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Back to Belonging: Nature Connection and Expressive Arts Therapy in the Treatment of Trauma and Marginalization

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Literature Review

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Expressive Arts Therapy

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Abstract

There is increasing research on the benefits of incorporating nature-based approaches into mental health. This can be done in myriad ways both in and out of the counseling office. This literature review focuses on the benefits of incorporating nature as co-therapist and kin rather than only material or metaphor, particularly in the treatment of people who have experienced trauma and or marginalization. According to Herman (1997), wounds made relationally must be healed relationally, and the literature reviewed in this paper suggests that connection with the "more-than-human" world (Abram, 1996), and coming back into a sense belonging in the larger web of life, can be a part of this relational healing. Expressive arts therapy draws on many practices that are relational, embodied, and nonverbal. These are all aspects shown to support both nature connection and trauma recovery, suggesting great potential for expressive arts therapy to assist with both. The author reviewed literature from trauma studies, ecopsychology, ecotherapy, expressive arts therapy, as well as material from other relevant authors and practitioners, to demonstrate the important role of relationship for humans, highlight ways in which nature connection can aid in trauma recovery, and how expressive arts therapy can help facilitate and deepen that connection. Herman's stages of trauma recovery are used to organize and highlight ways some practitioners are incorporating nature connection. The author uses a feminist paradigm of trauma, which acknowledges the impact of living as part of a marginalized or targeted group (Brown, 2004).

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Introduction

My aim in this literature review is to explore how nature-based approaches can be used to increase senses of connectedness, integration, and embodiment, especially when integrated with expressive arts therapy. Though I believe this can benefit everyone, my interest lies particularly with people who have experienced trauma and or marginalization. My primary focus is on fostering a felt sense of connection with what Abram (1996) calls the “more-than-human" world as a way of understanding the self as part of something larger, in a web of connection even when one feels isolated, ostracized, or has struggled with human bonds. I am interested in the therapeutic benefit of dispelling the myth of separation (Mitchell, 2018) as a way for humans to come home to our world and ourselves. To do this, I believe the best practice is to work toward “right relationship” on all levels including building mutual, rather than extractive, relationships with nature. My focus in this paper, therefore, is on the relational aspects of both expressive arts therapy and ecotherapies, and their potential to decrease symptoms that often accompany trauma, including dissociation, feelings of isolation, difficulty connecting and feeling safe, and struggles with self-concept (Herman, 1997), many of these can accompany marginalization as well. I will explore how nature can be incorporated into therapeutic practice not only as object or resource, but as co-therapist and holding environment, mirror and mentor, friend and family, and how this can be part of recovery.

I see nature-based work and expressive arts therapy as having many parallels and possibilities for enhancing each other. In both expressive therapies and in ecotherapy, practitioners are interested in maintaining a relationship that is present and alive, whether that be to the image, the creative process, the self, or the ecosystem. Expressive arts therapy, along with

other creative arts therapies, value nonverbal ways of listening and speaking, which can lend themselves well to connecting with the nonverbal more-than-human world. Other relevant aspects will be touched on briefly in this paper, including embodied practices, sensory experiences, resonance, active imagination, and intermodal approaches. This paper is primarily geared towards an audience with some knowledge of the principles and practices of expressive arts therapy, as my main goal of this review is to ground my thoughts in research regarding trauma and nature-based approaches. However, the last section includes a few basic elements of expressive arts therapy, and I believe all audiences can gain something from the research.

My interest in this topic comes from a personal, clinical, and political place. I am a white, queer, nonbinary, transgender person of settler-colonial heritage living on unceded native land, who seeks to be a part of creating a more just world. I was fortunate to grow up with the ability to wander in woods, to climb trees, and to feel generally safe doing so. However, my experiences on land have been severed from the more intimate relationship my far back ancestors must have had. In addition, the English language I speak does not weave me into familial bonds with the living planet the way the words spoken by people native to this land do (Kimmerer, 2013). With this, contrary to many indigenous perspectives, the dominant culture around me has mostly communicated, consciously or unconsciously, that I am separate from the land and that, as a human, I can dominate and control other life.

Still, the outdoors were places of connection and freedom to me. As I grew up and became more aware of the ways I differ from the mainstream, the connection I found with the natural world became even more important. While my gender, for example, may be subject to scrutiny or erasure among many humans, among trees I am not met with judgment or questions. My body relaxes and I see a mirror of complexity around me and life living into its many forms.

While “straight” has been equated with “natural” and queerness and transness have been attacked for being “against nature” (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010), there are in fact a great number of examples of both in animals. They have simply been gatekept and explained away by heterosexual scientists as anomalies (Bagemihl, 2000). In his book *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*, Bagemihl said we live in a “polysexual, polygendered world,” sharing that queerness in many forms has been documented in at least 450 species (p. xiii). This includes same-sex courtship, pair-bonding, sex, and co-parenting, and several animals, such as the cuttlefish, can change their gender (Begemihl, 2000). If we step beyond colonialist views, we can see that the natural world thrives on diversity and mutual relationship, not exclusion and domination (Kimmerer, 2013). In my connection with the more-than-human world I can be myself in my wholeness, my full-beingness, in relationship with other beings. As I have deepened my connection to nature, and the nature within myself, I have felt a deep sense of belonging that reminds me that I am a part of this planet. It reminds me also, that no other human, no matter what nasty words or laws they may wield, gets to decide otherwise.

Given my own experience and what I have seen with others, I believe reconnecting with the natural world has potential for improving mental health, particularly for people who have experienced trauma and or marginalization. When humans crave the connection that people like Bowlby, Kohut, Winnicott, and Sullivan have described (Mitchell, 1998), how can our relationship with the more-than-human world be involved? When a person has been deeply wounded by humans and struggles to feel safe, can some isolation be lifted by reconnecting and remembering their connection with non-human kin? It has been shown that the strongest protection against psychological breakdown for soldiers is the morale, leadership, and relatedness they experienced in their unit (Herman, 1997) and that our social support network is

one of the main ways we feel safe (C. Carter, personal communication, December 4, 2018). By establishing a deeper connection with the natural world, can it be part of our support network - one that never invalidates us or shames us for what we were wearing, our race, class, gender, or mental health status? Can this foster belonging and a healthy version of Winnicott's "holding environment"?

Though I have named trauma and marginalization, I will be looking at both under a single umbrella of trauma. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) holds one definition, but I lean more on feminist paradigms of trauma which acknowledge the impact of living as part of a marginalized or targeted group (Brown, 2004). Brown cited Root's concept of "insidious trauma" stating that "in the lives of many target-group individuals," such as people of color, transgender people, poor people, and people with disabilities, "daily experience is replete with subthreshold traumatic stressors" (p. 466). The needs may differ some but, on some level, principles of trauma treatment can be useful to working with people who are belong to marginalized or targeted groups. Given this, I will use Herman's (1997) framework for trauma recovery to organize and highlight some ways that connecting with the natural world may support people who have experienced trauma and or marginalization.

