

**‘Come Away O Human Child to the Waters and the Wild’:  
A Qualitative Study into the Role Nature can Play in  
Psychotherapy**

Submitted By

**Joanne Hanrahan B.A.**

Supervisors:

**Dr Mary Rabbitte**

**Dr Liam Mac Gabhann**

Submitted to the School of Nursing and Human Science, Dublin City  
University, as required to complete the

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**Declaration:**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the award of M.Sc. in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Joanne Hanrahan (Candidate)

ID Number: 10117458

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> December 2015

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## Abstract

The healing properties of the natural world have long been established. However, despite increased interest from the psychotherapy community in the therapeutic value of nature, ancient shamanistic ways and the newer eco-therapy approaches, there remains little qualitative research on the role nature can play in psychotherapy. The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the integration of nature into therapeutic practice. Semi structured interviews were used to collect data from eight psychotherapists from three of the four provinces of Ireland. The therapists interviewed see contact with nature as playing a significant role in their own personal process and an integral part in their clinical practice. All the participants trained in the mainstream therapeutic schools with some having engaged in nature related training post qualification. Approaches to integration of nature to clinical practice varied between participants but included outdoor sessions, outdoor homework, using natural materials in the therapy room and exploring the therapeutic value of a room with a view. A phenomenological informed thematic analysis was chosen as the most suitable method of analysis. Two overarching themes named ‘*Saints*’ and ‘*Scholars*’ provide structure for the five main themes identified. ‘*Saints*’ refers to two themes associated with how nature supports the spiritual numinous and more intangible aspects of psychotherapy. While the overarching theme ‘*Scholars*’ depicts two themes related to core elements of reflective practice and process work. *Saints and Scholars* speaks to the continuum between psychotherapy as a science and psychotherapy, as a therapy of the soul. It also addresses the dissonance along that continuum reflected in a final theme ‘*That’s not quite academic*’. This study concludes that integrating nature into psychotherapy practice can deepen and enhance many aspects of our therapeutic work. It also develops the academic research that embraces the therapeutic continuum between science and soul.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **Introduction**

The innate connection between humans and the natural world has been celebrated throughout the ages. From indigenous peoples and old traditions, through philosophy, theology, poetry, mythology and art, nature's healing properties have been embraced. Similarly at a scientific level the benefits of contact with nature have long been established (Keniger et al 2013; Hansen-Ketchum, Marck and Reutter 2009). Given psychotherapy is a human science supporting psychological healing, what of the integration between psychotherapy and nature? This study addresses this question.

This chapter serves as an introduction to this research. It presents the background and rationale for the study and highlights existing research gaps. The chapter includes the relevant aspects of the researcher's background and also addresses the specific aims and objectives of the project. It then highlights the chosen research method and sample before alluding to some of the expected and unexpected findings of this research based on detailed analysis of the data.

## **Background to and Rationale for this Research**

During the second half of the twentieth century a number of psychotherapeutic theorists, such as Jung (Sabini 2002; Jung 1963) and Frankl (1959) pointed to the psychological benefits of contact with nature. More recently, a school of psychological thought known as eco-psychology (Roszak, Gomes and Kanner 1995) has also emerged along with corresponding writings on the concept of 'eco-therapy' (Buzzell and Chalquist 2009). In addition, group pursuits involving many variables such as adventure therapy and wilderness therapy have been developed. However, the integration of nature and one to one psychotherapeutic processing generally, has only started to get attention in recent years.

In mainstream psychotherapy, it would appear that the integration of nature and psychotherapy is at a fledgling stage of development. In Ireland, non-peer reviewed articles in psychotherapeutic magazines and journals are beginning to appear in this field (Devlin 2015; O'Driscoll 2015; Devlin 2013). Internationally the topic has begun to receive more focus. For example, McLeod's (2013), latest edition of the

bestseller 'An introduction to counselling', now includes a new chapter on therapy in nature. Similarly the new edition of Burns' (2014) 'Nature-Guided Therapy' first published in 1998 also suggests increased interest in the topic as does recently published work by Jordon (2015).

There is an abundance of research on the value of nature to wellbeing (Sempik, Hine and Wilcox 2010; Mayer et al 2009). However there is significantly less literature relevant to the integration of nature and psychotherapy. The literature review, which is presented in chapter two, also highlights the dearth of empirical studies on this specific area of nature research. Analysis of the literature also points to gaps in the research which will be mentioned here, but developed in more detail in chapter two. Such gaps include little direct focus on pure psychotherapy and nature, as opposed to multidisciplinary approaches to therapeutic nature work. The focus of the research in this area is also on outdoor psychotherapy as opposed to a broader integration of nature to psychotherapy. From the reviewed literature it would appear that this is the first study to include data from a number of psychotherapists, using a mixed approach to nature integration.

### **Researcher Background**

The primary researcher in this project is a qualified psychotherapist with a background in education and school counselling. Her interest in this topic of study is based on her observations of overlap between her theoretical and clinical psychotherapeutic knowledge and experience of her own psychological process through contact with nature. Prior to engaging with this research she had integrated Jungian Sand Therapy and the use of natural materials into her indoor psychotherapy practice, however she had no of experience of shamanism, eco-therapy or outdoor psychotherapy.

### **Aims and objectives**

The central aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the integration of nature into therapeutic practice. This is achieved through an exploration of the lived

experience of psychotherapists who see nature as playing a significant role in their own personal process and an integral part in their clinical practice.

The main objectives of the study are:

- To explore the experience of integrating nature into psychotherapy practice.
- To conceptualise the theoretical links of this practice.
- To examine the therapeutic value of nature from psychotherapists' perspective.
- To identify further areas for research in psychotherapy.

### **Method sample and analysis overview**

A brief summary of the method and sample will be provided here by way of introduction. Chapter three of this paper presents an in-depth review of the methodological and sampling decisions made in this research along with the associated learning.

Psychotherapists were recruited for this research through the two main psychotherapeutic bodies in Ireland, the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) and the Irish Association for Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy (IAHIP). Eight psychotherapists, practicing in three of the four provinces of Ireland, engaged in semi-structured interviews thus providing the data for the study. The experienced participants had integrated nature into their clinical practices in a variety of ways. Approaches to integration of nature to practice varied between participants but included outdoor sessions, outdoor homework, using natural materials in the therapy room and exploring the therapeutic value of a room with a view. It is believed that the diversity in their approaches added depth to the study.

A phenomenological informed Thematic Analysis, based on Braun and Clarke's (2013; 2006) framework was chosen as the most suitable method of analysis for this data. A meticulous and embodied analysis of the data lead to the identification of themes related to the integration of nature to psychotherapy. Analysis of these themes highlight that a three way relationship between therapist, client and nature can greatly enhance therapeutic work and the awareness of the self. The analysis

also draws attention to an unexpected study finding - that of the continuum between psychotherapy as a science and psychotherapy as a care of the soul and to the dissonance along that continuum. The research findings are initially presented in chapter four with further discussion and analysis of the findings in the context of the current literature then presented in chapter five. The paper concludes with a final summary and recommendations in chapter six.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study both addresses a gap in the current research and adds to empirical research in the field. It deepens the understanding of what nature can bring to psychotherapy practice. It also extends the research beyond its original focus, highlighting differing aspects of therapeutic work and the continuum between psychotherapy as a science and psychotherapy as therapy of the soul.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**



## **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the most relevant literature to this research. It includes a brief introduction to nature-related health and wellbeing literature and background to specific nature and psychotherapy literature, highlighting the lack of focused research. The review then focuses on nature's value in aspects of the therapeutic process associated with symbolic work, sensory awareness and the spiritual dimension. This is followed by a review of issues which may be of interest in terms of integrating nature into psychotherapy practice. Possible limitations of the reviewed literature are highlighted and a summary concludes the chapter.

The literature search strategy used in this research, involved a search of the main electronic databases in psychology, nursing science and social science including Psyc Info, Scopus and CINHALL and a subsequent snowball search strategy. Key words included nature environment, eco-therapy, eco-psychology, shamanism, psychotherapy, counselling, mental health, wellbeing and other related terms and spellings.

## **2.2 Nature Health and Wellbeing**

Frequently cited works published approximately thirty years ago by Wilson (1984), Ulrich (1984) and Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) set the scene for what is now an "overwhelming body of evidence" (Sempik, Hine and Wilcox 2010, p.118) showing that the natural environment is beneficial to health and wellbeing.

Recent systematic reviews completed in different parts of the world by academics in the fields of environmental science, social work and nursing (Keniger et al 2013; Heinsch 2012; Hansen-Ketchum, Marck and Reutter 2009) have evaluated the body of research on human-nature contact. Literature examined in these reviews point to the psychological, cognitive, physiological, social and spiritual benefits of interacting with nature. Research highlighting beneficial interaction, is further categorised in terms of viewing nature, being in close proximity to it and direct participation and involvement with nature.

At a European government and social policy level the link between nature and health is now beginning to receive attention. The Cooperation in Science and Technology

(COST) is an intergovernmental network of 36 European countries whose mission is to strengthen Europe's research and innovation capacities. COST recently funded a multidisciplinary team report into 'green care'. The report defines, and is highly favourable of, green care as active processes and interventions that improve and promote mental and physical health through nature (Sempik, Hine and Wilcox 2010). UK mental health charity, MIND, have also produced two extensive reports in recent times (MIND 2013; MIND 2007) which indicate that people's mental health significantly improved after activities in nature. The green care and 'eco-therapy' interventions reviewed in the above studies predominately include activities such as social and therapeutic horticulture, facilitated green exercise and wilderness therapy. Despite what seems like an obvious extension of the reports' review, they provide little or no mention of one to one nature-related psychotherapy.

