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Watering Black Roots: Exploring Black Ecological Identity Development within Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Expressive Therapies Division

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Kellogg

Watering Black Roots:
Exploring Black Ecological Identity Development
within Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy
Literature Review
Lesley University

May 17, 2019

Stormy Saint-Val

Expressive Arts Therapy

Dr. Elizabeth Kellogg

Abstract

Nature-based expressive arts therapy promotes the holistic healing and recovery of individuals by interweaving the practices of ecopsychology, ecotherapy, and expressive arts therapy. These interventions have been proven to mediate ranges of symptomologies, such as anxiety disorders and PTSD. Research conducted by the U.S. National Park Services indicates that African-Americans are less likely to have a positive relationship to nature than all other racial groups. The amplification of this report without introspection of its context perpetuates racialized generalizations. This can limit a black individual's ability to embrace their ecological identity and be receptive of nature-based expressive arts therapy interventions. Autoethnography and literature review rooted in eco-critical race feminism perspectives are instruments the author utilizes to develop research analyzing the patterns of social, cultural, and political experiences that impact African-Americans and their collective relationship to nature. Since recovery requires remembrance and mourning (Herman, 1992), the author addresses the importance for African-Americans to process ecological grief. As nature-based expressive arts therapy continues to evolve, the significance for clinicians in this field to acquire oppositional gaze, a habit of critically assessing how white supremacy implicitly and explicitly influences their relationships to African-American clients is explored within this research. The benefits of centralizing diverse representation in nature-based research and uplifting the stories of African-Americans who display their enchantment with the eco-creative process are also highlighted. These topics are discussed within this literature review to advocate for the well-being of African-American clients and the collective conscious of America.

Watering Black Roots: Exploring Black Ecological Identity Development within Nature-Based
Expressive Arts Therapy

Introduction

Hiking Texas hills, drifting around a lake with my sunbathed body collapsed onto a floating tube, exchanging fake ghost stories around camp fires, and singing through the night with coyotes in the distance. These were moments I looked forward to every summer from the ages of twelve to sixteen. Over two hundred-fifty kids and I would travel on chaperoned charter buses to central Texas to spend a week at a Christian adventure camp. There was an undeclared promise that our worries would be diminished to avoiding ticks, poison oak, and sitting on cacti. My afflicted black body craved a break from the continual violence of environments that were supposed to keep me safe. When my introverted soul could no longer endure the scheduled social events the camp counselors produced, wandering between communities of trees was where I found solace. I had a yearly ritual of burying my letters of lamentations underneath oak trees and imagined their branches applauding my adolescent tenderness as the wind visited through. Nature provided so much wisdom and comfort to my transfiguring body.

Stepping back onto the sweltering pavements of Houston always felt difficult because there were limits to who I could share my experiences with and what I could share. My friends in my neighborhood thought the idea of dark skin black girls enjoying being out in the woods was shameful because “black people just don’t do that.” My black body would shrivel into a reclusive carapace in response to the continual rejection from those friends to at least try to go out into the woods with me. I couldn’t express my introspections with the friends who attended the camp with me, because hearing how their token black friend endured complex-trauma was too overwhelming for their sheltered ears. I kept my revelations in the pages of my journals and in

songs I wrote with a guitar I purchased with my first job at the age of fifteen. I would share them with the trees and plants who were so open to listen. This love remained private.

As I've gotten older, acquiring friends of color who publicly celebrate their love for nature and white friends who understand that there aren't any prerequisites for having a deep connection with the nature has been empowering. As I began embracing my ecological identity, I noticed myself integrating nature and creative arts at my internships during my undergraduate experience studying expressive arts therapy. I decided to intentionally pursue interweaving the interventions during graduate school. I acquired certifications in ecopsychology and ecotherapy to discover the integrated praxis of nature-based expressive arts therapy.

Experiencing rejection of nature-based expressive arts therapy interventions from African-American clients evoked countertransference. Their apprehensiveness transported me back in time to when I held my individuality with bewilderment. I would respond to "that's white people stuff" by completely negating the nature-based component of the interventions to avoid internal and interpersonal conflict. Exhausted of being dismissed, I decided to respond to an eleven-year-old client's resistance with openness. I asked her why she felt the way she did about this particular intervention and where she received such messages that made her feel like she wasn't allowed to feel comfortable connecting with nature because of the color of her skin. After we spent a few moments within the following sessions critically analyzing her environmental attitudes, the client expressed interest in integrating nature-based approaches to the expressive arts therapy interventions we had been engaging with in our previous sessions. Months later, the client's mother expressed to me how much the client's affect was improving. The mother continued to share that my client had been imagining nature imageries that she had

drew in previous sessions and using nature-themed breathing exercises as de-escalation techniques.

That outcome sparked a habit of investing in understanding resistances that some other black clients had towards the natural world. As I began including peers and friends of African-American descent into this dialogue, I began noticing themes from those who felt apprehensive about connecting with nature. The oppositions were tethered to oppressed imaginations populated by fragmentation of their ecological identity. bell hooks expressed in *earthbound* that, “to be fully free, one has to embrace the organic rights of the earth” (2009, p. 119).

This thesis aims to deconstruct research and literature to expose the social, cultural, and political factors that perpetuate stigmas disempowering black bodies to engage in their innate connection to the natural world.

This thesis is a celebration of the historical and current acts of eco-creative resilience of black bodies in opposition of the white gaze.

This thesis is a ceremony grieving severed connections between black bodies and nature caused by political and environmental violence.

This thesis is a liberation song for black bodies seeking to discover their enchantment of a requited bond with nature.

This thesis is a healing practice.

This thesis is an act of resistance.

Literature Review

Traditional academic paradigms position research largely within empirical, objective, rational, and Eurocentric forms of knowledge construction (Dickinson, 2012). Yet, the etymology of *research* is rooted in Old French for the process to seek out and in Latin for the

action to wonder or to go around (Etymonline.com, n.d.). Adapting this etymological perspective of research transformed the way I approached the exploration and discussion of this literature review. The barriers I encountered during the process of constructing this thesis are now perceived as emblems of my academic evolution. Research became a humbling practice of embodying the essence of a stream engaging its environment in the most creative and adaptive way uncovering and discovering truths. I encountered many obstacles during the process of collecting peer-reviewed content in Lesley's database about nature-based expressive arts therapy with African-American population, the history of environmental tragedy on black bodies, and ways African-Americans have historically illustrated resilient connections with ecology. Embodying the strategies of a stream resulted in realizing that I could access a wider collection of resource through the support of friends enrolled in different graduate programs around the country who have access to other academic databases. An abundance of literature and content arose to the surface like pebbles and fish, along with the realities of capitalism's influence on academic institutions. I will continue to structure the foundation of this thesis by clarifying essential terms, choice of theoretical lens, and the construction of nature-based expressive arts therapy.

