Eco-Morality as an Adlerian Counseling Ethic

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Faculty of the Adler Graduate School

____________________________

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Arts in

Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

____________________________

Sarah C. McCabe

Adler Graduate School
Abstract

The interconnection between self, others, and the environment is an essential foundation for human life. In modern society, there is a growing trend toward the isolation of individuals from both their communities and the earth. Historically, psychotherapeutic practice has promoted individual autonomy as a means toward improved mental health. This has created a rift between human and global problems. Adlerian practitioners have a commitment to promoting community feeling. This necessitates a morality of care and a concern for both individuals and the natural world. Introducing an eco-morality to the Adlerian counseling room is a means to accomplish this necessary paradigm shift. Throughout various time periods cultures have developed a synergistic relationship between human beings and the environment. These cultures can serve as models in defining how a horizontal, non-exploitive relationship between human beings and the earth might be included in, and fostered by, mental health counseling. Similarly, fields such as ecofeminism and ecotheology might provide useful paradigms for an emerging eco-morality for Adlerian clinicians. In addition to improving relationships and addressing the current ecological crisis, there is a growing body of evidence that supports improved individual mental health through increased contact with nature. This literature review proposes that an additional moral principle based on respect for the environment (an eco-morality) integrated with the holistic psychology of Alfred Adler represents the next essential stage in the evolution of a comprehensive approach to mental health counseling.
# Table of Contents

## Introduction

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 5

## Eco-Morality as an Ethic

1. Defining Eco-Morality ......................................................................................... 8
2. Defining Eco-Morality Based Ethics ....................................................................... 9
3. From Autonomy-Centered to Community-Centered Therapy .............................. 10

## Community Feeling

1. Defining and Developing the Role of Adlerian Eco-Community Feeling ............. 14
2. Community Feeling as a Foundation for Eco-Morality ....................................... 17
3. Object Dimension ................................................................................................. 17
4. Ideal Transcendent Characteristics ...................................................................... 22
   - Self-Actualization ............................................................................................. 22
   - Empathy ........................................................................................................... 23
   - Evolution .......................................................................................................... 24
   - Perfection ......................................................................................................... 24
   - Transcendence ................................................................................................. 25
   - Belonging ......................................................................................................... 26
   - Non-Conformity ............................................................................................... 26
5. Community Feeling as a Criterion for Mental Health ......................................... 28
6. Empirically-Supported Benefits of Community Feeling ..................................... 29
7. Developing Eco-Moralistic Community Feeling .................................................. 30

## The Benefits of Eco-Morality

1. Mental Health ....................................................................................................... 33
2. Creativity and Learning ......................................................................................... 35
3. Animal Therapy .................................................................................................... 36
4. Stress and General Health .................................................................................... 38
5. Community Benefits ............................................................................................ 40

## Eco-Morality and Earth-Centered Paradigms

1. Native Americans ................................................................................................. 43
2. Animals ................................................................................................................. 43
3. Land ....................................................................................................................... 46
Eco-Morality as an Adlerian Counseling Ethic

The Adlerian theory of psychotherapy has as a major tenet a fostering of the connection between individuals, others and the larger community. This model differs from traditional psychotherapy which is often more autonomy-centered. By ignoring the interconnectedness that Adlerian therapy addresses, the traditional model misses additional modalities to help individuals reach their therapeutic goals. This focus on interconnectedness often only describes relationships between the client, his or her peers and communities. There is a lack of connection and therapeutic alliance between the client and the environment. By bringing an environmentally based morality into the Adlerian therapy session, clients will gain additional unique healing modalities. It is through connecting to the environment that Adlerian practitioners will diversify the healing possibilities of their clients.

The relationship between individuals and the environment has dramatically changed over the past decades. As more than half of the population now resides in industrialized cities (United Nations Population Fund, 2013, para. 1) it is understandable that there is a fractured relationship between people and the environment. Individuals are losing a connection to a key Adlerian “community member” - the environment. This split between the individual and the environment is often unnoticed by the individual and is insidious in its progression. Gregory Bateson, a former systems theorist and ecologist at the Humanistic Psychology Institute in San Francisco, provided an apt analogy: a frog, placed in a pan of hot water, immediately jumps out; but one placed in gradually heated water will boil to death (Curry, 2011, p. 19). It is arguable that the vast majority of people are in the “heating water” and not realizing the dramatic psychological effects of being separated from the environment.
The traditional therapy room has also reached a “boiling point” of individual-centeredness and the inability to address the deep and far-reaching moral and social problems of modern times (Doherty, 1995, p. 5). This atomization, the dividing of the individual from others, produces alienation without clear guiding principles for behavior (Durkheim, as cited in Doherty, 1995, p. 96). Modern psychotherapeutic practice is often one arena blamed for the general loss of community and family values in the Western world (Doherty, 1995, p. 6). By not connecting the individual with his or her community traditional psychotherapy misses the crucial opportunity to integrate broader issues such as life satisfaction and community involvement into therapy. Adler’s view of the interconnectedness of all living beings and their natural proclivities toward cooperation is a moral framework that must be revived with an emphasis on the human-nature connection.

Eco-morality assists in reestablishing interconnectedness between individuals, others, and the environment. Using this moral framework in the Adlerian psychotherapy session will help in promoting the reconnection of clients with a necessary larger community. The Adlerian psychotherapy process needs eco-morality to expand and enhance its established tenet of community feeling to help individuals escape the “boiling water.”

This literature review will demonstrate that eco-morality is a moral principle for ethical decision-making and a key ethical value in the Adlerian counseling room. The intended audience for this literature review is Adlerian clinicians and also practitioners from other theoretical orientations who may have an interest in joining the dialogue concerning the reintegration of the environment into psychotherapy. The first section of this literature review will define terminology relating to eco-morality as an Adlerian counseling ethic. This will provide a framework to propose a psychotherapeutic paradigm shift from individual-centered to
community-centered therapy. This shift is needed for an eco-morality based therapy. Core Adlerian concepts will be addressed with an emphasis on community feeling and its key overlapping concepts with ecological morality. Research concerning the effects of interacting with nature on well-being will be presented in order to promote the wellness of individuals and communities. In the final section, both traditional cultures and modern-day paradigms will provide examples of how healing and wellness occur within a framework of healthy human-nature relationships. By demonstrating how these communities maintain symbiotic relationships with nature, the importance of bringing an eco-morality into the Adlerian counseling room will be established.

The proposition of bringing an eco-morality into the Adlerian counseling room may be challenging to practitioners as it consciously influences behavior and choices based on relevant moral principles. While psychotherapy has historically held client autonomy as a primary ethical mandate, it can be argued that the therapist inevitably influences his or her clients’ behavior and moral choices. Psychotherapy is deeply integrated with moral values; every aspect of the therapy process is value-laden (Becvar, 2001, p. 153). The matter at hand is not whether therapists influence their clients’ choices, but how.

How to conduct an eco-based therapy session is challenging. The common focus of contemporary therapy often involves working out personal problems; clients present for assistance with their immediate problems in living and may be averse to being introduced to an additional dimension such as the environment. If a client is suffering severely, it is a challenge to connect him or her with additional responsibilities to a larger community like the environment (Doherty, 1995, p. 100). To rectify this, the therapist must remain respectful with his or her moral influence; the virtues of prudence, caring, and courage should always be consciously
fostered within the therapist (Doherty, 1995, p. 17). By maintaining these virtues the degree of consideration with which a therapist responds to a client will not be altered (Doherty, 1995, p. 17). If the therapist keeps with the overall goal of the Adlerian psychotherapy process, which is to aid the client in identifying and working toward becoming his or her best self by fostering community feeling, the Adlerian therapist is then able to integrate an eco-morality into the process. This will provide further possibilities for the healing of both individuals and communities.

**Eco-Morality as an Ethic**

Connecting individuals with the environment engenders new paradigms of psychological health and wellness. The importance of connecting an individual and the environment is stressed by Adler’s community description. By establishing this interconnection with the environment, the client will enhance the environmental community and improve his or her psychological health and well-being as described by Adler. This ecologically based moral is a requisite component in the Adlerian therapy session. The practitioner in turn is ethically inclined by Adlerian thought to promote such an ecologically based set of morals. To inject such an ecological morality into the Adlerian counseling room positively affects individual and community wholeness and health.

**Defining Eco-Morality**

The eco-morality held by the individual and supported by the Adlerian practitioner is a complex therapeutic foundation within the counseling room. As a baseline, morality is seen as a complex set of perspectives of conduct; it is the evaluation of actions on the basis of a broader cultural context (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2011, p. 14). Such conduct is held to be that which
“would be put forward by all rational persons” (morality, 2013). Morality allows one to evaluate such sets of conduct.

The prefix eco, in reference to ecology, encompasses “the totality or pattern of relations between organisms and their environment” (ecology, 2013) and a "house, abode or dwelling; a part of a house” (Liddell & Scott, 1995, p. 429). Combining ecology with morality establishes a set of conduct premised on the relationship between the individual and his or her environmental setting.

Ecological morality within the Adlerian context is the relationship the individual has with his or her earthly, natural home or native abode. Adler describes the interconnection between individuals, others and their environment. One’s eco-morality is additionally the rational concern of the individual for and awareness of the earth, its ecological systems and to the greater community. To accomplish this, eco-morality requires particular actions from the individual including acknowledging interconnectedness with the earth. Eco-morality establishes a deep sense of responsibility to the individual regarding the natural environment and its inhabitants.

**Defining Eco-Morality Based Ethics**

An ethic is the acknowledgment and assimilation of moral values into a particular setting such as the therapy room. It is, as described by Corey, et al. (2011), “moral principles adopted by an individual or group to provide rules for right conduct” (p. 14). The professional ethic of an Adlerian practitioner is built on Adlerian morals; it is Adlerian morals in practice. By defining these morals based on Adler’s community, eco-morality becomes a major ethical principle that a therapist uses in practice.

Mental health practitioners use sets of professional ethics in the therapy room. Koocher and Keith-Spiegel describe common themes of these professional ethics including “promoting
the welfare of consumers” and “doing no harm” (as cited in Corey et al., 2011, p. 6).

Emphasizing eco-morality as an ethical value enables it to be used in the counseling session and aligns it with these themes. In turn this eco-morally based ethic becomes a principle for right conduct of the professional. The eco-moralistic ethic promotes individual and societal welfare, beneficence, and challenges individuals to live at a deeper level of responsibility to their communities. Such Adlerian communities encompass living beings in many different spheres and on many different levels, including the ecosystem (Stein & Edwards, 1998, para. 7). By establishing morals based on Adler’s community eco-morality is forged. By applying it in the Adlerian therapeutic process, an eco-morally based ethic is applied in principle.

**From Autonomy-Centered to Community-Centered Therapy**

Traditional psychotherapy is predicated on treatment of the individual as autonomous. This trend leads to increased isolation of the individual from social and environmental constructs. Adlerian therapy in contrast treats the individual as a part of a larger, social whole. It is arguable that the isolation noted in traditional therapy parallels a larger retraction of persons from the environment. As individuals have moved away from a direct relationship with the environment, therapy has echoed this in isolated individualized treatment.

Over the past centuries Westernized nations have progressively isolated the individual. Notably, with the beginning of colonization in the late sixteenth century the relationship of the individual and the environment began to change. The environment became more than for subsistence; natural resources were exploited to feed rapidly growing populations and the consumptive desires of Imperial Europe (Rasmussen, 2001, p. 105). The shift from a symbiotic to an atomized relationship with the environment continued to grow and escalated during industrialization. The transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy further
separated vast amounts of individuals from the environment (industrialization, 2013). Even in present day, the majority of all persons now live in an urban setting (United Nations Population Fund, 2013, para. 1). This trajectory of individuals separating from the environment is leading to individuals becoming further isolated from the natural world.

