funds to promote an agenda and propagandise their views and beliefs, none of them suggest or challenge the very system many hold responsible for the planetary crisis. These billionaires and oligarchs would seem to consider the accumulation of wealth and resources as a necessity and a reality and a sign of moral and personal superiority. Their solutions do not challenge the prevailing and dominant hegemonic forces which have created the crisis we face. In her work hooks makes reference to greed and how it impedes and affects love. As hooks points out,

“Greed subsumes love and compassion; living simply makes room for them. Living simply is the primary way everyone can resist greed every day. All over the world people are becoming more aware of living simply and sharing resources. While communism has suffered political defeat globally, the politics of communalism continue to matter.” (hooks, 2001, p125)

Narcissism is word associated and linked to extreme forms of self-love and capitalism has been linked with the breeding and encouraging of antisocial and narcissistic behaviour (Fromm, 1997, Kovel, 2007, Lent, 2021). This behaviour has been rewarded in many instances, particularly in more developed countries such as the United States of America and in more recent decades the emerging powerhouses in capitalism such as Russia, where billionaire oligarchs are the personifications of

unlimited and unregulated economic growth within an unequal, unfair and unsustainable global economy. These people, who are mostly men, hoard excessive amounts of wealth and are often connected with businesses and organisations which reward technological and scientific advances and developments.

Northern Ireland in Context

“We search for the goodness in ourselves by finding the evil in others, and through projection, we can justify taking actions that might otherwise be against our principles, while holding in contempt those who try to apply the same principles to us in return.” (McGuigan, 2009, p356)

Northern Ireland could easily be described internationally as a small country with a loud voice, a nation with a complex traumatic, violent (and unfinished) past, a highly politicised present, coupled with an increasingly volatile, unknown and precarious future. The country is often associated with the phrase ‘The Troubles’, which is somewhat ill-fitting when considering that it refers to thirty years marked by terrorism death, injury, trauma and violence. The word ‘Troubles’ suggests a concerning time and seems insensitive and inaccurate when considering the loss of life and extreme violence that the population was exposed to during that period. The threat of violence was a constant feature of daily life and something the population lived with for an extended period. This context is important for the research when considering the high levels of mental ill-health and particularly trauma within the general population, and by being aware of the segregation and problematic narratives and associations with space and place in a traumatised and deeply divided culture (Bolton, 2017).

Northern Ireland has some of the highest rates of mental ill-health in Europe and the statistics on suicide make for alarming and unsettling reading. The prevalence and continuation of paramilitary activity and the continued segregation of the population as evidenced in segregated housing and education suggests that while the country is over twenty years post the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the fragmentation of the population along ethno-religious grounds is concerning and indicated it remains a

conflicted and acrimonious place (even calling it a ‘country’ is contentious for some!). This is important when reflecting on both the spaces being inhabited by people and the mental health of the population in general from which the sample will be taken (Murphy et al., 2018).

“Despite the formal end to conflict in NI in 1999, a substantial proportion of the adult population continue to suffer the adverse mental health effects of chronic trauma exposure. Given rates of recovery of PTSD in the absence of evidence-based treatments, it is likely that the legacy of mental ill-health associated with conflict, if not adequately addressed, will endure for many years.” (Ferry, 2014, p.435)

Northern Ireland has alarming rates of ill health, mentally and physically along with some of the highest use of prescription medication in Europe as well as the longest waiting lists for medical help in the United Kingdom. There is strong evidence that much of the health issues and the experiences within the population are connected to the legacy of ‘The Troubles, as well as poverty and other underlying socio-economic issues’ (O’Neill, 2018). The use of nature spaces and the treatment of the natural environment is a matter of interest for this study. Northern Ireland has one of the lowest percentages of tree coverage in Europe, when comparing this to other countries we begin to understand the concerns. Agriculture is one of the main industries in the country and intensive, carbon-based and unsustainable farming, the large-scale use of artificial fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides etc. and increasing pressure on farmers to produce food, especially beef and dairy products, at increasingly lower costs. The economic

climate and combination of intensive practices have meant that sustainable methods and environmentally friendly practices have been abandoned in favour of cheap and often environmentally devastating methods.

This research is interested in our relationship with nature and that involves a connection with space and environments as we understand them, this embodiment or experience of spaces and the world of us is complicated in Northern Ireland as territory and space have long been politicised along ethnic-nationalist boundaries, and experiences of nature, therefore, carries with it historical and culturally symbolic issues of contested land ownership, territorial sovereignty, dispossession, injustice,

colonisation and a legacy of grievance. Land borders, land disputes, colonialism, the border, agriculture, industry all affect the land and how we engage with it. Northern Ireland does not have an extensive range of green spaces available to the general population and this issue is further exacerbated by the segregation of areas and communities because of political allegiances which have often been associated with religious preferences. These social and cultural influences will impact the environment and the use of spaces for therapeutic and leisure purposes.

This chapter has reviewed the research and placed this work in the context of ecofeminism, ecotherapy and the geo-political era that the work is positioned in. The planetary crisis impacts individual health and wellbeing, yet much of the health and mental health services and systems continue to view health through a personal and apolitical lens, therefore depoliticising the public health crisis we face as a result of climate and ecological breakdown. This work has been designed to consider mental health from a political perspective by examining how people understand nature experiences in relation to their mental health and how their work, be that paid or unpaid, productive or reproductive facilitates these experiences. The next chapter explains the methods used to conduct the research and give detailed explanations as to how the sample was recruited and how the data was collected.

Chapter 3

A Qualitative and Ecofeminist Methodology and Research Design.

“She cannot stop thinking about the topic. Almost everything seems to remind her of it in some way. As the yearning forms to understand the topic fully, she begins to explore accounts of others who are informed about the topic. Everything related to the topic has meaning and significance, drawing the intuitive inquirer closer to understanding. Name and unnamed, conscious and unconscious, an intuitive inquiry has begun.” (Anderson et al., 2011, p15)

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methods used and describes how the data was collected, considered and analysed. The analysing of data for this research was multi-layered and incorporated coding, and categorising techniques using a variety of qualitative research methods which resulted in the final themes and findings being presented using thematic and discourse analysis conventions. The sample and recruitment processes will be clarified in this chapter, as will the qualitative research methods that were chosen and reasons will be given as to why other research methodologies were discounted. The use of qualitative and detail-rich data was selected to allow the results to be both descriptive and to honour the subjectivity of the participants which is often preferred when conducting feminist or ecofeminist inspired projects (Wiggington & Lafrance, 2019). By the end of this chapter, the reader should be clear on the chosen research method, design and have background knowledge on the central methodologies and how their suitability to answering the central research questions.

Research Problem

As outlined in the previous chapter, the experience of nature and the natural world has often been believed to have therapeutic effects and healing properties, with significant theoretical and empirical data to support this statement. Walking groups, nature retreats and gardening are just some of the activities that have been used to enhance and promote mental health and mental wellbeing (Jordan, 2015, Buzzell et al., 2009, Jordan et al., 2016). This research intends to explore this area of interest by

implementing several questions relating to this assumption in the context of the Capitalocene and from an Ecofeminist Critical Perspective. The following research questions were devised to allow the researcher to explore the data through the lens of work and work practices and how they affect the relationship between nature experiences and mental wellness/ illness at a time of climate crisis.

Research Questions

1. How does our *obligation* to work impact how we experience nature?
2. How can nature experiences impact our sense of self?
3. What may be the positive and negative impacts of nature experience on mental health and wellbeing in the context of the planetary crisis?

The Research Methods

As the research developed and as global events unfolded it seemed that other qualitative approaches may be better suited to meet the criteria and answer the research questions that were best suited to the topic of interest (Lyons & Coyle, 2021). Critical Discourse and Thematic Analysis was adopted as the best approaches to analysis the interview data and as the study evolved and through the practice of coding and categorizing, the strongest theme of the research emerged and that was how our work or our employment impacted how we related to the natural world. It was through basic coding and categorising that it became evident that work and productivity were important findings of the research based on participant interview data, alongside how they spent time in nature and how they experienced the natural world.

While there is a large and growing evidence-based supporting the health benefits of spending time in nature for wellbeing purposes, what began to interest the researcher was the use of language and concepts relating to these activities were often ambiguous and not clearly defined or articulated. The words that individuals used to describe these experiences suggested that these interactions were symbolic and meaningful, particularly in terms of mental health, wellbeing and restoration, however this symbolism and meaning-making frameworks were rarely critiqued or analysed from any critical ontological positions. Words relating to being connected, feeling contentment and gaining wellness from nature experiences in a time climate breakdown suggests that the language around nature experiences supports and advocates essentialist,

reductionist and positivist epistemologies that rarely consider the ecocidal era we live in. It was for this reason that it was considered that discourse analysis was a valuable methodology to use to further explore how people understood and interpreted these experiences in terms of wellness and health particularly in a time of ecological crisis. Discourse analysis is a commonly used research method for critically analysing power structures and social systems as it is interested in making that which is implied and hidden, explicit through an analysis of shared experiences, beliefs and behaviours.

“The emphasis on language as a constructive tool is one of the core assumptions of discourse analysis. The language used is viewed as selecting from the range of linguistic resources available to them (words, phrases, metaphors, cliches, etc). And using these resources to construct a version of events, although not necessarily in an intentional way. The person may not recognize that they are constructing something when they speak or write, but this simply highlights the extent to which the constructive use of language is a fundamental, taken-for-granted aspect of social life- one that we may not even be aware of.” (Coyle and Lyons, 2021, p274).

The social and linguistic played pivotal roles in how the interviews were organised and how the interviews were designed and how their experiences were understood and communicated. Both thematic and discourse analysis are useful for finding patterns, themes, understandings and commonalities between what at first sight seem disconnected and disparate statements, views, reflections and observations. This will further developed in Chapters 5 and 6 which present the results and findings. From an Ecofeminist position these methods were limited as they focused on the text and the words which were being said this was one of the primary reasons that a mixture of methods was used in the end, as no singular method seemed to convey the richness of the findings.

The general nature and the grand scale of the concepts in question (Nature and Mental Health specifically) suggested that it may be important to ensure the meaning and understanding of these terms were qualified and explicitly defined by the sample. Participants were asked to define the terms ‘Nature’ and ‘Mental Health’ and their answers form the definitions presented in the next section. It is telling and noteworthy that participants found it difficult to succinctly define these commonly used terms. However, there seemed to be certain common perceptions and areas of agreement and

these overlaps created the definitions which will support the final themes and findings of this work.

It was whilst conducting an in-depth analysis of the interviews through transcribing, repetitive listening, extensive memo writing, note-taking and annotating the interviews that it became clear that an ecofeminist discourse analysis of the behaviours and actions of the participants would be most advantageous and productive, in terms of answering the research questions. The themes presented, the planetary and ecological context and the richness of the data all suggested that the method chosen would complement the research questions and create an in-depth, innovative, piece of original academic research. The work needed to be completed using a qualitative approach intuitively and organically. The researcher analysed, coded and categorised the data using several methods. This allowed their familiarity to increase and strengthen and the core concepts and themes to emerge strongly over time. The researcher needed to be completely immersed in the data to arrive at robust and rigorous results.

“One major point about qualitative research in this manner is that at the beginning of the analysis, the researcher doesn’t know with any certainty the degree of significance of early concepts. The researcher just kind of knows intuitively that something is important and should be noted.” (Morse et al., 2016, p44)

The notion that the participants/ agents/ social actors create the conditions and experiences around them informs much of the foundation of this work and is often linked to sociological theories such as symbolic interactionism (Bryman, 2016). The participants understood their experiences as meaningful and their beliefs and attitudes and how they understood, defined and processed these events were what was of the interest to the researcher. The premise that people are active agents in the social processes and relationships they experience, and their perspectives and insight are the most important and accurate accounts that can be collected’ is why these qualitative methods were chosen. processes informing their actions and activities. In social research, constructionism asserts that social entities and processes are subjective and social realities are not external to the individual but rather created through social discourse and social interaction (Taylor, 2018). In many qualitative research methods, such as Discourse Analysis, Thematic Analysis and Grounded Theory, the experiences

and accounts of the individual form the research findings and therefore are not considered to be objective.

“Constructionism is an ontological position (often also referred to as constructivism) that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena are not only produced through social interaction but are in a constant state of revision.” (Bryman, 2012, p29)

From the perspective of the researcher and particularly in relation to their ontological stance as an Ecofeminist the findings could be best to be considered through the lens of a process of co-construction and collaboration and a variety of analytical processes were adopted to consider the data from various perspectives. Experience sharing and storytelling appears to be a strong and significant theme within this methodological approach (Mills et al., 2006). This differs from most dominant scientific and empirical research designs and approaches. The voice and experience of the participants is of primary importance and focus within this model. With this in mind, it could be argued that this research is a search for shared realities and perspectives that overlap and collide and which can help us to understand the continual impact of patriarchal capitalism on nature experiences, the role of ‘work’, and the impact of both, and their interrelation, on health in this era. It is through the common themes/ codes that arise when analysing the information shared that these commonalities and synchronicities will arise and that is what will form the foundation for the findings and conclusions (Mills et al., 2006).

The storytelling and subjective experiences of participants are significant within this approach which centres on a critical Ecofeminist analysis as the individual and their narrative holds centre stage and is prominent within feminist and ecofeminist research designs (Boje, 2018). The methods employed and used respect the individual as the expert, which is one of the ways research methods of this kind are unique and preferred in feminist-based disciplines, as they concerned with promoting the voices and experiences of those who are researched, and it is through making the unseen and unheard experiences transparent that theorists have politicised otherwise personal concerns and struggles. As opposed to thinking in terms of mass numbers and large-scale studies, the mixture of qualitative methods aims to highlight the commonalities

between participants, even when the subjects are varied, separate with few seemingly unifying characteristics or traits.

One of the most appealing aspects of using qualitative methods, particularly discourse analysis and thematic analysis, is the desire to find common ground amongst the participants and therefore the possibility of uncovering some unifying 'truths' or shared realities and commonalities across participants and their discourses. Echterhoff et al. (2009) argue that humans have an innate longing and need to share a common reality, to find common ground and similar experiences that help them to relate to, connect with and understand each other. This concept is based on the four basic principles, which involve a connection to the 'inner states' of other individuals, a desire for commonality, that a shared reality can support others when thinking in terms of goals and aims, and for this shared reality to be discursively created, discerned and communicated, there must be similar motivations within the group it relates to. This desire and longing for a shared reality is an observation and finding that makes human beings distinct from all other animals, as this phenomenon has only been connected to people (Echterhoff et al., 2009). The human urge and need to connect and relate is also theorised widely within psychoanalysis and psychotherapy specifically in terms of attachment styles and developmental phases (Erikson and Levenson) that focus on how relationships impact the individual and their experiences.

When conducting research exploring issues relating to structural and systemic oppression qualitative methods are popular and particularly methods using tools such as in-depth interviews and focus groups. In this research in-depth interviews were used and other methods were considered extraneous to data gathering requirements. In terms of producing a robust Ecofeminist critique, the mixture of thematic and discourse analysis was decided upon to further demonstrate the importance of language within our meaning-making frameworks and to fully articulate how these relationships were interpreted and understood by those interviewed. There were limitations to these methods and this was most apparent when attempting to communicate the emotions and sensations being described. Emotions and their significance are often disregarded and undervalued in research, and to the extent they are recognised, they are often understood through a patriarchal and male-dominated lens. Emotions within research and particularly mental health research are often judged as signifying dysregulation and

illness, whereas the complexity and nuance are often discounted or considered insignificant unless perceiving them as signs of mental ill-health.

Feminism places more significance and meaning on the personal and subjective experiences of people, particularly those being oppressed and silenced, as they are considered relevant and central to highlighting social and cultural inequalities and injustices. an important epistemological stance when considering knowledge production and where knowledge comes from and how it is positioned in relation to research. Donna Haraway's works on situated knowledge argues that all knowledge is created within systems of oppression and subjugation and it is necessary that we highlight the power structures that suppose what is truth and what is science (Haraway, 1988). This of particular importance for much feminist research aim has often been to recognise the unseen and give voice to the unheard and consider the experiences of those who have been alienated and othered by societies that are traditionally dominated by men and masculine behaviours and tendencies (Wiggington & Lafrance, 2019). Exploring emotions, sensory experiences and spirituality have been undervalued and discounted in many social research contexts. This work placed the experiences of the participants as central to the research and their voices and accounts dominated the findings and the analysis that followed. Many research methodologies prioritise objectivity, but feminism and feminist practices embrace the lived experiences and first-hand accounts, as these often allow for more in-depth and critical analyses of systems and processes. Patriarchy and patriarchal capitalism influence all areas of society and life, and academia is not immune to the influences and historical legacies of imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism. One of the central tenets and aims of feminist research is to create space and opportunities to discuss these structures and how they oppress and alienate many people. In feminist research and particularly those interested in intersectionality, the mantra "all voices must be heard" is common. Ecofeminism moves the emphasis from people to all life on the planet and adds the non-human world in critiquing the anthropocentric and patriarchal framework within and through which most knowledge has been produced.

This research includes a rich variety and diversity of people and voices but is limited because all of the participants had positive associations and relationships with the natural world and were keen to support work and research that enhanced and advocated for greater time to be spent in nature. All of those interviewed were recruited from organisations and groups that were interested in conservation work, leisure

activities and environmental activism. This will invariably impact the research conclusions and outputs and it is important to acknowledge this from the outset. It is significant that all the sample included people who had beliefs that being outdoors was advantageous or essential to their mental health and wellbeing.

The non- human world plays a central role in this project; however it is presented from the perspective of people and the participants were all over the age of sixteen, which meant that children were not represented in the research. This is significant and worthy of consideration when we consider the significant impact of the Capitalocene on those groups of living beings. It was deemed problematic and unnecessary to include children in the original research design as it the ethical approval needed to be included was considered too time intensive and could potentially delay the project, the research timetable and data collection adversely.

Disrupting prevailing and damaging narratives and belief systems, within the current systems is labour intensive and these voices and their perspectives are devalued and impacted by the legal, education and social structures which promote knowledge production and knowledge dissemination as a hierarchal process which deems certain voices as more worthy and reliable and other voices problematic and often unheard, based on age, mental capacity and language abilities. The voice of ‘the other’. Those on the fringes, those who are often neglected and not visible (Children, the elderly, the mentally ill, disabled, ethnic minorities and nature and its entities and processes etc.)

“We may begin to see how we may be passively or actively denying others’ existence. And, in seeing ourselves, we may start to envision the ways we can alter our truths in ways that align, value, and welcome the truths of others.” (Pedro, 2018, p34)

Design Overview

The research data was drawn from twenty-three semi-structured interviews, with participants interviewed in settings and locations of their choice until COVID 19 struck and subsequent interviews were held online or over the telephone. All individuals were interviewed at least once, however, subsequent interviews were considered as a

possibility when recruiting and included in the original design process. This was in keeping with various qualitative research methods which encourage researchers to revisit participants if they believe it may be helpful. The sample group comprised of men and women over the age of sixteen with the eldest person interviewed being eighty years old. All those interviewed were individuals who were happy to discuss their relationship with the natural world and most of those interviewed believed this relationship was beneficial to their mental wellbeing. The reader must be mindful of the nature of the sample and their views on the environment, as they were not considered to be a fair representation of the population, given that there was an overrepresentation of those working in the environmental and conservation sector. Most of the cohort identified as nature enthusiasts, environmental and conservation workers, and political activists. This is significant when reflecting on who the research represents and how the results will not apply to the general population, this will be considered in more depth in the discussion chapter (Chapter 6).

The interviews were semi-structured, using open-ended questions to allow the participants to share their personal opinions and experiences in their language and idioms (See Appendix E). In selecting semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions, the aim was that the interviews would be relaxed and informal and thus the participants would feel confident when sharing their opinions on the subject (Mason, 2017). The length of each interview was dependent on the participant and the information they wanted to share. The interviews ranged from just over ten minutes in length to just under fifty minutes in total. The primary difference was how open, enthusiastic, and confident each person was in discussing this subject, those with more in-depth and detailed knowledge generally spoke for longer. The interviews were all audio-recorded and transcriptions were completed after the interview (King et al., 2018).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is of fundamental importance to the success of this research for two reasons. The primary reason being that high quality and ethical research demands intensive and rigorous reflexivity from the researcher, as the role of the researcher is pivotal to the interpretation of the data (Charmaz, 2017, Bryman, 2016). Secondly, nature and nature therapies are something that the researcher is passionate about and use regularly in both their personal and professional life. With, this in mind it important to note the self-

vigilance and self-awareness of the researcher when conducting the interviews and analysing and coding the data collected (Williams & Moser, 2019). Ecofeminist and feminist research embraces subjectivity whilst also honouring that there must be measures taken to ensure that the analysis is free from personal bias and researcher contamination. The data was collected to allow the voices of the participants to be placed centre stage, through reflexivity and vigilance the researcher must take steps to ensure these voices are amplified rather than minimised (Finlay, 2002).

“Relatedly, reflexivity entails a sensitivity to the researcher’s cultural, political and social context. As such, ‘knowledge’ from a reflexive position is always a reflection of a researcher’s location in time and social space.” (Bryman, 2016, p388)

In this research it is important that the researcher acknowledges their beliefs and prejudices and allows the data and the information to speak for itself (King et al., 2018). As a fully qualified and practicing integrative counsellor, the researcher has training and knowledge on how to reduce the likelihood that their previous experiences and knowledge may taint the process and interviews. This was done by the interviewer attempting to be as impartial and unbiased as possible, and interviewing people with whom they were not friends. Whilst this was mostly achieved there were people who volunteered to participate who knew the researcher through various community and professional roles. The researcher is also a political and environmental activist who knows quite a few people who work in the conservation and environmental sector because of this activism. The researcher did not interview any close friends or family members; however it became apparent over time that it would be difficult to interview people who were not aware of the researcher through their work and activism. The environmental movement in Northern Ireland is relatively small and this research project and recruitment process highlighted the size of this section of society. How the researcher’s own position and relationships may affect the interviewees and the interpretation of the information collected will be something to reflect upon and monitor as the research progresses (Urquhart and Fernandez, 2016).

The idea for this project was rooted in the researcher having a deep love and affection for the natural world, wild spaces and the more-than-human world. It was the desire to understand how nature experiences had supported them to stay well through

difficult times which led to the research proposal being submitted. The initial proposal was originally believed to be a project that would enhance their work as an ecotherapist and integrative counsellor. It was through extensive research, additional supplementary learning and multiple interdisciplinary conversations and debates that it became evident that the political and social issues relating to the climate crisis were of importance and concern.

“Researchers are increasingly prepared to forewarn readers of their biases and assumptions and how these may have influenced their findings.” (Bryman, 2012, p35).

In the participant information sheet and invitation letter it was made apparent that there were hopes and objectives to the research (See Appendix A and B). These hopes and aims were included as it would be dishonest to deny that there are aspirations with regards to how the research may impact on the field of interest. With these hopes in mind, it was pertinent that the researcher was vigilant, self-aware, transparent and ethical when reviewing the data, coding the results and allowing the final findings to emerge in whatever form it may take. Acknowledging the hope of the researcher was honest at the recruitment stage and while it is important to acknowledge biases it is considered that the findings documented are a true and accurate reflection of the information given to the researcher from participants, and there were several areas relating to nature experiences which are included which the researcher neither agreed with nor could relate to. The researcher believes we are nature and that we are always connected to the natural world and this view did not contaminate nor influence how people spoke about their experiences and this will be documented in greater details in this chapter and the next.

All individuals to have values, beliefs and philosophical leanings or preferences, and researchers are no different and thus they should be honest, open and aware of their own normative commitments. To be a person who exists and functions in modern society means to be a social being, and to be an academic means to be an intellectual with a duty to be conscious of their own thinking and modes of understanding and interpretation (i.e. second order thinking). As social beings we are impacted by the

environments and contexts we inhabit, our relationships, experiences and history, often subconsciously. To deny ourselves as unique individuals and to argue that we are immune to such outside influencing factors, be those social or otherwise, would be to both deny our humanity and be disingenuous. With that in mind, the researcher must consider these personal factors and influences when considering how they might contaminate or influence the research.

Participants

This study comprised of young adults/ adults (16 years and over) and involved recruiting both men and women, 13 females and 10 males of various ages ranging from 16 to 80. It was significant that the research included a variety of people with a diverse range of opinions, experiences, and knowledge on the issue. It was easier to recruit women and the increase of male participants was strongly linked to the onset of COVID and the ability for participants to engage with the research and be interviewed online. Recruitment involved contacting a multitude of environmental agencies and organisations, such as Ulster Wildlife, RSPB, Extinction Rebellion Northern Ireland, Park Run groups and National Trust staff and there were also attempts made to recruit a wider cross-section and move away from the main environmental groups, by engaging with local sports clubs and gyms however there was no interest in participation from these groups. The final sample included farmers, outdoor activity enthusiasts, fishing club members, community group participants and outward-bound entrepreneurs, as well as youth climate activists to name just some of those who participated and several of those who approached the researcher and volunteered to participate in the project.

Selection Criteria

All participants had to be over the age of sixteen and able to give informed consent, they also had to be available to participate in the interview and allow up to an hour for it to be conducted and complete the necessary paperwork, i.e., consent form (Appendix C). It was also a requirement that the participants feel comfortable discussing their thoughts on the subject area. Children (below the age of sixteen) were excluded from

this research, as they were not the population of interest for this project. It could be argued that their inclusion may have made the data collection more complex and added a dimension of safeguarding concerns and protocols that it would be difficult to justify or argue as necessary for the project.

Recruitment

Invitation letters were sent to organisations such as Ulster Wildlife, the Conservation volunteers, Ulster Farmers Union, the Department of Agriculture, National Trust, Biodiversity Ireland, Extinction Rebellion, the RSPB, local park run groups and community organisations. There was a good response to the initial emails with more volunteers than the research required coming forward to participate. The sample size is relatively small and in thematic analysis, it can vary widely, this study comprised of twenty-three interviews and all twenty-three were used in the thematic review and most of them were used retrospectively in the GT analysis. This was considered enough, as large amounts of data were included in the interviews, the information was dense in themes, observations and it was agreed with the supervision team that enough information had been collected and the analysis conclusively illustrated that further data collection would have been difficult to manage and was deemed unnecessary.

The organisations were contacted individually requesting that they send out the invitation sheets on the behalf of the researcher and thus they aided recruitment. Once the organisations had sent out the invitation letters, any possible participants were asked to make contact and then consent forms were sent out along with further details of the project. Each participant was made aware that they could opt-out of the research at any time and what the requirements of engagement would be. Participants were informed that the interviews may last up to one hour, but no longer. That was to ensure appropriate time boundaries and to ensure the interviews could be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Before each interview, the participants were made aware of the aims and objectives of the research and how their data would be used. By making individuals aware and answering any questions they had on the research, the hope was that they would be **p u t** at ease regarding their involvement. Transparency **a n d**

honesty are important when establishing trust and respect in the researcher-participant relationship (Glaser et al., 2017). In the recruitment process, the documents provided did not mention the word 'Anthropocene' or the environmental crisis. The epoch and ecological context became more relevant as data collection progressed and as the findings developed.

Interview questions, format and design

The interviews were semi-structured and mainly followed a framework of questions on three central themes; nature, mental health and the relationship between the two (See Appendix E). As previously illustrated and recounted earlier in this section, GT advocates and encourages fluidity and flexibility in the research processes and stages. The structure and content of the interviews altered, and the questions varied as the research developed. This allowed the data to lead the way to the final theory and the most significant themes and sub-themes to be identified and formulated. The questions were centred on exploring the definitions of nature and mental health, establishing the interviewees' relationship/s with nature, and considering if the interviewees believed there was a connection between nature and mental health. In GT it is widely understood that as the research progresses the questions and their format may evolve as themes begin to emerge (Bryman, 2012, Morse et al., 2009).

The questions were designed to be broad, open-ended and exploratory to allow for the research project to organically go where the data was leading and this was reflected in how the interviews progressed over time (Paul, 2019). Several of the questions appeared to be similar and overlapping: this was deliberate and allowed for clarification and encouraged additional and further reflection and consideration of the topics and concepts being explored (Appendix E). This repetition and overlap were to elicit as much exploratory thinking on the chosen topic as possible and it was an attempt to ensure the basic themes were covered comprehensively and conclusively from as many alternative perspectives as possible. Prompting and probing techniques and skills were utilised on occasion, but generally were not

required. Most interviewees were enthusiastic and wanted to discuss the topic in detail and on occasion at great length.

Semi-structured (SS) interviewing is a popular choice for qualitative research due to the flexibility it allows whilst simultaneously providing a supportive framework of content guiding the researcher. In GT researchers are required to be participant-led but also need to collect information on specific subjects. Questions can be dropped and added from the original schedule in SS, they can also be changed and amended as the interviews progress and when central and prominent themes emerge. Throughout the process, the interviews built on each other, and this flexible feature and iterative quality allowed for evaluation and investigation on themes and concepts that previous participants had mentioned and highlighted. Examples of this in this research were the emergence of themes such as parents as influencers and childhood memories (see themes and sub-themes in Chapter 4), which resulted in subsequent interviewees being asked questions on these areas specifically. The final interviews focused strongly on what the research from previous interviewees was suggesting. The final interviewees were asked for feedback and thoughts on initial and emerging theoretical assertions and thematic findings.

Structured interviews would have been too rigid and arguably researcher-led which is methodologically opposed to the essence of GT. Unstructured interviews would have been participant-led and the interview data potentially could have been diverted from the central topics and research questions. Semi-structured was a balance and allowed the researcher to guide the participants to focus on data that was most relevant. Unstructured interviews are inductive and exploratory and the most aligned with pure or classical GT. This allows for no contamination or influence on the part of the researcher; however, this research was constructivist, and the researcher steered the interviews to focus on the themes and issues in question. Semi-structured interviews were ultimately chosen to provide stronger analytical options and researcher control in terms of the data collected.

The questions used were deliberately probing and efforts were made when designing the research to avoid placing or assuming values (value-neutral) of the

interviewees as much as possible. Over time it became increasingly clear that the subjects and themes were not value-neutral to either the interviewees or the interviewer. This acceptance and recognition allowed for greater authenticity and increased reflexivity when considering the research and who it represented.

In the interview schedule (Appendix E) the flow and sequencing of topics was structured to build on participants' knowledge and information. The feeling, thinking, and sensing evaluation questions were important and purposefully broad to compensate and facilitate for different personality types and sensory and cognitive experiential frameworks and styles. Follow-up questions were regularly used in these interviews and depending on the interviewee and their contributions, probing may have been used to gather more information or explore themes in greater depth. Probing questions were used in most interviews to expand and develop perspectives and to clarify the information being presented. Linking to other comments made in the interview, building on specific observations and views of participants, all was to elicit more in-depth and relevant information. These investigative questions created an interview environment that was used to explore ideas and opinions, clarify mutual understanding and challenge inconsistencies. The questions were selected and chosen with the research questions in mind (Appendix E).

Research Questions

1. How does our *obligation* to work impact how we experience nature?
2. How can nature experiences impact our sense of self?
3. What may be the positive and negative impacts of nature experience on mental health and wellbeing in the era we live in?

Many of the questions were direct and straight to the point this reduced ambiguity and focused on the research areas in question. Interview

techniques improved as the research progressed, however, some interviewees were more forthcoming and enthusiastic about the topic than others. The counselling background of the researcher meant that techniques and skills were used which supported the researcher's ability to collect data and encourage individuals to talk freely and without judgment. Rapport building was important for data collection and the success of the interviews and efforts were made to eliminate anxiety and concern before the interview and throughout the interviews and in the recruitment process with the participant information sheets (Appendix B).

The quality of the data collected in the first few interviews was valuable and significant, however greater focus and clarity and confidence came with practice and as themes emerged and developed. Whilst planning the research the topic was not considered to be as sensitive or emotive as it transpired to be. As the interviews progressed, the interviewer became mindful and increasingly sensitive to the potential that disclosure of concerns and past mental illness may create emotional distress and concern. A distress protocol (Appendix D) was designed before the interviews and it was used on one occasion.

Remote interviewing

The participants were asked to decide where they would like the interviews to happen and the interviews eventually took place in a variety of locations; indoors, in cafes, in hotel lobbies, in natural settings and zoom online rooms because of COVID 19. They also took place in homes, places of work, on Queens University campus grounds and the telephone. The choice was given to the interviewees with the understanding being that wherever was most convenient and most comfortable for the interviewee was the general preference and chosen location. It was paramount that safety measures were put in place, both to protect the researcher and the research volunteers and it was also agreed that any natural settings must be public spaces and the researcher exercised caution when going to private locations and premises. These safety practices are widely utilised in many health care and public services and are considered good practice when carrying out research of this kind (King et al., 2018). The checking in and out of the researcher was conducted by leaving emails and messages with supervisors.

This communication was monitored and stored securely throughout the research period.

It was considered that interviews that occurred outdoors and in natural settings may present the need for alternative provisions and measures to be considered. The option to interview outside was included as some of the participants may not have had an office or indoor spaces or they may feel more comfortable in natural spaces. As the topic is nature and mental health, interviewing in outdoor spaces was deemed entirely appropriate and fitting. Factors that needed to be considered when interviewing outdoors included weather fluctuations, interruptions by co-workers, others using the space and the possibility of sound levels being affected whilst recording the interview (Bryman, 2016). Only one interview took place outdoors and there were no issues or concerns or interruptions that impacted the recording quality or the flow of the interview. Several interviews took place in cafés, and these proved to be more problematic in terms of background noise and privacy.

Transcriptions

The participants were informed that all interviews would be transcribed verbatim in the recruitment process and on the consent forms provided (Appendix B and C). All interviews were transcribed as shortly after the interviews as possible; this ensured that the researcher was familiar with the content and that the emerging themes could be recorded and considered throughout the fieldwork period. The interviews were carried out from October 2019 to June 2020 which was when theoretical saturation had taken place. Theoretical saturation is a point in the research progress where it is apparent that no further data would enhance or impact the research in any new ways and when it is considered appropriate to use the data collected to its full capacity.

All transcripts are stored on password-protected computers in secure buildings and locked premises. The data will be stored by General Data Protection Laws and will be disposed of after five years. All documents collected from participants, such as consent forms will also be kept securely in lockable filing cabinets. All the interviews were audio-recorded on a recording device and the researcher's mobile phone. Two devices were used to ensure One of the main advantages to an audio recording all interviews as opposed to taking notes during interviews, is to allow the interviewer to be fully present with the research and to ensure no pertinent data is lost (Bryman, 2016). Recording the interviews allows for a more relaxed researcher and a more relaxed

interview which means active listening communication through non-verbal cues and a more conversational and relaxed atmosphere (King et al., 2018). Note-taking can be distracting for both parties and can also increase the likelihood of misinterpretation by not being present to non-verbal cues and communications from the participant.

Data Analysis

“An important first step in becoming a grounded theorist is deciding how you position yourself philosophically.” (Birks et al., 2015, p1)

The thinking behind using a blend of discourse and thematic analysis is that through the analysis and immersion in the data collected using qualitative research methods and through in-depth scrutiny of the results the most significant themes would emerge that helps to understand the patterns found in the data collected (Mills et al., 2006). For this to happen the researcher must focus on responses being given by the participants and be mindful of their personal views and not allow them to unduly influence or contaminate the research (Strauss et al., 1994). To do this effectively, the researcher must be aware of any agenda or bias they may hold and take adequate steps to ensure, to their best ability, this does not influence the information collected. This requires academic integrity and personal self-reflection and awareness (Mills et al., 2006).

The collection of the data would be conducted over a year, to ensure that as much information as possible is gathered on the topic of ‘Nature and Mental Health’ from as many individuals as needed. It is believed that the interviews will continue until there appears to be a saturation with the data collected and distinct themes become apparent and evident (Thornberg, 2017). However, it is estimated that saturation will be reached between interviews fifteen and twenty throughout the research period.

“When and how saturation may be judged to have been reached will differ depending on the type of study, as well as assumptions about whether it represents a distinct event or an ongoing process.” (Saunders et al., 2017, p12)

In the interviews the participants shared their experiences and their observations regarding the questions put to them, and analysing the detail and specifics of these experiences allowed for a theory to emerge regarding how nature impacts an individual

and what may be happening with regards to mental health and nature (Glaser et al., 2013). Does nature experience have an effect? What effect/s may that be? What phenomenon may be occurring and why? What factors may be influencing or disturbing any effects that are experienced? The 'truth' regarding how individuals feel and experience this topic will be subjective and individual to each person, however, there may be common truths or collective 'truths'. This is what the research will be based on and this is why discourse analysis allows the truth to be presented by the participants and their experiences and perspectives to be considered central to how we can best describe and understand the relationship between the participants and the natural world.

"Truth is what is useful to people researching in a field, what helps the research project, what can be accepted and defended, what is open to criticism and renewal. It is a linguistic convention, a sort of shorthand that helps us to achieve our various objectives when researching and theorising." (Easton, 2010, p119)

Discourse and Thematic Analysis

This process was used first in the research design and is a descriptive, interpretative and qualitative approach where the researcher engages and organises the data by the main topics and subjects highlighted and discussed by the participants. This is a commonly adopted method within the social sciences that sees the researcher scrutinise the data and analyse for themes, sub-themes patterns, similarities and dissimilarities between interview data and categories using the language, opinions and beliefs of the interviewees. This information is then used to support understanding and posit causal links. The frequency and prevalence of themes create the bulk of the findings and are used to describe and increase awareness of the chosen area of interest. In this research project, themes were not predetermined and were generated by the interview data provided by the participants. The process was iterative and thus when themes began to emerge subsequent interviews asked questions relating to these particular aspects or areas of interest.