African-American/Black. Centralizing black ecological identity in this thesis necessitates clarity on the use of *black* and *African-American*. Race and ethnicity are complex terms that are often used interchangeably. The expressions comprise one or more of the following: shared origins or social background; shared culture or tradition that are distinctive, maintained between generations, and lead to a sense of identity and group; and a common language or religious tradition (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005). While the term *African-American* has been used at least since the 1920s, it has been the preferred term in the

USA since the 1970s. *African-Americans* refers to descendants of persons brought to the Americas as slaves between the 17th and 19th century (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005). “Black is unrelated to ethnicity but used in the America as describing people of brown and black complexion with sub-Saharan African ancestral origin” (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005, p. 1015). Individuals within this cultural group may find that any or both terms are limiting descriptors and have used various other phrases. I acknowledge that many people who were captured from Africa and displaced in other countries prior to migrating to the United States choose various other terms to describe their ethnicity (e.g. Haitian-American or Jamaican-American). For the sake of this thesis, I will be usage of the lowercased “black” and capitalization within “African-American” interchangeably to honor the nuance and homogeneity of race and ethnicity.

Nature. The term *nature*, *natural spaces*, and *more than human world* will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis to include all living and non-living entities within the ecosystem, constructed and intrinsic (Grimwood, 2015). Nature ranges in scale from the subatomic to the cosmic entities. This refers back to ecopsychology’s concept that nature is not separate from humanity and vice versa. Andy Fisher states, “if we too are nature, then we may participate in the creativity, wisdom, and artfulness of life by developing confidence in our ability to work skillfully with the truth in our thick experiences” (2013, p. 172). *Wilderness* has been a term used in exchange for *nature*, but the development is widely regarded as a product constructed by Western culture to distinguish humanity (and the intersecting groups within) from preserved and generative environments (Grimwood, 2015; Wilderness Society, 2012). Since *wild* has also been a term historically used by white people to dehumanize African-Americans (Stanford, 2008), I have chosen to omit this word for the remainder of thesis.

The Merging Theoretical Lenses

The process of observing, exposing, and uplifting content within this thesis is defined as eco-critical race feminism, which integrates three interdisciplinary lenses: ecocriticism, critical race theory, and ecofeminism. Ecocriticism observes the relationship between ecology, culture, and humanity in literature because they all affect and are affected by one another. First-wave ecocriticism comprised of literature by predominately white men like Henry David Thoreau and Mark Twain, focused attention on how the introduction of new technological innovations had a drastic, often destructive impact on the natural world (Issitt, 2017). Second-wave ecocriticism highlights concerns and critiques of the environmental justice movement in its literary and cultural analysis. Attention was not just on untouched landscapes but on the places where people work, play, and live (Wald, 2016). Theories of second-wave ecocriticism are influenced by a long history of civil rights, anti-colonialism, labor rights activism, and environmental justice demands that promote equal access to environmental benefits for poor communities and communities of color (Wald, 2016). Critical race theory challenges believed myths, stories, legal rules, and institutional disposition of prestige and power perpetuated by white supremacy (Simba, 2019; Delgado, Richard & Stefanic, 2012; Pyle, 1999). Critical race theory is influenced by the work of scholars, law makers, and philosophers like W.E.B. DuBois, Martin Luther King Jr., and Sojourner Truth. Ecofeminism highlights that nature is superior to patriarchy while addressing how colonialism exploits and oppresses the relationship between humankind and nature. Ecofeminism highlights intersections of oppression (sexism, classism, speciesism, homophobia, etc.) as a means to understand and assess the complex relationship between humans and the natural world (King, 2017; Shiva & Miles, 2017).

The Integrative Therapeutic Practice

Expressive arts therapy and ecotherapy are independent disciplines of psychology that are emerging in different forms around the world. Each approach is rooted in philosophical, cultural/historical, and clinical models to support the healing and recovery of the whole self—body, mind, emotions, spirit, and soul. In this section I will briefly review how these elements shape the theoretical framework of nature-based expressive arts therapy.

Expressive Arts Therapy. Expressive Arts Therapy is a multimodal intervention within psychotherapy developed in the 1970s (Estrella, 2005) that infuses creative arts and somatic practices. This includes dance, music, drama, poetry, symbol, imagery, storytelling, visual arts, and other creative forms. Therapists in this field at times may transition from one modality to another within each therapeutic encounter, integrate approaches simultaneously, or carefully facilitate modalities sequentially (Estrella, 2005). Theoretical principles and clinical applications are continually emerging under the umbrella of expressive arts therapy to provide the most appropriate healing services for all unique populations (Estrella, 2011; Drake-Burnette & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Richardson, 2016). Expressive arts therapists recognize that participation in creative healing practices engages affective, imaginal, cognitive, and somatic processes simultaneously for interpersonal, intrapersonal, and transpersonal functions (Estrella, 2005).

Ecopsychology. Principles of ecopsychology began explicitly developing in the 1990s when Theodore Roszak (1992) wrote *Voice of the Earth*. His work has inspired many theorists, practitioners, and researchers to contribute to defining the meanings and objectives of ecopsychology. Ecopsychology movement officially emerged during the 1960s (Smith, 2010) along with the feminist, social justice, and other environmental justice movements. Ecofeminism

(King, 2017; Shiva & Mies, 2014), deep ecology, ecowomanism (Harris, 2016), radical psychology (Fisher, 2013), spiritual ecology (Macy & Brown, 1998), queer ecology (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2010), and transpersonal psychology (Friedman & Hartelius, 2015; Davis & Canty, 2013) are some disciplines that have branched out of ecopsychology. Ecopsychology focuses attention on developing psychotherapeutic and educational thinking and practices aligned with the values of the natural world and fostering lifestyles that are both ecologically and psychologically healthy (Esbjörn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009). Ecopsychology presents two images for the relationship between humans and nature:

- (a) nature as home and its inhabitants as family (e.g., siblings or Mother Earth) and (b) nature as self, in which self-identifications are broadened and deepened to include the non-human world. These views stand in contrast to views that nature is dangerous and needs to be controlled and dominated or that nature is (merely) a useful resource to be exploited, protected, conserved, or stewarded (Friedman & Hartelius, 2015, p. 600).