Even in current business practices, there is a balance between “profit motive”, defined as the desire for profit that motivates one to engage in business ventures (profit motive, 2013), and other business ethics of fair play and comradeship. In a holistic model, business would be profitable and ethical simultaneously (Carroll, 2000, p. 35). Similarly, within the therapy room, the drive of the profit motive has pushed many therapists to provide short term, problem-focused treatment that does not encompass the broader issues of human development and quality of life (Doherty, 1995, p. 6). As this has occurred, civil society, including family and community centeredness, has lessened (Doherty, 1995, p. 96). From the initial separation of the individual from the environment to business models based on profit, the individual is rapidly becoming more isolated.

Just as European colonizers fostered values of autonomy and independence, traditional psychotherapeutic practice has done so within the client. As individuals have been removed from the environment and autonomy has been fostered, psychotherapy has also emulated this trend. William Doherty asserted that "...therapists since the time of Freud have overemphasized individual self-interest, giving short shrift to family and community responsibilities" (1995, p. 7). Traditional psychotherapists have promoted "expressive individualism", wherein individuals are encouraged to pursue their self-interests freely (Doherty, 1995, p. 8). It is assumed that if individuals’ needs are first met the family and community will flourish. However, this is not the
natural course for such self-improvement. This error in psychotherapeutic practice is described by Rollo May:

We in America have become a society devoted to the individual self. The danger is that psychotherapy becomes a self-concern, fitting...a new kind of client...the narcissistic personality...We have made of therapy a new kind of cult, a method in which we hire someone to act as a guide to our successes and happiness. Rarely does one speak of duty to one's society- almost everyone undergoing therapy is concerned with individual gain, and the psychotherapist is hired to assist in this endeavor. (as cited in Doherty, 1995, p.12)

As individuals have become more separated from the environment due to colonialism, industrialization and current business models of profit motive so too has traditional psychotherapy moved toward an individual-centered focus.

Psychotherapy is in need of a paradigm shift that establishes individuals as part of a large social and natural construct. This is possible by infusing a moral capacity into the therapeutic discourse. This moral capacity allows individuals to become connected with a larger sense of community which includes the earth. By shifting traditional psychotherapy to individuals as a part of a community, one can begin to undo the individualization of therapy and improve individual mental health. Individual-centered psychotherapy has glossed over individuals’ involvement in community and the outside world, but community centered therapy asserts that the therapy process can synergistically work with both the inner and outer worlds of the client (Doherty, 1995, p. 109). Therapists have a responsibility to contribute to the development of clients’ relationships with others and with the earth. Therapists can no longer be neutral and “hide behind the wizard's veil of clinical objectivity and moral neutrality” (Doherty, 1995, p. 20).
Therapists need bring a moral discourse into the therapy room and cultivate the skills needed for acting as moral consultants in this increasingly fractured world (Doherty, 1995, p. 7-8). Personal and interpersonal work in therapy can provide the client with tools to be more effective in the community (Doherty, 1995, p. 109). The isolation of the individual from the earth must be addressed; interconnectedness between persons and the environment must be re-established in order to reverse this unhealthy trend.

Emphasizing eco-morality as an ethical value in the Adlerian counseling room will bring about new modalities of mental health and wellness for both individuals and communities. Additionally, the historical influences of colonization and industrialization, in conjunction with the rising pull of the profit motive, have contributed to both the disintegration of humans’ relationship with the earth and the autonomy-centered focus of the traditional therapy model. Traditional psychotherapy fails to foster a community-centered approach to therapeutic treatment. In order to establish an environmentally-based therapy room, the individual must be seen as part of a whole. By establishing the individual as part of a whole, the individual may reconnect with the environment, thereby reversing isolation and separation from nature.

**Community Feeling**

Adlerian community feeling is the premise and framework for all interactions between self and others. It allows the individual to perfect him or herself in relation to the world. The object dimension of community feeling identifies a broader sense of community that includes the earth and its ecological systems. The actions and attitudes demonstrated by community feeling in its object dimension are based on ideals of human behavior and transcend interpersonal interactions. By modeling the ideal transcendent characteristics associated with community feeling, individuals can strive to attain an “ideal” community. These constructs are an overall
moral premise of interactions between an individual and his or her community. To develop eco-morality as a foundational principle within the Adlerian construct, the object dimension and ideal transcendent characteristics will be shown to encompass community feeling from an ecological standpoint. From this, eco-morality will be established as a subset of the larger morality within community feeling.

**Defining and Developing the Role of Adlerian Eco-Community Feeling**

Alfred Adler developed community feeling as an initial construct of Individual Psychology at the beginning of the twentieth century. Parting from his participation in Freud’s discussion group, Adler initiated a more holistic, goal-oriented psychology based on the idea of the indivisibility of the individual (Ansbacher, & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 3). Contrary to Freudian belief of divisions of the individual into id, ego, and superego, Individual Psychology left an individual unified (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 4). Adler’s model was rooted in human social embeddedness (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006, p. 11) and was “probably the most consistent theory of attitude of the individual to the problems of social living and in this sense, a social psychology” (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher, 1978, p. 128). Individual Psychology includes holism and self-consistency of the personality, a striving for superiority or improvement of one’s self or of one’s situation, and community feeling.

Community feeling was first introduced in a revision of Adler’s 1914 paper “The Need for Affection”, in which he used *Gemeinschaftsgefühle*, meaning “community feelings” (Ansbacher, 1978, p. 128). A related term, *Gemeinsinn*, or “community sense”, was introduced by Adler at the same time, relating to children lacking a “community sense”. The goal of both “community sense” and “community feelings” was to counteract natural selfish forces within the individual (Ansbacher, 1978, p. 128). Adler’s first use of the word *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, or
“community feeling” was in a 1918 article entitled “Bolshevism and Psychology”, in which he denounced the Bolshevist Revolution (Ansbacher, 1978, p. 129). In this, community feeling served the goal of counteracting selfish motivations and regimes based on power. As Adler’s view of human nature expanded more positively throughout his career, the concept of community feeling grew to occupy a prominent place in his theory and writings (Ansbacher, 1978, p. 129).

*Gemeinshaftsgfühl* has been translated various ways, with “community feeling” being the preferred translation for Adler (Stein & Edwards, 1998, para. 7). It is also the preferred translation for this literature review. Ansbacher (1992) noted that social interest, another common translation for *Gemeinshaftsgfühl*, actually refers to the way that a concern for others can lead to “socially useful behavior” (p. 404). Although Adler did not offer a thorough comparison between the terms *community feeling* and *social interest*, he did define “social interest as ‘the action-line of community feeling’” (Ansbacher, 1992, p. 405). This means that community feeling is a broader philosophical concept with social interest referring to actions displayed by individuals demonstrating community feeling. In consideration of these concepts, this paper refers to *Gemeinshaftsgfühl* as *community feeling* as it is the literal translation of the German word. Additionally, both *social* and *interest* are limited terms. *Community feeling* is broad enough to encompass all dimensions of *Gemeinshaftsgfühl*, including concepts related to eco-morality.

Adler indicated that community feeling was not a single idea but rather an interconnected, richly complex set of concepts. Community feeling serves several functions. It is a framework for moral judgment and a basis for human meaningfulness. It is the foundation for mental health (Bickhard & Ford, 1976, p. 27). Adler asserted that “social interest
[community feeling] is the main characteristic of each person and is involved in all of his actions” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 28).

The term *Gemeinshaftsgfühl* became so important to Adler’s theory that he added it to his earlier writings (Ansbacher, 1978, p. 130). For example, in a paper entitled “Neurotic Disposition” Adler wrote, “The child learns to dissimilate and remain silent- from oversensitivity, fear of punishment, or humiliation, *always also from oppression by the voice of his social interest* [community feeling]” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1978, p. 131). Adler added the absence of community feeling as a main component of mental illness.

The concept of community feeling developed throughout Adler’s career. It evolved into a cognitive function rather than an innate counterforce to selfishness. Cases of mental health failure were due to underdevelopment or lack of community feeling rather than a “throttling” of community feeling (Ansbacher, 1978, p. 135). This later view of community feeling is more compatible with the holistic foundation of Adlerian psychology. Holistic theory requires one central dynamic force which all other functions serve. For Adler, this force was the striving of the individual to be either on the socially useful side or socially useless side. Community feeling directly influences the direction of this striving by cultivating within the individual socially useful actions and attitudes (Ansbacher, 1978, p. 133). In its final stages of development, community feeling became a constructive description of an ideal norm for human beings. An individual fully demonstrating community feeling is a unified, self-consistent, confident individual. He or she feels and acts as part of a whole and strives for goals that are in harmony with the ideal of perfecting the world (Ansbacher, 1978, p. 138).
Community Feeling as a Foundation for Eco-Morality

Community feeling serves as a dynamic framework to guide individuals in making decisions. Ansbacher (1991) considered this to be the most important aspect of community feeling (p. 41). Eco-morality is a subset of this decision-making framework. Because morality is defined as a basis for evaluation of actions (Corey et al., 2011, p. 14), community feeling may be regarded as a foundation for morality and moral judgment. Identifying community feeling with morality, Adler stated that “What we call good or bad character can be judged only from the viewpoint of the community” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 130). Adler was asserting that judgment of actions and character has community feeling as its basis for evaluation. Adler continued, “If there exists, at least to some extent, a reliable knowledge of that meaning of life which lies beyond our own experience, then it is clear that this puts those persons in the wrong who flagrantly contradict it” (1964, p. 16-17). Within context, the meaning of life to which Adler refers is community feeling. It is morally wrong to violate principles or characteristics of community feeling. Adler construed community feeling as a criterion for both moral value and mental health (Bickhard & Ford, 1976, p. 37). Community feeling may be held as a standard based in eco-morality for both individual and community health and as an eco-moralistic standard for therapists.

Object Dimension

The object dimension is a prominent component within community feeling. This dimension extends community feeling beyond the interpersonal level to include an ever-expanding definition of community. In contrast to its person-to-person dimension, object dimension involves community feeling at its full conception, which includes the universe and earth-related elements (Manaster, Cemalcilar, & Knill, 2003, p. 111). Ansbacher (1992) asserted
that the object dimension alludes to a broad sense of affinity and kinship that extends to a cosmic level (p. 403). Its ideal transcendent characteristics are how object dimension theory demonstrates in individuals’ lives. They have as their foundation the concept of humanity striving toward perfection through the ideal form of community. When an individual is demonstrating eco-morality with his or her actions and attitudes, he or she is demonstrating the ideal transcendent characteristics associated with the object dimension of Adler’s community feeling.

From its first inception, Adler included within community feeling not only a person-to-person connection, but a person-to-cosmos connection. Alfred Farau stated the necessity for such a broadening of the definition of community feeling with, “He who sees in Adler’s Gemeinschaftsgefühl only a social feeling cannot understand and apply it fully” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 32). In order to demonstrate the object dimension of community feeling, an individual must utilize an ecologically inclusive view of community.

Nearly all things can be the focus of community feeling. Adler argued that the most sustaining and satisfying perceptions of the meaning of life are those that incorporate a sense of larger community (Crandall, 1980, p. 482). He spoke of a well-developed community feeling leading to a feeling of being “at home on this poor earth crust” and a feeling of “connectedness to the whole cosmos” (as cited in Crandall, 1980, p. 482). This is illustrated by a passage he added in 1922 to “The Aggression Drive”. He explains,

Gemeinschaftsgefühl which is innate to man must be regarded as the most important regulator of the aggression drive. It is at the basis of any relationship of the child toward people, animals, plants, and objects, and signifies the cohesion with our life, the affirmation, the conciliation with it. Through Gemeinschaftsgefühl, in its rich
differentiations (parental love, filial love, sexual love, love of one’s country, love of nature, art, science, love of mankind) acting together with the aggression drive, there comes about the general attitude a person takes, which actually constitutes his psychological life. (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 30)

In this passage, community feeling is equated with an affirmative attitude toward life in general and toward all objects in the world. The community of community feeling is not limited to the community of people but describes a community of general connectedness involving larger spheres (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 31).