A discourse and thematic review was not the first choice for data analysis. However, the interviews and the interview schedule meant that a thematic review of the data collected could be used to enhance the findings and conclusions and began to naturally occur as the interviews progressed. The researcher became increasingly aware

of the frequency and prevalence of reoccurring themes, ideas, conclusions and strong similarities between participants their backgrounds, their upbringings and their beliefs relating to the natural world. The commonalities and strong emerging fields and overlapping observations prompted the implementation of this alternative, descriptive, interpretive, research method, and this was the method that was used immediately

upon data collection, instinctively and intuitively the data began to be separated by naturally occurring observations.

As mentioned, the researcher was naturally inclined to analyse the data through discourse and thematic approach because of the strong and evident themes being presented almost immediately by those interviewed and particularly when reflecting on the initial literature review. The early interviews and findings were supporting the research that had been done, while additionally signalling new insights and suggesting themes and sub-themes that were seemingly not yet present in research in the field, or which had possibly not been brought to the attention of the researcher thus far.

Research Ethics and Governance

Ethics and Governance practices and procedures are of particular importance in academic work to ensure that best practices are followed, that participants are protected, and the integrity of the university is upheld. When applying for ethical approval the research needed to be deemed to be both socially responsible and beneficial. To secure permission for this research an application had to be submitted and completed for ethical approval and scrutiny (Approval granted on 11th October 2019, Ref: 026_1920). As the research involved human participants, it was fundamental that measures were put in place and best practice was ensured with regards to safety procedures, professional academic conduct and that any possible wellbeing concerns had been considered. The additional documents included in the application were an invitation letter (Appendix A), a participant information sheet (Appendix B), a consent form (Appendix C), an interview schedule (Appendix D) and a Distress Protocol form (Appendix E). As someone passionate about social justice, human rights and mental health, it was paramount that the research I conduct is ethical, humane and is in the best interests of all involved. That was why full informed consent was a priority in this research and was given before any data was collected.

All participants were given opt-out options and were made aware that they could decline to participate in the research at any point and could terminate the interview at any point also. The research topic is on mental health and nature and therefore it was important to consider that this may evoke memories and experiences that could be traumatic and may inadvertently lead to distressing memories and experiences being uncovered. The researcher made efforts throughout the process to ensure that all participants knew that they were in full control of what experiences and information they shared. The interview schedule was general (see Appendix D); however, some participants felt uncomfortable discussing mental health or may feel triggered by some of the questions included.

Protocol

When making inquiries and contacting organisations and agencies it was important that procedures were followed and that communication was both professional and transparent (Bryman, 2016). The first contact with organisations was via an email sent out requesting volunteers to participate in the study (Appendix A). The agencies at that point were able to decline the invitation or they could request additional information or as was the case on several occasions, they could produce volunteers.

Before the research, the researcher was explicit that any participants would not be friends nor family members or people they know in a friendly or social capacity. This decision was made to stop research bias, to minimise the influence of any social associations and reduce the likelihood of contamination or undue impact of the responses given in the interview (King et al., 2018). Time allocation and venues were considered and whether the interviews were being conducted during or after working hours. Some participants were volunteers, and some were paid employees and the researcher accommodated them when possible and was mindful of any expenses regarding travel, etc. and travelled to meet participants at locations that were convenient for each person. The researcher needed to be considerate to the requirements and expectations of the individuals and the organisations with which they are representing or associated.

Access to volunteers was only be requested once full ethical approval had been secured, which was in October 2019. Contacting the administration and head offices of the organisations, as opposed to individuals one to one also reduced the likelihood of a conflict of interests and ensured that the relevant organisations for aware of the participation of staff and volunteers. This guaranteed there was full transparency and minimised the likelihood of any issues which could arise once the research had been completed. The aim was that the organisations would provide full consent and support the participation of their employees, board members, volunteers or service users in the research without reservation or concern.

Storage of data

The data will be audio recorded at an interview on the researcher's mobile phone and on a dictaphone and will be transferred to and saved on password-protected computers. All consent forms will be stored in filing cabinets on university camps. The data will be kept securely under General Data Protection Regulations and disposed of five years after the research has been completed. All electronic data will be downloaded onto password-protected university computers. Written notes and equipment and hard copies of recordings will be kept in filing cabinets. All documents and equipment will be kept securely whilst in transit from interview locations to the university campus. All documentation and data concerning the research will be stored for five years after the completion of the product. In which time it will be destroyed safely and in accordance with all data protection policies and procedures.

Rigour

The design of the research and the methodological means employed mean that the research is characterised by being fluid and flexible, while also being academically rigorous. Whilst these methods and approaches allow the researcher to have more agency and freedom in terms of the processes and procedures used, reflexivity, accountability and academic integrity must be paramount (Glaser et al., 2017). All decisions made were documented, analysed, scrutinised and discussed with the

supervisory team. When coding was conducted, the practice of reflection was of greater significance than at any other stage, as it is the coding stage, where the final theory ultimately emerges (Bryman, 2016).

To ensure that this research is both valid and reliable the researcher must be able to defend and support each decision made and why other methods were discounted. Quantitative methods could have been employed, such as questionnaires and online polls. However, when conducting the literature review for the preliminary research proposal it appeared that quantitative methods and research seem to have monopolised the field in recent years. It was when conducting the initial scoping review and early conversations with the original supervisor and academic who supported the early application, that the researcher became aware of the lack of qualitative research considering the relationship between mental health and nature connections activities, particularly from a conceptual and theoretical position which critiqued the political and social factors from an ecofeminist position.

The next chapter will introduce each participant individually and interpret their experiences of nature and how these activities impact their health. Each contribution was instrumental in shaping the final piece of work and chapter 4 guides the reader through the research process and highlights the richness of the data and the range of voices and perspectives contained in this study. The central aim of chapter 4 is to give a clear and informed overview of all participants, their central contributions to the work and how their voices, perspectives and experiences are impacted by social and political forces, with a greater emphasis placed on the impact of patriarchal capitalism particularly.

Reflections on sample, selection and process.

The interviews collected were not representative of the population of Northern Ireland, they were largely representative of people who cared for the natural world and who were interested in supporting and contributing to the research. They were self-selected and they each volunteered their time. In line with ecofeminist thinking and good qualitative research design, the importance of intersectionality, representation and inclusivity were considered. It is necessary to acknowledge who was included and which voices were not heard, considered or to be found within this work. People with physical disabilities were not represented and neither were children under the age of sixteen and there was only

one person interviewed who was from an ethnic minority and one person who was from the LGBTQIA+ community. The sample included more women than men, and disproportionately represented those who are educated to a university degree and who were gainfully employed or were retired from employment. The sample overrepresented those from middle-class backgrounds, those who were in heteronormative relationships, physically able and people who were not significantly impacted by concerns relating to poverty and socio-economic deprivations.

Participants were unanimous in expressing admiration and respect for nature, and the levels of nature connectedness and pro-environmentalism they expressed are disproportionately high and not representative of the population of Northern Ireland. Many of the interviewees described a relationship with nature that they highly and which most of them believed helped them maintain positive mental health. The sample consisted of twenty-three people who all identified as having a relationship with the natural world and who were willing to discuss this relationship, and three participants were familiar with the researcher and their work prior to the interviews being conducted. Work, labour, production and reproduction are central to this research and thus important interpretative frames to be used, and themes to be aware of, when analysing the interview data. Below is a summary of how various work and labour activities related to the study and the participants. The categories were selected by their relevance to nature experiences and health and the number of participants they relate to are found in the bracketed numbers after each category.

- People who worked within the conservation and environmental sector (6)
- Environmental activists (3)
- Community centre attendees- retired (2)
- Entrepreneurs running ecotherapeutic ventures (4)
- Members of fishing club (1)
- Mental Health volunteers (1)
- Outdoors Activity Centre (1)
- Park Run organizer (1)
- Nature enthusiast (4)

As illustrated from the categories above the sample was representative of a small section

of society that aligned with environmental activism and represented largely middle class and educated participants. Those interviewed from environmental and conservation groups were often keen to promote the wellbeing and therapeutic effects, but that may have been connected to their professional roles, labour and work.

The previous chapter described the methodology and the research design for this study and the reasons for those choices. This chapter presents findings and explores some of the main themes found via a narrative style with a more in-depth analysis of some of the most prominent and definitive themes and categories discussed briefly for each participant (mental wellness/ illness, nature experiences and career and work processes). The next chapter aims to guide the reader through the interviews from start to finish as they occurred whilst simultaneously reflecting on the data and how interpreting the interview data helped answer the central research questions.

The invitations and the responses

The organisations contacted originally were environmental organisations, conservation groups and health and wellbeing groups with outdoor components, such as park runs and activity centers. The responses from the environmental and conservation sector were immediate and there were several responses from several individuals from each group. The decision was made to interview no more than two participants per organisation. This was an attempt to diversify the sample and include a broad range of professionals and perspectives.

The research was designed to include participants who were not familiar or known to the researcher. Shortly after the research commenced this proved to be difficult to achieve as in the first interview the participant had been present at an event attended by the researcher, and in the second the participant's partner was known to the researcher. While steps should be taken to attempt to be anonymous to the participant, sometime this is not be possible. Participants who volunteered who knew the researcher were declined on the grounds of a conflict of interest. The environmental and conservation sector is relatively small in Northern Ireland and it became apparent that the likelihood of participants being known or familiar with the researcher was high.

The interviews were designed to be semi-structured to allow each participant to expand and freely share their opinions and beliefs on nature and mental health. The interview questions were split into three sections covering the subjects of 1. Nature, 2. Mental Health and 3. Nature and Mental Health. These

h e a d i n g s were selected to gather as much information on the topic and sets included so as much detail as possible could be given. The research area is broad and ultimately it is the relationship between nature and mental health which is the primary focus. The purpose of having the two categories detailed separately was to gauge the terms and their inherent meaning to individuals and the last section was to explore the relationship between the two concepts as they were experienced by each person.

Chapter 4

The flow of the research journey: the relationships between participants, nature and mental health.

This chapter introduces each participant and gives some background to their motivations for being included in the study, and how they talked about three central matters: mental health, nature connection and work. The relationship between nature experiences and mental health is the foundation of this thesis, with the theme of work and employment emerging strongly through the initial analysis and data collection stages. This chapter considers each participant and present the rationale for their participation, how the project unfolded, and the central themes emerged and what led the researcher to end data collection after twenty-three interviews.

Mark

The first interviewee worked in an environmental charity and had been working in the conservation sector for decades. When discussing his work within the sector, he communicated that their ability to connect with nature was limited at work due to bureaucratic tasks like report writing taking up substantial amounts of their time. He identified time spent in nature as being a break from his work and not integral to their productive role within his organisation and that this time *“That helps you deal with all the work stuff”*. He stated that he believed that he did not spend enough time in nature, which could arguably reflect how the Capitalocene impacts the ability of people to connect with the natural world on a regular basis. This person believed the link is strong between mental health and nature experiences and stated that many within this industry have known this for a long time, *“there is nothing new about this stuff”*.

In this interview childhood experiences and parents were brought up as substantial and influencing factors on nature connection and connectedness. This participant’s father was a significant influence and they jokingly remarked:

“And when I think about nature and I think about people I think about my Dad and his background. You know growing up in a rural area, very much linked to the land in a lot of his childhood memories and things and nature and gardening being very important to him throughout his whole life. And growing up as a kid and being

involved in that. You know going for walks and helping him out in the allotment. I used to think the only reason my Dad had kids was to make us work in the allotment at weekends.”

For this participant, their love of nature was significant for their wellbeing and they saw the link. The theme of childhood and upbringing came to be considered as a possible necessity for nature connection, particularly during the initial interviews. In this interview nature-based activities such as group walking, growing activities and nature-themed workshops were all mentioned as both professional endeavours and leisure pursuits. The idea of being “plugged into” nature was raised by this participant and doing environmental work meant that it was important to maintain a consistent relationship with nature and to invest time and energy into the relationship.

“An American environmental educator called Joseph Cornell wrote a book called sharing nature with children and some other books as well. But in the 80s and 90’s he was quite influential involved in education circles and a lot of people, developed, or used his approaches with working with children and nature and stuff. And when I went on one of his workshops he had a lovely phrase. It said, “If you want to be an environmental educator”. He said, I can’t remember exactly what his words were, but it was something along the lines of, “It is like ironing a shirt”. So you are looking at him and going, Where is he going with this? He said, “It’s like ironing a shirt. If you are not plugged in it is hard work.”

This interview was one of several that referred to nature experiences as being invaluable for wellbeing and for working in the environmental and conservation field. The idea of being ‘plugged in’ seemed to refer to the feelings and sensations that came with spending time in natural settings, these experiences led to a sense of peace, contentment, alignment or balance, which will be referred to in this work as gaining a sense of flow or experiencing flow. This interview highlighted how formative experiences were important for forming a relationship with nature and that maintaining that relationship required effort. The family of origin and particularly their parents influenced this person and these childhood experiences proved to be the foundation for their career and affection for the natural world. The choice to spend free time in nature was something that followed this person throughout his life and was a passion they

shared with others. He had many positive associations and memories of this relationship:

“One of the moments I have talked about in the past is me and my mates used to muck about down the fields and we had this thing called the “impossible, impossible”. Which is like this hedgerow which you had to kind of crawl through.”

The interviewee also commented on a walk with friends where they developed a catchphrase whilst hiking up a mountain as a group on a windy day. He referred to them embracing the elements and the conditions on that day by encouraging each other to lean into the wind and shout “Feel the breeze!” to each other. This interview highlighted that acceptance and enjoyment were part of his relationship with nature and that nature was a space that encouraged an appreciation of life and all the stages, strongly supporting the biophilia hypothesis. He also believed that conscious efforts were needed to sustain and enhance the relationship by “topping up” on nature experiences regularly, this helped aide feelings of connection and flow, helping to find a sense of balance in life and work. This interviewee had a strong connection with the natural world and it was critical for balance, restoration and relaxation which helped to enhance both their professional and personal life. This relationship enabled them to be a better worker and maintain their health

Emma

The next interview was with a conservation worker who spent most of their day outdoors and who had worked in the environmental sector for over a decade. Childhood experiences, rural upbringing and parental influence became apparent again throughout the interview and it suggested that these may be significant when considering how likely people are to develop and sustain a positive relationship with nature. However, this participant talked about the idea that nature connection alongside education relating to conservation and environmental protection could increase sensitivity to the destruction of the natural world, and consequently have a detrimental effect on mood and wellness. This participant expressed disappointment in human actions, particularly perceived attacks on wildlife and non-human species. This suggested a caring for the non-human world and a sensitivity to the mistreatment of

other species by humans, it seems this person is aware of the planetary crisis, although they did not use terms and make that knowledge explicit in their answers.

“And I think I'm generally more cynical as well because I spend so much time in nature. It hurts, it hurts me more when I see a tree being cut down or somebody doing something ridiculous with their garden. Even like an avenue of trees along the side of the road, if I see the council topping them all for no reason then that really is just like, arrggghhh (sigh).”

It also became apparent that dosages of nature immersion varied as this interviewee spoke about spending about 80% of their waking hours in nature and feeling claustrophobic when feeling stuck indoors for meetings and domestic chores. This suggested that whilst this participant valued their relationship with nature and perceived it to be good for their wellbeing and positive mental health, this did not preclude negative associations or emotions being also associated with a strong relationship with the natural world. The idea that having a strong relationship with the natural world and good mental health were not necessarily synonymous. This participant spoke about claustrophobia, disappointment in human behaviour and cynicism because of their relationship with nature. Their relationships with other humans had been impacted by their work within this sector and they reflected on their feelings about those who work in the sector as being happier people “and nicer”.

“You sort of bump into people who are like-minded, I suppose a lot of people who are in nature seem to be happy generally anyway. It's not often that I would meet a really horrible person who works in my sector.”

Tam

The third interview was with a person who spoke in-depth about their mental health history and the various mental ill-health episodes they had been through. Paradoxically, her work within the sector had compounded her mental health problems as opposed to alleviating them. The complexities of this relationship with regards to mental health

and a connection with positive mental health and nature connection became apparent in this interview. The second interview suggested some negative associations with nature connectedness and this interview confirmed that even when people attempted to make careers out of their love for nature, mental wellness was not guaranteed. The idea that being strongly connected to the natural world led to positive mental health was challenged by the content of this interview and the profound mental ill health the participant had experienced over decades. The first and third interviewees worked for the same organisation and the career progression was markedly different, the first interviewee was male and this interviewee was female, both were of a similar age and their career trajectories had been different, with the female experiencing more mental health issues and struggles which impacted their progression and their sense of self and self-worth.

“But the core of it, what has happened over the last almost 20 years is, I've had treatment for a series of breakdowns, and realising that now, I realise I had, three breakdowns in my teens and my early 20s. But of course, they weren't ever medically recognised.”

In this interview, the participant, in keeping with the previous interviews, noted the importance of parents and their interests, and how that influenced their relationship with the natural world. The idea that a relationship with the natural world could be rooted in a relationship because of childhood experiences appeared to be strong from the data and interviews conducted at this point in the research collection phase. This also suggested that the work and career of parents influenced how interactions and experiences occurred in childhood.

“I was brought up in the country, my parents would have done country activities, they had a connection with nature. It was always in and around me in the house and outside. I followed that in my own interests in my own side.”

This was one of three interviews where the participant became overwhelmed and tearful when talking about how they felt about this topic. All three interviewees who became

emotional while discussing this topic were female and their emotions were considered to be a sign of overwhelm rather than distress. The intensity of the feelings and sensations when recalling a scene observing wildlife whilst alone on a beach was what triggered the emotions for this particular interviewee.

“There was this little zebra spider and I just love them, because they're dry, it was away from the little seaweed zone it was up higher up but they prefer the dryer and the markings you know, I just, to me it is the world they don't know the human world around them, they don't know how we were going to affect them, they are in their own world. They are concerned with their own survival. They are doing their own thing. And I'm just sat there and you know, I can't express how much joy that gives me (starts to well up and get emotional).”

In this interview, the participant also discussed autism and how they were considering an assessment in their fifties. This interview was significant as it was the first where neurodiversity was introduced and the participant disclosed multiple episodes of mental ill-health throughout their life (Singer, 2017). Their relationship with nature did not protect them from suffering from breakdowns, anxiety and mental ill-health related to their work within the environmental sector even though it offered them comfort, joy and respite throughout their life. This indicates that while nature experience is therapeutic, this was not sufficient to keep this woman well and mentally healthy.

Timmy

This participant was a male in their early twenties from a farming background. They presented as vibrant, healthy and content and they were in the process of completing a Master's degree in a health and fitness-related subject and was going to start a job working with a sports team shortly after the interview. They talked about their childhood and how pivotal it was to their relationship with the natural world. As the child of a farmer, they spoke about how they knew the land well and identified the family land as nature and that was suggested as being one of the central reasons they

have such a strong connection with the natural world and a part of their everyday life and childhood.

“Yeah like even as children growing up we would have went outside without being told to go outside, you would just go outside. Like we have a big yard and fields around our house where we can just go and roam about and go outdoors. It's always been a part of what we do or a part of our upbringing. You wouldn't have thought about it as we need to get outdoors.”

In this interview, the idea of nature activities and various activities serving different purposes emerged and this interviewee saw different activities reaping different benefits. The activity chosen appeared to provide different experiences and therapeutic qualities. When asked whether they preferred surfing or walking nature they stated.

“In a perfect day I'd do both. I love surfing, but it's hard to put a preference on that because they are so different. In surfing, I'm out on my own and I'm not really thinking I'm just completely engaged in the act of surfing and in the sport of it. Whereas walking and running with the dogs is a time where I'm thinking about what's going on in my head and checking in on myself. If that makes more sense?”

This was one of the several participants who spoke about feeling completely engaged in the given activity when in nature spaces, in this work this sense of being immersed or mindfully engaged with the activity will be referred to as flow. Flow represents being in the moment and being completely at ease and connected with the experience, the environment and the events as they unfold. They also presented as having positive mental health and did not appear to have had any mental health issues in the past. He associated nature connection as having a break from technology and social media in particular. Their beliefs suggested that technology and nature were dichotomous and mutually exclusive. Nature immersion and connection appeared to be associated with escapism and stress relief from the challenges of modern living, almost like an antidote to work and life pressures. This participant stood out as being one of the people who was most content and happy with their life.

“I suppose the main thing coming out is being outdoors. Being outdoors and being immersed outdoors, but I suppose it's different. Nature to me is walking the dogs outdoors, going for a run or going surfing. Being I suppose in the elements, being off your phone, off technology, going back a bit to the outdoors.”

Niamh

This interview was the fifth person in a row who spoke about being brought up in a rural setting and having formative experiences that influenced their relationship with the natural world in adulthood. This participant worked in the environmental sector, after making a career change and spoke about their career being in its infancy and their hopes for the future. This interviewee spoke about how their education on environmental-related topics enhanced their enjoyment of the natural world.

“I've always loved learning and I think that that was a wee way to keep learning even though it wasn't at a university or anything. It was just like a wee thing for me. So, the more I learned, a walk in the park turns into, how many birds can you hear? How many birds can you see? How many things can you guess?”

This interviewee associated learning and new experiences with their enjoyment and appreciation of the natural world. Whilst they reflected on their childhood as being a time where they spent time in nature, they also stated that their parents were not naturalists and asserted that they believed that whilst nature was something which they enjoyed, it may not be beneficial for everyone. They were keen to develop their career in this area and spoke about how they tried to encourage others to engage and connect with nature for health and wellbeing reasons, though with limited success.

“I do find that it's something that I get an awful lot from and it does affect my daily life in a good way. But I find that it's not for everyone and whenever I've tried to get other people interested, not forced but tried to get other people

interested. It definitely hasn't always been met with the enthusiasm that I treat it with."

This interview supported what other interviewees said, but the idea of individuality and the notion that nature therapy or nature connection may not be helpful for others was introduced. This interview again highlighted the multiple ways and various activities that can be used to connect with nature. The idea that there must be an interest and desire to connect with the natural world and nature was highlighted and an area of investigation that suggested a possible split in the thinking of those who consciously enjoy a relationship with nature and those with no interest or desire to engage with or acknowledge any such relationship.

This was the second interview where a female participant became emotional when talking about their experiences and their relationship with the natural world. It was difficult for them to explain or account for their emotions. They stated that they participated in the interview because they worked in the sector and spoke about how their change in career had led them to connect with nature more often. The emphasis was on developing a career in the environmental sector and the pressure to develop a career in this field occurred when they found discovered that they were not able to finish their qualification in teacher training. This was a long-term plan they had and it seemed to be a source of disappointment for this person that they had not achieved their aim of becoming a teacher. Nature connection offered some healing and therapeutic benefits for this person.

Tegan

The sixth interview was with a creative who worked in the environmental sector and who also had enjoyed a long career in the Arts sector too. The participant again reinforced the link between childhood experiences and nature connectedness as an adult. The link between nature and mental health was something they considered to be strong and they associated their relationship with nature as something that had supported them throughout life. They had been brought up in a farm and returned to Northern Ireland to care for their aging parents, and that was when they became

reconnected to the land and their surroundings. The link between land ownership and connecting with nature spaces was established by the participants who were brought up on farms and plots of land and who had access to wild spaces or large sections of land.

“In recollection and in looking back at my lifetime on the farm, I understand how that gave me the most incredible upbringing and give me a resonance and a strength that I have been able to carry through.”

This interview started to explore and highlight the diverse ways each individual connected to the natural world and how they viewed that world. The uniqueness of the lens with which each person connected to the environment became strongly apparent throughout this interview and when reflecting on the previous five interviews. The subjective quality of this relationship began to emerge as this individual spoke in such fluid, dynamic and visceral terms about their views on this much loved and celebrated relationship. This was the beginning of their response when asked what positive experiences they had in nature.

“So many it's very difficult to enumerate them. From, I find myself stopping my car regularly to take photographs because I love watching clouds. I love watching the interplay of sunshine, I love being beside the beach, every space has a different texture. I remember at uni when I was a postgrad student, my friend and I now, we would, the term I would use here is, but I've heard it called “dob”. We would disappear out of lessons, it was the only time we did and we will go for a walk down Portstewart prom when the waves were breaking over us. And there was an energy there that was just phenomenal. But nature keeps giving, it's generous even when it's brutal and it's cold.”

The conscious decision-making component of nature connectedness became highlighted and how spontaneous the desire may be and how it is possible to connect at almost any time and in any place where you can be outside. The idea of feeling a sense of flow and deep connection with the environment was communicated in how these experiences were given meaning and were recalled and remembered in this interview.

This notion of nature connection being an activity that involved being outdoors presented strongly in this interview and previous interviews. The link between nature connection and creative thinking and creative processes was apparent when reflecting on the language used and the inspiration received to produce creative pieces for this participant. The idea of nature and self-awareness and reflectiveness was also something that permeated this interview.

“I go into the forest for peace and quiet and for inspiration. Every season brings something new. I spent the day before yesterday with the photographer from a magazine where I’m writing an article about nature and the forest for the New Year. And he had never been there. I was saying look at this tree, look at the sunlight, look at this river. It’s a constant discovery and it takes me away from myself. I am not aiming to hide because I am aware of who I am. I am very self-aware but it allows me, again it sets me in context.”

This interviewee was candid and open about their mental health struggles and the difficulties that had experienced throughout their life. They spoke about taking medication long term to manage their depression. This disclosure confirmed that for many people a strong connection with the natural world is not sufficient to maintain mental health in this era. Many of the women interviewed for this research spoke openly about their mental health issues and struggles.

Debbie

This interview was with someone who had a wealth of experience within the environmental sector and who currently worked on a self-employed basis supporting children and families connecting with natural spaces. The person worked as a Forest School educator and worked on a self-employed basis after receiving accredited training and qualifications from an affiliated body. A common theme for many of those interviewed was a desire to turn a passion and affection for the more-than-human world into a career and a source of income.

“All my family were quite country especially involved in kind of shooting sports. And that is how I got involved and was the only real introduction to going out and being in nature. Working the dogs and walking the dogs and then I decided to do

my degree in nature conservation.”

In this interview, the participant spoke about their history of poor mental health and how it had impacted them, their work and their family. They believed their relationship with the natural world helped them to manage their mental health but this did not protect them from mental illness. They described episodes of mental ill health that required medical assistance and prevented them from functioning adequately.

“I guess mental health is to be able to look after my children properly. On a real personal level I guess. It's being able to get up in the morning and being able to make sure that they are thereby the end of the day.”

The idea of losing a connection with nature and the natural world also came up in this interview, when the participant spoke about a time when their mental health was poor and they sought professional help. The theme and concept of losing the connection with nature and then re-establishing it was prominent in this interview but was spoken about by other participants.

“A few years ago when we were trying for my little girl. it wasn't that long, it was 18 months that we were trying. I locked myself in our house, I didn't want to see anyone. I just got into the car to work, I was working in a very, I was working in a factory. I wouldn't be outside at all. So there you go, so there have been times when I haven't been outside and I remember going and seeing a lady actually and she said all I want you to do every day is to try and walk to the end of your street and walk back again. And then the next day tries a little bit further. And it worked.”

This illustrated how nature connection could be gently encouraged back into a person's life during a time of illness and that this relationship worked best when it was nurtured and regularly tended to. The idea that nature connection takes time and effort as well

as a conscious decision that was evident in most activities and nature-based activities that interviewees described. Awareness of the natural world could also be argued to be key to how that experience is considered in terms of wellbeing and mental health.

This interview also reiterated what several other participants had also stated about the importance of being outside as an important aspect and component of their nature experience. The benefits for them seemed to be dependent on being outside and not under a roof or in a building. The theme of freedom and being outside to enjoy the benefits of nature immersion and connection came up on multiple occasions.

Interview schedule development

The interviews had included those who worked within environmental and conservation organisations until this point (except interviewee number four who was a health and fitness student with a keen interest in the outdoors). A decision was made to branch out more in terms of interviewees and the sampling group. The data collected was concurring in many areas, particularly with regards to wellbeing, experiences of contentment and positive associations with nature and the importance and influence of parents and upbringings in terms of nature connection and connectedness.

There had recently been a growing interest in environmental issues within the school-aged population with the emergence of a young school-aged activist, Greta Thunberg. This young woman founded the Youth Climate Strike Movement Fridays for Future by starting to do their own weekly strikes in protest at climate inaction by governments. This movement soon gained momentum and saw school-aged children walk out of lessons to protest throughout the world to draw attention to the climate crisis. These school strikers created a global network online and it was decided that local school strikers should be included in this research.

Interviewees eight and nine were youth strikers and while they are not often thought of as working as they are attending school full-time. Schooling and learning are forms of work and activism is also a form of work. These pursuits involve labour, production, are time intensive and are also arguably necessary for this generation's survival and success. Climate and ecological activism in the Capitalocene could arguably

be considered political and social conservation work on a global scale. For the intents and purposes of this research activism and any activities which are connected to ensuring the planet is habitable in the future are important and necessary forms of work.

Cathy

This was the first participant who questioned the notion or idea that there may not be a relationship or connection between nature and mental health. They connected their awareness of the natural world with mental ill-health and they introduced the term “climate anxiety” to the data (Wu et al., 2020). This medical term or mental health condition is explicitly connected with nature and the natural world.

“I think climate anxiety is a big issue and it needs to be discussed because there is a lot of stigma around it.”

To the previous participants, the connection between nature and mental health was obvious and definite. This teenage participant felt the relationship was more complicated, this could indicate generational differences as well as the impacts of climate and ecological crisis. When asked about happiness and nature, their answers reflected their views that nature was not inherently good or bad, but vast, complex and often dangerous. The participant shied away from general and conclusive responses and was more reflective and discerning with their answers.

“Again, it depends on the context. If it was somewhere like I don't know there was a tiger, you wouldn't feel very comfortable but if it was in the right environment. And then it depends on the person as well, they might prefer somewhere like a park where there are lots of people. But then some people might prefer isolation.”

This participant was practical, methodical and less emotive or effusive than most other participants. Whilst they commenced the interview by describing their passion for nature which was supported by their activism and commitment to environmental

issues. They were also able to reflect on the not-so-pleasant aspects and parts of nature that they did not like or which they described as an “irritation”.

“I also like bees because obviously they give you us the majority of her food because of pollination but I wouldn't like to be near one.”

“I like nature but not all nature.”

In this interview, the quality of the natural space was considered important for connection. Whilst this participant lived in a city since birth and they believed there were differences in natural spaces and the wellbeing impact they may deliver.

“Well I live quite close to a park but it's not the same thing as going to the Mournes.”

This participant spoke about not being able to spend as much time in nature spaces as they would like because they were so busy with their studies and their activism. Their mental health was affected by the climate crisis and they were stressed by the amount of work they had to do within the education system. The anxiety represented the fears for their future and the high levels of stress they were under impacted their health in the present. It seemed that the pressures on the teenage population in the Capitalocene are considerable and the youth activists could be motivated by anxiety and a fear of their future, anxieties and fears exacerbated by government inaction. The introduction of the youth climate strikers introduced disorders and conditions directly linked to the environment, which previously had not been discussed or considered.

Nathan

As the interviews progressed the position, beliefs and values of the participants became increasingly evident. Their reasons for volunteering for the project were unanimous, they all felt passionate about the subject of nature or the environment. This participant was another youth climate striker and he again reiterated the connection between mental ill-health and the natural world. Both of the youth climate activists spoke

openly and directly about the threat to their future and the impact the climate crisis was having on their health. From their perspective, their future was in jeopardy and most people in power were not doing enough to ensure a habitable planet, this created distress, frustration and disappointment, which fuelled the global climate activism which they participate in.

“I just think it's important about getting out the fact that the climate crisis can cause mental health issues and it's about how you can deal with that. And that's why I got really interested in getting to engage with your research project.”

This interview was a good example of how the relationship with nature could be both positive and negative for mental health. While this participant spoke in positive terms and believed nature was good for their mental health they also spoke about their mental health struggles and how they were connected to their fears for their future as a result of climate change.

“I'd feel, nature has always, going out there and relaxing in sort of Gardens, taking a breathtaking a moment back has helped me with me fighting back and battling my depression. So, if I couldn't spend time, I don't know what I'd do. It's just so beautiful and I would hate to lose it.”

There was a melancholy and appreciation of nature that flowed through this interview, which differed from that of the other youth climate striker. The first youth striker spoke in more definitive and pragmatic terms, whereas the second young person spoke about nature in more creative and emotive language and with an almost ethereal tone influenced by concern for the future but with a deep appreciation of the natural world. The other youth striker had more fear and irritation, whereas this interviewee was more forgiving and impressed with the non-human or other-than-human world (*these terms will be defined in the opening chapters*).

“To me, nature means this wonderful other sort of world beyond this urban city high-rise life. This amazing sort of world out there, which we are so lucky to have but which we could lose so quickly if we don't act.”

This participant felt gratitude and suggested that this connection and relationship had saved their life. This would suggest that the relationship between environmental activism may be connected to mental health issues such as anxiety, trauma and depression. Whilst both youth strikers attributed their activism to anxiety, this participant also suggested this relationship had been lifesaving. One of the most concerning aspects of this interview was how much this young person had struggled with their mental health for such a long time. They spoke about having a psychiatrist and how they have had long-term depression. The two young people who took part in this study exhibited mental health issues and struggles that suggest that the Capitalocene is taking its toll on many of the most vulnerable in society. The future does not look good for many of the young people educated on the climate. Many of them are aware that without rapid political and social change the crisis will escalate and they will have to work even harder to stay mentally and physically healthy in the future. In one response this young person spoke about how he believed his relationship with the natural world had sustained him in difficult times. His words were:

“It has definitely brought me back from a physical and metaphorical edge.”

Mary

The former two participants were both still in school, while the following two interviewees were two widowed pensioners. Participant ten had been brought up and lived in a city environment all their life. They trained as a nurse and enjoyed their career and were also dedicated to bringing up their seven children. Their descriptions of family life throughout their interview suggested they adhered to traditional gender roles and heteronormative values. They associated connecting with nature as leaving the house and going outdoors. All participants associated nature connection and immersion with being outside, but most suggested the spaces should be ecologically

diverse. This participant believed stepping outside was an opportunity to connect with the natural world, even when walking through a built up or urban area. This view was different to most of the other participants but was shared by another interviewee who was also living in the city (interviewee fifteen).

“Just out walking in the fresh air.”

This participant identified being outdoors as being in the fresh air, which would suggest that they may not perceive the air pollution levels in Belfast to be problematic. Pollution or contamination of the environment was mentioned in this interview and was cited as one of the reasons they were interested in the research. The negative experiences mentioned were extreme weather and pollution with littering being mentioned specifically.

“Yeah, you know all this stuff like plastic and stuff at the minute. Sort of thing has spoilt nature. Litter.”

In this interview, incarceration or prison was associated with not being able to spend time in nature. As opposed to other potential obstacles to engagement this interviewee associated prison or being kept indoors with an inability to connect with the natural world. This would suggest that they associated being outside with freedom and autonomy and being confined and restricted with punishment and immobility.

“That would mean sort of like being in a prison something. You know if you were not in nature..... Like closed in if you weren't spending time in nature around you. I can't really imagine what that would be like.”

This participant had no specialised knowledge in the area but had a growing interest because of their awareness increasing around climate and ecological issues. She apologised for her lack of knowledge and said she wished she had prepared better for our meeting. This suggested that confidence, education and awareness influenced why some participants engaged in this research. The information provided

by each person was starting to suggest that the personality of each person was hugely impactful on how they related to the natural world. This woman enjoyed good mental health throughout their life, had very few needs or wants and seemed to enjoy a good and simple life dedicated to her family. She believed that nature connection was readily available to everyone who was able to leave their home.

Olive

This interview was with another retired person who was keen to participate in the research. They had enjoyed a career in education but had extensive voluntary experiences which they shared in the conversation and had a strong connection and respect with nature from an early age. The theme of memories and nature memories serving a therapeutic and healing purpose was prominent in this interview. She reflected on her childhood and most particularly her painful and troubled relationship with her mother. These memories seemed to provide contentment, even when the relationship was problematic, abusive and controlling in her adult life. These childhood remembrances of spending time with their mother in nature were consolatory in their old age.

“Something entered my long-term memory yesterday. Walking in this field with my mother, unfortunately, as life goes on my mother and I didn't have a good relationship. It is nice sometimes to have a bit of consolation that at one time things were very different.”

Nostalgia and positive associations and memories came up in many interviews and seemed to greatly impact how individuals perceived the natural world. This interview and her memories brought comfort and solace when reflecting on a relationship that was strained. When considering this through an ecotherapeutic lens these recollections are helpful for processing psychological pain and forgiving past grievances. It could also be connected to the grieving process; however, the peaceful component of the reflections and memories is noteworthy and supports the principles and practices

of ecotherapeutic interventions which use nature to bring comfort, contentment and relief to distress or mental ill-health (Jordan & Hinds, 2016).

This interviewee was an active and dynamic person in their eighties, who described experiencing significant trials and obstacles throughout their life. Their passion for the natural world was a constant feature of their life. They spoke poignantly about how this relationship had changed through the years and how they had engaged or expressed this passion via multiple activities. The relationship had changed and progressed because of circumstances and the changing seasons or stages of this person's life. The theme of change was particularly strong in this interview. The notion of access, transport and freedom came about also and illustrated one of the issues connected with nature connectedness and aging. It also showed that our ability to work and have a secure and healthy income at all stages of our life influences how we connect and relate to the environment.

"I think I was talking about this to my daughter the other day about that funny enough. With this coming up? I can't remember what started the conversation, I was feeling a bit tired and maybe it's just winter time and it could be advancing years but. I do miss that very much because of the stimulation there, the fresh air, the exercise. I do walk quite a bit. But there is not the same stimulation as there was say at the end of a group walk or something like that, that kind of thing. There is quite a bit of that over the years. I did some hill climbing and stuff like that I was very, very active when I had a car."