In Ireland, GP's in county Donegal, in collaboration with the Health Service Executive (HSE) have recently piloted "green prescriptions" as a form of eco-therapy to their patients. The programme's vision, based on a concept originally developed in New Zealand, was to develop a programme that "used nature as a source and resource for health and wellbeing" (Stirrat, McCallion and Youell 2013, p. 22). This is in line with the European reports emphasising the need for implementation of such innovative programmes in countries across Europe. Appraisal of the programme has been positive with recommendations that it be rolled out in other parts of Ireland. A suggestion that GP's increase their level of referrals to the green prescription programme from the cohort of patients presenting with mental health issues was also made in the evaluating report.

### **2.3 Background to Nature and Psychotherapy Literature and Dearth of Research**

The therapeutic qualities of nature recognised throughout the ages by Shamanistic healers and indigenous peoples (Abram 1996) are core to the integration of psychotherapy and nature. Established knowledge of nature's benefits, theoretical psychotherapy and influences such as 'eco-psychology' (Roszak, Gomes and Kanner 1995) underpin much of the relevant literature.

Eco-psychology is a branch of psychological thought developed by psychologists and environmentalists over the last two decades and focuses on nurturing the bond between humans and the natural world. In the US, 'eco-therapy' is seen as the applied or clinical form of eco-psychology (Buzzell and Chalquist 2009), whereas in Europe the term eco-therapy is used to refer to community horticulture (Seifert 2014), green exercise and only occasionally nature related psychotherapy. Despite increased writings and use of these terms in the literature, little empirical evidence has been presented on the integration of psychotherapy and nature.

A systematic review completed by Annerstedt and Wahrborg (2011), highlights that no aspect of nature-assisted therapy has been treated in any Cochrane review. It also draws attention to the lack of clearly defined research relating to therapeutic or intervention approaches. The literature search in this study concurs with these findings, and reveals a narrow range of subject specific literature with few peer-reviewed research studies.

Scandinavian countries seem to be at the forefront in addressing the dearth of research related to nature and psychotherapy. Recent purpose-built therapeutic gardens in Sweden and Denmark are now providing a venue for nature-based therapy and rehabilitation programmes which have been developed for both therapeutic and research purposes (Corazon et al 2010; Grahn et al 2010). Articles from these sources, along with literature and research with a high level of psychotherapy content, which closely address the aims and objectives of this study, form the basis for the rest of this literature review.

## **2.4 The Value of Nature in Exploring Psychological Process**

The integration of emotional processes through the holistic inclusion of mind, body and spirit is common in psychotherapy practice. In line with this integrative view, the value of nature in key therapeutic processes such as engagement with symbolism, sensory awareness and spirituality, will now be addressed.

### **2.4.1 Nature and Symbolism in Psychotherapy**

The terms symbolism, imagery and metaphor are often used interchangeably in therapeutic work and in the literature reviewed in this section. Symbolic work with nature is generally recognised as being valuable to the therapeutic process (Jung 1963; Ferrucci 2004). Symbolism underpins many of the nature-assisted approaches to therapy and this aspect of nature therapy receives particular attention also in the post intervention research.

Berger's (2008a) research on nature and symbolism shows the development of 'Nature Therapy' as being related to the universal truths and the cycle of life and death. The transpersonal aspect of his work invites clients to become more aware of the parallel stories that exist between their lives and the universal one and to embrace natural symbolism. According to Berger and McLeod (2006) this concept can offer great therapeutic potential while helping to normalise, add meaning, and develop a sense of belonging and oneness. Nature Therapy integrates aspects of drama therapy and shamanism to enhance the therapeutic benefits of engaging in natural symbolism through techniques such as 'building a home in nature' (Berger 2008b) and including ritual as part of the therapeutic process (Berger 2006a).

Corazon et al (2012), in designing their cognitive approach to nature-based therapy draw, in part, on Berger's work. The use of metaphors as a therapeutic tool is emphasised in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and other mindfulness based therapies. Corzon et al believe this cognitive approach integrates well with nature based work. The resulting therapeutic programme developed by Corzon et al (2012) is currently being used in the Nacadia Healing Forests, therapeutic gardens in Denmark. Although the first results of their longitudinal study are not expected until the end of 2015, results from other studies suggests the significant contribution of the use of nature based metaphor or symbolism in therapy.

In Linden and Grut's (2002) work in the UK based Natural Growth Project the experience of nature and metaphor is at the heart of the work with victims of torture. Results show that this form of work helps clients to make contact with issues that have been denied or suppressed. Similarly, studies by Adevi and Martensson (2013) and Sahlin et al (2012), suggest that the comparisons made between processes in

nature and clients' lives provide comfort and offer meaning to clients suffering from stress related illness. Research by Adevi and Lieberg (2012) also suggests that symbolic meaning making, associated with nature, can add vital dimensions to more traditional therapies. The psychotherapists and other professionals interviewed in this research claim that, in their experience, a natural environment that clients feel safe in, tends to "prepare, receive and open up" clients to therapy (Adevi and Lieberg 2012, p.57).

#### **2.4.2 Nature and Sensory Awareness in Psychotherapy**

In Gestalt Therapy, Mann (2010) speaks of sensations as being the raw data from which awareness emerges. He comments that "in a fast paced world in which virtual reality can be a substitute for feeling the wind against our faces" (Mann 2010, p.143), considerable forces can block our sensory experience and our communication with the world.

According to Abram (1996) and Sewall (1995) the natural world brings us into a world of sensory experiencing. Adevi and Lieberg (2012) suggest that through this sensory experiencing we can establish a wordless communication creating an emotional and existential awareness which greatly aids therapeutic work. Direct contact with nature can work as a medium to reconnect mind, body and spirit and it is through touching nature in an experiential way that our own nature is also touched (Plotkin 2013; Berger and McLeod 2006; Hillman 1995).

Burns' model (2014) of 'Nature Guided Therapy' influenced by Erickson's (1985) work is based on the sensory experience of nature and its restorative affects. Erickson pioneered many behavioural approaches to psychotherapy along with brief and solution-focused strategies and was also known to assign clients nature-based activities and rituals similar to those prescribed by traditional healers (Burns 2014). Burns' Nature Guided Therapy sees the natural environment and our senses as two broad categories of therapeutic resource. Through sensory awareness we make contact with nature and this contact can trigger emotional responses. Burns (2014) suggests that individualised, nature-based interventions for clients can help develop an awareness of personal resources, shifting their focus from symptoms to naturally

pleasurable sensations and experiences with the upshot of increasing their sense of wellbeing.

While Burns (2014) takes a ‘homework’ style approach to nature-based exercises, processing the emotional responses in later sessions, others use sensory focusing to develop awareness in the here and now. For instance unpublished research by Dooney (2013), on the experience of four psychotherapists working outdoors in the west of Ireland, highlights the importance of nature’s role in ‘here and now’ phenomenological work.

The use of mindfulness exercises in outdoor therapy work allows clients to tune into both inner process and outer sensations. De Young (2010) and Davis (1998) emphasise the restorative effect of walking mindfully in nature, while Jordan (2015) suggests the use of mindfulness exercises to help clients enter a therapeutic space both physically and psychologically.

A central aspect of many therapeutic modalities is to draw clients into the present so they can review the past from where they are now. The importance of this dual awareness has been highlighted by trauma psychotherapist Rothschild (Curren 2011; Rothschild 2000) among others. Linden and Grut (2002) found that drawing attention to the sights, sounds, smells, touch and tastes of nature can encourage clients to use present associations to alleviate the intensity of a painful past. Qualitative studies by Palsdottir et al (2014) and Adevi and Martensson (2013) show clients see close-up encounters with nature as an important dimension to their therapy.

Despite the obvious benefits of integrating nature-related therapy and body psychotherapy noted by researchers (Jordan 2015; Berger 2008a), literature on the topic remains scant (Beauvais 2012).

### **2.4.3 Nature and Spirituality in Psychotherapy**

Throughout the ages much has been written about spirituality and nature, not only by psychologists and theorists, but also by poets and philosophers. However, few empirical studies inform the integration of nature’s spiritual dimensions with psychotherapy. A recent systematic review by Keniger et al (2013) revealed that

only 5% of their reviewed articles focused specifically on the spiritual benefits of nature contact.

Existential theorist van Deurzen's (2015; 2012) concept of the four world dimensions explains that humans live in a multidimensional space. The four dimensions according to this theory are physical (which includes nature), social, personal and spiritual. van Deurzen (2015, p.65) suggests psychotherapists need to understand how "these layers effect each other and weave together". Davis (1998) argues that an integration of eco-psychology and transpersonal psychology would be useful to spiritual aspects of psychotherapy practice. Berger's (2008a) nature therapy framework also draws on eco-psychology, transpersonal psychology and other models. It specifically highlights the value of nature in working with spirituality in psychotherapy. Berger (2008a) suggests that an integrative approach to nature-based psychotherapy helps clients to expand their sense of self and widen their spiritual dimensions. Berger's (2008a) hypothesis is that through nature therapy clients may encounter nature based peak experiences at a deeper level. Maslow's (1962) concept of peak experience emphasises the inextricable connection between spirituality and nature. Concurring with Maslow's theory, a study of Nordic youths completed by Hoffman, Iversen and Ortiz (2010), suggests a high incidence of peak experiences involve nature

Spiritual reflections related to being part of something bigger through contact with nature, is apparent in much of the literature (Mayer et al 2009; Berger and McLeod 2006; Davis 1998). These reflections are expressed as a theme of "experiencing existential dimensions" in a study by Sahlin et al (2012). This IPA study looks at the experience of participants in a nature-based, multidisciplinary therapy programme. Sahlin et al (2012) highlights that nature has a mediating function for existential reflections. Similar to Frankl (1959), nature in this research is seen as having a deep impact on finding or re-finding values and meaning in life. Nature-based therapy, according to Sahlin et al (2012), evokes feelings of connectedness to a larger whole and sense of coming home and kinship with nature along with gratefulness for just being. Similarly, Palsdottir et al (2014) suggests this sense of being at one with nature can allow clients to get closer to their inner feelings and can serve as a source of inspiration.



