Nature Loss: Experiencing the Human Caused Disappearance of Nature

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We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a greater understanding of the human-nature relationship and its place in the field of counselling psychology through researching the lived experience of "Nature Loss," where Nature Loss is defined as the progressive disappearance of nature caused by human behaviour. A literature review surveys relevant theoretical approaches in this area including the Deep Ecology Movement, Ecopsychology and Ecofeminism, with a focus on the Despair and Empowerment work of Joanna Macy. In-depth, unstructured interviews were used with four individuals who had experienced this phenomenon. The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed and summarized under the following categories: (a) Looking at Nature Loss: Examples, (b) Looking Ahead: The Future, (c) Responding to Nature Loss, (d) Plastic or Paper? Personal Participation in Nature Loss, (e) Coping with Nature Loss, (f) Speaking of Nature Loss, and (g) Suggestions for Counsellors.

The themes that emerged from the findings are presented, identified as (a) Giving Voice to Nature Loss, (b) Nature Loss as "Wrong," (c) Implications of Personal Participation in Nature Loss, (d) Valuing the Human Community, (e) Nature Loss as "Too much," (f) Transforming the Pain of Nature Loss, and (g) The Bigger Picture.

Overall, this study provides a deeper understanding of the human-nature relationship and its significance for counselling psychology through description of the Nature Loss experience as lived by the individual. The results suggest that this experience can be one that is laden with strong emotional impact, as well as one that is often silenced in our culture through lack of language and audience, as well as other social, political and psychological factors. The findings imply that counselling psychologists ought to provide a context in which the client feels safe and encouraged to express their experience of Nature Loss, as well as validating the client's feelings of pain for what is happening to the world as a "normal" experience. This study concludes by describing the implications of these findings for theory, practice, and research.

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DEDICATION

For the trees.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> From news reports and life around us, we are bombarded with signals of distress.... These stir within us feelings of fear, anger, and sorrow, even though we may never express them to others.... To be conscious of our world today is to be aware of vast suffering and unprecedented peril.... Their source lies less in concerns for the personal self than in apprehension of collective suffering – of what happens to our own and other species, ... to unborn generations, and to the living body of the earth.... It is the distress we feel on behalf of the larger whole of which we are a part. It is the pain of the world itself, experienced in each of us. (Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 26-27)

Impetus for the Study

The impetus for this study came from my own personal experience of Nature Loss, my observation of the lack of existing language with which to express this experience, and the lack of a forum in which to discuss it.

My experience of *Nature Loss*, that is, my response to perceiving nature as something that is disappearing around me as a consequence of human consumption is a complex one. There are aspects of grief to it – I am seeing something I care about disappear – something that has meaning for me. I am watching trees being cut down, land being paved over, and animals being forced into smaller and smaller enclaves as humans continue to expand outwards in the world. There are aspects of blame and anger to this experience – both towards myself, as I am a participant in the consumption of nature, and towards the commercial/socio-political institutions and select (elite) individuals that profit from the loss of nature. Looming over all of this is a sense of hopelessness and helplessness, for it seems unlikely that this progression can be easily stopped as the forces behind the over consumption of nature are well entrenched.

I want to make it clear that I do not include the human consumption of nature for essential sustenance as a part of Nature Loss. We need to take a certain amount from nature in order to sustain ourselves: those basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. That

we are part of the foodchain is a given. Nature Loss represents more than this, it represents a taking from nature that is "too much," more than the environment can sustain. It is a taking without giving, without elements of stewardship or balance. It also represents a very *anthropocentric* view of the world, *anthro* or human-centred, a worldview that positions humans and their needs and wants at the top of the heap. Human needs are valued over the needs of any other entity in the universe.

Here my experience grows more complex: I do not always choose to put the needs of nature first. I want to enjoy my life, and not be overly burdened by considerations of the most environmentally correct behaviour, or feel shame for putting my needs first.

I noticed as I explored this experience, that it receives little validation in our society: there were no words to describe it succinctly, and traditional psychological theory makes no mention of it. I finally began to call this experience "Nature Loss" in order give it a name. As I spoke to others in the course of my research, I observed a reaction in them: a movement from puzzlement to understanding, followed by an outpouring of their own experience. It was as if, given the language and the forum, people wanted to express their experience of Nature Loss, usually for the first time.

While the term *ecopsychology*—used to describe the psychology of the human nature relationship—is a newly coined one, the idea behind it is not new, but rather, one that has been recovered. Looking to the past or to other cultures, we may observe traditions such as those found within the First Nations peoples that have an understanding of human life as belonging to the earth. These perspectives hold that there can be no artificial separation between human and nature.

Contemporary Western psychological theory has been expanding its area of concern to wider systems than that of the individual – to systems of culture, family, and gender – a continuance of this trend is the exploration of our psychological relationship with the ecosystem. This promises to be a rich area, little explored by our culture, in terms of contributions to counselling psychology research, theory, and practice. There is much to be learned about what it means to be human as we learn about the human relationship to nature.

Statement of Problem

> Environmental politics needs a new psychological sensitivity, a capacity to listen with the third ear for the passion and the longing that underlie many of our culture's seemingly thoughtless ecological habits… There must be some reason why people around the world have decided to undertake the mad devastation of the planet. (Roszak, 1992, p. 39)

Although arguments continue, many forecasts indicate that if human demands on the environment continue at the present rate, the survival of the ecosystem is in question (e.g. Brown, 2000; Carson, 1962; Government of Canada, 1991; Suzuki, 1997). "A host of warning signs—from diseased forests to dead lakes to severe ozone depletion over the Antarctic—suggest that not only individual ecosystems but the global environment as a whole may be reaching the limit of its capacity to absorb the stresses that human demands are placing upon it" (Government of Canada, 1991, p. 27). The pace of Nature Loss or the disappearance of nature due to human intervention is on the increase. We are consuming the natural world at such unprecedented rates that the environment has reached what is commonly termed a crisis point. The disappearance of nature shows itself in many forms; from global warming, to the field you played on as a child that is being paved over for a shopping mall. The consequences of this disappearance range in scope from the personal to the planetary.

Traditionally, theories of psychotherapy focus on the individual psyche (Fox, 1985; Clark, 1995; Guisinger, 1994; Macy, 1991;Prilleltensky 1997). More contemporary clinical applications have evolved under the influence of feminist and multicultural discourse to acknowledge the influence of social structure and human diversity on individual clients. Although counselling psychology is widening its scope to include more aspects of the systems in which we live, it has so far avoided seriously considering the eco-system, or the natural world.

Not surprisingly, a survey of contemporary academic psychological literature reveals that very little research has been done in areas relevant to the focus of this study. The investigations that come the closest typically comprise research into cognitive behavioural approaches towards changing human behaviour in order to improve or maintain the condition of the environment (e.g., Axelrod, 1994; Robbins & Greenwald,

1994; Schultz & Zelezny, 1998). These approaches fail to consider the social and political context of environmental issues; a context that may help to maintain these behaviours (e.g. Ford, 1993; Seligman, 1993).

By looking to the non-human, we learn more about the human. Looking outside of our counselling office windows, we can try on the lenses of a non-anthropocentric worldview, a more eco- or bio- centred way of seeing and feeling. Our thinking can be informed by *Deep Ecological, Ecopsychological,* and *Ecofeminist* thought, bringing illumination to the human – nature relationship, and its impact on the human psyche.

A less "shallow" view to environmental issues is reflected in the literature stemming from the Deep Ecology movement. This movement literally takes a deeper look at factors that contribute to environmental issues, examining human values and worldviews, and promoting an examination of the roots of the problems. The more inclusive concept of the *ecological self* extends self-identification to include the natural world: lending support to the experience of Nature Loss, where the experience is one of feeling for what is happening to the natural world, that is, not splitting one's self off from the environment (E.g., Bragg, 1996; Devall & Sessions, 1985; Drengson & Inoue, 1995; Fox, 1993).

As Joanna Macy elucidates in the Despair Work stage of the process of "Coming back to life: Processes to reconnect our lives, our world" (Macy & Brown, 1998), "owning and honoring our pain for the world" is an essential step in overcoming apathy, and moving on to a more life-affirming state of being through owning and expressing our experience. This study is an exploratory contribution towards helping us better understand this process and our experience of Nature Loss.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to further our understanding of the human-nature relationship and its place in the field of counselling psychology through qualitatively researching the lived experience of "Nature Loss," where Nature Loss is defined as the progressive disappearance of nature caused by human behaviour. This is an exploratory study, as little research exists in the field. This thesis poses the following questions: What is the individual experience of Nature Loss? How do we respond psychologically to

indicators that nature is disappearing? For the purposes of this study, psychological responses are the affective, cognitive, behavioural, belief, and somatic aspects of an individual's response.

Methodological Considerations

> Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2)

As the intent of this study was to explicate the individual's experience of the phenomenon of Nature Loss, the methodology chosen was one that best supports this endeavour. Thus, this research takes a qualitative approach, focusing on the personal meaning of the participant in an "interpretive" and "naturalistic" way. In choosing this method, I undertook the task of "communicating what [I] understand to be the meaning of the participants to an audience of readers" (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1999, p. 224). While there is no one specific qualitative or phenomenological method "Each particular psychological phenomenon, in conjunction with the particular aims and objectives of a particular researcher, evokes a particular descriptive method" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 53), this research is rooted in the phenomenological perspective in its pursuit of rich description of a phenomenon.

My researcher "stance" aligns more closely with the postmodern, social constructionist, and interpretive position, and thus the method is characterized by multiplicity of approaches, while remaining committed to allowing participants to look deeply into the fullness of their experience unlimited by my own biases or assumptions.

> One's research stance, one's framework for thinking and doing in light of the spirit of a theoretical position, must be a conscious choice; at the same time, there is room here as one goes along to alter one's stance, to amalgamate it with others, to create one's own, to select another and begin all over again. Thus, [approaches] become alternatives and possibilities rather than rigid corsets. To us this is a liberating view. (Ely et al., 1999, p. 33)

It is my assumption that this method, in allowing the individuals to speak for themselves will be of most use to counselling psychologists through providing a deeper understanding of the subjective reality of the Nature Loss experience.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature review for this study falls into two sections. The first presents an overview of the related literature in theory, research, and practice, while the second section examines the human-nature relationship more closely, including a survey of some of the factors that may have led to this point.

Theory

The three theoretical approaches to the human-nature relationship discussed in this section are representative of the leading bodies of thought in the field. Since very little research exists in this area, the majority of writing that is pertinent to this study is found in the emerging theoretical approaches of the Deep Ecology Movement, Ecopsychology, and Ecofeminism.

The Deep Ecology Movement

Arne Naess, a Scandinavian philosopher, and scholar of Ghandi first used the term "Deep Ecology" in the early 1970's in order to describe an alternative way of seeing environmental issues. He termed the mainstream approach to ecological problems as a "corporate" or, "shallow" environmentalism, finding solutions to environmental issues through changes that benefit the most privileged of humans – those of the more developed industrial nations (Naess, 1973/1995, p. 3). Shallow environmentalism is more "technological" and less global, treating only the symptoms of ecological problems by promoting technological fixes, scientific management of resources, and individual behaviour change, while maintaining economic growth and failing to address issues that affect the non-industrialized nations (Drengson & Inoue, 1995, p. xix; Naess 1973/1995). In contrast, the "deep" approach to environmentalism, while sharing similar concerns for the environment with the mainstream approach (e.g. regarding "pollution and resource depletion") seeks to discern the actual roots of the issues. A central example of a deep approach is an ecologically centred view of the world where humans and the rest of the

flora and fauna all have intrinsic value (Drengson & Inoue, 1995; Humphrey, 2000; Naess, 1987/1995; Naess, 1973/1995).

The Deep Ecology movement provides an alternative global framework from which to begin to examine the human nature relationship, providing definitions and concepts that help give language to the topic. In particular, it supports looking for the underlying meaning and motivations for what we are doing to nature.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is about "connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice. It asserts the special strength and integrity of every living thing" (Mies & Shiva, 1993, p. 14). French feminist Françoise D'Eubonne is credited with coining the word *Ecofeminism* in 1974 (D'Eubonne, 1980). Ecofeminist theory rests on the principle that the Western domination of women and the domination of nature are connected and illustrates how man's attempt to control nature has evolved in parallel to his attempts to control women (Merchant, 1980; Ortner, 1974). The social construction of what is "nature," including certain categories of humans helps legitimize their domination (Mies, 1986; Plumwood, 1993; Shiva, 1990), in this way "… nature is subordinate to man; woman to man; consumption to production; and the local to the global" (Mies & Shiva, 1993, p. 5). There has been some movement in the West towards a reclamation of women's lost spiritual past, such as the wisdom of the goddess-based religions. This is seen as a "practical" spirituality – a spirituality that is not separate from the material world, but more about the life-force in everything, deepening thinking to realize the connection between all of life, between human and nature.

Some ecofeminists criticize the way certain Deep Ecology writers dichotomize human beings and the non-human world. In focusing on the domination of the non-human by the human the domination that occurs within the human species, specifically the exploitation of women and the non-industrialized world is not sufficiently accounted for (Davis, 1995; Salleh, 1984). Instead of talking about human-centeredness (*anthropo*centrism), ecofeminists suggest that the real issue is male-centeredness, or *andro*centrism.

Both women and nature are treated in similar ways in our society. Defined in ways that suit the needs of the mainstream patriarchal culture: romanticized, denigrated,

or simply used up, depending on the need. Both are oppressed – burdened by unjust or excessive use of power, and accordingly situated in positions of little power in our social structure. Nature has no rights, and it is only recently that women have been constituted rights in our culture. A feminist framework, when applied to the situation of the environment provides illumination into the dark recesses of motivation, justice, and what is being omitted from consideration in the mainstream. It should be noted here that it is not just that our culture is patriarchal – it is that it is also hierarchical, favouring certain male values and a mechanistic control oriented approach that applies even to our inner world of self identity and emotion. Under a social system such as this one, men are also victimized, particularly in terms of the very limited range of experience they are encouraged to feel and express.

Ecopsychology

Ecopsychology is the term that describes a union of psychology and ecology, with each informing the other, situating human psychology in the larger and deeper ecological context. Theodore Roszak, one of the leading writers in the field states that the "psychiatric mainstream" of our modern society cannot inform us about our relationship to the natural environment, as it itself is "as alienated from the living planet as the rest of our society. Its role for generations has been to soothe the anguish of the urban-industrial psyche" (Roszak, 1992, p. 36). Ecopsychology continues the influence of past therapies that have redefined the roles of aspects of the human world by redefining the role of our relationship to the natural world, and definitions of sanity.

> At its most ambitious, ecopsychology seeks to redefine sanity within an environmental context. It contends that seeking to heal the soul without reference to the ecological system of which we are an integral part is a form of self-destructive blindness.... Ecopsychologists believe there is an emotional bond between human beings and the natural environment in which we evolve. (Brown, 1995, p. xvi)

Greenway (1995) describes Ecopsychology as a search for language to describe the human-nature relationship, using deep approaches to ecology in order to better understand this relationship. It is a synthesis of the ecological and the psychological,

viewing our environmental problems as a symptom of the psychopathology of our everyday life (Roszak, 1992).

Although Ecopsychology is understood to be a "new" field, it is actually a new therapeutic form of something that had existed for millennia. Examples of this can be found in the traditions of the First Nations, and other non-western societies where they have traditionally brought the natural world into their "psychology" and healing in such a way that separating the two would be inconceivable. It can be found in traditions handed down through generations, as Charlene Spretnak puts it

> The sense that the natural world is alive and that we are inherently connected with that life force is a core perception of most native peoples' worldview, from cultures of the Upper Paleolithic to those of the contemporary Fourth World… that perception, that awareness of vibrant interconnectedness, lingered stubbornly despite the challenge of new ideas that spread from Europe throughout the world. (Spretnak, 1991, p.18)

It needs to be added here that Ecopsychologists acknowledge how traditional cultures have been "ransacked" without respect. They try to be explicit in the use of the word "we," that the we of the industrial world is on many levels not the "we" of other cultures; that in fact they are separated by units of power.

Other writers in the Ecopsychological arena discuss the parallels between Nature Loss and death. Contemporary grief theory has extended to include pets, but it has stopped short of extending to the environment.

> How will we feel the end of nature? In many ways, I suspect. If nature means... great joy at fresh and untrammelled beauty, its loss means sadness at man's footprints everywhere. But, as with the death of a person, there is more than simply loss, a hole opening up. There are also new relationships that develop, and strains and twists in old relationships. And since this loss is peculiar in not having been inevitable, it provokes profound questions that don't arise when a person dies. (McKibben, 1989, p.70 – 71)

Phyliss Windle (1992/1998) a professional environmentalist and hospital chaplain discusses in "The Ecology of Grief," the experience of mourning for environmental loss, and the "inhibition" felt in expressing that bereavement (p. 137). Mourning has

traditionally been recognized to be composed of stages that include shock and numbness, disorientation, a period of reorganization characterized by sadness, anger, depression and despair, eventually followed by acceptance (Windle, 1992/1998; Kübler-Ross, 1969). Windle suggests that "mourning for ecological losses has no simple or predictable path. I suspect ...[we] are prone to inhibiting the pain of grief" (Windle, 1992/1998, p. 141). Feelings for plants or animals tend to be dismissed as "irrational," "inappropriate," or "anthropomorphic," yet at the same time, "confronting so vast and final a loss as this brings sadness beyond the telling" (Macy, 1995, p. 241).

Research

The majority of research literature in academic journals is concerned with the antecedents of human behaviour that contribute to ecological problems, in the vein of "Who Recycles and When?" (Schultz, Oskamp & Mainieri, 1995). For years, psychologists have attempted to understand the factors that lead people to participate in environmental programs, examining demographics, attitudes, beliefs, and personality as predictors of environmental behaviour (Axelrod, 1994; Clark, 1995; Geller, 1995; Robbins & Greenwald, 1994; Schultz, Oskamp, & Mainieri, 1995; Schultz & Zelezny, 1998). This research has produced a long list of correlates, including age (negative), gender (female), education (positive), income (positive), general pro-environmental attitudes (positive), and locus of control (positive).

Theoretical and paradigmatic strategies for intervention have also been studied and proposed (Clark, 1995; Geller, 1995; Booth, 1998), lending support for a behaviour modification approach to addressing environmental issues as well as calling for change on philosophical levels. For example, Booth (1998) promotes an "ethic of care" drawn from feminist theories in support of a loving and caring relationship with nature, while Clark (1995) suggests adoption of more adaptive values than presently held in the Euro-American model.

Chawla (1998) explores the term "environmental sensitivity" defined as an "empathetic perspective toward the environment" (p. 18). Her meta-analysis of qualitative research into life experiences of significant personalities in the pro-

environmental education movement focuses on how these individuals become sensitive to the environment. Again, the motive is to identify precursors to desirable behaviour.

Counselling psychologists are represented in the research by Howard (1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1993d) who takes a radical stance in suggesting that counselling psychologists themselves become involved in environmental action, and promote "the technological solution," exert efforts to reverse population trends and promote the use of more energy efficient lighting. Other critics resist the suggestion that counselling psychologists become directly involved in promoting pro-environmental actions (e.g., Ford, 1993; Seligman, 1993; Wolleat, 1993), providing an argument for limited involvement claiming that counselling psychologists are not ecologists and promoting environmentally responsible behaviour is not part of the job, and may in fact threaten the identity of counselling psychology as a whole.

The common theme of this research is that it calls for behaviour change while conceiving of the root of environmental problems to be individual behaviour. This is what some would term a "shallow" approach to environmental issues, "It advocates ... mild changes in lifestyle (such as recycling). It avoids serious fundamental questions about our values and worldviews; it does not examine our sociocultural institutions and our personal lifestyles" (Drengson & Inoue, 1995, p. xix).

Practice

The foremost therapeutic practitioner in this area is Joanna Macy, author of the workshop series Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect our Lives, our World (Macy & Brown, 1998), and Despair and Empowerment in the Nuclear Age (Macy, 1991). Macy has a life affirming approach, positing that we are on the brink of a revolutionary epoch that will result in a "Great Turning" which encompasses "a profound shift in our perception of reality" (Macy & Brown, 1998, p.21) – a shift in our sense of identity. Apathy, the greatest barrier standing in the way of change must be remedied by opening up to and examining the pain that we feel for the world. When we are apathetic, we repress our pain for the world and we do so because of many fears. We may be afraid that by opening up we will be exposed to pain, despair, or guilt; we may appear morbid, weak, emotional or powerless to others, and we may cause distress. Additionally, we

avoid looking closely at what is happening in the world because we "distrust our own intelligence"; our Western culture reinforces a "belief in the separate self" that creates the illusion that we can be somehow removed from what is going on. This repression has consequences to our well being, resulting in fragmentation and alienation from our inner selves and others; displacement activities such as addictions to consumption (of goods, alcohol, drugs, etc.); blaming and scapegoating of others in order to find a focus for our unacknowledged alarm; a political passivity "we comfort ourselves with the thought that we can and should trust our leaders" (p. 36); avoidance of painful information such as avoiding the news; an impaired capacity to think; and burnout and a sense of powerlessness.

A vital component in Macy's workshops is "Despair Work" (Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 91 –112, Macy, 1991, p.17 –19) a process of "owning and honoring our pain for the world." She quotes Buddhist poet Thich Nhat Hanh who was asked, 'What do we need to do to save our world?' His questioners expected him to identify the best strategies to pursue in social and environmental action, but Thich Nhat Hanh's answer was this: 'What we most need to do is to hear within us the sound of the Earth crying." In despair work, participants are meant to bring awareness to their inner responses to the "progressive destruction of the natural world… these responses include dread, rage, sorrow and guilt."

John Seed (1994) is another practitioner who has developed a "Council of All Beings" workshop with Joanna Macy in order to help people experience the sense of identification with the earth and its inhabitants. Seed believes that radical change is required in the human psyche in order for survival. One of the exercises in the workshop is a requiem for Nature Loss " …a mourning: we grieve for all that is being lost from the world, the species lost, the landscapes trashed. Only if we will allow ourselves to feel the pain of the Earth, can we be effective" (Seed, 1994).

So far, this chapter has reviewed the relevant bodies of work on the psychology of the human – nature relationship in theory, practice, and research. The rest of the chapter is devoted to examining this relationship from three different angles by: (a) Reducing the ambiguity of the concept of the human-nature connection, (b) Surveying the modes in

which our society relates to and values nature, and (b) Discussing factors that contribute to our destructive relationship with nature and its beings.