This participant was eighty years old and identified as having a strong connection with nature consistently throughout her life from childhood. They felt privileged and fortunate that as a land-owning family the opportunity to connect with the natural world was something afforded to them.

"As I say we had our own land and lots of beautiful flowers growing in it. Lots of vegetables I wouldn't have known anything scientific about them in those days. We were also fortunate enough to have a field at the back in our property."

This interview was a strong example of how the relationship a person has with the natural world can change greatly over time because of location, situation, responsibilities and circumstances. The fluid and changeable nature of the relationship with the natural world was strongly represented by this individual and this relationship was a source of comfort and joy throughout their lifetime. This participant had a relationship with nature that suggested they enjoyed feeling a sense of flow and connection when immersed and engaged in certain activities, such as gardening or walking. The idea of nature being a safe and comfortable companion was felt in one of their last comments in the interview and it was also a belief shared by several other interviewees.

“Nature speaks to me. So, I don't necessarily need anybody else. Because as I said my circumstances have changed, I'm not in the groups anymore. I do it on my own and sometimes I might have somebody with me and I'm quite happy.”

This interviewee referred to nature speaking to them and feeling peace and contentment when engaged in activities such as gardening or walking, this again suggested a flow state that was experienced for many individuals because of nature connection. The flow state involved being completely in the moment and content with what was happening in their body and within their environment, this is a sign of wellness and provides a sense of harmony and balance which is important for mental health and wellbeing.

Interviews and recruitment as data collection progressed.

When reflecting on the data collected and the participants it was agreed in supervision that it may be of benefit to try and get a more inclusive and varied sample and efforts were made to include those who had no obvious interest in the natural world. Research requests were sent to several gyms, leisure facilities and sporting organisations. Students were also spoken to on-campus and interviews were arranged.

However, cancellations were made and people not turning up became an issue for collecting data from people who did not identify as environmental enthusiasts or nature lovers. It proved difficult to engage those who were not interested in the subject matter, whereas comparatively, individuals had to be declined from the research if they worked in an organisation already represented in the study. This observation is important when reflecting on the motivation of the participants. It is worth noting at this point in the data collection that all the interviews were conducted face to face. There were twenty-three interviews in total, fifteen were conducted face to face and the remaining eight occurred via telephone or online conference calling. The reason for this change was a result of the outbreak of COVID19 and the health concerns related to meeting in person at that time.

Roisin

This participant had been brought up on a farm but had spent most of their adult life in cities. They felt the relationship between nature and positive mental health was strong and they spoke openly and confidently about this belief early in the interview. They were a full-time student and had volunteered to participate in the research as they were interested in the relationship between nature and health.

“Well I’m interested in the connection with nature and mental health and I’m interested in nature being a cure. I always feel better when I go outside and even if I go for a walk in nature it always makes me feel expansive.”

Again, this sense of connection and feeling immersed in the environment seemed to lead to a state of flow which brought all attention to the present moment and the surroundings being experienced. Exercise was a big part of this person’s life and daily routine. They enjoyed running and cycling and walking. They exercised indoors and outdoors and they enjoyed both for various and divergent reasons. This individual’s insight into the differences between exercising indoors and outdoors was interesting, as the participant enjoyed both settings. They stated that the parks in their

local area allowed for feelings of space and expansiveness which other areas did not. This appeared to be an association that they felt with those natural spaces.

“It's just beautiful, it's just nice being in the trees and seeing other people out with their dogs walking them. Although the last few mornings I cycle, not this morning, it was really windy and snowing and everything and I thought oh my god how am I going to go out in that. But you see the moment I go into the park, because I ride through the park it's just like wow, this is really nice.”

Noticing and observing nature and natural spaces was something that this participant did. They observed how when running in the park it was cooler in summer, than running through the streets. They reflected on their garden and how they did not maintain it but they nonetheless appreciated what was growing in it.

This participant associated nature with greenery and considered mental health as a “neglected” part of our health, compared to physical health. They also identified mental health meaning the “absence of anxiety” to them. Mental health was identified as “being content” and “experiencing gratitude”. These reflections and particularly the sensory experiences they described associated with exercise outside suggested their cognitions and thinking were different in these spaces. Nature was identified as “a place I do things in”, and the idea of sitting in the park was not something they considered doing when spending time in green spaces. It was a place to walk, run or exercise. They also felt that they could get “better mental clarity in the park”.

“If I was doing a tough workout in the gym I wouldn't be as aware of my thoughts as I would if I was running in the park. There is more of a meditative quality if I'm running in the park.”

The referral to a meditative quality would help to explain how these experiences were beneficial for the wellbeing of this individual as they created a sense of flow and connection between the person and the world around them. This interview was with someone who had a high level of fitness and engaged regularly with nature in an urban setting, as they were a city dweller. This person enjoyed good mental health and did not

mention having a history of ill health, either physically or mentally. They are a woman in their forties who did not have any dependents and who are financially independent and own their own home. They did not discuss the climate and ecological crisis, nor did they seem to have any negative associations with green spaces.

Maggie

This participant was a mother in her forties who had been running an online organisation that supported women connecting with nature by offering group nights and weekends away in wild spaces. The aim of her company was to empower and support women to meet up, support each other and enjoy nature immersion activities overnight in the company of other women. She spoke about how she had become connected with nature and what this relationship meant to her. They also brought up neurodiversity, specifically autism, when reflecting on their child and how nature immersion supported them with their emotions and sensory overload. Autism and other neurological and psychiatric conditions were mentioned throughout the interviews. On all occasions the benefits of using nature as a therapeutic intervention for neurodivergent people were highlighted.

“Yes, I think when I am feeling particularly stressed and anxious and I see it very much with my daughter when she is having a meltdown. If we can get her into the forest that will instantly calm her... If she’s having a particular meltdown and I think you’ll find with a lot of kids with autism, it’s the same.”

This participant was one of the few to be brought up in an urban setting and who had parents with no interest or enthusiasm for the natural world. However, in their childhood, they spent a lot of time in nature with friends and recalled feeling sad about a tree being felled. They described this sadness as being because the tree felt like “a friend” and therefore they experienced a loss when it was destroyed. They also spoke about the difference in the quality and the duration of nature immersion and articulated this by describing the difference between a walk in nature and an overnight stay.

“Staying out overnight in a forest adds a whole other level than just walking. Walking is, it's like dipping your toe in and staying overnight in the forest is like having a good long swim.”

This research included many individuals who were encouraging other people to engage with nature for wellbeing purposes and through their paid employment. This participant was running an organisation part-time, as well as working as a part-time Social Worker. It could be argued that their inclusion was inevitably going to support the claim that nature was beneficial to mental health and wellbeing. However, their additional knowledge and observations began to detail and outline the uniqueness of this relationship. This is an account of how this person felt when connecting with nature by staying overnight in natural settings on a hammock.

“You know the best thing I've done in the last year is I've bought myself a bush hammock. And the loveliest, loveliest time is when I'm lying in my bush hammock looking up at the stars. When I don't need the tarp when I know it's not going to rain. Although I have been woken up with a nice little sprinkling of rain in my face. And just getting rocked by the wind and the trees and looking at the stars. Now it can take me about two hours to get to sleep, but I'm so chilled out, it's just gorgeous. “

This participant did not discuss experiencing mental ill health nor did they explicitly consider themselves to be neurodivergent or susceptible to mental health problems. They did believe this relationship benefited their health and they were also keen to help others to have the same experiences. They were able to travel to access high-quality nature spaces and they were also able to buy any equipment and supplies for their trips and overnight stays.

Whilst reflecting on all the interviews to date, the level of education and employment is worthy of attention and acknowledgment. All the participants interviewed were professionals, retired professionals or students. There was also a gender imbalance in the sample, as out of thirteen interviewees, only three had been male. This was to change quite suddenly because of COVID19. Up until this point, most

of the participants were women, most were educated to a post-compulsory education level and most would be described as middle class.

Una

This interview included another woman who had begun a business focused on supporting local women to connect with nature through hiking. This person was a midwife by profession and had recently set up a hiking business to promote health and wellbeing for women. The business involved climbing mountains and sometimes involved strenuous exercise in wild areas. Many of these activities required a moderate to high level of fitness and were challenging for many people. This participant spoke about the importance of them putting time aside to personally connect with the natural world.

“I take myself away. I have to consciously make an effort because we do have a busy life and I do work and I have a family so I do have to consciously put time aside to say that I am going outdoors. The hardest part I think is just getting on the boots. Once I get the boots on, I could go anywhere. It’s like anything, once you get there you can do it, but it’s getting there. It’s like anything, like going to the gym or going to work, once you get there, you can do it, but it’s getting yourself there.”

This interviewee referred to the challenges involved in planning and getting to the activities and nature connection sites and those challenges often related to the effort required to organise and prepare for the activities. Once they had overcome the obstacles, mental, physical and logistical, they were able to achieve the flow state that these experiences evoked. This participant was a single mother and they had to ensure their children were cared for before they could engage with their preferred nature experiences, which were hiking in mountains. In this interview, the participant spoke about how they had experienced profound mental health challenges in their past and they attribute their recovery and positive mental health with their relationship with being outdoors and more specifically “the mountains”. They

spoke about experiencing suicidal ideation historically, however they use nature to manage their health and wellbeing.

“I hike, I hike a lot. I meditate outdoors. I also have conversations with people I will never have a conversation with. So you know those difficult conversations with the boss or the ex-partner or even your children. Maybe things that I want to tell them or either not ready to tell them or don’t think they are ready to hear it. I’ll just sit on a mountain and have that conversation with them. Which is amazing, because to me it is like I’ve put it out there, I’ve let go of it and I can move on”.

This relationship was spoken about in a way that was healing, reassuring, forgiving and transcended their other relationships with people. It was spoken about in terms of a complete relationship, a deep friendship and connection. The mountains were a “confidante” and a place of safety, security, non-judgement, confrontation, stress and acceptance, a place they could be themselves completely. This interview again reflected the very personal and varied ways that this relationship manifested and how it was perceived by each person. The commonality was the respect, how it was experienced, interpreted and integrated into their lives was what was unique.

“It comes back to that whole nature doesn’t judge you. So, I can sit on a mountain and tell them my darkest secrets and they don’t tell anybody. It’s a secret. It’s like telling your best friend or telling a counsellor or something. That’s what I feel like.”

This was a fascinating insight and reflection and affirmed how the ethos of ecotherapy and green therapeutic practices. To project these qualities and attributes to nature was interesting, as it suggests there are deeply healing benefits that some people experience when connecting with nature. Nature experiences providing opportunities to recover from trauma, pain and distress was a theme that came through for several of the participants. There also was a desire to share these healing qualities with others, as demonstrated by the entrepreneurial undertakings of participants thirteen and fourteen.

COVID19

Data collection had begun several months before COVID19 impacted the research and all aspects of life and social interactions. An ethics amendment form was submitted swiftly, to request that data collection could continue with as minimum disruption as possible to the project. The amendment requested that interviews could be conducted by phone or on other telecommunication mediums. All interviews that follow took place over the telephone or using conference calling technology, such as Zoom.

Max

This interviewee did not work in nature, nor were they connected with any special interest groups or organisations preserving natural environments. They volunteered to take part in the project as they liked the sound of it and they made contact with the researcher offering to participate. They identified as being from the LGBTQIA+ community and they lived in a city but had grown up in a rural setting. They were interested in the research as they had a strong connection with nature which they attributed to their rural upbringing. While they had a strong affection for nature they expressed disappointment for the rural community they originated from as a result of alienation and estrangement. They described walking in nature to find comfort during difficult times

“I would have went for walks and I would have found a lot of peace on those walks and I would have tried to drag them out. I would have gone mid-afternoon and I would have tried to drag them out and by the time I got home it would have been dark and I would have got a lot of peace during that time.”

This interview was the first to be conducted while the population was restricted from freely moving and required to remain indoors as much as possible because of COVID19. These restrictions and their impact were mentioned in this interview through the lens of nature connection. He spoke about how the pandemic had directly affected the urban environment they lived in and how there had been a dramatic decrease in

traffic, noise pollution and they were able to notice the more-than-human world more easily and readily.

“Even though during this whole pandemic, this is one thing that I have been able to enjoy a wee bit more. I went out into the fire escape yesterday and I could barely hear a car, I could barely hear anyone talking, shouting, especially in the middle of Belfast there is a lot of shouting. There were no doors banging. All I could hear was the birds and that lifted me a wee bit especially when the sun was shining. That was so peaceful and calming.”

When considering mental health and nature connection, this participant found comfort and peace by listening to the wildlife and observing from their fire escape. The activities they chose were more meditative and restorative as opposed to physically active. He did not mention or refer to the climate and ecological crisis but believed that the relationship was beneficial to health and wellbeing. This participant went for walks or focused their attention on the outside world to connect with nature. These activities did not require equipment or transportation and demonstrated that connecting with nature involved paying attention to the non-human world, as opposed to visiting high-quality nature spaces outside of urban areas.

Clint

This interviewee was particularly keen to discuss the issue and had made contact showing interest in participating in the research. He did not work in the environmental sector but volunteers supporting young men who are suicidal. His volunteering came about after he came across a dead body when out kayaking on a local river.

“I was out one day and I found a body in the water and it kick-started that kind of train of thought and when I saw what you were doing. I thought I can help there, I can give an opinion, plus I usually have a lot of opinions anyway.”

This interview had the theme of trauma and healing running very strongly through it. The associations with nature spots as places that are both tragic and cathartic were difficult for the participant to process and articulate. It seemed these stories and experiences were important for them to share. What was equally important was to give hope and a therapeutic context as well as the devastation and loss associated with places and events connected with nature. They stated that nature made them happy and they explained why in the interview.

“Having that time just to appreciate, might take a bit of time, but once you get going or once you get out somewhere. You slow right down and you start listening to sounds and noticing things and noticing things that are, dare I say beautiful and you wouldn’t normally notice. Or you even take for granted. Once you start appreciating the small things again, you start appreciating what you have as a person. So for me if I start appreciating ‘isn’t that great how that flower’s grown, isn’t it great how that bee has got honey, isn’t it great how I’ve got kids. It puts things in perspective for me.”

This participant described feeling a sense of connection and getting into a flow with the environment when he was out on his kayak, taking in the sights and sounds and being fully engaged and adapting to the rhythm of the non-human world. This participant connects with nature through “one-off events” and “when life allows”. This participant had a strong adoration and respect for the natural world but did not spend time daily, nor have nature connection as a priority. They believed nature connection took planning and equipment. They also believed time, transport, accessibility and weather were obstacles to nature connection. Their beliefs around nature connection affirmed that effort, time and conscious decision-making was required for this to happen. This person worked in IT and had a young family and wife. They were physically fit and their nature experiences were rooted in community work, leisure and relaxation. They touched on the subject of male mental health and believed that spending time in nature was beneficial for those who were struggling with mental health problems.

Graham

This interviewee talked about addictions and dependencies and mental ill-health. The idea of being grounded and mindful permeated this interview and this participant introduced the idea of nature being a space that could be considered spiritual. This terminology and these concepts are prevalent in much of the ecotherapeutic and wellbeing literature written around nature as a healing and spiritual location/ entity. Here is the participant's attempt to define the term "grounded":

"I don't know whether it's when you're surrounded by that environment. Whether it's in a forest surrounded by trees, you know there's a lot of visuals. There is a lot of visual stuff going on in terms of forest in terms of linear trees. You know the structure of the forest and it just makes you feel, you know you're feeling part of nature. Feeling part of the earth. There is something very healing, healthy and there is a sense of going back to basics."

Nature as a healing device or concept had been mentioned in several interviews and the idea of spirituality was mentioned or often alluded to. This interviewee also spoke of the possible spiritual nature of this relationship.

"I wouldn't describe myself as a spiritual person. I'm not a churchgoer and I'm not necessarily a believer but I would find if I ever have any of that type of thinking it would be usually when I am in nature."

The mention of spirituality and the inclusion of language such as being "grounded" suggested again that the words and expressions selected to describe and account for this relationship reflected the person and their beliefs, knowledge and opinions. This language could also be used to refer to the sense of flow and connection that has been mentioned by several of the participants. The sense of being present and aligned with the environment/ world in that moment could be considered as spiritual to some and to others it could be seen as gaining a sense of balance or homeostasis in that moment. The way each person engaged with nature reflected their interests and their preferences. What they believed was happening in nature in terms of their mental processes and

cognitions, varied widely but was generally positive, restorative and pleasant. For some it provided a space where their thinking took on almost transcendental qualities.

“Those bigger questions. That type of thinking usually comes to me when I’m in nature basically. It could be in the night sky or when I’m looking up at a tree canopy or when I’m sitting in the ocean looking out on the horizon. There is a calm feeling of peacefulness. Which can nearly give you feelings of spirituality. Which you don’t get or I don’t get it anyway from an urban environment.”

This theme of something bigger, something meaningful, something powerful means it is difficult to define due to the existential and subjective qualities and sensations that the various immersion techniques and activities evoke. These existential questions came to this person when in a natural environment. It was not uncommon for other participants to reflect on how their thinking was different in natural spaces. Articulating these experiences proved to be difficult to define or account for. This interviewee was male and worked in IT and organised a regular community event that promoted health through running in local parks. He did not mention the climate and ecological crisis and therefore it did not seem to have an impact on how he viewed the natural world. The activities he did in nature required transportation, equipment and time and he was able to connect with nature on a regular basis.

Ted

This interview showed the strength of storytelling when reflecting on the relationship each person had with nature. The story of how their relationship unfolded with the natural world was central to each person interviewed, but none more so than this interviewee. This person told the researcher that he had been “*blown up*” in a bomb in the early 1970s. He said the impact on his health was that he was now living with “*very, very severe PTSD*”. In the interview, he said it was only a couple of months before our meeting that he realised “*what has been wrong with me all my life*”. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Northern Ireland has some of the highest rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the world.

He had struggled with mental ill health for many years but had continued to work until a breakdown no longer made that possible. They acquired approximately 10 acres of land as an investment when they had taken early retirement. They began growing food on the land and over time they became aware of the therapeutic benefits they experienced because of the land and the work they did on it. It was not a conscious decision to buy land for therapeutic purposes, but over time the therapeutic effects became apparent. When asked why the interviewee wanted to participate in the research they responded.

“Because my interaction with nature has definitely helped with all my mental health problems”

This person described their mental health as *“particularly poor”*. They were undiagnosed with PTSD as they didn’t experience flashbacks, therefore the mental ill-health they faced for decades was not connected with the bomb attack they experienced in the 1970s. They had struggled with mental ill health for many years, however, had continued to work in quite stressful environments. Their relationships suffered and they had trust issues which culminated in a nervous breakdown. This breakdown led to him no longer being able to work with other people and that was when he considered other ways of making money. His ability to buy land led to him connecting with the natural world through land acquisition for business and financial purposes. This wealth and privilege gave him the time and high-quality nature space to heal from his traumatic past experiences in isolation.

“My goal was so I didn’t have to deal with people anymore and I could basically be a hermit. I had all that land and I had to do something with it. The whole thing just evolved from there. And planting trees and watching them grow and looking after them and finding out about wildflower meadows and how they evolve and what to do about them. I didn’t plant wildflowers, I’ve just used nature to evolve. I’m using a natural seed bank and the land to give me the wildflowers. That gave me lots to do without having to spend time dwelling on life and how cruel it had been to me.”

Fiona

This participant was an alternative therapist who worked privately and promoted spiritual practices and activities. She was a grandparent and enjoyed engaging with nature in a leisurely and relaxing manner. Her preferred activities were walking in green spaces where they could mindfully engage with the more-than-human world. Throughout her interview she expressed appreciation and respect for nature and she saw it as a part of a holistic approach to health. She promoted the use of nature engagement as a therapeutic approach in her professional practice.

“I was doing this gratitude thing and it was literally going outside of my back door. Breathing in, looking at the trees, looking at the sky. I suppose that’s where the mindfulness came in, because that’s what it is, it’s in the present. It’s what you see in the present. In the now. There is no past there is no future. It literally is what you have now.”

This interviewee spoke at length about the physiological and neurological processes occurring, they understood the benefits of nature engagement through this professional lens. This participant was someone who seemed more content observing from a distance and approaching wild spaces with caution and reservation.

“Although I love flowers and that, my hubby does the gardening, I don’t really do gardening to be fair. And even going on a big, long walk I think the idea of it yeah, but when I’m in there. I mean I went to go on this mountain and then we were scared of getting lost and then the rain would come on.”

She was aware of her limitations and clear on what she would enjoy doing and wouldn’t. She spoke about her preferences matter-of-factly; she knew what worked for her. Which were relaxing activities as opposed to high impact and high-energy adventures or pursuits.

“I don’t really like high-impact go somewhere that’s just completely wild. I love to look at that but I don’t like to be physically in it. So the like of somewhere that is a structured path. This path will take you to and there is a waterfall and there is this and this. I love anything like that. I suppose it’s just finding what works for you.”

Structure and having some control over the environment and knowing what might happen was important to this person. They were not expecting or desiring adventure or adrenaline from these nature interactions or experiences, they seemed more focused on having a pleasant and peaceful time.

Alan

This participant described nature connection activities that reflected their personality as well as the stage they were in life. They tried to account for how this relationship developed.

“I think over the last couple of years I’ve really had a renaissance in terms of my interest in nature and being in the outdoors. Particularly in trying to grow and starting to collect house plants for myself. I did some support work up in allotments through (name of company) and absolutely loved it.”

They enjoyed learning; they got great satisfaction from observing the processes of the natural world. They grew up in a city and their parents weren’t interested in the natural world. Their connection emerged because of work and the job they do with adults with learning difficulties. They noted that they had realised how beneficial nature was to their wellbeing by being aware of how they felt after they had spent time outdoors.

“I would say almost that it’s easy to not notice it in its absence, it’s only when you go outdoors and do something and come back, that you feel, that you noticeably feel better for it. Then you notice it only because you’ve done that. Do you know what I mean? Whereas if you don’t do it at all you kind of don’t notice the absence until you realise.”

This interview was with a man who was in their twenties and did not mention the climate and ecological crisis, nor did they seem to have experienced mental ill-health historically. Their work gave them time to connect with the more-than-human world and it was through their paid employment that they learned about the benefits of nature experiences to their health. They did not perceive there to be negative effects to their relationship with the natural world, it seemed to be a relationship that was developing and that they were aiming to nurture further.

Eamon

This interview was with someone who ran an activity centre and who has worked in the outdoor recreational industry for over twenty years. This participant viewed nature by the sports or activities he was doing and he worked with the environment as a businessman and a competitive sportsman. Reading the signs of nature was something he did regularly as a sportsperson and an activity centre manager. No other participant spoke in such detail and such pragmatic terms about their relationship with the more-than-human world and the environment.

“The thing about competitive racing is you can’t think about anything else while you are doing the other sport. It is really tactical trying to get in front of the other person. There are so many elements to it and it is very fast-moving. You have to be totally in the moment. You are taking in the nature and you are getting lots of fresh air and it’s quite physical too.”

This interviewee spoke about the sense of balance, connection and flow that occurred when they were engaged in their preferred activities. Being “totally in the moment” is beneficial for concentration and for enjoyment, it means to be fully engaged and present and in terms of wellbeing this is positive and beneficial for mental health and wellbeing. This participant also spoke about having feelings of claustrophobia because of lockdown and spoke about getting outdoors as getting their “fix”. They spoke about finding that “fix” at various stages in their lives and in varying ways. They became aware of how

important making time to be outdoors was and how even though their career involved encouraging others to get outdoors, they noticed as a manager how important it was for them to get their regular “fix” particularly as life changed and when stressors mounted.

“The pressures were very different, the life pressures. At university, there were certain stages where you would have felt under pressure and you would have had to get out and use it as a release.”

The pandemic had impacted this person’s ability to be outdoors as much as they would usually and this came up in the early stages of the interview when they spoke about needing to get outside every few hours. This interview showed how ‘nature dosage’ varied for each person, his person needed large amounts of time outdoors and described it in terms that reflected dependency and were like how people talk about addictions. The activities that he did in nature spaces required capital and resources and they also required specialist knowledge and education. The climate and ecological crisis were not mentioned in this interview and hence did not seem to impact their perceptions and experiences of the natural world or their mental health.

Lorna

This interview was recorded in early July 2020 and lockdown restrictions had been altered and there was greater freedom of movement and activity than there had been for the previous three months. This interviewee spoke about her connection with nature and how the relationship had evolved. She spoke about being diagnosed with bipolar disorder and how she had managed her life and her wellbeing since the diagnosis. She spoke about the changes she had experienced throughout her life and how the natural world impacted her at various stages of her life.

“I grew up in the outback of Australia. I was barefoot through my childhood and running through my childhood with my dog. Wide-open spaces, I was outdoors. I was born in Derry and we emigrated to Australia when I was four. So from ages four to fourteen, I was outdoors all the time. We were just outdoors. Very active,

very imaginative childhood, you know building forts and running through the bush I was a bush baby”.

Storytelling and reflection were a large theme of this interview. The changes in the environment and the life events that occurred were both challenging and deeply traumatic for the participant. This participant spoke about the issues they faced as a single parent and the impact of the death of their sister by suicide decades earlier. They shared how they came to re-connect after losing connection with the natural world for years because of painful family events, life experiences and medical processes.

“When I’m in nature I like to feel it. I quite like being cold and barefoot. I’m careful, safety and whatnot. But I wouldn’t be one for the big boots and waterproof jacket. I wouldn’t be one for hood up, I like to actually feel and experience it, rather than be separated from it.”

Again, the idea of being fully engaged and connected with the environment suggested that a state of flow was attained that led to feelings of balance, contentment and peace. This person worked in a caring profession and had recently begun an ecotherapy practice. This meant that the language used by the interviewee was influenced by their knowledge and training in the area. They referred to Wilson’s Biophilia Hypothesis in their interview. They had a good level of academic knowledge regarding the therapeutic effects of nature connection as well as a wealth of personal experiences. At the end of the interview, they were asked for their opinion on whether our relationship with nature was always a comment and reflection of our relationship with ourselves. This was their response.

“It sounds like it makes sense. Because nature is a reflection of us. It is sitting comfortably. It’s sitting, my gut is kind of going, yes, yeah, yep. It makes sense.”

Keith

This was to be the last interview and it was with a man who worked as a police officer and who also volunteered at a local fishing club. Fishing was considered an activity worthy of exploration as it is often carried out alone, however, this participant spoke at length about the social aspect of his involvement with the activity and the club he was

a member of.

“There are times I go up there with the intention of fishing and I don’t, I just go up there and sit there and chat and make a cup of coffee. There is one guy who opened up to me in the last year and he opened up to me last week and told me he had tried to kill himself.”

The interviewee worked in a stressful job and considered their leisure activities in nature to be crucial for their wellbeing and recovery from stress. The extent of trauma and dangerous and worrying behaviours this person had been exposed to was great. The thought of not being able to connect with nature was unpleasant and they spoke about how fortunate they felt regarding their job and the recent lockdown which hadn’t restricted their movement as much as many of the population due to their occupation.

“I would be devastated. I was lucky in the lockdown that I could go out and I had to go out as an essential worker. But I had four days on and four days off and on my days off I could go to the club.”

Conclusion

When reflecting on each interview and the entire process of data collection, it seemed that each interview had an essence to it. The main points and central reflections when considered separately reflected the person and their lives. When put together as a collection of interviews, we see a selection of stories, interests, insights, beliefs, opinions, experiences and observations. The commonality was an interest in the subject and a willingness to discuss the major themes. The belief that nature was beneficial to mental health was supported and advocated by most participants when the question was asked directly. However, the information collected did not categorically support

this assertion. There appeared to be too many variables, too many examples where nature connection or possibly nature/ environmental awareness was actually detrimental to mental health.

This chapter aimed to guide the reader through the participants and the contributions they made in reference to the central research questions, relating to work, health and nature experiences. Each person had varying degrees of mental health, each person had a personal relationship with the world around them and that work, income and finances influenced how people related to the more-than-human world. Nature was perceived to be all living things, including people, however nature connection was considered to take place in certain spaces but not all. While the idea of us being nature was considered true, this concept was not fully embodied or embedded psychologically or linguistically by virtue of the concepts discussed which highlighted the dualistic notions of nature being a space outside of most participants' home environments.

Nature was considered positive or good, and on several occasions, it was suggested that nature took on an almost sacred quality. And finally, most participants believed that the natural world and positive mental health were strongly linked. In the next chapter, these findings will be discussed and analysed in greater depth.

Chapter 5

Discourse Analysis and prominent themes: An ecofeminist critical analysis of nature experiences, health and wellbeing.

This chapter presents themes to answer the central research questions of the research. The three main research questions have been selected to help address how nature experiences and health relate to each other in a time of climate and ecological crisis. The global environmental destruction we are facing is often attributed to capitalism and capitalist practices. Ecofeminists criticise the power structures of patriarchy and capitalism. In this chapter the discourse and thematic analysis of the interviews will help to draw attention to how these systems may influence how individuals understand the relationship between nature experiences and health. A reminder of the main research questions.

1. How does our *obligation* to work impact how we experience nature?
2. How can nature experiences impact our sense of self?
3. What may be the positive and negative impacts of nature experience on mental health and wellbeing in the era we live in?

In the previous chapter all the participants were introduced and a summary of their working life, mental health and relationship with nature was given. In this chapter some of the most prominent themes that emergence in the interviews will be discussed and the central concepts will be analysed using discourse analysis. The combination of discourse and thematic analysis was to highlight the importance of discourse and how pervasive and prominent our beliefs and perceptions are when discussing subjects relating to the environment and health. The next section of this chapter will draw

attention to how nature, mental health and nature connection were understood and perceived by the participants. This will allow for the clarification of the conceptual and linguistic foundations which inform how many people interact with the more-than-human world and how they make sense of these interactions. In turn this allows the author to deconstruct and critique these assertions from an Ecofeminist perspective in the remaining chapters.

Discourse Analysis

Definition of nature

Nature, for the interviewees, was thought of in vast and inclusive terms. It was considered “*life on earth*” (Int 1) and “*everything that grows*” (Int 13), “*the elements*” (Int 10, Int 15), “*the great outdoors*” (Int 23), and was “*separate to buildings*” (Int 13). Nature was also thought of as “*what would exist no matter what*” (Int 15). Living things, being outside, fresh air and green spaces, all were used to describe this concept. Many of the participants grappled with the notions, ideas, words and terms that often seemed inadequate when searching for a definition. Nature was living things and that included humans and nature was what would happen if things were left as they were and included both living and non-living entities and processes.

“Nature to me is the freedom of the outdoors. There are no restrictions, it’s outside. With Mother Nature, the elements. The trees, the water, to me that’s what embodies nature.” (Int 14)

The idea that nature represented freedom was commonly mentioned by a high percentage of participants and was a key theme for the study at large; this notion will be established more when reviewing the themes later in this chapter. Nature as freedom was an idea that was articulated when expressing the feelings and associations with nature spaces and nature-based experiences. There was also general agreement that nature included humans. The issue of whether humans warranted inclusion under the umbrella term was often prefaced. It seemed that whilst humans were included, what

humans produced and created was not always included, the material world was generally considered to be outside of this definition. Human-made/ manufactured objects/ items/ buildings were largely excluded, with an exception being gardens and other structures that contain life and growth that have been created and designed by people. Many of the participants referred to human products as 'man-made', the use of the term 'man' when referring to material objects or products signifies how gender biased and sexist many production and material related phrases, terms and concepts are in capitalist and industrialised countries. The inference being that men make items and build things and women are not involved or included in this production or their labour is not valued in these processes.

"The Natural World, well even man-made stuff like Gardens and things are still nature. I think just growing." (Int 13)

"Not man-made, I keep coming back to as well, naturally occurring." (Int 22)

"I think even having a park or trees in your back garden is nature to me as long as there is life and not just a concrete jungle then it's nature." (Int 2)

The dichotomous or dualistic nature of this relationship was expressed in several interviews. The idea that people are nature, but that certain aspects of their existence and their products are not natural and does not fall under the category of nature, or occur naturally, was articulated by several interviewees. Through these notable psychological and mental compartmentalisations, we can recognise how the split between people and place is deeply embedded in the culture, the language and the psyche of those who were interviewed for this research. This is common in many westernised and industrialised countries and could be argued to be a good example of alienation because of centuries of capitalism and consumerism, both deeply environmentally destructive processes.

"Nature is the ultimate I suppose, the beginning and then we are part of it. Although a lot of people in my eyes are shunning it, they think nature is something separate, it's not, we are nature." (Int 2)

"I mean I like nature, whatever it is, I like it." (Int 10)

Definition of mental health

When collecting data on the commonly agreed definition of mental health and positive mental health, it may be beneficial to understand why the responses from the interviewees were used as opposed to general and widely accepted definitions. The reason the definitions were generated using the data was to illustrate and highlight the areas of agreement and to allow the research findings to be data- and participant-led. Mental health and wellbeing were something that most of those interviewed believed was associated with their relationship to and experience of the natural world. Many people would possibly not hold these beliefs. To understand how this may differ from mental health in other settings it was important that the participants articulated and defined mental health for the research.

“Good mental health is when I feel content. When I feel calm, relaxed. When I'm happy but not necessarily ecstatically happy. It's just that chilled-out happiness you know. Contentment to me is good mental health.” (Int 13)

The research found that for many participants mental health concerned feelings, thoughts and emotions (Int 1, Int 2, Int 3, Int 10). Good mental health was connected to individuals feeling ‘balanced’. Being able to function and enjoy life was also considered an important aspect relating to mental health (Int 20, Int 21). Most of the participants discussed their individual mental health experiences with a significant proportion of those describing having episodes of poor mental health requiring medical and psychological/ treatment (Int 2, Int 3, Int 5, Int 6, Int 7). For those who had suffered, their individual experiences seemed to increase their understanding and awareness of mental health. Ultimately mental health was considered variable and changing with

positive mental health being associated with feeling content and being able to function appropriately and productively (Int 7, Int 20, Int 21).

“Mental health is how you feel about yourself, how you feel about others, how you feel about the world.” (Int 11)

The notion of feeling and thinking being strong indicators of mental health persisted in the answers given. Feelings are unquantifiable, as are our thoughts.

“Mental health is a combination of how I think and how I feel. So if I am mentally healthy my cognition and emotions will be working well, doing well.” (Int 13)

The ability to act appropriately and productively was associated with good mental health and was arguably synonymous with living life free from extreme and predominantly unpleasant sensations and cognitions (Int 6, Int 20). Productivity was not exclusively considered within the context of formal work or paid employment, it also included non-paid work in relation to parenting roles, care work, and other household activities such as cleaning and cooking. Being able to parent and perform mothering and caregiving roles and duties was also considered to be a sign of positive mental health.

“I guess mental health is to be able to look after my children properly. On a real personal level, I guess it's being able to get up in the morning and being able to make sure that they are thereby the end of the day.” (Int 7)

For several participants, mental health included spiritual qualities that directly related to wellbeing. These attributes often appeared to transcend convectional and ‘normal’ thinking and language use, and there was no way to quantitatively measure these contributions. This could be argued to be the self as discussed in Chapter 2 in the Literature review section. The self is unique and is why each person will experience the world differently; this includes how they experience and interpret and self-understand their environment/s and nature-based experiences.

“For me, mental health is thoughts and feelings, but for me also there is a spiritual aspect and when I say spiritual, I mean the essence of the person. Again, something other than thoughts and feelings. People would refer to the soul or the essence. The core of the person, again it’s not going to show up on an X-Ray.” (Int 22)

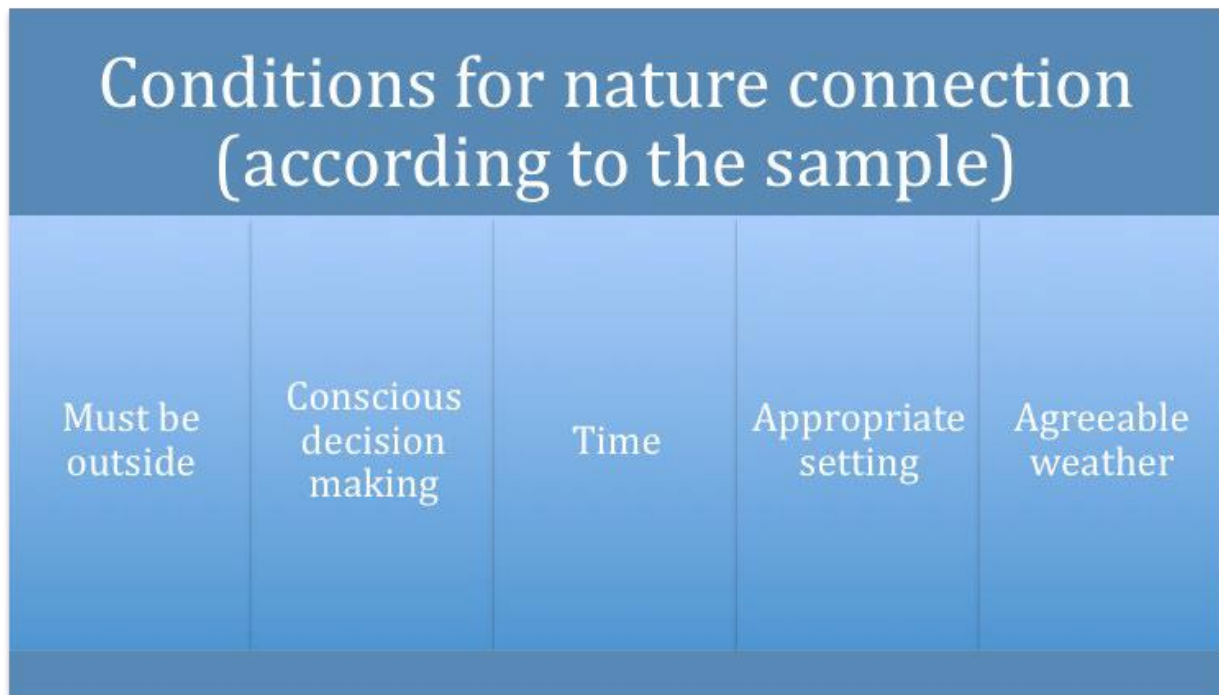
What appeared to be a strong indicator of positive mental health could best be described as eudemonic experiences, these conjured up feelings of wellness, contentment and fulfillment. This often seemed to be why the sample associated positive mental health with their relationship with the natural world. Words such as peace, contentment, joy and happiness were used often by participants to describe their time spent in nature and their reflections on that nature experience. These words all apply to *eudaimonia* and sensations and associations with it.