In his first book Adler used the word community in a sense that did not pertain to the human community (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 31). When Adler presented his theory that every aspect of the individual’s personality becomes subordinated to the “fictional personal ideal” of “the self-consistent life plan”, he wrote that even organically, “the individual becomes a self-consistent ‘community’ in which all parts cooperate for a similar purpose” (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 31). Adler was referring to both the community of parts within the individual and those that comprised the individual within the larger sphere of the universe.

Adler made additional statements about community feeling as a general cohesion with life and an affirmation of a larger sense of community throughout his career. For example,

The social feeling remains throughout life, changed, colored, circumcised in some cases, enlarged and broadened in others until it touches not only members of [the individual’s] own family, but also his clan, his nation, and finally, the whole of humanity. It is possible that it may extend beyond these boundaries and express itself toward animals, plants, lifeless objects, or finally towards the whole cosmos. (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 31)
Adler continued with,

the innate social feeling is actually a cosmic feeling, a reflection of the coherence of everything cosmic, which lives in us, which we cannot dismiss entirely, and which gives us the ability to empathize with things which lie outside our body. (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 31)

Adler emphasized the ecologically-expansive action of community feeling, which has as its foundation empathy and connectedness to all things within the universe.

Certain Adlerian writers also emphasized the extended meaning of community (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 31). Erwin Wexberg, a contemporary of Adler, asserted that to cross the boundaries of one’s self only with regard to human beings is not possible. One who is ready to extend himself will also be able to forget himself in nature and art.

In the end there exists Gemeinschaft [community] also with things. (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 32)

Wexberg included logic, objectivity, devotion to one’s work, devotion to nature and art, and a willingness to be universally responsible under the term community feeling (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 32). For Wexberg, the essential direction of movement within the individual was either moving inward or outward. This is in line with Adler’s socially useless or socially useful striving. An outward movement, or other-centeredness, is the direction of movement within the object dimension of community feeling. This socially-useful movement is based on the human capacity to empathize with others, including either people or the earth (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 32).

Lewis Way, author of Adler’s Place in Psychology: An Exposition of Individual Psychology, also extended community feeling to include the whole of the earth:
Adler used the word *Gemeinshaft* [community] because his meaning embraced not only the society of men, but an attitude of identification with the whole created universe. The ‘community’, as he seems to envisaged it, included love of nature as well as love of our fellow men, and even love of the inanimate. It was the sense of kinship with the other animals and the basis of our sense of beauty, of the earth and the sky and the sea. I would therefore be inclined to translate this difficult word as ‘sense of community’-of community with the Universe which is to be regarded as essentially ‘friendly’. (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 32)

Way elaborated on the term *Gemeinshaft*, asserting that it embraces the sense of relatedness, not only to the human community, but to the whole of life, and is therefore the highest expression of Adler’s concept of totality. It means the human being’s sense of himself as a part of the unity of existence in contrast to the fear of standing in the cosmos in a single, unrelated organism. (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 32)

Way expressed community feeling as being, essentially, a “cosmic feeling”, which comprises an ever-widening sense of connectedness that reaches out to include the whole universe. This includes a connection with nature, animals, plants, and land.

The object dimension of community feeling expands community feeling beyond an interpersonal focus to include the universe, earth, and entities within them. This focus on the earth and its objects fits an eco-morality within community feeling. Eco-morality asks of the individual to embark upon the task of reconnecting to the earth community. This reconnection is comprised of a sense of kinship with these community elements. It is additionally comprised of
an ever-widening sphere of interest and empathy. Because community feeling is a foundation for morality, eco-morality is a necessary ethic within the Adlerian counseling construct.

**Ideal Transcendent Characteristics**

Ideal transcendent characteristics are the attitudes and resulting actions that develop within an individual when he or she is demonstrating community feeling at its ideal transcendent level, which includes its object dimension (Manaster et al., 2003, p. 111). Manaster et al. (2003) identified the object dimension of community feeling as belonging to an ideal transcendent form of community feeling. Certain characteristics are associated with the ideal transcendent form of community feeling (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 31). Because the object dimension of community feeling is the foundation for eco-morality, these characteristics coincide with a fully realized extension of identification and interest with the earth and its entities. These characteristics include the self-actualization of the individual, empathy for entities beyond the human, actions attached to a transcendent viewpoint, a striving for perfection, a sense of belonging that extends beyond particular groups, and an ultimate non-conformity. Through exploring each ideal transcendent characteristic, a full sense of community feeling in its object dimension may be embraced. Because the object dimension of community feeling supports eco-morality, ideal transcendent characteristics manifest within an eco-moralistic mindset.

**Self-actualization.** Self-actualization is a state of being in which one has fully realized and is acting out his or her innate positive potential. From an Adlerian viewpoint, an individual who is self-actualized is someone whose community feeling is highly developed (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 33). Because the basis of self-actualization is a functioning on a level of growth motivation rather than deficiency motivation (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 34), a self-actualized individual includes nature and the universe as members of his or her community (Ansbacher,
1991, p. 33, 35). He or she will have an interest in the interests of humankind because Adler’s object dimension of community feeling extends beyond the social to all “objects that contribute to...the lives of all” (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher, 1978, p. 136). Therefore a self-actualized individual, while still a socially-embedded person, will consistently extend his or her sphere of interest. Adler discussed “the interests of mankind generally” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 36) when speaking of the focus of community feeling. Implied is the idea that genuine community feeling is an “interest in the interests of mankind” (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 36). The main trait of this interest is the merging of an individual’s interests with those of a broad definition of others, working toward harmony and affirmation of the larger world (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 37). Because an eco-moralistic mindset has the goal of reconnecting humans with the larger world, this expanded view of interest is the basis of eco-morality.

**Empathy.** The ideal transcendent characteristic of empathy is a key element of Adlerian community feeling. Empathy includes the ability to feel at home on this earth, feel part of a whole, and see a situation as others see it (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 38). Adler defined empathy as a strong identification with others: “At a play every person in the audience empathizes and participates. This is identification in our sense” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1978. p. 132). Adler sometimes called empathy “common sense”, which he defined as “all behavior which we find advances the community” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 38). He asserted that the goal of community feeling is to “see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1978, p. 132). Empathy has as its foundation a deep identification and feeling for another. Adler stated, “Individual Psychology may claim as its contribution to have pointed out that empathy and understanding are facts of social [community] feeling, of being in harmony with the universe. Empathy is a necessary element in
connecting to others, including a sense of other that extends beyond the human” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 31). From the viewpoint of eco-morality, empathy is a requirement for connecting to the larger earth community.

**Evolution.** Adler (1964) equated the goal of community feeling with the evolution of individuals and communities. He asserted that the goal is not the perfection of the individual, but one that “stands for an ideal society, amongst all mankind, the ultimate fulfillment of evolution” (p. 275). Adlerian evolution involves growing toward a goal of betterment. Adler asserted that “the development of man...can be guided in the direction of the generally useful. The indestructible destiny of the human species is social interest [community feeling]...Man is inclined toward social interest [community feeling], toward the good” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1978, p. 134). Individuals who are displaying community feeling are always evolving toward being useful to a broad sense of “others”. Eco-morality is expanded and enhanced within the individual through evolutionary movement.

**Perfection.** The evolution within community feeling has the final goal of societal perfection. Adler stated “Individual Psychology...regards all human striving as a struggle for perfection” (1964, p. 37). He continued with, “The universal fact of the creative evolution of all living things can teach us that a goal is appointed for the line of development in every species-the goal of perfection, of active adaptation to the cosmic demands” (1964, p. 270). This striving for perfection is a result of the continuous movement of individuals from a felt-minus toward a felt-plus, which is a primary growth motivation within the individual (Adler, 1964, p. 37). Adler explained this with, “There is something inherent which is part and parcel of life itself, a struggle, an urge, a self-development, a something without which life cannot be conceived. To live means to develop oneself” (1964, p. 269).
Adler was careful to apply this principle of perfection not to the individual but to the larger community. He said, “...the individual can never be the goal of perfection, but only mankind as a cooperating community” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1979, p. 40). The striving for perfection means striving for an ideal community, one in which cooperation and contribution increase. Once this level is achieved, one lives “with so little sense of inferiority and vanity that our connections with others demand only efforts for the common good” (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 42). An individual who reaches this level of perfection lives “as a full-fledged, equal member of the human community with interests of the human community as one’s own” in other words, “the horizon of the individual is the horizon of humanity” (Manaster et al., 2003, p. 113). Reconnecting to the earth through eco-morality involves the goal of health and wellness, and consequently the perfection, of both the individual and society.

Transcendence. Adler extended the use of community feeling to include the future; thus community feeling transcends the present time. In Adler’s most concise definition, community feeling “means feeling with the whole...under the aspect of eternity. It means striving for a form of community which must be thought of as everlasting, as it could be thought of if mankind had reached the goal of perfection” (as cited in Bickhard & Ford, 1976, p. 32). With this, he determined that the ideal form of community is one which transcends the present and extends to the future in an everlasting form. He stated, “The most sensible estimate of the value of any activity is its helpfulness to all humanity, present and future, a criterion that applies...also to higher activities such as religion, science, and art” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1978, p. 136).

Community feeling also transcends particular social, religious, or political groups: “Social interest [community feeling] means...feeling with the whole sub specie aeternitatis [under the aspect of eternity]...it means a striving for a form of community...as...if humanity had
reached the goal of perfection. It is never a present-day society, nor a political or religious form” (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher, 1978, p. 136). Dreikurs (1950) wrote that the larger meaning of community feeling is to view behavior “from the aspect of eternity” and that it is more than “a feeling of belonging to a certain group or class of people, or benevolence toward the whole race” (p. 7-8). Eco-morality requires the individual to transcend his or her person-to-person goals and focus on reconnecting with the larger world, which transcends societal forms. It expands its focus beyond specific groups to include a large, expansive definition of community. Eco-morality also includes a sense of transcendence of the present time and of particular groups.

**Belonging.** When displaying community feeling, an individual feels a deep sense of belonging that goes beyond particular attachments (Manaster et al., 2003, p. 111). Adler stated that “social interest [community feeling] does not mean...simply a feeling of belonging to a certain group or class of people, or benevolence toward the whole race” (as cited in Manaster et al., 2003, p. 111). This belonging involves a sense of being part of a larger whole. When an individual is acting based on an eco-moralistic framework, the belonging he or she feels is to a larger sense of the world.

**Non-conformity.** When an individual is demonstrating community feeling to its full extent, non-conformity to the norms of certain groups will be the inevitable result. The goal of perfection removes the individual imbued with community feeling from the goal of conformity. Mere adjustment to existing groups or standards “would actually freeze the great becoming. It would limit the individual, whereas social interest [community feeling] liberates him from the inadequacies of the present society, lets him rise above these, in his efforts for a better society of the future” (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 42).
Adler consistently equated community feeling with independence and courage. At the same time that an individual must grow in community feeling, he or she must pursue the “development of greater independence from the opinion of other people” (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 42). The mentally healthy individual cooperates for a better future for all and consequently gains the courage and independence to fight evils instead of conforming to them (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 42).

The importance of non-conformity cannot be overstated. When one identifies with a “partial” community, for instance a political group, nation, culture, or religion, his or her community feeling is incomplete (Manaster et al., 2003, p. 111). Because Adler used the object dimension of community feeling to refer to an intrinsic interest in non-human objects with eternity in mind, community feeling will often be in opposition to conformity (Crandall, 1980, p. 481). Eco-morality as a guiding principle will often promote non-conformity to certain norms and groups. It takes independence and courage to foster an eco-morality.