A recent large quantitative study by Ahmadi and Ahmadi (2015) focuses on the spiritual coping strategies of cancer patients. The research, based on 2355 respondents, highlights the importance of nature in times of serious life crisis. Nature features in all of the top three of twenty four spiritual coping methods analysed. Based on these results the researchers call for more attention to be devoted to “less conventional therapeutic methods for patients” and suggest nature as an important resource for enhancing spiritual connection (Ahmadi and Ahmadi 2015, p.1189).

## **2.5 Nature and the Practice of Psychotherapy**

This section of the review focuses on aspects of the literature which are relevant to the practice of integrating nature to psychotherapy. It highlights decisions the therapists may need to make regarding the role nature will take in the therapy, when and how nature should be integrated into therapy and how this approach can affect the therapeutic relationship.

Research by Palsdottir et al (2014) shows the importance of non-nature factors at the beginning period of therapy. Firstly, similar to Sahlin et al (2012), and therapeutic thought generally, the study highlights that clients need to be motivated to change. Secondly, the research highlights the importance of therapeutic alliance and the therapeutic relationship. The researchers additionally comment that it is then, in their experience that nature gradually takes on its “all embracing role” (Palsdottir et al 2014, p.7107). The benefits of the therapeutic relationship developed, often indoors and prior to the nature therapy is an aspect also noted elsewhere in the literature. For instance, IPA research by Kyriakopoulos (2011), involving one to one indoor psychotherapy and an adventurous outdoor experience, highlights the indoor therapy as an integral part of the intervention. The study demonstrates that therapy prior to the outdoor activity helped clients with group participation. Also, later sessions gave the clients time and space to reflect on, and integrate their outdoor experience and related inner processes. Similarly, Doucette (2004) noted that indoor sessions before and after an eight week “walk and talk” intervention also proved beneficial as did indoor work in Berger’s research (Berger 2010; Berger 2006a; Berger & McLeod 2006).



Furthermore therapeutic decisions include the nature approach taken by the therapist and the choice of venue. The literature suggests that the phase the client is at in their therapy (Palsdottir et al 2014, Sahlin et al 2012), or the particular part of their process they are working on (Devlin 2015; Tenngat Ivarsson and Grahn 2012), may be influential factors in such decisions.

The restorative qualities of nature (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989) are evident in Ottosson's (2007; 2001) research and experience of seeking support from nature in his recovery for brain injury. Palsdottir et al (2014), expanding on the importance Ottosson and others (Advei & Martensson 2013; Sahlin et al 2012) put on being alone in nature introduce the concept of "social quietness". The significance of solitude and its therapeutic possibilities also has clear implications for the design of an integrative therapeutic approach. A central theme, therefore, emerging from this literature review is the frequently cited benefit of integrating traditional therapy with nature throughout the therapy process.

Berger and McLeod (2006) suggest that underpinning nature-related therapeutic choices is the belief that nature is more than a therapeutic setting but a live and dynamic environment. Furthermore they suggest that a three way relationship exists between therapist, client and nature and posit that nature could be seen as a "third partner" or "co-therapist". This relational concept appears elsewhere in the literature. Hasback (2012) speaks of this "triadic" relationship and Plotkin explores this relationship when nature becomes the "primary therapist or guide" (Plotkin 2013, p.8).

Moving therapy outside fundamentally changes the therapeutic space. Berger (2008a) and Dooney (2013) indicate that the corresponding shift in the locus of power may be more democratic than working in the therapist's room thus benefiting the therapeutic relationship. Yet, outdoor therapy presents challenges too and these are also highlighted in the literature (Hegarty 2010; Linden & Grut 2002). Jordan and Marshall (2010) highlight a gap in the literature in their discussion of the "destruction or enrichment" of the therapeutic frame. Raising such crucial factors as confidentiality, boundaries and the importance of supervision, this work, expanded on by Jordan (2015), highlights issues to be addressed when taking clients outdoors.

Berger (2010) looks at clients with specific physical or psychological issues for whom 'Nature Therapy' may have limitations. However, he also presents some solutions to these limitations. He remarks on therapist's skill and integrative approach as not only counteracting some of nature therapies possible shortcomings, but greatly enhancing it. He reminds the reader of Yalom's (2002) belief that creativity and flexibility is one of the most important elements in therapy.

While nature is increasingly featuring in articles informed by specific therapeutic perspectives, for example, Adlerian (Reese et al 2014; Reese and Myers 2012) and Person Centred (Tudor 2013), based on the review of the literature presented in this chapter, nature work strongly lends itself to an integrative approach to psychotherapy.

Finally quantitative studies on factors which may mediate nature's positive effects are worth noting when considering outcomes to nature-related psychotherapy. Kamitsis and Francis (2013) suggest that spirituality may mediate the relationship between nature and psychological wellbeing. Ottosson and Grahn (2008) indicate the greater the level of crisis being experienced the more powerful the influence of experiencing nature, while Mayer et al (2009) explore levels of connectedness to nature and its positive effects.

## **2.6 Limitations of the reviewed research**

While the lack of psychotherapy and nature research has been highlighted, and the reviewed literature partially critiqued throughout this chapter, this section will now further address the limitations to the current relevant literature.

Much of the available research has been completed in the Scandinavian therapeutic garden programmes (Palsodottir et al 2014; Advei and Martensson 2013; Salhin et al 2012). While bridging a gap in nature based rehabilitation research, the studies are based on structured multidisciplinary programmes, predominantly with clients presenting with the same issue, stress related illness. Although their results are very useful to informing the integration of psychotherapy and nature, they do not represent psychotherapists', or clients' pure experience of one to one nature integrated psychotherapy.

Berger's (2008a) 'Nature Therapy' was developed through an active research and a grounded theory approach. Unlike many of the Scandinavian papers his study resulted in the development of interventions and therapeutic programmes for a variety of populations, however the model is based on experiential work facilitated by either Berger or his Nature Therapy trainees. Thus a possible limitation to his work may be that it represents his own version of integration and he himself calls for further research and for other psychotherapists to add to this knowledge base (Berger and McLeod 2006).

Going towards addressing this issue Jordan (2014) presents a narrative analysis of interviews with psychotherapists working outdoors in the UK. Participants represented a broad spectrum of dominant psychotherapeutic models however it could be noted that the themes highlighted seem to suggest a strong eco-psychological perspective. While Jordan's book (2015) provides a very detailed and balanced account of the background and theoretical underpinnings of outdoor psychotherapy it presents his own research in an anecdotal style. Similarly the related journal article (Jordan 2014) focuses on specific themes and does not include the number of participants who took part in the study nor what influenced their approach to integrating nature to practice.

Reviewing the literature through a purely psychotherapeutic lens, this researcher detected a possible environmental bias in some of the eco-psychological literature (Greenleaf, Bryant and Pollock 2014; O'Connor 1995). It would appear from the literature that one of the goals of therapy, often, taken in this approach, is to create an environmental awareness in the client and encourage environmental activism.

The search for relevant literature, in general, provided a predominantly western research base. Although shamanic influences are highlighted in some of the underpinning literature in this area, it's naming as an influence is not common in the research papers.

Finally the literature would suggest that positive outcomes arising from the integration of psychotherapy and nature are not always dependent on the psychotherapist's presence in the outdoors with the client (Burns 2014). It would appear that there is a gap in the research. Studies focusing on outdoor psychotherapy

may be missing valuable insight on the role nature can play in psychotherapy as a whole. Thus a sampling of psychotherapists with a wide range of influences and approaches to nature integration seems appropriate to add to the research base.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the most relevant literature on the integration of nature into psychotherapeutic work. It firstly highlighted nature's importance in the context of broader research and social policy on nature, health and wellbeing. Secondly, it presented some background to the more specific area of nature integration in psychotherapy and highlighted the dearth of research in this field. The chapter then examined the literature in terms of some important concepts to therapeutic process, namely, symbolic work, sensory awareness and spirituality. It looked at nature and therapy in the context of clinical practice and finally at the limitations to the literature. Based on an analysis of the literature reviewed the current study proposes to bridge a gap in the research and chapter three will detail the chosen sample and methodology.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the research framework and methodological considerations involved in this study. It provides insight on research reflexivity, the sample, recruitment strategy, piloting process, ethical issues and data collection. The Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis framework is presented in this chapter and a comprehensive outline of the analysis process in this research is offered. Methodological limitations, adaptations and learnings from this study are summarised from the method design, through data collection, to the data analysis stages. A note on quality in qualitative research is included and the chapter concludes with a summary.

### **3.2 Research Framework**

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the integration of nature into therapeutic practice. It is proposed that this is best achieved through an exploration of the lived experience of psychotherapists who see nature as playing a significant role in their own personal process, and an integral part in their clinical practice. Therefore a qualitative study using semi structured interviews is considered to be the most appropriate research design for this study.

Thematic Analysis (TA) is considered a flexible approach to qualitative analysis. It is flexible in terms of theoretical framework, research question, method of data collection and sample size (Braun and Clarke 2013). Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns, or themes in a data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). It highlights the “most salient constellations of meanings” (Joffe 2012, p.209) across the data and is best suited to “elucidating the specific nature of a given groups conceptualization of the phenomena under study” (Joffe 2012, p.212). Thus thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke’s (2013; 2006) framework was considered suitable to the study design.

The main difference between thematic analysis and other qualitative methodologies is that it is not grounded in a particular philosophical or theoretical approach. Phenomenological approaches, grounded theory and narrative analysis for example, all have clear ontological, epistemological and theoretical foundations. Key TA

authors referred to in this chapter (Willig 2013; Joffe 2012; Braun and Clarke 2006; Boyatzis 1998) highlight the fact that when using TA the responsibility is on the researcher to make their own epistemological decisions. The naming of the researchers epistemological viewpoint increases the rigour of the study. An understanding of the lens through which research is done provides enhanced clarity around the overall type of knowledge which is being sought and transparency as to how, through the active role of the researcher, themes are identified. The researcher in this study is influenced by a phenomenological epistemology.