The Human Nature Relationship

What exactly does it mean when we talk about "our connection to nature"? How are we connected to nature? John Seed explains it in this way:

> I don't believe this to be a mystical notion. It's very matter of fact. In reality, every breath of air we take connects us to the entire life of the planet – the atmosphere. I feel it very physically. I'm part of the water cycle. The sun lifts the water up into the atmosphere and then it comes down.... Eighty to ninety percent of what I am is just this water ... Just hold your breath for two minutes and you will understand the illusion of separation.... We're constantly cycling the water and air and earth through us.... Recognizing our connection with nature is very simple and accessible regardless of where we are living. We may think concrete and plastic surround us, but then we think a little further and realize that the concrete is sand and the bodies of shellfish. The plastic is a product of the rain forest laid down during the carboniferous era 130 million years ago and turned into oil. Look just under the surface and the unnaturalness of things starts to disappear. (John Seed interviewed in Nisker, 1992)

Humans are animals, we need to breathe oxygen through holes in our faces, drink water through another hole in our face, and perspire through small holes in our skin. We are porous. There is no strict impermeable boundary between us and the external world. What we breathe out, the trees breathe in. What tree breathes out, we breathe in. Aside from this more physical connection, we can also be connected in a more feeling sense, as illustrated by Naess' concept of the "ecological self." This extended sense of self is something more than ego, allowing us to feel our identification with the living world.

The word "Nature" is an innocuous one, commonly used in everyday speech. When we turn to the dictionary, we see that it derives from the Latin as in *nâtus*, past participle of *nâscì*, to be born. Among other meanings, it can be used synonymously with type or disposition, as in "the nature of things" or, "a cheerful nature." More in alignment with what we are seeking, we find the term applied to the more material realm: "The world of living things and the outdoors: the beauties of nature"; A primitive state of

existence, untouched and uninfluenced by civilization or artificiality: *couldn't tolerate city life anymore and went back to nature*" (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1992).

Nature as we conceive of it in our cultural, is something aside and apart from us, independent of humans. We go "back to nature"; it is something we visit. To our mainstream North American culture, inherited from European society and religion, we do not see ourselves as part of nature. Rather, we are part of this thing called civilization, something separate from, and superior to nature. Ranging from Judeo-Christian instruction that we have dominion over the earth to the modern ideology that separates man from beast.

Moving even more closely into the dualistic worldview, Sherry Ortner argued from an ecofeminist perspective in her classic 1974 essay, "Is female to male as nature is to culture?" – it is not just that humans are conceived of as being separate from and dominant to nature, but that males in particular are seen as being part of culture while females are part of nature. She believes that our society positions women within the realm of nature, purely as a cultural construct to maintain the secondary status of women. In our patriarchal society, women are seen as closer to nature physiologically (menstruation, pregnancy, etc.), because of their traditional social roles (domestic work such as cooking, cleaning), and the stereotyped female psyche (more emotional less rational). All these serve to position women closer to nature, which is seen as a lesser to culture. Men are positioned closer to culture due to further cultural constructs, and thus their dominant position is reinforced in our culture.

The definition of nature and human engenders further questions. If we use nature to refer to the non-human world, then Nature Loss is the result of something that we as humans are doing to the rest of the world, to the natural world of which we are, by this definition, not part. This sets up a separation between human and nature: in some uses, humans are not a part of nature. Nature is something external, out there, having to do with dirt and blood and leaves and fur – we humans are civilized, we live apart from this nature. But, do we? This definition is paradoxical of course. We are a part of nature. We are animals too, born of the same sweat and blood. It is our Western ideology, and our cultural perception that sees our selves as separate.

> Everything about our [Western] society is based on this idea of us as specially created apart from the rest of nature. We don't have to believe this intellectually to be completely enthralled by it. As long as we think of "the environment" we are objectifying it and turning it into something over there and separate from ourselves. Even if we don't believe in any particular theory of economics, our whole life is conditioned by an economic system based upon the principle that the earth has no value until human labor is added to it. The earth is just a bunch of dirt, and we are so clever we can mold that dirt and turn it into spaceships and into great long electric wires to carry our messages. We think we are the miracle, and we've refused to recognize the miracle of the dirt, which composes us. Any miracle that we have is only miraculous because we are made of this incredible dirt – miracle dirt that will agree to do everything we ask of it. (Seed, 1998)

Some of our ideas about our relationship to nature come from how we see its worth to us; that is, how we can use it. Godfrey-Smith (1979) provided a classic survey of the ways we value nature, usually used in the context of "why we should preserve nature." There are the "laboratory" arguments, stating that wilderness areas provide an essential "laboratory" for human scientific study. The "silo" arguments urge us to preserve nature in order to stockpile biodiversity, in case something goes awry with the genetic pool, or we need a rare herb to cure a form of human cancer. The "gymnasium" argument values the outdoors as a facility for athletic or recreational use, and the "cathedral argument" suggests that human satisfaction is derived from "spiritual contact" and contemplation of nature.

Again, all of these ways of valuing nature are as something for our "instrumental" use to benefit humans. To this type of environmental value supporters of Deep Ecology add intrinsic values of nature, where the beings of nature have worth on their own, not because we can use them.

> To refuse to recognize the intrinsic worth of other beings, to fail to appreciate the subtle ways in which natural processes work, and to seek centralised control is finally to be saddled with the ultimate responsibility that was once thought to be god's. Humanism, as homocentrism, joined with the technocratic paradigm, must finally assume the overwhelming responsibility for running everything. All nature must be managed for

> human ends, and even these ends must be managed (Drengson, 1995, p.89)

The ethics of ecocentrism sees a world where humans and the rest of the flora and fauna have intrinsic worth as an alternative to the prevailing anthropocentric paradigm that positions human beings and their needs as having greater value than anything else has in the world. In Deep Ecology writings, the term "Ecological Self" (Naess, 1987/1995) refers to a radical extension of "self" identification. Usually when we refer to self, we are referring to the social or personal (ego) self. Naess would have us reconsider the narrow concept, and learn instead to identify with our larger self. The ecological self transcends the boundaries of the ego, and feels identification with nature, in some sense the natural world becomes us, part of our self and part of our identity. "As we discover our ecological self we will joyfully defend and interact with that with which we identify; and instead of imposing environmental ethics on people, we will naturally respect, love, honor and protect that which is our self" (Devall, 1995, p. 104). Through "self-realization," we come to identify with the world around us; our sense of "self" is expanded to include our ecological community. In this way, Naess advocates a psychological approach to environmental issues, rather than a moralistic one (Drengson & Inoue, 1995; Naess, 1973/1995).

How did we get here?

> We live in an extraordinary moment on earth. We possess more technical prowess and knowledge than our ancestors could have dreamt of.... At the same time we witness destruction of life in dimensions that confronted no previous generations in recorded history... today it is not just a forest here and some farmlands and fisheries there; today entire species are dying... the logic of the Industrial Growth Society is exponential, demanding not only "growth" but rising rates of growth.... What will be left for those who come after? (Macy & Brown, 1998, pp. 15-16)

How has it come about that we have this destructive relationship with nature? We are strongly entrenched in a direction that signifies more losses for nature: invested in the continuing depletion and consumption of natural 'resources'. We find reasons to continue our ways "We say there are jobs at risk ... investments to be considered... conveniences

we dare not sacrifice. Can it be that our survival instincts are solely tuned to emergencies of a far more obvious, immediate, and local character? ... Confronted with global crisis, we lose our way among similarly petty distractions" (Roszak, 1992, p. 70). Our mainstream worldview, including our concept of self, economics, and politics all contribute to maintaining, and increasing, the pace of Nature Loss.

Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies consider our society's capitalist, patriarchal system that "emerged, is built upon and maintains itself through the colonization of women, of 'foreign' peoples and their lands; and of nature, which it is gradually destroying ... 'modernization' and 'development' processes and 'progress' [are] responsible for the degradation of the natural world" (Mies & Shiva, 1993, p. 2). Although the system is a patriarchal one within which men are viewed as being situated in positions of greater power than women are, it should be noted that men too are colonized in some ways under this system. Since globalization acts as a "monoculturing" force, it is one that narrows the possibilities for each of us.

In part, this dynamic of nature consumption and destruction that we find ourselves entrenched in is a manifestation of Euro-Canadian ideals: we value "rugged individualism manifested as autonomy, control, and personal responsibility for choice and action" (Brammer, 1993). We conceive of ourselves as separate from, and superior to the natural, non-human world. The scope of traditional Eurocentric theories of psychotherapy has not extended beyond the individual; it is the essential element of Western society (Sampson, 1995). While the move to individualism has "unleashed human creativity, enabling extraordinary technical advances" (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994), it has also had the effect of promoting a concept of the self seen in separation from our surroundings, and each other.

Particular economic systems and the pursuit of profit play a large role in keeping the structure of environmental degradation and the disappearance of nature in place. Some consider consumption in industrial societies as the major cause of the current ecological crisis (Kanner & Gomes, 1995).

> We have been lulled into insensitivity with standard economic indicators such as gross national product. (GNP) and gross domestic product, forgetting that they measure only short term benefits to people-in-the-

> aggregate, to 'the economy'. How perverse that by such reckoning, the Valdez oil spill has made a contribution to the GNP, when we know that the negative ecological impact will be felt for decades! (Government of Canada, 1991, p.15)

"The market is a remarkably efficient device for allocating resources and for balancing supply and demand, but it does not respect the sustainable yield thresholds of natural systems" (Brown, 2000, p. 9). Yet, it seems to be one of the most difficult to address. "Only population growth rivals consumption as a cause of ecological decline, and at least population growth is now viewed as a problem by many governments and citizens of the world. Consumption, in contrast, is almost universally seen as a good – indeed, increasingly it is the primary goal of national economic policy" (Durning, 1992, p. 21).

A common goal of pro-environmental programs is to reduce consumption. This is a challenge in a society founded on principles of unlimited economic growth. We are a "consumer driven" society, and an attempt to change this behaviour comes up against institutions of entrenched political thought. As Clark (1995) suggests, a change in our national values might be in order, but that is a tall order, and not likely in the immediate future.

Psychological factors

> James Lovelock, the scientist who popularized the Gaia hypothesis. (which says that the Earth is not just a lump of rock with "resources" growing on it but is a living integrated being), has said that what we are doing to the rainforests is as if the brain were to decide that it was the most important organ in the body and started mining the liver. (John Seed, interviewed in Nisker, 1992)

Some theorists suggest that certain forms of psychopathology lie at the heart of our behaviour. Paul Shepard (1995) in his essay "Nature and Madness" asks, "why does society persist in destroying its habitat?" considering answers such as "lack of information, faulty technique, or insensibility... [or] simply greed" (p. 22), but dismissing them in favour of "a kind of madness." He sees the causes rooted in an "ontogenetic crippling" that keeps us in a state of adolescence, institutionalized by the

invention of agriculture, where humans first achieved a sense of mastery over, and separation from nature. Our damage to the planet is a symptom of human psychopathology.

Ralph Metzner (1995) surveys possible psychopathological explanations of the human-nature relationship, including depicting the human species as having become "autistic" in relationship to the natural world and insensible to the living planet around us. The addiction model is another view, (Glendinning, 1993/1995) in which humans are addicted to consumption. Yet another perspective is the collective amnesia theory, suggesting that we have forgotten something that we have traditionally known, a way of relating respectfully to the earth. Metzner also suggests that the Euro-American psyche is split in such away that we direct our spiritual practice in an opposite and incompatible direction from nature. Thus we think that we must overcome our "nature" to align ourselves with Western religious teachings.

In conclusion, there appears to be no definitive answer to why we find ourselves here, with this destructive relationship to nature. The factors discussed above, buttressed by our social, political, and psychological ways are all contributors to maintaining the forces behind the continued loss of nature. This literature review has provided an overview of some of the most relevant theories and factors regarding Nature Loss, as well as a discussion of our relationship with nature. The next chapter describes the methods used in this study to research this experience.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Rationale

> Qualitative researchers are interested in telling, and are often consumed by the need to present their stories of research as an ongoing journey. Their writings must, therefore, reflect the process of research – the character and foundational beliefs of the original conceptual framework as well as the evolving one, considerations on the stumblings, in-progress victories, insights and puzzlements of the researcher as the research unfolds, disclosure of the researcher's stance and limitations as well as descriptions of the successes and failures of the ongoing stories of multiple meaning making. So, the process *is* the product. (Ely et al., 1999, p. 52)

Developing an understanding of the subjective experience of Nature Loss calls for the application of contemporary qualitative analysis rooted in the phenomenological method (Brunt, Milliken, & Shields, 1995; Creswell, 1998; Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). Phenomenology is the study of phenomena as experienced by humankind, emphasizing how the phenomenon reveals itself to the experiencing individual. Its approach is characterized by an attitude of openness for whatever is significant for the understanding of a phenomenon. Its content is the data of experience, its meaning for the participant, and particularly, the essence of the phenomenon. Phenomenology is interested in the way people experience their world, what it is like for them, and how to best understand them (Tesch, 1990). While the phenomenological approach does not expect common themes to occur between all participants, it is assumed that there will be an "essence" of shared experience, described by Patton (1990) as "the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon."

Coming from a counselling psychology background, my focus was strongly on the psychological dimensions of the Nature Loss experience. I wanted to pull out the somatic, imaginative, behavioural, affective, and meaning making of the participants' experience. The qualitative phenomenological approach facilitates this through

comprehensive and systematic descriptive analysis of the experiences of the participants, in order to reveal what meaning these experiences have for them.

Overview of Method

The descriptive data of the experience in this study were derived from individual, audiotaped interviews and a focus group with participants who had experienced Nature Loss. In these interviews, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions intended to elicit a rich description of their experience. The tapes were transcribed and then analyzed into discrete units of meaning while attempting to stay with the intended meaning of the original. The participants checked the resulting written accounts for accuracy.

Since "attending to the data includes a reflective activity that results in a set of analytical notes that guide the process" (Tesch, 1990, p.95-7), I kept field notes in a journal as I worked. Ely, et al. refer to the inclusion of personal experience in qualitative research, – the "Self-as-researcher" (1999, p 337-339) – as an aspect of integration. Along these lines, I have included excerpts from my field notes throughout this report, with the intention of revealing my position and thought process during the study, as a type of "pastiche," or "layered story." Pastiche highlights differing perspectives, as it "directs the readers' attention to multiple realities by combining various representations to emphasize the relation between form and meaning" (Ely, et al., p. 97).

Another characteristic of this type of qualitative research writing is that it emphasizes subjectivity as an integral part of the research process. "It follows that totally cool, distanced and distancing research writing would be alien to what qualitative research is all about" (Ely et al., 1999, p. 53). I attempt to do this, in part by writing in the first person, rather than referring to myself as "the researcher." This process is a revealing one, as the "distancing" is removed – this is an excerpt from my fieldnotes that refers to this experience.

> *I have a strange sensation, like sometimes when your hand is next to someone else's hand, or entwined, and there is a kind of numbness, and you suddenly can't tell which is your hand! You think you should know, after all it is your hand, but for an entranced, panicky moment, your brain can't make sense of the form. Which hand is mine? As I go over this writing, I feel like that, my eyes flick up several times to verify the name of the document, yes it says me, but did I get it mixed up? Somehow I can't remember writing this. It seems more – complex, and sort of differently written than I thought I might be writing. And now is the point when I move up, and actually put myself in here, change the name of this document ... I suddenly wanted to identify myself, not hide behind an alias. It is a bit scary, because now everyone can really see me.*

In order to be "available to situations as experienced by those who are living them" (Ely et al., 1999, p. 351) I use "bracketing" not in the sense of deliberately ignoring or putting out of my mind my responses to experience, but in attempting to record and articulate them, to make them explicit. Part of this process was to record my personal assumptions about the phenomenon of Nature Loss as described below.

Personal Assumptions

In keeping with the methods of this research, it is imperative to state my own assumptions about Nature Loss in order to make my beliefs explicit. What attitudes and worldview do I hold about the phenomenon under study? Before I began the actual interviews, I attempted to state my assumptions Nature Loss. The assumptions I identify below are based on my own experience of the phenomenon, and my worldview prior to doing this study.

Assumptions about the research

I wanted to contribute in a constructive and useful way to the body of knowledge about human-nature relationships. As a counsellor, I was concerned about how little value our field places upon our connection with nature and the natural environment around us, and personally, I had experienced a lack of available language with which to describe my own painful feelings. I was aware that the socio-economic structure of our society is a very powerful force in shaping our lives. Economic and political systems dictate that consuming natural "resources" and profiting from it is good for us all, in fact,

a vital thing. This has an effect of suppressing and minimizing the importance of our feelings about what is happening in the world. I assumed that this would be result in a lack of language with which to talk about this experience in the counselling session as well as in general. I hoped that this study would move the discourse on the topic forward, and help to open up a pathway into this experience.

My Paradigm

I am aware that I bring a feminist and "eco-centric" framework to this research, holding that aspects of both the feminine and the masculine have intrinsic worth, as do the non-human and the human. This leads me to focus on issues of equality and oppression within our society and culture, both in terms of gender issues and in terms of environmental issues, a worldview that extends to other marginalized groups as well. I believe that the non-human world has intrinsic value, and I respect and appreciate nature: humans and their needs and wants are not automatically of more importance than the rest of life. This does not mean that I think we should not act out of self-preservation, or for sustenance – I understand there is a connection between all of life, that we live off the energy of each other, and often something has to die so that something else can live.

I come to this research from "within a specific academic discipline, replete with its own theoretical traditions and interpretive approaches" and attempt to work as "*bricoleur*," making my research paradigm that which will "best suit the needs of the study at hand" (Ely et al., 1999, p. 230). As my research stance falls closer to the postmodern, social constructionist and interpretive position, the method is characterized by a more contemporary multiplicity of approaches, founded, as Laurel Richardson (quoted in Ely et al., 1999, p. 229) puts it, on the notion that "the core of postmodernism is the *doubt* that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty has universal and general claim as the "right" or privileged form of authoritative knowledge."

Assumptions about the Nature Loss experience

Some of the assumptions I held when I started this research:

- Nature is intrinsically "good": it ought not be treated disrespectfully, and destroyed or consumed solely for profit without concern for the deeper implications.

- Saving Nature is a good thing. Preserving Nature is a good thing. Ending the environmental crisis is a good thing. Healing our planet is a good thing.
- Humans need to have a different relationship with nature for their health, and the health of the planet.
- The patriarchal capitalist system of industrialized nations institutionalizes the profit motive above all else, and plays a large part in nature loss. Consumerism is not good for us, or for nature.
- Simple "solutions" such as recycling or behaviour change to save the world obscure the real issue: the quality of our relationship with nature.
- How I see the future mediates how I feel about Nature Loss: if I think things will turn out well, perhaps technology will save us, I will feel less disturbed by what is happening around me. I assume the participants will see the future in a negative way – that things are not going well for nature.
- The participants will describe their experience in terms of emotions: I expect response such as, guilt, sorrow, pain, and anger.
- That this experience is an "invisible" one in our society. There seems to be little or no popular forum in which to speak about personal feelings about Nature Loss, and there seems to be no language to describe what it is except in vague terms.
- That current mainstream psychological theories ignore the importance of our connection to nature.
- That there will be knowledge gained from this study that will be useful for counselling psychology.

The Participants

Participants for this study were sought from an informal Ecopsychology group that had recently organized to discuss issues related to the human-nature relationship. Four individuals volunteered. This sample was a purposive convenience sample: the individuals solicited were ones that were likely to be affected by the phenomenon of interest. At the outset, it was recognized that the small sample size and the voluntary nature of the individuals involved would affect the "generalizability" of the results in the traditional sense. However, in the context of my research perspective the extraction of

"essences" or themes from the experiences of these individuals is highly valuable in furthering our understanding of Nature Loss.

Of the four individuals who participated in this study, three volunteered after being contacted through the Ecopsychology group, and the fourth was contacted after a referral. The study group consisted of two males and two females. None of these persons were visible minorities. One came from Europe, while the other three were originally from the East Coast. Three of the participants were parents. All participants gave informed consent before the study began by signing the consent form found in Appendix A.

Interview Questions

An in-depth, unstructured interview was used to obtain individual descriptions of the phenomena under study. This method uses an interview guide that outlines general questions to be explored with each respondent, in no predetermined order (See Appendix B). I also used open-ended questions to probe more deeply (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Patton, 1980).

In order to elicit a full and open description of the experience of Nature Loss, I chose to begin the interview with a simple open-ended question "Tell me about your experience of Nature Loss ." I also was prepared with twelve optional questions to be used if I thought it would be useful to draw out a more detailed description: a "provisional outline" (Ely et al., 1999, p. 237). The main question was intended to elicit a description of the individual's experience of Nature Loss by asking just that in a straightforward manner. The optional questions were adapted from Joanna Macy's Despair Work workshop exercise "Open Sentences," an exercise that "...provides an ...easy way for people to voice their inner responses to the condition of our world" (Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 98). The optional questions asked for examples of Nature Loss, expectations for the future of the environment, descriptions of presence or absence of expressing, experiencing, or articulating feelings and thoughts about Nature Loss, how our culture influences the Nature Loss experience, how the participant is involved in Nature Loss, sources of courage and hope, and suggestions for helping others with this experience.

Research Procedure

Prior to the interviews, I contacted each participant by telephone or e-mail. At this time, the purpose of the study was fully explained, permission to tape-record the interview obtained, and an appointment for the interview was scheduled. One of the participants declined to participate in a tape recorded interview, and chose to communicate her responses via e-mail. I conducted the other three interviews in person, following the format laid out in the interview guide.

At the beginning of each interview, informed consent was ensured through the participant reading, understanding and signing the consent form (See Appendix A.). The interview began with questions about the client's age, occupation, and children. The participant was then asked the main open-ended question of the semi-structured interview in order to draw out as much as possible their experience of Nature Loss. Additional questions were drawn from the section of the Interview Guide entitled "Optional Questions" as needed. At all stages of the interview, when necessary, the individual was asked questions intended to deepen the information related to their experience for example: What does that feel like?

As the interview time drew to a close, the participants were asked if they had anything further to say, they were thanked and reminded of the steps to follow: their transcripts would be returned to them for review and verification, and at a later date, all participants would meet together to have a video taped focus group on the topic.

I responded twice to the individual who I interviewed via email. Initially she was e-mailed the interview questions and the consent form. She signed and returned the consent form before responding to the interview questions and returning her answers to me. On receipt of her answers, I responded asking for clarification and elaboration as needed until her answers seemed of a similar depth as the ones from the taped interviews. This individual did consent to participate in the focus group in person. It was not necessary for her to verify her transcript, as she herself had typed it.

Transcriptions of the three taped interviews were performed by myself, and commenced after the initial four interviews were complete. Each individual received a copy of their transcription: one participant responded with his corrections and comments via e-mail, and I met in person with the two other individuals to collect their responses.

After tentative themes were extracted from the data, I met together with all four participants in order to conduct a focus group. At the beginning of the meeting, individuals had some time to talk to each other, then each individual was given a listing of the tentative themes found in their interview transcription and an extract from my field notes that reflected my observations of each individual's experience of Nature Loss. The themes were read through by each individual and verified as to meaningfulness, a procedure referred to as "reliability checking" in more traditional qualitative research approaches. The group spontaneously initiated a reading of my individual reflections on their experience. They compared themselves to each other, and contrasted the differing themes. The participants were asked for feedback on their experience of the research process, and in line with feminist epistemology (Harding, 1987) were asked about any power imbalances that might be involved in the process (such as the power that I have to interpret the participants words, or take their words away and process them in whatever way I choose). In the end, I chose not to video tape the focus group, as it did not seem necessary, and the group ended up meeting in an outdoor setting that was not conducive to videotaping. An audiotape and written notes were used instead. This audiotape was not transcribed, as there was enough information available from my notes.