An analysis of Adler’s object dimension of community feeling reveals a complex of ideal transcendent characteristics. The object dimension of community feeling expands the definition of community to include objects beyond the human, including the universe, the earth, and all its inhabitants. The ideal transcendent characteristics are attitudes and actions that exist within an individual displaying community feeling. The object dimension of community feeling and its associated characteristics comprise a moral structure that is necessary for individual and community health. At the heart of this morality is a strong earth-centered, ecological foundation; eco-morality is core component of the Adlerian model of wellness.
Community Feeling as a Criterion for Mental Health

Adler asserted that the development and presence of community feeling is a requirement for mental health. Eco-morality is an extension of the object dimension of community feeling; thus eco-moralistic attitudes and actions may contribute to mental health. Adversely, the lack of community feeling, and of eco-morality, can be seen as one causal factor in psychopathology.

Adler described the multiple benefits of community feeling with,

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the value of an increase in social [community] feeling. The mind improves, for intelligence is a communal function. The feeling of worth and value is heightened, giving courage and an optimistic view, and there is a sense of acquiescence in the common advantages and drawbacks of our lot. The individual feels at home in life and feels his existence to be worthwhile just so far as he is useful to others and is overcoming common, instead of private, feelings of inferiority. Not only the ethical nature, but the right attitude in aesthetics, the best understanding of the beautiful and the ugly, will always be founded upon the truest of social feelings. (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 28)

Adler associated mind function, worth and value, a feeling of community and of being at home, and a foundation for ethics with community feeling. Because eco-morality is rooted in community feeling, these benefits may be extended to eco-moralistic actions and attitudes. Additionally, Adler asserted that the healthy person is one “whose mode of life is so adapted that- whether he wants it or not- society derives a certain advantage from his work” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 39). Community, in Adler’s broad and expansive definition, will always benefit from an individual displaying community feeling. With this, Adler expresses himself fully on the important and beneficial relationship of community feeling with health.
The lack of community feeling is associated with a decrease in mental health and wellness. Adler asserted that “...all that constitutes a failure is so because it obstructs social [community] feeling” (as cited in Bickhard & Ford, 1976, p. 44). The lack of community feeling leads to a sense of alienation from the earth, competition with others, and a sense of threat from others (Crandall, 1980, p. 483). Lack of interest in things outside of the self, coupled with insecurity and a need to protect a threatened self-image, leads to a narrowing sphere of interests and activities and a diminished capacity for enjoying many of life’s potential satisfactions (Crandall, 1980, p. 483). Without community feeling, the natural sense of striving for superiority within the individual becomes a striving for superiority over others as a compensatory measure (Crandall, 1980, p. 483). Crandall asserts that “Without social interest [community feeling], the striving for superiority becomes a striving for personal, relative superiority to others as a strategy to reduce threat and feelings of inferiority” (1980, p. 483). The lack of community feeling is both associated with and is a causal factor in negative mental health and wellness outcomes. Thus, the lack of eco-morality, an extension of the object dimension of community feeling, may also be associated with a decrease in mental health and wellness.

**Empirically-supported benefits of community feeling.** Numerous studies have produced empirical evidence to suggest that community feeling positively increases measures of mental health. These studies support Adler’s claims that equate community feeling with mental health and well-being.

Crandall and Putnam (1980) established positive correlations between community feeling and measures of happiness and overall well-being. In addition, cognitive and affective measures of mental health were associated with community feeling as were satisfaction in the life tasks of work and friendship and perceived meaningfulness in life.
Additionally, Crandall (1980) used his Social Interest Scale (SIS) to establish correlations between community feeling and both self-report and indirect measures of adjustment and well-being. Participants in the study made a number of choices between two traits they considered to be important. Each pair included a trait closely associated with community feeling and another not relevant to community feeling. Each individual was rated according to which traits he or she considered desirable. The study yielded positive correlations between community feeling and well-being. The correlations were higher in groups experiencing stressful life events, indicating that community feeling is important in coping with life’s difficulties. Individuals high in community feeling experienced fewer perceived difficulties and reported higher levels of satisfaction in life.

Similarly, Leak and Leak (2006) conducted two studies to find that community feeling is associated with well-being. The first study used the Social Interest Index to provide concepts upon which subjects rated themselves. The results showed that, subjectively, community feeling was associated with cognitive and emotional aspects of well-being, self-actualizing tendencies, a sense of identity achievement, and healthy values. The second study used the Prosocial Tendencies Measure to determine participants’ prosocial tendencies. The results were that, interpersonally, community feeling was associated with intimacy, generativity, agreeableness/nurturance, prosocial moral reasoning, and prosocial motives.

**Developing Eco-Moralistic Community Feeling**

The capacity for community feeling is innate within individuals, though it must be intentionally and consciously developed into an ability. Adler stated, “Social interest [community feeling]...is rooted as a potentiality, not as an actual ability” (Ansbacher &
Ansbacher, 1979, p. 25). Eco-moralistic community feeling is a potentiality that must be developed through positive conditions and an encouraging environment. Adler saw the goal of psychotherapy as “to develop behavior on the useful side and to establish in general a useful attitude towards life and society” (as cited in Ansbacher, 1991, p. 39). In this way, the overarching goal of the Adlerian therapist is to help an individual develop from partially-functioning to fully-functioning (Stein & Edwards, 1998, para. 53). In order to accomplish this goal, a client must work toward becoming his or her best self; he or she must increase his or her feeling of community. The client must use this insight to take concrete steps toward improving all relationships, including his or her relationship with the earth (Stein & Edwards, 1998, para. 53). Stein and Edwards explain, “In its largest sense, the goal of therapy is not to improve just the client’s life; the therapist is working to improve the quality of life for everyone in the client’s circle of contact, as well as improving society through the client” (1998, para. 53). The therapist seeks to understand and identify with the client and help him or her learn to “re-see the world...to bring it more into harmony with a common view of the world” (Ansbacher, 1978, p. 135).

A therapist begins to foster eco-moralistic community feeling within the client by gently providing encouragement and stimulation to cooperate. This will reawaken courage and creativity within the client, and a “new, unfamiliar feeling of community may develop as he [or she] discovers that he [or she] has something valuable to offer” (Stein & Edwards, 1998, para. 55). The therapist acts as a partner in this process and encourages the client to develop the courage to embark upon the process of developing eco-moralistic community feeling.

To bring an eco-morality into an Adlerian community feeling framework, earth-based modalities may be implemented into the process. Nature-guided therapeutic interventions in
various forms may be integrated into the Adlerian treatment modality. These interventions, based on ecological ethics, may enhance and expand traditional Adlerian treatment modalities. Both ecopsychology and ecotherapy have much to add to all dimensions of community feeling.

The moral framework that comprises community feeling provides a strong foundation for an eco-moralistic view of humanity’s relationship with the earth. Within Adlerian theory, community feeling is established as a foundation for morality and eco-morality. The object dimension of community feeling and its ideal transcendent characteristics highlight the interconnectedness between community feeling and eco-morality. Both Adler’s theory and empirical evidence support the positive correlation between community feeling and mental health and well-being. With community feeling as its foundation, eco-morality may be utilized as an ethic in the Adlerian counseling room. The process of developing community feeling includes fostering its innate potential with encouragement and support from the therapist. Implementing an eco-morality into the Adlerian therapy process may include the integration of earth-centered, community feeling-based treatment modalities.

Community-centered therapy may become a standard that contributes to a normative psychotherapeutic modality; Adler’s community feeling provides the reasoning and motivation behind it: “Through its extension into the future the concept of social interest [community feeling] not only provides a place for the independent spirit, the present-day non-conformist who contributes to the advancement of mankind, but makes him the ideally normal man” (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 43). Embracing this definition of community, and promoting within it an eco-morality, will bring individuals and communities closer to wellness.
The Benefits of Eco-Morality

There have been numerous, well-done studies that have demonstrated how a reconnection to the natural world enhances human health and well-being. All individuals can benefit from increased contact with the earth. Nature, part of Adler’s community feeling “cosmos”, has been scientifically proven to increase individual and community mental and physical health. The following empirical studies address the impact of nature on individuals’ mental health. These include studies involving animal therapy and the effect of nature on creativity and learning. Additionally, nature has shown to have positive effects on stress, general health, and communities. Eco-morality is based on the assumption that a reconnection to nature promotes mental health and is a valid extension of Adlerian philosophy. Therefore, to further define eco-morality, it is necessary to explore the benefits of the reconnecting to the earth.

Mental Health

A number of studies support the hypothesis that contact with nature is beneficial to mental health. Two studies present evidence that exposure to nature during exercise may help individuals recover from stress and promote concentration and clearer thinking. Pretty, Hine, and Peacock (2006) had participants view pictures of objectively pleasant rural landscape scenes while the participants engaged in physical activity. The subjects who viewed the pictures had a decrease in blood pressure and an increase in self-esteem and mood. In a Swedish study (Bodin & Hartig, 2003), male and female participants were randomly assigned multiple runs in either a busy urban or natural rural setting. The runners provided self-reports of emotions and behavioral measures before and after the one-hour runs. The findings were that the green environment promoted a greater decrease in anxiety and depression. These studies show that exposure to nature during exercise may have positive effects on mental health.
Additional studies have shown that positive mental states correlate with viewing nature, regardless of activity. Herzog, Herbert, Kaplan, and Crooks (2000) found that participants had a more positive outlook on life and higher life satisfaction when viewing slides of nature scenes. The researchers showed participants slides of rivers, dry lake beds, floodplains, and terraces for ten or fifteen seconds. The results were that, even within the short time period, positive mental states correlated with all of the nature scenes. Interestingly, all groups preferred the river slides, which may be a point of praxis to the Adlerian practitioner who is implementing nature-based therapeutic homework for the client.

Barton and Pretty (2010) conducted a study to examine just how much exposure to nature is required for improved mental health. The results showed that mood and self-esteem in the participants improved after a five-minute exposure. Another finding, similar to the previous study, was that nature areas adjacent to water offered the most improvement in mood. The authors concluded that exposure to nature can be conceived of as readily available therapy with no obvious side effects.

Perhaps because of the inherent positive correlation with mental states, individuals typically identified green spaces as favorite places. Korpela and Hartig (1996) examined the restorative qualities of these favorite places. The participants were subjected to slides which depicted various indoor and outdoor environments. The subjects identified as their favorite places the slides with greenery, water, and scenic quality. These places were associated with positive self-report measures of fascination, coherence, and compatibility, and negatively associated with anger, aggression, and fear arousal.

In studying the effects of horticultural therapy on mood, a team of researchers took cardiovascular patients on a tour of a greenhouse and gardens and had them participate in a
planting session (Wichrowsky, Whiteson, Haas, Mola, & Rey, 2005). Immediately following, the patients experienced a significant reduction in tension, depression, anger, fatigue, and confusion. They additionally experienced an increase in vigor and energy.

These studies show that increased contact with nature correlates positively with increased mental health. This improvement in mental health is aligned with the Adlerian assertion that mental health is defined as high levels of community feeling (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 28), including its object dimension.

**Creativity and Learning**

Numerous studies show that contact with nature has benefits to individuals’ creativity and learning capacities. Nature was found to significantly reduce symptoms of attention-related disorders. Faber Taylor, Kuo and Sullivan (2001) concluded that children show a significant reduction in the symptoms of attention-deficit disorder (ADD) when they engage with nature. Participants were comprised of children with a diagnosis of ADD within the same age bracket and from a similar climate. The children and their parents were asked to fill out a questionnaire in which they nominated two activities that seemed to decrease symptoms of ADD. The activities were then either labeled green, not green, or ambiguous by the researchers. The analysis of the data collected suggested that contact with nature (the green activities) is systematically related to lessened attention deficit symptoms. By decreasing ADD symptoms, learning capacity was increased.

Kaplan (1995) conducted a nine-year study for the U. S. Forest Service whose findings suggested that direct and indirect contact with nature can help with recovery from mental fatigue and restoration of attention. He followed participants in a two-week wilderness program. During these treks and afterward, subjects reported experiencing improved ability to think
clearly. In addition to supporting the theory that nature experience can improve psychological health, Kaplan summarized it helped restore the brain’s ability to process information.