### **3.3 Other Methodologies Considered**

Methodological considerations are vital to any qualitative study with a tight fit between the research question and the methodology selected being important. The researcher reflected on the use of grounded theory, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and descriptive phenomenology before deciding that thematic analysis was most appropriate to the study.

Grounded theory, although grounded in the data and taking an empathic stance rather than an interpretive one, similar to analysis in this research, aims to produce an inductively driven theory of social or psychological processes (Willig 2013; Tweed and Charmaz 2012). Since the focus of this research was not the development of theory, grounded theory was discounted.

“Phenomenology is concerned with the phenomena that appear in our conscious as we engage with the world around us” (Willig 2013, p.251). Initially it was felt that this may be appropriate to the study however on closer inspection of both IPA and descriptive or transcendental phenomenology it was discovered that the interpretive aspect of IPA and close focus of the experience of the participant on a particular phenomenon resulted in neither meeting the aims and objectives of the study. Since this study focuses on how nature may be integrated into clinical practice as opposed to purely the subjective experience of connecting with nature, a specific phenomenological method of data analysis was not considered appropriate.

The researcher's decision to use thematic analysis from a phenomenological perspective, was validated by Dr Linda Finlay, author of 'Phenomenology for psychotherapists: Researching the lived world' (2011), via email communication.

### **3.4 Reflexivity**

In the inter-subjective relationship between the researcher and the researched, careful consideration must be given to reflexivity (Thompson and Harper 2012). Reflexivity refers to "the ability to engage critically in understanding the contribution of the researcher's experiences and circumstances have had in shaping a given study and its findings" (Thompson and Harper 2012, p.6). The first strand of reflexivity, epistemological reflexivity, has already been addressed, and the second strand focuses on personal reflexivity. Qualitative researchers are encouraged to position themselves in their writing by declaring their experience of the phenomenon being explored (Creswell 2013). A brief introduction to the researcher was provided in chapter one of this thesis and the personal reflective statement included in Appendix A, highlights the researcher's personal background and perspective in relation to this study.

### **3.5 Sample and Inclusion Criteria**

Participants were recruited through a number of agencies. Firstly Turning Point Training Institute, the institution at which the researcher trained as a psychotherapist, was asked to forward an email (Appendix B) outlining the study and the participant inclusion criteria to all its staff and graduates. Secondly the Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapists (IAHIP), was asked to circulate the recruitment email to its members. Finally the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) members were emailed through the publicly available email list on the IACP website.

Participants were required to be accredited members of IAHIP, and/or IACP or be accredited with a discipline recognised by the Irish Council for Psychotherapy (ICP)



and work from a dominant theoretical model. In addition the psychotherapists selected for the study were to be those who;

- saw their own connection with nature as being important to them personally,
- believed that nature can play a valuable role in psychotherapy,
- had completed further study in the use of nature in psychotherapy and/or
- included work with nature as a significant part of their psychotherapy practice (eg working outdoors with clients).

Braun and Clarke (2013) state that a sample size of between six and ten is appropriate to a master's degree research project using thematic analysis. The researcher proposed to interview eight psychotherapists for this study. Mid way through Braun and Clarke's guidelines it was considered that a sample of eight participants was fitting to the time line of the project and was broad enough to provide a rich data set.

A participant profile form (Appendix C) was designed so that in the event that there was an excess of interested participants a purposeful sampling strategy would be employed to ensure the widest range of experience and approaches would enrich the study. The main selection criterion, in this case, was to be diversity, providing balanced sampling across the categories of demographics, professional experience, education and integration of nature into practice.

### **3.6 Recruitment experience**

A large number of psychotherapists were canvassed via the recruitment strategy outlined above and a total of twenty three therapists responded to the advertising campaign. Many of the respondents expressed an interest in the research topic but did not feel they met the specific inclusion criteria of the study. All were asked to fill out the participant profile form and the purposive sample strategy was explained. Those involved were also advised that data received would not only be used to help the researcher with purposeful sampling but would be included in the completed thesis in the form of a statistical profile of all respondents (Appendix D). Seventeen participant profile forms were returned and used in this manner and eight therapists were then selected and invited to participate.

### **3.7 Piloting Process**

Pilot studies are small scale try-outs of various aspects of the research protocol (Baker, Pistrang and Elliott 2002). They can be used to test measures and procedures. Piloting is a highly important aspect of the research process (Braun and Clarke 2013; Baker, Pistrang and Elliott 2002).

The interview questionnaire (Appendix E), which formed the basis for the semi structured interviews, was primarily discussed with peers and fellow researchers. Dr Martin Jordan, Lecturer at the University of Brighton and author of 'Nature and Therapy: Understanding counselling and psychotherapy in outdoor spaces' (2015) kindly agreed to review, via email, the interview guide and, based on his experience of qualitative studies on this area make suggestions on any further questions which could be added. Feedback proposed that the guide met the aims and objectives of the study and no further amendments were made.

Interviewing can be a very challenging skill to master for the interviewer as it requires a lot of multi-tasking. The process of reviewing consent and ethical issues, testing recording equipment, watching time, putting participants at ease, listening intently, mentally ticking off questions and prompting and following up with unplanned questions is demanding (Braun and Clarke 2013). Thus piloting the interview is very useful.

One psychotherapist who was an experienced qualitative researcher and met the inclusion criteria for this study, volunteered to engage in a pilot interview. The pilot interview and participant was subject to the same ethical consideration as that of the other interviews and participants in the study. As a pilot however, the data was subject to initial analysis but was not included in the final results. This interview not only provided invaluable insight into the interview and research process, it also produced very rich data. The decision to exclude this data is discussed in methodological limitations below.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

All research, both qualitative and quantitative should be of the highest ethical standards. Ethics should be seen as an integral part of all stages and aspects of

research (Braun and Clarke 2013). Prior to recruitment of any participants in this study, the proposed research, as documented in this thesis, went through stringent ethical safeguards. Firstly, the Research Ethics Advisory Committee of the School of Nursing and Human Sciences at Dublin City University (DCU) reviewed this project. Secondly, the DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC) reviewed the research proposal. Broad categories of review included risk and risk management, confidentiality, and data storage. The significant level of detail required encouraged the researcher to engage in a very reflective process around ethical issues and possible ethical shortcomings of the study. All feedback from both ethics committees was welcomed and adhered to by the researcher. Approval from DCU REC was granted (Appendix F) prior to commencement of the project.

### **3.9 Data Collection – Procedure and instruments**

Once the participant profile forms (Appendix C) were returned and the participants were selected as previously outlined, the next stage in the data collection process began. In advance of scheduling interview times participants were sent the plain language statement (Appendix G) and the consent form (Appendix H) and encouraged to ask any questions they had about the study. When subsequently met in person these forms were discussed with participants and consent forms were signed. Interviews were then audio recorded using a dictaphone and microphone. Processes and instruments used in the project are highlighted, where appropriate, throughout this chapter.

### **3.10 Data Analysis using Thematic Analysis**

Coding of themes in thematic analysis can be carried out using either inductive or deductive analysis and both can also be used simultaneously. Inductive analysis is a ‘bottom up’ process which, much like grounded theory involves coding directly from the raw data. Deductive ‘top down’ analysis on the other hand considers theoretically informed themes and allows researchers to replicate, extend and refute existing studies (Boyatzis 1998).

Also worthy of attention is the level at which themes are identified (Braun and Clarke 2006). Analysis can focus on semantic or manifest content identifying themes based directly on the content of data this is sometimes referred to as ‘empathic’ analysis. A more interpretative, latent or ‘suspicious’ approach to analysis can also be taken to the TA framework (Willig 2013; Joffe 2012; Braun and Clarke 2006).

Understanding, that all qualitative research is interpretive as data never simply speaks for itself but is processed and interrogated for a particular purpose (Willig 2013), analysis in this study was predominately inductive and empathic.

### **3.11 Process of Analysis**

Braun and Clarke’s (2013; 2006) framework of six phases of thematic analysis, as listed below, was followed in the analysis of this piece of research. Although this structure gives guidelines to researchers there is no ‘right or wrong way to manage the mechanics of coding’ (2013, p.210) thus in this section the specific approach that was applied to coding and analysis in this project will be highlighted.

#### **1. Familiarisation with the data**

Initial engagement with the data involved jotting down first impressions and ideas directly after each interview in a reflective journal. Audio recordings were then transcribed verbatim and read and re-read again taking note of the researcher’s thoughts and ideas as they came.

#### **2. Generating initial codes**

As the analyst was new to the research process this stage presented the first hurdles. The volume of data seemed overwhelming. Keen to adhere to the recommended process but unsure as to how to get started the researcher sought some practical guidance. Attendance at Carla Willig’s workshop on ‘Analysing qualitative data’ (DCU 2015) was the first step in development of coding skills (Appendix I). A professor of psychology in City of London University Carla Willig is an expert on qualitative research and analysis and her workshop proved to be very informative. Secondly the researcher and her supervisor, Dr Mary Rabbitte, simultaneously coded the same section of data. Comparison and discussion then highlighted any blind

spots. Professor Willig and Dr Rabbitte both encouraged a creative, albeit systematic, approach to analysis.

The visual aspect of the researcher's learning style led her to developing a system to 'look at' the data in a different way prior to coding. Large, approximately A0 size, sheets of paper and post-its were used (Appendix J) to create displays of the data. This was done separately for each of the first three interviews. Individual sentences of data were handwritten on different colour post-its and were grouped, on the sheet, in terms of general content, not questions asked. This produced a 'picture' of what lay in each of the chosen transcripts. Although very time consuming this process improved the analyst's sense of the data before coding began.

Returning to the printed transcripts complete coding was then done across the data set. Line by line analysis of the interviews involved underlining and highlighting. Codes, which identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst in terms of the research question (Braun and Clarke 2006) were written in the margins. Professor Willig's advice on 'negative case analysis' (DCU 2015) was considered in the process by actively looking and coding for opposites to the findings expected.