The initial interviews lasted approximately one hour, while the focus group took about two hours. All of the data was collected within a six-week period.

Analysis of the data

A thematic analysis was performed on the data. After the interview data had been transcribed verbatim, it was decontextualized or segmented into thematic units. Next, categories were developed to explain and describe the data, and the meaning units were coded into one or more of the categories. The categories were examined and metathemes were defined that highlight the patterns found in the data (Brunt, Milliken, & Shields, 1994; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). In this way the analysis process moved from the general to the specific as I attempted to reveal the "essence of the phenomenon." A journal was kept during this process to record my observations of the data and the process. The excerpt below from my fieldnotes illustrates the "emergent" nature of qualitative research (Ely et al. 1999, p. 175). There is a recursive analytic process, a sense of moving in and out of the data, often getting immersed in it. From my fieldnotes:

Today, wallowing in the networks of the codes. I feel a bit lost, there is too much, I kind of get some connections, but what to do with them. I am losing touch with my journey metaphor guide. I enjoy keeping track of all the little thoughts and notes, producing networks/maps on "Response to Nature Loss" Seeing Nature Loss, Ways of seeing, looking at Nature Loss, not looking at Nature Loss, responses to Nature Loss, responses to suffering. It's funny how it seems to go back to the things I am thinking/learning about on other levels. Can I help but do that? I mean, thinking about my big questions... in all this abstraction and philosophizing and theories, you can get pretty lost. I am reluctant to grab on to any one, and say this is the answer, this is my truth, this is it. It seems to me when I look for the one answer, when I can see things in black and white; I am wrong, way wrong. There is always more, there is more to integrate, to hold, to step back and hold. I want something to come out, but I am not inspired. If I were inspired, I would make connections, break connections, loop and weave there would be a pretty sweater all made up the audience, my reader, the academy ... they could try it on and kind of nod approvingly in the mirror. Hey that's a nice-looking sweater. Warm too. ...But I'm a little stuck. It looks more like the scenery in Road Warrior, nodes and wreckages all around, me alone in the dessert, the only living thing, hint of enemies unseen. Walking up and down a dusty road. Where should I go next? My task is not finished, and once again I am lost.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the results obtained from the interviews conducted with each of the four participants who took part in this study. The results include an introduction to each participant and a description of their experience of Nature Loss. Selected quotations that elaborate on the themes are included to illustrate basic concepts, with an overall goal of describing the experience of Nature Loss. During an analysis and study of the transcripts several categories emerged into which participants' descriptions have been organized:

- Looking at Nature Loss: Examples – Here participants speak about what Nature Loss looks like to them, revealing specific examples that provide an illustration of the concept of Nature Loss.
- Looking Ahead: The Future – In this section the participants explicate their beliefs about the future of nature and the condition of the environment.
- Responding to Nature Loss – This section provides a description of the individual responses to the Nature Loss experience. Here illustrative quotes from each participant are presented in order to provide an overview of the variety of feeling responses that Nature Loss elicited in these participants.
- Plastic or Paper? Personal Participation in Nature Loss – Part of the Nature Loss experience that each participant spoke about was their own sense of complicity, of contributing to the loss of nature by their own actions. Usually there was a sense of guilt and frustration associated with this. We get so much information from different sources; it is hard to say whether choosing plastic or paper is better for the environment.
- Coping with Nature Loss – This section describes the various ways that participants were able to navigate this complex and often painful experience. Examples in this category are: personal process, belief systems, meaning making, meaningful choice, writing poetry, and minimizing one's own participation in Nature Loss.

- Speaking of Nature Loss – In this section, participants discuss their experience of giving voice to Nature Loss, what it is like for them to talk about it, and how their external context influences their comfort with speaking.

The final section of this chapter "Suggestions for Counsellors" summarizes the participants' descriptions that are directly useful for counselling psychology. In this section, the individuals describe what helps them to feel empowered in all of this pain, and they make suggestions about how they would help others with these feelings.

The results are presented below in the order of the interviews. Participants are identified by a "code name" of their own choosing. In order to keep this report aligned with the participants' original meaning the participants' own words are used as much as possible.

Morris

About Morris

Morris is a 40-year-old man who describes his occupation as "an organic farmer at large." He considers himself a community organizer, has diplomas in French and forest engineering, a degree in environmental studies, and has almost completed a diploma in counselling. I interviewed him in his cabin near his garden, in a very beautiful rural setting on the outskirts of the city. These are my impressions of Morris, as recorded in my field notes.

> *Morris has refined his belief system in order to be able to appreciate his life well. When it comes to Nature Loss, he has indeed felt these things. There are beloved places that he describes in magical terms whose survival he fears for. Avalon, the magic isle. He is involved in a personal process right now; one leads him towards being more aware of and in touch with his feelings. He wants to live his life from a place of love, not fear. He is disciplined in this, continually moving back towards centre. He makes conscious decisions, from where he lives, how he earns his money, how he wants to be in the world, to what guitar to buy. He sees his task in life to appreciate the world, to remember who he is. The world is a classroom, the physical plane mirrors back to us what is inside. What can we learn from this?*

Looking at Nature Loss: Examples

Morris began his interview with a story describing his childhood playing fields and how they have now been paved over. This story brought forth an emotional response in me, a sense of poignant loss and yet Morris himself conveys a remote distance from his feelings, both here and throughout his interview. This description conveys an impression of something once open, present and pleasurable now "abandoned," paved over and closed: an impression of Nature Loss.

> When I was a kid we would go out to what were then farmer's fields, but they'd been abandoned already at that point…I would catch snakes… that was a playground for me, those fields, just a five- minute walk from the house. And now that's the centre of Scarborough which is a borough of six hundred thousand people...they built the second biggest mall in Canada on there... and there is a light rapid transit system that goes through there and it's a massive, massive conglomeration of buildings and so that's what I knew as a kid, those fields, and again, the feeling sense isn't there for me right now. It's more of oh look at this, look at what this used to be, what this is now... that's one of the earliest experiences for me.

In this next passage, he describes an example from his trips to Clayoquot sound. He describes his experience somatically, a "heaviness" in his eyes and belly. A sense of stooping over adds to the image of a weight being placed on him, as if he is literally carrying his feelings, burdened by them, even as he accepts them philosophically.

> I spent nine summers in Clayoquot sound... every year that I went there I could see more and more of these mountainsides clearcut... because I didn't spend a lot of time there, I could really notice the changes. People who live in the midst of it maybe don't notice them quite so readily, but I really noticed them. So one mountainside that might have been pristine one year, we go back and there is a huge cut block up there… when I think about that I feel the same thing. I feel the weight; I feel heaviness in my eyes and in my belly. I feel like I kind of crouch over a little bit; lean forward like I am not sitting upright feeling empowered right now. Intellectually I've done lots with that over the years. And I have a strong intellectual understanding, and maybe maybe... a spiritual understanding of what's happening there. And so a level of acceptance. But I don't really... I don't like it. I don't feel okay about it.

Morris conveys his ability to make meaning out of what is happening intellectually and spiritually, yet there is still an uneasiness in him around what is happening to an environment he knows. In this next passage he reveals his fear of actually going back to see what has. His intellectual understanding and acceptance does not protect him completely – he still does not want to have to see the losses.

> There's a mountain there called CatFace... and ironically enough, the whole face of the mountain… has been clearcut years and years ago. And then every year they add a little bit more to it… the whole thing has been denuded… it's just... it's an enormous scar. And because of the steepness of the mountain, there's a huge amount of erosion from the roads, and five or six years ago, when they had tremendously strong rains there, there was something like 27, I forget the number, landslides. Inside of a two- week period on the various mountain ranges around there... just from that logging.... So, I'm also in some ways afraid to go back. I haven't been. I was back last summer for a little while, but to go back and see what's happening is not a pleasant feeling.... It's a little fishing village, and in the last probably four or five years it's been discovered by the whaling companies and the tourists and now the kayakers have been there for a long time so it's an Ecotourism base right now big time… it's becoming Whistlerized, massive, massive big houses being built there.... That's hard for me. I really don't want that to happen. And it is.

In this example, I find his description of this little island "magical," he shows a love for nature, an attachment to place, and the experience of the threat of loss of that place:

> There's a little island that doesn't have a name on the map, and that's where we camped. There's no water on the island; no one else camps there…I call it Avalon, because I think the island disappears when we're not there. It's beautiful, its about 10 acres, and there's some really big trees on it, and its all forested except for one little promontory of grass and the tide comes up really high in the winter, and so there are no trees there, but in the summer it's out and there's a big rock that we can watch the sunset from. I had one of my most special moments of my life sitting on that rock… you can't get lost and it's really a gentle, forgiving beautiful island… I went there last year, and somebody had hooked up a boat to the far end of the island and built a dock and presumably was living there.

> And somebody else had brought a camper up and put it on the shoreline, and then the tides had come in over the winter and smashed up the camper. So it had just, there are just bits of debris around. So this little island, this seemingly pristine island, that had only been selectively logged, maybe a hundred or two hundred years, 150 years ago maybe. So just to have those images, those examples, those realities of people living there permanently. It felt kind of like a travesty. I didn't feel as comfortable staying there for those two weeks. And in staying there for a couple of weeks, we always felt fine with that because we knew that we were going, and that we were being very respectful of the land. And then when we left, nobody would know that we were there except for perhaps some of the nettles pushed down but then every winter, the tides would come in and they would be growing. So, like a little gem up there... I have fear about going back and what will happen with that little island.

Looking Ahead: The Future

When Morris looks to the future, he sees an eventual change for the better. This vision is embedded in his worldview, a belief system that conceives of the outside world as a reflection of our inner world: as we evolve, consciousness will evolve, and the physical world will reflect this. His spiritual worldview is described in more detail under the section, "Coping With Nature Loss" below.

> I think that it will get worse for quite a while from an ecological perspective, we'll degrade it, pollute it even more. And then it will shift. And we will start to do a tremendous amount of healing work. Consciousness is shifting right now, big time and yet the physical side hasn't caught up with it yet. So I don't know whether, can't even put a number on it. But it's going to decrease, the quality of life will decrease for a while environmentally and nature will be impinged quite a bit more until we finally turn it around.

Responding to Nature Loss

This section provides a description of Morris' feeling responses to Nature Loss. He identifies feelings of fear, grief and sadness around his experience of Nature Loss, yet continually expressed a removal from his experience. Here he attributes his social and cultural background with responsibility for this lack of "feeling experience."

> I am being somewhat facetious when I say being white North American male, but given that reality, the feeling experience of Nature Loss is not one that I have let myself feel a tremendous amount… I don't like that reality and I'm just recognizing that it is a reality now. I can describe to you experiences around it, and certainly, there are some feelings there… the irony is that I really want to feel it big time and let it pass through my body, and the fear is that it is too painful, let's not go there… In our culture, men in particular are taught not to feel, I mean this is not rocket science, we know this. So it's really difficult for us to go into that place and be vulnerable like that with other people. So the tendency is to avoid, is to pave it over, to get busy and do things

He further illustrates his distancing when, after describing a painful experience of Nature Loss he finishes by saying, " The feeling sense isn't there for me right now. It's more of oh look at this, look at what this used to be, what this is now." His ability to intellectually make sense of things is some consolation, yet he is "frustrated" at his lack of feeling experience: "… I have that understanding intellectually, but it still, it still, the feeling, it's not a felt sense of spirituality, it's more like again, an intellectual one. And that frustrates me. I frustrate myself around that." Ironically, *I* felt emotionally moved by his words, for me there was definitely a "felt sense."

This next quote illustrates his feelings of fear, in this case, fear about going back to the magic isle "Avalon" and possibly seeing unwanted changes that might be "too painful" to experience.

> I'm also in some ways afraid to go back. I haven't been. I was back last summer for a little while, but to go back and see what's happening is not a pleasant feeling…I have fear about going back… what will happen with that little island? When I see people living there permanently and dogs running around it... and garbage washed up on the... the shoreline... it feels like people aren't being respectful of that part of nature and that part of ourselves. It feels like it's one more resource to be exploited and to be used. And not to be cared for. My fear would be that people with less consciousness and less or different intention would come and would do damage so that they might clearcut part of the island or all of the island… And the fear is that that is too painful, let's not go there.

Morris also identifies grief as one of his feeling responses. He carries it around in his body. His grief is not just for the relationship that humans have for the non-human, but it is for the relationship that humans have with one another. Thus he includes humans in his definition of nature.

> There's a tremendous amount of grief inside my body that has been here for a long time. That is related a lot to the way I see the world around me. And it's certainly about how we relate to nature, and I want to include human beings in that nature as well, so it is certainly about how we relate to one another.

Morris connects his grief around his family of origin with his grief around Nature Loss. For him nature is solace, and the loss of places of solace is something to grieve. Here he does experience his sad feelings, in contrast to his statements to the contrary.

> The grief around my own family…is really integrated with the grief around what we call nature as well, because my solace as a kid was nature, that's where I got. You know I'm feeling a little sad right now even as we go into this.

He recognizes his sadness, feeling it like a weight in his stomach, his eyes and his shoulders. Again, this brings to mind the image of "carrying" emotions as a weight.

> I can feel some sadness for sure.... In my belly.... It's more like a weight... pulling me down, yeah. And I feel it in my eyes a little bit too. And it's not like tears, it's like a weight pulling me down. And, and on my shoulders... like 'agh', that kind of experience... like, like a weight being put on me and pushing down, so it's that kind of thing... so it's not like a depressed feeling, it's like a pushing down, something outside is pushing down.

Plastic or Paper? Personal Participation in Nature Loss

Morris joined his fellow participants in connecting with guilt over his own contributions to nature's loss. He is extremely aware of the latest data on what is environmentally sustainable behaviour and what is not, and he makes many of his choices based on what is best for the earth. I am struck by the contrast of him not wanting to put his banana peel in the garbage instead of composting it, with the careless way many in

our society dispense with the many disposable articles that are part of our consumer society. In this first passage he speaks of the ways he participates in Nature Loss in the physical sense, and in the second, he describes how he adds to the destruction in an *emotional* sense.

> I'm quite pleased with my lifestyle, but there are many ways, I drive a truck I drive a motorcycle. I bought bananas for the very first time in 10 years. On Earth Day! I used to do lectures talking about bananas. So there I was on Earth Day walking around eating bananas feeling really guilty... And then I didn't have anywhere to put the peel. I wasn't going to bring it home and bring it home to my compost, so yeah. The food choices I make. I often eat bioregional, but I still eat Hagen-Daz ice cream, and throw away the container. There are ways like that, in a physical sense for sure.

Emotionally, Morris believes that when he isn't straightforward and expressive with his feelings, he adds to his participation in Nature Loss.

> In an emotional sense by withholding my feelings and not expressing them directly. It comes out in other ways. And that influences people around me. So if I'm feeling sad or scared it comes out as anger or grumpiness towards people and I think that's really a way of contributing to the dysfunction of our world.

He feels "certainly guilt. Inadequate… not doing enough" when reflecting on his contributions to environmental deterioration. Yet at the same time, he recognizes that the world is as it is, and that he cannot live without impinging on the environment in some way. He tries to use that understanding to have more compassion, and be less judgmental of himself.

> At times, I feel sad that I know better and yet I can't seem to change behaviours. But I also feel sadness at other people's behaviours too, big time. Certainly, there's been anger in the past… Judgements. You know, I went into town yesterday to pick up [a friend] and bring him all the way out here, and take him back. I have a pick up truck, ¾ ton pick up truck that carried one person twice and two people twice. And that's a shit load of fuel. So I feel guilty about that, but less guilt these days, more sadness that I have to go that far to create community. I don't like that the world is that way. That I'm living in a world that way. So I'm less judging of

> myself in a harsh way and more recognizing that the sadness that I feel around not knowing how to make it different.

Coping with Nature Loss

How does Morris cope with his experience of Nature Loss? As he has described, the feeling experience is not always easily accessible. He also describes experiencing his feelings of sadness as a heavy weight, and indicates that when he doesn't express his feelings, they stay stuck inside of him. In a sense, this is one way to cope with his painful experience of Nature Loss, one that he is not content with, but one that nevertheless keeps pain away. He copes by "not letting himself feel," or doing lots "intellectually" and "spiritually" in order to have "a level of acceptance" and understanding.

Morris' worldview and belief system also plays a mediating role in his experience. He considers the external physical world to be a manifestation of our internal world: when we evolve (and we are always evolving) to a state where our consciousness is at a higher level, the outside world will reflect this new order. This understanding helps him have faith in a positive outcome to the seemingly senseless destruction. It gives reason and purpose to the happenings in the universe, and reframes experience as lessons of life. It also supports him to focus on his own process, and his own way of being in the world, and in relationship to nature as a catalyst for bigger change.

> I accept that as human beings spiritually we live in a three dimensional reality. And the whole purpose of the physicality around us is to mirror back what's happening inside us. That's my belief. So the clearcut mountainsides need to happen with our level of consciousness right now, so we can look at it and see okay, the turmoil I have inside me is out there on the side of the mountain, I can see it. And so I have that understanding intellectually, but it still, it still, the feeling, it's not a felt sense of spirituality, its more like again, an intellectual one.

For Morris, the "intention" behind the actions is very important: it is not so much *what* is being done to nature, but *how* it is being done that is important. In acting from a "place of love" instead of fear, we can live in a more co-operative, harmonious way. We can know that we are doing the right thing by contributing to the well being of the planet.

In this way, Nature Loss may cause us less pain, as we can reframe our experience as one of learning.

> Given the reality that we are very much a part of nature, I have no problem at all with us using, even if its killing animals for our own needs, and I'm largely vegetarian. Killing carrots for my own sustenance. I don't have a problem with that. For me its mostly about the intention that we have, if the intention is to honour whatever it is, whether it's a tree that I'm about to cut down, so I can rebuild the arbour in my garden, or whether it's a carrot that I'm gonna pull up, or whether it's a moose that somebody might be taking for their winter larder. If their intention is a pure one and it's to meet their own needs and not their wants necessarily, but their needs, then I think that's fine. Because we are not separate from this, we have to interact in the best way that we know how. But if people are acting from a place of fear rather than love, so they are acting from a place of greed or victimization or blame or guilt or any of those fear based feelings, then they're not being respectful to the land and they destroy rather than create.

He believes that life will continue to evolve in a positive way where we interact with each other and other species in a co-operative way, one that is motivated by love, not fear. This strong belief helps to cut the feet out from under the pain of Nature Loss. The pain can always be salved with the knowledge that all of this is in some way "meant to be," that it is a lesson. Morris acknowledges that some of his beliefs may sound "whacko" in the context of "our" culture (white, North American), but they show a strong trust in the power of love over fear and hate.

> I think it will happen on the earth, where the relationship, the dance between the lions and the lambs… or you know, whatever creatures seem to be prey and predator, the dance now is one that we fully don't understand now, there's a level of co-operation in there that's really deep I think. And so we can get to a place where we're not coming from this fear-based ideology anymore. So the animals won't react to one another from fear…. We live in that physical reality that we have bodies that need to be sustained, and so, until we go beyond that, and I think we can, we still need to drink and we still need to eat. So we need meat or plant life to sustain ourselves, I can accept it at that level. But, again, spiritually I think we can move beyond that where we, we... and this may sound whacko to

> most of our culture... but I really believe that we will evolve beyond that to a place where we can live in grace, and we are no longer coming from a fear based ideology. We're coming strictly from a love-based ideology. And thus our needs, you know plants get their energy from the sun directly. That's a good example of it. There are places we can get our energy from other than by eating other animals.

Speaking of Nature Loss

This section contains descriptions of what it is like to give voice to the Nature Loss experience, whether that is acknowledging it within oneself, with others, or within our culture. Morris usually doesn't share his feelings of grief and sadness with others. It is easier for him to share feelings of joy or passion, positive things.

> When I share the feelings of joyousness and passion about changes in my relationship with the world… it's really easy. When I want to share feelings of grief and sadness that's really hard for me to do. Unless I'm with people I feel really safe around and we spend time creating an atmosphere, then its very rare that it would happen… usually I don't.

He stops himself from experiencing or expressing his feelings by putting "obstacles" in the way. He becomes "philosophical," or "intellectual" or he might just "tell people about things":

> You now, I can easily pontificate if I choose. And to put out theories and ideas, not just tell stories… And that can also be a way of not allowing the feelings…intellectualizing, telling stories, philosophizing, asking people about themselves, making myself busy… I still do it by keeping myself busy in the garden. Or busy with letters or such. But in a physical sense I know there are times when I feel sadness... Either publicly or privately, I push it down. You know, I can feel my body holding it down.

When he doesn't express or experience his feelings, he believes they get "further pushed down" – that they need to be experienced in order to move through them. "They get further suppressed, they get further pushed down. Because they are there, they're not going away. Until they are experienced." The silencing of his own emotional voice has the effect of keeping things the same within him.

When Morris considers how his cultural context effects his awareness of Nature Loss he responds that it works in two ways: because of our "consumer ideology" it promotes a forgetfulness of the implications of consumption for nature, and yet he sees mainstream culture conveying other more earth-positive messages with growing frequency.

> Mainstream culture helps me to forget because we get wrapped up in the material way of seeing things. There is a Costco store just down the road that used to be a place where Garry Oaks used to live... But increasingly we are being inundated with messages, from Monday Magazine for instance, or Earth Day... So there's more and more coming from seemingly even mainstream culture that helps me to remember what is happening around us. So it's still way out of balance but increasingly coming into balance.

When I asked Morris "Are you worried that you'll be labelled in some way if you talk about your feelings of Nature Loss?" Morris responded to this question by saying both yes and no, depending on who he is talking to. When reflecting on how he feels about this, he says that on the one hand he wants to be accepted and not appear to be "crazy," but he also likes to identify outside of "mainstream ideology."

> With you and with the others that I have, no not all. But in the mainstream crowd, for sure... airy fairy, crunchy granola, hippie, naïve, that's an important one, naïve, unrealistic, got your head in the sand, this is the way it needs to be, nature lover, tree hugging nature lover. Appellations like that... the way I do see the world is seemingly out there, very alternative, very different from mainstream. So, I don't want to appear to be crazy or to be airy-fairy or to be way out there, but... part of me likes that too. So, yeah. I like not being identified with mainstream ideology. But I also want to be accepted by people.

His summary statement in reference to the interview was "I've enjoyed it very much. This is the juice for me. My passion."