Given the barriers that can exist to accessing, or feeling comfortable in, more rural or wilderness settings, I am interested in how nature-based approaches can be used in a variety of settings, including more urban areas and directly in the counseling office. As humans we are, of course, never separate from our interconnectedness with the more-than-human world, nor should connecting with nature be relegated only to those who can drive to the woods or those who feel safe there. Even when surrounded by buildings, we can still feel the wind on our cheeks, watch

our bird and squirrel neighbors, notice grasses making their way through cracks in concrete, and learn from the trees branching to form their own skylines. As urbanized as many of us have become, we all have roots to people who were intimately connected to land and, regardless of whether we recognize it regularly or not, we are human animals.

With this literature review, I hope to demonstrate why nature connection may be particularly useful for people who have experienced trauma and marginalization and why expressive arts therapy, and those who practice it, may be particularly helpful in facilitating a connection with the more-than-human world.

Literature Review

In the following pages, I review literature from trauma studies, ecotherapy, expressive arts therapy, as well as perspectives from other relevant authors and practitioners, to highlight ways in which nature connection can aid in trauma recovery and how expressive arts therapy can support that. First, I review literature on some ways, both theoretical and practical, that the natural world is being incorporated into therapy, with particular attention to those intending to foster a relationship with the natural world and studies that have demonstrated participants feeling social benefits and a sense of connection. From here, I review the literature on the importance of relationship and connection for humans, particularly in recovery from trauma. This includes an introduction to Herman's (1997) framework for trauma recovery. Then, I review literature on ways in which nature connection can support that framework, including practitioners who work to increase senses of connection, integration, and embodiment in their clients, and end by briefly highlighting a few reasons why expressive arts therapy, and those who practice it, may be particularly helpful in facilitating this connection.

Theoretical and Practical Approaches to Nature in Therapy

In many ways, involving the more-than-human world in healing is considered new, though it draws on things that are arguably ancient to our species, as do the expressive arts. Though many forget, humans are, in fact, interconnected with the natural world. We rely on the elements to survive and thrive and are subject to the same laws as any other living being on this planet. There are many definitions and many nature-based therapies, sometimes nestled under the umbrella called *ecotherapies* or *nature-assisted therapies.* In this section I will briefly review the landscape of nature-based approaches in mental health, theoretically and practically, as well as touch on a few studies relevant to the themes of relationship with the natural world and developing a felt sense of connection to self and something larger.

Theoretical

Ecopsychology. Ecopsychology is the main theoretical field spoken of in relation to this subject. Referencing the work of Roszak, Gomes and Kanner, Jones and Segal (2018) said, "In theory and practice, ecopsychology seeks to address the alienation of humans from the 'more-than-human'" and "heal these fractures by articulating and creating the felt experience from the psychological and ecological ways in which human beings are fundamentally interdependent with nature" (p. 129). Summarizing ecopsychology theorists, Beauvais (2012) wrote, "Ecopsychologists argue that, because we have evolved within the earth's ecology, we remain implicitly connected to it beyond conscious awareness. They claim that by spending time in and cultivating awareness to nature, we can reinvigorate feelings of belonging and connectedness to it" (p. 278). Conn and Conn (2009) wrote, "To restore our own individual health, it is necessary to develop an ecological identity, a consciousness of one's place within the web of life" (p. 112).

Both ecopyschologists (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009; Roszak, Gomes & Kanner, 1995) and expressive arts therapists (Kossak, 2015; Knill, Levine, & Levine, 2005; McNiff, 1999) have said that the dualistic, Cartesian view, has created the disconnection that has led to destruction and many of the mental health issues we see today. Ecopyschologists tend to identify the historical, cultural, political, and economic roots of the ecological crisis and address the social sources of violence done to the human and more-than-human world (Smith, 2013). There has been important critique within the field of ecopsychology, however, that more needs to be done to ensure diversity in the field (Anthony, 1995; Smith, 2013) as well as to acknowledge settler-colonialism and curb the perpetuation of harmful dynamics (Jones & Segal, 2018). This is very important to consider, especially given the subject of trauma and marginalization, but in-depth discussion exceeds the scope of this paper. Also, though not the focus of this review, it can be noted that from the view of ecopsychology, acting on behalf of the earth could help address some of the underlying causes of distress, trauma, and social issues.

Systems theory. Simply put, systems theory describes the flows of energy in communication between the parts and the wholes of systems. According to Macy and Brown, it also "defines the link between all dynamic relationships on earth and, potentially, in the universe" (Beauvais, 2012). Many ecopsychologists also endorse systems theory.

Practical

One does not have to subscribe to ecopsychology in order to bring nature into the therapeutic process. There are myriad ways people incorporate the more-than-human world in their work. Some are more active approaches such as wilderness therapy, animal-assisted therapy, horticulture therapy, therapeutic horticulture, or bringing natural materials into the office with which clients can interact, while less active approaches such as incorporating nature

as metaphor, incorporating landscape photos or soundscapes into the environment, or simply spending time outside are also used (Annerstedt & Wahrborg, 2011; L. Buzzell, personal communication, January 28, 2019; Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009; Kamitsis & Simmonds, 2017). Though the idea of simply putting a landscape photo on the wall or listening to water sounds may seem like it would have little impact, it has been recorded that the difference of having a view of natural elements in a hospital room may have restorative benefits (Ulrich, 1984).

Evidence-based findings. Though the pool is relatively small, there is increasing literature and research about the benefits of engaging with the natural world for human mental and physical health. Studies have shown that nature-assisted therapy can aid in reducing stress (Annerstedt & Wahrbor, 2011; Kam & Siu, 2010; Vujcic et al, 2017), anxiety, and depression (Annerstedt & Wahrbor, 2011; Kam & Siu, 2010; Sahlin, et al, 2012; Vujcic et al, 2017) as well as increasing attention (Kaplan, 1995), self-efficacy, and social functioning (Son et al, 2004). Others have reported other restorative effects (Hartig, 1991; Sahlin et al, 2012) and an increase in psychological resilience (Ingulli & Lindbloom, 2013). There are fewer studies specifically on developing a felt sense of connection with nature, though it is often a piece of the work. Some studies have shown, however, that participants in programs involving nature have experienced social benefits (Kam & Siu, 2010; Silva, 2018; Vujcic, et al, 2017) and a feeling of being connected to something larger (Kam & Siu, 2010; Sahlin, et al, 2012; Silva et al, 2018).