Conditions for nature connection

Nature connection and its meaning/s are central to the research and phenomena under investigation. If we use the definition of nature provided by interviewee, that being in nature means being outside and amongst living things, then we can establish that simply being outdoors is not what most people are referring to when they refer to nature-based experiences and connecting with nature. This next section will establish the conditions that are possibly required, for a nature connection to occur by the sample. A simplified definition for nature connection is that it refers to a nature-based (outdoor) experience that holds meaning and significance for the person. These conditions have been produced because of comparing the responses given by participants and their experiences and nature-based reflections. This list of conditions aims to explore and explain the concept of nature connection relating to all of those interviewed for this study. Whilst these features may be helpful for the reader to increase their understanding of what is needed for nature connection to take place it is also important to understand that this list will not be exhaustive. The concept of nature

connection will have been defined and explained in detail in previous chapters (Chapter 2 - Literature Review) and will continue to be further developed in subsequent chapters (The Analysis and Conclusion- Chapters 6 and 7).

Figure 11- Conditions for nature connection.



Source: Created by author for this thesis, 2022.

Must be outside

In the data analysis, every participant associated nature with being outdoors and detached from buildings and from being closed in. This condition was strengthened when participants were asked to consider no longer being able to spend time in nature. Several participants associated this with incarceration or being unable to access outside spaces. This strong identification with nature experiences and being outside was identified as having freedom and agency. This was a strong association that permeated most of the findings and interviews of this study.

“Just literally being outdoors I see as being in nature and I talked about this a number of times. Just coming out of a building and being underneath the sky again.

You know, I feel some sort of, something happens when I go outdoors and I am under the sky. And that could be getting out of my car and walking across the car park and coming into the building. Or coming out of the house.” (Mark)

The idea of not being able to access nature directly was made explicit by one participant, who related an inability to connect with nature with being imprisoned. This idea that nature experiences were freedom and therefore other experiences, settings and activities were not spaces where people were able to be free was explicitly mentioned in numerous interviews.

“That would mean sort of like being in a prison or something. You know if you were not in nature.” (Mary)

This seemed to be one of the most valuable parts of the nature experience, the outdoors component. Space and spatial awareness were mentioned in the interviews, with one person (Emma) stating they often felt claustrophobic inside in meetings and situations where access to the outdoors was limited or denied. One participant spoke about how when they run in the park as opposed to on the streets, it is for a feeling of “expansiveness”, the feeling of having room to move and breathe freely (Roisin). This sense of freedom and liberation was associated with being outside and in natural settings. This sense of freedom was also linked to having the perceived liberty to do as they please or as they like in these environments. Again these feelings or evocations of freedom seem to be juxtaposed to other environments or settings, where people felt restricted. These restrictions were linked to work and work environments, many participants spoke about their nature experiences as antidotes to work. They were opportunities to unwind, recharge and rejuvenate. Work and caring responsibilities such as domestic chores and childcare are not freedom for most people, feelings of freedom are most associated with feelings of autonomy and freedom of choice and movement and many people experience nature-based experiences as windows of time where they experience and enjoy a sense of freedom.

Daylight hours and the light was mentioned by many interviewees, suggesting that nature connection was most associated with occurring during the day. There were

a few references to winter and a change in mood also, which suggested that daylight was strongly preferred (Emma, Timmy). The exception for this was for those who enjoyed camping when they spoke about sleeping out under the stars in hammocks and doing this with groups of people.

“Camping, I actually like. Staying out overnight in a forest adds a whole other level, then just walking. Walking is, it's like dipping your toe in and staying overnight in the forest is like having a good long swim.” (Maggie)

Seasonal Affective Disorder (Seasonal Affective Disorder) was mentioned in interview two when the person revealed that they believed they possibly suffered from the condition because their mood was affected by the decrease in daylight hours (DSM-5, 2013). This association with being outside was present in every interview, but the association with daylight was less pronounced in a few interviews where camping was discussed (Cathy, Maggie, Lorna). Exposure to the outdoors and the elements was an absolute for all those interviewed. There was no referral to vicarious nature-based experiences or technology-aided activities such as looking at images of nature on computer screens, watching nature-based documentaries or meditation or relaxation exercises utilising nature sounds.

“Being outdoors and being immersed outdoors, but I suppose it's different. Nature to me is walking the dogs outdoors going for a run or going surfing. Being I suppose in the elements. being off your phone, off technology, going back a bit to be outdoors. That is the main thing I think of.” (Timmy)

Conscious decision-making

There appears to be a conscious decision-making element involved in the process of nature connection. Whether that is by deciding to notice the surroundings, the natural world or the outdoor space around the individual, or by deciding to prepare or plan an event, a trip, a walk or choosing an activity or choosing to do something spontaneously is itself an intentional act. Being outside was not always considered enough to be

connected to the natural world, but when a conscious effort was made and awareness was introduced to the activity, the ability to connect appeared to be heightened.

“I take myself away. I have to consciously make an effort because we do have a busy life and I do work and I have a family so I do have to consciously put time aside to say that I am going outdoors. The hardest part I think is just getting on the boots. Once I get the boots on, I could go any way. It’s like anything, once you get there you can do it, but it’s getting there. It’s like anything, like going to the gym or going to work, once you get there, you can do it, but it’s getting yourself there.” (Una)

The decision-making component would appear to differentiate between nature connection and merely being outdoors. Being outdoors does not automatically mean being connected to the natural world. A conscious or potentially sub-conscious or unconscious decision-making process could lead to a perceived nature connection experience. This component differs from being outdoors and not experiencing any connectedness or feelings of connectivity to the natural world. The decision-making also suggests that there is an intention with these activities and the intentions are often linked to self-care. The previous quotation demonstrates how nature connection activities are often seen in a similar vein to going to the gym or going to work. For some people, they are an important event that they must do to stay well, healthy and happy.

Time

Time was an important aspect of nature connection. The amount of time varied from person to person. Several individuals connected with nature daily (Int 1, Int 2, Int 5, Int 21), several weekly (Int 2, Int 13), and some spoke about less regular occasions of connection (Int 8, Int 9, Int 15). To some, it was a necessity and they felt claustrophobic if they could not be outside engaging in their preferred activities (Emma, Alan), for others they connected less frequently and did so via camping trips or kayaking expeditions (Cathy and Clint). One participant spoke about connecting through Art,

Poetry and Photography and this engagement might take a few moments and involve stopping the car and taking a photograph as described here:

“I find myself stopping my car regularly to take photographs because I love watching clouds, I love watching the interplay of sunshine, I love being beside the beach, every space has a different texture.” (Tegan)

Stopping briefly and noticing surroundings was noted by a few interviewees (Mark, Niamh, Tegan, Debbie). It seemed that most participants identified nature connection with more immersive and time-consuming events, taking more than a few moments to engage with the natural world. Walking, gardening, surfing, and cycling were all mentioned as nature-based activities, as well as hiking expeditions, camping trips and outdoor holiday experiences. When asked about the most positive experiences in nature a few participants discussed holidays (Emma, Cathy, Nathan, Mary). Holidays are often associated with relaxation (and are, at root, time and experiences away from ‘work’) and when on holiday many people may have more time available to them to connect with the natural world. Family holidays were mentioned as important events which allowed extended periods of nature-based activities.

“I suppose it's always been a massive part of my life, so when we were young we would always go on holidays and be dragged up mountains all the time and it was always in the UK and Ireland that we would holiday. We would never go abroad; oh I suppose until later on when we went to France and stuff. My early years were always drudging round in the rain and I think that's a really good thing because you get to know your own place, where you're from rather than just jetting off to Spain or elsewhere.” (Emma)

The amount of time and frequency of nature experiences varied for each person, for some daily small visits were what they enjoyed, others spent less time and did not feel like they required daily nature contact. Time was an important component and aspect relating to nature-based experiences, for some the temporal aspect was more important

than for others, thus illustrating the subjectivity in terms of how much time was deemed necessary and what time represented to each person.

“I would go for a walk nearly every day and it can just be a walk through the park or a walk down to the water and that is really all it has to be. I don't expect, it doesn't need to be an amazing, sort of adventure day it can be just as simple as a fifteen-minute walk through the park.” (Niamh)

Appropriate setting

The setting needed to be a space where the participant believed immersion and contact with nature could occur. While all involved in the study associated being in nature with being outdoors. The conditions required of that outdoor space varied from person to person. The optimal conditions differed for each of those interviewed and the requirements also changed. The setting chosen was significant to how the participants felt about the interaction.

“Well I live quite close to a park but it's not the same thing as going to the Mourne. It's almost like artificial.” (Cathy)

For some people, the setting could be in a car park or at the side of the road, as mentioned in the ‘time’ section of this theme (Mark, Tegan). However, for some participants, the location or the level of nature quality had to be to their taste for nature connection to occur for them. For Una, mountains were how they connected through hiking, which they did both alone and in groups. Whereas Fiona preferred structured and manicured nature settings which were less wild and more managed. This preference enabled connection on the terms of each person and promoted a sense of safety and contentment. For some people the maintained spaces were preferential and thus it became evident that humanised nature spaces can offer safety and a sanctuary that wilder spaces may not be able to accommodate for certain people.

“I don't really like to go somewhere that's just completely wild. I love to look at that but I don't like to be physically in it. So the like of somewhere that is a structured path. This path will take you to and there is a waterfall and there is this and this. I love anything like that. I suppose it's just finding what works for you.”

(Fiona)

The definition of the word nature would influence the setting, location or space identified with nature-based experiences. An immersive, connected experience was leaving a building for some people, while for others it involved being transported to more remote natural locations. Leaving a building does not require much planning preparation and resources, while going kayaking for a full day would. This again reflects that each person perceives their relationship and their choice of activities by their beliefs, opportunities, and preferences. Again, this highlighted that work, work practices, including care work, and modern living influenced the nature connection activities for certain people. This depended on how they viewed nature and what their preferred nature-based experiences were.

Agreeable weather

The weather was a determining factor for a high proportion of participants. Cold conditions and rain were often identified as unfavourable for nature connection. Extreme weather, meaning storms or conditions that were potentially dangerous were deterrents to nature-based activities and the opportunity for some participants to enjoy nature connection. These conditions suggest that nature connection was perceived as a leisure activity or enjoyable event, which needed to be pleasing to each person for them to get the necessary and desirable outcomes relating to health and wellbeing.

“Weather. At the minute it's getting dark about 4, so potentially daylight. Weather as well. If it's constantly raining you tend not to go out as much. I did find I would naturally be way more outdoorsy in the summer. I try to get out every day. But in the summertime particularly, when it is a bit warmer, a bit more welcoming, I naturally spend a bit more time outdoors than I would in the winter.” (Timmy)

The weather was mentioned in quite a high proportion of interviews and weather was an obstacle to several interviewees. Some of those who discussed weather associated rain and cold conditions as unfavourable and as potential obstacles to nature connectivity (Timmy, Niamh, Mary). The rain was mentioned most often as being a determining factor regarding the quality of the nature immersion event. Rain was also spoken about as having different qualities and some types of rain were more tolerable than others.

“There is not too many limitations, obviously the weather. I don't mind the cold, when I walked over here today it was beautiful crisp and nice but when it's raining, it's ok sometimes but when it's horrible, horrible, horrible rain.” (Niamh)

Weather and weather events often determine what activities take place. If weather is preferable there is a greater chance of nature connection occurring. Weather was noted as the most mentioned negative aspect or element that evoked negative nature experiences. This next section of the findings chapter introduces the main themes that emerged during the research.

Thematic Analysis

Three themes will be explored in depth in this section.

- 1. Work and Leisure and nature connection**
- 2. Activism**
- 3. Process for reconnecting with nature**

Theme- Work– Employment and Reproductive Labour

Work could be both a barrier and enabler to nature connection, depending on the job and the line of work of the participant and the work being considered, as work can take many forms particularly when thinking in terms of ecofeminism and reproduction, care labour and societal gender roles and expectations. Paid employment and finances influenced the frequency and decision-making component of nature connection, that meant that employment and income influenced how participants engaged with the natural world. For those employed within the conservation and environmental sector,

the stress of the job could paradoxically minimise and affect their relationship with the natural world. It could impede or hamper their ability to engage with nature on their preferred terms, this was highlighted strongly by Tam.

“I would find that when I was stressed out and it was something a counsellor said that helped. When I had had episodes and there were times I just couldn't think. Because nature was so much connected to my work I was doing the opposite until I could draw back and come out of the hypervigilant anxiety state that I was in. The episode at that time and what I wanted to do was come back to the stage where I could enjoy it for me.” (Emma)

Whilst the stress of working for environmental charities could induce stress associated with educating and facilitating nature connections for others. It could also promote further connectedness.

“If you want to be an environmental educator and you want to get people involved if you are not plugged into it yourself. You are going to have a really hard job convincing other of it. But if you are plugged in, people will pick up on that.” (Mark)

The theme of work-related stress was something that came up a few times in several of the interviews and is a possible area worthy of further inquiry. For some, their paid work complemented their life and ability to connect with the natural world (Emma, Niamh, Tegan) but for others, the opposite was true (Mark, Emma, Debbie).

“At the moment not enough for pleasure, most of it is for work. And it's odd because people would say oh you're so lucky, you do the XXXXXX XXXXXX, you're out. You're in here all the time. But I do find there is stress associated with that. It's not just work it's my own business, so I have to make sure that things go well. There is a lot of preparation, the time that I really enjoy being in nature is just going out with my kids for simple walks.” (Debbie)

The desire to merge the affection for and admiration of nature and work was reflected by several participants and there were several women who were developing enterprises and careers that mixed their love of nature with business and entrepreneurial ventures (Int 7, Int 13, Int 14, Int 19). Some were able to integrate this relationship into their working life more harmoniously than others. Whilst several in the sample were employed within the environmental sector, a significant number of interviewees worked within environments which could be considered oppositional to, or at least divorced from, the natural world, such as IT and public services (Maggie, Una, Clint, Graham). The research found that those who worked in jobs connected with the natural world often found it stressful and believed they didn't spend enough time enjoying nature (Mark, Tam, Debbie, Fiona).

"I was as I said in environmental education, very pressurised, I felt, in dealing with the people, whether it be the school structure, the group structure the parent structure that was involved in the project. And I just felt I couldn't do that anymore. I just couldn't do it anymore. And the core of it was I've always found being outside doing stuff outside has helped me so much, but the added factor of doing that as a job, with the responsibility of people, actually created a bigger stress." (Tam)

This observation would further support the assertion that nature immersion and nature connection are distinctive. Work and business would appear to impact how some individuals connect with nature and how they experience nature in their professional life. Tam spoke about the stress associated with trying to communicate their passion for nature professionally as a teacher. Eventually, they ended up taking an administrative role in the company because of stress. Working in nature was both a stressor and motivator to spend time outdoors. This participant felt motivated to spend more time outdoors and in nature because of starting to work in the sector.

"It's nice to have a reason to go outside. You know, if I wasn't actually interested in it (nature), I think I would find it very hard to get up and out and exercise and anything like that. So the fact that I have an interest in it makes me not sit on the sofa for as long. I'll say I'll go out for a walk this evening and watch TV or

something. But if you didn't actually enjoy nature or I didn't get anything out of it. Then I could easily just go home and sit in the house all day and not want to do anything.” (Niamh)

In one of the interviews a retired adult spoke about their relationship with nature and how it had evolved over their lifetime, they were eighty years old at the time of the interview. Public transport and accessing natural beauty was something they did regularly but as they could no longer afford to keep a car they were no longer able to visit nature sites as regularly as they would like. The impact of finances was something that impeded and influenced how people engaged with nature and how they spent time in nature.

“There was a lot of last year when I didn't have a car. So I was very restricted and I know that would limit an awful lot of people, you know if they don't live in..... I was very frustrated that I couldn't get to the shops. But say I lived somewhere urban and I didn't have greenways or something that I could go to. That would be just as limiting for them so yeah. I think it's access and even funds to an extent, you know not all of these places are free to go into.” (Debbie)

Holidays were spoken about and camping was mentioned by several participants. These activities were seen as experiences of freedom and were designated time away from work and other responsibilities and priorities. Cars as modes of transport and entry fees for green spaces were also touched upon (Debbie, Olive), and all of these affect how individuals access nature. The type of home people lived in was also a determining factor on nature connection. This was mentioned by Max and Fiona. Both participants referred to the impact of the pandemic and apparent increase in nature connection by members of the general population. Max stated that they were able to connect with nature without a garden. However, for Fiona they perceived lack of a garden was a possible obstacle.

“I have a front and a back garden. At the minute it is bringing to the fore people that don't have an outside space.” (Fiona)

While Max was able to connect with the natural world from their fire escape (see Chapter 4- Participants), it seems that those with outside spaces have a natural resource and space which will aid and support nature-based experiences. This suggests that finances and the size of the home and garden attached can enable nature connection consistently and more readily. Gardens, gardening and horticultural-based activities were mentioned by many interviewees.

Reproductive and unpaid domestic work were mentioned by several of the participants and were given as reasons why nature connection was problematic or why it was not able to happen as regularly or freely as they would like (Debbie, Mary, Una). Childcare responsibilities were also referred to by the participants and influenced how several participants organized their working lives and their leisure time. It was mainly the female participants who attempted to combine their nature experiences with their paid employment and who would arrange these events around their reproductive and caring roles and responsibilities (Debbie, Maggie, Una, Fiona). Social and family commitments i.e. care labour were cited as obstacles to spending time in nature. These obligations determined how easy it might be for individuals to make time to immerse themselves in activities and locations suitable for nature connection. These were often reflected by societal expectations and cultural norms and would vary in accordance to each person and their life. Their relationship with others, their routines, as well as work schedule would impact how and when they chose to spend time in nature. Therefore, these responsibilities proved to be constraining to each person to varying degrees.

“Definitely housework and I suppose like the dark nights and after a long day I suppose energy levels, the dark and chores. Domestic, domestic chores.” (Emma)

Domestic tasks were mentioned on two occasions as obstacles to spending time in nature, on both occasions it was females who discussed them as being a barrier.

“Doing chores and stuff like that, you know. Attending to things that you need to attend to. You know everyday mundane things.” (Mary)

The use of the word chores refers to domestic labour such as cleaning and cooking, which have historically been considered the work of women or those who spent the most time in the domestic sphere. This work, along with childcare and other reproductive forms of labour were tasks that impeded the ability to connect with nature for some of the participants. These forms of work are often overlooked and undervalued in many societies, yet they are necessary for a functioning home and a stable family environment. Chores, housework and childcare are all forms of work that could be considered barriers to nature connection, as they are deemed necessary and these barriers often impact women more than men. The stage of life, the number of dependents and whether the participant was a dependent was influential with regards to how they spent time in nature and how they connected with the natural world. This sub-theme links in with the stage of life sub-theme in the evolution of the relationship theme/ category. Commitments will vary from person to person and be influenced by factors such as gender, employment status and age.

Theme - Freedom- Personal Preferences/ Subjectivity

Group or individual activities

The complex nature of interpersonal relationships and how they affect mental health meant that human interactions and their connection with nature were nuanced. Social activities were commonplace with open water swimming (Tam), group walking (Olive), horticulture activities (Alan) and competitive sports (Eamon) all being mentioned by interviewees. Solitary activities were also popular with those with a strong connection to the natural world and confidence in nature spaces (Emma, Timmy, Niamh, Tegan, Debbie, Ted, Alan). One participant described living alone on a nature reserve for months (Debbie).

“I was there by myself for months and months and months. But I was actually OK because I had the reserve around me.” (Debbie)

Personality type seemed to affect how individuals felt about spending time in nature and whether it was solitary or social. Whether a person is introverted or extraverted may influence who they spent time in nature with and how they connected with natural spaces. Participant 11 reflected on how the way they engaged with nature and how social those interactions were, had altered due to their life circumstances associated with aging.

“Nature speaks to me. So, I don't necessarily need anybody else, because as I said my circumstances have changed, I'm not in the groups anymore. I do it on my own and sometimes I might have somebody with me and I'm quite happy.” (Olive)

The ability to connect with the natural world on each individuals' terms was strongly reflected in activities chosen and whether they did them alone or in groups. Interviewee 18 described themselves as “a hermit” with a preference for spending time alone and reflected that the pandemic had not impacted them or their life significantly, as they lived a life which they perceived as isolated and unsociable.

“The current COVID 19 isolation is meaningless to me; they haven't changed my life in any way. Apart from the queue outside the supermarket. (Ted)

Escapism from work and care labour/ Freedom

The relationship described by several participants suggested time spent in nature was a chance to have a break from their other responsibilities and roles and enjoy their time freely. The sense of feeling trapped by being unable to connect with the natural world suggested that they felt trapped indoors and nature was a form of escapism from their everyday lives and routines, and the expectations and demands of domestic and professional life. These feelings of entrapment were most often linked to their working life and employment requirements. This sense of freedom was also articulated in the

childhood memories and many of the positive associations with natural surroundings and green and blue spaces and freely exploring wild and green spaces. Incarceration is how several participants believed they would feel if they were unable to connect with nature. This observation suggests that time in nature offers a sense of freedom and adventure that other areas of their life cannot provide or facilitate.

“I’d feel intense, a bit stressed. Yeah, I couldn’t imagine being in a box all day long. I’d feel boxed up claustrophobic.” (Timmy)

The opposite of incarceration/ imprisonment is freedom, and several members of the sample associated their nature-based experiences as being liberating and feeling a sense of freedom.

“It gives me a huge sense of freedom. There are no expectations from it. There’s no judgment. It’s just there. It’s there without judgment. I suppose. With humans and work and everything else it comes with an element of something is expected of you. Or you are being judged in a certain way. With Nature there is nothing, it is just complete freedom.” (Una)

This sub-theme was substantiated strongly by the participants’ responses to being asked to consider how they would feel if they were no longer able to spend time in nature. The responses reflected how that notion was unpleasant to most of the cohort and several believed they would get ill quickly. They believed that this loss of nature contact would be hugely detrimental to their life and health.

Relaxation, rejuvenation, restoration and stress relief

All the participants, with the exception of one, associated spending time in nature with feelings of contentment, peace, calm, and joy. These sensations and these associations support the claim that time spent in natural settings is relaxing and conducive to stress relief. This was supported by most of the participants.

“It would be a lot of peace and calm and just that feeling of freedom. Whenever I went for the walks it would have been just by myself and I was taking in all my surroundings. I found a lot of peace with that.” (Max)

These feelings and sensations were spoken about by those participants who volunteered that they had poor mental health, either currently or historically.

“I’d feel, nature has always, going out there and relaxing in sort of Gardens, taking a breathtaking a moment back has really helped me with me fighting back and battling my depression.” (Nathan)

These observations and reflections suggested that even in times of mental ill-health, nature experiences may offer respite and relief for those who are suffering. Whilst they were able to help people manage mental health conditions and concerns by giving people respite and moments of peace from their busy lives or problematic relationships, these nature-based experiences were not able to buffer or protect participants from mental distress and frequent relapses or episodes of poor mental health.

Exercise and nature

Exercise and purposeful activity seemed to play an important part in how individuals spent time in natural settings. Very few participants spent time in a passive or sedentary manner when in natural settings. The activities and the amount of physical exertion required to participate in each pastime varied in terms of ability, age, and preference. Activities such as gardening were included in the data, as well as more physical activities requiring additional efforts such as surfing, wild swimming or kayaking. The more physically demanding sports such as competitive sailing, mountain biking, running, and hiking holidays and expeditions were also cited and created nature-based experiences which required more in-depth planning and increased levels of fitness and agility. Exercise played a role for most of the participants, however,

exercising in the elements or outdoors provided a different experience than exercising in a gym or indoor area.

“I mean I'm a big fan of exercise as well I love to exercise, and the benefits of it, and I like doing exercise in nature. I would go running in the park, or go walking in the park, in the forest at the weekend. I just feel better for being outside. It's the space.”
(Roisin)

The activities chosen varied greatly whilst appearing to have similar effects in terms of wellbeing and stress release. The wealth of activities noted by participants reflected the diversity in the ways individuals spend time in natural settings.

“I like being active I suppose, activity. After a spell of activity, it's nice to sit and be in it as well. I would find it hard just to sit there, as I'll probably get cold. I like to be physical like doing something like running or surfing or whatever or even working.” (Emma)

Nature-based activities and experiences

Where people engaged with nature was significant and has been mentioned previously with regards to nature connection. The location and activity as a reflection of the person and their personality seem to explain the personal quality of these experiences. When asking about preferences the detail given by participants was extremely illuminating. Whilst the location is significant to the ability to connect, equally so would seem to be the chosen activity in the natural setting. Timmy attempts to explain how different activities in different settings have different outcomes.

“In a perfect day I'd do both. I love surfing, but it's hard to put a preference on that because they are so different. In surfing, I'm out on my own and I'm not really thinking I'm just completely engaged in the act of surfing and in the sport of it. Whereas walking and running with the dogs is a time where I'm thinking about what's going on in my head and checking in on myself.” (Timmy)

The sensory experience and preferences played a role in the type of activity selected. For individuals who had a strong and substantial relationship with nature, they had a stronger and more articulate way of defining how they preferred to engage.

“I love open water swimming. I’m a water baby, I love the water. Barefoot is very important to me and I’m wondering is that a throwback to childhood. When I’m in nature I like to feel it. I quite like being cold and barefoot. I’m careful, safety and whatnot. But I wouldn’t be one for one the big boots and waterproof jacket. I wouldn’t be one for hood up, I like to actually feel and experience it, rather than be separated from it.” (Lorna)

Theme – Barriers and enablers- Process of reconnecting with nature- Location- Urban and rural.

Access

Access to nature locations was mentioned by several participants. This was predominantly a concern for urban dwellers and those who did not have transportation to nature spaces (Int 8, Int 9, Int 11). Accessibility and lack of appropriate spaces meant that some people considered some nature experiences to be of greater value than others. Where each person lived and worked impacted their level of engagement. Factors such as urban development could affect accessibility and alter the amount of green space around homes. When this student was asked about what obstacles there may be to spending time in nature, they referred to recent developments around their home.

“Yeah, another one is there used to be loads of green fields around my area and they have been built up. Massive housing developments and all that, which is a shame.”
(Nathan)

For some urban dwellers, they were able to access local parks and green spaces, but their level of satisfaction with these experiences was reflected in how they felt about these spaces (Mary, Roisin, Maggie). For some participants, mountains were required for their preferred experience (Una), was as for others a run in the local park was sufficient (Roisin). For some people stepping outside into the fresh air was an experience (Mary) and spending time in a garden was pleasurable (Olive, Fiona). Rural living enhanced the accessibility to engage with and experience green spaces. Emma finished their interview by commenting on how they believed Northern Ireland was a comparatively difficult country for nature connection due to our strict trespassing laws and lack of public access walkways.

“I have lived in Northern Ireland for 7 years now. The only thing that would make me move back home is the right of way. There's not really a lot of ... there is no right to roam here. There is no look at a map to choose a path and going walk in nature and it all interconnects. Through people's farms and stuff. You really have to go, I think it's harder for people in Northern Ireland to connect with nature because, in my view, it might not be right for everybody because they have their dad's farm and uncle's farm to run around in. Because I suppose people have more of a connection to farms here, in the families. For me when I was growing up you could just cycle for 10 minutes and then you're on a path that could take you for miles and miles. Here you would have to go to the Mourne or to Cave Hill or Belvoir, I find it more limiting.” (Emma)

Time

This was one of the greatest barriers according to the sample. The notion of time and the impact it had on the likelihood of nature connection would suggest that it may be associated with being non-essential and not a priority for several participants. Time was

a factor that influenced all the participants and their ability to freely engage at will with the natural world. One of the youth strikers, Nathan, spoke about how their A-Levels were impacting how frequently they could spend time in nature.

“Obviously the pressure at school. You know having everything and getting your work done. So as the years go on I spend less and less time going out into nature and just sort of spending time and I’m having more work piled onto me. That’s a massive limit.” (Nathan)

This barrier was subjective as some of the sample associated nature connection with something time-consuming, whilst for others, it was something that could simply occur by stepping outside. It is also worth noting that for the older generations their childhoods were instrumental for developing this relationship. In the 5 time is a valuable commodity and children and young people are being pressed to spend extensive amounts of time studying and preparing for careers. If there is little or no time allocated to nature experiences in childhood, it will impact how they relate to the non-human world (Louv, 2008).

Influencers

The link between parents who were keen naturalists, botanists or gardeners was a theme that emerged early in the development of the research (Mark, Emma, Tam, Debbie). The relationship between parents showing interest in the natural world suggests that this may encourage or lay foundations for adults sustaining this relationship into adulthood. It was not a requirement to nature connection in adulthood, but it was a strong determining factor.

“My mum, though she wasn’t professionally taught was, is a very keen amateur botanist. When we were driving, she would just stop and she would keep a catalogue of flowers just as we be driving around, as a child.” (Tam)

Parents and their input and influence developed as a strong theme from the early stages of data collection. Parents were established as important for some interviewees because of their own nature connection and their relationship with the natural world. These interested parties supported their children and enhanced the relationship and

encouraged nature based and educational experiences which facilitated engagement and connection.

“You know growing up in a rural area, very much linked to the land in a lot of his childhood memories and things and nature and gardening being very important to him throughout his whole life. And growing up as a kid and being involved in that. You know going for walks and helping him out in the allotment. I used to think the only reason my Dad had kids was to make us work in the allotment at weekends.”
(Mark)

The role of parents as influencers supported the positive associations with nature connection and childhood. Whilst family holidays and parents and their various interests emerged as a strong theme, the strength and significance of their input diminished as data collection progressed and the sample diversified. The latter participants had fewer childhood nature-based experiences associated with parents and several stated their parents had no interest in the natural world. Privilege, land ownership and access to green spaces were common amongst the sample and the patriarchal influence of land being passed down to men, particularly farmers, was evident in the interviews. Owning land and having access to land was common for those who had parents as influencers.

Childhood memories

Recalling stories and memories was a theme that emerged with several of the participants. Some traumatic incidents occurred in natural settings; however, the associations were positive for the most part and the stories shared reflected that (Clint, Keith). Playing in fields and other natural settings were discussed on several occasions by participants of all ages (Mark, Timmy, Niamh, Max). Playing and exploration, which is often connected to adventure, was present in several interviews, with an association between adventure and the freedom associated with nature experiences referenced. Even participants who were brought up in urban settings spoke about accessing nature and natural settings with their friendship groups by exploring. This exploration again

evoked feelings of freedom which were always identified as positive and states to be desired (Maggie, Clint). Playing outdoors in childhood was spoken about by almost all the sample.

“One of the moments I have talked about in the past is me and my mates used to muck about down the fields and we had this thing called the “impossible, impossible”. Which is like this hedgerow which you had to kind of crawl through.”
(Mark)

Playing with friends or siblings was discussed by participants and the association with those nature-based experiences were recalled positively and were often associated as foundational to the relationship in adulthood. The sense of freedom, openness and exploration was strongly linked with childhood memories and nature-based experiences, particularly when recalling events with other children. The play was often unstructured, unscheduled and allowed for events and discovery outside and in nature spaces.

“So, from ages four to fourteen I was outdoors all the time. We were just outdoors. Very active, very imaginative childhood, you know building forts and running through the bush I was a bush baby”. (Lorna)

These associations with imagination, freedom and adventure in childhood were common amongst the older people interviewed and establish a strong and important connection with nature spaces representing something both positive and valued. Childhood relationships and associations are formative and for many of those interviewed these experiences in wild or green spaces were recalled with nostalgia and deep fondness. The expectations of children and adults vary and may differ from generation to generation, but for many of those interviewed, childhood experiences in nature represented a level of freedom, not allowed or facilitated while being closely monitored or supervised by adults. Linking nature with freedom as a child, may increase the likelihood to continue to make the association in later life.

Upbringing location and surroundings

Several participants described having a rural upbringing and this sub-theme emerged in the first set of the interviews. This prompted the interview schedule to include more childhood and upbringing questions to gather more specific data on this area. In the preliminary interviews, it was initially believed that the findings would support a strong correlation between rural upbringing and high levels of nature connectedness. However, as the interviews progressed evidence emerged that this relationship may enhance nature connection, whilst also not being as influential as it was initially considered. As reflected in the comment by interviewee 8 who was brought up in a city and was attending school at the time of being interviewed. They noted how rural upbringing would impact how they perceived the natural world and their relationship with it.

“If you’ve grown up somewhere in the countryside then you’re used to it, then you might find it very calming because it’s familiar. And maybe if you went to uni you would like miss it.” (Cathy)

This observation helps us to consider the possible differences in upbringing location and the potential effects in relation to the regularity of nature experiences in childhood. It is important to clarify that rural living and nature connection are not necessarily closely linked or compatible. Nature immersion or connection is not dependent on location but is about conscious decision-making and an awareness and appreciation of the natural world around you at any given moment. A person may connect with nature in a block of flats or an inner city and equally a person sitting on a secluded beach may not be connected to the natural world if their attention and concentration are elsewhere, such as scrolling social media on their smart phone. As several participants noted, to walk outside is to be in nature, suggesting that their connection with nature began when they were outdoors (Mark, Mary). Their conditions for nature connection were minimal, meaning that they were able to make this connection more readily. For others, the conditions required for nature connection were more complex and nuanced.

One participant commented on how they thought living in Northern Ireland could affect accessibility to nature for the population.

“You really have to go, I think it's harder for people in Northern Ireland to connect with nature because, in my view, it might not be right for everybody because they have their dad's farm and uncle's farm to run around in. Because I suppose people have more of a connection to farms here, in the families. For me when I was growing up you could just cycle for 10 minutes and then you're on a path that could take you for miles and miles. Here you would have to go to the Mourne or to Cave Hill or Belvoir, I find it more limiting.” (Emma)

Four of the participants interviewed, who worked in the conservation or environmental sector were brought up in England. All these individuals were brought up in rural areas in England. One participant was from New Zealand and grew up in a city which had access to natural spaces. Four interviewees had grown up in farming families, with another being from a family who had a smallholding. Over half the sample grew up rurally, but a significant number were city dwellers who had grown up in an urban environment.

Opportunities to engage

The opportunities for nature connection in childhood appeared to be significant when reflecting on their relationship with nature. For several growing up on a farm enabled them to get outdoors and access space to explore and play. Accessing nature was much easier for those who were brought up in rural locations and several of the participants were from farming families.

“Yeah, like even as children growing up we would have went outside without being told to go outside, you would just go outside. We have a big yard and fields around our house where we can just go and roam about and go outdoors. It's always been a part of what we do or a part of our upbringing. You wouldn't have thought about

it as we need to get outdoors. It just would have been going out and play hide and seek or or whatever you know?"(Timmy)

The accessibility to outside space and the freedom to go outdoors and play seemed to be a commonality that most of the sample shared. What this theme is highlighting is the importance of access and opportunities to have these formative experiences. A great deal of this will be influenced by factors such as parents, their jobs, levels of income, education and their levels of interest in what? Or who? This would mean that there is potentially a disparity and inequality between what children have these experiences available to them. It seems to matter what type of family they were born into, the location they were brought up in, the levels of interest and education of those parents, and the love, concern and interest parents expressed and showed towards their children.

Education and learning

"I've always loved learning and I think that that was a wee way to keep learning even though no it wasn't at a university or anything. it was just like a wee thing for me, so the more I learned, a walk in the park turns into, how many birds can you hear? how many birds can you see? how many things can you guess?" (Niamh)

Acquisition of knowledge and information seemed to enhance and strengthen the relationship between nature connection and positive sensory and mental experiences for the interviewees. Several participants spoke about how they loved learning about nature and that it was an important aspect of their relationship with the natural world (Emma, Tam, Alan). Alan spoke about how understanding plants and how they developed enhanced the satisfaction of their involvement with an allotment group. Niamh talked about their growing interest in ornithology and the positive feelings experienced when successfully identifying different birds while out walking. Knowledge of plant, animal and fauna species was also mentioned by Mark, Emma and Tam.

“If you can put a name to it and you know what is going on with that particular tree, it adds more depth, you notice more. I think being able to put a name to something, being able to name something is important.” (Alan)

For those educated in conservation or the environmental sciences, it was evident that their education played a pivotal role in their relationship with nature. Their experiences and perceptions of their time in nature were filtered through the lens of their knowledge of what they were observing, immersed in or connected with at any given moment. Most of those who spoke with in-depth knowledge of the natural world and with a degree of proficiency in ecological processes had upbringings where their parents were interested in environmental studies. And very often they had grown up in rural settings and households with access to natural spaces and land (Mark, Emma, Tam, Timmy, Roisin).

Theme - Evolution of the relationship with nature

All participants valued their relationship with nature with varying degrees of intensity and passion. Some individuals spent hours in nature every day with Emma estimating they spent 80% of their waking time outdoors and Eamon stating they get “twitchy” if they are not outdoors every few hours. The need to be outside at more regular intervals was much greater for some people than for others. While all in the sample agreed that time spent outdoors was beneficial for health, some seemed to require more frequent interactions and had a greater dependency on nature connection for wellbeing purposes than some of the other people interviewed.