An additional study examined the distinctive benefits of natural environments on reflection and attentional recovery (Herzog, Black, Fountaine, & Knotts, 1997). Participants were told that their goal was either to regain their ability to concentrate and focus their attention or to think deeply about their serious personal problems. Then they were shown color slides of nature, entertainment, and urban settings. The nature settings had the highest correlation with effectiveness of meeting the goals of both groups. The authors concluded that nature settings provide a soft fascination which allows directed attention to rest, leaves room for reflection, and provides a buffer against painful thoughts that may accompany reflection.

Furthermore, a set of two experiments conducted by Berman, Jonides and Kaplan (2008) showed that participants’ memory performance and attention spans improved by twenty percent after an hour of interacting with nature. Interestingly, all outdoor temperatures produced equivalent results. The Adlerian practitioner can always recommend activities in the environment, regardless of weather conditions.

These studies show that increased contact with nature has positive effects on individuals’ creativity and learning capacities. This is in line with the Adlerian framework which asserts that engagement with nature, one dimension of community feeling, will have positive effects on individuals’ well-being (Ansbacker, 1991, p. 28).

Animal Therapy

Contact with animals provides numerous psychological benefits. One team of researchers (Marcus et al., 2012) implemented the use of a therapy dog in the waiting room of an outpatient pain management clinic. Patients who spent time with the therapy dog reported a pain decrease
of close to twenty-five percent, and an increase in feelings of calm, cheerfulness, and pleasantness.

A study in Norway (Berget, Ekeberg, & Braastad, 2008) conducted the first randomized controlled study of the therapeutic benefits of farm animals. Ninety patients with mental health diagnoses completed questionnaires to assess self-efficacy, coping ability, and quality of life before, at the end of intervention, and at a six month follow-up. Two thirds of the patients were given interventions and the remaining served as controls. One finding was that farm animals are able to assist with therapy for such mental disorders as schizophrenia, affective disorders, anxiety, and personality disorders. Additionally, self-efficacy rates stayed elevated with the treatment group six months after the study. Contact with the farm animals increased patients’ self-confidence, the learning of new tasks, and coping strategies. Furthermore, the patients with the largest increase in coping skills also reported favoring physical contact with the animals.

Family pets play a role in mental health as well. In a review of the effects of animals on mental health, Walsh (2009) examined the role of pets in family therapy. Walsh analyzed the effects of multiple research studies involving dogs, cats, birds, and fish on resilience, family functioning, family climate, and family violence. She concluded that the inclusion of an animal within the therapeutic process enhances the therapeutic milieu and facilitates change through interactions with clients. Including companion animals as valuable resources can inform and enrich therapeutic work. Regarding animals and children, Friesen (2010) explored animal-assisted programs in school and therapeutic contexts. After reviewing multiple empirical studies involving animal-assisted therapy, Friesen concluded that animals offer children unique and valuable social and emotional support. This is precisely because animals are active and willing
participants but it is outside the realm of their communicative abilities to verbally criticize or judge the child’s progress.

Equines play a large part in benefitting the human-nature relationship. Selby and Smith-Osborne (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of fourteen studies involving the benefits of equine therapy. The researchers collected biopsychosocial data from studies that included a wide variety of participants, including children and adults from various ethnic backgrounds. The majority of the studies demonstrated significantly positive effects on their participants. These effects included increased quality of life, self-confidence, and self-worth, and a decrease in anger, depression, and frustration.

Additionally, Klontz, Bivens, Leinart, and Klontz (2007) conducted an open clinical trial to study the psychological effectiveness of an equine-assisted experiential therapy program. After the participants attended eight equine therapy sessions within eight months, they reported being more oriented in the present, better able to live more fully in the here-and-now, less burdened by guilt, regrets, and resentments, less focused on fears related to the future, more independent, and more self-supportive.

Connecting with animals enhances health and well-being. Additionally, fostering a relationship with animals is engaging in the object dimension of Adler’s community feeling. Therefore, connecting with animals is acting within an eco-morality based Adlerian framework.

**Stress and General Health**

Nature scenes not only affect positive mental states, they diminish symptoms of stress. Numerous studies support the notion that an increase in community feeling leads to reduction of stress states. Researchers out of Texas and Delaware (Ulrich et al., 1991) examined individuals’ ability to recover from stress during exposure to both natural and urban environments. The
researchers first exposed participants to a “stressor” that consisted of a ten minute film that depicted several serious and graphic injuries. Following the stressor, the participants viewed a second ten minute film that displayed either a nature or an urban setting. The results indicated that natural outdoor settings had more restorative influences than the urban settings on positive affect, anger, aggression, and fear. The researchers noted the rapid recovery that occurred with the nature setting group: most of the recovery occurred during the first four minutes of exposure to the nature video. The researchers speculated that the short recovery time is a promising finding for people who live in urban setting and who have only short exposures to nature through daily life.

In one study (Diette, Lechtzin, Haponik, Devrotes, & Rubin, 2003), patients undergoing bronchoscopy were randomly assigned to receive sedation or sedation plus nature contact, which included either water in a stream or birds chirping. The finding was that patients with nature contact had substantially better pain control. High pain perception is often associated with high levels of stress. Therefore, a decrease in pain perception is associated with lower stress levels.

A Japanese team of researchers studied the effects of forest bathing (shinrin-yoku) from twenty-four field experiments in Japan (Park, Tsunetsugu, Kasetani, Kagawa, & Miyazaki, 2010). Forest bathing is defined as making contact with the forest. The researchers tested participant salivary cortisol levels, elevated levels of which are associated with stress, before visiting forest and city study sites. There, participants sat in chairs, viewed the landscape, and walked around. The results showed cortisol levels decreasing after time in the forest area compared to the city setting. Additionally, pulse rates decreased and systolic blood pressure was significantly lower in the forest area. Stress is often measured with heart rate and blood pressure. A decrease in these measures is often associated with improved stress states. The researchers
concluded that the physiological effects of time in nature can aid in effectively relaxing the human body.

Gardening can also decrease stress. Park, Shoemaker, and Haub (2009) measured the physical health conditions of older adults classified as gardeners or non-gardeners. Participants were subjected to health assessments prior to completing a questionnaire regarding their leisure-time physical activities. Results showed that active gardeners reported higher physical function, hand function, and general health and vitality compared to the moderate gardeners or non-gardeners. These general physical health benefits often are associated with lower stress levels.

In addition to improving stress, nature can be an antidote to obesity. Bell, Wilson, and Liu (2008) found that the greener the neighborhood, the lower the Body Mass Index of children. The study involved 3,800 inner city children from the same residential county who lived at the same address for the two-year duration of the study. The children’s living areas were tested for amount of available green space following a test of the children’s Body Mass Indexes. After a two-year follow-up test of Body Mass Index, the study revealed that living in areas with green space has a long term positive impact on children’s weight and health. Similarly, Parsons (1991) found that exposure to natural environments, such as parks, enhances the ability to cope with and recover from stress and recover from illness and injury. These studies provide evidence that nature spaces reduce stress and increase general physical well-being. These findings could support Adler’s belief that the capacity for community feeling both promotes, and is an indicator of, health and well-being.

Community Benefits

There are numerous community benefits to increased contact with nature. Weinstein, Przybylski, and Ryan (2009) conducted a study that demonstrates how exposure to the natural
environment leads people to nurture close relationships with fellow human beings, to value community, and to be more generous with money. Participants were exposed to natural or man-made settings by looking at images on computer screens or by working in a lab with or without plants. As participants in the study focused intensely on “artificial elements”, they highly rated wealth and fame. The results were summarized by noting that people are more caring when they’re around nature.

Contact with nature can also reduce violence in communities. Kuo and Sullivan (2001a) conducted research in a Chicago public housing development. Arguably, Chicago public housing attracts people of similar socioeconomic backgrounds and stress levels. The study compared lives of women living in apartment buildings with no greenery outside to those who lived in identical buildings - but with trees and greenery immediately outside. Those living near the trees exhibited fewer aggressive and violent acts against their partners. The researchers linked incidences of violence to low scores on tests of concentration that resulted from high levels of mental fatigue. In a similar study, Kuo and Sullivan (2001b) showed that play areas in urban neighborhoods with more trees have fewer incidences of violence. The findings of these studies on nature and community provide scientific backing to Adler’s assertion that community feeling not only positively affects the individual, but communities as well (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 39).

It is evident that encounters with nature result in a wide variety of benefits for individuals and communities. These benefits include positive effects on mental health, learning, creativity, stress, and general physical health. Additional research suggests that contact with nature has the positive effect of prompting individuals to be more community-oriented, more altruistic, and less violent and aggressive. This research affirms what Alfred Adler theorized
ninety years ago: “Individual Psychology accepts the viewpoint of the complete unity and self-consistency of the individual whom it regards and examines as socially embedded. We refuse to recognize and examine an isolated human being” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 126). This embeddedness is in all of the earth’s interconnected systems. All of life is rooted in nature, and a separation from that wider world desensitizes and diminishes mental, physical, and community health capacities. The benefits that result from connecting humans to nature are in direct line with Adler’s community feeling. The results of these studies support the need for an additional ecologically-based moral principle informing Adlerian counseling ethics.

Eco-Morality and Earth-Centered Paradigms

The separation of people from nature points to perhaps the most profound cause of humankind’s destructive relationship with the environment (Owens, 2001, p. 224). This destructive relationship has had negative effects on individual and community health and wellbeing. Due to the destructive relationship between humans and nature, one must investigate traditional cultures that demonstrate symbiotic relationships with the earth for improved guidance. Unlike the prevalent, fractured way of relating to the earth, in these cultures individuals are not removed from and superior to nature but rather an essential part of the complex of relationships that comprise the environment (Owens, 2001, p. 227). Delving deeper into these relationships will prove to be a foundation for the praxis of eco-morality as an Adlerian counseling ethic.

The characteristics of Native American, Buddhist, Shinto, and Nature Romantic paradigms present ways of living in symbiosis with the earth. Adler defined health as having developed community feeling at the affective level. This entails a fostering of the relationship between self and a broad definition of others (Stein & Edwards, 1998, para. 8). These cultures
have developed unique and positive relationships between humans and the environment and can act as models of how a healthy relationship might present. At the heart of these cultures is an intricately linked mixture of traditional ecological knowledge, local ecological wisdom, ecological ethics, and corresponding ritual practices (Curry, 2011, p. 208). In addition, the modern paradigms of ecofeminism and ecotheology may serve as lenses through which to view the propagation of a healthy relationship with the earth. This knowledge provides points of reference for the praxis of an eco-morality in the Adlerian counseling room.

**Native Americans**

Traditional Native American cultures give guidance as to how to reorient contemporary therapeutic culture toward an earth-centered modality. Native Americans have long used stories for passing down earth-centered traditions. These stories transmit the cultural values and worldviews of Native groups regarding aspects of nature that have been developed based on observations and experiences (Aftandilian, 2011, p. 192). Stories of Native Americans’ relationship with animals, the land, and the rituals that establish these relationships may contribute to an understanding of how eco-morality might present in the Adlerian counseling room.

**Animals.** Fundamental beliefs of Native cultures, told through stories, suggest ways in which to view animals with respect and reciprocity. In most Native American cultural stories, animals have agency and the ability to act consciously in this and other worlds. They can talk, play games, make plans, and possess human-like qualities and abilities (Hallowell, 1992, p. 63). Irving Hallowell discussed this idea based on his ethnographic work with Ojibwe peoples of the upper Great Lakes region. Hallowell learned that the Ojibwe do not class just humans as people,
but also consider spiritually powerful beings from the world of nature to be people, including animals. Animals think, act, and have souls just as humans do (Hallowell, 1992, p. 63).