In a study by Sahlin, Matuszczyk, Ahlborg, and Grahn (2012), most interviewed experienced some kind of existential dimension, which they found helpful in healing. “Feelings of connectedness to a larger whole emerged whereby participants expressed a sense of coming home and a kinship with nature in which they felt accepted as they were and could find

restoration of the self" (p. 15). All had their "eyes opened" to the "beauty and detailed interplay" of nature, which was "helpful in finding meaning and coherence in life and existence" (p. 15).

These studies suggest many people can find a host of benefits in bringing nature-based interventions into therapy. These include, but are not limited to, a sense of self, the experience of the present moment, connection with others, an understanding and appreciation of systems and cycles, and a sense of being connected to "something bigger." While there are great benefits to conducting this work outside and in more intensive settings (Sahlin et al, 2012), nature connection can happen in the counseling room as well (Kamitsis & Simmonds, 2017). These studies contribute to the growing literature speaking in favor of nature-based therapies and show they can assist in fostering feelings of connection to self, others, and belonging to something larger, all of which are beneficial in healing from or managing trauma and marginalization.

Levels of ecotherapy. Linda Buzzell, a well-known writer, educator, and practitioner in the fields of ecopsychology and ecotherapy, has identified two distinct levels of ecotherapies. Level one comes from a place of "using nature for human health" which she described as narcissistic. These practices include using some aspect of nature to feel better on a psychological, physical or spiritual level but remain anthropocentric, or human-centered. Natural materials may be used, for example, but it may not include practices of asking permission of the natural world, thinking about how materials collection is done, or giving something back in return. In this model materials are simply taken from the earth for human use (L. Buzzell, personal communication, January 28, 2019). If the earth is seen as material rather than a living organism, the relationship is extractive and nonconsensual. Buzzell said that, ideally, "We're moving from the great lie of separation and superiority to the deep truth of interdependence, connection, and interbeing. This can be hard because it is so different from much of mainstream society" (L.

Buzzell, personal communication, January 28, 2019). Full discussion of being in "right relationship" with the more-than-human exceeds the scope of this paper but shapes my orientation to this work.

Buzzell shared that, unfortunately, many ecotherapies are stuck at level one. In contrast, she called level two a "reciprocal circle of healing." When working on this level she said, "We have a deeper understanding that I can't just use you so I feel better and not care about how you are and how the rest of nature is. This has to be absolutely reciprocal, in my opinion, to be true ecotherapy" (L. Buzzell, personal communication, January 28, 2019).

Personally, and for the purposes of this paper, I am interested in level two ecotherapy. More specifically, I am interested in how fostering a felt relationship with the natural world can support people who have experienced trauma, including marginalization. I will refer to the practices that intend to foster a closer relationship, sense of connectedness and belonging, as "nature connection." This is to distinguish them from practices that utilize or take place in nature but do not have express intention of cultivating relationship between the person and the more-than-human world. In the next section I discuss trauma treatment with a focus on Herman's (1997) stages of recovery, of which relationship and connection are important parts. I then share literature on why and how nature connection can be involved to support people in these stages, and how expressive arts therapy can aid in fostering this connection.

Healing Trauma: Recovery Through Relationship

I have just shared some of the demonstrated benefits of engaging with the natural world as well as several ways nature-based approaches, both theoretical and practical, are used in the field of mental health. I will now discuss the treatment of trauma and highlight the role that relationship plays in recovery, to demonstrate that relational reconnection is an important part of

trauma recovery. I later highlight ways that relationship with nature may be a part of that healing. Again, I am using the feminist understanding of trauma which includes marginalization.

According to Herman (1997), “Helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma. Empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery” (p. 197). Herman cited research saying that some of the faculties affected by trauma include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy and that, “Just as these capabilities are originally formed in relationships with other people, they must be reformed in such relationships” (p. 133). Subsequent sections will highlight the ways in which fostering a connection with nature can be a part of this relational trauma recovery work.

The Neurobiology of Connection

In addition to Herman’s assertion that wounds made relationally must be healed relationally, research has demonstrated the neurobiological role connection plays in humans, and therefore the role it can play in recovery. Stone Rice cited research from Graham showing “Supportive relationships and compassionate self-reflection" can affect neuroplasticity, the brain’s capacity to grow new neural connections, in part through the release of oxytocin (Haller, Kennedy & Capra, 2019, p. 131). He also cited research from Ecker and stated, “When well-being, trust, and connection are experienced repeatedly, the accompanying release of oxytocin enables the brain to rewire itself” (Haller, Kennedy & Capra, 2019, p. 131). Another form of contemporary research on human connection is interpersonal neurobiology.

Daniel Siegel is one of the leaders in the emerging field of interpersonal neurobiology, which has highlighted the importance of relationship for humans. Citing neuroscientific research from Cozolino, Siegel (2006) said “Our brains are profoundly social. The structure of our neural architecture reveals that we need connections to other people to feel in balance and to develop

well" (p. 254). Siegel spoke of mirror neurons, which are believed to be the neural basis of empathy. "By perceiving the expressions of another person, the brain is able to create an internal state that is thought to 'resonate' with that of the other person" (p. 254). This has major implications for the impact of trauma as well as recovery (Kossak, 2015). Further discussion on this exceeds the scope of this paper but is very relevant to the issues and ideas presented here.

According to Siegel (2006), "Therapeutic experiences that move a person toward well-being promote integration" (p. 249). As individuals move through various levels of integration, clinical experience has shown "a fascinating finding in which people begin to feel a different sense of connection to both themselves and the world beyond their previously 'skin-defined' sense of self" (p. 256). He used the term "transpiration" to name "how new states of being seem to emerge as a vital sense of life is breathed across each of the domains of integration" (p. 256). Stone Rice wrote, "Social neuroscience provides us with the evidence that we are structurally wired for connection to others" and that Siegel has suggested "interpersonal neurobiology can be used to understand our relatedness, beyond the interpersonal, to other living creatures and to our whole planet" (Haller, Kennedy & Capra, 2019, p. 133). It could also be argued that coming back into felt connection and integration with the wider web could support this transpiration.

If connection is vital to our sense of well-being as humans, and Siegel suggested that our interpersonal neurobiology connects us to the whole planet, it could be argued that this research also supports the possibility of nature connection playing an important role in mental health and recovery from trauma. In addition, given that expressive arts therapy and other creative arts therapies such as dance/movement therapy (DMT) often draw on mirror neurons and resonance (Kossak, 2015; Pierce, 2014), this research also provides support for how expressive arts therapy may be uniquely positioned to enhance nature connection when used intentionally.

Stages of Recovery

There are many approaches to the trauma treatment, but for the scope of this paper I will be focusing on Herman's (1997) stages of recovery laid out in her quintessential book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror.* In her framework, Herman lays out three main stages, 1) safety and stabilization, 2) remembrance and mourning, and 3) reconnection. As mentioned above, Herman says that trauma often takes a person's sense of power and control and therefore, for Herman, the guiding principle of recovery is restoring empowerment, which applies at all stages. She wrote that moving through the stages is facilitated by a healing relationship, including the therapeutic alliance.