How each person benefited or connected with nature was unique and particular to them. As the study unfolded and the themes emerged it became increasingly evident that the self was reflected in their favoured pursuits and pastimes regarding the natural world. How we perceive nature is a statement about us and not about this huge indefinable and ambiguous concept that encompasses so much life on the planet. Participants shared the common ground of respecting the natural world as they understood it from their perspective. Some were open to the fact that it may not benefit everyone.

“Whenever I’ve tried to get other people interested, not forced but tried to get other people interested. It definitely hasn’t always been met with the enthusiasm that I treat it with. I guess that kind of highlights that maybe it’s amazing for some people, but it might not be as effective for everybody.” (Niamh)

Point of connection

The idea that nature connectedness was constantly accessible for each person seemed strong during the first ten interviews particularly. However, the data suggested that nature connection could be constant for some such as Emma but not necessarily everyone.

“I suppose I don’t make a good case study because I haven’t had the flip side, I haven’t had the not being connected to nature and feeling stuck in or trapped or whatever. Whereas I have seen a lot of people who have felt like that, and they have come to work in the environment I’m in and they changed.” (Emma)

Nature connection is one of the central areas of interest in this study, however, being constantly in connection to the natural world was rarely considered to be the experience of most of the participants. Through the interviews, it seemed that some people had a greater awareness and relationship with nature throughout their life and others noticed it at different stages in their life. Interviewee 2 who worked in the environmental sector identified as someone who had a constant relationship with the natural world.

“I suppose it’s always been a massive part of my life, so when we were young we would always go on holidays and be dragged up mountains all the time and it was always in the UK and Ireland that we would holiday.” (Emma)

As did this participant who grew up on a farm.

“There hasn't been a transformation in terms of I was always indoors or on the PlayStation and then the light switch went off and I started going outdoors more. I suppose my upbringing and being in the countryside, outdoors has always been a part of it.” (Timmy)

For some, the point of awareness or establishing a relationship came later in life, often through accident or sometimes through their work. For one participant it was through their job as a care worker.

“I would never have been aware that there is a positive relationship until I discovered it for myself.” (Ted)

The relationship is not something that most people are conscious or aware of and some were able to reflect on points or times in their lives when they felt connected and other times when they did not. Ted discovered the relationship later in life after buying a property with substantial land connected to it as a financial investment. This led to curating the land and thus began his connection with the natural world. It was often through land ownership or accessibility and access to nature that people were able to make a connection that was meaningful and pleasurable.

Changing responsibilities

Childcare, work commitments and academic studies were all mentioned in the interviews as impacting nature connection opportunities and pursuits (Cathy, Nathan, Mary, Olive, Una). For several people, these responsibilities changed or impacted the amount of time they had to engage with nature. These responsibilities invariably took priority over nature connection.

“Maybe just things to do. Doing chores and stuff like that, you know, attending to things that you need to attend to. You know everyday mundane things.” (Mary)

Domestic responsibilities and caring tasks, housework, childcare, shopping and domestic administration, were some of the duties or forms of labour that inhibited the ability to freely engage with nature (Emma, Mary, Olive). Whilst parenting was mentioned in several interviews (how many? list these), caring for aging family members could also affect the amount of time designated to nature connection and the quality of the nature engagement activity.

“No in actual fact for the last little while, I haven't had time. And one of the reasons why is I'm very much in a process of caring for my parents who live quite a long way away. So that takes out a chunk every month.” (Emma)

These observations and reflections highlighted the importance of prioritising and organising the experiences and juggling them against work and care work commitments and obligations. For some their preferred nature-based experiences took more planning and commitment. This effort illustrated the importance of the relationship in their lives and highlighted the different ways that people liked to manage and organise their time spent in natural settings. Time availability to pursue nature experiences was something that fluctuated with changing responsibilities, family situations and career obligations.

Stages of life

Graham spoke about how they had been disconnected from nature in their earlier adult years because of their social life.

“Well, I'm 48 now so I'd say the last 10 to 15 years. When I was in my teens my 20's and probably my early 30's, I was very much into partying and friends and drinking and all that. And then I think as I grew up as I have children, I now appreciate it.” (Graham)

As people aged their priorities seemed to change and for some of the cohort this involved adapting how they engaged with the natural world.

“I do walk quite a bit. But there is not the same stimulation as there was say at the end of a group walk or something like that, that kind of thing. There is quite a bit of that over the years. I did some hill climbing and stuff like that I was very, very active when I had a car.” (Int 11)

For some people, their relationship with nature strengthened with age and it provided a refuge, a sanctuary and a hideaway (Clint, Graham, Ted, Eamon). This was the case for one of the participants who bought a smallholding as an investment and enjoyed spending time hiding on their land and avoiding too much human interaction.

“My goal was so I didn’t have to deal with people anymore and I could basically be a hermit. I had all that land and I had to do something with it. The whole thing just evolved from there.” (Ted)

Another participant reflected on how their life had changed and how different life events and stressors had enhanced and strengthened their desire to connect with the natural world. Eamon spoke about feeling the need to get out for a ‘release’ as they identified their relationship stronger with stress relief and sporting activities. Whilst their life had changed and the activities altered slightly, the desire to get outdoors to ‘release’ was consistent and they reflected on this in their responses. While their time at university was considered less stressful to their current life, they still felt a need to get outside to regularly de-stress.

“The pressures were very different, the life pressures. At university there were certain stages where you would have felt under pressure and you would have had to get out and use it as a release.” (Eamon)

Aging and the enhancement of the relationship with nature over their lifetime was suggested by several participants (Mark, Tegan, Clint, Graham, Ted). Those who reflected on aging and their affection for and admiration of the natural world often spoke about nature in nostalgic tones. They would often speak with reverence and recall

poignant memories or stories with deep meaning for them. Aging seemed to increase the likelihood of nature connection and heightened levels of nature connectivity. For the older persons interviewed the relationship between nature and positive mental health was generally complete and absolute. The strength in their affection for the natural world was captured in their willingness to engage in the subject and speak at length about it. It was also noted in how they promoted it to others and reflected on how that relationship had benefitted them over their lifetime.

“Maybe it's because I'm a bit older than the guys I work with and I know that I have suffered with mental health issues at different times of my life. Maybe it's a timing thing for some people where they haven't, they just haven't discovered it yet.” (Ted)

Theme - Mental Health/ Illness/ Distress in the Capitalocene/ Activism

The planetary emergency

There was some mention of the planetary crisis, particularly from the youth activists interviewed but there were hardly any other references to it and this omission is worth noting and considering. It was particularly interesting as several of the participants were employed in the environmental and conservation sector.

Grief

Grief connected to destructive and damaging processes was mentioned by the youth climate strikers and several other interviewees. Another participant spoke about how actions by their local council were upsetting for them to observe which were enforced because of strict regulations. They attributed these actions and behaviours to their belief that most people were “disconnected” from the natural world as stated in their interview.

“It's just wrong. It is wrong. Because people have become so disconnected, I think that really affects me as well. It's like why?” (Emma)

Being educated and aware of global environmental degradation could be detrimental to wellbeing, as 'bearing witness' to environmental destruction induced unpleasant

emotions and experiences. Those who do not have this relationship are less likely to experience and be impacted by the environmental actions of others. In one interview when asked about negative experiences with nature, the young person responded by discussing recent global environmental events.

“Like in Australia with them estimating over a billion animals dying, that's a negative experience.” (Cathy)

This clarified that for some people, being aware of the destruction and the damage to the environment, changed them on a personal level even if it was not affecting them directly. This is often referred to as eco anxiety, a mental health condition rooted in concerns relating to the climate crisis and ecological breakdown and exacerbated by government inaction.

Trauma

“I love being by the sea and when I was divorced, I managed to have a fairly long and chaotic career not having a lot of money, as my ex-husband left me in a lot of debt. So I had a shitty little Renault 5 car and one day I was feeling absolutely really low and I thought coming home from college I would drive. How lucky am I to Benone Beach? Because it was quite stormy that day the car got hit by a tidal wave.” (Tegan)

While weather and negative experiences were mentioned frequently in the interviews, death and near-death experiences when in nature were mentioned on a few occasions. One incident involved a boat capsizing (Mark), one a tidal wave (excerpt above from Tegan), and one interviewee spoke about finding a body on a river whilst out kayaking (Clint).

These traumatic experiences were not enough to stop these participants from appreciating and engaging with nature, but the mental health impact of these events was substantial. However, the results of these experiences did not deter from further engagement, quite the opposite in fact. Clint who found a dead body when out kayaking went on to volunteer in an outdoor activities capacity to support local

people with their mental health. Trauma may often lead to avoidant behaviours, this experience motivated and inspired this individual to engage in actions that would benefit others. There can also be a transformative and motivational component to trauma and in many instances, traumatic experiences can be integrated and used to promote growth and encourage change on an individual level.

Stress

While the de-stressing benefits and qualities of nature immersion are well documented (see Literature Review – Chapter 2). It is worth noting that nature-based experiences can be stress-inducing or stressful. Time spent in nature can lead to discomfort, distress and irritation depending on the conditions, events and preferences of each person. It was noted that large amounts of nature connection affected how this participant felt about indoor spaces.

“I didn't use to be claustrophobic, but I think since I spend more and more time outside with lots of space. I feel more confined easily, more easily. So I know that's one negative thing of being outside a lot.” (Emma)

Most interviewees were effusive about the natural world and their commentary was positive and almost utopian in tone and sentimentality on occasion. However, there were stressors identified with nature and nature-based experiences. This interviewee reflected on how the context of the experience needed to be considered in terms of whether nature induced happiness.

“Well it depends, I mean if there was a naturally occurring poisonous snake, I wouldn't be very happy. Or like a cliff or something. It depends on the context.” (Cathy)

Anxiety

The term “climate anxiety” was used in both interviews that were conducted with the youth climate strikers (Cathy and Nathan). Both these young people named this as a condition that required more attention and acceptance and that affected large numbers of people.

“I just think it's important about getting out the fact that the climate crisis can cause mental health issues and it's about how you can deal with that. And that's why I got really interested in getting to engage with your research project.”
(Nathan)

This anxiety existed as a direct result of the environment and the global climate issues. The growing use of environmental terms, increasing awareness of climate science and mental health language saw the emergence of terms such as ‘climate anxiety’. These terms then began to enter the vernacular of certain sections of the population.

“I think climate anxiety is a big issue and it needs to be discussed because there is a lot of stigma around it.” (Cathy)

It was the interviews with young people that led to this theme being explored in further depth. The notion that nature connection may have wellbeing disadvantages was suggested in previous interviews. It was in interview number 8 where the first challenge on the complete relationship between nature connection and positive mental health was completely questioned.

“Well, I mean I live in the city, so I'm not in nature and massive amounts so it probably wouldn't affect me overly but I just enjoy it. I'm doing my Duke of Edinburgh and it's in nature and I'm excited. Like but it's not the end of the world if I don't.” (Cathy)

This interviewee stated that they believed that nature connection was not essential for their wellbeing. The other young person interviewed felt differently and had a stronger sense of desiring a personal connection with nature. Both were motivated to actively

protect the natural world through their activism, but both had very different personal views and opinions on how nature impacted them personally.

“To me, nature means this wonderful other sort of world beyond this urban city high-rise life. this amazing sort of world out there, which we are so lucky to have but which we could lose so quickly if we don't act. “ (Nathan)

Another interviewee said they didn't know much about the subject but wanted to be included in the research as they were becoming increasingly aware of environmental issues. This person was retired and in their seventies.

“Well, I think it's I've noticed it more lately because it's more topical at the minute. So that people's consciousness..... you're made more aware of it. Ordinary people like myself are more aware of how the environment is being contaminated.” (Mary)

The data collected highlighted fascinating and informative narratives about each individual and their lives. The personal preferences of each person appeared to strongly suggest that the relationship with nature reflected the self and was paradoxically separate from the natural setting or the environment we live in. The observations, preferences and descriptions all accounted for the individual and not the atmosphere or the setting necessarily.

As the research project continued the theme of nature reflecting our inner worlds and mental and cognitive processes became more evident as the varying descriptions and accounts unfolded from each of the interviews. Events and experiences were value-laden according to the beliefs of the individual in question, and incidents and experiences became emotionally heightened or weakened by the significance given to them by the person who experienced the events. These recollections as moments of wonder, extreme awareness or meaningful events, were only granted meaning by the person experiencing them. An individual could easily sit on a beach and observe the

same scene recalled by participant 3 in their interview, but they may not be choked with emotion and feel overwhelmed with gratitude in the presence of the event they are experiencing. The event and its significance of it were heightened by the beliefs, sensations and mindset of the observer. These heightened sensory experiences and observations and the strength of the feelings connected to them may lead the researcher to conclude that in nature and with nature connection senses may become heightened for some people and with that overwhelm may occur. This observation would also be supported by non- academic literature that associates nature experiences with sensual and emotive experiences (Abram, 2012, Blackie, 2016).

In interview 1 the participant related a story about appreciating ourselves through nature when we see something that makes us smile that is nature appreciating itself or “nature smiling at itself” (Int 1). This reflected their observations and their knowledge of the natural world, for them, the way they perceived nature and their relationship with the natural world was free of judgment. They experienced joy in their observations and interactions and walking past a hawthorn tree brought a smile to them. Walking to their car from work under the sky made them feel connected and feeling a strong breeze whilst out walking led to feelings of exhilaration (Int 1). This person was one of the most content and fulfilled of all those interviewed and their relationship with the natural world reflected that.

All participants valued their relationship with nature with varying degrees of intensity. Some spent hours in nature every day with interviewee number 2 estimating they spent 80% of their waking time outdoors and participant number 21 stating they get “twitchy” if they aren’t outdoors every few hours. The need to be outside regularly was much greater for some than others.

Nature connectedness, interactions and experiences were diverse and multiple. How each person benefitted or connected with nature was unique and particular to them. As the study unfolded and themes emerged the reflection of the activities on the personality or the self became increasingly evident. How and in what ways we perceive nature seems to be a statement about us and not about this huge indefinable and

ambiguous concept that encompasses so much. The participants shared the common ground of respecting the natural world and nature as they understood it from their perspective. Some were open to the fact that it may not benefit everyone (Niamh).

Conclusion

The themes identified from the interviews are varied and often overlap, however, they attempt to describe and affirm a relationship that is difficult to account for and define. For most of these individuals, the relationship between nature and mental health seemed to be absolute, however on closer inspection and through the lens of a critical analysis theory lens, all is not quite as it seems. The relationship is not without its conditions, sensitivities, downsides and exceptions. The link between positive mental health and a strong relationship with the natural world is not without problems particularly in the Capitalocene. When we begin to scrutinise from an ecofeminist position the issues and tenuous links become increasingly apparent. This is where the findings begin to show their real strength and potential in this field, in the unanswered questions, in the gaps in the knowledge, and because this area is seemingly primitive to many, whilst simultaneously also being irrelevant in the eyes of most of the general population. But who within the health disciplines are considering this within the wider and deeply problematic concern of nature connection in a time of climate breakdown? This thematic analysis did not support a complete causal connection between nature connection and good mental health. It showed that the sample believed nature experiences can be beneficial to mental health. However, these experiences and

relationships did not preclude or determine the mental health of participants. Mental health is impacted by multiple variables and whilst this research supports that having a relationship with nature is advantageous to mental wellbeing. It seems that the benefits experienced depend on variables that are contextual and also personal and unique to each person. Gender, age, social class, location and income were all influential on how nature experiences helped people to stay well in the Capitalocene.

The sample comprised of individuals with varying degrees of mental health problems and concerns and several with psychiatric conditions and disorders. The findings do not fully support the widely held narrative and belief that nature connection and nature-based experiences are exclusively and always good for mental health. There were significant mental health issues, disorders and diagnoses within the sample. Traumatic experiences and events were recalled and there were negative associations and experiences in natural settings including suicide, harm and disaster. Without a doubt, nature connection is something enjoyed and valued by the interviewees. Participants recalled many positive feelings and emotions in natural settings, but what cannot be ignored was the levels of ill health historically and presently within the sample and this observation introduced many new questions and concerns.

The more data that emerged, it became increasingly evident that the relationship was not only subjective but reflective. It reflected and described the individual. Nature was on occasion almost inconsequential when analysing the data and the interpretations by each person. The participants stories, their recollections, their choice of words, their mental health histories, their emotions, their choice of activities all reflected them and their self and while there were commonalities amongst the sample, fundamentally it was the self that they were describing and encountering when speaking about their experiences and their opinions of the natural world. Their sense of self informed and dictated how they understood all of their experiences and how these events were understood and integrated into their psyche and interpreted from their point of reference. All these perspectives suggested their relationship with their inner world and personality, their sense of self, was of more significance than the natural world around them. The natural world was given meaning by their thoughts, perceptions and education about their environment as opposed to how it actually was and what was actually happening in their environment. This assertion is best be

supported when reflecting on the relatively low number of participants who addressed the climate and ecological crisis directly.

When reflecting on the data and the information given, the concept and theme of acceptance was prominent throughout many of the interviews. The youth climate youth strikers could be argued to be unaccepting of their place in society and the events around nature and climate, and for them activism is a sign that they are not willing to accept things as they are, and it seems that nature connection are experiences that promote acceptance and accommodation with the 'status quo'. Many of the interviewees spoke about the relationship in peaceful and eudemonic terms and how it helped them feel peaceful and calm. The main priority for many of the participants interviewed seemed to relate to having a good life and living well. While they did not appear to be conscious nor explicit about this objective, it became apparent that living a fulfilling and worthwhile life through work choices and experiences in nature was important to many of those interviewed. Contributing to their communities and helping people with their work, was also strongly evident in the data collected.

This chapter highlighted some of the central themes that emerged when interviewing people in a western country on the relationship between mental health and nature. The next chapter analyses and discusses some of the key issues that these present from an Ecofeminist position, within the context of the Capitalocene. What can this work and these observations tell us about health and wellbeing in a time of climate crisis?

Chapter Six

Work, Self-Care, Activism and Flow in the Capitalocene.

The previous two chapters introduced the participants and the central themes that emerged from the interviews relating to work, the self and mental health. This chapter further analyses those findings through an Ecofeminist perspective and considers what these observations tell us about staying healthy, working and engaging with the natural world for wellbeing purposes at a time of climate crisis. The obligation to work in westernised and capitalist countries, and for most of the global population, is inescapable and relentless. Most societies and economies are organised in such a way that people are arguably born to work, and how people work and are rewarded for it is linked to their sense of worth and their quality of life. This chapter will introduce new arguments and alternative ways to think about work, particularly in relation to personal and environmental health. Many people must work hard to stay healthy and be able to be productive and function in this era, and this is regularly referred to as self-care and considered the duty of the individual to monitor, fund, organise and manage. This work is mostly unpaid and, in many instances, costly, and undervalued and is determined by factors such as gender, race and class, as these variables can significantly impact both health and employment. This chapter will discuss and analyse both self-care and political activism as important and necessary forms of work in the Capitalocene and discuss who benefits from this work and who carries the disproportionate burden of this work.

There will also be some discussion on how attaining a state of flow in the Capitalocene seems to relate to nature experiences as demonstrated in the previous chapters and the interviews given. This chapter will also discuss and analyse how some participants in the study appeared keen to mix their passion for nature with their duty to work, and this is possibly a neoliberal and entrepreneurial response to an era where innovative and profitable new ways of connecting and relating to the world are beginning to emerge. For many of the interviewees the relationship they enjoyed with the natural world was considered personal and unique, however the political influences

and factors were always present and represented by how they chose to engage and what they used these experiences to achieve. Nature experiences are *inherently political* in capitalist and industrialised countries, as the access to these spaces is limited and for many people these activities are dependent on a certain amount of wealth and privilege. The activities chosen by interviewees are influenced by legislation, social structures and cultural forces outside of the individual's sphere of influence and awareness. These relationships are not without boundaries and limitations enforced by dominant and oppressive systems of management and coordination that restrict and control the lives of the population. The freedom to relate to the non-human world is dependent on influences and decisions that most people are not conscious of or appear to be concerned about. For example, while the sample did not mention capitalism or patriarchy explicitly, the impacts of these systems were plain to observe in the interviews in how participants lived their lives, structured their days, engaged with nature and how they thought about themselves and the natural world. Domestic responsibilities and childcare impacted how much time was spent in nature, levels of income/wealth, access to a car or transportation were significant factors too, and land ownership was linked to how much people connected to nature. Farmers' children, small holding owners and people with gardens were strongly represented in the sample; these are signs of the impact of patriarchy/sexism, wealth, privilege and capitalism.

The themes that emerged and the way the interviewees related to the natural world reflected both their self and the political environment where these acts occurred. Several of the themes, namely Barriers and Enablers (Chapter 5) affirmed that access to green and blue spaces is not classless, fair or equitable. The sample was united in their recognition of the positive effects of nature immersive experiences. However, within the interviews there is little evidence of participants reflecting on or recognising that these experiences they all are so appreciative of, were unavailable to all sections of the population. In this way, nature experiences were an indication of privilege. At the same time, the interviews do not discuss the lack of public access to nature in Northern Ireland (except for Interviewee Two who mentioned Public Access Paths in England and the Right to Roam policies of Scotland).

Work and Career

The emphasis on career and career development was a common theme, even though none of the questions explicitly referred to employment and career (see APPENDIX 5- Interview Schedule). Perhaps this could be interpreted as a ‘commonsense’ view that it a) work and an identify of being a ‘worker’ is assumed, not least in structuring their lives and conditioning their aspirations, and that b) this identity was more prominent than an identity as an ‘activist’. The research premise was based on the relationship between nature and mental health, however it became apparent quickly that this relationship was strongly influenced by whether people were working or not. Participants’ lives were mainly structured around their jobs and almost all spoke of how they spent a lot of their time at work or recovering from work. While the association with work was strong, and the compulsion to work and the lack of autonomy within work was also evident in the interviews, this was in stark contrast to associations with nature, where interviewees reported experiences of freedom, autonomy, joy, pleasure and stress relief. Work was seen as a necessity and obligation, and often related to stress and lack of choice, rather than described as a negative or unpleasant feature of life. There were negative impacts and harmful consequences to unsuitable work environments and schedules, but work was neither perceived as good nor bad, just a ‘normal’ and ‘expected’ part of life. However, work was often strongly coupled with stress, discipline, control and being unable to be autonomous or freely connect with the natural world. Work is often seen as doing and engaging in processes where skills, knowledge and time are used in return for financial compensation, however this is an androcentric and anthropocentric way of defining labour. Work is not always paid, it can be voluntary, and unpaid work such household tasks and caring roles are often gendered, with women and girls doing a disproportionate amount of such ‘reproductive labour’. And not only is such work unpaid, it is also unrecognised and unacknowledged in not being included in official economic statistics or measures of the economy and work such as Gross Domestic Product (Barry, 2012). A lack of freedom of choice regarding the activity and the perceptions of the individual can be helpful when establishing if something is work or not. Do they feel an obligation to complete the task by their expectations of themselves? Does the task require effort? In an ideal world, and where their basic needs for food, heat, shelter, education, health, transport etc. were taken care of, would this be how they choose to spend their time and energy?

Career prospects and employment history were spoken about in the interviews and this seemed important for participants to share and reflect upon. This suggested that what people did affected how they perceived themselves and not only their sense of self, but also their sense of worth. Many seemed to enjoy using natural spaces to recover from the stress and negative consequences of their work practices. A degree of cognitive dissonance emerged when interviewees noted that humans are nature while at the same time unanimously agreeing that nature is a space and entity that we can be connected or disconnected from. If we are part of nature, how can we 'disconnect' from it? Equally, if we are part of nature, how can it be perceived as a space outside of ourselves, and somewhere we "visit"? These beliefs are ecologically problematic as they are a sign of human alienation from place and planet, or they may also relate to the uniqueness of humanity in being 'a part of and apart from nature' (Barry, 1995).

This sense of separateness may impede developing an acceptance of how dangerous things really are in relation to the planetary emergency and the serious threat this poses for all species and life on earth, including our species. This may lead us to consider that while nature connection is perceived as an activity that gives life meaning for some people, particularly those in positions where they have high-quality nature spaces available to them. Nature provides a space to escape the working self, the material self, the stressed and unhappy self, but this is not a luxury afforded to most people, and these nature experiences as markers of privilege, namely economically comfortable citizens in countries that are (at present) least impacted by the climate crisis, but whose societies and lifestyles are largely responsible for the crisis.

Work, as it was understood in this research, relates to how people use their time and productivity outcomes, these activities are most associated with obligations and duty, rather than leisure and enjoyment. Activities such as record keeping, family visits, chores, housekeeping, child-minding, after-school activities and school trips, as well as social events are all forms of work qua human labour. We have been conditioned to associate work with being a way that we purchase our way to freedom, which is an effective and deeply ingrained capitalist conditioning. 'Nature connection' is arguably a white middle-class leisure pursuit and a capitalist construct. This concept can help

individuals to enjoy good mental health but is limited in environmental and ecological value when other social and political problems, such as privilege, class, race and gender inequalities and injustices, are left unacknowledged, unrecognised and thus unchallenged. The fact we have accepted a rupture and disconnect from nature suggests we have accepted a rupture and disconnect from ourselves. Most people concede that people are nature, but their behaviour and beliefs suggest they see themselves as a higher form of nature or as a more dominant and superior form of life. The connection with nature may thus be considered through an extractivist, consumerist and instrumental frame, as opposed to meaningfully relating to other species and the environment (Lent, 2017).

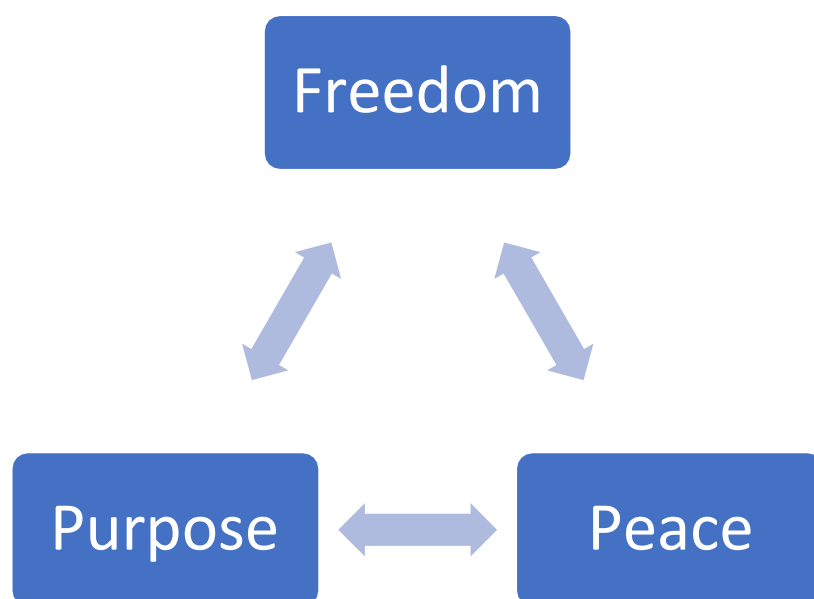
Flow and dissonance

In the Literature Review Chapter (Chapter 2), the concept of self-actualisation was introduced and discussed. This concept also appeared to be occurring throughout the interviews with participants striving to embody and create lives of meaning, purpose and contentment. The process of actualisation involves the individual striving to become the best version of themselves possible (Moore and Shantall, 2003). This ideology centres on principles and epistemologies that celebrate individualism and hierarchy and are rooted in patriarchal capitalism. To become actualised involves being in the present moment and accepting things as they are and the interviews suggested this was happening when people described experiences that seemingly helped create a sense of flow, balance or homeostasis through nature-based experiences. Nature connection presents itself as a soothing and healing activity but may become another way to anaesthetise people to the current environmental crisis and become an activity which is similar to going to the cinema or a music concert, another activity used to distract or entertain. The sense of flow or feelings of peace and contentment could potentially impede critical, political and potentially transgressive thinking patterns. These findings could be used to argue that many people (knowingly or unknowingly) engage in consciousness-numbing activities that anaesthetise and shelter them from the harms and exploitative consequences of capitalism in general and formally paid,

compulsory work in capitalist economies. The consciousness-numbing aspects of the relationship relate to the locations they visit, the access they have to high-quality wild spaces and the resources available to them to help them stay healthy and well, as outlined /expressed by many participants in Chapter 5. Paradoxically, their ability to use these practices to stay healthy and economically productive while they remain apathetic or apolitical about the climate crisis will invariably make them better workers within the capitalist system.

These feelings associated with attaining flow states through nature experiences seemed to depend on three general variables. They were a sense of freedom, a general satisfaction with their life and career and generally good mental and emotional health. While all of these are subjective and open to interpretation, it was the sense of enjoyment and satisfaction that the combination induced within people that seemed to provide the optimum therapeutic benefit. The flow like state which was described by a number of the sample related to them being completely immersed in the environment and fully engaged with the task or activity they were doing, this created a sense of wellness and equilibrium that is often associated with self-care practices such as mindfulness, meditation and yoga, it brought the full attention to the present moment.

Figure 12- Flow diagram



Source: Created by author for this thesis, 2022.

Flow is a term that is not quantifiable; it is experiential, rooted in sensory and relational experiences and is influenced by gender, socio-economic factors and the demands of capitalism. It is rooted in the experiences and the connection of being in the present moment and being alive to what is happening inside and outside and experiencing the peace and contentment which so many people pursue and crave in this time of chaotic and overwhelming personal and planetary upheaval and disarray. These windows of experiences where everything feels peaceful and meaningful provide opportunities for the self to relax, recover and enjoy life. The three qualities or variables that seemed to contribute to enjoying our feeling a sense of flow were having a sense of freedom or autonomy in their lives, feeling a sense of achievement and purpose in their lives through their work and feeling contentment or good mental and psychological health, when these areas were balanced flow was more likely to happen or occur. Achieving or maintaining flow in the Capitalocene would seem to be affected by wealth, power and privilege and something that is more easily and generally achieved by men. Care giving roles and responsibilities can impact whether someone can achieve flow. For some women this may be achieved through care giving roles but for several of those interviewed their experiences were that their domestic and caregiving roles did not help them to achieve or maintain a flow state.

The findings state that what we do for work and income has an impact on how we relate to others and the non-human world. Work also controls how we structure and organise our time and our lives, as many participants either implicitly or explicitly stated (Chapter 5). One of the great successes of Ecofeminists such as Federici and Salleh, is how they argued to broaden and re-construct how we think about production, labour and work (Federici, 2012, Salleh, 2017) and the need to include the reproductive sphere and its work and experiences in our thinking and acting. One of the main contributions made in this research relates to how we think about work and how we define it in the era of the Capitalocene. In this chapter an argument will be made that both activism and self-care are forms of work and these are often underpaid and undervalued, but essential to good health in the context of the planetary crisis. These activities play an important part of preserving planetary health and are often

performed by marginalised and oppressed people, such as indigenous people, women and, as this research holds, children. Children and future generations appear to be carrying the burden of work relating to climate change, not least through the ‘emotional labour’ they perform in being anxious and afraid about the future because of climate breakdown, and the inadequate policy and societal responses to it. For most of those interviewed the planetary emergency did not seem to be a pressing concern or issue, except for the youth climate strikers.

For many of those interviewed their sense of self was clearly impacted by the work that they did. The interviewees were not asked questions relating to their careers nor was it expected that most people would use the interviews to discuss their careers as demonstrated by the interview schedule (Appendix E). Yet this topic came up time and time again. In capitalist countries we must work to meet our basic needs and be a ‘good’ citizen by being a ‘productive’ worker and a ‘desiring’ consumer. And if we want to self-actualise (referred to in Chapter 2), then we must be able to function to a high degree within society. Our ability to meet our needs and to flourish affects what activities we do, where we live and how we spend our time (both ‘in work’ and ‘free’). To actualise is to become a person who is fulfilled, challenged and accepting of the world and what became clear over time is that for some people this takes a lot more work than it does for others (Barry, 2019, 2021).

Self-care as an activity was strongly presented and this is arguably a form of work and an important aspect of actualisation or human flourishing. Scholars and academics within psychology and psychoanalysis regularly theorise on how the individual may become actualised, with few discussing or advocating for the actualisation of communities and societies. This again promotes a neoliberal understanding of health that does not consider the huge material, resource and other inequalities between people which may make actualisation more difficult, if not impossible for many people. Health and mental health are cloaked in ideologies of individualism with the emphasis being on self-management and succeeding independently. Working to stay healthy to be productive is something that is rarely mentioned or considered by Marxist thinkers and most other contemporary theorists and one of the most pressing reasons is because work is a term that has been viewed in over simplistic and patriarchal terms for

centuries. If we consider work to be activities, we feel obligated or duty bound to fulfil, then we may begin to consider our lives and our labour in different terms and we begin to rethink about activities that are not remunerated but expected, particularly caring roles and domestic chores, these are often perceived as obligations, which are unpaid and often overlooked. If we feel obliged to go to gym, to go the supermarket, to visit and care for our aging relatives, we begin to consider work in different terms and from different perspectives. For many people work creates stress, anxiety and discomfort, working is not something many people enjoy or look forward to and when work creates ill health, distress and disease then the time spent outside of the contracted working hours may be spent recovering from the trauma or discomfort created by the working environment and conditions. This recover or time spent repairing psychologically, emotionally and physically from paid work is a form of self-care labour that is often ignored nor taken into consideration. In many capitalist countries, whether a job is beneficial to the life and health of the individual is not prioritised as the profit and financial compensation is of greater importance than wellness. Marxist theories, and ecofeminism assert that labour should be liberated from capitalism and the emancipatory, joyful and democratic attributes and qualities of work should be considered of greater importance, in turn this would lead to greater health and more ethical and liberatory working practices and processes. This research highlights the scope for paradigmatic shifting discussions and debates about how we spend our lives working, recovering from work or preparing for work and how placing health and wellness would have a positive impact on quality of life and how people relate to the world and others. Our lives are highly organised around what we do and it impacts all our choices and relationships and will invariably impact our health, mentally and physically. People who enjoy their work and feel fulfilled by it and can enjoy their relationships and will spend less of their time outside of work recovering from their employment, in turn they will have a better quality of life.

From the interviews these spaces where nature connection occurs are dissociative locations ('dreamy/otherworldly' spaces i.e. not 'productive/efficient' spaces according to the logic of capitalist production and formal employment) (Chapter 5). The natural world appears to offer people a space to escape 'capitalist reality' (Fisher, 2009)

and avoid the stresses of highly structured, disciplined and stress-producing ways of making a living. It allows them to take a break from modern, industrialised life and associated societal-economic pressures. However, this could be counter-productive in terms of meaningful eco-political or social change in the long term, as these experiences appear to have an almost anaesthetising quality to them, i.e. such nature experiences could be viewed as not only transactional, but depoliticised examples of individuals who rather than seek to change the world, change themselves (as can be seen from the interview data, Chapter 5). They appear to soothe symptoms of distress or discomfort and offer a remedy to psychological, emotional and mental pain, but do not inquire into or address the underlying structural causes of that distress and discomfort. The comfort found in these spaces and experiences can lead to a denial of the planetary crisis and reluctance to engage in political education, analysis or activism that could challenge the ecocidal status quo.

These experiences are often seen as a reward or a leisure activity as opposed to being a space for political transformation. In the sample very few expressed a deep desire to change themselves or to work to change the world. They want to protect nature and to help others and the environment, but they did not mention capitalism nor a desire for ecosocialism or any other 'post-capitalist' social order, and there was next to no political references and cries for revolution. Even the youth strikers wanted action within the current political system, not beyond it. While perhaps too sweeping a generalisation, one could say the interviewees, perhaps reflecting a large body of public opinion, could more easily imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Consciousness shifts require discomfort and are often preceded by pain, trauma and awareness, as seen by successful social and political movements of the past. The interviewees generally wanted to find balance and contentment in their lives and their nature experiences were often used to help them with that objective. They cared about the world and nature, they did not seem to believe that an revolutionary and transformative structural change to our economies and societies, or a large-scale climate movement were essential for humanity to survive and respond to the climate and ecological crisis. Cognitive Dissonance is an important psychological issue when considering collective consciousness and individual transformation (Harman-Jones & Mills, 2019). Most people like to avoid thinking about things that are harmful, negative and unpleasant. People will sometimes go to great lengths to avoid the discomfort of

having their beliefs and perceptions challenged. Politically many of the participants did not seem to be aware of the extent of the harmful forces outside of their control, and it did not appear to be in their consciousness in most of the interviews- if they do not see patriarchal ecocidal capitalism as a problem in their life why would they want to change it?

Environmental and Climate Activism- Agents of dissonance, discomfort and discord.

One of the most interesting observations and findings of this project was not what was clearly stated, but what was often not discussed, while the young strikers were dedicated to their political activism, few other participants spoke about the planetary emergency in any detail when discussing nature experiences. The positive ways in which nature experiences were recalled seemed to suggest that many were keen to focus on the pleasant aspects of the natural world and how they relate to it. The environmental movement is not young; it is a movement that has enjoyed limited and sporadic success, but it has been active since the 1960s and 1970s. There has been much criticism of the movement and tactics employed by environmental activists for decades, not least its gender, class and racial blindness, especially in the global north. When considering environmentalism within the mainstream media, the preference seems to be to focus on a small number of prominent and well-known public figures such as David Attenborough, Jane Goodall and Greta Thunberg. Immediately, when considering these activists and environmentalists' ages is a point of interest and the generational gaps they represent are telling. They represent both ends of the life experience, the old and the young and their activism and tactics employed vary greatly, however, the message is the same.