Diana

About Diana

Diana is a 52-year-old artist and music teacher originally from Germany. She has three teenaged children. I had met Diana in person, but my interviews with her took place via e-mail. She describes herself as a "right brain person" who leans more towards the "the emotional level." From my fieldnotes, this is my impression of Diana:

> *Diana's coping system has been won through struggle. She has done a lot of work on herself, and recognizes that it is both a painful and a chosen place to be when she is in despair. She chooses not to be there if possible, and the way she helps herself is to focus on survival. She learns and teaches about how to live in the world in a way that does not rely on consumer goods. She thinks of the time ahead when humans go too far with their actions, when society crumbles. She is renewed and rejuvenated by nature; considering it part of family. She seeks to teach by example, and learn from nature.*

Looking at Nature Loss: Examples

Diana relates her touching and sorrowful first experience of "senseless" loss of natural beings, in this case the death of a loon. The loon conjures up an essential Canadian image of nature and wilderness – not just through its depiction on the face of our dollar coin, but through its haunting cries that echo across our lakes. This loon died because it had discarded fishing line tangled around its beak, its cries silenced by human action long before it died. This can be seen as a metaphorical silencing of nature, the invisibility and voicelessness as we cause nature to disappear all around us.

> The first encounter that saddened, frustrated and angered me was when I picked up a dead loon. This guy had starved to death, because a discarded fishing line was tangled around its beak, therefore preventing him from feeding. The sadness about the loss of this beautiful bird, the senselessness behind it, the thought of not having young loons this year and the confusion of the loon's mate about what happened to her partner struck me very deep inside…the loon and I are one... whatever happens to him, can and will happen to me and I was filled with deep love, compassion and

> sorrow for this wasted life. For us, fishing is a hobby, a sport... for him it's his only food.

Diana's connectedness to nature is apparent in her words. She exhibits self-identification, deep empathy, and strong feelings for what happens to the non-human. In this next passage, she experiences Nature Loss close to home, not as some abstract occurrence on another continent but right here as she observes a tree that held a nest of young woodpeckers cut down. For her, this is obviously a "stupid" mistake, but for our culture, with its concept of rightful human domination over nature, it has a different meaning.

> This wasn't about the rainforest in South America being logged... this was about the tree where the woodpeckers had their nest being cut down in spring, while the young were still in the nest. STUPIDITY OVER STUPIDITY!!!! But I realized very soon that for most people, a tree or a woodpecker is not a friend or relative or partner in this circle of life, but the tree rightfully belongs to the landowner and is here for the sole purpose for us to take.

Looking Ahead: The Future

When I asked Diana "What direction do you think the condition of our environment is heading" she made a point of challenging my definition of "the environment" in this context. Her worldview is that we are not separate from nature, that "The environment, the mystery of life, happens not only 'out there,' it's also inside of us. By disconnecting us from the environment, we disconnect ourselves from our souls... we become aliens to our very being." For her, it is important to conceive of humans as integrated with "the environment." This was her description of what she sees in the future:

> I see major devastation happening, the source of our lives – water, air, sun, and soil, polluted on a level that will put human survival at risk. The living organism Earth – Gaia – will undergo major changes, important changes to protect her own life. The predictions are sad: people dying from environmental sicknesses, increased cancer rates, mass starvation, floods, earth quakes, volcano eruptions... it's all very visible these days. My major fears are that when this stuff is happening on a bigger and bigger scale,

> that most people will have no idea how to deal with that, that cults will skyrocket and that gangs will take over... false prophets and leaders, and weapons of mass destruction readily available for whoever wants them... insanity at its best. And the suffering will increase... not just people who lose their livelihood, but also the rest of creation.

Diana has many questions about the future, questions that can get "disturbing." Sometimes she hopes that whatever is going to happen will happen soon so that the "man-inflicted suffering can come to an end."

> It's not up to me to predict the future, and I have more questions than answers: will we be able to adapt to air, water, and soil pollution? Will gen technology manage to let food grow on depleted soil? Will technology provide us with "food replicators" – like in Star Trek – or will the "Thunderbolt" – our culture – crash? These questions can get very disturbing and then I need to remind myself that all I can do is to learn... and to live by example... This may sound strange to you, but my hopes are that the Earth changes will happen soon so the man-made and man-inflicted suffering can come to an end.

Responding to Nature Loss

Among Diana's responses to Nature Loss were feelings such as anger, (including anger directed at the human race), compassion, hopelessness, pain and sadness. I noted her strong affinity to process: when she recalled or related painful or disturbing ways of experiencing the world, she typically embedded her comments within a description of her transformative process that helps her convert her pain into a more empowering experience. This seems to be a deeply learned lesson, based on her knowledge of herself as a "right brain person" with a tendency towards the "emotional level" – it is her way of helping herself not get overbalanced with emotion. It seemed as if her movement to process and move beyond the pain to a more empowered place was inseparable from the pain itself.

Diana expresses anger at the human race for their role in Nature Loss. It seems that there is a tone of disbelief in her voice as she expresses her feelings about our audacity to claim superiority over the rest of life.

> How dare we to think that our recreation is more important than the loon's lunch? How dare we to think that it's not that important what happens to him? How dare we to be so ignorant that we don't see the result of our actions? How dare we to be so arrogant to think that we don't need to share with other creatures?

Her responses toward the members of the human race who are destroying the natural world also include pain, sadness and frustration. At one time she thought it would be best if there were no humans on this planet.

> When I saw other people polluting, paving over, or simply not caring about wild places and beings and it was a very painful, sad and frustrating experience for me. Back then I figured if the Earth would get rid of us two leggeds, all problems would be solved.

Later, in the section on Coping, Diana demonstrates how she has moved beyond being stuck in this anger. She has an ability to transform these feelings that blight her life, taking responsibility for turning them into something more compassionate where she accepts the human presence as being an integral part of nature. This next comment illustrates this turning point.

> Yes, I do get angry, frustrated or even depressed when I see clearcuts, or whale watchers, or my neighbours using pesticides, or my kids leaving the lights on and the tap only partly closed... but this anger or frustration or depression doesn't help anybody… it's up to me to turn anger, frustration and depression into the desire to appreciate and live life to the fullest…. This is not about running, or being overly optimistic, this is not about denial, it's more about that my purpose in life is not to make my, or other beings lives miserable by dwelling on destructive attitudes.

Her experience with Nature Loss has taught her a deeper compassion for the First Nations peoples. As she experienced feelings of loss herself, she was able to identify empathetically with the losses of others. Again this shows her strong resiliency, and ability to learn and expand her consciousness through opening up to the pain of Nature Loss. There is a sense of deep sadness in this quote.

> For the first time I understood what native peoples must have gone through when their land was taken away... the land that supported them

> and supplied them with all they needed... the land and all that lives there and that they loved so much.

Diana has learned through experience that she can get stuck in her sense of hopelessness about what is happening to the world. She wisely understands that being stuck here, while it is a valid response to the overwhelmingness of it all, does no good for herself or others. She will be "robbed" of her life unless she moves to another state of being.

> Looking around me, and seeing the ignorance everywhere fills me with hopelessness, and this hopelessness can be so overwhelming that it robs me of my own will to go on living... to pursue the good life that is our birthright.

When I asked Diana to describe her pain more fully, she seemed to side step the answer. At first I felt frustrated that she was not being direct, but then I understood how deeply her process of transformation is ingrained in her. She is conscious that the pain is and has been there, but she has developed a coping method of not dwelling on it. She immediately translates it into her teacher, rather than her prison. Here, we also see some of the personal price it takes to do this, how it can be a lonely place, but driven by a force from deep inside of her.

> Do you want to know more about the pain? It's hard to describe, because I dealt with it by becoming an "educator"... it's hard for me to dwell solely on the pain, or feelings of nature loss, because it is such a good teacher... because it was the so much needed wake-up call for me to turn from surviving to living... from pointing fingers to start learning.... It's hard to describe this pain... kind of as if something is tearing away my soul, piece by piece... anger, frustration, sadness, sorrow... and the knowledge that there is no place to hide... that I need to face it now that I let it touch me... the urge to scream and yell it everywhere... to tell everybody: don't you see what we're doing? Don't you see that loons have feelings and a right to live? Don't you see that they're our partners, our teachers, our friends? These thoughts made me feel kind of lonely... questioning if it was just me seeing the world in the wrong light. But the urge to do something came from such a deep level that I didn't have a choice... I had to talk about not only my feelings, but also the importance of sharing with other life forms.

And again, her internal process reflects a strong need to live life fully, with hope instead of despair, "gratitude" instead of "misery."

> All this, including perfectly managed city lawns, fish farms, GE food, etc. saddens, frustrates and scares me often so much that I need to come to terms with this in a way I can deal with, in a way that lets me enjoy life and the life that's all around in more gratitude for all there is than in misery.

Diana carries around feelings "of great urgency, and that if this society doesn't smarten up soon, we will be headed in the same direction as the dinosaurs." She again speaks about her philosophy on destructive feelings:

> I'm learning to find out where destructive feelings come from, to go deep inside to find out why they have a hold on me and what I can do about them. Yes, I do get angry, frustrated or even depressed when I see clearcuts, or whale watchers, or my neighbours using pesticides, or my kids leaving the lights on and the tap only partly closed... but this anger or frustration or depression doesn't help anybody. It only closes doors and lets me dwell in my own and self inflicted misery... and I don't want to do that anymore: life is too much of a precious gift to waste it on negative emotions, but it's up to me to turn anger, frustration and depression into the desire to appreciate and live life to the fullest. To come to this point I needed to go through some major self-healing work... and every experience was well worth it. When I'm confronted with self-destructive emotions, it's time for some inside time again. With that I mean taking some time off to explore where this stuff comes from, what kind of trigger is there and how can I take it out into the light to have a close look at it, acknowledge it, heal it or put it aside for the time being. This is not about running, or being overly optimistic, this is not about denial, it's more about that my purpose in life is not to make my, or other beings lives miserable by dwelling on destructive attitudes. No, I'm far from perfect, but I'm learning and working on it... and nobody can do this work for me; help me, yes; but the hard work is my own job.

Diana has in the past considered that her experience of Nature Loss might be too much for her. She wasn't sure whether she could handle it.

> I thought about if I would be able to live with this pain. It's so much harder experiencing it first hand, instead of reading or hearing about it. Should I go back to a less rural place, where the destruction has already happened and where I'm not on such a personal level involved with this pain? Or should I stay and do something about it? Being faced with this hurt in my soul on an almost everyday basis? Could I handle it?

Now, through her learning process, she is actually grateful for the painful experience because it helped motivate her to learn:

> My personal learnings where immense, and I think that without the sadness, frustration and sometimes anger I couldn't have done and achieved what I needed to achieve. And without the constant reminder of the destruction of our shared home, the pain was the best tool Ma Nature could have given me. The pain made me learn about nature, the pain turned me into becoming native in nature, part of nature instead of an alien or visitor, when the dead tree that was used by ospreys to start building their nest was felled, its loss became my loss... increasing my understanding about nature and my place in it. The soul of the tree was my soul, the confusion and sadness of the ospreys when they came back the next spring and saw their home gone... turned into firewood, became my confusion and sadness... we're all in this together.

Plastic or Paper? Personal Participation in Nature Loss

Here Diana reflects on how she participates in the Nature Loss process. She considers both the material ways, and the emotional ways such as not taking responsibility and remembering that she has a choice about herself.

> Yes, each time I buy the paper, each time I drive my car, each time I blame somebody else for what's going on, each time I look inside and around me in misery instead of in gratitude, I'm part of the destruction.... Again, it's my choice to dwell on this or to learn more about living without destroying. The knowledge is out there and within us and I do have a choice. For the time being it's more about learning for me to get me ready for the time when I will live what I preach... with all the consequences. For the next year or so it's about finding the balance between what I can do and what I can't do today... if I have to drive the car for a purpose, I can live with it without feeling guilty... going for a

> joyride out of boredom is a different story. But again, the question is: why did I go on this joyride, what's missing in my life and how can I fill this void? ...this is not about denial, this is about seeing the problem and finding solutions that work for me... and hopefully to pass this on to others by living it.

Coping with Nature Loss

Diana found that her experience of Nature Loss brought up emotional responses that were too much for her. Her coping process involves transforming her pain into a learning process. Exposure to Nature Loss " including perfectly managed city lawns, fish farms, GE food, etc." elicits such an immobilising emotional responses in her, it "saddens, frustrates and scares me" to such an extent that she needs to " come to terms" with it, "in a way I can deal with, in a way that lets me enjoy life and the life that's all around in more gratitude for all there is than in misery." Her worldview is influenced by the teachings of "Earth-based tribal people" who have had a strong connection with nature. An important aspect of this is in seeing humans as part of nature; and seeing nature as the source of spirituality.

> Here's my philosophy, based on the ancient and universal knowledge of people that knew how to live a good life without destroying the rest of life. First I need to ask: what IS nature? Nature is the web of life, the food chain – life lives off of life, there's no life without death and death is nothing but a flowing exchange of energy. Nature is beautiful and loving and caring and life- sustaining... and nature is wild and powerful and cruel. Nature is the miracle and mystery of life and despite competition, thrives on co-operation and diversity. And like every other life form, humans evolved from and with nature – shaping and being shaped by nature. Earth-based tribal people have known for millions of years, and some still do, the secret of life: Man belongs to the earth. Man is one part in the sacred circle of all life, not more important, but also not less important. To belong to the earth, to nature, means to understand man's place within it... taking what we need to live a good life, and sharing with the rest of the community of life as partners... because without them, there would be no us. A strong sense of identity, self and place was achieved through ceremonies, talking circles, games, story telling... keeping body, spirit, mind and emotions in balance. Spirituality is based on nature. To take away the place, the natural world, is to take away one's spirit.

Her coping process has been informed through learning from Nature, "Listening to, watching and being outside taught me some very important lessons: Everything is connected and each step I take has consequences." Part of her learning has been to situate humans within nature instead of as the enemy of nature, and this understanding helps her cope.

> Back then I figured if the Earth would get rid of us two leggeds, all problems would be solved. Now I'm starting to realize that we do have our place and our reasons to live on this planet, but that I need to re-learn to be one part of life, taking what I need and being grateful for it.

Diana has "something inside" of her that compels her to "turn this fear into learning." This "something" is akin to a "survival instinct." She understands that she can only "change myself, and fear is the wrong helper."

> The way I overcome this fear is by learning and appreciating what's still out there... learning how I could fit in... Learning about the plants and their gift to me... learning about the animals, their tracks, their secrets, their food... learning about the trees... and this in turn fills me with gratitude and empowers me to learn more, to become more native to the place and a partner in all this beauty.

Another part of Diana's worldview that buffers her from apprehension about the future is that she actually anticipates "the end." She finds this empowering, knowing that she can survive after "the crash." She is aware that "This may sound strange to you," but "my hopes are that the Earth changes will happen soon so the man-made and man-inflicted suffering can come to an end... just knowing that there is life after the crash of this society, and that it depends on each one's ability to listen and to adapt is at least some empowerment." Diana has a strong theme of choice running through her words. She makes a choice to cope in a positive way.

> It's my choice to dwell on this or to learn more about living without destroying. The knowledge is out there and within us and I do have a choice. For the time being it's more about learning for me to get me ready for the time when I will live what I preach... with all the consequences. For the next year or so it's about finding the balance between what I can do and what I can't do today... if I have to drive the car for a purpose, I

> can live with it without feeling guilty... going for a joyride out of boredom is a different story. But again, the question is: why did I go on this joyride, what is missing in my life and how can I fill this void?

Diana copes also by focusing on learning skills that can help her live off the land, and teaching these skills to others:

> What I need to do more is to go out there and learn all the lessons of life, to understand and to know without claiming ownership, to go back to the basics and fulfil my needs, including filling my belly on wild edibles, to know how to build a shelter, a fire, what plants can be used for medicinal or food purposes, how to fish and catch a rabbit if needed, and how to cook it without wasting anything... how to feel at home in the forest, the meadow, the lake, or the ocean... without taking part of my home with me. And whatever I learn, I must pass on to whoever is willing to listen!

Speaking of Nature Loss

Diana says she does not really "avoid expressing these feelings anymore," but sometimes it is difficult to express them in a way that is "understandable and non-offensive." When she does "avoid expressing my feelings" she believes that it is indicative that she doesn't "really care... may that be about the person or whatever message is inside me that wants to come out... an attitude that disturbs me." When she distracts herself instead of listening to herself, it "leaves me empty... this feeling of a missed opportunity... something exciting that was waiting for me and I didn't pay attention." She takes responsibility for her actions, saying "Again, this is about MY attitude towards life... am I willing to open up and see and listen and feel the life that surrounds me, or do I close myself to all this and live in a self-made cave?"

When she shares her feelings around Nature Loss, "some people understand, others think that I'm a visitor from Mars." When talking with other people about what is happening in the world, it depends on whom she is talking to. If it is "to people that are so concerned about what is happening" then the conversations tend to be " depressed and hopeless." Yet:

> These are the conversations where I'm learning a lot about my own reactions towards people. Whenever misery feeds on misery, something is

> wrong, and usually it's my own rather destructive side that tries to pull me down. The lesson here is to speak my truth, at least on a level others can understand... whether that's about opening a window to let the flies out instead of killing them or to talk about the beauty and life-giving power of the rain. And to speak my truth in a way the other can understand, I need to be connected to my soul, my inner voice, whatever name we want to give this ancient wisdom that is in all of us. The good conversations are about hope and beauty, when I can talk about the spiritual side of life and how this manifests itself in the physical. Lately I had three beautiful talks with total strangers... this feeling of knowing each other and trusting each other without any fears. And these talks acknowledge the insanity, but don't dwell on it.

When she does silence herself, she does it through distracting herself "there are lots of distractions around, from going shopping, watching TV, reading or writing to taking doggie for a walk." She believes that our culture silences us by telling us "the biggest and most destructive lie: the earth was created for humans and humans are here to rule, to manipulate and control it."

Emily

About Emily

Emily, 48, has been a medical office receptionist, Tai Chi and meditation trainer, and a lay counsellor. Lately she has been working in organic gardening, and making jewellery and crafts. She has two children, a daughter of 26, and a son of 15. I interviewed Emily in her little cabin overlooking a small lake in a beautiful rural setting. This is what I recorded in my field notes: my impression of Emily:

Emily is a poet. She embraces things with her feelings. She filters things through her feelings. She has had to develop ways to keep her safe from feeling too much, too much anguish and pain. Feeling too much like this doesn't help the world, it doesn't help herself. She loves nature; she would choose it over the human race. She has a sense of serendipity in her life, when she follows her heart's desire to be close to nature, all things flow from that for her. She entertains the possibility that what is happening to the world is something terrible and disastrous. But she also looks at the idea that raised consciousness will help turn the tide. Things will get worse before they get better however. I am remembering Emily, that day we all walked to the top of the nearby hill and looked out over the valleys and peaks. I remember looking behind to see Emily catching up with us, and she seemed so fully present, looking directly ahead of her at a boulder, covered in springy green moss, and the way she touched it with her hand, like a friend, like a handshake, like a greeting, with respect and pleasure. A deliberate, unashamed flowing movement.

Looking at Nature Loss: Examples

Emily's examples of Nature Loss are studded with her emotional responses and expression, in this first one, she describes the "Black Hole" of Clayoquot sound, an enormous clearcut that tells the story of humans taking from nature in ways that are disrespectful, and leaving devastation. When Emily first saw this, she was stopped in her tracks; "devastated" just like the mountainside.

> The first time I saw what's called the Black Hole… in Clayoquot, it was probably almost 20 years ago, and driving merrily along with a friend and enjoying the mountains and all of this and then all of a sudden here is this whole big mountain that had been clearcut... And I was just devastated, like what is that? I'd probably seen clear cuts before, I know I'd seen blowdowns by the wind in other places, but that didn't seem so bad. This particular place, and then they'd tried to burn it, to burn off what they'd left, anyway, just awful place. It's where the peace camp was for the Clayoquot demonstrations. I have mixed responses, I get really upset and I cry and I also get angry.

She also feels her pain for Nature Loss in her body as a sense of nausea. There is a feeling of being small and powerless, in the face of the big, anonymous machinery. What is happening is "so removed from anything real": the men doing the work don't

even have to touch the soil, plants, and creatures that they are destroying. She thinks that maybe if they did, if they were closer to what they were doing, then perhaps things might be different, there might be more hope, more respect or care for nature. That they would "stop and look at what they are doing… they would understand the consequences… they would start asking themselves"

> When they were doing roadwork… they were scraping the banks, and they were digging big ditches that I thought were just totally unnecessary and a lot of us were very upset. And when they were building Home Depot down at the end there, destroying this whole field, and all these big machines, and I would literally cringe as I drove by. I just would cringe because, my whole body, I felt like I was going to throw up. I just got instant knots in my belly, at the harshness, at the bigness of these machines, at the noise. And it's so removed from anything real, that's what real was to me, those big machines, if those men were our there with shovels, right, having to look at what they were digging up, it might be different.

Looking Ahead: The Future

When Emily considers the future of nature, she thinks that things might go in one of several directions. The "scarier" predictions are so difficult for her that she doesn't even want to hear any more about what is happening in the world, it would make her too "depressed." She likens what she sees happening to the course of the Titanic:

> I kind of see a bunch of different things. On the scary side, I see more and more destruction, global warming, remaining forest chopped down, water pollution, you know all the scary stuff is getting worse and worse. I don't read the newspaper; I don't listen to the news. I don't have a TV. I could not handle it if I was to keep abreast of all the latest destruction. I'd probably just commit suicide. I would feel so hopeless, so depressed. What would be the point? Nature is the single most biggest thing in my life. I mean yeah I love my kids, and on and on and on. But… if it was all gone, I would not want to live here, I would not want to be on this planet. And I want to read you something that I wrote a while ago… [a friend] had been doing some reading about the Titanic… the Titanic was on a collision course. With the icebergs, and they'd been warned four times apparently... and they ignored it. An iceberg, as you know, so much of it is

> undersea and you can't see it, and so is this feeling of a collision course with something bigger…I was also reading a lot about genetically engineered food.

Emily read the following from her journal. These words fill me with a heaviness and a horror as well, an example of the fear for the future that comes with understanding the process we are stuck in, the continued process of Nature Loss. Asking this question over and over, "What will we do?" what kind of a future is it that we are headed towards, this iceberg, with its full impact immersed, invisible to us. So many questions, a search for meaning, why is this happening? How can it? How can this be the reality that we find ourselves in, that we live with every day, and have seemingly no control over?

> Is anyone listening? Does anyone care? Is everyone asleep? Anger dances, mingles with sorrow. We humans are on a collision course with reality. What will we, my eyes look upon for sustaining beauty when there are no trees left? What will my, our lungs breathe? Where will I, we go for peace when houses and humans and machines chewing up thousands of years of nature's works have gobbled up everything. What will I eat when genetically engineered foods, scorpion genes in corn, my mind recoils in horror. Horror at the Why, horror at the insane manipulation. Horror at possible consequences of rampant carrier bacteria let loose. Sci -Fi at it's best, only this is real. What kinds of minds can even think up these things? What kind of mind can actually do these things so far from the natural order? What will nourish my soul when nature's beauty is gone? Gobbled up by human's insane greed and denial and arrogance. What will feed my body when all has been poisoned. Where will I go? Is anyone listening? Does anyone care? Are you all asleep?