Safety and stabilization. The first stage of safety and stabilization is about addressing a client's safety in all domains. According to Herman (1997) and many others, safety and stabilization must be the first step in trauma work (Fisher, 1999; Tippett, 2017), "for no other therapeutic work can possibly succeed if safety has not been adequately secured" (Herman, 1997, p. 159). The most relevant pieces of this in terms of this literature review include developing skills for orientation to the present, which often include grounding and sensory experiences, as well as the healing relationship as a part of this safety. Pierce (2014) wrote that the work in stage one "mirrors attachment, where clients gain the basic, implicit, and often non-verbal capacities for emotional bonding and self-regulation" (p. 9).

Remembrance and mourning. This stage involves sharing traumatic memories so that they may be integrated into the person's life (Herman, 1997; Pierce, 2014). This stage also involves wrestling with meaning making. Being witnessed is an important piece of this stage. Herman (1997) said "Unless the relational aspect of the trauma is also addressed, even the limited goal of relieving intrusive symptoms may remain out of reach" (p. 183). Herman argued

that “a socially meaningful form of testimony" is essential (p. 184). She also stated a survivor’s healing does not depend on whoever caused harm expressing remorse. Instead, “Her healing depends on the discovery of restorative love in her own life” (p. 190). Here we see again the importance of relationship in recovery and integration, but that the healing of relational wounds does not necessarily need to happen with the person or persons who have caused harm. This leaves the door open for the potential of healing through connection with the natural world.

Reconnection. The issues of stage one are often revisited in stage three, “But while in the first stage the goal was simply to secure a defensive position of basic safety, by the third stage the survivor is ready to engage more actively in the world. From her newly created safe base she can now venture forth” (Herman, 1997, p. 197). This stage is about reconnecting with the self, one’s dreams and desires, as well as others and the wider world. By this stage, the person has regained some trust and ability to maintain a sense of autonomous self while also relating to others. They are more able to risk deepening relationships and greater intimacy.

Though in-depth discussion exceeds the limits of this paper, it should be noted that radical feminist therapist Bonnie Burstow (2003) has offered important critiques of Herman and others who she saw as having a therapeutic goal of survivors returning to a “normal” orientation of trust in the goodness of others. Burstow said this rests on the incorrect assumptions that firstly, the world is a mostly safe place and so general trust is merited, and secondly, that people who have been traumatized view the world less realistically than others. She cited Lewis who wrote that for many marginalized people, the world is not a safe place and mistrust is appropriate. This is very important to keep in mind in this work. Can we support people in building trust without pathologizing the loss of it, especially for people who have many reasons to mistrust? For the purposes of this paper, I choose to use Herman’s framework with Burstow’s view in mind.

It could be argued that the reality that the world is not safe for many people due to ongoing persecution from other humans adds to why connecting with nature and building a sense of relationship and belonging could be vital. However, it is important to recognize that some may have traumatic or mistrustful relationships with the natural world. They may have experienced weather traumas or losses, felt vulnerable to harassment or assault in rural or isolated places, or they may have associations with the land which bring up pain or trauma, such as lynching trees (Pinna-Perez, 2018), sharecropping, or slavery (Penniman, 2019). Further discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is extremely important to take into account.

Based on the literature presented here, cultivating a felt connection with nature could be a part of all of these stages, though perhaps particularly supportive to stages one and three. The role of nature connection in relational recovery is the focus of the following section.

Nature Connection and Relational Recovery

I have just laid out some ways that relationship and connection have been shown to impact humans, with particular focus on trauma recovery. I will now bring in ways in which the literature supports the potential of nature connection to play a role in this relational recovery. This will begin with what Herman (1997) said should be the guiding principle of the work: empowerment, followed by the factor that facilitates the work, a healing relationship. This will be followed by some of how nature connection can be integrated into the stages of recovery.

Nature and Empowerment

Brown (2004) said empowerment is one of the guiding principles for trauma treatment not only for Herman but for all with a feminist approach. She also said understanding connection with the wider world may lead to more of a felt sense of empowerment. Starhawk (1988), in her book *Dreaming the Dark,* said it is a forgetting of our innate belonging in a connected, living

web that has cut us off from our power. She said, “Because we doubt our own content, we doubt the evidence of our senses and the lessons of our own experience” (p. 7). It would follow then, that by knowing one’s “content”, which includes having a felt sense of inclusion in a web of life and brilliant nature, one can better access one’s own resiliency and resources, a key component to recovery. This, along with studies that have demonstrated some improvement in areas of self-esteem and empowerment after participation in nature-based programming (Kam & Siu, 2010; Silva, 2018; Son et al, 2004; Vujcic, et al, 2017), points to the notion that knowing one’s “true nature,” as being a part of the natural world, can be supportive in recovery and mental health (Kam & Siu, 2010; Sahlin, et al, 2012; Silva et al, 2018).

In addition, Starhawk (1988) asserted that recognizing the natural world as alive and interconnected can help shift underlying power dynamics. She argued that without a connection to nature, the world can be seen as made up of separate and nonliving parts with no innate value. "Among things inherently separate and lifeless, the only power relationships possible are those of manipulation and domination” (p. 5). She said this applied to humans’ attempts at domination of the planet, but also of one another. Along these lines, Sherri Mitchell (2018), or Weh’na Ha’mu Kwasset, born and raised on the Penobscot Indian Reservation wrote about how the “myth of separation,” which parts from indigenous views of humans as part of an interconnected web, supports the power structures that have been created. She said, “When we forget this truth, and embrace the lie, it becomes possible for us to be at war with one another, and to be at war within ourselves” (p. 46). Both authors wrote about the connections between the false idea that humans are separate from the natural world, and the perpetuation of oppression, both internalized and imposed. They made the case that coming back into connection with the planet can, over

time, help interrupt some dynamics that create trauma and marginalization in the first place as well as support people in recognizing and rooting out ways they have been internalized.

Nature as Part of a Healing Relationship

Nature as therapist. As discussed, Herman (1997) stated that recovery from trauma requires the presence of a healing relationship, of which the therapeutic relationship is a major part. Given this, inviting nature in not only as inanimate resource or metaphor, but instead coming from more of a relational angle, the possibilities and therapeutic benefit may also increase. Hasbach, said ecotherapy can be seen as a tool for therapists, but they should know how to incorporate it effectively (Phillips, 2018). She emphasized nature is not just a beautiful backdrop, but can be an active agent in the therapeutic process, essentially as a co-therapist.