Native American stories also promote humans’ kinship with animals. Animals are not just people, they are relatives of humans, too. The Netsilik Eskimo and the Skagit and Thompson Indians of the Northwest coast share the belief that animals once had human form and society and spoke human languages. Because of this, they can understand human speech and behavior (Collins, 1952, p. 354). Stories of animal intermarriage provide another way in which humans can become related to animals. For example, stories told by many Northern Plains tribes such as the Arikara, Lakota, and Pawnee describe a human man marrying a buffalo wife, who had been sent to the humans by her people (Walker, 1983, p. 109).

Humans depend on animals for both sustenance and spiritual assistance. In the creation stories of many tribes, humans are seen as the weakest of all created beings. For instance, in Ojibwe tribes, creation was conducted in a certain order: plants, insects, birds, animals, and human beings. In the order of necessity, humans were the last and the least; they would not last long without the other forms of beings (Powers, 1986, p. 153). This sense of dependence and humble position, shared by many Native American tribes, indicates that humans should behave in a respectful, lowly manner toward other animals (Powers, 1986, p. 153).

For Native Americans, animals and human beings are related and humans depend on them for physical sustenance and spiritual power. From this, humans should use animals with restraint, treat them with respect, and establish reciprocal relationships with them. The Koyukon Alaskan Natives’ conservation ethic, for instance, specifies that they cannot overhunt, but take only what they need. The Koyukon say that “If someone kills an animal and then leaves it unused or neglects to return for its meat, bad luck or illness will come as a punishment” (Nelson,
Animals are portrayed in Native American stories as embodying human qualities, being humans’ relatives, providing humans with both physical and spiritual sustenance, and meriting a respectful, reciprocal relationship with humans.

**Therapeutic implications.** In traditional stories, animals are viewed as equals to humans, participating within a cycle of life that involves equal interchange. Animals are viewed as having innate value. This changes the spirit of the human-animal relationship from that of the Western worldview to one based in Adlerian holism. Because animals have consciousness, agency, and even souls in these stories, from an eco-moralistic viewpoint humans’ relationship with animals is worth examining as a component of mental health. The object dimension mandates that individuals’ lives extend beyond their human experiences, in interdependence with the rest of the world. The eco-moralistic framework that is rooted in community feeling may take cues from Native American cultures and cultivate a humble and respectful relationship between and animals and humans as a means to wellness and mental health. Because Adler defined community feeling as both a foundation for morality and to include entities beyond the human (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 30), it is correct to suggest that it is a moral obligation within the Adlerian counseling room to extend moral value to objects within the earth. The praxis of this morality may be manifest in a number of ways, including treatment modalities that involve the client fostering community feeling toward nature and its non-human inhabitants.

Taking Native American animal ideas into current day therapy could include animal assisted therapy. Interwoven into an Adlerian treatment modality, animal therapy may provide an avenue into healing that integrates a component of Adler’s community feeling with a Native American model of relating to animals. For example, Neda DeMayo, a therapist who implements equine-assisted therapy, argued that the bond between horses and humans is often
profound and emotional and can lead to higher self-esteem, increased trust in intuition and instinct, and feeling more at home in one’s body (1999, p. 149). Through the use of wild horse equine therapy, DeMayo facilitates self-discovery and a sense of “presence” within clients (1999, p. 151). DeMayo stated, “When our physical movements are an honest reflection of our intent or request, we can begin to see the horses helping in the teaching process by showing us, through their physical responses, that communication is happening” (1999, p. 155). The profound efficacy of animal assisted therapy may be attributed in part to its ability to change the way humans view their environment. The Western way of humans relating to the environment is predicated on rearranging the environment to fit humans’ needs and desires. Animals foster respect and humility within humans, thus shifting their perceived relationship with the earth to one based on presence and interconnectedness (De Mayo, 1999, p. 151). This interconnectedness is in direct line with both Native American human-animal symbiosis and Adler’s community feeling.

**Land.** In addition to animal stories, land-based narratives are woven throughout Native American culture. Native Americans’ identities are inseparable from particular landscapes (Cochran, 1995, p. 70). Many Native American groups view land as a living presence. A sense of this living presence is learned through stories which attribute meaning to and through the land. This land is a place in which one may be symbolically rooted and oriented (Cochran, 1995, p. 70). In Native American Pueblo and Aztlan cultures, “Land and community comprise a matrix of kinship relations, individual psychology, spirituality, and history...the land manifests soul: its own, an individual’s, a community’s” (Cochran, 1995, p. 70). The land pervades stories as both a physical and a figurative reality and as a living presence.
Many Native American cultures hold a mental image of the land as a set of relationships. For example, Pueblo Laguna culture has an archetype called Spider Woman. She is the “spirit that pervades everything”, the creator and matrix who has being in the land and in her many names (Allen, 1986, p. 13). The image of Spider Woman presents land as a web in contrast to the traditional Western idea of ecology as a chain (Allen, 1986, p. 13). A chain inherently promotes value discrepancies, while a web represents interconnected equality (West, 2007, p. 88).

Many traditional cultures express the people’s reverence for a particular physical place. In these cultures, there is a unifying sense of the sacred being attached to individual places. Each place has its own spirit-beings, whose presence give a spiritual and physical meaning to the land (West, 2007, p. 88). These places also give meaning to the lives of the people who live on the land and who cannot conceive of themselves as apart from the land (West, 2007, p. 88). The sacred site for each group helps to define individuals’ identities. Individuals define their standing in relation to the land, which they see as the center of the universe (West, 2007, p. 88). In a broad spectrum of Native American stories, the land is not just a geographical spot on the earth, but a spiritually-centered, identity-giving holy place that confirms Native people’s rootedness. The dominant Native American narrative posits land as a living presence, a web of relationships, and composed of specific sacred places.

**Therapeutic implications.** In indigenous cultures, land is viewed as sacred and having innate value and sometimes spiritual power. These cultures are deeply connected to their sense of place; it gives individuals identity, sustenance, and safety. Based on Adler’s object dimension of community feeling, an individual’s relationship with land or place may be successfully integrated into the Adlerian therapy process using eco-moralistically based modalities.
An example of a treatment modality that might integrate community feeling with land is habitat restoration, which involves the restoration of native plant and animal habitats. Based on community feeling, habitat restoration runs counter to notions of private ownership of the land and its natural resources (Shapiro, 1995, p. 224). Restoration projects may be urban or rural. They mimic the life-sustaining patterns inherent in a place, and aim to bring back the vitality and diversity to the community (Shapiro, 1995, p. 225). The act of restoring natural habitats allows eco-morality to manifest in a concrete way.

Sarah Conn, an eco-therapist, explores with her clients their experience of “home” in terms of what they know or what they can find out about the place they inhabit (1995, p. 166). This may include such questions as,

What do they know about the soil in their neighborhood? Or the formation of the bedrock? How much rain falls each year and where does it go? What watershed are they in? What kinds of trees are native to their neighborhood? Can they tell by looking?

What trees are they drawn to? (Conn, 1995, p. 166)

Re-establishing a client’s connection to “place” and “home” may open up new doors to Adlerian-based healing possibilities.

**Ritual.** A common thread woven throughout Native American stories about both animals and land is the presence of ritual. Ritual is defined as the performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by tradition or a specific, observable mode of behavior (ritual, 2013). Ritual, in the traditional world, places people in relation to the land, to each other, and to other tribes (West, 2007, p. 90). Rituals are a grounding action by which individuals and communities play out their beliefs, stories, and connections. The regularity of ceremony in everyday life connects individuals to tradition and culture (West, 2007, p. 89).
One function of rituals is to promote mindfulness. For example, some Navajo people carry strings of beads in their pockets, made from juniper seeds collected from stores of seeds belonging to animals, carefully chosen so as not to disrupt their supply of food. These beads represent the partnership between the tree that gives its berries, the animals which gather them, and humans who pick them up...If you keep these beads on you and think about them, your mind, in its balance with nature, will tend to lead a healthy existence. (Toelken, 1976, p. 18-19)

These beads provide a means to connect individuals to mindfulness in daily life.

In this manner, rituals establish the identity of the individual within the collective whole. Rinda West, an ecological scholar, explained this collective identity:

In this way, the individual does not live alone in the world, as Western people so often do, but is surrounded by family, clan, and tribe; by animal powers, plants and rocks; by ancestors, spirits, and subjective realities, all of which working together are responsible for maintaining the harmony that allows each element to thrive. Subjective, social, and ecological balance is the goal, and story and ritual the means. (2007, p. 90)

Rituals also reinforce humans’ need to maintain a reciprocal relationship with nature.

Humans give in return for what they take. For instance, nature needs humans to renew the world in a spiritual sense. This helps ensure the changing cycles of the seasons, the fertility of plants and animals, and to promote harmony among all beings through rituals and ceremonies (Brown & Cousins, 2001, p. 98). It is through various rituals that humans establish a reciprocal relationship with the earth. Animals and plants give themselves so that humans might live, and humans sacrifice in a spiritual sense through rituals so that harmony and balance might be maintained in the world (Brown & Cousins, 2001, p. 98). If humans do their part through ritual
observances and passing down stories, the world will continue to be renewed, and the circle of
life will continue unbroken (Brown & Cousins, 2001, p. 98). Rituals promote mindfulness,
establish the identity of the individual within the whole, and reinforce humans’ need to establish
a reciprocal relationship with nature.

**Therapeutic implications.** Various rituals consecrate the notion of give-and-take
between humans and nature, reinforcing a web-based view of interconnectedness. These
cultural traditions promote a daily living in oneness with the earth through various means.
Rituals may translate Adler’s community feeling to action.

As many people feel a lack of meaningful communal rituals (West, 2007, p. 79), Shapiro
(1995) uses ritual as part of the habitat restoration process through a method called “balance of
attention”. It involves having the client draw attention to “breathing as a process of continuous
contact and exchange with trees birds, and other people, since air is the nurturing ocean in which
we all live” (Shapiro, 1995, p. 231). Attending to both breathing and natural surroundings serves
to eliminate boundaries between “self” and “other”. In this way, clients can embrace the entire
continuum of inner and outer experience (Shapiro, 1995, p. 231). Additionally, Germer (2009)
employs a therapeutic ritual intervention called Nature Meditation, which uses loving-kindness
meditations in conjunction with walking and sitting in the woods in order to encourage both
vulnerability and connection within the client (p. 265-266). Both of these therapeutic
interventions could be implemented within an Adlerian therapeutic model to promote nature-
based ritual in clients’ lives.

**Eastern Traditions**

There are many cultures based on human-nature symbiosis. Buddhism is a religion
attributed to Siddhartha Gautama, who is commonly known as the Buddha, or “the awakened
one” (Buddhism, 2013). Shinto is the indigenous spirituality of the people of Japan. It is a set of practices that have evolved to establish a connection between present day Japan and its ancient past (Shinto, 2013). Both Buddhism and Shinto share Adlerian-based commonalities that provide an alternative to the Western way of viewing humans’ relationship with the natural world. In these paradigms, humans are seen as part of, and in harmony with, nature.

Like the Native American traditional worldview, Shinto views humans as an integral part of nature in contrast to being separated from and trying to dominate it (Kalland, 2002, p. 146). There is a common belief in traditional Japanese culture that people, plants, and even inanimate objects have “souls” or an inert power (Kalland, 2002, p. 150). This is called kami, or a supernatural power that resides in anything that gives a person a feeling of wonder or disbelief (Kalland, 2002, p. 150). The word Shinto literally means “way of the kami” (Shinto, 2013). Similarly, in Buddhist doctrine, all things have a “Buddha-nature” (Kalland, 2002, p. 150). Since everything has a Buddha-nature or the potential to harbor supernatural powers, all objects, animate and inanimate, have the same level of value. A divide does not exist between humans and the earth (Kalland, 2002, p. 150). This echoes the beliefs held by the traditional Native American worldview. Kyburz (1997) asserted that it is within both Shinto and Buddhism that one can encounter a worldview of nature that corresponds to the cosmic whole, or the “totality of existing phenomena” (p. 257). Within this worldview, all things are linked and inseparable. Everything is a reflection of the other (Kalland, 2002, p. 150).