Responding to Nature Loss

Emily expressed and described her feelings around Nature Loss, including anger, anger at the human race, frustration, grief, guilt and pain. She also revealed her ways of coping with her feelings, often through journalling and poetry, some of which is reproduced below. In this poem "Mama Speaks" I hear her voice as the voice of "mother earth" – taking on a colourful, colloquial tone that really does sound "earthy" as she sends us her warning. She describes "Mama" as "no doubt one of my shadows" and that

she has an image of " a large, angry woman no longer tolerant," a persona that "shocked me out of denial and complacency."

Mama Speaks

Hello earthlings this is your Mama speaking.
Listen up.
I gave you this beautiful gem of a planet
hanging like a blue-green diamond in the Milky Way
and for a long time you did it right,
you respected the animals and trees,
you took no more than you needed.
But in the last few thousand years,
I know, blink of an eye for me,
you humans, you've forgotten you're earthlings.
You've forgotten this little planet isn't just yours.
You've forgotten you are a part of me and I am your Mama.
You've forgotten so much,
you don't even remember that in cutting down all the trees,
poof! there go your lungs.

All the junk you're putting in the water, air and soil,
why you dummies,
you're killing yourselves along with everything else.
I don't know what to make of you,
you're murdering other species like there was no tomorrow.

Well, guess what?
There isn't going to be a tomorrow if you don't listen up.
You've forgotten almost everything you need to survive
on this little blue-green diamond hanging in the Milky Way.

You know, good planets are hard to find.
Took me a few million years to get this one just right,
the creatures and plants, to balance everything out,
to get the air cycle going between the trees and the carbon dioxide
exhalers.

So listen up, you still have time to remember how to live,
to remember who you are.

But it's going to take all of you pulling together,
to turn things around or you aren't going to be around.
Oh, I'll still be here
and in a few million years, blink of an eye for me,
there'll be a whole new crop of youngsters.
Maybe they won't forget who they are and how to live
like you did.

Although the poem is pretty much "in your face" Emily herself prefers to avoid confrontation. She too sometimes focuses her anger on the human race, and entertains the notion that the world would be better off without us. This leads her to a stuck place. "when I'm in that place… humans are an aberrant species, and should all be wiped off the face of the planet, and I don't go there, but I do at times have a hard time believing that humans will ever evolve enough, or fast enough before the whole planet's destroyed." She finds this makes her "pretty depressed" and makes it difficult to "get motivated to do much of anything—in the external world." She does feel pulled to express her anger with action, but she says, "I don't like the confrontational approach… I don't see it as very constructive." Yet there is a part of her that entertains the idea of making somebody take notice, to do something about her feelings and get people to "listen up" just like "mama earth." She needs to make some sense out of what is happening, it seems unbelievable to her as she asks, why do you need to do this? Isn't there any place that can be free of human domination?

When I'm in anger or despair... I went so far one day as to make a plan to go and immobilise the bulldozers which, I mean I've never considered myself somebody who would do that but when they start coming on MY ROAD its like, I just want to blow the machines up. I just want them to stop. Do NOT touch my road. You've fucked everything else. Can we please have somewhere that is not destroyed? For reasons that make no sense to me? Why do you need a three-foot ditch? Why do you need to destroy 12 feet in order to create a 3-foot ditch? I've heard their reasons and they don't make sense to me.

Her feelings cause a somatic reaction in her stomach and her blood, her anger has no where to go, there is no one to blame. Where do her feelings go when there is no one to hear her?

> [When I talk about Nature Loss] my pulse is kind of racing actually. [touching her stomach] I get angry again…I start to feel something going on, it's like, here is all this energy going around and so, what do I do with it? Who do I yell at? Who can I go yell at? …There's nobody who will listen. There's nobody who particularly cares, that has the power to do anything about it. You know, I could get angry with lots of other people who feel angry, but it wouldn't change anything.

Her feelings become so physical for her that she actually gets nauseous when they were "destroying a whole field" during the construction work down her road. They were using "all these big machines," and she would "literally cringe as I drove by. I just would cringe, my whole body, I felt like I was going to throw up. I just got instant knots in my belly, at the harshness, at the bigness of these machines, at the noise." Emily has learned that she needs to transform her anger into something healthier for her. When she is in a place of wanting to blame others, she realises she has to blame herself as well – and she incorporates compassion.

> My own process was trying to find healthy anger that's not about blaming, because hey, I'm a consumer too. We are all part of it. There's nobody who isn't a part of it. I smoke, I drive a car, I try not to do that too much, but I still do. You know, I'm not perfect either.

Sometimes there is nothing that can hold all of her feelings of frustration. "There are times when I feel like I want to run up and down the street screaming. But that's the only thing big enough to express my frustration." There is a sense of hopelessness to her frustration, a theme of being silenced, like in those dreams when you are trying to call out, but no voice comes out. "There's nobody who will listen. There's nobody who particularly cares, that has the power to do anything about it. You know, I could get angry with lots of other people who feel angry, but it wouldn't change anything."

When confronted with Nature Loss, one of her responses is a grieving response. She again expressed this eloquently in poetic form as part of her process. This poem

expresses a belief that what is external mirrors our internal world, that the "wounds" we see in nature are a reflection of our wounds, that how we treat ourselves is how we treat nature. She wrote the poem "Earth Mirror" when she was travelling, "marvelling at the awe-inspiring beauty" around Strathcona Park. Suddenly she came upon a huge clearcut:

> suddenly there was a mountain, it's sides barren, gouged, lifeless. How many other times had I closed my eyes to clear-cuts and strip-mining, unable or unwilling to acknowledge the destruction? This poem was an attempt to deal with grief, move through despair and arrive at a place of empowerment and constructive action
>
> Earth Mirror
>
> The Earth is our home, our nourishment,
> Our livelihood, our survival.
> Where else is there to go?
>
> Look at a majestic mountain stripped bare, denuded, raped.
> Allow in the pain, feel the scars and hurting places.
> She is the recipient of our disowned pain,
> projected shadows and woundedness.
> The Earth is a mirror – whose anguish is it?
>
> The Earth is our mirror.
> We have done to her
> what has been done to us,
> what we do to each other and ourselves.
>
> The Earth is a mirror.
> Look at the incredible beauty:
> trees, flowers, mountains, rivers
> and all the living creatures.
> Experience the richness and fullness
> of sight, smells, sounds, tastes and touches.
> Lie face down in a forest, in a meadow,
> on a big rock, on the sand.
> Let your face rest on soft moss, leaves, grass.
> Feel your whole body in touch with the Earth.
> Feel the heart beats beneath your breast – whose heart beats are they?
> Yours, hers or both?
>
> The Earth is our mirror.

> All the loveliness and grandeur,
> colours, lushness, diversity and wildness
> are within us too.
> The Earth is our mirror
> and we are her reflections.

Emily is very sensitive and aware of her own participation in Nature Loss, and this awareness comes with a sense of guilt that she needs to cope with. She speaks about gardening, and how she wants to relate to all of nature as something valuable, yet how she becomes conflicted in this when she is doing something as simple as weeding.

> now I'm really trying to be in a place where I pull it out and I say 'oh you're so beautiful'. Last year I spent the whole time saying I'm sorry, I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry. And that's not a great place to be either, you know, I think I reached a place where I got tired of apologising for my existence, you know, that doesn't feel very good either.

Emily has had to cope with her feelings of frustration, which translate into wanting to blame others for what is happening. She found this really overwhelming.

> In a way it made me feel worse, because then, it's, well I can't blame you either, you know, who can I blame. This thing of wanting to blame somebody because I feel so powerless. That my puny little efforts at buying recycled paper and recycling and using the library extensively and buying used books and all of my little efforts maybe don't matter very much. And at that time I got really overwhelmed a lot more than I do now.

Plastic or Paper? Personal Participation in Nature Loss

Emily has taken "five or six baby steps in terms of living environmentally correctly," but she feels like "there's still a hundred more to go." She has a wood fireplace and drives a car, saying that if she had more money, she would do things differently. She goes "back and forth between feeling frustrated and feeling despair, and feeling well, all I can do is my own little life." She sometimes feels that "that's not enough. I should be able to do more." Along with this comes feelings of "Guilt… the guilt that we're destroying the planet. Its very insidious…" she has felt that she can never do enough to "make up for the guilt for the things I've done wrong. Inadvertently,

knowingly or unknowingly, doesn't matter." She also believes that feeling this guilt "contributes to my own ill health" so, she tries to "let it go" and be "more accepting… okay, I do what I can do."

Emily minimizes her participation in Nature Loss, yet she can't completely stay out of it, for instance, because she chooses to live in a rural setting away from amenities, she needs to have a car. She finds the situation is complex, torn between meeting her needs, and trying to tread lightly on the earth

> It's a conflict; it's really hard. I try not to drive… It's a contradiction, if I lived in the city, I wouldn't need a car, I could take a bus. But then I'd be miserable. I don't know. It's... the whole thing is fraught with polarities and dualities and contradictions and conflict. And you can, you know, tear yourself apart, as I've done – lots. Or I can just accept this is where I am right now. And yeah, I contribute to the destruction. I try not to. I try to use as few resources. But I still drink coffee; it's not shade grown and organic because I can't afford it. There are still lots of things that I wish I could do different. And I try to be gentle with myself too. Instead of beating myself up. You know, well, all in good time. Maybe there isn't time, I don't know. I don't know.

Coping with Nature Loss

Part of coping for Emily has been her choice to live in a beautiful rural setting some distance from town; she finds this healthier for her. Another method that helps her in difficult times is being able to pull her focus inwards to her personal sphere of power: in this way, she is able to feel more effective, less hopeless and powerless. She works to effect change in her own community, rather than taking on everything that is happening.

> Last year there was a lot of road work done down Millstream road. And I got really upset again as a lot of people do, part of the way I've learned to deal with it since moving here is try to make a commitment to this is where I live, okay I can't do anything about those big mountains a hundred or five hundred miles away. Other than what I am doing in my own small way. But I live here, and maybe I can do something here. So I got involved with some of the politics and the meetings….

Not only does being more accepting of herself help Emily find a healthier position in terms of the Nature Loss experience, but actually being open to her pain and allowing herself to experience it and be present with it helps her turn to a healthier way of being in the world. She expresses her quest to do this in her poem "Choices."

> The questions in Choices were directed at myself. Could I keep moving through the tears and come out somewhere new at the end?
>
> Choices
>
> Can you be with your pain
> without turning away,
> allowing, sinking deeper
> into the seemingly endless wound?
>
> Can you let the tears fall
> over and over again,
> softening, moistening the hard shell
> of aeons of defensiveness and armour?
>
> Can you hold honesty and realness
> as your guide and lighthouse
> when your heart is pounding
> and fear nearly strangles your breath?
>
> Can you stand before another
> with sorrow naked on your face,
> without fears and walls
> masking your vulnerability?
>
> Can you resist putting the armour back on
> when the tears have dried,
> deepening into softness
> and gentle openness?
>
> Can you turn away from the black pit of despair
> and say "Yes" again to Life and Love
> when understanding doesn't come
> and trust is a tiny beacon in the darkness?
>
> Can you be as compassionate with your self
> as you would with your beloved

and extend your hear to
every tender new bud and being in your world?

Can you rise like the phoenix
as your cherished hopes lie forlorn on the ground
and search among the ashes
for the gift hiding there?

Can you greet the morning
and carry on with courage and hope,
knowing there is a redeeming purpose
and it is your choice to find it?

This poem is full of promise and hope. As we stay present and aware and open to our experience, we can move through it, and we will find it transformative: as with the phoenix, something golden and beautiful and new can rise out of the ashes of our pain.

Emily also speaks about how important context is for her to find ways to cope with her feelings. Living in a rural environment helps free her from being overburdened by unhealthy feelings, while living in the city is much harder for her.

> Before I moved here, I was living in Fernwood, in quite a nice little duplex with my kid, and I had a garden and I recycled... but I started to feel really out of integrity and needing more... to live the way I am now living, which was not possible when I had my son to take care of. You know he wanted all the toys, plus just the reality of having to shelter and feed him and all the rest of it. And for months I was very depressed, and then I got really sick, and, the whole thing of, I need to live in a sustainable way… I don't want to live in the city anymore. I kept telling myself, its okay, another five years, six years, he would be gone. Well my body kind of took over and I got quite sick. I had to quit my job, and my son went to live with his dad… then I went camping with a girlfriend, and we only stayed out one night, but I got up the next morning, and I felt better. And it was just one of those, you know, big awakenings, where, and I didn't know what I was going to do with my life. I was at a real impasse, and it was just like, I have to go live in the woods. I have to have my hands in the soil, I have to garden, I have to be with living things, beings. I cannot live like this anymore. I don't want to be in these boxes surrounded by concrete. And I went back and I gave notice to the place I'd moved in to a week before. If

> I couldn't live here the way I'm living, I would find it much harder. I still have a lot of comforts; I still have electricity… and I only got a phone because of my kids. I have a much more direct relationship with the elements here. The water comes from the lake right in front of me… It's real, where my water comes from. My heat comes from the wood that I helped get from the forest, dead trees. Some of my food I grow myself. And I don't think I could deal with what's happening on the planet if I didn't live here.

For Emily, being able to live in a rural setting helps her cope "If I couldn't live here the way I'm living, I would find it much harder… I don't think I could deal with what's happening on the planet if I didn't live here." Emily has a variety of other ways to cope with her feelings, from numbing out to writing about it and activism.

> Eventually I just kind of numb out. Or… when I was parenting full time I didn't have the luxury of staying with the feelings very much. There's always something immediate you got to deal with. So if I didn't stuff it, I would write. Writing is a good outlet. I always had friends who felt the same, I joined different groups, I tried to always be part of something that was trying to do something different. I did environmental education stuff with Earth Day; I always tried to find something that would be going in a better direction to be involved in. I didn't actually stay as an environmental activist very long. I don't, I'm not really suited to that type of work. I don't like the confrontational approach even though I can get really angry; I don't see it as very constructive.

She also retains a hope that people can change and be more conscious of their relationship with nature and through this, nature will have more of a chance.

> My hope would be that if you are touching something alive, even though you don't credit it with life, which most people don't in the same way. But there's a chance that you might see this plant in front of you, there's a chance you might see this snake that you just stepped on. Nature stands more of a chance somehow. Of being seen, of being touched, of it touching humans.

She hopes that through this:

> That then they would stop. And they would look at what they're doing. And they would understand the consequences, that they would start asking themselves. They would look around at this Garry Oak meadow that they are chewing up with their big machines and they would stop and they would look at it....Maybe they might even ask themselves, do we need another big shop? Or do we need to put it here, I mean look at this little meadow, this is really pretty. That they would have some mindfulness about that they are actually destroying something of value, that maybe has a right to live.

Part of coping is "trying to just find another way to look at it... and feel." She may be doing the same behaviour, for instance, pulling out weeds, "but my intention and the way I do it the way it feels in my body is really different... I don't want the dandelions to be enemies. I don't want to see them that way. Because that sets up a different frequency in my body. That sets up tension. That sets up fighting, and I'm tired of fighting. It doesn't feel good."

Her motivation to cope with her feelings around Nature Loss comes from her realization that "the world does not need one more agonised person. It's not going to help change anything. And maybe in some small way, by living the way that I live... the ripple effect goes out."

Sometimes, Emily is able to "take a really big evolutionary perspective," where she can "recognize... that humans are evolving as is the planet as is everything, and there is some higher order that I can't really see but I trust is there." This trust helps her believe that "even though right now things look really awful, it will be okay in the end." When she is able to have faith in this, then she is "okay." She can "just go about my life and do what I can and even maybe allow myself to think that it's okay to be happy." Other times, she has a harder time relaxing with this worldview: "what if the evolutionary process is too slow? And yet how can it be if it is part of the planet.... you know there's so many questions, no answers." Her questioning leads her to a bigger perspective, looking at our world as one planet among many and in an existential way, we are part of nature and part of nature is the birth death cycle. If this is so, then Nature Loss has a different meaning, and a different influence on her.

> What other possibilities are there? What have other races or beings done? How have they coped? How have they turned it around? And just allowing my mind to go bigger. Looking for answers? Somewhere else? And in the really big scheme of things, you know, I mean we're talking about life and death and rebirth. Well, in the really big picture, planets are born and planets die… it's not a very socially acceptable opinion… I'm not sure that I've voiced it at all... because it sounds really uncaring and unfeeling. And like I don't care. And like it doesn't matter. But really we are just one little planet. It's a very huge universe. And so it's this duality between the immense and the microscopic

Speaking of Nature Loss

I asked Emily if she was worried about being labelled in some way if she talks about her feelings around Nature Loss. She replied:

> Probably, that's part of it. But you know, I've kind of been the odd one out anyways most of my life, no matter where I am. So on the one hand I'm used to that… and there's not many people that I'm willing to be that vulnerable with. It would feel very vulnerable. And I don't do that with very many people.

Emily has had an experience that felt like she was in the position of being the representative of the earth, the voice of nature in her business class.

> I thought I was dressing and behaving really normal and.... professional, I was trying to be terribly professional, but within three or four days, I got labelled as the hippie Earth Momma. And that was a really interesting process, because most of the people in the class were you know, pretty so called 'normal' whatever that means. But they were all, you know, trying to do something with their lives that meant something to them too. So in that way they weren't normal… I very quickly, whether I fell into the role, or whether I was elected into the role, or whether it just came out of who I am, I was the one who was, you know, always bringing up Earth things. And, first it was really hard, because I felt nervous, I felt like I wanted, I didn't want to be criticized, and I assumed I was going to be criticized and judged harshly… after the instructor had called me a hippie I went to him, because I assumed it was something bad. That was my assumption, that he meant something bad by it, and that he'd been insulting me. I went to him afterwards, and I said to him, what did you mean? And he said, well,

> because you have never lost touch with the values that the so-called hippies had in the 60's and the 70's of caring for the land. And just being more real and honest and simple lifestyle, never lost that. And here I'd assumed he meant something bad by it. So that was a really good lesson, and as the program went on, it got easier and easier for me to be the one, and to accept that maybe that was my job there, to the extent where I brought in shells and rocks and feathers, and I created my little altar on my desk.

> [Sharing feelings] it's really hard, and it probably comes out more as anger than as sadness, that is a safer emotion… I usually get concurrence. It isn't too often that anybody says to me oh, that's not happening… I guess I'm thinking if I share factual stuff. Sharing my feelings? Maybe I don't. Maybe I don't very much… I don't really share my really close feelings. With many people.... I think I'd just get depressed… I might say something…I would probably say something that later I would wish I didn't say, because it would seem so inadequate to say something like: "I wish they wouldn't do that" or "isn't that awful"... because...it would just take too many words…I just keep it to myself… And maybe I'll process it later when I come home, maybe I'll write… except for my daughter, the rest of my family, I can't talk to about what's real for me. About most things.

> I'm sure I numb out sometimes… it's just kind of like, I can't deal with this right now, I'm hungry, I'm tired, I have to call my kids. I mean, life goes on… there are times when I can sit and really be with these feelings, and I'll usually write. Or you know I have close friends that I would share it with. But then there are other times when I mean, life, you're in the middle of something and you know, you cannot stop. And I think the way I try to deal with all those feelings is partly through trying to understand different perspectives. Partly by staying committed to minimizing my harmful impact.

Emily thinks that our "culture is set up to ignore it. And continue it. That's the whole name of the game." She comments on participating in this research, for her it is part of her activism.

> I think, well, I've told you, I think what you are doing is really important and I'm really happy to participate in that, and help get this awareness out

into the psychology field, where it can trickle out into the rest of society hopefully.

Hartley

About Hartley

Hartley is 43 years old, a counsellor with three children. This is what I entered in my field notes as my impression of Hartley. I wrote this description in the first person, as if Hartley were speaking.

> *I have gone deeply into these issues. I have closely studied the environment and what is happening to it. I have had many wonderful experiences in nature that gives me a special affinity for it. When I looked deeply, it became very painful. There is no end to the bad news about what humans are doing to the planet. It becomes overwhelming, and I have to put my hands over my ears, like Edward Munch's "The Scream." I have looked at Nature Loss very deeply, and have felt it very deeply. I have had to look away. It is not a callous or apathetic move, but this is my choice at this point in my life. I have other priorities right now, I have a family that I have responsibilities to, I have a demanding job. I am mostly satisfied with my choices, with how I am in the world. Nature Loss still bothers me, but it seems like something in my past, something I have moved away from. It still exists, out there, and maybe in here, but I don't stay with it.*

Looking at Nature Loss: Examples

Although Hartley conveyed a strong awareness of what is happening in the world, from his own experience and his Environmental Studies courses, he does not relay many discrete or dramatic experiences of Nature Loss. In this quote he recalls seeing the clearcut "moonscape" at Carmanah Valley, and his despairing response to that. This was at a time in his life when he was already feeling overwhelmed with the "problem saturated approach" to environmental issues: experienced as an unbearable "scream" of pain and problems that was sounding louder and louder.

> In terms of me having some dramatic experience of being out in the natural world and you know, turning a corner and suddenly seeing a clearcut, I haven't had many of those. I remember the first time I went to

> Carmanah; just being silenced by... the moonscape. I didn't know that such a thing could actually look like that. And... that was around the same time that I had my hands over my ears, because the scream's getting pretty loud. So, how did I feel that? I felt it in my body... as a kind of quiet despair, I would say. And a sense of out of control.

Looking Ahead: The Future

Hartley said that although he'd rather not believe this, he sees that the world is heading "due south" towards a very bleak future:

> South… due south… I'd like to pretend otherwise, and convince myself otherwise. And part of me says, well, because I haven't really been studying it in depth for 5 or 6 or 7 years, who knows? Maybe the problem has gone away? Denial is such a wonderful thing. What a great anaesthetic. But... in my more sober moments, then I can't say anywhere but south… Moving toward zooplankton living on petrochemical soup. How's that for bleak Gen -X kind of image... I think it's moving towards some serious problems. It's building momentum and mass. And when it hits a point of critical mass, then we're going to experience some... individuals who never thought they would, will experience direct suffering and misery because of it. Right now, in our culture, we're so buffered from the impact of environmental degradation. But it's not so everywhere in the world. And just with pure population growth, I mean, we know that within whatever it is, x number of hundreds of years, if the planet had limitless resources, we would be expanding outward at the speed of light or approaching the speed of light. Off the planet into space, right? Like that's just a fact that's the population doubling… there are… predictions that the earth can't sustain more than 10 billion people. Maybe it's 12, I forget which… and we're getting to that point. And so, what's going to happen when it caps out? When the J-curve hits the flat line? People are going to suffer. You know a lot of the substrate that we depend upon for food, shelter clothing, will be gone. There'll be, I see a bleak, bleak future with that.

He is non-specific about when it is going to happen, but he does see that if things are going to change, we have to go against some of our animal survival instincts.