### 3. Searching for themes

This stage involved sorting the different codes into potential themes and collating of the relevant data within the identified themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). The term 'immersion' in the data really became evident in this phase, with the continual movement between the transcripts, codes and themes. The drawing of mind-maps (Appendix K) and scribbling of handwritten lists aided the process of identifying candidate themes.

### 4. Reviewing themes

The next phase of the analysis involved the refinement of the candidate themes and again was based on a very active process between the researcher and the data. Keeping Braun and Clarke's definition in mind that a theme has a 'central organising concept, but will contain lots of different ideas or aspects related to the central organising concept' (2013, p.224) the review of the candidate themes began. It became clear that some candidate themes were not really themes, while others merged into each another. Candidate overarching themes which don't contain data

in themselves but structure or group themes were also identified in this phase. A rough thematic map was devised and checked against the entire data set. Braun and Clarke (2013) was a particularly helpful reference for this and the next phase.

#### 5. Defining and naming themes

This phase involved identifying the essence of what each theme was about and ensuring there was not too much overlap between the themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). Theme names, in this research, but not necessarily in all TA reports, were taken directly from the data. Names provide an immediate and vivid sense of what the theme is about and can, as in the case of the over-arching theme names in this report, signal the analytic ‘take’ on the data (Braun and Clarke 2013). When the themes were named and defined the thematic map was refined and produced electronically.

#### 6. Producing the report – Finalising analysis

The process of analysis continued throughout the write up as the ‘complicated story’ (Braun and Clarke 2006) of the data was presented.

### 3.12 Methodological Limitations, Adaptations and Learning

#### Method Design

- Inclusion criteria – One exception was made to the inclusion criteria initially laid down in the research plan. A response to the call for participants came from one therapist who, although not as yet fully accredited, had done post qualification training in eco-therapy in the UK and was integrating outdoor psychotherapy as a significant part of their practice. Inclusion criteria had required accreditation however as this respondent had specific eco-therapy training they were included on the grounds of diversification.
- Advertisement wording - The recruitment advert called for therapists who ‘include work with nature as a significant part of their psychotherapy practice (eg working outdoors with clients)’. Although difficult to know how to re phrase this, it may have caused confusion. Many respondents, even those well qualified wondered, in their initial email responses, if they met the criteria.

Therefore one can surmise that this wording may have turned off some suitable potential participants also.

- Recruitment – The inclusion criteria welcomed members of the Irish Council for Psychotherapy (ICP) which includes other branches of psychotherapy besides humanistic and integrative. These include constructivist therapy, couple and family therapy and psychoanalytic therapy. However ICP members were not directly emailed as part of the recruitment campaign thus the sample did not include therapists specifically accredited in these modalities. Their inclusion could have provided different perspective.
- Participant profile – The researcher believes that none of the participants in this study were involved in another piece of Irish qualitative research (Dooney 2013) relevant to this topic. Thus the participants in this study added to the broader research data and population. However if a question had been included in the participant profile form or asked before the interview in relation to participation in any other psychotherapy and nature related studies the researchers hunch on this issue could have been validated.
- Pilot Interview – During the research planning period it was decided that the data gathered from the pilot interview would not be included in the final analysis. This decision was based on the researcher's understanding of pilot interview protocol at the time. However further reading on this issue (Braun and Clarke 2013) indicated that in studies of small sample size or from a small population, the inclusion of the pilot data in the analysis is acceptable. The pilot interview provided rich data however ethical approval had not been sought to include this. Future studies should plan to incorporate pilot data into analysis.

#### Data Collection

- Interview process - Flexibility should be allowed for in terms of the time given to the interview process. The first interview, after the pilot, took well over an hour, and although all the data was not completely focused on the research it did provide the researcher with a very comprehensive introduction to shamanism and to an overview of much that was happening both in Ireland and abroad on nature and psychotherapy generally.

## Data Analysis

- Method - Although thematic analysis proved to be a very flexible and appropriate method in this project it was noted by the researcher that the interventions used by the participants could not comprehensively be incorporated into themes. Aspects of client interventions are highlighted in the discussion and summarised in Appendix L however future studies could possibly use a grounded theory approach to develop a model around the integration of nature into psychotherapy.

### 3.13 Quality in qualitative research

While it is important to ensure quality and demonstrate trustworthiness in all types of research studies, it may be more easily achieved and measurable in quantitative research. In qualitative research issues of validity, credibility and rigour become critically important to demonstrate trustworthiness and to assess the quality of the research.

This chapter has provided comprehensive detail on how the research and analysis was carried out along with highlighting any shortcomings. The researcher epistemological framework was presented and a personal reflexivity statement can be seen in Appendix A. This indicates the lens through which the project and analysis was approached. The fifteen point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2013; 2006) was also referred to throughout the research process and adhered to. Although the checklist has not been listed in this chapter it can be seen in Appendix M.

### 3.14 Summary

Thematic analysis was seen as the best fit for this qualitative study giving the analyst the flexibility to choose between an inductive or deductive approach and to decide on the level of interpretation. This chapter provided the reader with an overview of Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to thematic analysis along with a detailed account of the researcher's approach to analysis. Details of the method design, planning and piloting stages were highlighted as well as the data collection and analysis phases. Methodological considerations were provided as were the



limitations, adaptations and learnings which presented throughout the project. Research findings, based on the active process of engagement between the analyst and the data, as explained in this chapter, will be offered in chapter four as will some detail on the participants involved in this study.

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## **Chapter 4: Results**

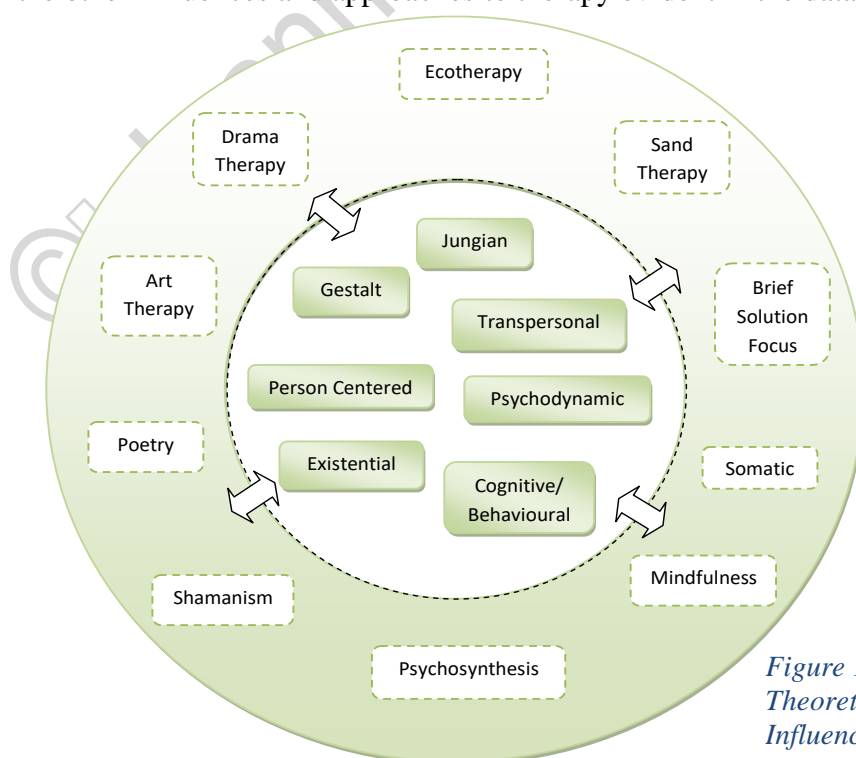
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## 4.1 Introduction

An overview of the research findings will be presented in this chapter. A summary of the participant's relevant experience and background will firstly be provided by way of reference to the reader. The themes identified through the detailed process of analysis outlined in the previous chapter will then be introduced. A thematic map, developed by the researcher, theme definitions and illustrative quotations from the data will aid communication of the study findings. A more in-depth analysis of the data will follow in the discussion in chapter five.

## 4.2 Participant review

Eight psychotherapists from three of the four provinces of Ireland engaged in approximately one hour long, face to face interviews with the researcher thus providing the data for analysis in this paper. Four of the clinical practices had their base in urban areas, two were based in rural areas and two of the therapists had practices in both urban and rural settings. All the participants were Integrative psychotherapists whose primary training covered the mainstream theoretical frameworks. Four were accredited by IAHIP and four were members of IACP. These core frameworks are represented in the centre of Fig 1. Enhancing the personal integrative models of the participants, the outer circle of Fig 1 depicts some of the other influences and approaches to therapy evident in the data.



*Figure 1: Participant Theoretical Frameworks, Influences & Approaches*

The data highlighted that at least two of the initial psychotherapy trainings incorporated some outdoor process work. Some, but not all, of those interviewed had studied shamanism or had completed extra training in eco-therapy or outdoor therapy approaches post qualification. A summary of participant professional backgrounds is presented in table 1 below.

