

Ecopsychology Without Nature-Culture Dualism

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Many researchers and therapists working with ecopsychology view consumer culture with a negative bias in contrast to the positive value given to wild nature. Too much ecopsychology tends to either forget or react against our media-saturated technoculture. Too many wilderness field instructors I've known demonize pop music and large corporations, treating Britney Spears and McDonalds as if they were the source of all the world's problems. Too many ecotherapists I've met think that everyone just needs to spend more time in nature in order to heal their ailments: Alienation, depression, ADHD, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anger issues, schizophrenia, anxiety, trauma, substance abuse, low self-esteem, and the like will all be remedied by overcoming a "nature deficit" and spending time outdoors. Although I am not opposed to that, it does not account for the embeddedness of ecopsychology in a global civilization.

However, in a globalized world where nature, humans, and technology are inextricably intertwined, what is called for is an ecopsychology without such a nature-culture dualism, which is to say, an approach to ecopsychology that accounts for the interconnectedness of the natural and artificial in multiple ecological contexts (urban, rural, and wild). As the population rises past 7 billion and technology continues its exponential growth and complexification, personal identity is becoming a hybrid of local and global, natural and artificial, wild and domesticated. Boundaries between self and other are becoming more ambivalent, more porous and permeable with new media. What are the implications for the field of ecopsychology? One implication is that ecology is no longer about a nature separate from culture. Following Tim Morton's lead in his work with an "ecology without nature," I suggest that we need an ecopsychology without a backgrounded nature clearly and distinctly separate from culture, technology, artificiality. Ecopsychology must redefine the relation-

ship between psychology and the complex natural/artificial hybrids proliferating around the planet.

One suggestion I have for the field of ecopsychology is to include more empirical research, not only case studies from wilderness therapy programs, experiential outdoor education schools, adolescent and youth leadership programs, retreat centers, eco-villages, and environmental work-study programs, but also urban schools with gardening classes, green businesses, churches with recycling programs, rock concerts with eco-friendly messages, and so on. Is it really experiences in the wilderness or with nature that initiate care and concern for the more-than-human world? Or can such concern emerge from watching ecological documentaries, participating in urban community gardens, attending church services, going to concerts, or spending time with family and friends indoors? It is important to retrieve information on the specifics of these experiences. Empirical research is communicable to a mainstream audience, and it does not have an inherent bias against modernity, technology, or pop culture. Nor does it treat the indoors like a paltry substitute for the "great" outdoors. If the field of ecopsychology can communicate its message to a wider audience and situate its research in a global technocultural context, it will gain more reputability, attention, and possibly receive more funding for projects.

Research might expand the field of ecopsychology on a horizontal scale, but we also need to tend to the vertical scale, or the depth psychology aspect, of ecopsychology in a globalized world. In short, ecopsychology without nature reflects back to us something inside ourselves, our own hybrid identities. The process of projection, reflection, and integration is how we move toward healing and wholeness. Although it tends to be easier to see ourselves mirrored in a stream or through a long, rocky trail surrounded by canyon, it might be more important to do this work in the city where there is noise, poverty, advertising, garbage, and all the trappings of civilization. As our population continues to rise, urban cities will house a greater number of people and must become sites of sustainable and psychologically healthy communities. Many people, especially

minorities, do not have access to stretches of wild nature. In a globalized world we don't have the luxury of granting universal access to wild nature. We need an ecopsychology of hybrids—wild/domestic, natural/cultural, organic/technological, and so forth.

Programs can and should be developed focusing on psychology in city ecologies. Cultivating ecological practices is important for our youth, as well as for anyone caught in the hustle and bustle of a populous civilization. Seeing diversity through the eyes of your neighbor as well as interconnectedness with a local pigeon are a few practices I can foresee. In hopes of a thriving earth community, I say yes to attending to the wildness of relationship. To do the work of healing, as well as to keep the field of ecopsychology relevant, we must find a way to see inside ourselves, perhaps creating our most

authentic and unique selves within the ecology of the city—the ecology of a globalized, interconnected, fast-paced world.

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