> I'm not sure which generation…. I'm not sure when it's going to happen. But I do know that the population will need to level out… What a bizarre

> thing. That for millennia, our survival depended upon propagation... now; our survival depends upon not propagating... If there's a collective history, or collective history in our collective consciousness... that history... either whispers or tells us or shouts to us..."breed"... and then we have to use this logical manipulation to convince ourselves that that's actually not a great idea. I can understand why, having become a father, it was a lot simpler for me to talk about this in a righteous way before I became a father. And what I realized was this was the stand I'd taken for you know, kind of taking a bit of dessert for very selfish purposes, right. I'm taking a plot, and I'm raising kids on it kind of thing. Even though that plot is 40 or 50 times more rapacious than a lot of people in the world, probably 80 percent of the world... I don't think I'm any different... Oh. It gets dark!

Responding to Nature Loss

Hartley showed depression, despair, guilt, hopelessness, pain, sadness and a longing for the past. The problem-saturated approach he encountered in his Environmental Studies courses brought up feelings of depression and discouragement:

> I do recall a number of professors saying, "We're going to hell in a handbasket"... I really took that on, and I felt it, and then I think I started to get depressed again. It appeared to me that the magnitude of problems facing the world... you know, from looking at [all the reports]... I started to feel, yeah, more and more discouraged

Sometimes Hartley's feeling manifest in a physical sense, where he says "I felt it in my body... as a kind of quiet despair, I would say. And a sense of out of control." The "helplessness" and "hopelessness" seems overwhelming.

> [I was] taking Environmental Studies courses... all seemed really good... however the more I got into it, the more discouraged I became.... I think it's just the nature of... deeply studying that topic, is that it... there's the potential for it to become a very problem saturated kind of thing...I have this sense that I went deeply into the study of what could I do to help, and I came away with this sense of despair, like really... nothing. Very very little. VERY very little. And a sense of helplessness. Helplessness and hopelessness.

The chances of finding a solution to our environmental problems, and finding co-operation between all those who have to implement the solutions seem very small. If he were to hear positive news like this, his hopes would rise.

> I haven't heard anybody say, here's the brake, all we have to do is throw it. And get everybody to agree to that. You know, when I hear that, and buy into it myself, then I'll have a greater belief that there's a more hopeful outcome in store. See this is where I go with this topic. I get pretty dark with it. Yeah. You know people talk about the Amazon as being the lungs of the planet, but it's becoming a desert…[my feeling response is one of]... Constriction…what's it like to breathe dusty lungs?

Another response to Nature Loss is depicted in this expression of longing for something different than what exists, sometimes it is a change in human behaviour and in this case, it is a longing for something from the distant past. Hartley is buffered from direct experience of Nature Loss, living in a pleasant and clean city. Sometimes however, it drifts in to him – even in this context – taking the shape of a longing for something beyond memory.

> I'm not that exposed to Nature Loss right now. Victoria's a wonderful city to live in. the winds are always blowing, so it doesn't smell as bad as it ought to. The currents are always moving, so the sewage isn't as close as it ought to be [laughs]… I think what happens to me is I ride my bike along [to a certain intersection] and every time I stop and I just look up at that huge Douglas Fir that is sitting in someone's front lawn, and I have this thought, and it happens frequently, of "wow, there was a time where this whole flatland here was filled with Douglas Firs." Yeah. And I remember that and I think, mmm. I feel a longing to experience that. But it's pretty fleeting. You know, the next thing is I'm focusing on the road and the traffic and getting my bike over to daycare.

He also recalls his "deep sadness" when Chernobyl happened, saying he "felt very desperate... felt a deep sadness. It wasn't even so much fear, it was sadness…like something had pressed down on my chest." Again a physical response to a sorrowful event. Hartley also names fear, anger, guilt, and a "quiet desperation" as feelings he carries around with him. Yet, he is so preoccupied with the demands of daily living, that

he doesn't have time to be very self-reflective on the topic. His "mini-ecosystem" of family is more his focus than the larger ecosystem.

> Well, denial's not a feeling is it? [laughs] it's a state of mind...quiet desperation... that would be; you've tapped into it here. I think you've also probably tapped into some anger and some guilt. And into some fear, so yeah those all exist for sure. Maybe those are the things that combine to give a sense of quiet desperation... my life is just so full, and so busy, within the kind of mini ecosystems of family, you know, it's an open system and stuff comes in and stuff goes out. I'm constantly on a balance beam. And... in terms of my waking hours, a lot of them are spent keeping the family going in some capacity, either working, or direct tending to their needs. I don't have a lot of time for expansive reflection these days.

Hartley's focus is on his family and his work, and in another way, this keeps his direct experience of Nature Loss in the background. It has not always been this way for him however, as he uses a very descriptive image to illustrate his painful experience with Nature Loss. He refers to Edward Munch's 1895 painting "The Scream." The image is of distorted figure in the foreground, a man with his hands up to his face in horror, his mouth open in a soundless scream. Hartley's comparison of his experience to the expression in this painting typifies this Nature Loss response to "too much."

> I just eventually had to just kind of, I have an image of that Edward Munch painting, "The Scream"...I just had to put my hands over my ears, and in this contorted, painful way, shut it out...It just was, it went in too deeply to feel the pain of so much loss.

Plastic or Paper? Personal Participation in Nature Loss

Hartley acknowledges that we need to find nutrients from external sources in order to live and thus consumption is a necessity, yet he still knows he can minimize that consumption and attempt to step more softly on the earth. Again, when work and family come into the picture, his "footstep" gets a little "more kick to it." In this next quote, Hartley speaks about his guilt for the amount he does contribute to Nature Loss. It illustrates how difficult it is to balance the many different demands of daily living and

being personally responsible for what happens to the environment by minimizing one's own impact.

> If I had all the time in the world, I would spend a lot more time in nature…And if I was spending more time in Nature, I'd think that I would be confronted with these feelings of desperation due to Nature Loss. And all that goes with that.... So there's a conscious sacrifice here that I've made for the lifestyle that I have. And that sacrifice has a cost... to myself and to the planet. There, there's the guilt. Okay.

At the same time, he is motivated to find a healthy way of living for himself and his family, " at the same time, trying to provide really rich experiences for my children and to continue to engage in richness myself."

> I am living in the world very much, and I have three kids, and they want.... They don't go through a filtration process of "what would be the impact of my wants on others around me?" and their wants influence me…. We try, in our family to be conscious, and to... minimize the destructive impact of that footprint… And at the same time, I just went out and bought a new van. So… I feel like I'm kind of in the middle of a tug-of-war between how I would live if I wasn't responsible for the welfare of my family, not that I'm totally responsible for them, but I do have a responsibility there. And how I live to balance their needs without wanting to be eccentric and stoic, and have life be relatively easy for them, right?

Coping with Nature Loss

Hartley described his changing relationship with nature, at times spending a lot of time in the outdoors, and learning in-depth through Environmental studies. He came away from this overloaded with "problem saturation" – a very negative forecast for the future of the environment. He does believe that the world is headed "due south," that the future of the environment is not a positive one. Yet, he has chosen to focus on the more human aspect of life, his career and his family. He feels that this is the right choice for him at this time, although he acknowledges some guilt about it. His coping process has been a movement towards this place of not focusing on Nature Loss and being relieved of the pain of "The Scream."

He found himself drawn to the study of Ecopsychology because it seemed to be a way for him to both connect with people, and to make a difference in the world. It seemed to be a better approach for him than political activism, or the ineffectiveness of working within the system.

> I stumble across a topic called Ecopsychology. And I start thinking, now this, this I like. This I have the sense I can connect with individuals. And I have this… big shift in the way I was thinking, and I got to thinking here is my shift. There's not a whole lot I can do to really make effective change. I'm not a political animal. Civil disobedience doesn't really appeal to me. I support it. I think it's... you know, emotionally I support it, and I think it's really cool, but it's not my path. Working within the system...the wheels of change just appeared so slow, compared to the speed of degradation.

Making meaning out of what is going on in the world is another way of coping. If what is happening to the world is somehow an occurrence that is "meant to be," if somehow we can understand Nature Loss as being part of a greater plan, then it may lose its sense of wrongness. In Hartley's case, he sometimes entertains the idea that the greater plan is a "grand experiment." Perhaps the image of nature that we are attached to is a thing of the past, and perhaps what it looks like may not be what is actually happening:

> What if this is all just one grand experiment? And that, as Bruce Cockburn says, everything that rises, afterward falls… You know, when we look in Geological terms, I mean, earth has suffered huge cataclysms long before humans were ever born. But they weren't perceived as cataclysms. They were just a tree falling in a forest with no ears, and so who cared? Right? In fact, you know, what we are doing to the planet horrible though it is, is maybe just one more of nature's cataclysms. And so there's kind of a breathing in and a breathing out, that, maybe this is all part of it…. I don't, with my saying that, want to encourage the idea of living out of integrity with a kind of like, "it's all just one big party so who the hell cares?" because, you know, I don't think that is living with integrity. But I also wonder if there's a perspective that is you know, maybe we are attached to a past image. Which, first of all, may not be as grand as it really, you know, as we think it was. And second of all, just isn't what's going on right now.

He admits that if he were more exposed to Nature Loss, he would be speaking differently during this interview. He would be less removed from events, and feel it more personally.

> The environmentalists' fight to save old growth forests in Temagami is very active. Temagami is where I used to go every summer and go on canoe trips. I haven't been back for 25 years. I think... I think our interview would be different if I had just come back from a canoe trip in Temagami. It would be more personal.

Although it may not be a coping method per se, there is a theme in Hartley's words about the complexities and requirements of daily human living that takes him away from focusing on the non-human world and what is happening to it. I was struck by how comfortable Hartley was with his choices, although at other times he acknowledged a sense of guilt, he has chosen what he needs to in order to live well at this point.

> I've made choices in my life that perhaps are in reaction to not wanting to feel Nature Loss. And part of the sacrifice is that I don't spend a whole lot of time in Nature these days.... Feels like the right place to be right now. I've done what I need to do to the best of my understanding and knowledge.

Speaking of Nature Loss

I asked Hartley if he was worried about being labelled in some way when talking about his feelings around Nature Loss:

> No. No worries, none. Except maybe my 13-year-old cynical stepson. But not even him. And in fact you know I think about, as much as I've painted one part of the picture, the other part is that we have him in a program called Teen Outdoor Adventure Development and every month he's out experiencing the natural world and all summer he'll be doing that. So I mean, there are places where we are trying to encourage as best we can that experience of nature, that will be a part of him.

When further considering how he shares his feelings with others he finds that he cannot relate at the moment, because he is not in a place where he does that. In the past however, he recognized a shared sense with others.

> The question doesn't really fit for me because I don't do a whole lot of that now… in the past when I have... I think there's a shared sense of felt experience, desperation… it's just felt like a connecting conversation... I remember at the time I was working for the Great Lakes Environment Organization, you know people said to me "how can you do that kind of work?" and my response was probably, I'm not quite sure.

In terms of internal silencing, Hartley avoids expressing his feelings by "avoiding feeling them" in the first place, or " by pretending I'm an ostrich… the time that I have to myself to expand my consciousness I don't spend just brooding on Nature Loss.... I think because I don't have the psychic space to hold that for myself." He attributes this partly to his work as a counsellor, where he is already exposed to so many "tales of depression."

> I spend probably 30 hours of my week listening to tales of desperation... and sometimes I feel overwhelmed by that. And the system supports me to some extent to not feel overwhelmed by that, and I can support myself to some extent not to feel overwhelmed by that. But it's there. And it's in my psyche, in my consciousness, in my body... then I spend a whole bunch of time in service of my family. And then what feels like, what little time is left over... I spend recharging. And there isn't a whole lot of time for that these days. So I feel fortunate that my health is pretty good to keep up with all I got going.... And my recharge doesn't generally tend to take me down the avenues of really being aware of. So basically, I'm with clients, Nature Loss is not prominent, I'm with my family, and Nature Loss is not prominent. I'm recharging; Nature Loss is not prominent. I've made choices in my life, that perhaps are in reaction to not wanting to feel Nature Loss. And part of the sacrifice is that I don't spend a whole lot of time in Nature these days.

Hartley believes that our culture "is driven to forget, from the Madison Avenue boys who conspire to say more is better, and I think that permeates all of our culture. Yeah. The bad guys are winning." The forces that drive us to keep consuming, and keep making profit, and spending it are a part of our cultural background that keeps the system of Nature Loss in place.

Suggestions for Counsellors

In this section I have catalogued the responses of the participants in answer to the question "What gives you hope, courage and strength?" as well as their direct suggestions of how they would help somebody who was struggling with Nature Loss. I included the answers to the first question in this section although they are not specifically suggestions for counsellors, as they should provide us with some restorative and healing directions in the face of such pain and hopelessness.

What gives you hope, courage, strength?

In response to this question, Morris described examples of possibility in places that are seemingly impossible, of change, forgiveness and kindness. He starts with "the story of the little sprout," coming out of a subway station in downtown Toronto where all was concrete, he looked down, and saw "a dandelion and some grass coming up between the building and the sidewalk, couldn't even see the crack it was so small, and yet it was coming up through there." That gives him hope, as does seeing that "people like Nelson Mandela get out of jail, and aren't bitter towards the people that put him in there," or the "Berlin Wall comes down without people predicting it's going to happen." He is also moved to tears by "little acts of kindness towards one another, that's when I cry. I can cry really easily when somebody does something really kind towards somebody else."

Believing that there is another way for us to live, as exemplified by the "earth based" peoples who have lived before us, and learning and teaching these lessons gives Diana hope. She is encouraged by the knowledge that "life will go on... with or without us" she reminds herself that "this society is NOT humanity, that earth based, tribal people lived for thousands of years in place and with place without destroying the place," that there are alternative ways to live and we can relearn how to "live as partners and not masters of life." She focuses also on spreading this knowledge "whatever I learn, I must pass on to whoever is willing to listen!"

Emily feels hopeful through reading "inspiring books" speaking with "good friends," doing what she can in her personal sphere of power "that's right in front of me." She is also trying to open up to more people, being honest about who she is and what is "real" for her. Through her poetry and her crafts, she tries to "speak my truth." She also

receives strength from spending time in nature, in particular, "talking to the trees – that's the biggest inspiration... sit with them." Having faith that "there is some kind of ordering spirit creator. There is some purpose to it all, beyond what I may ever understand, and having to learn to accept that I may never understand" is also a source of strength.

Hartley finds inspiration in human "ingenuity," that there is a "driving thrust of humanity to evolve beyond its misery." Also, "nesting" this topic in the "bigger picture," or the context that "everything that rises afterward falls. And I'm not going to live forever, and neither is this planet. It's really just a speck of dust. In a much bigger cosmos. So that gives me hope too." This helps him "loosen up the ego-attachment" to the small choices in life about how to live in a more environmentally responsible way, from "how many times do I flush the toilet today," or "is it better to get plastic or paper when they offer it at the supermarket because I've over extended on my little cloth bag. I think paper, I'm not sure. Paper is trees, plastic is polymers, where does it go?" Being in some way free from these "considerations that are with me on a day to day basis" helps give him more strength in his life.

How would you help other people deal with their feelings of pain for our world?

Morris' suggestions:

> By really encouraging them to talk about it, and by really listening. Giving time for that, giving silence. Education, letting them know that it is okay to feel, and to express their emotions. By spending time myself feeling those things and being around other people that express freely and thus being comfortable with that. Taking the time creating the environment, having the intention of holding the space for that.

Diana's suggestions:

> By taking them out into the woods or a meadow or the ocean, by showing them the beauty and harmony, the power and the strength of the "real" world and by learning and passing on how we can become wild and succulent and free partners in life again… Opening us up again to the life that's all around us... feeling the wind on our skin, the earth beneath our bare feet, seeing the different colours of green and brown, getting to know what the ants are doing, taking time to "smell the roses"…getting dirty and involved, realizing that the ants and the birds have a purpose and that

this purpose is not that different from ours… This IS our home, this IS where we belong, this IS what touches our souls because they remember and this is the recipe for healing our souls.

Emily's suggestions:

Encourage them to cry, and write and talk about it in a safe place… I think it's impossible to go through that alone. Maybe not impossible, but so hard, so hard... because for me, nature is, you know, friend and healer and teacher and I understand my own cycles largely though the cycles in nature…. It would really help me to be with someone who understood that perspective, that I didn't feel that I had to explain myself to first, too much. And who honoured, I mean, the earth is our context. Society is not my context; it's a sub context that we've created. And it's not as strong, certainly not where I get my nurturance.

Hartley's suggestions:

If someone came in and what was clear was that their despair was primarily due to Nature Loss. I would have a lot of time for them. I would really hold the space as best I could. For them to fully feel their story, and to see what they could do to invite gain into their life… It would depend on what they came in with. But I think the first thing I would do is just really play the ball where it lays.... I would want them to know that I hear them…It's not in the DSM… It's interesting, because as you're talking, what I'm aware of is the association between privilege and natural experience. And the reason I'm aware of that is because many of the people that I see are impoverished, so that they haven't got the financial means to get themselves out into nature. It's really rarely even a question. I mean they are dealing with you know Maslow's lowest level on the pyramid. Dealing with security and safety is like primary.... It's not for everyone. But for a number of people…Yeah. I think I'd be real comfortable talking about that… I think, you know it could be a really interesting question. What's your relationship with the natural world?

Overall, the participants' suggest that encouraging clients to experience, feel, and express their feelings for nature's loss, as well as encouraging them to connect with nature and learn from it, are ways of helping with this issue. This concludes the presentation of the results. The next chapter moves on to a discussion of these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

> The front page news was particularly vivid on 24 March 1989. It conveyed the signs that launched a thousand ships of associations, or a thousand thousand gallons of crude oil into the crystalline mind of Prince William's Sound. "It's a sign of the times," it's in the Times. The unconscious collected images of dying otters, oil slicked fish eggs and infinite blackened rocks and beach pebbles. The signs turned into sings and their meanings became unclear; like discordant melodies that never end, never stop long enough to be examined or analyzed. Signifiers rose above signifieds and floated across the surface of our skin until they settled like leaves on a pond and made their descent into our bodies and murky drams. Inside our bodies suffering otters turned into painful utters, the body is a cavern vulnerable to pollution and helplessness. (Bluhm, 1992, p. 391)

In this chapter, the significance and implications of the study are discussed in the context of counselling psychology research, theory, and practice. A necessary preliminary to this is to make clear the limitations of this study. The four individuals who participated in this study were white, Caucasian men and women, of varied middle socio-economic background. Three of the individuals were involved in the counselling field. Only one had been born and raised in another (European) country. The age range varied from 40 to 52. All of the participants reside in a mid-sized west coast Canadian city, in an area that still retains an abundance of nature and natural environments, but is at the same time subject to the demands of a growing population and economy, the observable result of which is expansion and development into surrounding areas, and a subsequent loss of natural beings and places.

Since the experiences, beliefs, attitudes and insights represented in this study are a reflection of these particular four individuals, readers should not assume that all individuals think, feel or experience similarly. Nonetheless, it is possible to extract a phenomenological essence of the experience of Nature Loss as expressed by them.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the experienced phenomenon of Nature Loss by providing a description and analysis of individual experience. In asking the question "Tell me about your experience of Nature Loss," I had assumed participants would give such answers as "It frightens me, I feel angry, powerless, guilty" – a sort of inventory of each individual's psychological response. While I did indeed receive descriptions of this type, I also got something more that I had not expected. What began to take shape was an explication of each individual's coping process, their way of transforming their painful experience of Nature Loss into something that allowed them to feel more empowered in their lives.

The experience of Nature Loss for all participants was a psychologically uncomfortable one, with feeling responses ranging through sadness, anger, guilt, grief, fear and hopelessness. They demonstrated a connection to nature and what befalls nature. They felt pain as they comprehended the natural world around them in distress. Although traditional theories of psychology do not consider the human nature relationship to be of significance to human well being, the results from the participants in this study would indicate otherwise. It may seem as if our consumption of nature is a purely external physical event, limited to the realm of matter, but the participants in this study describe how this phenomenon is experienced by them on a deep emotional level.

This impact was mediated by how each individual saw the future. Beliefs that reflected a negative future that entails a final destruction of some part of the natural world by ourselves provided a framework for a painful emotional experience that was too self-destructive to maintain. The one participant who consistently saw a hopeful future (Morris) maintained a belief system that supported a worldview where human consciousness is evolving to a state where we would no longer relate to the natural world as we do today. His belief system enabled him to make meaning, and in a way "cope" *with a painful reality.*

The other participants had also developed ways of seeing the world and making meaning of Nature Loss so that they could live their lives in a healthy way for them. Without the development of a coping system that allows the participants to make meaning out of their experience of Nature Loss, it is too much to bear. It was impossible

for all of these participants to keep engaging with the negative picture of what we are doing to our world for long. In my field notes, I used the analogy of "looking at the sun" – a behaviour one cannot continue to engage in without sustaining damage. From my field notes:

> *I am the Indian woman going to gather wood for the cooking fire, and I notice that I have to search longer and farther to find it, because what used to be is gone. I am the Canadian driving in my car, seeing the land that for years has been green and untouched, now for sale. I am the fisherman, seeing that the salmon are not returning. I am the adult revisiting the place I grew up, reminiscing, "this used to be a farmer's field, this used to be a lake I swam in, this used to be trees I played in. Now it is... pavement... houses... gone... I am the person seeing that which once was, is now gone (This is a painful place of sadness).*
>
> *And there are ways of mediating the experience. You can look full on at the sun, at Nature Loss, and if you look too long, your eyes will be burned. It is painful to see it like this. That things are changing, are being lost.*

I continue to struggle with the extension of this analogy, however. The sun is a life-giving force and its presence in the sky each day is a beneficial thing for both humans and the earth. We simply need to learn not to look at it, and we avoid damage. If we simply learn to avoid "looking" at Nature Loss, we may avoid pain, but at the same time, Nature Loss is not a life-giving force. It is not beneficial for the earth or us. Just looking away or even reframing the experience in such a way that we feel better about what is happening does not seem to be a wholly healthy response. It has no effect on the continuing disappearance of nature, just as the sun continues to shine.

As counsellors, our work is often to help people adapt, and we may use varieties of reframing to assist with this. In this situation, I think we need to be careful with what kind of reframe we use. If we reframe in a way that makes the client feel better, but Nature Loss continues outside the window, are we really helping? Perhaps a reframe is definitely in order, a reframe that is empowering, and enables the client not to be incapacitated by the experience -burned by the sun – but at the same time, enables them to be effective in their lives, whether that is through personal sphere of power, activism or living with more respect for nature.

This next section explicates some of the relevant themes that arose during analysis of the transcripts: (a) Giving Voice to Nature Loss, (b) Nature Loss as "Wrong," (c) Implications of Personal Participation in Nature Loss, (d) Valuing the Human Community, (e) Nature Loss as "Too much," (f) Transforming the Pain of Nature Loss, and (g) The Bigger Picture.

