

Divergent Video: Scripted Content for a Clinical Practice Biography

Matthew P. Larson

Transpersonal Wilderness Therapy, Naropa University

CNSW-719-A.2023FA: Ecopsychology

December 1, 2023

Author Note

A scripted response to the final prompt paraphrased from our online course; a relatively short video, 10 - 15 minutes. It should contain the following elements:

- *A short definition of ecopsychology/nature-based work*
- *Why is ecopsychology/this lens especially important right now?*
- *Inspiration; why, how does it make this work alive for you?*
- *Offer a taste of an ecotherapeutic practice*

Some additional optional prompts, covering the entire semester of course work:

- *What got invoked in you?*
- *What was inspired in you?*
- *What did that experience elicit?*
- *Did you notice change in relational dynamics w/ spaces and people?*
- *Who/what was included/not included in the experience?*
- *What will I use from this experience in my work as an ecopsychological counselor?*
- *What was my experience with the activities and their impact on my perception of the world around me, across time and geography?*
- *What is my current thinking on how interconnectedness relates to transpersonal psychology, ecopsychology, and sustainability?*
- *What are ways you've come to listen more deeply, interact more deeply?*

Divergent Video: Scripted Content for a Clinical Practice Biography

Hello, and welcome! My name is Líf, and I feel very grateful for your time and attention. In this video I'll invite you to join me in exploring ecopsychology. With a brief demonstration of an ecotherapy practice we'll explore what it might look like for us to work together on whatever personal goals you might have. Please feel free to use or adapt it while deepening your own relationship with the natural world. First, let's go through some terminology focused on the foundations for the various ways that humans engage in relationship.

I like to start with defining terminology for several reasons. Shared language is very important in effectively communicating our needs and desires to other people, and this type of interaction can certainly feel vulnerable or confusing at times. Let's establish a basic understanding of the topics we'll be covering today before we go any deeper: counseling vs. coaching, therapy vs. therapeutic, safety and bravery, ecopsychology and ecotherapy. We'll add some definitions along the way, although these provide a frame for our overall conversation.

Anyone with knowledge in a given subject area, and the ability to explain their expertise to help another grow, might be considered a coach. There is some of that in counseling, we call it psychoeducation (sharing psychological knowledge and therapeutic practices), and it goes further when assessment, diagnosis, and therapy (professionally licensed practices) come into play. Therapy could happen in many different ways or places; one key feature is that you have a counselor present with you and tracking your progress over time. Some of the practices one learns in therapy or community forums might be described as therapeutic; they foster healing, growth, etc., but they don't necessarily require professional help with diagnosis or treatment plans, they may be done on your own, or guided by a counselor, as needed.

Safety is also a very important consideration when we look to others for help achieving our personal goals. I seek to provide space where one might perceive freedom from immediate danger; this might be seen as safe enough to engage in therapeutic work. I ask anyone I work with to consider stepping even further into brave spaces. When we become willing to take risks, even when we think our experiments might make us uncomfortable, we begin exploring brave spaces. We allow for, and sometimes expect, discomfort as part of the learning process. Some timely examples might include working with white privilege or transphobia; it can be unsettling to admit that the ways we've been trained to act while working to achieve our goals in modern society cause harm to others, but once we know better we can begin doing better.

Now, getting more into the specifics of our topic area, we might define ecopsychology as theory about our understanding of experiences influenced by human connections with elements of the natural world. These relationships may exist within a wilderness, rural, or even urban setting. Instead of limiting our engagement exclusively to people (and pets), ecopsychology encourages us to consider the livelihood of everything we encounter. It frames people as part of nature, inseparable from the earth that holds us. We are asked to contemplate, instead of traveling into nature, how we come from and remain part of nature, and how we relate as natural beings to the many interconnected and interdependent networks that surround and support us.

When we wrestle with ecopsychology concepts like animism and biophilia we might discover ourselves free to indulge in conversations with plants or animal friends. We might speak to a rock monolith, seek to absorb the wisdom from a creek running through a densely wooded slope, or listen for the latest news from flocks of migrating birds. We might also take

time to contemplate how answers to our deepest questions might arrive from any of these sources. Wait. What...? I slipped a couple unusual terms in there....

“Animism is a foundational element in the development of ancient human spirituality” (Perkins, 2019). “All things—including people, animals, geographic features, natural phenomenon, and inanimate objects—possess a spirit that connects them to one another.” Biophilia theory tells us that “humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life” (Rogers, 2019). “The symbolic use of nature in human language ... and the pervasiveness of spiritual reverence for animals and nature in human cultures worldwide are other sources of evidence” supporting these theories.