Ecotherapy. Ecotherapy is a form of applied ecopsychology, with the process of forming a relationship with nature having two aspects:

- (a) a passive connecting with the aesthetic beauty of natural environments that in themselves become places of healing, and (b) a more active engagement in which therapy is conducted using the resources of the natural environment, as in green exercise, wilderness therapy, horticultural therapy, and animal-assisted therapy (Ilias & Simmonds, 2017, p. 230).

There is a substantial body of research suggesting that both passive participation and active forms of ecotherapy can support cognition, emotion, and physiology like alleviate anxiety, depression (Annerstedt & Wahrborg, 2011; Kam & Siu, 2010; Sahlin, et al, 2014), stress (Kam

and Siu 2010, Park, et al, 2010), improve self-esteem (Harvey, 2016) attentional capacity (Duvall 2011; Kaplan, 1995), and other restorative effects (Hartig, Mang, & Evans, 1991; Sahlin et al, 2014). As nature is perceived as kin, professionals in ecotherapy can practice at two levels. The first level incorporates using nature for anthropocentric reasons such as psychological, physical, or spiritual development (Jordan & Hinds, 2016; Kam & Siu, 2010; Groenewegen, et al 2006; Sahlin, et al., 2014). This level is an accessible practice to facilitate and engage in. The limitation of the first level is that it can perpetuate an extractive mindset, rather than a reciprocal experience. Level two ecotherapists guide people to develop a sense of their ecological self in relationship to the whole planet because the bond between humans and nature is interdependently reciprocal (Jordan & Hinds, 2016).

Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy. The integration of ecotherapy, ecopsychology, and expressive arts therapy is referred to by Atkins and Snyder (2018) as nature-based expressive arts therapy. This discipline emphasizes that art is a birthright that links the patterns and rhythms of nature to human imagination, intuition, and physical bodies through reciprocity between the human and more-than-human world (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). Utilizing nature as medicine advocates for humanity's capacity to respond to change or disturbance in a way that resists damage and promotes recovery. The engagement in creative expression provides clarity and resolution for an individual's transformation, however an individual's environment dictates the efficacy of their therapeutic revelation. Ranges of this integrated experience may look like collecting pieces of nature during hiking trails to create mandalas, ecosomatics, sand tray play therapy, ecopoetry, nature imagery, pottery, and painting scenic landscapes.

Examining Black-Ecological Narratives

Discussion of the merging theoretical lenses, essential terms, and construction of nature-based expressive arts therapy enables the thorough conception of this literature review continuing forth. Researchers from The U.S. National Park Service have reported that African-Americans engage with nature substantially lower than every other racial/ethnic group in the United States (Gramann, J.H., Grandjean, B.D., Taylor, P.A., 2011). Outdoor industries, environmental movements, outdoor educators, ecotherapists, and other professionals in nature-based field use this information to rationalize maintaining lack of multicultural sensitivity or racial inclusivity in the development and structure of their programs and policy making. The research outcome also fuels the sociocultural construction of who belongs in natural spaces. In this section, I will explore how historical and current acts of environmental racism on African-American communities can negatively influence environmental attitudes. The construct of environmental attitudes refers to the collection of beliefs, affect, and behavioral intentions a person holds regarding environmentally related activities or issues (Schultz, P.W., Shriver, C, et al, 2004; Parker & McDonough, 1999). I will also examine conducted research that effectively includes the context of race/ethnicity to display its ability to positively impact black ecological identity.

Chronicles of Environmental Racism

“As we travel from Ferguson, Missouri, to Wall Street, to the Middle Passage, to Oakland, California, we will uncover the intertwined legacy of environmental degradation and human exploitation”, expressed M.P. Pavel and Carl Anthony (2015, p. 252). Deportation, incarceration, gentrification, toxic waste emission in low income communities, and police brutality are included in the historical and modern environmental issues that target black lives in

America. A ten-year-old client who attending my group therapy sessions at an after-school program I worked at once expressed, “there’s no nature out here” when I invited him and the rest of the group members to go on a nature walk around their community. American conceptions of the natural environment have shifted over time, influenced by social and political processes, reflecting ideas about culture and nation (Finney, 2014). It is difficult for an individual to perceive nature within in their community if that individual is socialized to associate their environment as anything but a natural space.

In a dialogue between two prominent ecopsychologists on the topic of *Environmentalism and the Mystique of Whiteness*, Roszak pointed out the irony of the relationship between African-Americans and nature in America. He states,

Here are a people who were forcibly brought to this continent primarily to work on the land; they were bonded to the soil by violence as the society’s most basic farming population. Now in the late twentieth century we think of blacks almost exclusively as people of the city, of the inner city (Roszak, 1995, p. 4).

In agreement to Roszak’s statement, ecopsychologist Carl Anthony responds, “the process of human domination and the exploitation of nature occurred at exactly the same time” (Roszak, 1995, p. 4). Carl Anthony expounds on his statement by sharing the exploitive history of tobacco farming in Virginia:

At the point they realized that this one crop was a source of great potential wealth, they looked around for a labor force to cultivate the land. That’s when slavery began to develop and harden. So, you can see this pattern of lack of caring, a pattern of ruthless exploitation of the land coming precisely at the time of the institution of slavery. (Roszak, 1995, p. 5).

According to the Federal census, in 1790 approximately 700,000 slaves worked with rice, tobacco, and indigo. By 1850 the country had 3.2 million slaves (1.8 million of whom worked in cotton fields) and continued to increase year after year (Gates, 2019). After slavery was abolished, a total of six million African-Americans left the South to find refuge in cities in a movement known as The Great Migration (Gates, 2019). Carolyn Finney described a “psychological divorce” (2017, p. 59) from the environment occurred due to the amount of trauma that was experienced in captivity. Finney shares in her book *Black Faces, White Spaces* about research she conducted where nearly all the African-Americans that she interviewed collectively expressed feeling like the burdens of the past (i.e. slavery) influenced their beliefs and attitudes toward the natural environment (2017). She recalls one participant sharing, “we’ve had so many atrocious things happen to us in the woods” (Finney, 2017, p. 59).

As African-Americans migrated towards the north, the systemic efforts of “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2004, p. 1) shadowed African-Americans through various levels of discrimination, such as segregation. Access to parks and public areas were catered more to white people. The development of New York City’s Central Park in 1825, is an example of intentional displacement of black families and communities for white people to comfortably engage in recreation (Fiona, 2015; Wang, 2015). Formation of park systems across the country normalized the displacement of people of color while uplifting the narrative devised by prominent scholars like John Muir that interactions with wilderness were exclusively for wealthy white people (Fiona, 2015; Deluca & Demo, 2001; Byrne & Wolch, 2009).