In writing about using horticultural therapy in trauma recovery, Joanna Wise referenced studies that showed "The vital role of attachment in complex trauma is increasingly recognized" and that "bringing our authentic selves as therapists is essential for repairing attachment bonds that have been broken or damaged due to trauma" (Haller, Kennedy & Capra, 2019, p. 134). In recent years, several people have begun drawing parallels between theories of attachment with the human mother and attachment with mother earth (Beauvais, 2012; Jordan, 2009). Their work, along with Wise's research supports the case for the idea that fostering a felt connection with nature can increase the potential for trauma recovery.

Ronen Berger (2006, 2017) has presented a similar concept while describing the approach he developed called Nature Therapy. He also acknowledged a similarity between the artwork in art therapy representing a third medium but said it is different because "nature is a living, independent entity that gives this triangular relationship a unique meaning … nature plays an active role and has a dynamic life of its own" (Berger, 2017, p. 6).

Some believe the more-than-human world is actually the primary therapist. For example, the founder of the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs (2018), M. Amos Clifford has said, "The forest is the therapist. The guide opens the doors." Ecotherapist John Scull (2009) suggested helping people follow the three steps of preparation, experience, and debriefing, but beyond that, advised therapists to allow people to make their own discoveries and relate them to their lives. He said he found this to be "astoundingly effective" (p. 148). In this way, there are parallels to the way that expressive arts therapists are taught to "trust the process" of art making (McNiff, 1998), showing another tie between expressive arts therapy and nature connection in therapy, and an example of why bringing them together is a natural fit.

From therapist to kin. Differentiating the role of the natural world from material and metaphor to a relationship, such as primary- or co-therapist, is important in the type of work I am describing in this paper. However, to come into even closer connection, one could go a step further and see nature as friend and family, as kin. There are a few reasons this could be beneficial. First, though not the intent, calling nature a co-therapist runs the risk of anthropomorphizing. Furthermore, as therapists, we choose the role willingly and consciously engage clients from that role which, arguably, nature would not be doing in this context. In striving for right relationship on all levels, this feels like a potentially important distinction.

In addition, though a therapist can play a key role in a person's recovery and care a great deal about their clients, they are expected to maintain professional boundaries, to avoid too much intimacy. They are not meant to form a loving or familial bond, the relationship is not meant to be fully reciprocal, and there is a termination point. Part of the healing aspect of connecting with nature that I have laid out here, however, is the potential for reciprocity, perpetuity, kinship, and love. Many ecotherapists speak of *biophilia*. Larson (2018) quotes Wilson who defined it as

humans' "innate urge to affiliate with other forms of life and lifelike processes" (p. 4). Again, if we take Herman's assertion that wounds made relationally must be healed relationally, feeling kinship and perpetual belonging with the more-than-human world may be particularly helpful for those who have experienced marginalization, and or trauma, or disturbances in attachments.

Whether as co-therapist, primary therapist, or kin, the literature suggests that the more-than-human world can be an effective part of a healing relationship, which has been established as a key component for all stages of Herman's trauma recovery framework.

Integrating Nature into the Stages of Recovery

The elements of empowerment and the healing relationship are components that Herman (1997) said should infuse every stage of recovery. From there, the work of safety and stabilization must take place before any other work can be done. Beyond that, however, Herman stated that "No single course of recovery follows these stages through a straightforward linear sequence" (p. 155). In line with this, the ways nature connection can be incorporated does not fall strictly in one stage or another. For example, much of what was established in discussion around nature connection as a healing relationship, could also be a part of stage one and stage three. For this reason, I will be separating this section by relevant themes rather than the stages. This list is by no means exhaustive, but a taste how this work can connect. The themes are also common components of expressive arts therapy. This highlights ways in which this work can weave together well and that expressive arts therapists, already trained in these concepts, may be able to facilitate this work in combination with other modalities.

Sensory and awareness activities. Given that trauma disrupts a person's sense of the here and now, cultivating the ability to be in the present moment is vital to recovery. Many ecotherapists engage their clients with sensory activities outside or with natural materials in their

offices (Annerstedt & Wahrborg, 2011; Kamitsis and Simmonds, 2017; Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009; Haller, Kennedy & Capra, 2019), which can increase awareness and presence. Wise cited research showing that activities used in horticultural therapy such as "Repeated, simple, and familiar actions such as walking, digging, pruning, and potting up, when carried out mindfully, engage all the senses in the present moment, calm and regulate our nervous system, and may help us to process traumatic memories" (Haller, Kennedy & Capra, 2019, p. 135). Though these activities are not always explicitly about developing a felt relationship with nature and instead focus more on nature as material, this research demonstrates a way that some ecotherapies can contribute to trauma recovery and makes a case for incorporating sensory activities into nature connection to enhance the benefits, especially for people who have experienced trauma.

In their interview about "Reclaiming Wild Safe Space," Pinar and So Sinopoulos-Lloyd of Queer Nature, an organization that facilitates nature-connection and ancestral skills for LGBTQ2IA+ and non-binary people and their allies, said that survivors of trauma and marginalization have developed some of the instincts needed in wilderness skills such as acute awareness or sensory cues, which sometimes manifest as hypervigilance (Young, 2018). They said by engaging in activities such as wildlife tracking, these people can put those skills to use by directing them not towards detecting danger, but towards being curious about, and coming closer to, non-human kin. They said paying attention and tracking, whether it be animal footprints or birdsong, can be regulating to the nervous system (Young, 2018). An added benefit is a sense of not being alone in the world, which has been established as supportive to recovery as well.

Sensory and awareness activities could contribute to all stages, as they can be grounding and regulating, promote integration, and may also foster a sense of reconnection. When the

natural world is involved not only as inanimate material but as an active agent, as co-therapist or kin as laid out above, the impact should be greater.

Embodiment and belonging. Sensory and awareness activities and skills can be a part of embodiment, which is a key component of trauma recovery and the opposite of dissociation, which is so often a symptom and survival mechanism for people who have experienced trauma. Burstow (2003) wrote, "Trauma befalls *embodied* individuals, and even when there is no explicit assault on the body, people become alienated from their bodies in some respect" (p. 1302). Somatic therapist Christine Caldwell (1996) said, "Being in the moment creates direct experience. Direct experience puts us in touch with our aliveness, with the accurate perception of being in the world and of the world. Being in the here and now awakens us to knowledge of the vibrant, pulsing body in which we live and move" (Caldwell, p. 21). Similarly, renowned trauma psychiatrist and researcher Bessel van der Kolk has said that in order to recover from trauma, people need to feel their aliveness, their "substance" (Tippett, 2017).

This type of embodiment could also be seen as watering seeds of empowerment. Alta Starr of BOLD (Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity), said as people come more into their aliveness, they come more into their authority. Through this, emotional stamina grows and they are able to go on in the face of challenge (generative somatics, 2017). Similarly, van der Kolk's idea of "substance" (Tippett, 2017) could tie to Starhawk's (1988) assertion that knowing one's "content" is an important part of empowerment, recovery, and shifting power dynamics.