In Buddhism, everything is seen as connected to everything else in a network of interdependencies, and the laws of cause and effect, known as karma (Kalland, 2002, p. 151). This echoes Adler’s description of the interconnectedness of life (Stein & Edwards, 1998, para. 10).
In Shinto, nature is understood holistically and can be manipulated by rituals (Kalland, 2002, p. 151). Kalland states, “Japanese perceptions of nature have therefore been taken as an example of a holistic-organic approach to nature, as an alternative where man and nature meet in a harmonious unity of mutual respect, complementarity, and symbiosis” (2002, p. 151). Although Buddhism and Shinto have varied differences, they both share a commonality with traditional Native American worldviews that involves a deep reverence for the earth and its inhabitants. This includes a daily individual and communal connectedness that establishes these cultures with nature.

**Therapeutic implications.** Both Buddhism and Shinto share commonalities with Adler’s community feeling, which is most notably demonstrated in these traditions’ teaching of universal compassion (Berry, 1999, p. 185). The object dimension of community feeling is shown in the cosmic holism present in relation to all things in the earth.

Integrating this into an Adlerian nature therapy model is advanced by asking questions that will facilitate an awareness of the impact of the client’s interaction with the earth. Conn’s model asserts that asking questions of the client is an essential part of the healing process between humans and nature (1995, p. 166). This model is intended to create interventions that contribute to the development of the self-world connection. Conn’s questions start with the client’s awareness of the larger world and his or her emotional responsiveness to his or her relatedness to other entities. Questions are posited about the client’s ability to integrate the information that comes with such awareness. Finally, in line with community feeling, come questions about action for the client. For Conn, action-based therapeutic homework may include getting out into natural settings and observing and interacting with the natural world (1995, p. 170). The goal is to help develop a sense of engaging in collective action that confronts the
larger earth system that includes all entities (Conn, 1995, p. 170). John Scull (1999), an eco-therapist, uses questions in an initial assessment with the client to explore the client’s relationship to the natural world. He asks,

Could you tell me about an early positive experience in nature or about a special place in nature that you knew as a child or know now? Could you tell me about times when you found a sense of safety in nature or about places or times when you felt completely relaxed outdoors? Finally, do you ever go camping, hiking, boating, or swimming? Do you engage in any other outdoor sports? (1999, p. 141)

These questions help the practitioner determine which form of nature-connecting therapy is most appropriate for different clients. In each case, he will work with a clients’ full spectrum of feelings about nature to implement an individualized treatment plan (Scull, 1999, p. 142). With these questions, the therapist is gently encouraging an awareness within the client of Adlerian-based interconnectedness with the earth. Through this, eco-morality is fostered within the client.

**Nature Romantics**

In the late sixteenth century, William Blake penned the lines, “Great things are achieved where men and mountains meet. This is not done by jostling in the street” (as cited in Surridge, 2004, p. 20). Blake’s great vision was that all humans need a place of retreat from the urban world in which to make themselves whole. He noted the profound effect that the natural world has on the human condition (Surridge, 2004, p. 20). His ideas on holism and a resurgence of connection between humans and the earth ushered in the era of Nature Romanticism. This was a period of time in which Adlerian values such as interconnectedness with the earth and an overall holism was propagated in mainstream culture.
The artistic, literary, and intellectual movement of Nature Romanticism flourished in the nineteenth century. Artists, writers and philosophers at this time expressed a deep connection with the natural world. Romanticism was in part a reaction to both the industrial revolution and the prevailing Enlightenment ideals of the day, which favored scientific thought over natural, emotional, and personal artistic themes (romanticism, 2013). Ralph Waldo Emerson, a quintessential writer during this time period, wrote,

To the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone. The tradesman, the attorney comes out of the din and craft of the street, and sees the sky and woods, and is man again. In their eternal calm, he finds himself. (1991, p. 14)

Walt Whitman emphasized connectedness with the earth as well. In speaking of a bean in a pod: “And there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheeled universe” (1989, p. 6). Whitman was seeing an entire web of connection between individuals, society, and the earth’s systems within a singular object from nature, asserting its significance despite its size.

Popular culture at this time surged with a mindfulness of humans’ connectedness with the earth. The common belief was that nature was good and innocent and that humans were connected to it; that an unbalanced relationship between humans and the environment would lead to negative outcomes. These thinkers embodied what an eco-moralistic collective mindset looks like.

**Therapeutic implications.** Just as with the examples of Native American and Eastern religions, there is a distinct interface between the Nature Romantic worldview and Adler’s concept of community feeling. The concepts of interconnectedness, social embeddedness, and
striving for perfection all show themselves as primary ideas from this paradigm. Nature-assisted therapies may be integrated into the Adlerian model based on Nature Romantic concepts.

Horticultural therapy may be an additional way to address this interconnection between persons and their environment. Gardens are traditional places of refuge and healing (Messer Diehl, 1999, p. 166). The benefits of horticultural therapy may be attributed to the multitude of fragrances, colors, textures, tastes, and sounds of plants that awaken the senses. Humans’ sense organs are designed to detect changes in stimulation (Messer Diehl, 1999, p. 168). Sensory stimulation helps individuals connect with nature by providing a physically, emotionally, and cognitively engaging experience (Messer Diehl, 1999, p. 168). Incorporating plant based homework into the Adlerian therapeutic treatment model may offer opportunities for nurturing and growth, stimulate feelings of self-worth, and rouse good thoughts about caring for living things and fostering beauty (Messer Diehl, 1999, p. 171). Digging in the soil and tending a garden may be a physical aid in fostering an Adlerian sense of connection between clients and the earth. This connection to plants echoes Nature Romantic concepts of valuing the human-nature connection and is a valid point of praxis for an eco-morality within the Adlerian counseling construct.

Much can be learned from, not just about, people whose beliefs about reality offer a contrast to and perhaps an enlargement of Western linear, materialistic views of reality. The Native American, Buddhist, Shinto, and Nature Romantic worldviews offer a circular and multidimensional view of nature, one in which everything is interrelated. This vision informs and fosters a deeper relationship between humans, communities, and the earth. Treatment modalities such as animal assisted therapy, habitat restoration, mindfulness rituals, nature-based therapeutic assessments, and horticultural therapy that are based on these paradigms may be
integrated into the Adlerian therapeutic process. By doing so, eco-morality may be concretely integrated as an Adlerian counseling ethic.

**Eco-Morality in Current Paradigms**

As with traditional and indigenous cultures, current paradigms provide a valuable framework for a practical approach to eco-morality in the Adlerian context. Ecofeminism and ecotheology demonstrate how traditions relating to indigenous worldviews might be assimilated into modern cultural paradigms. Aspects of Adler’s community feeling are interwoven in both of these cultural examples. These examples may act as yet another resource for the integration of an eco-morality into the Adlerian counseling room.

**Ecofeminism**

Ecofeminism grew out of the 1970’s feminist movement and took its name from Francoise d’Eaubonne’s term *ecofeminisme*, which appeared in 1974 in her book, *La feminisme ou la mort*. D’Eaubonne called for a feminist revolution to assure global ecological survival. D’Eaubonne held patriarchal systems and male power responsible for “the destruction of the environment and for the accelerated pollution that accompanies this madness, bequeathing an uninhabitable planet for posterity” (1974, p. 64). The ecological revolution that d’Eaubonne proposed required destruction of male power to make way, not for female power or matriarchy, but for new egalitarian relations between men and women and between humans and nature (d’Eaubonne, 1974, p. 66-67). The concept of egalitarian relations between humans with each other and with the earth is a foundation of Adler’s theory of wellness, of which community feeling plays a central role.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, an ecofeminist theologian, described the interplay of feminism and ecology in her definition of ecofeminism: “Ecofeminism brings together these two
explorations of ecology and feminism, in their full, or deep forms, and explores how male
domination of women and domination of nature are interconnected, both in cultural ideology and in social structures” (1992, p. 2). As Reuther’s definition indicates, ecofeminism refers to an interconnection between women and nature. This interconnection leverages a critique of systems hostile to both women and nature. Ecofeminism and community feeling share a common goal: to bring individuals and communities into a closer relationship with their social and environmental contexts.

Ecofeminists are diverse in their approaches to feminism and nature. However, there are unifying principles that shape ecofeminist belief. One tenet for all ecofeminism is a recognition that the historical ideological association of women and nature has not been advantageous to women or nature (Primavesi, 1991, p. 42). This harmful ideological association identifies both women and nature as “other” than the standard, male-centered cultural norm. Ecofeminism stresses the connections between women and nature on the grounds that both, in a distanced, masculine-centered culture, have been made “other”, something essentially different from the dominant human male who has an unlimited right to exploit the earth (Primavesi, 1991, p. 42). Making both women and nature “other” has the destructive effect of fostering a fractured relationship between humans and the earth. Adlerian community feeling also has as its goal eliminating the sense of separateness that occurs when one group identifies another group as “other” (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 39).

Ecofeminism proposes an interconnected and interdependent view of ecology and claims that hierarchy is projected onto nature from the perspective of human social models (King, 1989, p. 24). The ecofeminist view rejects hierarchy and the human illusion that it is possible to manage or control nature and instead favors reciprocity in relationship with nature (King, 1989,
Additionally, a strong case may be made for ecofeminism confronting the issue of animals’ suffering and incorporating it into larger critique of the maltreatment of the natural world (Adams, 1991, p. 126). Since animals are part of the natural world, some ecofeministic analysts assert their freedom from being used by humans for self-serving purposes (Adams, 1991, p. 125).

An additional core belief of ecofeminism is that of social transformation. Social transformation refers to large scale social change or cultural reforms. Within the context of social transformation, ecofeminism proposes that power-based hierarchical relationships must be replaced with relationships based on reciprocity and mutuality. This social transformation must be part of a movement that advances common goals and opposes all forms of oppression and domination (King, 1989, p. 20). Ecofeminist views of the domination of humans and nature require activism and movement toward social transformation (King, 1989, p. 20).

Social transformation within ecofeminism must include the eradication of dualisms. Dualisms involve the division of conceptual ideas into two opposed or contrasted aspects. Whereas Western thought relies on dualism and hierarchy in regard to women and nature, ecofeminism promotes non-dualistic forms of thought (Birkeland, 1993, p. 21). The eradication of dualisms is in direct line with Adler’s assertion of the interconnectedness of all things (Stein & Edwards, 1998, para. 10). Some examples of dualisms are culture versus nature, mind versus body, reason versus emotion, human versus animal, individuality versus interconnection, and public-male versus private-female (King, 1989, p. 19-20). Dualisms intrinsically promote hierarchy. Such hierarchy leads to negatively associating women with nature (King, 1989, p. 20). Buckingham (2004) argued for the dissolution of these dualities as the only way in which to avert an ecological crisis which has separated “nature” and “culture” in the West (p. 153).
Ecofeminism calls for new intellectual frames of reference that remove dualisms that separate humanity from environment, male from female, and privileged persons from “others” (Birkeland, 1993, p. 20). The foundation of Adlerian community feeling is equality and interconnection among all things. The eradication of dualisms supports this foundation.

**Therapeutic implications.** As with traditional earth-centered cultures, useful therapeutic implications may be proposed from the modern paradigm of ecofeminism. Adler was an early feminist. He held that both men and women suffered from undervaluing of women and overvaluing of men (Stein & Edwards, 1998, para. 1; Corey, 2013, p. 123). Ecofeminism underscores Adler’s basic assertions of equality and belonging within his community feeling. What ecofeminism offers to Adlerian eco-morality is a consciousness of dualisms and hierarchies that may exist within the client’s social context. Both ecofeminism and Adlerian psychology aim to foster a non-hierarchical interconnectedness between humans and the earth.