Though equal access to space were promoted in 1964 through the Civil Rights Act, which abolished segregation laws and Wilderness Act, which enforces the management and preservation of national park systems across America, African-American citizens continued to

face many obstacles that hindered their relationship to nature. When public parks later became more accessible to a diverse clientele, park managers imposed strict behavioral rules and dress codes to inculcate cultural norms of the elite within working-class and immigrant visitors (Byrne & Wolch, 2009). Researchers found that minority groups still currently have fewer financial and locational access to public parks and recreation areas compared to whites as a result of segregation-era bioregional design (Le & Holmes, 2012). If one observes the zoning of communities and racial groups in cities across America, themes that point out inequitable resources will be exposed. This displays how the history of structured racism continue to influence city design.

The term *environmental racism* resulted when African-American communities began protesting the unethical placement of communities of color near landfill with the Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States 1987 report (United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, 1987). Environmental racism exposes how low-income communities of color are disproportionately impacted by the negative social, economic, and public health effects of hazardous waste facilities and uneven environmental regulation enforcement (Dicochea, 2012). Environmental justice movements resulted from this collective awareness and began highlighting the various ways black communities were experiencing environmental racism in present day. Toxic pollution, lack of government support after natural disasters destroy homes, poverty, hunger, incarceration, lack of access to clean water or health care are already familiar to vulnerable communities in the United States and a majority of the world's populations (Pavel & Anthony, 2015). As the global Climate Justice movement is expanding, communities that experience the outcomes of environmental catastrophes the most are fighting to be heard due to disproportionate distribution of wealth, education, resources, and power (Park, 2009). This

obstacle further burdens African-Americans and subsequently negative impacts their environmental attitudes.

Representation in Research

Carolyn Finney expresses in her book *Black Faces, White Spaces* that “scholarly work on representation has highlighted how power, personal interests, and unchallenged historical accounts of the past influence how places and peoples are represented” (2016, p. 7). In the process of this literature review, I came to the equivalent conclusion of Finney expresses about race and ethnicity being minimally discussed in research that seeks to observe the benefits of outdoor activities (Finney, 2016). A majority of the research I discovered highlighted the sex, location, and age of the participating subjects but excluded the race/ethnicity. Evaluating studies that effectively include the context of race/ethnicity seeks to enlighten the development of future research and shift the collective pessimistic perception about the relationship between African-Americans and nature.

The U.S. Forest Service conducted research to understand how different racialized groups engaged in Oregon State Parks. The study highlights barriers and attributes of nonparticipation towards engagement in outdoor experiences. Overriding themes expressed by black/African-American participants were: the desire for physical safety, a non-remote location that allows for an immediate place to go for protection, an aesthetically pleasing location that is maintained, and a location where they didn't feel stereotyped while seeking solitude, and a place to socialization with friends and families (Burns, Covelli, & Graefe, 2008). The participants further expressed that understanding of health information, free events, engagement with African-American organizations, and being provided more information about the site would increase their engagement in natural spaces. Though the study reports a lack of outdoor engagement amongst

African-Americans, it provides insight while also noting “African Americans are interested in outdoor recreation activities and specifically mentioned hiking, picnicking, and viewing nature” (Burns, Covelli, & Graefe, 2008, p. 129).

Among the shortage of research that included ethnic/racial representation, I found limited amount that promoted multicultural awareness throughout their engagement with black clients. In a study exploring the impact of horticultural therapy with incarcerated offenders who have a significant substance abuse history was one of them. The researchers conducting this study decided to adapt the intervention based on the observed racial demographics of the site by formulating the program centered around Afro-centric principles that intersected “nature, cultural, spiritual, and universal principles” (Richards & Hafami, 1999). Seventy-three percent of the men in the program of 33 male participants were African-American and twenty-seven percent were Caucasian (Richards & Hafami, 1999). The facilitators also introduced concept of ecology, “not in the traditional environmental sense, but rather as related to echo, feedback, and relationships in which individuals feel a connectiveness to what they see and produce in the gardens” (Richards & Hafami, 1999). Participants were also taught to prioritize animals and plants as much as they do their own life by viewing the garden as an extension of themselves. Some themes that the men explored while engaging in weekly gardening, journaling, and group discussion were self-awareness, dealing with loss, coping with feelings, experiencing the beauty of life, and creating healthy life structures. The outcomes from the study showed that horticultural therapy helped with anxiety, depression, somatization, reducing vulnerability in addiction, reducing distress, OCD diagnosis, increasing sociability.

Another study that adapted to needs of the participants was on adventure therapy for adolescent girls. By prioritizing accessibility of adventure therapy for urban communities,

researchers facilitated a study at a community-based mental health treatment center to observe whether if the use of adventure therapy could decrease problem severity among adolescent girls. Approximately 19% of the participants were African-American, 72% were white, and less 1% Hispanic or Native American participants out of the 1,135 girls between the ages of six and twenty-one engaged (Tucker, Javorski, et al, 2012). The key principles of adventure therapy are: (1) engagement in action-centered therapy; (2) the use of an unfamiliar environment, situation, or stimulus; (3) creation and maintenance of a climate for change; (4) the application of activities/intervention as continual assessment tools; (5) a focus on small group development and creation of a caring community; (6) a solution-focused approach to therapy; and (7) a shift to therapist as facilitator from therapist as expert to allow for greater flexibility in the therapeutic relationship (Gass 1993; Gass and Gillis 2010; Gass et al. 2012). The research revealed that the African-American clients who participated in AT had a significant decrease in problem severity than the African-American clients that participated in any other the other interventions provided (Tucker, Javorski, et al, 2012). The researchers stated that “although the number of African-American youth in each of the categories was too low to allow for generalizations, these findings suggest that adventure therapy could be a promising modality for African-American youth struggling with mental health issues and should be evaluated on a larger scale” (Tucker, Javorski, et al, 2012, p. 174). Community-based Adventure Therapy was chosen intervention because it provides accessible, cost efficient, and adaptive services in non-remote locations that also temporarily removes participants from their home environments (Tucker, Javorski, Tracy, & Beale, 2012).