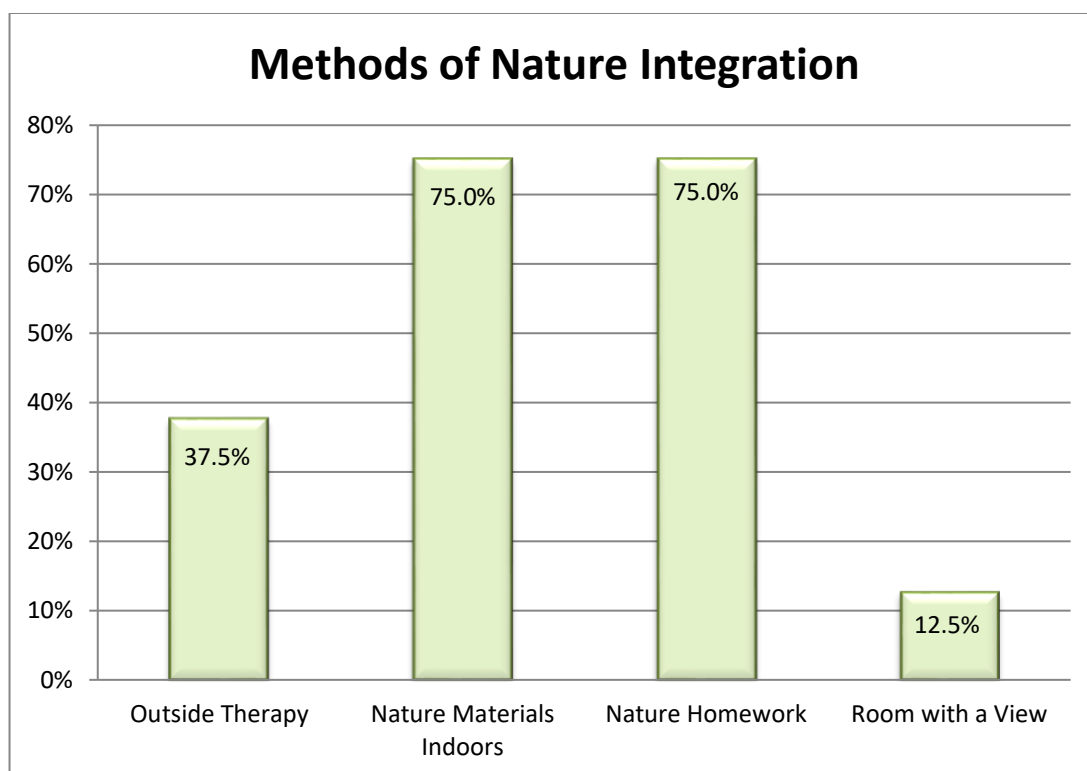
Table 1: Participant Experience *Table 1: Participant Experience*

Experience	Number of Participants
Accredited 20 + Years	3
Accredited 10-20 Years	2
Accredited 5-10 Years	2
Pre Accredited	1
Post qualification Shamanic/ Eco therapy/ Outdoor training	5
Clinical Supervisor	4
Psychotherapy Trainer	4
Shamanic Trainer	2

Nature had played an important role in the personal therapeutic journey and 'psychological dig' (Diane) of all the participants. The therapists had very much integrated nature into their clinical practice and saw it as having significant therapeutic value. Five of those interviewed estimated that nature related work constituted 11-30% of their clinical practice whereas three participants felt they integrated nature into 51-70% of their therapeutic work. Integration to practice took various forms including combinations of the following; engaging in sessions outdoors with clients, encouraging nature based 'homework' between sessions, using natural materials indoors and incorporating the value of a room with a view. The

breakdown of participant's use of these, as focused on in their interviews, was slightly different than presented in their participant profile forms. Since the interview transcripts were the primary source of data for this research Fig. 3 presents the information most indicative of the interviews.

*Figure 2: Methods of Integrating Nature into Practice - Interview data*

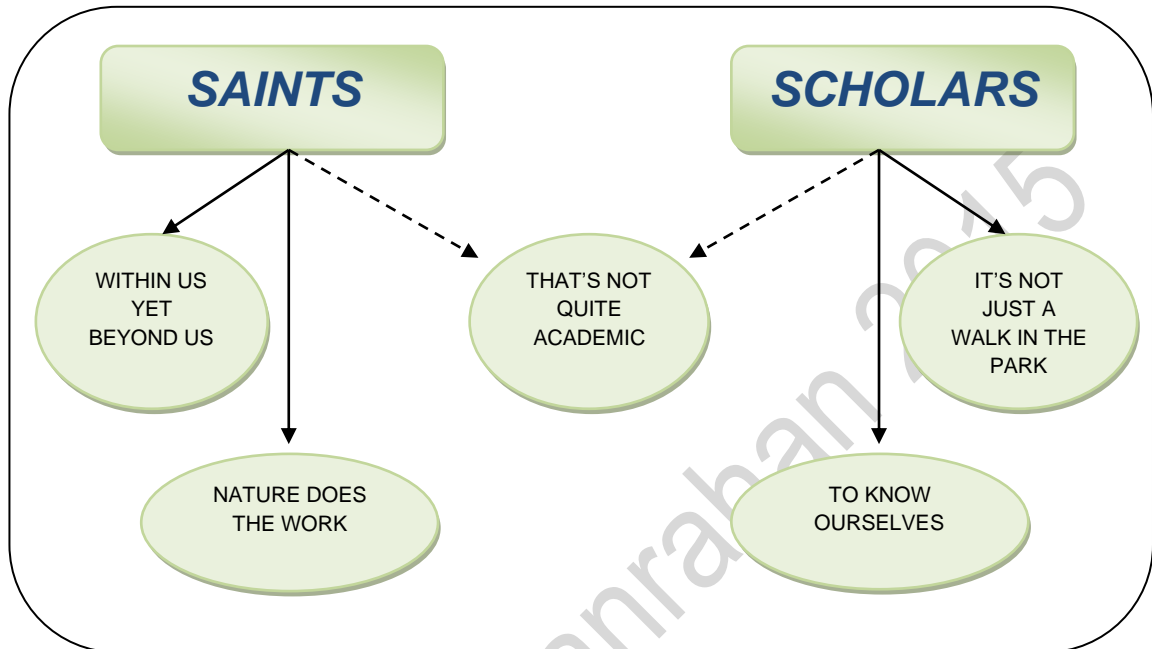


The interview data, as represented above, highlights that three, or 37.5%, of the participants saw working outdoors with clients one to one, as a significant part of their integration of nature into practice. While not focused on in the interviews, and therefore not presented in Fig 3, others had engaged in one to one outdoor interventions on rare occasions, or used outdoor work as part of group or workshop facilitation, thus bringing the total number with outdoor therapy experience to seven or 87.5%. Also not visible from Fig 3, but worth highlighting, is the quality of the data which was obtained regardless of level of involvement in outdoor therapy work. The one participant who did not disclose any experience of outdoor therapy provided very rich data of her integration of nature via her therapy room with a view.

### 4.3 Overarching Themes and Main Themes

Analysis of the data in this study identified two overarching themes and five themes as shown in Fig.3\*.

Figure 3: Thematic Map



*\*Key: Solid one directional arrow denotes a direct link from an overarching theme to a theme whereas the dotted one directional arrow indicates a tentative link from an overarching theme to a theme.*

Overarching themes organise and structure research findings. Containing neither codes nor data they capture an idea encapsulated in a number of themes (Braun and Clarke 2013). This research highlights two distinctive patterns in the data; that of the intangible aspects of working with nature which might be described as mystical, symbolic or spiritual and therefore numinous and that of a theory driven reflective practice focusing on core therapeutic goals and principles. These overarching themes will be referred to as 'Saints' and 'Scholars'. Their naming captures something not only of the themes but also of the diversity of traditions and modalities that inform the practice of the participants. The association with the phrase 'Ireland of the saints and scholars' (Flood 1917), evokes the concept of culture and heritage also relevant to the study. However, most significantly the

naming of the overarching themes speaks to the continuum between psychotherapy as a science and psychotherapy as a therapy of the soul. It addresses the dissonance along that continuum reflected in the theme ‘That’s not quite academic’.

‘That’s not quite academic’ is linked to both overarching themes however both ‘Saints’ and ‘Scholars’ also provide an organising structure to two distinctive themes each. Under Saints the themes are named ‘Within us yet beyond us’ and ‘Nature does the work’ and Scholars supports the themes ‘It’s not just a walk in the park’ and ‘To know ourselves’. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013) all the themes have a central organising concept and contain different ideas or aspects related to those organising concepts. All five of the theme names have been taken from direct quotations in the data. The naming quotes were seen as not just important in themselves but as providing an immediate and vivid sense of what the themes are about (Braun and Clarke 2013).

## **Saints**

The overarching theme of Saints should not be misunderstood as referring to religious themes. It should be interpreted in the broader sense of spirituality, magical mystery, creativity, symbolism and meaning making. The story of these concepts in the data are caught in the themes ‘Within us and yet beyond us’ and ‘Nature does the work’.

## **Within us yet beyond us**

The theme ‘Within us yet beyond us’ captures that deep sense that we are more than our physical selves. This was a very strong theme throughout the data set. All the participants spoke of how contact with the natural world evoked the concept of spirituality, interconnectivity and inspired a feeling of awe. Two of the participants disclosed details of their own peak experiences in nature. All the therapists also discussed how this element of the therapeutic work is important to clinical practice. Some illustrative quotes for this theme are presented in table 2 below and it should

be noted that names used throughout this paper are pseudonyms and not the real names of the participants.

*Table 2: Quotes Supporting the Theme 'Within us yet beyond us'*

Sean	that deeper sense of being, call it soul whatever word you want to call it, that expansiveness that is beyond us. <b>Within us and yet beyond us.</b>
Brid	So for me nature and spirituality are very much intertwined
Paul	On a personal level I'm an atheist, this gives me, eco-psychology and eco-therapy and this work has given me a better connection with what is the spiritual, but now I'm there and I know I'm there in a Jungian sense. I know it now. I feel it now...
Fionn	Nature is the spiritual... You don't have to look to the temple or you don't have to look to the ashram. It's out there. You just look out the window and it's there
Peig	The bigger picture, I think it's a really good way to look at life ... there is much more expansion that can happen or integration of coming outside ourselves, being conscious of other people, of other beings, once we know where we are ourselves in the world. That compassion for the rest of the world, the rest of nature, the rest of our neighbours. I suppose it's more integrative, you know, it's interconnected.
Rosemary	For me that is profoundly spiritual that there is a spirit of life that emerges, and it has emerged really profoundly on this planet that we call earth that's utterly connected to this wider universe..... and just that's to me awe inspiring at a very deep level
Mairead	it is almost visceral, it's a hunger that is beyond...My soul wouldn't settle until I met it, a trip to the seaside would do it. A walk up the hills would do it
Diane	Spirituality in nature... I just think it's so obvious