Betty Roszak, an eco-therapist, suggests the centering of the therapeutic dialog on power and growth as one ecofeministic therapeutic intervention (1995, p. 299). This involves exploring power relationships with the client. The therapist encourages the client to see that there are other forms of power than “power over” or domination, for instance the power of creativity implicit in nature (Roszak, 1995, p. 229). For example, a deep exploration of the power dynamics within the client’s personal relationships may set the stage for a conversation about the client’s relationship with nature. A core tenet of both ecofeminism and Adlerian eco-morality is a promise of connection. These connections may include the inner with the outer, the self with the “other”, the ordinary with the sacred, the individual with the earth (Roszak, 1995, p. 300).
Ecotheology

Ecotheology is a form of constructive theology that focuses on the relationship between religion and nature. A main tenet of ecotheology is that a relationship exists between religious worldviews and the degradation of nature. It explores the interrelatedness of ecological values and the human domination of nature (Brown, 2012, para. 2). The focus here will be on Christian ecotheology because it remains the dominant Western religion (Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project, 2012, para. 2). Ecotheology presents an additional facet of humanity’s relationship to the earth. The assertions within ecotheology share commonalities with Adlerian community feeling. Through the exploration of Christianity as both cause and solution to humanity’s separation from earth, ecotheology will be presented as an additional lens through which to view Adler’s community feeling.

Christianity as cause. In 1967, historian Lynn White, Jr. argued that the historical roots of our ecologic crisis lie in religious cosmology, specifically in Western Christianity’s anthropocentrism and instrumentalist view of nature (p. 1204). White asserted that the “science, technology, and democracy” that now threaten the earth were “developed through the worldview of the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen” (1967, p. 1205-6). Obviously a controversial statement, it started a debate involving religion’s hand in causing a separation of humans from the earth. This helped to generate the field of ecotheology (Jenkins, 2009, p. 283). Christian ecotheology has been especially shaped by White’s thesis because it has needed to fashion some response to his complaint. Western Christianity’s doctrine had taught Europeans to view themselves as separate from nature, which they could dominate with indifference in pursuit of their eternal destiny (Jenkins, 2009, p. 284). Therefore, the budding field of ecotheology had
a clear environmental task: “recover an ecological worldview centered on nature’s value rather than human transcendence” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 284).

**Christianity as solution.** A first theological response to the ecological crisis involves fostering a stewardship ethic. The development of a stewardship ethic is a response to the command to exercise dominion over the earth, as noted in Genesis 1:26-28 (New International Version). White identified the “problem” as an ideology of dominion (Bauman, 2007, p. 121). Dominion involves ruling and perfecting the earth (Kearns, 1996, p. 57). In response to this, some ecotheology groups reinterpret this initial commandment from God as a charge to be good stewards and take care of the earth. Because stewardship is in opposition to dominion, to relate to the earth from a standpoint of dominion is sinful (Kearns, 1996, p. 59). The stewardship ethic asserts that the problem with humans’ relationship to the earth is that Christians have not been Christian enough; they have not been true enough to Christianity (Kearns, 1996, p. 59). This stewardship ethic, in its promotion of an equality-based relationship with the earth, relates directly to Adlerian community feeling.

A second Christian solution involves the reintroduction of materialism to Christians’ view of the earth and its systems (Plumwood, 2002, p. 223). Materialism is the theory that physical matter is the only reality and that physical well-being and material possessions constitute the greatest good and highest value in life (materialism, 2013). Val Plumwood, an ecological theologian, insisted that “There is an important sense in which what we need is more materialism, not less, a better awareness of ourselves as materially embodied beings in a material universe in which we are all material (e.g. food) for one another” (2002, p. 223). A strong materialism will help people develop a more communicative relationship with the natural world. This will allow humans to recognize their place in the world rather than categorizing the whole
world in human terms. Adler emphasized the idea of a communicative relationship with the world as well, encouraging individuals to recognize their place within the cosmos through the construct of community feeling (Ansbacher, 1991, p. 31).

**Therapeutic implications.** Principles within ecotheology are relevant to the Adlerian therapeutic process. Survey data from members of the American Psychological Association indicate that religious and spiritual matters are ethically appropriate, therapeutically relevant, and potentially significant topics for counseling practice (Delaney, Miller, & Bosino, as cited in Corey, 2013, p. 469). Within ecotheology, both the stewardship theory and Plumwood’s theory of materialism overlay with Adler’s community feeling. Adler proposed that individuals are all part of a holistic, interwoven web, of which no parts are greater than the others (Stein & Edwards, 1998, para. 6). Stewardship supports this notion of treating nature and its systems from a position of humility and respect. Plumwood’s materialism, which proposes a viewpoint of material humans embedded in a material cosmos, coincides with Adler’s object dimension of community feeling.

Therapeutically, the ideas of ecotheology may be used as part of the discourse of eco-morality, especially with a client whose religious views greatly inform his or her life. This may involve working with the client to develop an ethic of care, which fosters a sense of equality and interrelatedness between humans and the earth. For the Christian client, this ethic of care may be rooted in the stewardship ethic and may manifest in various therapeutic activities such as homework involving the nurturing of the human-nature connection. These may include such activities as wildlife rehabilitation, hiking excursions, working with community-supported agriculture, or working with ornithology groups.
On an individual level, Christian ecotheology insists upon a change of values and of consciousness. Ecotheology echoes Christianity placing Christ at the center of life with the placement of an “ecological self” at the center of individuals’ spiritual lives (Gottlieb, 2006, p. 42). In this way, ecotheology, eco-morality, and Adler’s community feeling may be interwoven into a unique therapeutic model for the client.

The modern paradigms of ecofeminism and ecotheology offer unique insights into the complexities of the human-nature relationship. Both gender and spirituality may be addressed within the context of Adlerian eco-morality as they both may be highly affective forces within individuals’ lives. Ecofeminism explores hierarchies, dualisms, and the disproportionate allocation of power from both women and nature. Therapeutically, these ideas shape the landscape of Adlerian eco-morality for both male and female clients’ relationship with nature. Ecotheology brings an ecological awareness and focus to religion and spirituality, important factors in many individuals’ lives. Ecotheology provides a model for the integration of spirituality and eco-consciousness. These contemporary paradigms may bring to Adlerian eco-morality an alternate consciousness and may help revive the broken relationship between individuals, communities, and the earth.

The fractured relationship between humans and the earth has had negative effects on individual and community health and wellbeing. Traditional paradigms such as Native American, Buddhist, Shinto and those found in the spirit of the Nature Romantics demonstrate symbiotic relationships with the earth. These examples provide insight as to how such relationships with the earth might manifest in communities and individual lives. The modern paradigms of ecofeminism and ecotheology provide further insight into the holism and interconnectedness that comprise Adler’s community feeling. These paradigms provide much-
needed insight to the praxis and demonstration of an eco-morality as an Adlerian counseling ethic.

**Conclusion and Future Research**

Mental health and wellness are predicated on an interconnection between self, others, and the environment. This interconnection has suffered from a disintegrating relationship between people and the environment. Additionally, traditional psychotherapeutic practice has suffered from a focus on individual-centered therapy. This therapy has failed to meet the moral and ethical needs of individual clients and their communities. The current states of denigration of both the human-nature relationship and traditional therapeutic practice are in part the result of a separation of humans from the earth. To revisit Bateson’s analogy, both humanity and traditional psychotherapy are like a frog sitting in a pot of water, unaware it is soon reaching its boiling point. Using Adler’s object dimension of community feeling as a foundation, Adlerian therapists may implement a wider vision of community to include all of the earth’s inhabitants. Eco-morality is foundational principle within this vision. Connecting individuals with the environment engenders new paradigms of psychological health and wellness. By establishing this interconnection with the environment, the client will improve his or her psychological health and well-being as described by Adler.

Eco-morality is a complex therapeutic foundation within the counseling room. Morality is a framework to evaluate actions and “eco” refers to one’s environmental home. With this, conduct premised on the relationship between people and the earth is established. An ethic is the assimilation of morality into a particular setting, such as the counseling room. Eco-morality is forged by establishing morals based on Adler’s community feeling. By integrating eco-morality into the Adlerian therapy process, an ecologically based ethic is applied in principle.
The advents of colonization, industrialization, and the rising business profit motive have caused a surge of both the autonomy-focus of the therapeutic process and the alienation of individuals and communities from the environment. In contrast, Adlerian therapy treats individuals as part of a larger, social whole. Adlerian theory and praxis provide insight for traditional psychotherapy with the promotion of other- and community-centeredness.

Adlerian theory has as its base the central concept of community feeling. This construct recognizes the interconnectedness of individuals with each other and the earth. The object dimension of community feeling involves community feeling in its fullest meaning, which includes the earth. Ideal transcendent characteristics reveal themselves in an individual who is demonstrating the object dimension of community feeling to its fullest extent. These characteristics include self-actualization, empathy, transcendence, perfection, belonging, and non-conformity. Community feeling is an innate potentiality that must be developed through positive conditions and an encouraging environment. Numerous empirical studies suggest that maximizing community feeling increases mental health. This is in line with Adler’s claims that community feeling is the foundation for mental health and well-being. Adler’s concept of community feeling is supported by additional studies indicating that increased contact with nature fosters greater mental, cognitive, and community health. These studies demonstrate the positive effects of re-fostering the relationship between individuals and communities with the environment.

Cultures that maintain a symbiotic relationship with the earth establish a foundation for the praxis of an eco-morality as an Adlerian counseling principle. Earth-centered paradigms, including Native American, Buddhist, Shinto, and those found in the spirit of Romantic period of the nineteenth century, provide insight into how symbiotic relationships with the earth might
present. Corresponding areas of therapeutic intervention include animal-assisted therapy, habitat restoration, mindfulness rituals, therapeutic questioning, and horticultural therapy. To further enhance understanding of eco-morality in practice, the modern paradigms of ecofeminism and ecotheology highlight distinct areas of intersection between humans and nature. Related therapeutic techniques include therapeutic conversations centered on power constructs, fostering an ethic of care, and an “ecological self”. The specific points of praxis drawn from these paradigms may be successfully integrated into the Adlerian treatment model to effectively foster eco-morality as an Adlerian counseling ethic.

Future research is needed to enhance eco-morality as an Adlerian counseling ethic. Specific research studies could investigate the intersection of Adler’s community feeling with earth-based therapeutic treatment modalities. Specific questions to be further explored could include, “What are the effects of nature-based therapy on community feeling for both individuals and communities?” and “How does fostering community feeling influence individuals’ ability to reconnect with nature?” Exploring these questions may serve to broaden and deepen the scope and effect of eco-morality in the therapeutic setting.

Separation from the environment diminishes individual and community mental health and well-being. Reconnecting to nature opens new doors to health and wellness. Eco-morality as an Adlerian ethic implements an earth-based, decision-making framework as a set of standards for Adlerian counseling practice. This morality is based on Adler’s community feeling and his definition of health and well-being. The practice of eco-morality as an Adlerian counseling ethic expands the definition of mental health from an emphasis on individual autonomy to include the capacity for experiencing mutually enhancing relationships and reciprocity with nature. Eco-
morality aligns with Adler’s community feeling. By doing so, the Adlerian therapeutic model is expanded and enriched.
References


*Ethics in marriage and family therapy* (pp. 153-168). Alexandria, VA: The American 
Association of Marriage and Family Therapy.

Bell, J. F., Wilson, J. S., & Liu, G. C. (2008). Neighborhood greenness and two-year changes in 

Berget, B., Ekeberg, O., & Braastad, B. (2008). Animal-assisted therapy with farm animals for 
persons with psychiatric disorders: Effects on self-efficacy, coping ability, and quality of 
life, a randomized controlled trial. *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health, 
4*(9), 1-7.

nature. *Psychological Science, 19*(12), 1207-12.


*Journal of Individual Psychology, 32*(1), 27-49.

University Press.


*Sociology of Religion, 57*(1), 55-70.