Experiences and practices of embodiment can be linked to all stages of recovery, though perhaps particularly two and three. It should be noted that, since dissociation is often a safety mechanism for people who have experienced trauma, coming back into the body can be frightening for many. For this reason, it is important to return to stage one whenever necessary.

Many see an important connection between embodiment and a felt sense of interconnection and relationship with nature (Bauer, 2008; Bull, 2012; Burns, 2007; Beauvais, 2012; Macy & Brown, 2014; Wasson, 2005). Wasson (2005) said "Our bodies are the closest contact we have with nature. Our bodies are nature. They obey the laws of nature" (p. 12). Therefore, coming into relationship with the natural world in a way that recognizes humans as part of it, may contribute to restoring relationship with the body. Also, Bauer (2008), of the field of ecosomatics said, "As we come to recognize that our very breath, bones, and fluids are in fact parts of the natural world around us, we realize our deep interconnection with one another" (p. 9). This contributes to a sense of belonging, which supports trauma healing and resilience.

Burns (2011), proposed that "embodiment also involves cultivating a somatic awareness of embedment, of being in and living through embodied reciprocity" with the natural world and that "we know our human bodies only in relation to other bodies and that these others include the more-than-human" (p. 40). Hasbach has noticed that when her clients feel a sense of belonging to something bigger, this aids them in embodiment (Phillips, 2018). With the goals of fostering embodiment, embedment, and an ecological self through relationship with the natural world, practitioners have incorporated activities such as Authentic Movement (Bull, 2007), mirroring (Wasson, 2005), and meditation (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009; Macy & Brown, 2014). Abram (2010) wrote,

> Owning up to being an animal, a creature of the earth. Tuning our animal senses to the sensible terrain: blending our skin with the rain-rippled surface of rivers, mingling our ears with the thunder and the thrumming of frogs, and our eyes with the molten gray sky. Feeling the polyrhythmic pulse of this place – this huge windswept body of water and

> stone. This vexed being in whose flesh we're entangled. Becoming earth. Becoming animal. Becoming in this matter, fully human. (p. 3)

This suggests that embodiment through connection with nature could also support processes of merging and differentiating, which Pallaro named as important to forming and maintaining secure relationships (Pierce, 2014; Wyman-McGinty, 2007) and which Pierce (2014) linked to stage three of trauma recovery. Being able to merge and differentiate means a person has developed a sense of self as well as a capacity to enter into relationship with others.

Feeling an embodied sense of ecological self, or a sense of merging, may impact one's sense of belonging. Deep ecologist John Seed said "When humans investigate and see through their layers of anthropocentric self-cherishing, a most profound change in consciousness begins to take place. Alienation subsides. The human is no longer a stranger, apart" (Macy & Brown, 2014, p. 44). For people who have experienced marginalization or trauma, that could be huge.

Witnessing and being witnessed. Herman (1997) told us that being witnessed is an important component of a person's trauma healing journey. With all of themes listed here, there are not clear separations between them and they tend to influence each other. For example, some ways that embodiment and witnessing are often combined is through Authentic Movement as well as mirroring. Wasson (2005), for example, invites people to find something in nature and move with it, move like it, and allow themselves to be witnessed by it, and to notice what shifts in their emotions and relationship to self and other. The acts of both witnessing and being witnessed can be profound. Atkins and Snyder (2018), authors of *Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy: Integrating the Expressive Arts and Ecotherapy* wrote, "We acknowledge that the world is alive and that, in the words of author and artist Paulus Berensohn (2001), 'Whatever we

touch is touching us'" (p. 56). Mirroring also brings in the concept of mirror neurons, and potential for our interpersonal neurobiology to aid in regulation and resilience (Siegel, 2006).

> In all the wilderness skills they teach, from carving spoons, to tracking, or building fires, So Sinopoulos-Lloyd of Queer Nature told Ayana Young (2018), host of the podcast *For the Wild*, "It's all grounded in listening … and witnessing". They said, "This newer and also indigenous, which is very old, view of ecology is that it's made up not just of elements but relationships and relationships are actually the core" (Young, 2018). Ecologist, ethnobotanist, and writer of European and Anishinaabe ancestry, Robin Wall Kimmerer has said Western science asks us to learn *about* organisms while traditional knowledge asks us to learn *from* them, a big distinction in relational orientation (Tonino, 2016).

Because of this, Sinopoulos-Lloyd said the advice they give to people wanting to connect to nature, including in cities is to choose a spot, visit it regularly, and just listen. They have said they see this as having great overlaps with trauma work and trauma studies because "so much is about listening and witnessing, and being witnessed and being listened to" (Young, 2018). Herman (1997) has said that many people benefit from being able to contribute to others as well, which suggests that offering reciprocity in deeply witnessing non-human kin may also support a person in their healing journey, something Sinopoulos-Lloyd also suggests.

Ecotherapists Lane K. Conn and Sarah A. Conn (2009) suggested something similar, asking people to "be chosen by" a "natural being" who is part of the landscape of their daily life and to develop a relationship by spending time with that being daily (p. 113). They said the "challenges and benefits reported by students and clients where they engage in this exercise are very powerful" (p. 113). To support their clients in building this relationship, they facilitate the

process of "opening to the other". "To 'open to the other' fully, you are asked to put aside your normal ways of relating to other, both human and non-human, and prepare to know yourself as part of other life forms" (p. 112). This begins by slowing down and stepping back from one's typical way of interacting with the world. "In order to open yourself to the direct experience of another being, you must shift from a precipitating to a participating mode of interaction, from making it happen to sharing in the happening" (p. 113). They suggested shifting to seeing rather than looking, hearing instead of listening, and being touched rather than touching.

Conn & Conn's approach of "opening to the other" could have far-reaching benefits if this way of listening extends into other areas of a person's life.

> To have the other as a guest in your house of consciousness requires that you attend to the others' expression of itself. To do this you must let go of the words and stories you have for the other. The words are mere symbols, not the actual expression itself … Instead of throwing out a net of words to capture the other, you open yourself and let the other reveal itself to you in its own way. (p. 112).

This could be particularly supportive for a person who has experienced trauma, whose stories have been judged or discarded, or a person who has been continuously defined and degraded by society based on a demographic profile. Developing this type of listening, and the potential to listen to themselves or be listened to in that way by another being – human nor non-human – could be very healing. It may be part of the "socially meaningful testimony" that Herman (1997) says is essential to stage two while providing opportunities for reconnection with self and the outside world, stage three (p. 184).

This practice invites relationship that moves from names and labels to paying close attention with patience and the desire to learn with, rather than to define. Therefore, it may help

with integration, which involves regaining a sense of self beyond the trauma which has ties to stages two and three.