## Nature does the work

The second theme associated with the overarching theme Saints is 'Nature does the work'. This theme addresses the experience that contact with nature can not only aid the therapy process, but in some ways provides more to the client than the therapist alone can. Teachings from nature are discussed in terms of the cycle of life and hope. The role of metaphor, symbolism and imagery in psychotherapy are highlighted in the context of nature and the nourishing properties of nature as a resource and as a support to self care are also explored. Some illustrative quotes for this theme are presented in table 3 below:

*Table 3: Quotes Supporting the Theme 'Nature does the work'*

Fionn	I as a therapist, as a psychotherapist, can take no credit for the healing that happens when people go out in nature. It's nothing to do with me at all. The only thing I can take credit for is setting the scene.... But when they go out there it's <b>nature does the work</b>
Rosemary	the sea air and just being able to see the hills.. just let that do its thing
Diane	And sometimes I think client's don't even know what's happened, or even myself, I wouldn't know what's happened. Healing is the word maybe I'm looking for, it's more than psychotherapy, and it's healing.
Paul	You can almost feel this sense, so there's no need for me to do anything, just stay there, and be there when they come back.
Mairead	it (nature) gave these silent metaphorical stories to the unconscious. How can you work if you don't have ...find your metaphors
Brid	'Wow, against all the odds. It's freezing cold, it's frosty and this little delicate flower has come up' and that gave him hope.
Sean	(Clients) begin to say there's something changing here.... could be as simple as saying I've started walking, I'm noticing the colours of whatever, I'm just paying attention to what's around me, so there's that gradual connection with, and then that supports their work on their own
Peig	why not see what else we can be drawn towards that might nourish us, nothing better than the earth.

## Scholars

The overarching theme ‘Scholars’ corresponds to much of what might be described as core to clinical practice, therapist reflexivity and client process work. The themes in this category, ‘It’s not just a walk in the park’ and ‘To know ourselves’ refer to reflective theoretical practice and the deepening awareness of the client to their own psychological processes.

### To know ourselves

The second theme related to the overarching theme Scholars, ‘To know ourselves’ depicts much of what therapy is about. It describes emotional affect, embodiment through direct experience and a move away from being stuck in cognitive processes. It represents a deepening of awareness and an increased sense of self. Again some illustrative quotes for this theme are presented in table 4 below:

*Table 4: Quotes Supporting the Theme 'To know ourselves'*

Peig	I think that’s one of our purposes in life is to get <b>to know ourselves</b>
Rosemary	Just as the body needs this so the psyche needs it too, so the total self needs to know itself as embodied, as earthed , as grounded, as natural
Paul	But a few sessions of walking outdoors and I get sense that they’re literally dropping deeper, earthing with the space around them
Sean	clients sometimes who are quite slow to really express deep held aggression, deep held anger. A place that they can do it safely, I find, and clients who have done it, is to find a place that’s pretty isolated and roar and shout all you want... some actually find it a way around shame. It lessens the power of the shame
Diane	I think the deepest work we can’t always put words on it, it’s not from a cognitive place, it’s from a heart place, our bones.... So I think that’s the element it brings (nature), it’s not easy to verbalise or find words for it. It’s a really deep, ancient, I think anyway, a deep ancient energy, it’s survival at one level, it’s our survival.
Mairead	(client with cancer) We did a lot of walking up and down the driveway, a lot of sessions when she was able to walk. The moment she could

	walk she needed to be outside. So we walked slowly....that sense of needing to touch nature, needing to be in it um, she said it brought her alive
Rosemary	...my body just gets totally rewired, re-cleansed out, it's moving more freely, I'm moving more freely. It feels like yeah I'm literally being renewed and my cells of my body not just that this does me good.
Fionn	When we connect with nature, we connect to our true selves...your nature rests itself in nature

### **It's not just a walk in the park**

The theme 'It's not just a walk in the park' portrays the very strong evidence of reflective practice throughout the data. Participants had studied, read, observed and in many ways done their own phenomenological research with their clients over time to help them understand what nature was bringing to the work. They have linked this to many of the theoretical processes that underpin therapeutic work. They keep their focus on the client's needs and are also cognisant of how nature has supported them in their own development and what, as a result, they bring as therapists. Chosen illustrative quotes for this theme are presented in table 5 below:

*Table 5: Quotes Supporting the Theme 'It's not just a walk in the park'*

Paul	I don't sit with my supervisor talking about the beautiful day we had in wherever. That's when the nuts and bolts of therapy might be coming out.... <b>it's not just a walk in the park</b>
Mairead	(in supervision) 'Can you see something? What is going on here?' Because I did have a worry about that in the beginning, is this my counter transference? You know, or is this something real that works for people. So I have come the conclusion it is real and it works for people.
Peig	Yeah in the aftermath of these experiences there definitely is more expansion. There is more being able to relate on, an equal basis. There is no, the projection would certainly diminish.

Rosemary	There were a couple of times when they were sitting in the chair and they would suddenly stop and I was like, it would take a minute now to know if this is outside or inside that stopped them in their tracks because it could be either, sometimes just allowing it to ‘that’s a Jay’, ‘that’s a ..’ whatever so that’s lovely to have those moments as well.....it really allows us to, the relationship deepens.
Mairead	it was very much informed by gradual work with the clients, by noticing how they love touching the sand, playing with it, how they touch the plants, how they notice nature.
Sean	I’m also realistic enough to know the natural world is not a place for all clients and some of them will run a mile and say, ‘what the hell do you walk in a wood for?’
Peig	she was with me about five years and as that progressed and an issue that she had, we eventually discussed something about moving outside which we did. Because we had tried things indoors and it didn’t quite satisfy what she needed so we went outdoors and we planned it
Paul	in the spirit of really authentic, integrative therapy that I thought I have to bring this in, this is who I am and this is what I do.

### **That’s not quite academic**

Differing to the other themes the fifth theme, ‘That’s not quite academic’ can be indirectly linked to both the overarching themes of Saints and Scholars. It relates to a research finding that many of the participants felt, at times they had something to justify or deny in terms of their practice and beliefs. Some, seemed to encounter issues with, or needed to defend or refute aspects of their work with nature which didn’t seem academic enough, while others resisted the ‘*over psychologising*’ (Fionn) of psychotherapy. This finding will be addressed in more detail in the discussion chapter. Illustrative quotes to support this theme are shown in table 6 below:

Table 6: Quotes Supporting the Theme 'That's not quite academic'

<b>Mairead</b>	'Oh <b>that's not quite academic</b> , woopsy!' and you'd get the feeling 'oh right, Mairead is off on her little hobby horse again'
<b>Diane</b>	it's really hard to get past reviewing panels and stuff because they asked us to take the word spirituality out of our, anything that isn't measurable, so what we're talking about here today a lot of it isn't measurable
<b>Paul</b>	I'm trying not to use the word magical or spiritual
<b>Brid</b>	for years we were regarded as the counsellors doing the hokey stuff, the weirdy spirituality and we kept quiet about it
<b>Fionn</b>	Psychotherapy must be very careful, in its attempt to be taken as a serious science that it doesn't lose the art of what it's really about and that's the art of healing

#### 4.4 Findings not represented in the main themes

The participants' experience of nature interventions and their fond memories of clients throughout their years of practice provided the foundation for this study. Client examples provided the framework for the development of the themes addressed. Strictly applying the Braun and Clarke (2013; 2006) approach to thematic analysis these interventions did not constitute a theme in themselves. However they are particularly significant, to the understanding of the integration of nature to therapeutic practice. Participant's reflections on client work and client feedback certainly enriched study and put the research in context. For this reason some examples of client interventions are included in Appendix L.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the reader to the theoretical background of the eight study participants along with their approaches to nature integration. The main findings of the research have also been established. In it the overarching themes and other themes, which were found as a result of a stringent thematic analysis of the

data, have been launched, illustrative quotes provided and a thematic map developed. Overarching themes, named 'Saints' and 'Scholars' have provided structure to the main themes uncovered through the analysis process. The five highlighted themes, named via direct quotations from the data, were 'Within us yet beyond us', 'Nature does the work', 'To know ourselves', 'It's not just a walk in the park' and 'That's not quite academic'.

'Within us yet beyond us', highlights the role of nature in accessing spiritual and transpersonal dimensions of psychological process. The significance of this aspect of nature's role in psychotherapy was clear across the entire data set.

'Nature does the work', not only draws focus to nature's role as a resource in terms of self care but as a rich source of learning and symbolism aiding both conscious and unconscious therapeutic work. As such, the concept of nature as a third force in the work was evident.

'To know ourselves', is the theme which highlights nature's role in deepening our sense of self. Suggesting that contact with nature can increase our embodied experience of self, boost positive emotional affect and help aid cathartic release and letting go of painful feelings.

Through the theme 'It's not just a walk in the park', the participants' diligent theorising, study reflexivity and ongoing phenomenological research within their clinical practice is addressed. Their years of research into how nature integration can aid, or in some cases, hinder therapeutic work, brings depth to the current study. Aspects of how the therapeutic relationship is affected by an integration of nature to practice were explored.

Finally, the overarching themes not only provide structure to the themes, but 'Saints' and 'Scholars', also speaks to the continuum between psychotherapy as a science and psychotherapy, as a therapy of the soul. Addressing the dissonance along that continuum reflected in a final theme 'That's not quite academic'.

A detailed discussion of how these findings pertain to current literature along with further analysis and development of the findings will form the basis of the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the role nature can play in psychotherapy practice. The analysis of eight psychotherapists' experiences, who have integrated nature into their practice, led to the development of five themes and two over-arching themes. The over-arching themes provided structure to the themes. The themes identified included, 'Within us yet beyond us', 'Nature does the work', 'To know ourselves', 'It's not just a walk in the park' and 'That's not quite academic' and the over-arching themes of 'Saints' and 'Scholars' as shown in figure 4 below.