The research I will discuss provides insight on the importance for facilitators to be aware that the process engaging in remote places away from one’s community can be difficult for

African-American boys. Among the research on the effects of wilderness programs in relationship to adolescents' race, 143 adolescents that participated were 13% African-Americans, 19% Asian-American, 17% Caucasians, 33% Hispanics, and 17% considered themselves biracial/other (Orren & Werner, 2007). Participants engaged in group activities like hiking trips, backpacking trips, conservation trips, and outdoor education trips. Through this process, research observations were placed into five categories: self-concept, internalizing behaviors, externalizing behaviors, environmental adaptation, and environmental trust. This results from this study correlated with research conducted by The U.S. Forest Service I share in this section (Burns, Covelli, & Graefe, 2008). Self-conception decreased for African-American boys as they began trusting the researchers, their environment, and process of the program (Orren & Werner, 2007). The researchers noted that the increase of trust developed as their self-protective skills lowered overtime (Orren & Werner, 2007). A scholar reviewing this research hypothesized that African-American boys could excel in all five criteria if more intent was placed on culturally humble practices, institutional structure, racial representation within staff members and peers, understanding of social discourses that go on about natural spaces, the types of internal experiences that affects the client's sense of emotional safety, and perception of nature as therapeutic (Lundy, 2015).

Examining the Counseling Relationship

I previously discussed how racial/ethnic representation in nature-based research benefits African-American clients, researchers, mental health practitioners, and society by centering context and cultural awareness. A lack of culturally competent practitioners and a legacy of negative experiences with health care providers (Lundy, 2015) contribute to resistances from black clients when invited to connect with nature-based interventions. Training to be a clinician

involves extensive work on critically assessing the construction of one's personal biases, values, and beliefs to become aware how one influences the relational dynamics between their self and the client. Lundy expresses that because the homogeneous picture of ecotherapists are white people, it is especially important for these professionals to practice cultural humility, cultural competence, and the critically assessment of self (2015). Though it is important for all clinicians to be aware of their interactions with clients, consideration of implicit and explicit ways racism impacts client interactions enlightens white clinicians of how to create dynamics that mirror the sustaining reciprocal relationships within nature. This is especially essential due how white people influenced by unrequited ideologies have historically managed the exploitation and harm of black bodies and natural resources simultaneously for capitalistic advancements. As I resume this portion of the thesis, I will discuss self-analysis practices created by scholars for white clinicians to adapt to promote healthy relationships with African-American clients.

Inheriting Oppositional Gaze

Toni Morrison (2012) declared that the world opens up once the white gaze is taken away. I will examine why this perspective is a crucial component to promoting the well-being of black clients. White gaze is defined as “a process of seeing without being seen, that constructs the black body into its own colonial imaginary” (Griffin, 2014, p. 183). Dialogue about this phenomenon can be dated back to literature by WEB Du Bois (1903), Ralph Ellison (1952), and James Baldwin (1984). “Under the gaze, dominant culture situates African-Americans as objects, not agents; observed, not observers; passive, not active” (Gerken, 2011, p. 633). The power of the gaze has the capacity to shape a black person's behavior, attitudes, and even sense of self (Ilmi, 2011). The gaze is a continuing microaggression directed at black bodies. Internalization of ongoing microaggressions may begin to reshape individuals' perceptions of themselves, their

ethnic group, and the benevolence of the world; leading to low self-esteem, psychological distress, and even suicidal ideation (Williams, Metzger, Leins, DeLapp, (2018).

When white therapists fail to recognize how they implicitly and explicitly influence relational dynamics between clients of different races than them, they create psychological obstacles. Not opening up space for African-American clients to address any resistance to a nature-based intervention further perpetuation suppression or traumatization, no matter what the intentions are. Assuming that an African-American client will automatically reject nature-based interventions is equally as violent, no matter what the intentions are. Two practitioners in ecopsychology have echoed this concern to fellow white colleagues by stating, “that good intention and words, and the unsettling of mental attitudes and worldviews, are not sufficient to address the material realities of colonization” (Jones, A.T. & Segal, D.S., 2018, p. 133).

Lack of acknowledgement about the white gaze influences human interaction by altering one’s perception to “other” individuals, rather than seeing how everyone and everything is intrinsically connected. Ecotherapists can demonize or tokenize African-American clients based off generalizations in the collective conscious perpetuated by white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 2004). bell hooks demands that people acquire “oppositional gaze” (1992, p. 116), which enacts the critique of the spectator— white supremacy. Deconstructing dehumanizing representations of black lives leads to humanize blackness resiliently and exposing the dominant gaze (Griffin, 2014). For white clinicians, enacting oppositional gaze means dedication to holding themselves accountable to critically assess the way they perceive and interact with their client. In *Unsettling the Settler Within*, Paulette Regan calls for “settler peoples” to “turn a critical gaze upon themselves and settler colonial culture to investigate their role within a system that benefits them at the expense of Indigenous peoples” (2010, p. 127).

Jones and Segal (2018) express that learning about the history of settler colonialism and its ongoing nature can result in a variety of responses such as shame about benefiting from injustice, anger, fear about loss of privilege, denial, or guilt about not doing more to redress the situation. Encountering one's savior complex in the process dismantling the power of white gaze is a common experience that individuals can overcome (Byma, 2016). Shame and other difficult emotions can lead to affective blunting and psychic numbing, which block the creativity needed to alter power relations and reimagine relationships between settler and Indigenous peoples (Jones, A.T. & Segal, D.S., 2018), along with other marginalized groups such as African-Americans. Critically confronting these archetypes and emotions is part of reaching authenticity within one's relationship with self and others.

Creating Space for Ecological Grief

Andrea Olsen denotes in *Body and Earth*, "as we open our senses and attend to the earth, we encounter grief" (2002, p. 126). Grief is a natural cycle of the evolving human experience. As emotional memory of specific terrains is encoded into human DNA (Olsen, 2002), the process to grieve ecological catastrophes must be accessible for all. Environmental generational amnesia is a traumatic phenomenon that white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal societies foster refers to the "historical forgetting of ecological degradation due to the shifting baseline across generations of what is seen as ecologically normal" (Fisher, 2013, p.171). An ideological suppressing of ecological and critical political consciousness detaches society from its humanity by derailing individuals from their natural cycles (Fisher, 2013; Korn, 2013). The failure for society to acknowledge historical and current environmental traumas disenfranchises black ecological grief. In the previous section, I discussed the importance for white therapists to critically assess the influence of the white gaze. In this session, I will discuss creating space for African-

Americans to grieve environmental traumas. When therapists (especially white clinicians) in the field of ecotherapy do not actively acknowledge the legacy of environmental racism, they are doing a disservice to their selves, relationships with their African-American clients, communities, and the earth.