Reconnecting with fellow humans. Elements of reconnecting have been woven through the themes thus far, primarily with non-human kin. However, there is some writing specifically about how connecting with the non-human can foster the ability to connect with humans as well.

Establishing safety, which can be done at least in part through nature connection practices, opens doors for further connection. Wise, in Heller, Kennedy & Capra (2019), said horticulture therapy can play a role in this. She said once people feel safer, they can relax more and allow their attention to be more engaged with the fascinations of the natural world. She said they "are also likely to feel more open toward engaging with other friendly animals, such dogs or horses, and with other friendly humans, thus helping to reduce the isolation and loneliness that frequently accompany trauma" (Heller, Kennedy & Capra, 2019, p. 135). According to Stone Rice, research suggests "Horticultural therapy may affect a participant's … capacity for attachment. Cultivating plants introduces a relationship that may feel less threatening and therefore may evoke the experience of safety" (Heller, Kennedy & Capra, p. 134).

Wise cited research by Bratman et al., Corbett and Milton, and Pretty et al., that showed that "experience of caring human contact and trusted connections can gradually be introduced and enjoyed" through nature-based work (Heller, Kennedy & Capra, p. 135). More importantly, citing research by both Jordan and Milton, she said the three-way connection offered by bringing nature into therapeutic work adds "the possibility of transitioning … toward more secure and healthy attachments involving restoration, renewal, and resourcing" (p. 135). She continued, saying, "a more integrated and broader experience of recovery awaits, involving reciprocal

healing relationships not simply between individual client and therapist but also potentially with our wider community, society, and ultimately our world. (p. 135)

Horticultural therapy is just one mode of nature-based work but it has been one of the most studied and many of the results suggest that other nature-based work may have similar effects. Herman (1997) said, healing from trauma must happen through relationship and that "The restoration of social bonds begins with the discovery that one is not alone" (p. 215). The literature shows that it is possible for humans to wake up from the myth of separation and to once again feel a sense of belonging. It could be argued that this is best done through embodied practices. Beauvais (2012) said "To believe one is part of nature is one thing, but to know it in one's blood, bones, and organs may be the impetus that inspires us to more creative solutions" (p. 279). This may be, as Abram (2010) suggested, part of becoming human.

In the next section I briefly describe the some of the reasons why expressive arts therapy may be uniquely poised to foster this felt relationship with nature.

Drawing Closer / Moving In: Using Expressive Arts Therapy in Nature Connection

In previous sections, I reviewed literature on theoretical and practical applications of nature-based approaches in therapy and named "level two" ecotherapies as preferable due to their relationship orientation. I then looked at the importance of relationship and connection for humans, particularly in recovery from trauma, and outlined Herman's (1997) stages of recovery. I have just given examples of fostering a felt connection and relationship with the more-than-human world and how it can relate to Herman's framework. I now very briefly introduce some reasons why expressive arts therapy, and those trained in it, may be particularly helpful in fostering a felt connection with nature, which I have demonstrated through the literature may be supportive to those who have experienced trauma or marginalization.

Some elements of expressive arts therapy have already been named briefly in this paper, such as resonance and trusting the process. Elements of sensory experience and embodiment are also often present in the work of expressive arts therapists (Donahue, Halprin, 2003; Knill, Levine & Levine, 2004). The field of ecosomatics, which draws on body-based creative arts has also been mentioned. Expressive arts therapy, while under the umbrella of creative arts therapies and involving many different art practices, has its own theories and approaches (Donahue, 2011; Estrella, 2005; Knill, Levine & Levine, 2004) that may be particularly relevant to the topic of this paper. Much of the theoretical underpinnings of expressive arts therapy come from the belief that words cannot reach all places and that the creative arts offer gateways for people to better access, understand, and be in relationship with themselves, their experiences, and others (Halprin, 2003; Kellen-Taylor, 1998; Knill, Levine, & Levine, 2005; Kossak, 2015; McNiff, 1999, 2007, 2009, 2017; Rogers, 1993). Given that much of nature does not communicate verbally, expressive arts therapy practices can support people in honing non-verbal "listening" and therefore may enhance their ability to foster connections with the more-than-human world. In addition to what has been named already, of particular interest are the intermodal art process, attunement and entrainment, and a relational approach to the arts.

Intermodal Art Process

Intermodal theory is a key component of expressive arts therapy. It emphasizes "the sensory and somatic ways each art discipline communicates to the psyche" (Donahue, 2011, p. 498). Kossak, has likened intermodal transfer, the act of moving from one art form to another, to translating the work among languages (Kossak, personal communication, September, 12, 2017). With each translation, the relationship deepens, and a bit more is learned or felt. Estrella (2005) quoted Shaun McNiff, one of the founders of the field, as

saying his commitment to this integrative approach was rooted in the belief that "art by its nature includes everything imaginable" (p. 195). This could be very useful when applied to attempts to connect with the natural world, integrating various arts modalities to find the best way to establish communication and felt connection with the natural world as well as further the conversation begun by any of the approaches named in the nature connection section of this literature review.

In her article *Imagination and the World: A Call for Ecological Expressive Arts Therapy,* Maureen Kellen-Taylor (1998) wrote that it was through her arts practice she began to see the world as interconnected relationships. She wrote, "No longer a collection of discrete things and people, I saw how I inhabit a pattern that includes everything. The joy of knowing that there was nowhere to fall out of, that all is connected" (p. 304). She said "Art hones our abilities to perceive and reconfigure unusual and dynamic patterns, associations and connections. Making art implies travel amongst the realms of the sensuous and the intellectual, the abstract and the material, the spiritual and the mundane" (p. 304). The expressive arts can facilitate movement between cognitive and embodied experiences, aiding in integration of experience, insight, and modes of being and knowing (Hinz, 2009), which also lends itself well to both nature connection and trauma recovery.

Attunement and Entrainment

Kossak (2009, 2015) writes about the importance and power of attunement and entrainment in expressive arts therapy. Both are elements of experiencing connection and oneness, which he has said can be with any other being, not only humans. Entrainment, he said, is to "sympathetically resonate with a rhythmic flow of energies" and it "can create moments of a felt inner sense of deep shared connectivity or merging in the moment" (2009,

p.16). Writing about its use in music therapy, Kim, Gabel, Aguilar-Raab, Hillecke, and Warth (2018) said, "Entrainment refers to the process in which two rhythmic events interact, so that they adapt to one another and eventually merge into a common phase" (p. 49). These processes could be useful in nature connection by helping people attune to the natural world as they might to rhythm or other art-making, facilitating connection and more conversation with the more-than-human. Fostering entrainment with elements of the natural world, allowing one's rhythms to merge with that of the ocean, a calm breeze, or a sturdy tree, for example, could also have wide reaching affects.