You may be wondering why all this information is so important to cover before we dig any deeper. Put simply: informed consent. I want you to settle any curiosity you have about what I bring to you before even thinking about proceeding with a particular practice. By now, you might have wondered why anyone would devote any time to this ecotherapy thing.

Recent sociopolitical events aside, research literature shows that humans benefit by simply spending time in natural spaces or focused on plants. Journal articles detailing the negative impacts of anxiety, depression, PTSD, among other concerns with increasing diagnosis counts, tell us very clearly that modern life is full of challenges. Many of those symptoms reported by researchers have been shown to be directly addressed in nature-based therapies. I’m here to tell you that if you want to deepen your relationship with nature, you’re in the right place!

Throughout my training in Transpersonal Wilderness Therapy at Naropa University, beyond clinical skills crucial to a licensed counselor and technical skills necessary for physical safety in remote and rugged places, expanded awareness of the many connections everyone

shares was a major focus. Our human-nature connections, vital to our survival, are something we can tend to any day, any time, from any place. Relating to, instead of dominating, wild and natural spaces supports our own wellbeing, the health of our communities, and every one of the marvelous systems and creatures and elements with whom we share this planet.

Embracing my own intersecting identities, and deepening my relationship with the natural world, allows me the capacity to show up authentically in relationship to all that is within my field of awareness. This supports an exchange of lovingkindness, it provides resources aplenty. When we find ourselves practicing awareness with open hearts, focusing only on the present moment, opportunities for healing and growth abound. Ecotherapy practices may be quite elaborate and deeply personal, or they might be simple and portable. Please join me now in a guided version of the practice I call *What if? and How?*, and explore ecopsychology in action!

What if? and How?

Contemplation of the various aspects of nature is something I recommend engaging in at least three times each week. You may want to start with 5 or 10 minutes per session, perhaps even keeping a journal of things you notice each time. *There is no wrong way to do this*; your relationships with various aspects of nature are yours to define.

Now, if you're ready to begin, I'd like to ask that you walk into a space you haven't been spending much time recently; then simply stop and notice whatever is around you. You may sit or stand or lay in a hammock, however you'll be comfortable in focusing without interruption.

You may notice a tree, a rock, a bird, a hill, an insect, or a bright flower. One at a time, taking as much or as little time as you like with each relationship, ask yourself, "What if this aspect of nature has its own spirit?" If you care to go deeper into any particular relationship, ask

yourself, “How might knowing about this spirit change my perspective?”, “What if this aspect of nature noticed me?”, “How does this aspect of nature relate to what I do?”, “What if this aspect of nature made a request of me?”, “How may I be of service to this aspect of nature?”

Now, as you approach the end of this experience, you may choose to offer gratitude for the ways these aspects of nature have served you before returning to other pursuits. A silent message of thanks, a splash of water, spontaneous melody.... whatever is arising in your present moment, honor it and express your truth.

The *What if? and How?* practice can dive pretty deep. You may choose to stick with only noticing or listening for a while, or spend entire sessions (or longer) deepening a single natural relationship, it all depends on where you care to take your journey. Please reach out and make contact with any questions or curiosities. I hope our time today has given you something that you will take with you and use in wellbeing.

Thank you.

References

- APA. (2022). *Diagnostic And Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders* (5-TR). American Psychiatric Association.
- Dayan, F. E. & Dayan, E. A. (2017, February 6). Porphyrins: One Ring in the Colors of Life. *American Scientist*. <https://www.americanscientist.org/article/porphyrins-one-ring-in-the-colors-of-life>
- Deming, A. H., & Savoy, L. E. (2011). *The Colors of Nature : culture, identity, and the natural world*. Milkweed Editions.
- Perkins, M. (2019). What Is Animism? *Learn Religions*.
<https://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-animism-4588366>
- Rogers, K. (2019). Biophilia hypothesis. *Encyclopædia Britannica*.
<https://www.britannica.com/science/biophilia-hypothesis>
- Sunne, T. (2023). Systemic Ecotherapy. *Ecopsychology*, 15(3).
<https://doi.org/10.1089/eco.2022.0097>
- Walker, N. (2019). TRANSFORMATIVE SOMATIC PRACTICES AND AUTISTIC POTENTIALS: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION.
https://neuroqueer.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Nick_Walker_Dissertation.pdf