A study revealed that the psychological impact of trees being taken away from urban natural spaces can be experienced as bereavement (Kidner, 2007). The legacy of structural displacement from flourishing natural resources into communities with environmental disparities are collections of traumas (historical, intergenerational, personal, and cultural) that black bodies yearn space to grieve from. Collective recognition centering the fact that American culture has normalized using nature as a tool to inflict harm on black bodies needs to continually be enacted. Trees, as beings who carry memory (Wohlleben, 2015), I believe desire to grieve with black people for their non-consensual involvement of lynching victims of racism. Dogs need grieving for being trained to attack black and brown bodies for protesting their rights, water needs grieving for being contaminated in communities like Flint, and crops need grieving for being trodden for slavery.

Unresolved grief manifests as depression and anxiety (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1976) as well as a myriad of other physiological symptoms that may be debilitating or even life threatening (Burnett, Middleton, et al, 1997; Parkes, 1996). Somatization, derealization, apathy, addictions, and depersonalization are all examples of dissociative coping skills related to lack of connection to earth (Korn, 2013). African-Americans are burdened by the possibilities of inheriting and developing pathologies due to disrupted access to healing and rightful connection to the nature. The subjugation of experiencing grief can result in communities of color to experience feelings

of shame, powerlessness, and subordination (Brown-Rice, 2013; Smith, 2014). Recovery requires remembrance and mourning (Herman, 1992).

Individuals damage their selves and the planet when they continue the cycle of denial and fragmentation (Pavel & Anthony, 2015). Even if people are well aware of the history of trauma their ethnic/cultural group endured, they might not have the insight about how the events of the past may impact them today (Brown-Rice, 2013). That's why it's important for therapists to understand how to help African-Americans clients explore and navigate their grief when they are in of this service. This means giving voice to their experience by tending to the seven essential non-sequential stages of grief: shock, acknowledging denial, anger, bargaining, depression, seeking realistic path towards recovery, and moving forward (Olsen, 2002; Kübler- Ross, 1969). Creative arts can help individuals express their deeply repressed feelings, provide opportunities to transform both intra- and interpersonal relationships, and transmute perception (Ruffin, 2010). Since African-American communities have historically created healing spaces as in act of resilience to white supremacy, lack of trust from mental health counselors must be expected and understood to rebuild interpersonal trust (Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008). Understanding the social, cultural, and political context prevents self-fulfilling prophecies and strengthens the professional relationship to help client's transition towards healing and transforming intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal connections.

Reclaiming Black Ecological Identity

The feelings and relationships people develop with landscapes and how they identify with nature in the process is referred to as ecological identity (Thomashow, 1995). In *The Psychological Significance of Nature*, the authors state,

Environmental identities inevitably contain a social component because they depend on and ultimately contribute to social meaning. How we understand ourselves in nature is infused with shared, culturally influenced understandings of what nature is—what is to be revered, reviled, or utilized. (Clayton & Opatow, 2003, p. 10).

In the previous section of this thesis, I discussed how access to ecological grief can repair and transform one's relationship with their self, communities, and nature. As the individual's perspective of nature-based interventions shifts from apprehensiveness to appealing, this also improves their connection to their ecological identity. One can easily discover their connection to vast organisms while walking around their neighborhood. Breath attaches to biophilia (Wilson, 1984), suggesting that the relationship with the natural world is a hard-wired part of human existence. The acknowledgement that human interaction with the natural world is not exclusive to remote locations opens one's perception to the wide array of experiences that nature-based expressive arts therapy offers. I will discuss how comprehension of one's ecological identity and its evolution can empower African-Americans to have agency over their connection with their environments and well-being.

Carolyn Finney announces that “the African-American identity is negotiated (individually and collectively) in the production of an environmental narrative in the United States” (2014, p. 5). She further expresses how “the dominant environmental narrative in the United States is primarily constructed and informed by white, Western European, or Euro-American, voices” (Finney, 2014, p. 3). The amount of vigor placed towards elevation of these narratives simultaneously silences and separates truths about the African-American experience with the natural world. “Social variables affect how we are able and choose to focus on the natural environment and how we interpret what we see” (Clayton & Opatow, 2003, p. 10). When

one is part of a culture that is implicitly and explicitly pressured to be subservient, it is difficult for that individual to realize that they have autonomy over what social narratives they belong to. When the ten-year-old boy who originally could not see how nature thrived in her community decided to continually attend the nature walks and interact with the discoveries of plant medicine growing on her street, his perception and value of her environment transformed.

In *earthbound*, bell (1998) refers to her sharecropping grandfather Jerry's wisdom of how "big boss may think he can outsmart nature, but the small farmer know. Earth is our witness", which meant that, "the relationship to earth meant that Southern black folks, whether they were impoverished or not, knew firsthand that white supremacy, with its systemic dehumanization of blackness, was not a form of absolute power" (1998, p. 185). Trusting in the relationship with the nature has historically provided African-Americans resilience that has sustained generations. Claiming this sustaining cultural narrative rather than passively accepting the restrictive and generalized notion that black people don't like nature is a political act that liberates one's self and others (Ilmi, 2011). African-Americans who confidently entangle their environmental identity with their cultural/ethnic identity have "a sense of connection to some part of the non-human natural environment, based on history, emotional attachment, and/or similarity, that affects the ways in which we perceive and act toward the world" (Ewert, Mitten, et al, 2014, p. 66).

Identity Development

Clarity of one's identity is argued to be of central importance to the self-concept and psychological well-being (Taylor & Osborne, 2010). Identifying how African-American identity evolves enlightens clinicians on how to better serve their clients during their developmental journey. Personal identity is organized as a hierarchical cognitive structure that emerges from one's interaction with their geography, social world, biology, and psychological factors. Sense of

self starts when individuals cease to understand their self as isolate, narrow, competing egos and begin identifying humankind and more-than-human existence (Strumse, 2007). Various models within the field of psychology and sociology have conceptualized identity development models to provide interventions that are appropriate for individuals of all unique backgrounds. While contemporary developmental models, such as Erikson, acknowledge cultural differences, the models do not differentiate racial or ethnic factors. This is due to the fact that individuals from dominant groups are so embedded in their identities without needing to remain conscious about them (Taylor & Usborne, 2010, p. 98). Racial/ethnic identity formation models demonstrate how the legacy of one's culture, beliefs, and values influence their developmental.