The aim of Extinction Rebellion (XR) is to encourage widespread civil disobedience and to instigate affirmative, disruptive, transformative and effective environmental and climate action. The success of the movement is difficult to fully establish. There would appear to be an increase in awareness regarding the issue since the organisation declared itself in October 2018, revolution and rebellion have been the

aim. Mobilisation is ultimately what this organisation and other environmental agencies and groups aim to achieve. XR argues that 5% of the population is needed to enact political and social change (Rebellion, 2019). The controversial and arguably antagonistic tactics have resulted in mass arrests and the actions and protests have often been met with apathy and anger from the public. These shock and disrupt tactics are not new to environmental movements and have been discounted by prominent theorists such as Theodore Roszak who wrote an essay 'A Psyche as Big as the Earth' on the challenges and potential solutions to the environmental crisis. In his writing, he recounted his multiple attempts to manipulate his audience into action by adopting shock tactics or guilt-inducing and alarmist narratives. He argued that people were often overwhelmed by the scale and magnitude of the issue and concerns presented to them.

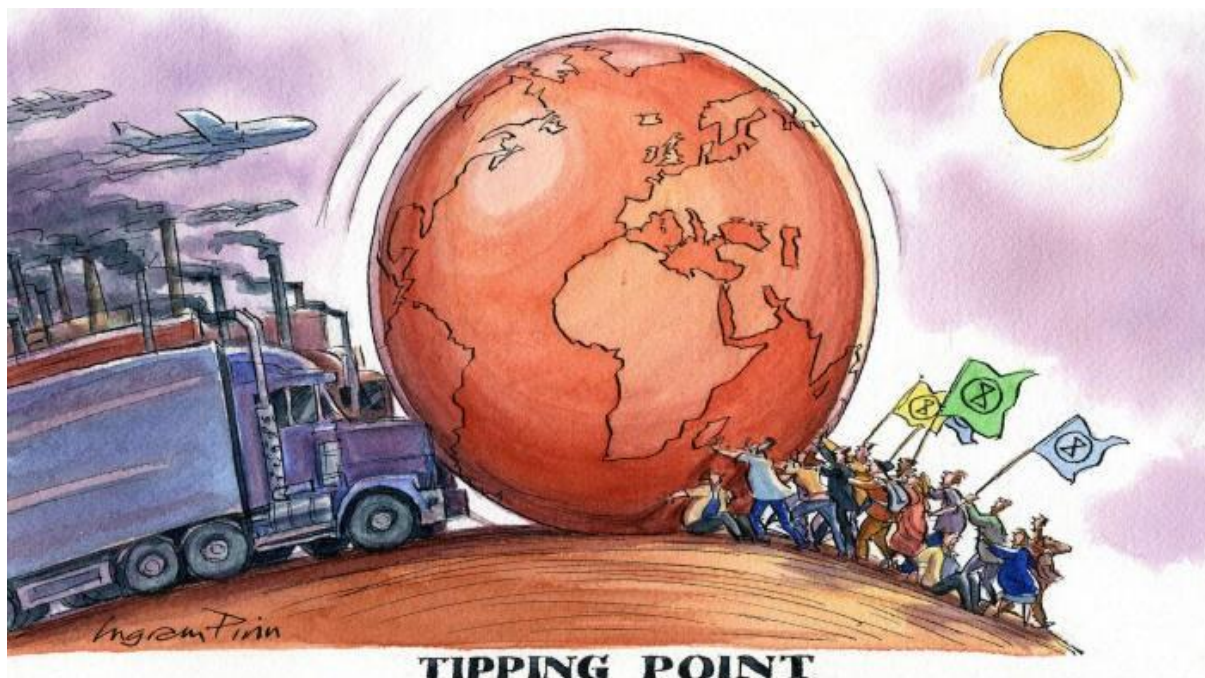
"I had a hundred examples of thoughtlessly harmful environmental behaviours to unload on my audience. It made me feel virtuous to stand before them, predicting the doom our way of life would soon bring down on us. But as time went on I recognised that presentations like this were making less and less of a difference, and indeed I was growing weary of spreading gloom." (Buzzell et al., 2009, p30)

The environment as a space to protect and defend could be argued to be the root of most wars, battles and conflicts. Patriarchy, colonisation/imperialism, industrialisation and capitalism are all connected with accumulation, domination, exploitation, commodification and (dis)possession. The environmental movement is founded on the desire to protect and preserve the non-human or the other-than-human world. In Freudian terms, the green movement, and especially groups such as XR can be viewed as the protection of life and the life instinct, 'Eros', against the capitalist death instinct, 'Thanos'. This desire is immersed in the notion that these life forms or environmental spaces are not capable of defending themselves against exploitation and extraction. Those who see our natural world from a perspective of justice, respect and longevity and those who come from the capitalist perspective will ultimately collide and disagree. The dualistic and divergent

objectives of those who believe in anthropocentrism and those who are committed to ecocentrism mean that compromise is difficult and will involve significant shifts in consciousness, as a necessary prelude to political activism and agency.

Nature transcends borders, languages and continents and as does capitalism. In the past year, even Sir David Attenborough has connected Capitalism with the destruction of our natural world. In his documentary aired on BBC in October 2020, he stated that capitalism was destroying the world and leading to mass extinction and that rewilding the planet was the only viable way of beginning to compensate for the damage. This admission by one of the most popular environmental figureheads in The United Kingdom on the main broadcasting channel was groundbreaking and long overdue. This was revolutionary when considering the lack of attention by most media outlets and due to the programme being aired on the BBC. Ignorance was no longer an option for many and this could be viewed as an open and direct challenge by one of the environmental giants to our politicians and policymakers.

Figure 13- The Tipping Point.



Source: Financial Times, 2018.

Activism could also be argued to be considered a trauma response or an anti-social action, as it is inherently and often rebellious, angry and defiant. Activism is often to reject the status quo and pursue objectives and outcomes outside of conventional systems and structures (Vaughan, 2020). The consensus amongst the scientific community is unanimous, we are experiencing a climate and ecological crisis and with this knowledge accompanied by political inertia, trauma, stress, anger and despair are all arguably healthy responses. Where there is less agreement is what can be done to mitigate this crisis and involve as many people as possible with the necessary change. For some academics the battle has already been lost, humanity has gone too far and societal collapse is inevitable if not imminent and we must adapt to this situation (Bendell, 2018, Bendell & Read, 2021, Bendell & Carr, 2020).

“People who engage in dialogue and initiative for Deep Adaptation believe that societal collapse in most or all countries of the world is either likely, inevitable or already unfolding. Typically, such people believe that they will experience this disruption themselves, or that they have already begun to do so while recognising that the disruptions are being experienced first and worst by people in the Global South. Therefore, Deep Adaptation describes the inner and outer, personal and collective, responses to either the anticipation or experience of societal collapse, worsened by the direct or indirect impacts of climate change.”
(Carr and Bendell, 2020, p5)

Figure 14- Screenshot of article on The Arrestables in Extinction Rebellion.



Source: Buus, 2019.

One of the most radical and attention-grabbing aspects of the Extinction Rebellion protests that happened globally in 2018 and 2019 was the range of people who were willing to be arrested. The tactics they employed were developed to promote peaceful and impactful civil unrest. It was through the research of Roger Hallam and through connecting and collaborating with another passionate and panicked academic, Gail Bradbrook that Extinction Rebellion was formed with the three demands creating the foundation for the revolution they were committed to creating (the three demands are tell the truth, act now and beyond politics). revolution that seeks to completely uproot and destabilise the systems responsible for the crisis and demands governments act immediately and radically to avert complete catastrophe and widespread death and annihilation (here the response by states and societies to the global pandemic is an indication of the type of political action needed – see Barry, 2020). The language Extinction Rebellion uses is dramatic, alarmist and provocative, it seeks to unsettle and disrupt and in terms of health and wellness, this is counter to what most wellness and therapeutic strategies and interventions promote. The wellness industry is rooted in pleasant feelings of contentment and fulfilment and activism seeks to unsettle and cause discomfort and unrest.

Activism as shadow work- Redefining and reimaging activism from an Ecofeminist perspective

All forms of activism are counter-cultural, in questioning and rejecting the existing social order. Activism is a form of conflict, and in a culture with a history of violent conflict, such as Northern Ireland, it is worth exploring how trauma, segregation, discrimination and prejudice may impact activism in the Capitalocene. Historically radical social and political activism has often led to deaths and violence, examples would be the suffragettes and in Northern Ireland, paramilitaries have often perceived themselves as social and political activists who are fighting for their cause. In the environmental movement, activists have been known to have been murdered if they proved to be effective and dangerous threats to development and profitmaking ecocidal companies. One of the most famous examples is Chico Mendes who was murdered for his activism against loggers in the Amazon Rainforest. For many activists the motivation and planning of their actions are often considered controversial and attention grabbing as they set out to create discord and to grab the public's attention, and that may be something that impacts the health and wellbeing of activists who challenge political and governance decisions and decision-makers, but also it can impact the general public as this disruption can generate unpleasant emotional and psychological responses. It can be seen as counterintuitive to societal, scientific, industrial and 'common sense' views of progress, which has been established within the general population as largely inevitable and necessary for economic and social stability and development. This dominant and dominating cultural narrative is supported largely by the mainstream press and prevails as the dominant discourse accepted and championed by both the media and the compulsory education system. Protest is often dismissed as being hysterical, disproportionate, unnecessary and undemocratic, as activists are not elected representatives and, on many occasions, activism is rooted in civil disobedience and unrest which is deviant by default. For these reasons activism is arguably a form of shadow work in any culture or society, as it is drawing attention to the unfavourable and displeasing aspects of the culture, it is generating discomfort and most people will

go to great lengths to avoid discomfort and the pain of doing the important and exhausting transformative work that the shadow brings into focus.

In terms of mental health and wellbeing, it is important to consider the roots of organisations and protest groups and to establish their central aims and objectives. Environmentalism and the environmental movement are not homogenous, nor is it possible to consider it as authentically intersectional and diverse. The common ground for most people involved in the environmental sector and the environmental movement is that they often share an interest around protecting and preserving natural spaces and our environment. For many in the environmental and conservation industry, they are there to make money and often to profit from the environment. The environmental movement often consists of people who are unpaid and who volunteer to carry out tasks to protect the planet. Both are forms of work, both are important in the Capitalocene. But the work that challenges the system will not generally be profitable and can often come at a huge personal cost to the individual. This is a price that a select few are willing to pay. Develop this notion of activism as a necessary form of ‘work’... and how it might differ from either compulsory care /reproductive or productive-paid labour

The argument for love

The lack of political activism amongst interviewees was notable, and while all participants cared for the environment and showed varying levels of awareness relating to the climate crisis, they did not exhibit any significant fears or threats relating to the planetary crisis. It was the lack of political activism within this section of society that seems to beg the question is caring for the planet enough at this time? Do we need to feel more than care to engage in actions that place the health of the planet as a subject in desperate need of attention and action? Is loving the planet different and how would it make people respond to the crisis differently? What this work and these participants are suggesting and signaling is that we need less action and to slow down and connect and cherish nature and to adapt the pace of the natural world and slow our lives down is more conducive with effective personal and political change and engagement. The feminists and ecofeminists spent much time advocating for self-care and creative practices as effective emancipatory and revolutionary practices. With most of the most prominent and influential thinkers and theorists being Audre Lorde, an intersectional feminist who brilliantly argued that adopting a radical self care approach was a form of practical and revolutionary political activism (Lorde, 1992, 2012, 2017, 2018, 2020).

Love in the Capitalocene, is caring enough?

“Care is not only ontologically but politically ambivalent. We learn from feminist approaches that it is not a notion to embrace innocently. Thought and work on care still has to confront the tricky grounds of essentializing women’s experiences and the persistent idea that care refers, or should refer, to a somehow wholesome or unpolluted pleasant ethical realm. Delving into feminist work on the topic invites us to become substantially involved with care as a living terrain that seems to need to be constantly reclaimed from idealized meanings, from the constructed evidence that, for instance, associates care with a form of unmediated work of love accomplished by idealized carers.” (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p8).

This research affirms how healthy, positive relationships are often rooted in care (including self-care) and how to care and caring work and labour have historically been connected to females and women, and more specifically casting women and mothers, life-sustainers and as carers. This notion of care being gendered is flawed and problematic, however, the devaluing of caring roles in society illustrates that care, whilst crucial for functioning societies and labour that is essential for healthy families and communities, is still not recognised nor rewarded as valuable work. This research shows that caring is the sign of a relationship or a connection, and in this instance, that connection is with the environment and the natural world. This caring was nurtured by effort, time and work, that work was often paid but not always, and in many cases that work was unpaid, this work was both an enabler and a barrier to nature connection, forcing the work and the care could be problematic for the interviewees.

“Thinking with care invites us to question unilateral relationalities and exclusionary bifurcations of living, doing and agencies. It brings us to thinking from the perspective of the maintenance of a many-sided web of relations involved in the very possibility of ecosystem services rather than only of benefits to humans.” (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p188)

The research findings support the idea that to relate to the natural world is to care deeply for it, and to engage with the processes and activities which were beneficial to

the growth, development or nurturing of the more-than-human world. The respect amongst the interviewees for the natural world was evident and while the levels of interconnectedness varied between participants, it was clear that an awareness of other species was linked to caring. This caring did not only extend to the more-than-human world it also existed between other people and group activities. This caring introduces a dynamic and a conversation that includes community and ecology; it signals an intersection between personal, communal and global health. It suggests that there is a desire to care beyond ourselves when we have a relationship with the natural world, a desire to nurture and protect life other than our own.

One of the main findings relates to the work that is required to stay healthy and productive in this era and this work is often referred to or thought of as self-care. Caring is a form of work that has been discussed and debated extensively by feminists and ecofeminists, but self-care is a phenomenon that relates to caring for the self, a concept which describes activities that prioritise wellbeing and health. Self-care can also be thought of as a form of self-love and self-approval, and a way of placing the self as important and an entity that needs to be cared for, nurtured and valued. It is arguably a form of self-love and love is a concept that requires further exploration and acknowledgement in this work. It was clear the love that participants had for the natural world and these positive associations suggested that the feelings of deep respect and affection were indicative of loving relationships and generated feelings of loving and being loved/ cared for. Fromm argued that love was the ultimate need and desire of human beings; in his work he spoke about objects of love and argued that love was the answer to most societal and global problems. He succinctly expressed- *“Love as an active concern for the life and the growth of that which we love.”* (Fromm, 1995, p21). In his work he highlights the different types of love that exist for people, namely love between parents and child, brotherly love, erotic love, self-love and the love of God. Fromm associates basic elements with all these various types of love and he names them as; care, respect, responsibility and education. Later in this research, the interviews will be analysed to establish if the relationship they are describing is loving and if they are how does this impact health and wellbeing. It has been argued that those who have a deep connection with the natural world are guided and motivated by the love they feel for the world (Fogarty, 2017, Milton, 2002).

“Biophilia is the passionate love of life and of all that is alive; it is the wish to further growth, whether in a person, a plant, an idea, or a social group.” (Fromm, 1996, p485)

From this perspective to love life is to love in general and it was Fromm who linked the two ideas and who is one of the central and formative thinkers upon which this study is founded. Biophilia will be explored in more depth in the next chapter, but it is worth introducing the link between love and life at this stage in the research. Fromm's work went into detail about objects of love, and he was one of the few psychoanalysts and theorists who critiqued culture and spoke analytically about the factors and social influences that impede health and wellness. He saw love as essential to survival and he was able to critically evaluate how certain systems influenced our ability to be loved and to give love freely, and capitalism was one of those systems he critically analysed. Fromm argued that some of the advances towards equality, which could be seen as a form of social and cultural love and progressiveness, are the elimination of differences and the expectations of sameness. This is not a loving process when we think of capitalism and patriarchy particularly, as love allows for differences and respects and values diversity. Capitalism has no such ideas or concerns, profit at all costs is the objective and this is unnatural and damaging to the health of people, place and planet on both a personal and political level. Interestingly though Fromm argued that for love to exist the giver or receiver could not be viewed as objects but there must be a genuine ability to relate and connect, capitalism is known to alienate and therefore is a force that impedes, counters and damages loving and meaningful relationships and connections. He spoke about the character development required to be a loving person and the traits or characteristics which could impede such development.

“It is hardly necessary to stress the fact that the ability to love as an act of giving depends on the character development of the person. It presupposes the attainment of a predominantly productive orientation; in this orientation, the person has

overcome dependency, narcissistic omnipotence, the wish to exploit others, courage to rely on his powers in the attainment of his goals. To the degree that these qualities are lacking, he is afraid of giving himself- hence of loving.” (Fromm, 1995, p20).

When we reflect on these words and consider them through the structures of colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism and patriarchy- all of which have been identified as power dynamics and political and social structures which dominate western culture and harm the natural world, we begin to see the revolutionary potential and emancipatory power that could be attributed to loving and ‘letting go’. Alienation could arguably be described as an expression of anti-love and a process that rejects and undermines connection, compassion and relatedness to anything other than work, output and capital (Berardi, 2009). Under capitalism economic growth is prioritised and earning money to survive within this system dictates how our lives, homes, communities and countries are organised and structured. As such, capitalism even affects a person’s ability to love and be loved. The elements required may not be available to each person and if they are not able to love, their chances of survival are also diminished.

Fromm believed that the main condition needed to achieve love was to overcome one’s narcissism and to see things objectively as they are as opposed to how we may wish them to be. He also believed that love was not solely a personal or private endeavour and that it was important to consider it as a social phenomenon. He discusses capitalism again near the end of his work and makes the important and controversial assertion that there are arguments that love and capitalism are not compatible. This could potentially help to explain and account for the lack of discussion on climate and ecological issues from the participants, as many of the sample were fully accepting and respecting of nature spaces, with no expectations of circumstances or their surroundings being any other way than the way they are. This full acceptance, respect and affection for things as they could signify that their love for the natural world was found in spaces and locations that felt and presented as an alternative to the trappings and restrictions imposed by capitalism. There is also an argument to be made that these

experiences encourage feelings that are altruistic and are counter to the narcissistic and hyper-individualistic tendencies that are encouraged by capitalism and neoliberalism. This work would support theorists like Fromm who offer rather damning and fatalistic assessments of how society has evolved to favour narcissistic and individualistic tendencies which are detrimental to creating loving bonds (Fromm, 1997, Fromm, 2006, Kovel, 2007). Many cultural theorists, radical thinkers and ecofeminists describe love as a form of action, it is not words or emotions but our active expression of these, a constant unfolding and endeavour, not necessarily an innate and naturally occurring phenomenon (Macy, 2012, hooks, 2000, Fromm, 1995). When considering the relationship between wellbeing and the natural world, how these interactions occur will define whether love exists between the individual and the world outside of them. Just because someone states they love something; this does not necessarily make that a reality. The idea of this relationship being loving suggests a deep connection, affection and level of responsibility and care.

“Of course love has its downside, which is also important in motivating and communicating the conservationist cause. The damage to and destruction of nature is experienced as a personal loss which provokes anger and sadness.”
(Milton, 2002, p57)

Philosophical and feminist thinkers and theorists have often led discussions on how love is political and how love could be transformative in certain contexts and within various cultural and political settings. In Butler's work- *The Force of Non-Violence*, they discuss how Melanie Klein contends that there is a constant flux of love and hate in us all and that could be considered as an innate struggle, this research did not find there to be a flux between love and hate in nature experiences and this would support the observation that these events are less linked with survival and relate more to enjoying life and all comes with being alive. The dissonance created by capitalism and capitalist practices, that force people to engage in activities and pursuits against their, juxtaposes our desire with connection with the necessity of surviving within a system that alienates

our ability to meaningfully connect with and therefore love others. Butler's work discusses struggle and documents the power of non-violence in any movement or process, however, unlike other theorists who promote and encourage love, Butler suggests it is non-essential. "*We do not have to love one another to engage in meaningful solidarity.*" (Butler, 2021, p203) It seems that while it may not be a pre-requisite to love each other to collect and organise in resistance to common injustices and inequalities, it may be necessary that love is somewhere in the equation, whether that be a love for life, for justice, for the common good. The inclusion and presence of love seems to be a common theme in many political and social struggles. Love for justice and freedom are often rooted in meaningful and successful political struggles, the love of life and planetary health would seem like a common goal of many environmental and climate rooted struggles and campaigns.

In this research, the love that seems to be closest for the participants is that which is generated from their nature connection activities, and this comes close to being Agape - a type of love often associated with Christianity and other religions and argued to be the highest and most altruistic form of love (Enright et al., 2022). This is often associated with a love for the world, as opposed to loving parts of life or specific material objects and concepts and may help to explain why spirituality seemed to permeate the experiences of a number of the sample. This type of love relates to loving all of life and is similar to the concept of biophilia; it is historically associated with a love of God. The feelings of love, affiliation and appreciation participants say they have for their gardens, green spaces and the ocean etc. can be construed as a form of unconditional love. The forgiving and the unappealing aspects of the natural or the non-human world and the evocation of the sublime and wondrous elements of nature? suggests that participants experience exaggerated feelings of serenity and affection, much like someone who is experiencing mania when falling in love. Perhaps to sense of flow for many of the participants could be argued to a form of falling in love, falling in love with their surroundings, with their life and with other forms of life. The sense of unity, connection and harmony would be similar to how many people feel when falling in love with another person. Flow could be a state that is found in nature connection that nurtures

and encourages feelings of love and affection, that make many people naturally more peaceful and content.

Spirituality, nature experiences and coming to ecological consciousness

The cultural, as well as spiritual discourse regarding nature as beauty can be problematic when establishing a complete analysis and exploration of the relationship between nature and wellbeing on both micro and macro levels. To think of nature as being unequivocally beautiful and pleasant is both unrealistic, polemical and insensitive when experiencing the horrific and lethal nature-based experiences large sections of the global population have and are experiencing. The images that follow are from websites that link nature experiences with positive wellbeing experiences and associations.

Wildlife and environmental images and narratives are often used to encourage us to make associations with positive experiences relating to peace, aspiration and contentment and are extensively used in advertising and marketing campaigns (Hartmann et al., 2013). Images of nature can be used to promote health because pleasant and peaceful nature-based scenes and experiences are beneficial for us. These whimsical, ethereal and aesthetically pleasing and evocative images and depictions are used to promote a sense of wellbeing. These positive associations of the natural would fall under the remit of ecotherapy, which is a term used to describe therapies and activities where the natural world is used to help people improve their mood and address any issues they may be having in their lives (Jordan et al., 2016). Ecotherapy and the empirical research that has been conducted in the field was discussed in Chapter 2.

The idea of having a soul or being spiritual and having spiritual practices is often associated with consciousness, sensing, intuition, connection, mindfulness and heightened awareness (de Bruin, 2021). Spirituality is associated with actions and life choices that relate to beliefs around life holding intrinsic meaning and events, our lives, the world, etc. being intrinsically meaningful (Panzini et al., 2017). Spiritual concepts and metaphysical experiences are often considered to be related to the natural world and nature-based situations. The desired aims and outcomes of nature connection or nature connectivity are often related to consciousness and connecting with ideas,

concepts and entities that are much bigger than the individual. This feeling part of something much bigger (and more enduring) than oneself is part of the meaningfulness and meaning-making potential of nature and nature experience.

“Experiencing total acceptance in nature provides a gateway to deep inner truth and identity beyond social and cultural conditions. From this perspective, nature enables awareness and connection with an ultimate aspect residing within us described as a core authentic self, spirit, and loving consciousness that may contribute to knowing and living a more authentic and connected identity and life.”
(Naor et al., 2020, p13; emphasis added)

Consciousness and coming to consciousness are accepted as prerequisites for social and cultural change or large-scale social revolution (Lim, 2019). Revolutionaries such as Lenin, Marx, Che Guevara and James Connolly were committed to raising consciousness with regards to the working class and social and political struggles. These leaders all sought to bring about collective shifts of consciousness of the working classes, the majority in society, with the aim for radical change in the name of socialism, emancipation, freedom, equality, democracy and republicanism. Consciousness shifts are often considered the same as paradigm shifts, which involve a complete upheaval of everything we know or believe to know.

These shifts in consciousness often require discomfort, disobedience and dissolution, and are a call for complete (or almost complete) redefining and restructuring of old beliefs, behaviours values, ways of thinking and acting, institutions and systems. The civil rights movement, the feminist movement and the environmental movement are all linked to creating conversations and dynamics which lead to progressive social and political change. These movements are counterculture and are birthed when those being oppressed and suppressed find ways of overcoming the prejudice and discrimination which they are subjected to and creating a space and movement which changes the dynamics of power, control and domination. It does not seem that many of the nature experiences recalled by participants are producing revolutionary or transgressive thinking within people, though it could be argued to be consciousness numbing and soothing experiences more than anything else. It seems to

offer comfort, peace and healing rather than a call to activism and neither does it seem to evoke a desire to think radically and transformatively, these experiences seem to support balance within the status quo as opposed to opportunities to revolutionise the way we live. While this work does not fully support the notion that nature experiences are important or necessary for emancipatory thinking or as a precursor for environmental activism, they could be used as wellbeing devices and sources of political, creative and emancipatory inspiration.

Jung stated that *“There is no coming to consciousness without pain”*, and this has been one of the prominent and determining factors of all social movements and collective change. Painful yet necessary transformations are often accompanied by discomfort and disruption and nature connection activities have a regenerating and rejuvenating impact on many people, these experiences could be used to keep environmentalists from taking affirmative political action or may be used as wellbeing and restorative activities for activists and conservationists (Screechinth, 2019). Processes of evolution and change have often required active unlearning, questioning and challenging accepted norms, practices, institutions, beliefs and worldviews. Consciousness shifts involve conversations, awareness-raising debate and are often associated with antagonistic dialogue and non-violent disagreement (Butler, 2021, hooks, 2000, Macy & Johnstone, 2012).

For the environmental movement the ‘oppressed’ are all those (human and nonhuman) who are threatened by the ecological and climate crisis, and the explicit inclusion of living beings that are voiceless adds an additional layer of nuance and complexity that Ecofeminists have strived to introduce to the movement. The desire, urge and need to protect, preserve and support who or what? is often associated with love and compassion, qualities often connected to healing and personal and political transformation. This is also an excellent example of how emotions can be used to create change and foster conditions that are favourable to transformation and change, be that on political, social and personal levels. Emotions have often been disregarded or discounted as unnecessary and unhelpful experiences, however in many situations where there are injustices or tragedies, they have the potential to help mobilise people and can be revolutionary if processed and acted upon. These qualities of caring have often been gendered and within the research there was a desire for community within

these settings and locations. These communities could be seen as an indirect way of preserving and mobilising to form bonds with these natural spaces. Many climate and ecological scholars and theorists understand how important community is when countering and responding to environmental devastation and destruction (Shiva, 2020, Federici, 2019, Slevin et al, 2022).

High levels of stress in our lives have become normalised over centuries of industrialised, commercialised and urban living. While lifestyles, for some, have improved in terms of purchasing power, personal material and economical wealth, it has come at a high cost to the individual and community. That cost includes people spending more of their time, energy and labour outside of the home, they are often separated from their family and community and place of origin. This can lead to feelings of alienation from self, other people and place, and this alienation can make it difficult for people to come together to spend time in nature and to recover from, never mind organise against oppressive systems and have difficult political conversations. Many families have two full-time workers in a standard household whereas the traditional, nuclear family historically would have generally had one person, the man, working. In many households, both parents earn and therefore often spend long hours and more time away from the home, and thus pay for childcare and are removed, to some extent, from traditional gendered family roles and expectations.

While the need or desire for both parents to work and provide financially to the household may have increased over the last few generations in western countries, the household still requires work and labour in terms of domestic chores, cooking, cleaning and childcare and these tasks are still largely undertaken by women. The stresses of working long hours and the expectations on women have increased as their rights to work and earn on an equal footing to men have improved. The rights in the work have progressed while the expectations relating to gender roles and parental obligations continue to place the role of mother central to caregiving and child-rearing, thus meaning that workloads have increased for many women in developed and capitalist societies as they are often expected to earn outside of the home and work to manage the home outside of that employment, invariably this will increase stress levels.

“We have our grief and our celebration. Resistance work demands a long time frame- it includes our ancestors and our descendants- even as we focus on the immediate threats. I have found that embedding pastoral support and spiritual presence into our movements can help prevent burnout and help us recover from the inevitabilities of caregiving activist fatigue.” (Macy, 2020, p335)

Nature connection as a capitalist construct

In chapters five and six the participants were clear and empathic on how nature connection was beneficial and often instrumental to their health and wellness.

Nature connection as an activity is documented to lead to positive associations with the non-human world (Richardson & Hamlin, 2021). Nature Connection is understood to be good for mental health and thought to lead to pro-environmental behaviour (but largely individualised in terms of recycling or reducing energy or car use), which would encompass behaviours such as gardening, nature appreciation to more radical forms of political activism (Richardson et al., 2021). In this research the natural world was established as a positive, embracing, inclusive and safe space for most of those interviewed. The associations were strongly linked to freedom and a rest from the pressures and stresses and strains of life in general and work. The idea of working and work processes relates to capitalism and the by-products of living in a capitalist society. Most people and most academics do not question that working is a requirement for living in modern societies. We are born into a world where we are educated and conditioned into believing that to survive (and possibly thrive) we must work and to be worthy we must be productive. Our inherent value as people has been commodified and marketised to such an extent, that the current social order is considered sensible, normal, logical and rational by the general population. From a Marxist perspective this might be viewed as the power of capitalist ideology or ‘common sense’. The strength of these beliefs are so powerful, that few people question the status quo and capitalism has become accepted as both a “normal” and “natural” part of life. Kovel argues that to save the environment we need to move towards a whole new system and embrace ecosocialism (Kovel, 2007, Löwy, 2015). He argues that the macro structures, which are rarely questioned, are the reason why so much personal, political and planetary

dysfunction and dis-ease prevails; leading to the situation where the way we have been conditioned to live has been designed to be unnatural and unhealthy.

“For if capital were natural, why has it only occupied the last 500 years of a record that goes back for hundreds of thousands? More to the point, why did it have to be imposed through violence wherever it set down its rule? And most importantly, why does it have to be continually maintained through violence, and continuously reimposed on each generation through an enormous apparatus of indoctrination? Why not just let children be the way they want to be and trust they will turn into capitalists and workers for capitalists.... Those who believe that capital is innate should also be willing to do without police, or the industries of culture, and if they are not, then their arguments are hypocritical” (Kovel, 2007, p122)

Kovel’s work sits within critical green politics, but as this research illustrates, the relationship between people and the environment is inherently and unavoidably political, as it is helped or hindered by economic, political and cultural structures in and through which we participate. Participation in culture or the economy is not consensual, it is enforced, and its effects are pervasive and inescapable and thus inevitably political by nature. To challenge capitalism takes huge effort, resources, time and energy and this is what is required to create widespread political change in the climate crisis. This research supports the claim that a meaningful relationship with the natural world or nature connection is linked with caring for the natural world and enhances wellbeing. However, these spaces and experiences are not facilitating or encouraging emancipatory or transgressive political dialogue and debate. These nature locations were often communicated as being spaces that existed outside of politics, the economy, culture and work. They were embodied and spatial locations, which were other to urban and other to industry. The rhythm of life, work and day-to-day processes and the rhythm of the natural world are in tension with each other. The rhythm of the natural world is linked by many of the cohort with relaxation leisure and rejuvenation and a welcome respite. The antidote to capitalism is ecosocialism and one of the antidotes to capitalist stresses are arguably nature experiences.

Campaigns such as the one run by the Mental Health Foundation are problematic as they neglect the macro issues that impact health particularly relating to the environment and climate. That is, they address the effects not the root causes. There are some psychologists who are beginning to think more politically when considering mental and psychological distress and ill health from an ecological perspective, but they are the exception rather than the rule (Tweedy, 2017, Totten, 2011). Most organisations and professionals that advocate the mental health benefits of time spent connecting to nature do so without addressing poverty, racial issues and gender inequalities and are therefore maintaining and supporting the neoliberal, patriarchal and capitalist discourse which endangers vulnerable people and perpetuates social and ecological unsustainability and injustice (Kovel, 2007). The destruction of our environment is a public health concern but is often considered a peripheral issue. In recent times it is seen as a radical and unreasonable agenda to press for governance and legislation on climate issues. Cultural theorists, environmental scholars and conservationists have been writing about the eco destructiveness of capitalism for decades with limited success or political advancement, such is the prevalence and strength of the constant desire for growth and profit at all costs and the (largely unthinking) support for capitalism within the general population. This misogynistic and ecocidal economic model prevails over international trade, global marketing and industrial practices and protocols. The status quo is dominant and profit at the cost of life and relatively few people in the way seem to be concerned about this.

“Under such a regime the economic dimension consumes all else, nature is continually devalued in the search for profit along an expanding frontier, and the ecological crisis follows inevitably” (Kovel, 2002, p121).

Another cultural theorist and writer who made connections between climate, health and capitalism was the late Mark Fisher. He was a radical thinker, a successful blogger and an academic who critiqued culture and discussed post-capitalist alternatives. His book *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* challenges the status

quo and argues that mental health, and most other social issues which are accepted as inevitable or natural, are direct by-products of late capitalism. He states that these are manufactured and profitable, suggesting that human suffering itself has an economic value under capitalism.

“The ‘mental health plague’ in capitalist societies would suggest that, instead of being the only social system that works, capitalism is inherently dysfunctional, and that the cost of it appearing to work is very high.” (Fisher, 2009, p19).

Both Kovel and Fisher share the same argument that the end of the world is easier to imagine, for most people, than the end of capitalism. This signifies that the issues presented by the practices and behaviours associated with the system under which most of the population live within are so pervasive and powerful that there is little that can be done to challenge or counter them. In this work patriarchal capitalism appears to be deeply rooted within the collective and the individual that it seems almost untouchable. Even for those working within the environmental and conservation sector, there seems to be an acceptance of things as they are. This is arguably an example of how deeply rooted psychological and physical alienation has become under these systems of domination. In this time of climate chaos, it is almost ridiculous to conceive of other ways of living and organising in our societies.

“But what is capitalism? Capitalism, then, would be this system whereby this alienation-to use that term- of human capacities is taken to its absolute limit.” (Fisher, 2020, p124).

Nature connection is, within capitalism, an individual's responsibility, and the urge for people to connect with the natural world has long been established in scientific and empirical research as an innate and a natural human desire. However, Marxist theorists argue that capitalism has created unnatural ways of life and work and processes which

actively damage our lives and reduce individual and collective freedom and potential. If we consider nature in terms of health, we cannot look at the relationship in any meaningful way if we do not address the rift in both macro and micro terms. If we believe we are nature, then we must accept the less than favourable and pleasant aspects of that nature, such as widespread pollution, catastrophic levels of carbon in the atmosphere, the extinction of species and all the other aspects of planetary ill-health. If we want to be complete, we must accept the shadow aspects of the planetary crisis, and it seems that we are quite a long way from acceptance and integration regarding what true i.e. non-capitalist nature connection would look like beyond the Capitalocene.

Moving from the Capitalocene to the Symbiocene – Embracing Fight and Flow

A dominant cultural and personal narrative in many westernised and heavily industrialised countries revolves around work, career and acquiring income, possessions, wealth, status and capital. These are often deemed to be determining factors of personal success which in turn impacts our sense of self and our health. The belief that our work is a reflection of our value as a person is supported by the prevailing social and political systems which continue to commodify and marketise public services and goods. In the Capitalocene profit is the priority and those who produce profit are rewarded at the expense of those who are disadvantaged, disabled or disinterested in benefiting the ruthless demands of capitalist systems.

The mantra for many climate and environmental activists is “System change, not climate change”. The findings from this project highlight how even activities that are considered environmentally ethical and kind can be detrimental to the planet if not placed in the context of climate change and the necessity of political responses to and understandings of it. This work critiques the idea of nature connection as a positive and environmentally beneficial activity as it may result in political inertia and reinforce a disconnection that does not exist, we are nature, we are never disconnected from the ecosystems upon which all life depends. The idea of nature and nature spaces as a subset of culture, or outside of culture is both anthropocentric and ecologically problematic. It has become widely accepted that we are separated from nature, and while the Marxist concept of alienation may seem dated and unhelpful in twenty-first-

century academia, it accurately captures the pervasive issues that linguistic concepts such as nature connection and nature connectivity highlight.

Albrecht has coined the term solastalgia to articulate a feeling of loss and sadness of existing at a time of ecological despair. Sadly these feelings of intense grief are an everyday reality for many environmentalists and conservationists. In the most simplistic and succinct terms, solastalgia describes a homesickness that we experience whilst simultaneously being at home. This concept is both poignant and tragic, yet the person who coined this phrase still holds a lot of hope. Another term they have created is 'the Symbiocene', and Albrecht believes that this term could define the post- Capitalocene era. As he puts it,

"In essence, I am hopeful that a new form of human community, sumbio-tribal in its protection and love of place, can arise out of the current identity crisis of all the "techno-industrial" post-boomer generations and other people already emplaced at small scale all over the world. They will use their inner distress, the scientific critique of homogeneous gigantism and its toxic legacy, climate chaos, plus sumbiophilia and tribalism, to create the Symbiocene." (Albrecht, 2019, p176)

These writers and theorists are united in the call for radical and immediate action. They also engage in honouring and harnessing difficult, unpleasant and often rejected or suppressed emotions. Theorists, scholars and therapists (whether ecotherapists or more traditional in their approach) encourage engaging with these sensations and experiences, on the basis that emotions are communicators and are both natural and normal. Many patriarchal societies and cultures, particularly in the west, celebrate those who are not emotive, who hide their true feelings and who conform to the status quo. Being emotional has often been associated with being hysterical or crazy and was often linked to women and seen as an unhealthy, feminine quality. These authors and environmental thinkers are reframing and affirming the importance of accessing and processing emotional responses to the crisis we are facing. Emotions are a sign of consciousness and in the context of climate change are arguably a healthy and moderate response to the existential threat we are facing. And going through that emotional

process can lead to or is a necessary step towards revolutionary political action? You need to make some connection like this here

Mental health in the Capitalocene is not an individual issue. Mental Health is often considered a personal problem or concern, particularly when considering it through the widely adopted medical model. The mental health of each person may seem to be apolitical but because we are inherently social beings and because wider political, economic and other structures and institutions affect and influence our health, this makes it an innately political issue. When considering decisions and political behaviours on this level, it can be easy to consider how the non-human world is not a priority nor considered to be important. For example, there is a disconnection and continued dissociation between many groups along ethno-political lines in Northern Ireland, which is a relational issue, and if relating to our neighbours is problematic, relating to other species may be problematic too. If we care about other people, we will protect them, conversely if we do not care about them we will not be concerned with what happens to them. The climate crisis is an issue which should transcend all other political and social issues, as it is a public health issue and if the environmental and climate movement succeeds, all life on the planet will benefit. This is the opportunity that is before us and this is where the Symbiocene shows us of the potential within all of us to come together for the greater good.