Themes Emerging from the Data

Giving Voice to Nature Loss

Part of my process of writing this thesis has been a struggle with owning my own voice, and allowing myself to legitimize the human nature relationship. When I first began I could find no name for the phenomenon that I wanted to study and I realized that there was no mainstream language for this experience. I began talking to my peers about what I wanted to do, struggling and experimenting with different ways of naming and explaining to them. I found different responses along the way. One that stands out was from someone who assumed I wanted to study what it was like to live in the aftermath of a landslide or earthquake. There appeared to be not just a lack of language, but a lack of support at social, political and institutional levels for this kind of exploration. It hovers at the edge of psychological theory, not comfortably grounded in existing accepted theory, yet often embraced with interest by individual clinicians and counsellors.

It helped when I was finally able to settle on the term "Nature Loss" to refer to the phenomenon, because then I was able to talk about it with more ease, not complete ease, but more ease. It is interesting to experience first hand the difficulty of expression when the experience has not been "languaged": it seems there is no one who wants to hear about it, there is no forum in the mainstream helping professions and the Universities in which to speak of it. This must apply to our clients as well as ourselves, for if they did want to speak about their feelings for the earth, they have an additional obstacle to try to overcome – lack of names and words with which to describe their experience. The effect of this is a silencing, a vague sense of shame that results in this experience remaining a private one. For myself, having these words enabled me to develop a way of talking that was easily understood by my participants, my peers and myself.

Over time, I began to recognize another response when I spoke about my study topic – a response that energized me. Once people "got" the concept, many of them seemed to "light up" and their own stories came pouring out. I wrote in my field notes "it was as if I had caught them on fire" by bringing it up. The way they spoke of it was as if it was the first time they had ever given words to their experience. In this way it was novel, but, on another level, it sounded very familiar, something they were intimate with. The "spark" was an opening; a name for something they had not realized was legitimate. I heard so many stories, and feelings about what was happening in the world, it convinced me that people need and want to be heard on this.

The participants in this study described their experience of speaking about Nature Loss, and also the ways in which they do not "speak" about it: whether this is internal and shows itself through a lack of feeling experience or expression, or external, suppressed with our culture's messages to "forget" about what is happening. The internal silencing seemed to come about because there was too much pain involved with listening for long (looking at the sun for too long), while the external silencing came with social messages, or simply a lack of forum and language – socially constructed.

Emily expresses the frustration and helplessness that results from this lack of forum "There's nobody who will listen.... There are times when I feel like I want to run up and down the street screaming. ... I start to feel ... all this energy going around and so, what do I do with it? Who do I yell at?" Morris speaks about not wanting to return to a beloved place for fear of seeing unwanted change – a censoring of his own experience. He also reports a lack of "hearing" his internal voice – he lacks a "feeling experience" around Nature Loss. Diana believes that "it's so hard for us children of this society to listen to our souls..." and that our culture helps promote this mentality. When she does talk with people in a way that the conversation gets "depressed and hopeless" she finds it not helpful, preferring the "good" conversations about "hope and beauty" where she can focus more on the "spiritual side of life" and how that can be manifested physical realm. She appreciates the kind of talking that "acknowledge the insanity, but [doesn't] dwell on it." What helps Diana in all of this is "to speak my truth in a way the other can understand" and to "listen" to nature as a way of learning. Hartley's image of the Edward

Munch painting, "The Scream" depicted his "silent scream" poignantly – silent, but at the same time so loud that he had to put his hands over his ears and stop listening.

All the participants said that in some way our culture reinforces this silencing, by helping us to forget what is happening to nature through messages aimed at reinforcing consumption oriented society. Morris did say he sees some signs of other messages getting through, his example was that Earth Day is becoming more popular in mainstream culture.

When I reflected on my own experience with Nature Loss, and my ways of silencing I wrote "What I hear other people doing, and what I do too is to look away." When I sat down to write out my assumptions and responses to the interview questions, my first impulse was "I don't want to talk about it, write about it." Not only was it difficult on a psychological level with this strong feeling of resistance, but also it was difficult because "There are no words for it, there is no where to talk about it." the language was lacking, and the forum, the audience was lacking, in particular in the mainstream and popular culture. I acknowledge that there are arenas such as those provided by the work of Joanna Macy, John Seed, and others, but this work is not well known in the mainstream. I wondered about this in the context of counselling practice "… if people don't talk about this, if they avoid experiencing and expressing it, then how do we know it's there? Do I need to ask all my clients – how do you feel about nature?" At the same time, one of my assumptions was that "I *believe* that people feel it and think it, but there is no *language* in the mainstream for it yet, no place for it to be heard, no one asking the questions." Perhaps by naming it, by being open to talking about it, this will change. From my field notes:

> *No one to listen (Emily).*
> *No one to hear*
> *No language to use to describe it (Me).*
> *No way to open my mouth and cry out (the loon).*
> *The Scream – the soundless scream (Hartley).*
> *Nothing to feel (Morris).*
> *No Life – Robbed (Diana).*
> *Denial, Repression, Apathy, Inertia*
> *Being silenced/stuck in anger/guilt/blame/the scream*
> *Paved over (The fields Morris played in as a child).*

Cut down (The Garry Oaks near Emily's home).
Disappeared
Lost
No Voice
The loon
No one to hear.

The implications of this "silencing," lack of common language, and lack of open forum should not be lost on counselling psychologists. This will be discussed further in the "Implications for Counselling" section below.

Nature Loss as "Wrong"

I found that the participants spoke of "right" way and a "wrong" way that humans relate to nature, particularly when it comes to consumption. The concept of Nature Loss is differentiated from the consumption of nature for reasons of sustenance or basic life needs. For the participants, Nature Loss was in part defined by a feeling of "wrongness" about what is happening and has happened. That natural beings and places are being used or killed or denuded for the wrong reasons, unnecessarily, for greed or profit, disrespectfully, is wrong. That we live by consumption is a given, but that we do it unnecessarily and disrespectfully is part of the pain of Nature Loss - Nature Loss is different from consumption for sustainability.

For some this manifested in a focus on intentionality: the how and why it is done is more important than what is done. If we are acting from a "place of love and not fear," then our actions have more integrity, and we are treating nature better. Wrong intentions included people acting towards nature in a way that is motivated by "greed," that was "short term thinking," assuming that nature "rightfully belongs" to them, or exists for the "sole purpose" of their use. When this is internalized, there is a delicate balance in trying to be "respectful, but not guilty" in reference to the participants' own interaction with the natural environment.

Implications of Personal Participation in Nature Loss

> If this is not my planet, whose is it? If this is not my family, whose is it? If not my responsibility, whose? I am both the victim and the victimizer. I am the cause and I am the cure. … When I educate myself, I break through my denial and see that human kind is facing an absolutely unprecedented crisis (O'Connor, 1989/1995, p. 153)

Being "aware" and educated about what is happening to the environment impacts daily on my life. It adds complexity and guilt, as I try to minimize my own impact. The disappearance of nature has raised concerns that show themselves in the smallest minutiae and decision making of our daily lives. From the morning coffee that requires balancing the merits and costs of organic, free trade, shade grown, decaffeinated, low fat, take out or drink in, to the decision to take a paper or a plastic bag at the grocery store, the thought processes involved can be very complicated. I become a link in the chain that extends from the Douglas Fir stump in the clearcut to the decaying bag in the landfill. The decisions involved touch on aspects of personal health, personal morals, local economy, consumption of nature, global health and global economy. This is yet another way in which this time in history differs from any other. As Joanna Macy says "as members of this society, we feel implicated in this catastrophe, and haunted by the thought we should be able to avert it" (Macy, 1995, p. 241) in reference to the guilt is entailed in our complicity. Or as Wendell Berry writes:

> It is the destruction of the world in our own lives that drives us half insane, and more than half. To destroy that which we were given in trust: how will we bear it? (Berry, 1998)

Comparing our own lifestyles to these suggestions, we will almost always find that we are lacking somewhere, in some way we are contributors, complicit in causing Nature Loss. The participants all actively worked at minimizing their own impact on the environment, trying to balance the welfare of themselves and their families and friends, and the welfare of the environment. Sometimes this feels like being caught in a "tug of war," trying to balance what one can and can't do, sometimes it is a struggle with guilt "the guilt that we're destroying the planet," trying to be "less judging of myself in a harsh way," putting daily life in context. Still, even though "all in good time" can be reassuring,

there remains the question "maybe there isn't time. I don't know." Truly, "the whole thing is fraught with polarities and dualities and contradictions and conflict. And you can, you know, tear yourself apart." From my fieldnotes:

> *The impossible situations we come into as humans. That we are solely personally responsible for consuming the planet, I disagree. The companies out there, entrenched in their profit motivation, maybe some of the people who work in there see it too, out of the corner of their eyes, or in other ways. But what can you do? You have to make a living right? You have to feed your children; you need to have some pleasure, fun, and frolic. The tension we need to hold between all these things: rubber bands, attach me to the spectre of Nature Loss, just out of my view, to the Sierra Club, or some other equally righteous activist movement. To my kitchen, where I love to cook with olives and feta cheese, lemons and Thai fish sauce, imported, probably not organic, all the minute and large implications of my choices on the environment. To my self, my moods, my sorrows that a chocolate bar immensely improves. To my student loan, to my gender, to my social status. To my goals, my car, my family that lives hours away. Rubber bands pulling in all these directions. It becomes very difficult to make a move that is not strained. It is a complicated equation. I suspect it used to be simpler: want food, grab it and eat it.*

Valuing the Human Community

The participants all brought up their relationships with the human community in comparison to their relationships with their natural environment. Aspects of this included a desire to define "human" in relationship to nature, in a way that "included" human being in that nature, and "how we relate to nature" is about "how we relate to one another." People are "not separate from this thing we call nature." When defined like this, then the "environment" is not just about what "happens out there," but it is also "inside" of us.

Part of our "nature" is to "be social," and for some of the participants community was very important. Morris felt "guilty" that nature was not enough for him, he needs to belong to a human community to feel whole as well. Hartley also reflected on his need for community, times when his community has dissolved he has felt himself falling into something like "depression." Emily on the other hand said that nature was foremost for her, "the single most biggest thing in my life" if there was no place for her to live as she

does now, in a natural setting, she "would not want to live here, I would not want to be on this planet." For her, this statement reveals the deepest significance of Nature Loss.

Nature Loss as "Too much"

For all participants, in some sense, looking at Nature Loss was "too much" to handle emotionally. Sometimes it comes to the point that the pain of exposure to Nature Loss is too much to bear, and it must be turned away from. Emily does not even want to read the news because it is too much for her to hear – she thinks she would "commit suicide" if she were exposed to all the depressing news about the environment. Morris avoids returning to beloved wild places because he fears that the changes he would see might be too "painful." Hartley, overexposed to statistics and problems in his Environmental Studies courses felt like the figure depicted in the painting "The Scream" where the warnings are getting so loud that he had to "put his hands over his ears." Diana had to think whether she could "live with this pain," that maybe she should move away to a more rural setting where she wouldn't be exposed to it.

Field Notes:
It must be transformed.
I cannot live this way
I cannot live under such pain, such heaviness, such doom
I cannot stay stuck
I cannot keep looking at the sun
I cannot ignore it
How can I transform it into something that empowers me?
I need to live too. I want to be happy. I want to help. I want to heal myself as well as my planet.
Diana: I thought about if I would be able to live with this pain.
Morris: the fear is that that is too painful, let's not go there
Emily: I could not handle it if I was to keep abreast of all the latest destruction. I'd probably just commit suicide. I would feel so hopeless, so depressed.
Hartley: I have an image of that Edward Munch painting, "The Scream." That was me in fourth year Environmental Studies. I just had to put my hands over my ears, and in this contorted, painful way, shut it out. Because it was just too much. It just was – it went in too deeply to feel the pain of so much loss.

The experience of Nature Loss is not something that we can sustain for long, it seems that the more one studies it, the more difficult it gets to live with. Unlike other topics where knowledge might bring some kind of understanding and relief, Nature Loss just sits there, getting worse and worse. Perhaps we ought not to focus on it for extended periods of time? Acknowledge it and validate it certainly, but what next? Where do we go from here when the pain becomes unbearable?

Transforming the Pain of Nature Loss

How do we cope with this often painful experience of Nature Loss? Most of the participants found it too much to handle, analogous to "looking at the sun." Staying stuck in a place of feeling the pain and observing the disrespectful devastation of the earth is disempowering and for some, led to ill health. Each of the participants has had to develop their own way of coping with what could be a debilitating experience, finding ways to make sense of what is happening, to process it in order to transform the experience into something that allowed them to lead fuller lives. Below is an extract from my field notes that describe my understanding of this processing method. Although it is written in a linear form, it is in no way intended to imply that the process occurs in any kind of order. This is just my interpretation, written in a collective voice of my participants:

> *I become aware of what is happening to the natural world around me. I learn about far ranging issues that I cannot see directly, and I see some things directly.*
> *I like Nature. I have a relationship with Nature that I enjoy. Nature is my teacher, my healer, my equal. I find my sense of spirituality in nature. I go to nature when I need to heal. When I want to be refreshed.*
> *I look at Nature Loss*
> *I see what is happening, what has happened, and the predictions for what will happen if things continue as present.*
> *I see that I contribute to what is happening. I drive a car. I consume.*
> *I respond. Anger. Fear. Hopelessness. Guilt.*
> *It becomes too much for me to continue looking at.*
> *I must look away.*
> *I find ways to cope. I write poems. I work for change. I minimize my own impact. I find a way to make meaning of what is going on.*
> *Sometimes I go back to the beginning, because the machinery of Nature Loss continues, and I see it all around me.*

An "urge" or a need motivated the movement away from being stuck in the pain, and towards its transformation to a way of being that was more empowering. Emily is spurred on by the fact that "the world does not need one more anguished person" incorporated with her will to live in the world with integrity – she is motivated to move on from a stuck place of pain and despair. Emily wrote about this turning in her poem "Choices" (above), using the image of the Phoenix to illustrate her quest to "turn away from the black pit of despair" when it is difficult to understand or to trust, rising out of the ashes with the knowledge that there is a "redeeming purpose" and it is up to you to choose to pursue it. Writing poetry is an aspect of Emily's coping mechanism, a way to release and describe her feelings.

Diana's descriptions of her painful experiences were inseparable from her description of her need to turn away from the pain "my soul also wanted to reach out to the beauty that's still around... it needed to glory, to be, to watch, to feel, to hear, to sense the wind and the water and the cry of the loon, and the first spring flower... the sensuous miracle of all life; sadness and joy... very deeply connected... without the sadness I couldn't have experienced the joy." For her, the pain is always the teacher, the motivation and the lesson that keeps her turning it into a learning experience. Accepting and living through her feelings enabled her to move into greater depth and affirmation of life, through positive action.

The participants' experiences were mediated by their worldview and belief systems. Morris believes that a change in consciousness is coming. He is able to make philosophical and spiritual meaning out of what is happening in the world and this is a reflection of what is going on inside of our selves. We are evolving, and as we evolve, the natural world will reflect that. Although things will get worse for a while, they will in the end work out okay, and by focusing on our own processes and being honest with others, and ourselves we can be active in the evolutionary process. Emily sometimes adapts this attitude as well, as demonstrated in her poem "Earth Mirror" (above). Sometimes she is able to relax and trust that there is a greater purpose, that things are evolving and going as they should. At other times however, she questions it. Is it happening fast enough? Will we be able to save things?

Diana in some ways anticipates the end of "human caused suffering," a time when human actions will go so far as to cause the collapse of our society. She moves through life, leaning from her painful experiences, and learning and teaching survival skills – ways to live when we no longer have the amenities we are used to. Hartley takes a humorous, down to earth perspective. His coping method is that of making a conscious choice, having chosen to focus elsewhere right now, on his family responsibilities, on his work. His life is full and what he does is meaningful. He spent a lot of time studying what is going on, and found it overwhelming, with no clear solutions. For now, he is able to put it aside, and try to have a relatively pleasant life. He does believe that things are not going to get better however, we are basically "going to hell in a handbasket."

From my field notes

So, each of these "maps" of the world, belief systems, understanding of the future, lead us to see, feel, taste, hear the world in a different way, they influence our perceptions and our feelings.

Being a counsellor is in part about helping people feel better, find paths through their problems, their pain. As counsellors, our work is done within a greater context; history, place, time, culture, society, and gender influence our methods. So it is clear that we cannot completely separate emotional healing from these other influences which may be termed political and social.

But, if my job is only to help people feel better, then, well, I don't need to look outside the window. I can get them on medications; I can help them adjust to a sick society, a sick environment. I can help teach them a belief system that makes things feel better. If we can believe in something, some purpose for being here, it helps put our questions to rest.

Act from love, instead of fear. I like this, and I think it is a good rule of life. However. I am concerned. The extinctions are still happening. The places I love are being bulldozed. We are still living disrespectfully on the land. I would like to believe, to have faith that this is enough, that our consciousness will evolve in time. But I can't. I'd like to, and I can see how there would be less pain, more acceptance. But I don't buy it completely. Maybe I am just not spiritual enough. I cannot help but be distracted by the way I see things changing in the world around me.

This I think is important to take note of as counsellors. If we are going to help our clients and/or the earth, we need to think deeply about this. Is adjusting our clients to acceptance and inner peace while the world continues on its downward path enough? Are we then just moving chairs around on the Titanic? Or is this where it all grows from, start inside at the heart, and everything must follow. I don't know the answer. But I cannot let myself, at this point, just relax and let go of my sorrow for what I see happening. The understanding that it is a spiritual lesson is not enough.

There must be more than these two positions –looking at it, full of pain, or looking away, feeling no pain about it. Perhaps looking at Nature Loss is not useful. I mean, it isn't if you just sit there and stare at it the whole time. "Wow it is so bad. I am so depressed".... To be stuck blinded by staring at the sun too long. Ouch, that hurts, but keeping the hand in the fire. Okay, that is not adaptive.

But looking away and doing nothing, that's not useful either.

It only hurts when I think about it in a certain way: that humans are going to destroy the world/environment or themselves. That we/humans are destroying/changing something I care about. It also only hurts if I look at it for a long time. So – the meaning that I attribute to the human caused changes in the environment influences the way I see what is going on. This can either help me feel better, or help me feel worse about what is going on, and my life, my part in it. I only see these things if I look at it. I can look away and forget about them. Then it doesn't hurt so much either.

In reacting to Nature Loss, we may find that it is too much, that we want to look away, and deny that it is happening. Sometimes it seems we are torn between these two

extremes, full exposure and incapacitation, or full denial and capacity to live. There must be something else that is neither just one of these things. Perhaps it is a balance: being fully conscious and engaged, yet not incapacitated by the experience.

The Bigger Picture

Another theme that emerged during analysis took an existential form, as some of the participants took on the question of meaning. What is the meaning of Nature Loss, of what we are doing to our world in the larger sense? One of the possible approaches to answering this question include seeing Nature Loss as something that is in some way "meant to be," that the death of nature and its beings is itself a part of a "natural" life cycle. Perhaps, as John Seed contemplates below, our greater purpose is to act as the maggots in this lifecycle:

> Then I think, well, maybe the earth is dead already, and we're the decomposing bacteria or the maggots, and it's our job to eat the corpse; to multiply until the corpse is totally consumed. What if that is the case? Then here I am, this reluctant maggot, not doing my job of consuming the resources of the earth as fast as possible. It's actually the James Watts and Ronald Reagans who are doing their job properly. And I'm just some kind of a demented maggot that refuses to fulfill its role because of some weird ideas that have come into my head, So, maybe it will take five minutes longer to consume the corpse because I am dragging my heels. But maybe the final decision hasn't been reached yet. (John Seed, interviewed in Nisker, 1992)

Emily spoke of this through her science fiction reading; stories that tell of planets that have had to "be evacuated" or "gone dead." This leads her to look at the "REALLY big picture," where we are talking about "life and death and rebirth. Well, in the really big picture, planets are born and planets die." Hartley sometimes wonders if perhaps "this is all just one grand experiment," that, if we look at life in the "Geological" sense, we can see that it has been through "huge cataclysms" before, but they were accepted as part of the process. It follows that "what we are doing to the planet horrible though it is, is maybe just one more of nature's cataclysms. And so there's kind of a breathing in and a breathing out, that, maybe this is all part of it."

Morris believes that what is happening is part of a larger plan, but not one of endings, one of beginnings. A turning point towards a new consciousness, where we will live in co-operative harmony with our world. Diana did not address this point, but does have an acceptance that human society at least, is headed for destruction. This is what I wrote in my field notes:

> *To believe there is a bigger meaning, a benevolent meaning. And here I think of that scene from American Beauty, where the white paper bag was dancing with the wind as energy, in front of a red wall. There was an all-encompassing benevolent energy behind that dance. That feels good, then we can all still be held in a mothers arms, a father's arms. Protected, in the end, even though things look bad, they are for the best, they are good.*

Considering this in context that, in some billions of years or so, our sun will go super-nova, and this earth will be gone. Everything dies, and our planet is no exception. This perspective is both a soothing one, and an uncomfortable one. It makes sense that all things must come to an end, but it is difficult to extrapolate to this ultimate scale. How like or unlike our experience of human death is this? As Hartley said, "is it any different than living with the knowledge that we are all going to die? I mean, you know, the Buddha says that the greatest mystery out of all the mysteries in the world, is that everybody is going to die, but nobody believes it will happen to them. And so …there's an existential reality that affects not just our own little tidy egos but our planet."

But, the earth is not dead yet. We are here now, and we still must choose how to live, whether with honour and integrity, or not. Perhaps this type of meaning making is another form of denial.

> Extinction is a constant theme of life on Earth, one of nature's ways of pruning, improving and clearing space. But if it is to happen, best that is should be as part of some grand global transformation that has a certain geological, even cosmic grandeur to it. (Roszak, 1991, p. 49)

Results related to Assumptions and Expectations

Certain assumptions and expectations were stated in Chapter three. The assumption of Nature as intrinsically good was met in some ways, as the participants defined nature as healer, and teacher, as something they loved and respected for its own

sake. Of course, the term "good" is a catch all, and perhaps should have been replaced by the term "beneficial" or "worthy of respect," statements that the participants' descriptions upheld. It follows that the assumption that "saving" nature is a good thing comes into question. If nature is in some way existentially "meant" to end, that is if the "death" of the world or aspects of it is a part of a greater cycle of life and death, then what does it mean that we try to resist this process? However, within this, it still seems that our *relationship* to nature, whether that nature is meant to die out or not, is what is important. As the participants words reinforced, it is *how* it happens, not *what* happens that is important: the intention behind the act is paramount. That humans need to have a different relationship with nature for their health, and the health of the planet appears to be a valid assumption. As just stated, it is the quality of this relationship that discerns "rightful" use of nature from "wrongful" or Nature Loss. If the relationship is one imbued with integrity and respect, that is, one different than our current socially constructed relationship to nature, then health for both individual and environment seems to be more forthcoming.