William Cross (1978) developed the first model of racial identity development called Black Identity Development model following the Civil Rights Movement. Cross's original model includes five primary stages. *Pre-Encounter* encompasses absorbing many beliefs and values of the dominant white culture, including the notion that "white is right" and "black is wrong" without being aware of one's racial group membership. *Encounter* involves being forced by an event or series of events to acknowledge the impact of racism in one's life and the reality that one cannot truly be white; and being forced to focus to identify as a member of a group targeted by racism. The stage of *Immersion/Emersion* enacts the simultaneous desire to surround oneself with visible symbols of one's racial identity and an active avoidance of symbols of whiteness; and actively seeking out opportunities to explore aspects of one's own history and culture with support of peers from one's own racial background. *Internalization* involves being secure in one's own sense of racial identity; when pro-black attitudes become more expansive, open, and less defensive; and the willingness to establish meaningful relationships with white people who acknowledge and are respectful of one's self-definition.; *Internalization-Commitment* is the

engagement of finding ways to translate one's personal sense of blackness into a plan of action or a general sense of commitment to the concerns of black people as a group, which is sustained over time; and comfort with one's own race and those around them.

A decade later, Phinney (1989) created a three-stage model of ethnic identity development. Like Erikson, Phinney's model focused on the period of adolescents due to the belief that it is a critical time in the human lifespan for developing social mores and claiming group membership. During the first Stage, *Unexamined Ethnic Identity*, the individual either is in the diffusion state where there is a lack of interest with ethnicity (no commitment and no exploration) or the foreclosure state; and where the individual internalizes information about ethnicity is from family and peers without questioning and exploration. The second stage, *Ethnic Identity Search/Moratorium*, occurs when a shocking personal or social event that temporarily dislodges the person from their old-world view, making the person receptive to a new interpretation of their identity. The last stage, *Ethnic Identity Achievement*, is the stage of acceptance, internalization, and clear understanding of one's ethnicity.

Phinney and Cross' ethnic identity developmental models can provide clarity of self-conception for individuals of racially oppressed groups. African-Africans, whose culture has continually faced a magnitude of cultural disruption by slavery, genocides, and other racial/ethnic related conflicts require continual reconstruction of cultural/ethnic identity (Taylor & Osborne, 2010). Bronfenbrenner's model of ecological systems theory (1979) acknowledges the many levels one's environment, culture, ethnicity influences their identity construction. Distinguishing black ecological identity development acknowledges the nuanced experiences of individuals within the cultural/ethnic group to promote positive well-being, esteem, and connection with nature.

The Ecology of Imagination

I previously discussed the conception and evolution of black ecological identity. The establishment of one's identity demands the capacity to engage with their imagination. I will explore how limits of one's imagination dictates how the individual is able to be present in the world. adrienne maree brown describes imagination as being "shaped by our entire life experience, our socialization, the concepts we are exposed to, where we fall in the global hierarchies of society" (2017, p. 252). The history of racism marked by transatlantic slavery, segregation, incarceration, and environmental racism has hindered the majority of black individuals the possibility of nurturing their imaginative capacity and establishing a strong bond to their environment (Hanafi, 2018). Environmental attitudes impact spatial imagination, which enables the individual to recognize the role of space and place in their own biography, to relate to the spaces they see around them, recognize the relationship which exists between them and their neighborhood, to claim and use space creatively, and to appreciate the meaning of the spatial forms created by others (Hanafi, 2018). Therefore, imagination is very unlikely to grow in an environment that constrains a person's intellectual space and limits the possibility to exercise their ability to choose different alternatives (Hanafi, 2018).

Cultural memories can be suppressed or awakened by media representations and create the potential of increasing African-American environmental participation. Findings suggest that the lack of visual and textual representation (i.e., stories and images of African-Americans engaged with the natural environment) shapes the negative attitudes black people have about the environment and that white people hold about African-American environmental attitudes (Finney, 2014). Landscapes are artifacts of past and present racisms, they embody generations of socio-spatial relations, what might be called the sedimentation of racial inequality (Pulido,

2000). Soul Fire Farms creator, Leah Penniman shares that “we have confused the subjugation our ancestors experienced on land with the land herself. We do not stoop, sweat, harvest, or even get dirty because we imagine that would revert us to bondage” (2009, p. 2). “Whoever has representational authority can determine how our stories get told and how we think about ourselves in relation to others” (Finney, 2014, p. 6). In the absence of freedom of the mind, freedom of choice, and flexibility —values closely connected with autonomy— the ability for a member of a society to think creatively and critically is hindered. Autonomy is considered one of the most important prerequisites for promotion of creative imaginative skills (Garold, 2013).

Preserving the Legacy of Black Eco-Creativity

Cognitive science states that the human body is a lived text that is interconnected with all things, revealing that embodied interactions inform human perception (Westlund, 2014). The body is an evolving story generating information about the past, present, and future; continually expressing insight about and within its environment. Within the preceding sections, I revealed how the capacity of one’s imagination dictates how the individual is able to conceptualize their self and the environments. I also cite literature indicating that being informed about one’s racial/ethnic history benefits the individual’s ecological development, esteem, well-being. Findings also suggest that representation dictates how white people white people perceive African-American environmental attitudes (Finney, 2014).

I will continue the journey of this literature review by uplifting the legacy of African-Americans displaying active engagement of eco-creativity, which means the braiding of ecology and creative arts. This process seeks to further expand the individual and collective imagination, as well as enhances black ecological identity. Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy reclaims creative-arts, embodied practices, and connection with nature as a birthright of being human that

enables people to naturally turn toward the patterns and rhythms of nature (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). The integrative practice also promotes the reciprocal connection between the human and more-than-human world (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). As white supremacy influences American society to suppress and silence African-American cultural practices and history, bell hooks demands that reclamation of history and living in harmony with nature is a meaningful act of resistance (1998).

Nature and Movement. Ecosomatics refers to one's awareness and relationship to the environment. "Ecosomatics supports us to locate ourselves within the whole—'this is my place in my body, in the dance, in my daily life, in my community'" (Bauer, 2008, p. 9). "African ancestry acknowledges that "dance uses the earth as if it were an extension of the dancer's feet" (Primus & Welsh-Asante, 2002, p. 6-7). Herbalists and healers were trained to excel in dance in some cultures to ward off sickness and cure illness (Primus & Welsh-Asante, 2002). Dance was a way of expression during the sowing of the seed and the harvest, puberty rites, hunting, warfare, marriage, and grief (Primus & Welsh-Asante, 2002). Alvin Ailey is an African-American dance company that choreographed movement pieces like *Butterfly* (Lamb, 1974) and *The River* (Ailey, 1970), allegories of birth, life, and rebirth. Ecosomatics extends beyond dance. African-Americans found ways to create their own summer camps, beaches, recreational facilities, farming, hiking areas, and more for their selves despite discriminatory policies (Wald, 2006; Foster, 1999; Watson, 2011; Chase, 2006).