“The beautiful planet is sore, and bearable living conditions continue to be inaccessible to the many. The joint fortune that immeasurable forms of life with technoscience is no longer news. Developing more scientific research and technological solutions continues to be the dominant response to problems globally and locally- whether these concerns climate change, economic recessions, food crises, infertility, or access to health care or information.” (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p27)

The dominant narratives are we must work or struggle our way out of any issue and any problem. While work is important and indeed necessary, this research concludes that

work and work processes in the Capitalocene are deeply problematic. Capitalism requires workers to labour, to be part of systems of extraction to create commodities that are sold for profit and consumed. Working less, producing for need and joy not profit or consuming less is an option that few have considered. More gratitude, more compassion, more rest, more joy. Business as usual is the story that Joanna Macy suggests is the first choice we have when considering the era, we are living in. We can make a choice and just continue as we are, for many people, particularly activists this is not an option. This is where Macy and other environmental philosophers and academics are most powerful as they advocate meeting this pain and trauma with more care, more compassion, more love. To speak about love as a verb, an action and a form of activism is how environmentalism should be considered. The issue we are faced with in environmental and societal terms is we are facing a public health issue of global and unprecedented proportions. In planetary terms, it is an existential crisis and thus a spiritual issue for our species. This calls for making not only the personal political, but the soul political. At its core the planetary crisis is a spiritual crisis. It is the culmination of centuries of profit and greed and the result is climate chaos, mass extinction and ecological devastation. To counter this we must stand against patriarchal capitalism, stand with life over death. We must end all forms of domination and exploitation and encourage pluralism through collaboration. We must build global communities that prioritise sufficiency and wellness and who measure success in terms of collective and individual actualisation. We must not be scared of unpleasant emotions and express our emotions. The dark or shadow side of humanity must be discussed and addressed and we must embrace and integrate all that we are and all that we face. Only then is there a possibility to make this an era of transformation and hope.

This chapter has discussed the main findings of the research relating to how work and work practices in the Capitalocene related to the natural world and how this impacted the mental health and wellbeing of participants. The idea of finding flow through these experiences was presented and linked with the innate desire and longing for individuals to have a good life and reach their full potential in their lifetime. Nature experiences seem to evoke and generate feelings of peace and contentment and these activities were considered to be a form of self care, this observation and conclusion is

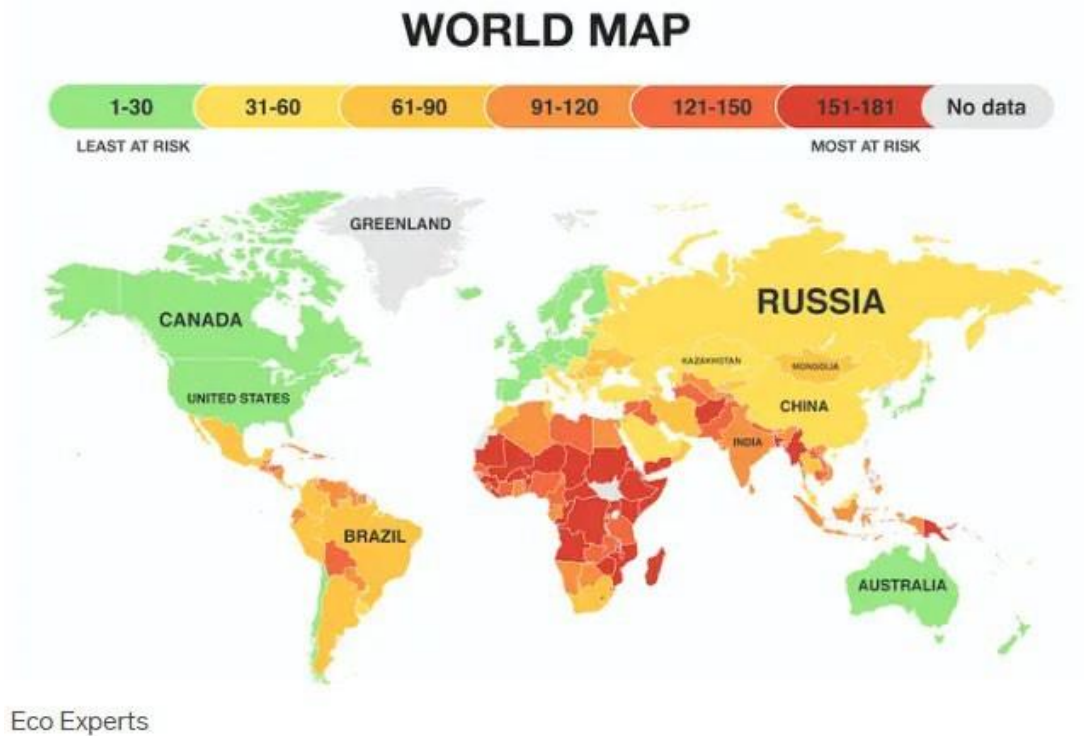
supported by empirical data and academic research from disciplines such as psychology, medicine and social care. The looming presence of the climate crisis was significant in much of the interviews and data collected by virtue of the fact it was barely mentioned. The next chapter will place these experiences and these findings in the context of the greatest threat to life of our time, the climate and ecological crisis, and conclude this thesis by discussing what can be done with the knowledge we have and how an ecofeminist analysis is beneficial for rethinking and reframing the planetary emergency from a radical, divergent and progressive ecological and political standpoint.

Chapter Seven

Staying healthy through nature connection while the biosphere burns: An impossible venture or a revolutionary self-care and political activism opportunity?

The Capitalocene is a time of ecological disaster and disorder characterised by significant risks for the health of the global population, both human and more than human i.e. all life on this planet. During the life of this research, heatwaves, forest fires and extreme weather events due in whole or part to climate change have occurred with increasing regularity and severity (Howden & Ma'asi-Kaisamy, 2022). Canadian doctor diagnosed a patient with climate change, rates of ecoanxiety were on the rise, and a coroner noted that a child in London, Ella Kissi-Debrah, died as a result of pollution levels close to her home (Laville, 2020, Mishra, 2021). These events are happening at a time when we have mental health organisations promoting nature connection (MIND, 2021). Herein lies one of the fundamental issues of this project: the 'nature' that is healing and helping us via nature connection experiences, is the very same nature which is destabilised, polluted, infected and endangering our (and other species') survival, now and in the future. This research took place in the Global North and in a country, on an island which is in a privileged position and has been sheltered from the worst and most harmful impacts of the climate crisis (see Figure 15).

Figure 15- A World Map on the effects of Climate Change.



Source: Brodwin, 2019.

This research found that many people find joy, relaxation and respite in nature experiences in this time of climate crisis. And while many people are alienated from high-quality nature spaces for multiple reasons (as outlined in Chapters 5 and 6), the capacity to experience wellbeing and health benefits as a direct or indirect consequence of nature connection activities is supported by the interviewees and a wealth of empirical research (see Chapters 2, 4 and 5). However, what has become increasingly concerning and harmful is the deep psychological and cultural rift which dominates the hegemonic discourse between people and the natural world in most westernised and industrialised countries. In some indigenous cultures there is no notion of being separated from nature, as the thought is literally incomprehensible (Kimmerer, 2013). Here lies one of the most fundamental issues regarding relations and relating to other people and species in highly, developed capitalist countries. Namely, the idea of separateness from nature, which is omnipresent, total and deeply engrained within the personal and collective consciousness of large numbers of the population, including the majority of those interviewed (Chapter 5).

These nature spaces/ locations and the various human and non-human activities that take place in them, appear to offer a reward for and respite from work, formally paid employment and caregiving. They are spaces where leisure activities occur i.e., non-work, which offer recovery from work and domestic pressures and thus are often

experienced as forms of escape from the multiple pressures and stresses of modern life. For some of the interviewees these spaces are lucrative and the desire to turn leisure activities and pursuits into businesses or career opportunities was evident for some of them. The commodification of these spaces was apparent through the productivist and individual-focused perspective of how these locations could benefit each person and how they could be used to provide financial, therapeutic and leisure outcomes. These observations are arguably a reflection of the pressures on many people to produce and work and find new and innovative ways to combine business, pleasure and meaning. Several of the women interviewed were developing small businesses that connected other women to the natural world through group nature-based activities. This suggested a desire to create communities within these spaces and the gender component demonstrated both a need to connect with others and create 'safe spaces' in nature for women. The need to blend events and activities with health and wellbeing goals and outcomes was supported by the findings, alongside their need to be 'productive' while making their encounters and experiences meaningful and authentic and, to some degree, more than transactional. What the participants showed us was that a love of nature spaces and experiences is key to engaging with nature connection activities and these activities can be used to create pleasurable and therapeutic memories and experiences that are not clouded by political and cultural issues and catastrophes.

Nature connection academics and scholars within social care and medicine, support the premise that people and place are to varying degrees disconnected or separated from each other (Prichard et al., 2020). The body of knowledge produced by these scholars suggests that nature experiences may be considered as viable interventions and social prescriptions for people who are suffering from emotional distress or high-stress levels for various reasons, most of which are work-related (Chapter 5). While this research supports the claim that experiences with the more-than-human world and other rich natural spaces can promote health and wellbeing, it challenges the narrative that we are separate from nature. This work proposes that we need to challenge and overcome this separation through actively considering our relationship with other species, places and our environment...and ourselves. At the same time, most nature

connection scholars neglect to focus on larger social, economic and political structures, institutions, norms and habits which alienate, oppress and impact the health of both ecosystems and humans. Here an Ecofeminist perspective can fill that gap in that it has created a body of knowledge that shows that the same forces that subjugate, exploit and oppress women are the same forces that are endangering the natural world, namely patriarchal capitalism (Gaard, 2018, Salleh, 2009, Federici, 2012, Shiva, 2020).

If we want to promote nature connection intellectually and academically, there is an explicitly political and ethical argument to make which is that to deny the necessity to radically and urgently transcend existing social and economic structures, institutions and worldviews is reductionist, essentialist and deeply counter-productive, risky and ultimately irresponsible. Structural and systemic forces impact, constrain and enable individual agency, determine our health and ability to freely relate and interact with our natural environments, of which we are part. Yet these systems are insufficiently confronted and discussed within academia, outside of the humanities yet they influence how people relate to our environment and the material world, including relationships with both humans and non-humans. Nature experiences in a time of climate breakdown are socio-economic issues as our environments, natural and social, have become increasingly hostile (Vohra et al., 2021). The planetary conditions have become hostile because of extreme weather events, dangerous levels of pollutants and contaminant environments in the and increasingly hazardous environmental conditions that have been created largely as a result of unsustainable practices and processes directly linked to late capitalism and the Capitalocene, such as unregulated fossil fuel usage, unnecessary consumerism practices and a lack of education and awareness of the dangers of an ecocidal and genocidal global economic system.

Work as worth in this lifetime

Work, work practices and how people felt about their work, were the strongest indicators of health and wellbeing amongst those interviewed. Access to resources and finance was mentioned as necessary for many favoured nature-based activities such as

sailing, kayaking mountaineering and surfing. For many who were content or happy with their jobs and their lives, these spaces were entertaining and a 'leisure activity' more than therapeutic. These pursuits often helped to revitalise and rejuvenate participants and served as activities that both assisted or improved their ability to be productive at work, and reproductive at home, and overall enhanced the quality of their life, their self-efficacy and sense of self-worth. Work and the ability of people to be productive and financially independent are affected by other social, economic and cultural values such as gender, disability, race, age and caring roles and commitments, which are determined by the patriarchal and other social, economic and political systems.

The use of an individual's time, space and body were dictated by what resources were available to them, and these resources were dependent on their finances and the capital they had. Sporting accessories, transportation and holiday experiences were all considered to be necessary or favourable nature experiences. This highlighted the socio-economic inequalities that alienated these spaces and many of the favoured activities, as they were reliant on people having access to money for equipment, transportation and other expenses such as accommodation. These additional costs excluded many people who did not have this income to afford these activities. The nature-culture split was further reinforced by romanticised and essentialised notions of what nature was and how it was perceived by the sample, often in the form of denial of the profoundly destructive and dangerous qualities connected to our environment and the threats it currently presents to life and health. The dichotomous and over-simplified constructs of nature, work and home supports the hegemony that reinforces and perpetuates the alienation of humans from the environment and determines how our lives are structured, articulated, constructed and communicated (Popejoy, 2014). Most people in many westernised countries talk about visiting and watching nature as a separate entity and thus reaffirming their position as being separated from the environment, as opposed to being embedded within it.

Work and productivity are priorities in most people's lives and what someone does for a living impact how they live, where they live and how their time is organised and spent. Several participants spoke about their career history and how ill-health,

largely mental ill-health conditions such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, altered their ability to progress and succeed. These experiences influenced their ability to stay at work and to earn, which impacted their ability to be well. It was largely, not exclusively, the women in the sample who struggled to manage their mental health and career. The ability to juggle domestic responsibilities and societal expectations such as nursing aging parents, organising social events, being a single parent and running a household alongside work proved to be problematic and detrimental to the health of several of those interviewed. These participants recalled prolonged bouts of ill health when getting outdoors was not possible for them due to feeling overwhelmed and mentally unwell.

The definition of work was extended in this research to encompass both political activism and self-care. The Capitalocene is an epoch that demands healthy workers and high levels of productivity and consumption, while simultaneously we observe activists pushing the planetary health crisis onto the political agenda through large amounts of voluntary and unpaid work often in the form of lobbying politicians, protests, political and environmental campaigning and conservation work. The burden of a large proportion of that work has fallen to young people and future generations and this is taking a toll on their health, through the increase in conditions such as ecoanxiety (Gregory, 2021). Both self-care in the form of nature connection and activism in this era of planetary crisis are forms of work that are required for people to live well and maintain good mental and physical health. As the planetary crisis escalates and the imperative of capitalism for constant economic growth and profit increases, the tension between health and the environment will increase along with the need for increased levels of self-care and political and transformative, if not revolutionary, mass activism. This may mean that as the crisis escalates, it could become increasingly problematic to use nature for leisure and wellbeing purposes if people are not engaged in political activism that protects the life and spaces that are providing them with their health. If efforts are not made by the individuals using these spaces for these purposes, then the relationship becomes transactional and consumptive rather than reciprocal, sustainable and healthy and is an action that maintains the ecocidal status quo that is placing planetary life and therefore public health at risk. Medical and mental health conditions

relating to the climate and ecological crisis, which disproportionately impact younger generations and those who are poor, increase the amount of work required to stay healthy as well as productive at this time (Pacheco, 2020). Those who are already disadvantaged will be expected to work even harder under this inequitable and unsustainable economic and social model as the climate and ecological crisis escalates.

Nature Connection and Ecotherapy in a time of climate chaos

How people give their lives meaning is often reflected by how they organise their lives, work and free time, their worldviews, and what their beliefs are about the more-than-human world. Nature connection and nature-based experiences are one way those interviewed found meaning, purpose and fulfillment; however not all people who spend time in nature are interested in meaningful and life-affirming experiences. For some the spiritual dimension is central to how they engage and the levels of respect and compassion they express towards the non-human world will be reflected in how they honour, almost worship, nature and cherish and love the/ir environment. For others, the interaction is purely about what they need, an almost transactional relationship and how they are improving their mental and physical health through the relationship. This is arguably experienced and entered into as a necessary ‘coping mechanism’ to enable them to recover and be resilient to the pressures of work, and to be more productive and ‘recovered’ when re-entering their ‘productive/reproductive’ roles and demands. The difference in interactions can be best considered when reflecting on whether a person is *consuming or connecting with the natural world*. Another helpful way to consider these experiences is whether they are hedonistic or eudaimonic (Kim, 2020, Turban, 2016), where hedonism is about pleasure-seeking and eudaimonic experiences are more peaceful, uplifting and contentment focused encounters.

One of the ways people bring meaning, contentment and wellbeing into their lives is by engaging and spending time in green and blue natural spaces. These experiences are often associated with feelings of freedom and stress relief, and people will sometimes associate prison, being trapped and claustrophobia with being away from and being unable to engage or connect with the natural world. As this

research shows, the ways people engage with nature is, in large part, determined by gender, age, income, location and levels of fitness and dis/ability. These variables mean that this relationship is often dependent on external, social and economic factors outside of the control of the individual. These factors at a time of climate and ecological crisis make our relationship with the natural world explicitly political and an area of increasing public interest, particularly from a public health perspective relating to mental health, wellbeing, pollution levels and ecological degradation.

Nature Connection and concepts relating to ecotherapy and ecotherapeutic interventions rarely critique and deconstruct the larger systems and political and economic structures upon which they depend and within which they are located (Divya & Naachimuthu, 2020). The concept of nature connection is arguably essentialist and reductionist as it reinforces the positioning of nature as outside of culture and promotes an ontology of disembodiment and disconnection from an environment that sustains us and which we are utterly interdependent (Lent, 2021, Spretnak, 2011, Barry, 2012). The concept is a contradiction from an ecological perspective, yet relatively few academics and scholars critique this narrative that nature connection is good for our health (Fletcher, 2017). The need to deconstruct and critique our health services and practices is growing, and academia is slowly understanding the problems and issues around individualising health when the economic model is unhealthy and unjust. As Krishnamurti wisely noted, *“It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society”*. It is unnatural and unhealthy external forces, structures and powers that impacts all life and living systems and is detrimental and disregarding of health and wellbeing outside of productionist interests. Davies argues that our mental health crisis is a product of capitalism.

“Given this culture’s continued expansion, we must question why it thrives year on year despite it presiding over the very worst outcomes in our health sector Only by doing this will we be able to glimpse the various hidden mechanisms that keep our failing system operational at the considerable human and economic expense.”
(Davies, 2022, p180).

Capitalism systematically unsettles life, destabilises life supporting systems and the natural rhythms and cycles that correlate with healthy ecosystems, as such it is the antithesis of the natural world; it is Thantos mobilising against Eros . Capitalism is a simplistic and linear system that adheres to clear and succinct economic demands relating to profit and growth (Kovel, 2007, Barry, 2012). Life and living systems, adhere to seasons, tidal systems, cycles and these are often guided by non-linear forces and processes, which appear chaotic, dysfunctional, emergent and wild. Therefore we can say that Nature Connection and nature-based leisure and therapeutic experiences represent capitalist practices, temporary ways of artificially reconstructing these natural processes. Capitalism by definition unsettles life and rhythms, and nature connection could be described as a neoliberal, individualistic and essentialist experience that attempts to, for a short time, redress the imbalances of capitalist practices. Nature experiences can be viewed as capitalist permitted and 'legitimated' non-capitalist experiences, functional and necessary for the continuation and smooth functioning of the capitalist economic order itself.

Areas for Further research

The research project was originally designed to explore the relationship between nature connection and mental health. For many people time spent in nature is beneficial if it helps them to find balance between the world outside them and the world happening within. If they are accepting of their life and what is taking place in the world they will generally find contentment in such experiences. Many individuals are aware of environmental concerns and the climate emergency, but this may not impact on their mental health. That is, they can love the world and be aware of the planetary crisis and yet not experience mental ill-health. Some may refer to this as resilience, some may refer to this as coping and others may see it as deluded thinking. The variety of responses to the planetary emergency may be accounted for by doing further research amongst people who are mentally suffering due to the planetary crisis and those who are not. Research exploring the cognitive and psychological responses and reactions to that crisis is an area that needs more research to be addressed and explored.

What is clear is that our wild space and our green spaces are important places to many and that people who believe in nature connection see these experiences as positive and believe they are generally good and meaningful, even if they are also necessary in terms of offering respite and recovery from the stress of work. There appears to be a conceptual and a real rupture between society and nature that many of the participants supported by their use of language and the re-enforcing of the distinction between people and environment, nature is a place that people visit, as opposed to being something that people embody. We are nature however the culture and the language used to give these experiences meaning communicate that we are separate and distinct from the natural world, the intellectually established and recognised concept of nature connection supports this division. Those who believe there is no separation appear to be a minority, and inhabit an intellectual, spiritual and philosophical space that is not accessible or relatable to the majority of the population. It is well documented that many indigenous cultures do not recognise this division and place their relationship with the natural world as central to how they organise relations and practices, how they sell themselves etc., and often refer to the non-human world as kin, acknowledging the importance and significance of all beings (and non-beings) as important contributors to ecosystems and life-sustaining relationships (Haraway, 2016). The interviewees in this study reminded us that self care and nature connection are effective and important political and emancipatory behaviours and actions. Being joyful and relentlessly pursuing wellness and health through pleasurable activities such as nature-based pursuits is arguably a form of political activism, particularly when framing it using an intersectional ecofeminist ontology.

Research involving those who do not desire to spend time in nature would help in the exploration of why some people are not concerned about the climate crisis. There is a rich tradition in feminist and subversive disciplines of ensuring all voices are heard, and in this work there was a lack of representation in the interview sample from members of oppressed and minority groups. There was also a dearth of input from people who do not enjoy nature spaces and prefer spending time in urban and artificial or technological spaces. While the dominant binary gender norms were generally well represented, the sample was not a reflection of the general population. This could be accounted for mainly because nature connection and environmentalism has often been something that the white middle to upper classes in society are interested in. These have historically been the section of society that can access green spaces more readily and are

more likely to be landowners. Considering the viability and efficiency of nature connection interventions and recommendations along class and socio-economic lines is an area where more research is needed. Contemplating the impact of class on levels

of nature connectedness would be a step towards understanding and addressing the inequalities that exist for people accessing green and blue spaces.

The difference in experiences of the therapeutic benefits of nature immersion across the generations would seem to be another feasible project that follows on from this research. The sample included two youth climate strikers and three retired people. Their concerns and experiences were illuminating, and they expressed concern for the environment, with younger participants having a much more complicated relationship with the natural world, because of the climate and ecological crisis. The generational experiences and particularly the observations of a changing environment and landscape would be an interesting ethnographic or comparative piece of work that could potentially further strengthen the understanding of the link between health and environmental and planetary concerns. Further research looking at activism is a form of work and how that impacts health in the Capitalocene.

Capitalism is not only destroying the planet and the ecosystems on which we all depend, but also destroying communities and invariably that will impact mental health. In Northern Ireland, there are many community groups and environmental campaigns attempting to stop the advances and plans of international gold mining companies. The impact these companies have on the local population is damaging and divisive. Poor and vulnerable communities are more susceptible to experience violence and threats and a lack of political and state support. This complicates and affects the relationship between the natural world, individuals and mental health. This research included many individuals who appreciated and had affection for nature, but few were political activists. Working-class environmentalism is an important and underdeveloped area, as is the impact of damaging and destructive environmental activities on local populations. This research has argued that activism is a stress and trauma response or at least an indication of anxiety or pre-trauma of how the environment is going to be altered and many of the participants, who work in the conservation and environmental sphere, prioritise self care and a more peaceful and accepting pace of life, than engaging in activism that is socially and politically disruptive. It is worth remembering that this is true for Northern Ireland and the participants were all based in and referring to Northern Ireland when discussing most of their nature experiences and beliefs. The Ecofeminist lens allowed the researcher to explore and analyse the data from a critical and equitable political lens and it was by using this approach that self-care, creativity and emotions were given greater value and relevance.

Exploring the mental health of communities affected by mining and other extractivist industries would be an area for further research and placing that within the context of Northern Ireland, a deeply traumatised and divided country, allows for further nuance and consideration to be given to how colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism perpetuate inequality and injustice and how that problematic that is for achieving and maintaining sustainable and long lasting peace and health in vulnerable areas. Extractivism is an industry that exemplifies the harmful practices which are detrimental to people and planet and where profit comes at a huge ecological cost to communities who are often sacrificed. What can these environmentalists tell us about the world and how can we relate this

knowledge to our environment and ecology? What needs to happen for more people to start caring and for activism to be considered a virtuous and essential component of actualisation in the Capitalocene?

Another area of the interest that may be worth further considering is how the emergence of conditions and disorders such as autism and other neurodivergent conditions may be understood or explained from an ecofeminist or critical ecological perspective. Many of these ‘medical disorders’ impact a person’s productivity and ability to function within many systems and societal structures and are determined by a person’s ability to integrate and assimilate in ecocidal and environmental destructive social structures and institutions. Research considering how these conditions are impacted and positively affected by nature experiences may be beneficial for further understanding of the relationship between non-human nature experiences and mental health in an era marked by the ongoing climate crisis. Academic research that embraces connections and relations between gender critical work and the political activism that is evolving relating to neurodiversity and disability rights relating to mental and neurological health would be worth developing because of this work. The interviewees referred to various mental, psychological and neurological conditions and they all considered nature experiences to benefit these conditions. What is the relationship between patriarchal capitalism and the growing numbers of people who are identifying as neurodivergent?

Finding flow as an act of resistance in a time of multiple struggles/ fights-embracing dissonance and rethinking and reframing health in a time of environmental and global insanity

This research involved those who perceived themselves as people who enjoyed a relationship with the natural world, most only had positive things to say about the natural world. Most used it or consumed it as a form of stress relief, which improved their productivity and their ability to contribute to the structure we live in. The activists changed the story, challenged the narrative and brought forward more questions than answers because they were listening to the science and signalling their concerns and like all forms of activism pushing and, in their case, demanding changes immediately.

This leads to a very important question and concern: do these people, many of

which work within the environmental or conservation sector, believe we are facing catastrophe? And if so why was that not more explicit in their interviews? The sample included ecotherapists, farmers, smallholding owners, forest school leaders, hiking group coordinators, activity centre managers and running group organisers. Most of these were educated and knowledgeable on the issue and all of them identified nature as an entity that brought them wellbeing and stress relief, but they did not express explicit concern for the future generations, the future of the planet or their demise or endangerment because of environmental and climate collapse and devastation.

This suggests that the right to consume and the right to use things and resources to our advantage may be a belief that many, even those engaged with work in the natural world, uncritically hold largely unchallenged. Essentially, they may believe their work is enough, paid or voluntary. They may not perceive the climate crisis as something they can do much about or they may feel they have too much to do already and activism is something they do not have time or energy for. Perhaps too they believed that volunteering and engaging in this research was a form of activism and a form of using their time in a socially acceptable way to help the natural world. The participants who engaged were enthusiastic and passionate about the topic. When comparing them to others who were contacted and did not engage- farming unions, football clubs and gyms- the main difference was they were interested in speaking about it and they felt generally positive about the topic. People tend to engage when it feels good and they will not when it does not.

The relationship between environment and health is absolute and for many people the alienation from high-quality natural spaces is substantial, including having the time to experience nature. By design, the capitalist, socio-economic forces under which we all live control and dominate much of our time and our resources and green leisure pursuits or nature practices depend on privilege and power. The ability to connect and spend time in ecologically rich and diverse natural spaces is, under present capitalist structural political and economic conditions, a luxury or privilege for the few not the many.

A major tension this research has suggested is that as the planetary crisis escalates, the environment will become harmful to the health of people and other species, and this problematises how we frame nature-based experiences and activities. The paradox can be expressed this way: how can nature connection and experience in one context be overwhelmingly positive, restorative and recuperative, and yet in

another harmful, dangerous and an existential threat? In this time of the Capitalocene, we may be inadvertently reproducing capitalism every time we use language and constructs that alienate and separate us from the natural world. To resist and challenge this we must remember and practice our interconnectedness and interdependence with nature. We should seek to construct societies and lifestyles according to our needs but also the needs of all life on earth. We need new language, and we must prioritise consciousness shifting actions, regeneration and rejuvenating experiences that are beneficial to all life. We have got to envisage new worlds and we must work tirelessly to create opportunities for a new era to unfold. The work of our time involves collectively placing life and planetary health as a priority above dreams of domination and myths of accumulation. To do this will involve global political and social emancipation and a complete dismantling and deconstructing of the social and economic systems that led to and created the crisis we face. If we want complete transformation in a time of climate crisis, we need masses of people to be concerned for the future of humanity and the planet and for that to happen there needs to be a social and ecological revolution, one that is rooted in and guided by health, compassion, kindness, community, care and love.

References

- Albrecht, G. A. (2019). *Earth emotions: New words for a new world*. Cornell University Press.
- Al-Delaimy, W., Ramanathan, V., & Sánchez Sorondo, M. (2020). *Health of people, health of planet and our responsibility: Climate change, air pollution and health*. Springer Nature.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). APA.
- Anderson, R., & Braud, W. (2011). *Transforming self and others through research: Transpersonal research methods and skills for the human sciences and humanities*. SUNY Press.
- Andrade, C. C., & Devlin, A. S. (2015). Stress reduction in the hospital room: Applying Ulrich's theory of supportive design. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 41, 125-134.
- Arvey, C. G. (2018). *The biophilia effect: A scientific and spiritual exploration of the healing bond between humans and nature*. Sounds True.
- Arvey, C. G. (2018). *The biophilia effect: A scientific and spiritual exploration of the healing bond between humans and nature*. Sounds True
- Assagioli, R. (1961). *Self-realization and psychological disturbances*. Psychosynthesis Research Foundation.
- Assagioli, R. (2000). *Psychosynthesis: A collection of basic writings*. Synthesis Center Publishing.
- Association for the Advancement of Psychosynthesis. (2017). *What is psychosynthesis*. AAP. <https://aap-psychosynthesis.wildapricot.org/What-is-Psychosynthesis>

Atchley, R. A., Strayer, D. L., & Atchley, P. (2012). Creativity in the wild: Improving creative reasoning through immersion in natural settings. *PloS one*, 7(12), e51474.

Barrable, A., & Booth, D. (2020). Increasing nature connection in children: A mini review of interventions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 492.

Barry, J. (2012). *The politics of actually existing unsustainability: Human flourishing in a climate-changed, carbon-constrained world*. Oxford University Press.

Barry, J. (2019). Green republicanism and a 'Just Transition' from the tyranny of economic growth. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 24(5), 725-742.

Barry, J. (2020). This is what a real emergency looks like: What the response to Coronavirus can teach us about how we can and need to respond to the planetary emergency. *Green House Think Tank*. <https://www.greenhousethinktank.org/this-is-what-a-real-emergency-looks-like-what-the-response-to-coronavirus-can-teach-us-about-how-we-can-and-need-to-respond-to-the-planetary-emergency/>

Bateson, G. (2000). *Steps to an ecology of mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology*. University of Chicago Press.

Bayley, J. (2019). Ecotherapy: the benefits for young people. *Holistic Healthcare*, 16(1), 24.

Bendell, J. (2018). Deep adaptation: A map for navigating climate tragedy. Institute for Leadership and Sustainability (IFLAS) Occasional Papers Volume 2. <https://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/4166/>

Bendell, J., & Read, R. (Eds.). (2021). *Deep adaptation: Navigating the realities of climate chaos*. John Wiley & Sons.

Berardi, F. (2009). *The soul at work: From alienation to autonomy*. Semiotext(e).

- Berger, R. (2006). Using contact with nature, creativity and rituals as a therapeutic medium with children with learning difficulties: A case study. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 11(2), 135-146.
- Berger, R. (2008a). Building a home in nature: An innovative framework for practice. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 48(2), 264-279.
- Berger, R. (2008b). *Nature therapy: Developing a framework for practice*. University of Abertay, Dundee.
- Berger, R., & Tiry, M. (2012). The enchanting forest and the healing sand: Nature therapy with people coping with psychiatric difficulties. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 39(5), 412-416.
- Bettmann, J. E., Scheinfeld, D. E., Prince, K. C., Garland, E. L., & Ovrom, K. V. (2018). Changes in psychiatric symptoms and psychological processes among veterans participating in a therapeutic adventure program. *Psychological Services*, 16(4), 525-534.
- Birch, J., Rishbeth, C., & Payne, S. R. (2020). Nature doesn't judge you: How urban nature supports young people's mental health and wellbeing in a diverse UK city. *Health & Place*, 62, 102296.
- Birnbaum, L. C. (2012). *The Future Has an Ancient Heart*. Bloomington: iUniverse.
- Bratman, G. N., Hamilton, J. P., Hahn, K. S., Daily, G. C., & Gross, J. J. (2015). Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 112(28), 8567-8572.
- Brenner, N., & Katsikis, N. (2021). Hinterlands of the Capitalocene. In M. Lancione and C. McFarlane (Eds.), *Global urbanism: Knowledge, power and the city* (pp. 34-48). Routledge.

Brodwin, E. (2018, January 10). *The best countries to escape the worse effects of climate change*. Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/best-countries-escape-climate-change-map-2018-1?r=US&IR=T>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Brown, A. M. (2019). *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*. AK Press.

Brown, J. S., & Duguid, P. (2001). Structure and spontaneity: knowledge and organization. In I. Nonaka & D. J. Teece (Eds.), *Managing industrial knowledge: Creation, transfer and utilization* (pp. 44-67). SAGE.

Brown, M. Y. (2004). *Unfolding self: The practice of psychosynthesis*. Allworth Communications, Inc.

Browning, M. H. E. M., Mimnaugh, K. J., van Riper, C. J., Laurent, H. K., & LaValle, S. M. (2019). Can simulated nature support mental health? Comparing short, single-doses of 360-degree nature videos in virtual reality with the outdoors. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2667. Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.

Butler, J. (2002). *Gender trouble*. Routledge.

Butler, J. (2021). *The force of non-violence: An ethico-political bind*. Verso.

Buus, K. (2019, October 7). Extinction Rebellion: The arrestables – a photo essay. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/07/extinction-rebellion-arrestables-photo-essay>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022)

Buzzell, L., & Chalquist, C. (Eds.) (2009). *Ecotherapy: Healing with nature in mind*. Counterpoint.

Callaghan, A., McCombe, G., Harrold, A., McMeel, C., Mills, G., Moore-Cherry, N., & Cullen, W. (2021). The impact of green spaces on mental health in urban settings: A scoping review. *Journal of Mental Health*, 30(2), 179-193.

Carr, K., & Bendell, J. (2020). Facilitation for Deep Adaptation: Enabling loving conversations about our predicament [Unpublished]. Institute for Leadership and

Sustainability (IFLAS) Occasional Papers Volume 6. University of Cumbria.
<http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/5792/> (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Chomsky, N., Pollin, R., & Polychroniou, C. J. (2020). *Climate crisis and the global Green New Deal: The political economy of saving the planet*. Verso.

Cleary, A., Fielding, K. S., Murray, Z., & Roiko, A. (2020). Predictors of nature connection among urban residents: Assessing the role of childhood and adult nature experiences. *Environment and Behavior*, 52(6), 579-610.

Coffey, Y., Bhullar, N., Durkin, J., Islam, M. S., & Usher, K. (2021). Understanding eco-anxiety: A systematic scoping review of current literature and identified knowledge gaps. *The Journal of Climate Change and Health*, 3, 100047.

Collier, B. (2020, June 30). *Covid-19 and our relationship with nature*. The Ecologist.
<https://theecologist.org/2020/jun/30/covid-19-and-our-relationship-nature>

Conn, S. A. (1998). Living in the earth: Ecopsychology, health and psychotherapy. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 26(1-3), 179-198.

Crowther, R. (2019). *Wellbeing and self-transformation in natural landscapes*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Culley, S., & Bond, T. (2011). *Integrative counselling skills in action*. SAGE.

Davis, J. (1998). The transpersonal dimensions of ecopsychology: Nature, nonduality, and spiritual practice. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 26(1-3), 69-100.

Davies, J. (2022). *Sedated: How Modern Capitalism Caused our Mental Health Crisis*. Atlantic Books.

Davis, J. V. (2011). Ecopsychology, transpersonal psychology, and nonduality. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 30(1), 14.

Davis, J., Moulton, A. A., Van Sant, L., & Williams, B. (2019). Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?: A manifesto for ecological justice in an age of global crises. *Geography Compass*, 13(5), e12438.

de Bruin, A. (2021). Self, soul and mind. In *Mindfulness and meditation at university: 10 years of the Munich Model* (pp. 25-30). transcript-Verlag.

de La Bellacasa, M. P. (2017). *Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds* (Vol. 41). U of Minnesota Press.

Divya, C., & Naachimuthu, K. P. (2020). Human nature connection and mental health: What do we know so far? *Indian Journal of Health and Well-being*, 11(1-3), 84-92.

Doran, P. (2017). *A political economy of attention, mindfulness and consumerism: Reclaiming the mindful commons*. Routledge.

Doran, P. F., Killeen, R., McDermott, M. C., McErlean, K., Millar, L., & Rodgers, S. (2021). Criminalising 'ecocide' at the International Criminal Court. SSRN Electronic Journal. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3827803>

Dryden, W., Horton, I., & Mearns, D. (1995). *Issues in professional counsellor training*. Burns & Oates.

Ducarme, F., & Couvet, D. (2020). What does “nature” mean? *Palgrave Communications*, 6(1), 1-8.

Echterhoff, G., Higgins, E. T., & Levine, J. M. (2009). Shared reality: Experiencing commonality with others’ inner states about the world. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4(5), 496-521.

Federici, S. (2004). *Caliban and the witch*. Penguin.

Federici, S. (2012). *Revolution at point zero: Housework, reproduction, and feminist struggle*. PM Press.