The participants all agreed with the literature that our social system's institutionalization of the profit motive based on consumption plays a lead role in Nature Loss. Orthodox economic theory supports the systematic consumption of nature for profit. That "simple solutions" such as recycling or behaviour change to save the world obscure the real issue was also partially addressed in this research. Participants admitted to taking part in these types of activities, to "minimize their footprints" on the earth, and also recognized that their emotional state was a factor in the process. It became apparent that the kind and quality of the human – nature relationship was a more pivotal issue.

It was confirmed that "how I see the future mediates how I feel about Nature Loss" as participants who predicted a frightening and catastrophic future had less comfort with the Nature Loss experience than those who felt it would work out for the best in the end. My expectation that the participants would describe their Nature Loss experience in terms of such emotions such as anger, fear, sorrow, was met. However I also began to see that their experience was inseparable from their coping processes that helped them reframe their pain into something more empowering for their lives. There was something more dynamic about the experience than I had expected. That this experience is an almost

"invisible" one in our society was in many ways confirmed, but emerged in a more auditory than visual form. As opposed to being "unseen" it was often termed "unheard" – usually there was no one to listen to their Nature Loss experience.

The assumption that current psychological theories ignore the importance of our connection to nature was not highlighted in the participants' words, but it follows from descriptions of our culture as one that promotes "ignoring" the subject in favour of reinforcing the consumption patterns that buttress our economy. The findings of this study do provide information for counselling psychologists, the most specific of which is found in the words of each participant as they explain how they might help someone else with this issue. This provides an authentic description from a "client" perspective. These results are discussed below in the section "Significance and Implications of the Findings for Counsellors."

Relationship of Findings to Literature

As described in the literature review, there is little research on the topic of Nature Loss for counsellors. More representative writing is found in the theoretical approaches of the Deep Ecology Movement, Ecopsychology and Ecofeminism, as well as the practice-based descriptions from the Joanna Macy and John Seed's workshop strategies. There were no contradictions between this literature and the results of this study, and in general, the results aligned themselves with this body of work.

The findings of this study indicate that the participants experienced emotional connectedness to what is happening to the environment, in ways that connected with their own self. The origin of the word compassion means, "to suffer with," and the participants did indeed demonstrate their compassion for the earth and its beings, suffering as the earth and they suffered. Naess' deep concept of the *ecological self* names an extension of the sense of "self" to the larger ecological context. "*Self-Realization* achieved through wider identification with one's ecological context" (Drengson & Inoue, 1995, p. xxi). It is this identification with all living beings that the participants touched upon. They also spoke about the "deeper" implications behind the human treatment of nature, that the intention behind the actions was of importance, more so than the action itself.

The Ecopsychological literature considers environmental destruction to be rooted in a psychopathological human nature relationship. The participants' comments reflected these observations, describing what is being done to the natural world as something so unbelievable that the motivation cannot be fully rationalized. These are not the actions of psychologically healthy individuals, as illustrated by Emily's words "What kind of mind can actually do these things so far from the natural order?" or echoing Paul Shepard (1995, p. 22)"...why does society persist in destroying its habitat?"

The participants' words also demonstrated that their connection to nature and their response to Nature Loss entailed a psychologically significant component for them, whether it was spiritual, emotional or intellectual. Expressing their pain for what is happening to nature expressed the "distress we feel in connection with the larger whole of which we are part. It is our pain for the world" (Macy, 1995, p. 241).

As for the Ecofeminist literature, there was little that came up in this study that pertained to these issues. Typically those seen as being responsible for the losses were depicted as male. One participant indicated that his gender socialization prevented him from being fully able to experience his feelings of Nature Loss. This suggests that since men in our society are less able to experience their feelings of Nature Loss, they may be more likely to contribute to Nature Loss. I speculate that the oppression of nature and women may be less possible for individuals who are more in touch with their feelings.

The participants spoke about "not speaking" or expressing feelings about Nature Loss, along the lines of denial discussed in the writings of Joanna Macy and John Seed. Some did not want to face the pain for the world because of their fears, that they would be "exposed to pain, despair, or guilt; we may appear morbid, weak, emotional or powerless to others, we may cause distress," and agreed that Western culture reinforces a "belief in the separate self" (Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 31). This repression had consequences to the participants' well being on emotional and physical levels, sometimes resulting in "avoidance of painful information such as avoiding the news; an impaired capacity to think; burnout and a sense of powerlessness" (Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 31).

The difficulties of being aware of what is happening in the world was clear in the findings that trying to act in environmentally sound ways was inseparable from guilt and a feeling that it was never enough. Sadness was present as well, a sadness that is about

suffering because "your actions and the actions of your species are at fault, and [are] preventable" (McKibben, 1998, p.85). The fact that we know we did this makes it all the more significant. Even if it were inevitable, it is a process attended by grief. And if it was a mistake, this adds to the grief. "So there is the sadness of losing something we've begun to fight for, and the added sadness, a shame, of realizing how much more we could have done— a sadness that shades into self-loathing. We, all of us in the First World, have participated in something of a binge, a half-century of unbelievable prosperity and ease.... We didn't turn our lives around to prevent it" (McKibben, 1998, p.86).

Significance and Implications of the Findings for Counsellors

These findings should alter the way we as counsellors think about the environment and its issues as pertains to our research, practice and theory. Currently, our psychological theory does not incorporate the human-nature relationship. This study has demonstrated that it is a reality for these participants and also that it can be a painful reality. Thus, we as counsellors ought to revise the way we treat the individual in isolation from his or her surroundings. In seeking to further conceive of how we might do this, we can look to the findings of this study to improve our understanding of Nature Loss. This has been provided through descriptions of the inner experience of these individuals - allowing us to see how the experience impacts upon their well being.

The results of this study indicate that psychological disturbance may occur on many different levels correlated with experiencing Nature Loss. These findings also show that for these participants the experience of Nature Loss has major significant psychological impact. This impact can be harmful to the individual unless they have a way to cope with the painful feelings that arise. Developing a coping method and having a belief system that helped them to reframe the experience was important for their well being. From my field notes

So, if these things are true, that we are changing the world permanently. What does that mean for counsellors? For psychology? For counselling theory? Do we continue to use the theories that we have, theories that were created, and meant to be used in a world that had unlimited future, unlimited potential, unlimited growth possibilities for humans to benefit from ... I am reading these quotes: yes, the oceans are rising. Yes the temperature is rising. Yes, it is pretty certain that human influence is so all pervasive that we have dominated the planet, and nature itself may be over with. So. I turn to the psychologists and say, what are you doing about this? How are you reacting? Perhaps you are changing your lifestyle, making personal changes. But what about in counselling? What about in the definition of health and well being and healing? Here we are, counsellors, medicos in the middle of the battle, sitting on our little chairs in a relatively sheltered spot. Just looking into each other's eyes. And talking about personal issues removed from this context. Removed from the context of the "crisis" or the huge changes that human influence has brought about. Personal issues and healing and the individual are absolutely important things, crucial to the healing process. But so is the external. What are we healing this person for? To go out into... what? How many more generations? Think of all the metaphors. Growth, the river of life, the little sprout coming up through the concrete.

Let's talk about it. Let's talk about it with our clients. Let's bring it up. Let's understand that as nature as we know it changes, then people as we know them change.

Implications for theory

In our hearts, we know there is something maniacal about the way we are abusing the planetary environment… how often do we read reports of the devastation and say 'That's crazy!' We use the word, but in this context 'crazy' has no professional status, no theoretical depth… 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 … they ignore the greater ecological realities that surround the psyche – as if the soul might be saved while the biosphere crumbles. (Roszak, 1992, p.19)

Traditionally, theories of psychotherapy focus on the individual psyche (Macy, 1991; Fox, 1985; Guisinger, 1994; Clark, 1995; Prilleltensky 1997), although more modern clinical applications have evolved under the influence of feminist and multicultural discourse to acknowledge the influence of social structure and human diversity on individual clients. Although counselling psychology is widening its scope to include more aspects of the system in which we live, it has so far avoided seriously considering the eco-system. The irony of this approach is that it discounts human experience outside of a narrow scope, never looking out the window of the counselling office. Behind the closed doors in a good counselling session, the client is supported to become self-aware and individually empowered in a peak human experience of empathy and compassion, fortified by the most modern theories. This is important and meaningful. Yet, when the client steps outside the door to manifest these internal changes in the world, they will find that the external environmental dynamics have not changed. The eco-system still shows signs that it is falling apart, and there is no mainstream forum in which to address the client's psychological responses to this awareness.

What would a psychology that incorporated Ecopsychological theory look like? "It would need to be comprehensive, holistic and systemic: ... it would be an expanded psychology of relationship" (Mack, 1992/1995, p. 293). It seems reasonable that it is the logical next step as counselling theory expands to include our relationships to social, gender, sexual, cultural, and familial systems, that we expand to include our relationship with nature. Mack goes on to delineate these factors that would be key in future directions for theory: (a) An appreciation that we do, in fact, have a relationship with the earth itself; (b) An analysis of traditional attitudes toward the Earth in our own and in other cultures that may facilitate or interfere with the maintenance of life; (c) The application of methods of exploring and changing our relationship with the Earth's environment that can reanimate our connection with it; (d) An examination of politics and economics from an ecopsychological perspective; and (e) Psychologists need to become professionally and personally committed and involved outside their offices and laboratories (Mack, 1992/1995, p. 287). A suggested starting point for this would be to offer undergraduate and graduate level courses on Ecopsychological topics in our Universities.

Implications for practice

> This new psychology must include not only the development of a body of theory that would understand or interpret our relationship to the environment, but also ways of working with clients and patients that will bring forth direct or disguised thoughts and feelings in relation to the environment, and empower constructive initiatives. At the very least, this must mean that when we hear expressions of distress about pollution or other forms of environmental destruction in dreams and other forms of communication, we not hear or interpret these simply as displacements from some other, inner source. (Mack, 1992/1995 p. 281)

What would the integration of environmental consciousness and psychotherapy look like? Conn (1992) speaks of an "ecologically responsible psychotherapy or ecotherapy" which views the individual problems of the client in context of the "larger whole, of what is happening in the larger world." She goes on to say that through this approach, "the goals of therapy become not just personal release but also participation in and contribution to the health of the world" (p. 3 -4).

Joanna Macy found that many of her workshop participants expressed feelings of pain that they had never been able to express to their counsellors (Macy, 1991, p. 60). She suggests that obstacles to counsellors include factors such as lack of preparation and training, sense of professional limits, reluctance of the client, professionals' inexperience in dealing with their own distress, professional objectivity and distance, interpreting pain as "malfunctioning" rather than a healthy process, and individualistic theories of the self. In order to combat these factors, counsellors could validate feelings of distress for the world, encourage disclosure by asking clients if they are concerned for what is happening to the world, countering fatalism, and encouraging assertive response. Additionally it may be useful to re-evaluate the roles of both client and counsellor (Macy, 1991, p. 60-64). Macy also suggests these five principles of empowerment (Macy, 1995, p. 251):

1. Feelings of pain for our world are natural and healthy;
2. Pain is morbid only if denied;
3. Information alone is not enough to deal with our distress;
4. Unblocking repressed feelings releases energy and clears the mind;
5. Unblocking our pain for the world reconnects us with the larger web of life.

The findings of this study indicate a difficulty of expression for individuals experiencing the pain of Nature Loss, taking the form of feelings such as "it is too painful, I don't want to see it/hear it," or "there is no one to hear what I have to say." These elements could be incorporated into counselling practice by creating a space that indicates to the client that there is someone to hear, that you as practitioner find these experiences valid and important to talk about. Also, helping the clients with their fear of the pain that accompanies their feelings for the world by promoting an atmosphere that normalizes feelings of pain for the world, and promotes the understanding that becoming conscious and accessing this pain is a route to its release, rather than a source of more pain. Our pain for the world is so important because it serves as a "doorway" to social consciousness, a catalyst for a new relationship with nature (Macy, 1995).

The words of the participants also contribute to our understanding of the implications of this study for practice. Here are some of their suggestions.

> By encouraging them to talk about it, and by really listening. Giving time for that, giving silence …letting them know that it is okay to feel, to express their emotions. By spending time myself feeling those things and being around other people that express freely and thus being comfortable with that. Taking the time creating the environment, having the intention of holding the space for that.

> By taking them out into the woods or a meadow or the ocean, by showing them the beauty and harmony, the power and the strength of the "real" world and by learning and passing on how we can become wild and succulent and free partners in life again. … Opening us up again to the life that's all around us... This IS our home, this IS where we belong, this IS what touches our souls because they remember and this is the recipe for healing our souls.

> Encourage them to cry, and write and talk about it in a safe place. … I think it's impossible to go through that alone… It would really help me to be with someone who understood that perspective, that I didn't feel that I had to explain myself to first.

> If someone came in and what was clear was that their despair was primarily due to Nature Loss. I would have a lot of time for them. I would really hold the space as best I could. For them to fully feel their story, and to see what they could do to invite gain into their life. … I would want them to know that I hear them. …It's not in the DSM. It could be a really interesting question. What's your relationship with the natural world?

> Most of my clients, when I ask them what gives them strength, I would say almost every one talks about the natural world.

Helping our clients develop "coping methods" as described in this study is another way in which we could be of assistance: through co-constructing a new narrative, or reframing experience. The caution with this is that we do not want to be doing the type of therapy that is merely "moving the chairs around" on the Titanic. While we may find an approach that helps the individual feel better and allows them to live a healthy life, it may not be comprehensive enough to address their deeper issues and the reality of what is happening in our world. This can be difficult, but not impossible to reconcile – finding the balance between living life enjoyably in a healthy way, and being able to hold in our consciousness the possibility that the earth is being destroyed around us. I believe we are "big" enough to hold all of this, and in expanding to do so, we will be expanding our personal sense of empowerment as well as our sense of self in a beneficial way.

In my own practice, I use nature and aspects of nature as a metaphor and a role model for life. For example, I compare the cycles we go through in our lives to seasonal changes or plant growth. Depression can be likened to winter, a time of less light, a slowing down. A time for seeds and animals to hibernate and draw within – winter is a natural and necessary part of the process of life, and spring certainly follows. I use nature as a role model, to lend meaning to client experience – such as when a tree is cut down a new shoot will spring from its stump, and we too can grow again in a new way after something traumatic happens to us. That compost and rot is necessary to provide the nutrients from which new growth may spring. The lasting lesson of nature is that all of this is *natural*: the effect of normalizing cycles like these helps alleviate the added burden of fear, opening up the possibility of being comfortable even in the uncomfortable.

Personally, I take time to connect with nature and allow myself to reap all the benefits of that experience. I also let myself be aware of my pain for what is happening to the world around me, and try to find ways to be able to hold the tensions of possibility and despair. I also bring stones, plants, (if windows exist!) sunshine and fresh air into my counselling area.

Implications for research

With respect to research, it seems important that we investigate this more deeply, and consider ways in which suffering for the world might manifest—perhaps as everyday stress and depression, anxiety or panic. In particular, given that there is very little research on the experience of Nature Loss, further studies in this direction are needed to affirm for those who experience Nature Loss and for counsellors that this experience is a valid and significant one. As a science, the discipline of psychology is being challenged to respond to the changes in the world around it. Marsella (1998) advocates the development of a "global-community psychology" that addresses emerging social and environmental problems. Prilleltensky (1997) suggests an "Emancipatory Communitarianism" where the focus is shifted away from individualism. In order for psychology to clarify the role that it will play in responding to the potentially catastrophic changes in the world around us, it will be necessary to accumulate evidence regarding the psychological implications of these changes.

A number of directions that future researchers might follow to build on the foundations of this study are suggested below:

- Because of the small sample size, further research would be useful to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.
- Interview "non-sympathetic" participants, perhaps people who make a profit from Nature Loss, or people who do not think about Nature Loss.
- A quantitative study: how many people think about this? How many people didn't think about it before, but when they have words, language for it, begin to see it. How many people just don't care, or think about it? Are there correlates to gender, culture, age, or experience?

- As the participants and researcher in this study are homogenous (white Canadians of European descent, low-middle income etc.) it is important to obtain a cross-cultural perspective on the experience.
- Do different contexts make a difference in the experience? Do people who grew up or live in urban environments have a different experience than those whose context was more rural?
- Do people who are in different stages of the environmentally aware continuum have different perspectives? For example how are 1st year Environmental Studies students who are just being exposed to all the information compare to people who have gone "back to the land"? Are there different perspectives in those who are just thinking about it, to those who are living it?
- An Ethnographic study that examines cultures that maintain worldviews that lead to Nature Loss.
- A study of socio-economic issues. Is Ecopsychology a pursuit of the privileged? If your first concern is meeting your basic needs, how environmentally "correct" can you be – organic is expensive.
- A study that focuses on the spiritual aspects of our relationship with nature, and how this is affected by Nature Loss.
- A study that builds on existing theories of death and dying and loss in context of nature.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of Nature Loss. In doing so, a number of themes became apparent. It was discovered that the experience of Nature Loss is embedded within a coping and meaning making process, that experiencing Nature Loss directly and for a prolonged time is very painful, and not desirable, and that there is a silencing of this experience that ought to be addressed by counsellors. This exploration promises rich areas for future research, as well as sources of illumination for counselling theory and practice. It seems timely that counselling psychologists interest themselves in surveying this area in order to expand our understanding of our psyches, our world, and ourselves.

The expansion of our healing practices may seem uncomfortable. There are few established precedents, and the implications of this kind of change in theory, research and practice are radical. It certainly involves adjustments – in the way we do our counselling work, in the way we see each other, and in our relationship to the natural world. But this is exactly the kind of adjustments that can challenge us to grow and become more of who we want to be – more who we actually are in relation to the world and ourselves. We are being challenged to face that which we are fearful of seeing. As this study has shown, it is this fear of the pain that can hold us back – and it is through opening to this pain that we can transform it into something more empowering.

In all of this, let us try to see clearly. Let us expand ourselves to be able to hold more than we do now, to hold the pain of Nature Loss and the promise of what we can learn from it. Let our goal be to see it and feel it and respond with as much integrity as we possibly can. Let us be aware of our relationship with ourselves, other humans, and the rest of the world, and strive to understand that it is all connected. What happens out there reflects what happens in here.

> *From my field notes: This fits in with the meta-journey, or the bigger journey that I am a part of when I think of myself in broader terms, in terms of human society, the world, and the environment. The kinds of things that existed before "I" did, and that will continue to exist after I do.*
>
> *Zooming out from my little map, I see a map so huge, stretching out, scale of time, scale of place, scale of context. Zooming in, I see just this little drop of water that I can scoop up in my little dipper. All I can hold, all I can handle.*

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a project entitled "Nature Loss: Responses to the Disappearance of the Natural World" that is being conducted by a graduate student, Jennifer Taylor, as part of the requirements for the Masters in Counselling Psychology degree at the University of Victoria. If you have any questions or concerns about the project, you may either contact the student at 598-8060 (taylorj@uvic.ca) or call her graduate supervisor, Dr. Norah Trace at 721-7840 (trace@uvic.ca). You may also contact the Associate Vice President Research at the University of Victoria 472-4362 if you have any concerns about the study that the student and supervisor cannot help you with.

The purpose of this project is to provide a description of the lived experience of Nature Loss: to gain a greater understanding of how people respond to the knowledge that our species is consuming the natural world around us at an unprecedented rate. The resources for conducting this study are being provided by the researcher, Jennifer Taylor. The benefits of participating in this study include gaining a deeper understanding of this topic and your experience. It may also enhance your ability to dialogue with others. You will receive a summary of the analysis, and there are no costs or anticipated risks of participating in this study.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to first take part in a one hour audiotaped individual interview, then to take one hour to reflect on the initial summary of the analysis provided by the researcher, and finally to participate in a three hour videotaped focus group discussing and elaborating on the analysis. The total time required will be five hours. The interviews will be conducted by the researcher, and the focus group will be facilitated by the researcher. The other members of the focus group (six participants) will be the other individuals who have participated in individual interviews. Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you are free to refuse to participate, to withdraw from it, or to refuse to answer certain questions, without any negative consequences. In the event that you withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed immediately, or used as is, depending on your preference. Whether you participate or choose not to participate will have no bearing on any grades and/or academic standing.

All data collected in the study will remain confidential; audio and videotapes will be erased immediately after transcription, and your name will not be recorded on the data. You will be assigned a code name, which is not obviously linked to you, and is identifiable only to the researcher. This code name will replace all references to your name in the transcripts. Code names and consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the office of the researcher's supervisor at the University of Victoria, while the transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home office, in the sole possession of the researcher. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

You should be aware that given the nature of group interviews, it is not possible to protect your anonymity within the group and others may know or recognize you. However, as a member of the group, you and your fellow participants will be expected to treat the information you provide and hear confidentially. The results of this study will be prepared for presentation at a special meeting with the researcher's supervisor and committee members. In addition, an abstract will be given to all participants, and the results may be reported in a scholarly journal. The thesis will be put in the University of Victoria library. At the conclusion of the study, all of the raw data will be destroyed after two years, during which it will remain locked and secured separately from the code names as described above.

Having understood the above information and been given an opportunity to have my questions answered, I agree to participate in this study:

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

A COPY OF THIS CONSENT WILL BE LEFT WITH YOU, AND A COPY WILL BE TAKEN BY THE RESEARCHER

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Ensure that consent form is signed and understood before beginning the interview.
Convey this information to the interviewee: "The purpose of this interview is for me to gain an understanding of your experience of Nature Loss, that is, how you feel, what you think, what you do, and how you make meaning out of the disappearance of nature. It is not an evaluation of you, or of how much you know. Do you have any questions?"

Demographics

What is your Age?
What is your Education Level?
What is your Occupation?
Do you have children?

The interviewee's responses to the following questions may be deepened by asking further questions on the emotional, cognitive, behavioural, somatic and meaning levels of their experience, such as.
How do you feel about this?
What do you think?
What do you do?
How does you body feel when you talk about this?
How do you make sense of it all?

Tell me about your experience of nature loss, where nature loss is defined as the disappearance of the natural world due to human interventions such as cutting down trees, paving over more land, polluting etc.

Optional questions

- Can you remember a time when you saw or heard something about the loss of the natural world that made you feel concerned about the environment? Tell me about this experience.
- What direction do you think the condition of our environment is heading?
- What do you think the world we leave for our children will look like?
- What feelings do you have about all this, which you carry about with you?
- What usually happens when you try to share these feelings with other people?
- How do you avoid expressing these feelings?
- How do you avoid experiencing these feelings?
- How would you help other people deal with their feelings of pain for our world?
- Does our culture help you either to be aware or to forget the loss of nature?
- Are you aware of any ways in which you personally participate in the loss of nature?
- Have you ever before today discussed your personal thoughts and feelings about the loss of nature? If not, why?
- Are you worried that you'll be labelled in some way if you talk about your feelings around Nature Loss?
- What gives you hope, courage, strength?

VITA

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Jennifer Lynn Taylor

April 20, 2001