Nature in Writing. African-American ecoliterature is historically undervalued since society centralizes the ecopoetics of white men such as Henry David Thoreau. *Black Nature* (Dungy, 2009) contains four centuries of African-American nature poetry conveying a wide array of unique perspectives about each writer's relationship with nature. Lucille Clifton, Nikki

Giovanni, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Richard Wright, Yusef Komunyakaa, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Langston Hughes are some poets included in the collection. The book also features Phillis Wheatley's poem, "On Imagination", which she created during mid-1700s to express her gratitude of feeling like freedom of imagination was easily accessed through her loving relationship with nature (Dungy, 2009). Other texts that highlight African-American ecoliterature are *Color of Nature* edited by Alison H. Deming and Lauret E. Savoy (2011); *Planetwalker* by John Francis (2008); *Belonging: A Culture of Place* by bell hooks (2009); and *Black on Earth: African-American Ecoliterary Traditions* edited by Kimberly Ruffin (2010).

Nature and Art. Kara Walker's *U.S.A. Idioms* (2017) and Faith Ringgold's *The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles* (1990) are visual art pieces represented through different mediums that display the legacy of the relationship between nature and African-American heritage. *U.S.A. Idioms* (2017) is a large visual collage of images formed by ink and graphite referencing the disturbing history of slavery and its ongoing legacy. *The Sunflower Quilting Bee* (1990) is a color lithograph honoring Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Fannie Lou Hammer, Madam C.J. Walker, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Ella Baker for their achievements. Kehinde Wiley is a contemporary visual artist that is currently well-known his painting of Barack Obama at the National Portrait Gallery (2018). Wiley's work is focuses on incorporating archetypes of nature as backdrops of portraits of African-Americans to elevate their vibrant and elegant features, in protest to how white supremacy tries to portray African-Americans.

Nature and Drama. Directed by Julie Dash and Cinematographed by Arthur Jafa, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) follows the life of a family in the Gullah community of coastal South Carolina in 1902. The displaying of the intimate connection that the black characters have

with nature influences their dialogue, demeanors, and actions. Beyonce's visual album, *Lemonade* (2016) paid homage to the film in 2018. *The Color Purple* (Spielberg, et al, 1985) and *Her Eyes Are Watching God* (Winfrey, et al, 2005), originally books written by black women, were created into movies directed by white people. Both films depict the complex symbolisms of nature that influences the black character's spiritual connection, development of self, and exploration of love as they endure life lessons.

Nature in Music. The symbolism and wisdom that nature provides is continually expressed in African-American songwriting. Songs like "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holliday (1939), "Nature Boy" by Ella Fitzgerald (1976), "Green Garden" by Laura Mvula (2013), "River" by Leon Bridges (2015), and "Rose That Grew from Concrete" by 2Pac (2000) express complex sentiments about nature that evoke various types of emotions. "Wade in the Water", "Sweet Chariot", and "Follow the Drinking Gourd" were nature themed songs created by Harriet Tubman and slaves to empower hostages to actively pursue their liberation strategically (Bradford, 1886). These displays of eco-creativity demonstrate how claiming one's ecological identity tunes their heart to the renewal and resilience of nature, which connects the individual to their own storehouses of strength to navigate threat, stress, and change (Atkins & Snyder, 2018, p.55).

Discussion

Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy promotes the psychological liberation by empowering people to become "authors of new sustainable stories that honor the life and dignity of our vast self, embedded in the body of the Earth" (Atkins & Snyder, 2018, p.55). This literature review examined research and literature to expose the social, cultural, and political factors that disempower African-Americans to have autonomy over their connection with nature

and their well-being. Describing the models of ecological and ethnic/racial identity developmental theories enables clinicians and black clients to better support evolution of the ecological identity. I also discuss how acknowledging the legacy of environmental racism empowers African-American clients to process ecological grief; enhances and restore the individual's ecological identity; shifts white people's perception about African-American environmental attitudes; and enables the confrontation of harsh realities with a higher capacity to channel creativity, assessment, connection, and resilience. Since white people currently dominate the field of ecotherapy, I emphasize the importance of inheriting oppositional gaze to critically examine implicit and explicit ways white supremacy influences the therapist's relationship with black clients. Highlighting the legacy of African-Americans engaging in eco-creative expressions can shift the environmental attitudes of black clients to reconsider the participating in the multimodal practice of nature-based expressive arts therapy.

Carolyn Finney discusses that African-Americans environmental concerns and interests have been excluded, ignored, and suppressed to maintain the ideologies of "white wilderness" (2014), p. 90-91. As the field of nature-based expressive arts therapy evolves, heighten one's discernment skills, I offer strategies inspired by Phoenix Smith that advocate black ecological identity (2013):

- Address individual and institutional blind spots and biases by learning about the diverse environmental history and the stories of people of color, as well as include them in required reading in ecopsychology/ nature-based expressive arts therapy curricula. (p. 232)
- Create alliances with ecological justice, climate justice, restorative justice, food justice, and public health organizations that are at the forefront of analysis and action of the connection between poverty, racism, militarism, the prison industrial complex, and the ecology of the planet. (p. 232)

- Invite more people of color into ecopsychology, ecotherapy, and nature-based mentorship program with scholarships allocated for their participation. (p. 232)
- Create Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy communities of practice that include individuals from diverse fields, honoring the interdisciplinary and interconnected wisdom of these communities. (p. 232)
- Create racial and ethnic representation in ecopsychology research that addresses benefits of nature-connection.

My lived experience, intuition, personal philosophical orientation, clinical experience, and intellectual interests will continue to inform my nature-based expressive arts therapy practice. Formulating this thesis gave me the ability to conceptualize what motivates my clinical practice. This literature review uncover wisdom that helps me provide richer experiences for black clients as I continue to facilitate nature-based expressive arts therapy interventions within individual and group therapy settings. As more content and research about nature-based expressive arts therapy surface, I look forward to seeing how my perspectives evolve. To reiterate what I shared at the beginning, this thesis is a healing practice and act of resistance. Being in communion with flora and fauna while formulating this research inspires me to complete this literature review with the last lines of Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow is Enuf*: "while endlessly weaving garments for the moon with my tears, I found God in myself and I loved her. I loved her fiercely" (2010, p.110).

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