Federici, S. (2018). *Re-enchanting the world: Feminism and the politics of the commons*. PM Press.

Federici, S. (2020). *Beyond the periphery of the skin: Rethinking, remaking, and reclaiming the body in contemporary capitalism*. PM Press.

Fenske, M., & Norkunas, M. (2017). Experiencing the more-than-human world. *Narrative Culture*, 4(2), 105-110.

Ferrucci, P. (2004). *What we may be: Techniques for psychological and spiritual growth through psychosynthesis*. JP Tarcher/Penguin.

Finlay, L. (2002). “Outing” the researcher: The provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(4), 531-545.

Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* John Hunt Publishing.

Fisher, M. (2020). *Postcapitalist desire: The final lectures*. Watkins Media Limited.

Fletcher, R. (2017). Connection with nature is an oxymoron: A political ecology of “nature-deficit disorder”. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 48(4), 226-233.

Fogarty, P. (2017). *Whittled away: Ireland's vanishing nature*. The Collins Press.

Foster, J. B., & Clark, B. (2018). The robbery of nature. *Monthly Review*, 70(3), 1-20.

Francis, P., (2019). *Finding Your Deep Soul: Guidance for Authentic Living Through Shamanic Practices (Therapeutic Shamanism)*. Paul Francis.

Francis, P. (2017). *The shamanic journey: A practical guide to therapeutic shamanism* ("Therapeutic Shamanism" Series, Vol. 1). Paul Francis.

Francis, P. (2018). *Rewilding yourself: Discovering your soul's deep roots through shamanic practices* ("Therapeutic Shamanism" Series, Vol. 2). Paul Francis.

Fromm, E. (1995). *The art of loving*. Thorsons. (Original work published in 1956)

Fromm, E. (1997). *The anatomy of human destructiveness*. Pimlico.

Fromm, E. (2006). *The fear of freedom*. Routledge.

Fromm, E. (2015). *The art of being*. Open Road Media.

Fromm, E. (2020). *To have or to be?* Bloomsbury.

Gaard, G. (2018). Feminism and environmental justice. In R. Holifield, J. Chakraborty, & G. Walker (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Environmental Justice* (pp. 74-88). Routledge.

Gates, B. (2021). *How to avoid a climate disaster: The solutions we have and the breakthroughs we need*. Knopf.

Gidlow, C. J., Jones, M. V., Hurst, G., Masterson, D., Clark-Carter, D., Tarvainen, M. P., & Nieuwenhuijsen, M. (2016). Where to put your best foot forward: Psycho-physiological responses to walking in natural and urban environments. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 45, 22-29.

Gillis, S., Howie, G., & Munford, R. (Eds.). (2004). *Third wave feminism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Giusti, M. (2019). Human-nature relationships in context: Experiential, psychological, and contextual dimensions that shape children's desire to protect nature. *PloS one*, 14(12), e0225951.

Görg, C., Plank, C., Wiedenhofer, D., Mayer, A., Pichler, M., Schaffartzik, A., & Krausmann, F. (2020). Scrutinizing the Great Acceleration: The Anthropocene and its analytic challenges for social-ecological transformations. *The Anthropocene Review*, 7(1), 42-61.

Green Climate Fund. (2021, August 11). Latest IPCC report is a wake-up call for immediate climate action. *ReliefWeb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/latest-ipcc-report-wake-call-immediate-climate-action>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Gregory, A. (2021, October 6). 'Eco-anxiety': Fear of environmental doom weighs on young people. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/06/eco-anxiety-fear-of-environmental-doom-weighs-on-young-people>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Guerrero, D. G. (2018). The limits of capitalist solutions to the climate crisis. In V. Satgar (Ed.), *The climate crisis: South African and global democratic eco-socialist alternatives* (pp. 30-46). Wits University Press.

Hanh, T. (2013). *Love letter to the earth*. Parallax Press.

Hanh, T. N. (2008). *The world we have: A Buddhist approach to peace and ecology* (Easyread Super Large 20pt ed.). ReadHowYouWant.com.

Hanh, T. N. (2016). *How to love*. Random House.

Hanson, M., & Salleh, A. (1999). On production and reproduction, identity and nonidentity in ecofeminist theory. *Organization & Environment*, 12(2), 207-218.

Harari, Y. N. (2014). *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. Random House.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist studies*, 14(3), 575-599.

Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

Harmon-Jones, E., & Mills, J. (2019). An introduction to cognitive dissonance theory and an overview of current perspectives on the theory. In E. Harmon-Jones (Ed.), *Cognitive dissonance: Reexamining a pivotal theory in psychology* (pp. 3-24). American Psychological Association.

Hartmann, P., Apaolaza, V., & Alija, P. (2013). Nature imagery in advertising: Attention restoration and memory effects. *International Journal of Advertising*, 32(2), 183-210.

Hayward, M. W., Scanlon, R. J., Callen, A., Howell, L. G., Klop-Toker, K. L., Di Blanco, Y., Balkenhol, N., Bugir, C. K., Campbell, L., Caravaggi, A., Chalmers, A. C., Clulow, J., Clulow, S., Cross, P., Gould, J. A., Griffin, A. S., Heurich, M., Howe, B. K., Jachowski, D. S., ... Weise, F. J. (2019). Reintroducing rewilding to restoration: Rejecting the search for novelty. *Biological Conservation*, 233, 255-259.

Hicks, L. J., Smith, A. C., Ralph, B. C., & Smilek, D. (2020). Restoration of sustained attention following virtual nature exposure: Undeniable or unreliable? *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 71, 101488.

Higgins, P. (2012). *Eradicating ecocide*. Shephard Walwyn.

Hooks, b. (2002) *Communion: The Female Search for Love*. Perennial.

hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Pluto Press.

hooks, b. (2001). *All about love: New visions*. William Morrow.

Howden, M., & Ma'asi-Kaisamy, O. (2022, February 28). As extreme weather ravages the Pacific, there is much to do and no time to waste. *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/01/as-extreme-weather-ravages-the-pacific-there-is-much-to-do-and-no-time-to-waste>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Huang, Q., Yang, M., Jane, H. A., Li, S., & Bauer, N. (2020). Trees, grass, or concrete? The effects of different types of environments on stress reduction. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 193, 103654.

Hughes, J., & Carr, V. (n.d.). *Connection to nature*. RSPB.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/connection-to-nature/> (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Hulme, M. (2009). *Why we disagree about climate change: Understanding controversy, inaction and opportunity*. Cambridge University Press.

Huss, E., & Magos, M. (2014). Relationship between self-actualisation and employment for at-risk young unemployed women. *Journal of Education and Work*, 27(3), 306-322.

Illich, I., (1971) *Deschooling society*. Marion Boyars.

Illich, I., (1976) *Limits to medicine*. Marion Boyars.

Iwata, Y., Dhubháin, Á. N., Brophy, J., Roddy, D., Burke, C., & Murphy, B. (2016). Benefits of group walking in forests for people with significant mental ill-health. *Ecopsychology*, 8(1), 16-26.

Jepson, P., & Blythe, C. (2020). *Rewilding: The radical new science of ecological recovery*. Icon Books.

- Johnson, E. L. (2013). Mapping the field of the whole human: Toward a form psychology. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 31(2), 130-150.
- Jordan, M. (2014). *Nature and therapy: Understanding counselling and psychotherapy in outdoor spaces*. Routledge.
- Jordan, M., & Hinds, J. (2016). *Ecotherapy: Theory, research and practice*. Macmillan International Higher Education.
- Joye, Y., & Dewitte, S. (2018). Nature's broken path to restoration: A critical look at Attention Restoration Theory. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 59, 1-8.
- Jung, C. G., & Long, C. E. (2018). *Collected papers on analytical psychology: "Included Glossary of Jungian Terms"* (Revised ed.). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Kaplan, S. (1995). The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 15(3), 169-182.
- Kaur, A. (2013). Maslow's need hierarchy theory: Applications and criticisms. *Global Journal of Management and Business Studies*, 3(10), 1061-1064.
- Kheel, M. (1990). Ecofeminism and deep ecology: Reflections on identity and difference. *The trumpeter*, 8(2).
- Kiell, P. J. (2016). Blue mind: The surprising science that shows how being near, in, on, or under water can make you happier, healthier, more connected, and better at what you do. *AMAA Journal*, 29(3), 17-18.

Kim, R. (2020). Well-being, eudaimonia, and nature-fulfillment. In M. Hähnel (Ed.), *Aristotelian naturalism: A research companion* (pp. 371-385). Springer.

Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.

Kiritsis, P. (2013, July 26). Roberto Assagioli and psychosynthesis. *Down the Rabbit Hole*. [http://www.paulkiritsis.net/blog/Down The Rabbit Hole/post/roberto-assagioli-and-psychosynthesis/](http://www.paulkiritsis.net/blog/Down%20The%20Rabbit%20Hole/post/roberto-assagioli-and-psychosynthesis/). (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Kjellgren, A., & Buhrkall, H. (2010). A comparison of the restorative effect of a natural environment with that of a simulated natural environment. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30(4), 464-472.

Klein, N. (2014). *This changes everything*. Penguin Random House UK.

Kovel, J. (2007). *The enemy of nature: The end of capitalism or the end of the world?* Zed books.

Laville, S. (2020, December 16). Air pollution a cause in girl's death, coroner rules in landmark case. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/dec/16/girls-death-contributed-to-by-air-pollution-coroner-rules-in-landmark-case>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Lent, J. (2017) *The patterning instinct: A cultural history of humanity's search for meaning*. Prometheus Books.

Lent, J. (2021). *The web of meaning: Integrating science and traditional wisdom to find our place in the universe*. New Society Publishers.

Lewis, S. (2021) Let's say it without flinching: The fossil fuel industry is destroying our future. *The Guardian* 10 August.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/aug/10/fossil-fuel-companies-ipcc-climate-report-governments>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Lewis, S. L., & Maslin, M. A. (2018). *The human planet: How we created the Anthropocene*. Yale University Press.

Liefländer, A. K., Fröhlich, G., Bogner, F. X., Schultz, P. W. (2013). Promoting connectedness with nature through environmental education. *Environmental Education Research*, 19(3), 370-384.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241231906_Promoting_connectedness_with_nature_through_environmental_education/figures. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Lim, H. L. (2019). Environmental revolution in contemporary Buddhism: The interbeing of individual and collective consciousness in ecology. *Religions*, 10(2), 120.

Lombard, C. A. (2017). Psychosynthesis: A foundational bridge between psychology and spirituality. *Pastoral Psychology*, 66(4), 461-485.

Lorde, A. (1992). *Burst of light* (p. 19). Women's Press (CA).

Lorde, A. (2012). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Crossing Press.

Lorde, A. (2018). *The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. Penguin UK.

Lorde, A. G. (2020). *When I Dare to Be Powerful*. Penguin Books.

Lorde, A. (2017). *Your silence will not protect you*. Silver Press.

Louv, R. (2008). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Algonquin Books.

Louv, R. (2012). *The nature principle: Reconnecting with life in a virtual age*. Algonquin Books.

Löwy, M. (2015). *Ecosocialism: A radical alternative to capitalist catastrophe*. Haymarket

Books.

Lyons, E., & Coyle, A. (Eds.) (2021). *Analysing qualitative data in psychology* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Macfarlane, R., & Morris, J. (2018). *The lost words* (E. O. Bowman, G. Garvey, C. Matthews, & B. Zephaniah, Narr.) [Audiobook]. Anansi Audio.

MacGregor, S. (2006). *Beyond Mothering Earth: Ecological citizenship and the politics of care*. UBC Books.

Maclagan, P. (2003). Self-actualisation as a moral concept and the implications for motivation in organisations: A Kantian argument. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 12(4), 334-342.

Macy, J. (2012). A wild love for the world. Joanna Macy interview by Krista Tippett, 'On Being', American Public Media, 1.

Macy, J. (2021). *World as lover, world as self: Courage for global justice and planetary renewal*. Parallax Press.

Macy, J., & Brown, M. Y. (2014). *Coming back to life: The guide to the work that reconnects*. New Society Publishers.

Macy, J., & Johnstone, C. (2012). *Active hope: How to face the mess we're in without going crazy*. New World Library.

Magan, M. (2020). *Thirty-two words for field: Lost words of the Irish landscape*. Gill Books.

Maslow, A. H. (1962). Some basic propositions of a growth and self-actualization psychology. In A. W. Combs (Ed.), *Perceiving, behaving, becoming: A new focus for education* (pp. 34-49). National Education Association.

Maurer, M. M., & Daukantaitė, D. (2020). Revisiting the organismic valuing process theory of personal growth: A theoretical review of Rogers and its connection to positive psychology. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1706.

McConnell, A. R., & Jacobs, T. P. (2020). Self-nature representations: On the unique consequences of nature-self size on pro-environmental action. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 71, 101471.

McGrath, M. (2021). *Climate change: IPCC report is “code red for humanity”*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-58130705>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Mearns, D., Thorne, B., & McLeod, J. (2013). *Person-centred counselling in action* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Mechler, R., Singh, C., Ebi, K., Djalante, R., Thomas, A., James, R., Tschakert, P., Wewerinke-Singh, M., Schinko, T., Ley, D., Nalau, J., Bouwer, L. M., Huggel, C., Hug, S., Linnerooth-Bayer, J., Surminski, S., Pinho, P., Jones, R., Boyd, E., & Revi, A. (2020). Loss and Damage and limits to adaptation: Recent IPCC insights and implications for climate science and policy. *Sustainability Science*, 15(4), 1245-1251.

Mellor, M. (2006). Ecofeminist political economy. *International Journal of Green Economics*, 1(1-2), 139-150.

Mellor, M. (2019). *Money: Myths, truths and alternatives*. Policy Press.

Merchant, C. (1980). *The death of nature: Women, ecology, and the scientific revolution*. HarperCollins.

Merchant, C. (2006). The scientific revolution and the death of nature. *Isis*, 97(3), 513-533.

Meredith, G. R., Rakow, D. A., Eldermire, E. R., Madsen, C. G., Shelley, S. P., & Sachs, N. A. (2020). Minimum time dose in nature to positively impact the mental health of college-aged students, and how to measure it: A scoping review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2942.

McGuigan, R. (2009). Shadows, conflict, and the mediator. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 26(3), 349-364.

Mies, M. (1999). *Patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale: Women in the international division of labour*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Mies, M. (2014). No commons without a community. *Community Development Journal*, 49(suppl_1), i106-i117.

Milman, O. (2021, February 9). “Invisible killer”: Fossil fuels caused 8.7m deaths globally in 2018, research finds. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/09/fossil-fuels-pollution-deaths-research>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Milton, K. (2003). *Loving nature: Towards an ecology of emotion*. Routledge.

Mishra, S. (2021, November 8). Canadian becomes world’s first patient to be diagnosed as suffering with “climate change”. *The Independent*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/01/as-extreme-weather-ravages-the-pacific-there-is-much-to-do-and-no-time-to-waste> (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Mind. (2021, November). *Nature and mental health*. Mind.
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/how-nature-benefits-mental-health/> (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Moore, C., & Shantall, T. (2003). The self-actualisation theory of Abraham Maslow. In V. Rapmund, C. Moore, P. Oosthuizen, T. Shantall, A. van Dyk, & H. Viljoen (Eds.), *Personality theories: Only study guide for PYC2601*. University of South Africa.

Moore, J. W. (2018). *The Capitalocene Part II: Abstract social nature and the limits to capital*. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 45(2) 237-279.

Moore, J. W. (Ed.). (2016). *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, history, and the crisis of capitalism*. PM Press.

- Moore, J. W. (2021). Capitalocene & planetary justice. *Études Digitales*, 2020(9), 53-65.
- Moore, N. (2011). Eco/feminism and rewriting the ending of feminism: From the Chipko movement to Clayoquot Sound. *Feminist Theory*, 12(1), 3-21.
- Nakate, V. (2021). *A bigger picture: My fight to bring a new African voice to the climate crisis*. Pan Macmillan.
- Naor, L., & Mayseless, O. (2020). The therapeutic value of experiencing spirituality in nature. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 7(2), 114.
- Natural England (2016, February 9). *Connecting with nature offers a new approach to mental health care*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/connecting-with-nature-offers-a-new-approach-to-mental-health-care>
- Nelson-Jones, R. (2002). *Essential counselling and therapy skills: The skilled client model*. SAGE.
- Nichols, W. J. (2014). *Blue mind: How water makes you happier, more connected and better at what you do*. Hachette UK.
- Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press.
- Nutsford, D., Pearson, A. L., & Kingham, S. (2013). An ecological study investigating the association between access to urban green space and mental health. *Public Health*, 127(11), 1005-1011.
- O'Brien, M., & Houston, G. (2007). *Integrative therapy: A practitioner's guide*. SAGE.
- O'Donohue, J. (1999). *Anam cara: Wisdom from the Celtic world*. Transworld Publications.
- O'Donohue, J. (2010). *Divine beauty: The invisible embrace*. Random House.

O'Hara, S. (2009). Feminist ecological economics: theory and practice. In A. Salleh (Ed.), *Eco-sufficiency and global justice: Women write political ecology* (pp. 180-196). Pluto Press.

Ojala, A., Korpela, K., Tyrväinen, L., Tiittanen, P., & Lanki, T. (2019). Restorative effects of urban green environments and the role of urban-nature orientedness and noise sensitivity: A field experiment. *Health & Place*, 55, 59-70.

O'Reilly, K. (2009). *Key concepts in ethnography*. SAGE.

Pacheco, S. E. (2020). Catastrophic effects of climate change on children's health start before birth. *The Journal of Clinical Investigation*, 130(2), 562-564

Panzini, R. G., Mosqueiro, B. P., Zimpel, R. R., Bandeira, D. R., Rocha, N. S., & Fleck, M. P. (2017). Quality-of-life and spirituality. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 29(3), 263-282.

Pellow, D. N. (2018). Review of *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern*, 2nd edition by Ariel Salleh. 2017. London: Zed Books. 369 pages, ISBN 978-1-7869-9040-2 Paper (\$25.00). *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 24(2), 478-482. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jwsr.2018.864>

Perls, F. S., & Andreas, S. (1969). *Gestalt therapy verbatim* (Vol. 979). Real People Press.

Pettersen, T. (2020). Caring for more than humans: Ecofeminism and care ethics in conversation. In O. Lysaker (Ed.), *Between closeness and Evil: A festschrift for Arne Johan Vetlesen* (pp. 183-213). Scandanavian Academic Press.

Plumwood, V. (2002). *Feminism and the mastery of nature*. Routledge.

Popejoy, M. (2014, April 23). *Beauty in nature*. Harvard University. <https://green.harvard.edu/news/beauty-nature> (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Poulsen, D. V., Stigsdotter, U. K., & Refshage, A. D. (2015). Whatever happened to the soldiers? Nature-assisted therapies for veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder: A literature review. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 14(2), 438-445.

Price, J. (2020, October 21). *COVID-19 strengthens our connection with nature*. Discover Wildlife. <https://www.discoverwildlife.com/news/covid-19-strengthens-our-connection-with-nature/>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Pritchard, A., Richardson, M., Sheffield, D., & McEwan, K. (2020). The relationship between nature connectedness and eudaimonic well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 21(3), 1145-1167.

Psych-Mental Health Hub. (n.d.) *Sigmund Freud psychoanalytic theory*. Psych-Mental Health Hub. <https://pmhealthnp.com/sigmund-freud-psychoanalytic-theory/>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Qin, H., Prasetyo, Y., Bass, M., Sanders, C., Prentice, E., & Nguyen, Q. (2020). Seeing the forest for the trees: A bibliometric analysis of environmental and resource sociology. *Society & Natural Resources*, 33(9), 1131-1148.

Read, R. (2018). *This civilisation is finished: So what is to be done?* IFLAS Occasional Paper 3. Institute of Leadership and Sustainability, University of Cumbria.

Rees, N. (2021). *The climate crisis is a child rights crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index*. UNICEF.

Research History (2012, June 16). *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. Research History. <http://www.researchhistory.org/2012/06/16/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs/>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Richardson, M., & Hamlin, I. (2021). Noticing nature, nature connectedness and time in nature: Associations with human and nature's wellbeing during the corona pandemic. *Mapping Intimacies*.

Richardson, M., Passmore, H. A., Lumber, R., Thomas, R., & Hunt, A. (2021). Moments, not minutes: The nature-wellbeing relationship. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v11i1.1267> (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Rogan, F., & Budgeon, S. (2018). The personal is political: Assessing feminist fundamentals in the digital age. *Social Sciences*, 7(8), 132.

Rogers, C. R. (1951). *Client-centered therapy: Its current practice, implications, and theory* (Vol. 560). Houghton Mifflin.

Rogers, C. R. (1995a). *A way of being*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Rogers, C. R. (1995b). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Rook, G. A. W. (2022). Evolution, the immune system, and the health consequences of socioeconomic inequality. *mSystems*, 7(2), e01438-21

Roszak, T. (2001). *The voice of the earth: An exploration of ecopsychology*. Red Wheel/Weiser.

Roszak, T. E., Gomes, M. E., & Kanner, A. D. (1995). *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*. Sierra Club Books.

Rowan, J. (2013). *Subpersonalities: The people inside us*. Routledge.

Rowland, M. (2018, April 8). *Why nature was the theme for Mental Health Awareness Week* 2021. Mental Health Foundation.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week/why-nature>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Sabini, M. (Ed.) (2002). *The earth has a soul: The nature writings of CG Jung*. North Atlantic Books.

Sakhai, K. (2018). *Capitalism and psychopathology: Alienation as mental illness*. Independently published.

Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE.

Salleh, A. (1995). Nature, woman, labor, capital: Living the deepest contradiction. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 6(1), 21-39.

Salleh, A. (2005). Moving to an embodied materialism. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 16(2), 9-14.

Salleh, A. (2009a). The dystopia of technoscience: An ecofeminist critique of postmodern reason. *Futures*, 41(4), 201-209.

Salleh, A. (Ed.). (2009b). *Eco-sufficiency & global justice: Women write political ecology*. Pluto Press.

Salleh, A. (2017). *Ecofeminism as politics: Nature, Marx and the postmodern*. Zed Books Ltd.

Scott, S. S. (2003). *Healing with nature*. Simon and Schuster.

Scranton, R. (2015). *Learning to die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the end of a civilization*. City Lights Publishers.

Scull, J. (2008). Ecopsychology: Where does it fit in psychology in 2009? *The Trumpeter*, 24(3).

Seligman, M. E. (2002). Positive psychology, positive prevention, and positive therapy. *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, 2(2002), 3-12.

Shanahan, D. F., Bush, R., Gaston, K. J., Lin, B. B., Dean, J., Barber, E., & Fuller, R. A. (2016). Health benefits from nature experiences depend on dose. *Scientific Reports*, 6, 28551.

Sharma, K. (2022, May 6). *Is India's intense heat wave a sign of climate change and global warming?* Business Insider India. <https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/science/is-india-e2-80-99s-intense-heat-wave-a-sign-of-climate-change-and-global-warming/ar-AAWYaHA>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Shepard, P. (2011). *Nature and madness*. University of Georgia Press.

Shiva, V. (2020a, March 25). *Ecofeminism and the decolonization of women, nature and the future* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVbbovgRfig>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Shiva, V. (2020b). *Reclaiming the commons: Biodiversity, indigenous knowledge, and the rights of Mother Earth*. Synergetic Press.

Shiva, V., & Moser, I. (Eds.). (1995). *Biopolitics: A feminist and ecological reader on biotechnology*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Shiva, V. & Shiva, K. (2020). *Oneness vs the 1%: Shattering illusions, seeding freedom*. New Internationalist.

Sidenius, U., Stigsdotter, U. K., Varning Poulsen, D., & Bondas, T. (2017). "I look at my own forest and fields in a different way": The lived experience of nature-based therapy in a therapy garden when suffering from stress-related illness. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, 12(1), 1324700.

Singer, J. (2017). *NeuroDiversity: The birth of an idea*. Kindle.

Slevin, A., Barry, J., Hill, T., Orr, J., O'Flynn, P., Sullivan, L., & McLernon, R. (2022). Local climate praxis in practice: Community climate action in Belfast. In C. Howarth, M. Lane, & A. Slevin (Eds.), *Addressing the climate crisis: Local action in theory and practice* (pp. 3-13). Palgrave Macmillan.

Slevin, A., Elliott, R., Graves, R., Petticrew, C., & Popoff, A. (2020). Lessons from Freire: Towards a pedagogy for socio-ecological transformation. *Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 73, 95.

Sorrell, S. (2011). *Psychosynthesis made easy: A psychospiritual psychology for today*. John Hunt Publishing.

Spretnak, C. (2011). *Relational reality*. Green Horizon Books.

Sreechinth, C. (2018). *Musings of Carl Jung*. UB Tech.

Steffen, W., Broadgate, W., Deutsch, L., Gaffney, O., & Ludwig, C. (2015). The trajectory of the Anthropocene: the great acceleration. *The Anthropocene Review* 2(1), 81-98.

Sternberg, R. J., & Lubart, T. I. (1995). *Defying the crowd: Cultivating creativity in a culture of conformity*. Free Press.

Stevens, P. (2010). Embedment in the environment: A new paradigm for well-being? *Perspectives in Public Health*, 130(6), 265-269.

Stevens, P. (2012). Towards an ecosociology. *Sociology*, 46(4), 579-595.

Stigsdotter, U. K., Corazon, S. S., Sidenius, U., Nyed, P. K., Larsen, H. B., & Fjorback, L. O. (2018). Efficacy of nature-based therapy for individuals with stress-related illnesses: Randomised controlled trial. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 213(1), 404-411.

Strumse, E. (2007). The ecological self: A psychological perspective on anthropogenic environmental change. *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 3(2), 11-18.

Stuart-Smith, S. (2020). *The well-gardened mind: Rediscovering nature in the modern world*. WF Howes Limited.

Summers, J. K., & Vivian, D. N. (2018). Ecotherapy – A forgotten ecosystem service: A review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1389.

Summers, J. K., Vivian, D. V., & Summers, J. T. (2019). The role of interaction with nature in childhood development: An under-appreciated ecosystem service. *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*, 8(6), 142.

Takayama, N., Korpela, K., Lee, J., Morikawa, T., Tsunetsugu, Y., Park, B.-J., Qing, L., Tyrväinen, L., Miyazaki, Y., & Kagawa, T. (2014). Emotional, restorative and vitalizing effects of forest and urban environments at four sites in Japan. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 11(7), 7207-7230.

Taylor, B. R. (1995). *Ecological resistance movements: The global emergence of radical and popular environmentalism*. SUNY Press.

Taylor, S. P. (2018). Critical realism vs social constructionism & social constructivism: application to a social housing research study. *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research*, 37(2), 216-222.

Thunberg, G. (2019, February 18). “Our house is on fire”: Greta Thunberg, 16, urges leaders to act on climate. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/25/our-house-is-on-fire-greta-thunberg16-urges-leaders-to-act-on-climate>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Totton, N. (2011). *Wild therapy: Undomesticating inner and outer worlds*. PCCS Books.

Trigwell, J. L., Francis, A. J., & Bagot, K. L. (2014). Nature connectedness and eudaimonic well-being: Spirituality as a potential mediator. *Ecopsychology*, 6(4), 241-251.

Turban, D. B., & Yan, W. (2016). Relationship of eudaimonia and hedonia with work outcomes. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 31(6), 1006-1020. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-07-2015-0271> (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Ulrich, R. (1984). View through a window may influence recovery from surgery. *Science*, 224(4647), 420-421. 10.1126/science.6143402

Ulrich, R. S. (1999). Effects of gardens on health outcomes: Theory and research. In C. C. Marcus and M. Barnes (Eds.), *Healing gardens* (pp. 27-86). John Wiley and Sons.

Ulrich, R. S., Simons, R. F., Losito, B. D., Fiorito, E., Miles, M. A., & Zelson, M. (1991). Stress recovery during exposure to natural and urban environments. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 11(3), 201-230.

University of East Anglia. (2022). Turning eco-anxiety into action. UEA. <https://www.uea.ac.uk/climate-of-change/eco-anxiety>. (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Upham, B. (2020, June 22). *Coronavirus glossary: Key terms about the pandemic explained*. Everyday Health. <https://www.everydayhealth.com/coronavirus/coronavirus-glossary-key-terms-about-the-pandemic-explained/>

Vohra, K., Vodonos, A., Schwartz, J., Marais, E. A., Sulprizio, M. P., & Mickley, L. J. (2021, February 9). *Fossil fuel air pollution responsible for 1 in 5 deaths worldwide*. Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/c-change/news/fossil->

[fuel-air-pollution-responsible-for-1-in-5-deaths-worldwide/](#) (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Völker, S., & Kistemann, T. (2011). The impact of blue space on human health and well-being: Salutogenetic health effects of inland surface waters: A review. *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health*, 214(6), 449-460.

Wallace-Wells, D. (2019). *The uninhabitable earth: A story of the future*. Penguin UK.

Warber, S. L., DeHudy, A. A., Bialko, M. F., Marselle, M. R., & Irvine, K. N. (2015). Addressing “nature-deficit disorder”: A mixed methods pilot study of young adults attending a wilderness camp. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 2015(Article 651827). <https://doi.org/10.1155/2015/651827>

Ward, B., & Dubos, R. (1972). *Only one earth: The care and maintenance of a small planet*. Penguin Books Ltd.

Warren, K. J. (2001). Feminist theory: Ecofeminist and cultural feminist. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 5495-5499). Elsevier.

Whitburn, J., Linklater, W., & Abrahamse, W. (2020). Meta-analysis of human connection to nature and proenvironmental behavior. *Conservation Biology*, 34(1), 180-193.

White, M. P., Elliott, L. R., Grellier, J., Economou, T., Bell, S., Bratman, G. N., Cirach, M., Gascon, M., Lima, M. L., Löhmus, M., Nieuwenhuijsen, M., Ojala, A., Roiko, A., Shultz, P. W., van den Bosch, M., & Fleming, L. E. (2021). Associations between green/blue spaces and mental health across 18 countries. *Scientific Reports*, 11(1), 1-12.

Wigginton, B., & Lafrance, M. N. (2019). Learning critical feminist research: A brief introduction to feminist epistemologies and methodologies. *Feminism & Psychology*, 0959353519866058.

Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2010). *The spirit level: Why equality is better for everyone*. Penguin Books.

Williams, F. (2017). *The nature fix: Why nature makes us happier, healthier, and more creative*. WW Norton & Company.

Williams, M., & Moser, T. (2019). The art of coding and thematic exploration in qualitative research. *International Management Review*, 15(1), 45-55.

Wilson, E. O. (1984). *Biophilia*. Harvard University Press.

World Wildlife Fund UK & the Mental Health Foundation (2021). *Thriving with nature: A guide for everyone: Making the most of the UK's spaces for our mental health and wellbeing*. Pyramid Press.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/Thriving-With-Nature-compressed.pdf> (Date last accessed 25/07/2022).

Wu, J., Snell, G., & Samji, H. (2020). Climate anxiety in young people: A call to action. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 4(10), e435-e436.

Wyles, K. J., White, M. P., Hattam, C., Pahl, S., King, H., & Austen, M. (2019). Are some natural environments more psychologically beneficial than others? The importance of type and quality on connectedness to nature and psychological restoration. *Environment and Behavior*, 51(2), 111-143.

Yerbury, R., & Weiler, B. (2020). From human wellbeing to an ecocentric perspective: How nature-connectedness can extend the benefits of marine wildlife experiences. *Anthrozoös*, 33(4), 461-479.

Zajonc, A. (2009). *Meditation as contemplative inquiry: When knowing becomes love*. Lindisfarne Books.

Zein, L. F., & Setiawan, A. R. (2017). General overview of ecofeminism. *OSF Preprints*.
10.31219/osf.io/fmjgk

APPENDIX A

Invitation letter

Dear / To whom it may concern,

I am writing to invite members of your organisation/ company to participate in a piece of research as part of my PhD on Nature and Mental Health. I am currently a second-year postgraduate student with the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work. I am keen to interview participants who engage with nature on a regular or semi-regular basis and who would be happy to be interviewed on their opinions and experiences.

My research aims to explore the possibility of how nature may affect an individual's wellbeing by using a theoretical framework called 'Constructivist Grounded Theory'. This methodological approach argues that by obtaining in-depth information and data from individuals on a specific topic or area, a new theory will emerge from the material collected from the participants.

My hopes and aims are that this research may be used to develop the field of ecotherapy and nature therapies. I have included a Participant Information Sheet with this email and would encourage anyone who is interested in taking part to read through it. If anyone is interested in participating or would like any further information, please tell them to email me and get in touch and I will arrange an interview at a time that suits them. I would like to thank you in advance for any time and consideration you may give to my request.

Kind regards,

Louise Taylor

APPENDIX B

Participant Information Sheet

Study title:

The relationship between nature and mental health: a grounded approach.

Invitation:

You are being invited to take part in a piece of research on the relationship between nature and mental health. The research is part of a PhD project with the Department of Sociology in Queens University Belfast, which is due to be completed in September 2021. Your participation would involve completing an interview with the researcher, that will be no longer than one hour in length. Some participants may be invited to do a second interview if they have more they would like to discuss on the issue. Please take the time to read the information provided carefully and consider whether you would like to participate.

Background:

The aim of this research is to try and establish a theory as to why nature or spending time in nature may be beneficial to mental health. Constructivist Grounding Theory is the methodology that will be used to develop a theory using the data provided by participants. This research method states that by following qualitative research methods (such as interviews) a new theory may emerge through intensive scrutiny and coding of the data collected.

The hope is that this PhD will contribute to the growing field of ecotherapy and ecopsychology and the findings could be used to promote sustainable and alternative mental health practices. As the theory will emerge from the data collected, it is difficult to predict what may be concluded and that is why it is important to have a diverse, cross section of people involved and to allow the data collected to speak for itself.

Expectations of participation

It is expected that each participant completes a consent form and an informal, semi-structured interview of no longer than one hour. On a rare occasion there may be second interview requested if it is deemed appropriate and beneficial. However, all participants have complete autonomy over whether or not they want to do a second interview.

What will happen during the interview?

The interview will be as relaxed and informal as possible and will be based on the topic of nature and mental health. There will be a set of questions on the subject area, which the researcher will use to prompt discussion and guide the interview process.

How will the information provided be used?

The information provided will be transcribed and the data will be used by the researcher to identify emerging themes and areas of interest.

Schedule

The interviews will take place at a time and location which suits the participant and researcher. All interviews will take place during the day. The researcher is happy to travel to locations that are accessible and suitable to the interviewees.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?

The advantages of participating in the research is that you will be supporting the development of a theory and the progression of the academic area of ecotherapy. It is difficult to foresee any disadvantages to participation as the research will be based on the views and experiences of the participants. All participants will be reminded to only disclose and discuss experiences and views which they feel comfortable with and do not have to answer any questions they don't want. It is hoped that the interviews will be enjoyable and worthwhile experiences for all those who volunteer their time and opinions.

How will the information be stored and processed?

All data will be saved on university computers which will be password protected and on university grounds. All information collected will be kept anonymously. Each interview will be audio recorded and transcribed shortly after being recorded. Any identifying information will be removed from the transcripts and the audio recordings will be deleted. No individual will be identified in the final research piece/thesis; however, all participating organisations will be included in the final work. The anonymised data will be stored in accordance with all General Data Protection Regulation. It will be stored for five years after the research has been concluded and will be available for others to access and after that time it will be disposed of.

Contact details

If you have any issues or concerns, please feel free to contact Louise Taylor by emailing ltaylor31@qub.ac.uk.

Page Break

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

Title of project: The relationship between nature and mental health: A Grounded Theory Approach.

Name of Researcher: Louise Taylor

Name of Primary Supervisor: Dr Paul Best

Name of Secondary Supervisor: Prof Gavin Davidson

Please tick each sentence to confirm understanding and sign and date the bottom of the form:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information participation sheet provided for the above study and have been given the opportunity to ask any questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to opt out of the study at any point without explanation.
3. I understand that if I wish to opt out after a completed interview that any information retained will remain in the study.
4. I understand that all data and personal information collected will be stored securely on password protected computers in Queens University.
5. I understand that all efforts will be made to protect my anonymity and to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in this study.
6. I therefore give permission for the researcher to hold relevant personal data.
7. I agree to take part in the above research.
8. I agree to any interviews being audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.
9. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes from my interviews being used.

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Page Break

APPENDIX D

Distress Protocol

These are the steps the researcher will follow if a participant exhibits or communicates, they are distressed or experiencing discomfort

Distress: Participant communicates distress or discomfort

Step 1: The researcher will stop the interview and ask the participant what they would like them to do.

Step 2: The researcher will ask the participant if they would like to discontinue the interview or take some time out.

Step 3: The participant and the researcher will review the situation and the participant will decide if they would like the interview to continue.

Step 4: If they participant is happy to continue the interview will be resumed. If they are not, the interview will be stopped completely, support will be given to the participant and a courtesy follow up call will follow to check on their wellbeing and to get feedback on the situation.

Page Break

APPENDIX E

Interview Schedule

Introductory questions

Please tell me a little bit about yourself and your background.

Please could you explain why you were interested in volunteering for this research project?

Questions on nature

How would you define nature?

What does nature mean to you?

Questions on mental health

How would you define mental health?

What does mental health mean to you?

Time in nature

How do you spend time in nature?

What do you prefer to do in nature?

How would you feel about no longer spending time in nature?

What obstacles are there for you that limit and interfere with you spending time in nature?

What positive experiences have you had in nature?

What negative experiences have you had in nature?

How has nature affected your life?

Does nature make you happy?

Could you elaborate

What does happiness mean to you?

Any other comments?

Questions on nature and mental health

Does nature help in terms of your mental health?

How does it help or not help?

Do you believe there is a relationship between nature and mental health?

What do you think that relationship is?

If you believe there is no relationship, could you explain further?