Relational Approach

Atkins and Snyder (2018), authors of *Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy,* have drawn many parallels between expressive arts therapy and ecotherapy in theory and practice. They named relational presence as basic to expressive arts therapy because the approach is based on a process orientation to the work and life, and see that as having parallels to systems theory. "From this perspective, everything, even the things we name as things, such as a tree or our body, is actually a system of layers within layers of interrelating processes" (p. 117). As mentioned, McNiff (1998) sees trusting the process as key to expressive arts therapy. He has also made the case for continuing to cultivate presence to what is emerging through that process and resist the urge to jump to definition (2007), a process modeled after Jung's active imagination (Donahue, 2011). Donahue (2011) wrote "Images are the chief language in expressive arts processes. They have their own intelligence and communicate sensory and somatic experiences" (p. 498). It could be argued that this orientation lends itself to the "opening to the other" that Conn and Conn (2009) described. In fact, McNiff (2007) has said that the practice of imaginal dialogue, often employed in expressive arts therapy, can be part of developing a "sensitivity to otherness" (p.

242). In nature-based expressive arts therapy, "the concept of presence is expanded to include a respect for the deep intelligence woven into all living beings" (Atkins & Snyder, 2018, p. 117).

McNiff (2007) told us to approach the images as if it is someone we would really like to meet, offering them patience and time to speak. This suggests that engaging in expressive arts therapy practices such as this could support people in relating to the more-than-human world in similar ways. It could create an environment in which people connect and get curious, rather than jump to definitions. It could provide ways to break out of seeing the world as inanimate or just a backdrop to human interactions and begin to dispel the myth of separation. With that, the possibilities of witnessing and being witnessed are greater, as is the possibility of a felt sense of interconnection and the potential to feel a sense of attachment with the more-than-human world.

Atkins and Snyder (2108) shared archetypal psychologist James Hillman's views, saying, "Our capacity to respond to the world is an ability of the heart, closely linked to our own imagination. [Hillman] stresses both the importance of the imaginative response of the heart and the bodily response of the senses in engaging the animus mundi, the world soul or the world ensouled … The imagining heart enables us to experience depth, beauty, love and soul in ways that go beyond words" (pp. 71-72). I believe this speaks to why nature connection and the expressive arts can enhance each other. Expressive arts therapy combines imagination, with practices that are nonverbal, embodied, and relational, all aspects that the literature shows are integral to both nature connection and trauma recovery.

Discussion

This paper reviewed literature on nature-based approaches with a particular focus on those that foster a relationship between humans and the more-than-human world, locating them back in a felt sense of belonging to a wider web of life. Trauma literature was reviewed as well,

with a particular focus on Herman's (1997) trauma recovery framework and the relational components of healing. The literature demonstrated the importance of relationships in healing wounds that were made relationally, such as in the case of trauma and marginalization, and made the case for nature to be one of those relationships. The literature shows there are many people using nature connection in ways that promote trauma recovery and also that, even when that may not be the intention, some foundational practices could be used to that end. A few basic principles and practices of expressive arts therapy that could be interwoven to support and deepen the connection with the more-than-human world were also reviewed.

I came to this literature review already having a personal and experiential sense of the potential in weaving together nature connection, expressive arts therapy, and trauma work. I wanted to do this review to ground those senses in research and provide more of a basis for this work going forward. I also wanted to highlight a particular orientation to nature-based work, including striving for right relationship with the natural world as well as bringing a trauma-informed and anti-oppressive lens.

In my research, I found that though there were a variety of studies demonstrating the mental and physical health benefits of being in nature, as well as promising programs using natural materials, there were very few that spoke to the explicit goal of facilitating a felt sense of connection, interconnection, or kinship with the natural world. I found a few scales to measure "nature connectedness" (Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Schultz, 2002), but they did not seem quite right to me as a valid measure for various reasons. Admittedly, the lack of research could be due in part to the fact that it is difficult to measure, but I believe there are ways of doing so and that the field could benefit from more research in this area. In addition, many of the programs I read about did not fit the "level two" ecotherapy requirements of being in reciprocal relationship, or at

least did not articulate this orientation as a part of their method. Even if evidence-based research proves difficult to accomplish, I would argue the need for more writing and programs coming from these frameworks, as the literature I reviewed here underscores their value and importance, especially when working with people who have experienced trauma, including marginalization.

In addition to more formal research, I would like to be in more conversation about these ideas with more people who have experienced trauma and marginalization. I shared a bit of my own story but I am only one person and, though I have various intersecting identities and experiences, many of them are privileged. Though I have spoken with several other people about these ideas, I would like to discuss them with a larger amount of people of varying backgrounds, identities, and experiences to gather feedback and generate discussion.

Along with this, though the scope of this paper did not allow for much in-depth discussion, I believe that those of us who are not of indigenous heritage need to make sure to be working towards "unsettling" (Jones & Segal, 2018) in all of our work, but perhaps particularly in nature-based approaches. We must also work to incorporate more diversity of all kinds into our therapeutic programs, training programs, and academic discourses. This also means efforts to be as accessible as possible on that front. In terms of therapeutic programs and individual therapy, it is not enough, however, to include people of diverse backgrounds. As practitioners of intersecting identities, we need to work to be as informed and skillful as possible in supporting people who hold identities that are different than ours, particularly in relation to marginality. In fact, since the feminist view of trauma includes marginalization, if we are to be truly trauma-informed in our therapeutic practices, then being anti-oppressive is a part of that.

I believe the theoretical and practical approaches discussed in this paper can benefit both those in the expressive arts therapy field interested in trauma treatment and nature-based

approaches, and those who work primarily in the fields of nature connection and ecotherapy. As the field of expressive arts therapy continues to evolve, and nature-based expressive arts therapy emerges more fully, I hope the ideas and practices discussed here will be taken into account. Including the value of a reciprocal versus extractive relationship with nature, and a move towards including nature as kin rather than only material. As a result of this work, I have also begun conversations with several people to incorporate the expressive arts into existing nature connection programing and have been invited into emerging conversations around trauma-informed nature connection. I believe that these fields have much to gain from each other.

In further practical applications, I have recently started a 10-week trauma-informed nature-based expressive arts therapy group at my internship site, an outpatient community mental health clinic in a basement with little access to green space. The group focuses loosely on the theme of connection and exploring these practices for improved mental health. Thus far, participants have voiced benefits from the program and I have been able to incorporate and foster nature connection even though we are mostly confined to a basement. Discussion of this exceeds the scope of this paper but I am open to contact and further discussion about these ideas and practices. The research in this review has informed my design and implementation of the group and will continue to shape my future programs, as well as therapy with individuals. I believe there is great potential in this work and am excited to see what emerges in the coming years.

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