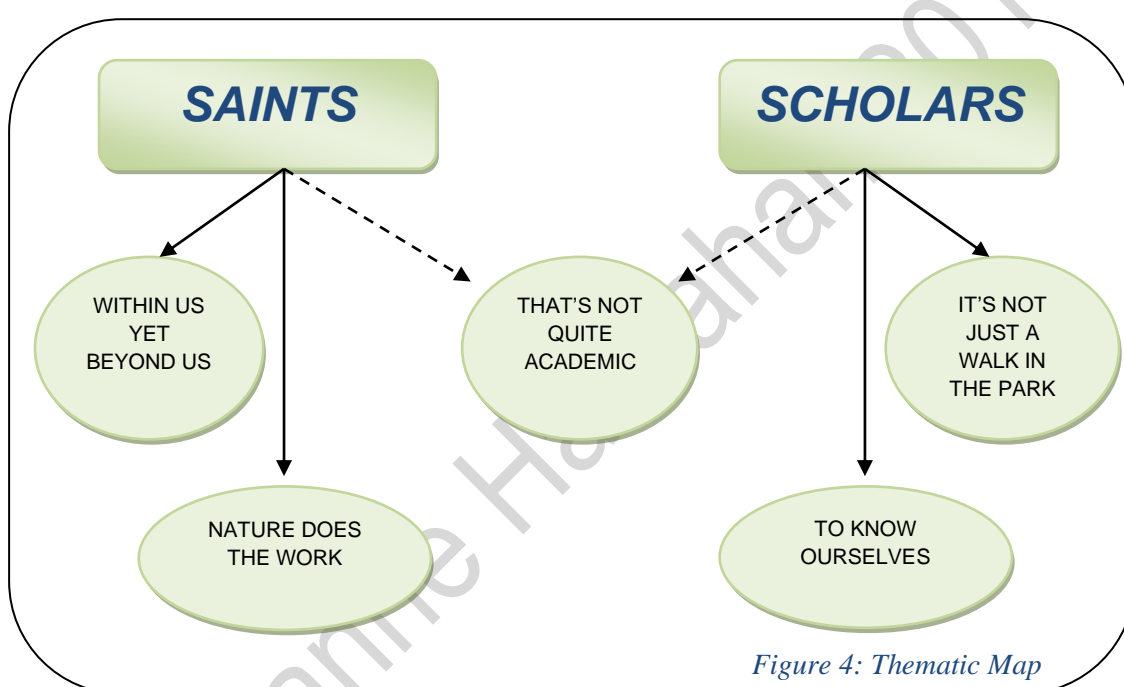


Figure 4: Thematic Map

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the research findings and reviews how these findings pertain to the current literature. It begins with an examination of the first four themes 'Within us yet beyond us', 'Nature does the work', 'To know ourselves' and 'It's not just a walk in the park', on a theme by theme basis. The chapter then addresses the final theme 'That's not quite academic'. This includes reviewing the continuum between psychotherapy as a science and psychotherapy as a therapy of the soul and addresses the over-arching themes. The synergies between themes and the suggested relationship between therapist, nature and client is then considered. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.



## 5.2 Review of Therapists' Experience by Theme

### 5.2.1 Within us yet beyond us

*“That deeper sense of being, call it soul, whatever word you want to call it - that expansiveness that is beyond us. **Within us and yet beyond us**”.* (Sean Interview)

‘Within us yet beyond us’, relates to the over-arching theme ‘Saints’, and reflects the finding that the natural world evokes a sense of spirituality, interconnectivity, and inspires feelings of awe. This is a dominant theme which was reflected across 100% of the data set. Munthe’s (1931) reflection on the spiritual dimension of nature “the soul needs more space than the body” (Munthe 1931, p.436) was highlighted in the study, and this sentiment finds resonance in the theme ‘Within us yet beyond us’.

Jung, well known for his deep connection with nature (Sabini 2002), often spoke of spaciousness in a similar manner to Munthe (1929).

I am looking forward enormously to getting back to the sea again, where the over stimulated psyche can recover in the presence of that infinite peace and spaciousness (Jung 1963, p. 368).

‘Space’, with its air and depth, is in itself nature. This research highlighted the spiritual benefits of the great ‘*expanse*’, while also drawing emphasis to the fact that nature is everywhere. It is the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink and even in a city, as one therapist stated “*the earth is always below us and the sky is always above us*”.

Analysis of the research data suggested that the experience of the spiritual dimension in nature, involves moments of deep connection to both inner and outer worlds. This is in line with literature by many psychotherapeutic theorists including Ferrucci (1982), Jung (1963), Maslow (1962) and Frankl (1959) and more recent studies (Palsdottir 2014; Sahlin 2012; Berger 2008a). In this research, one of the therapists, who was influenced by the existentialist van Deurzen’s (2015; 2012) four world dimensions, explained the view that the natural or physical world is a ‘gateway’ and “*the one of the four that can actually lead to the other three*”. In this study the sense of being at one with nature was considered helpful to the therapeutic process and

referred to as an *'intertwining'* and an *'interconnectivity'*. This finding is similar to Palsdottir et al (2014).

In line with Sahlin (2012), the importance of feeling part of *'something bigger'* was frequently expressed by the therapists. This research suggested that by connecting with the spiritual dimension of nature, being part of something bigger, can initiate change for the client with their *"problems not being so big and not being so all-consuming"*.

The fact that we are *'beings of nature'*, and not separate from nature was also emphasised in this study. The study results additionally reinforce the shamanistic and Jungian view which identifies nature as 'the spirit' or spiritual (Abram 1996; Jung 1963). Furthermore the interplay between the self and the transpersonal self (Assagioli 1965) was evident, and referred to by one therapist as the need to *"rest our souls in nature"*. Moore's (2008) term, and therapeutic philosophy, "care of the soul" was also used by the therapists to reflect nature's soothing spiritual qualities.

The external world was seen as inspiring change and transcendence in the inner world. Akin to Maslow (1962) and Hoffman, Iversen and Ortiz (2010), this research revealed the prevalence of nature inspired peak experiences. Such a peak experience was described by one therapist as *"almost that glimpse of eternity where time stands still"*. The sense of awe and wonder around the magnificence of the universe echoed throughout the data. Nature related peak experiences were both personal to the therapists and recounted to them by their clients.

In this research the spiritual aspects of nature and spirituality in the therapeutic process were seen as very beneficial and important. However, also highlighted regularly in the data, was the view that nature and the spiritual world are not mutually exclusive, and need to be grounded in a physical sense. As one therapist stated, *"the body wisdom, I think that's the spirituality, that's the creation....the embodiment. So, live in the body first. Live in the world"*.

Reflected throughout the data was the strong sense that the concepts which led to the development of the theme 'Within us yet beyond us' were not religion based. In fact, as many therapists highlighted, religion can often get in the way of the concept of spirituality.

### 5.2.2 Nature does the work

*“I as a therapist, as a psychotherapist, can take no credit for the healing that happens when people go out in nature. It’s nothing to do with me at all. The only thing I can take credit for is setting the scene.... But when they go out there it’s **nature does the work**”.* (Fionn Interview)

The second theme ‘Nature does the work’ relates to many of the intangible dimensions which nature brings to psychotherapeutic work. This theme also relates to the over-arching theme ‘Saints’ and was represented across 100% of the data set. This theme addresses the finding that contact with nature not only aids the therapy process, but in some ways, can provide more to the client than the therapist can alone. It also addresses the value of symbolic and metaphorical teachings from nature, and nature as a resource to self. Finally, the theme addresses the creative and imaginative aspects of contact with nature along with its mystical qualities.

Levine’s (1997) development of the approach to trauma in psychotherapy Somatic Experiencing is based on his learnings from nature through the study of animal trauma responses. The theme ‘Nature does the work’ therefore suggests that learning from nature is not only useful to theory development but to the practice of psychotherapy.

This research suggested that the natural world can provide an extra, often, very enriching dimension to therapy. As such, this study validated Berger’s (2008a) concept of the three way relationship between therapist, nature and client. In this research some therapists referred to nature, in a similar manner to Berger and McLeod (2006) as a ‘third’ or a ‘co-therapist’. It is interesting to note, however, that one therapist disputed the term ‘third’ and the term ‘co-therapist’. This was argued on the idea that human nature constitutes an inextricable part of nature.

This research highlighted the value of clients’ engagement with nature in supporting their integration of issues such as life and death. As client’s pay attention to and learn from nature they start to integrate and understand, as one therapist stated *“there are seasons in a process... a beginning and a middle, deepening, an opening, a yield into the next”*. This research suggested that learning from nature provides hope.

Findings in this study reflected the value of symbolism, often referred to as imagery or metaphor, in psychotherapeutic practice. Similar to Linden and Grut (2002) and Corzon et al (2012), the integration of natural symbolism was evident in the clinical practice of the therapists in this study. Akin to findings in Adevi and Martensson (2013) and Sahlin et al (2012), this study suggested that engaging in nature related symbolism can provide comfort and enhance meaning for many clients. Examples of such symbolic work are evident throughout the data. One therapist spoke of a client suffering with cancer. She stated that a tree, with the fungal growths known as cankers, had provided solace for the client;

That tree became like a talisman for her through her cancer journey.. She would go back again and again with a friend.. She learnt from the tree to live with her cancer rather than worrying about dying from it. (Mairead Interview)

According to the therapist, the client gained a lot from the tree and working with the tree in therapy helped deepen her learning, process existential issues and embrace hope. While this process with nature was in the conscious awareness of the client this research would also suggest that messages from nature may also aid unconscious process. This finding would concur with Linden and Grut (2002) that symbolic nature work can help clients to make contact with issues and have been denied or suppressed.

Interestingly, the findings from this research suggested that not all clients are open to conscious imagery and metaphorical work. One therapist stated that, for some clients, *“It’s not a place they can go very easily so I wouldn’t, I’ll take it at their pace”*.

This study also showed the value of integrating nature and ritual into psychotherapy. Therapists gave examples of engaging in ritual with clients that included burying or burning letters or art work, engaging in planting and accompanying clients to places of importance. Also evident was therapists’ encouragement of clients engaging in rituals on their own. This is in line with Berger’s study (2006a) that linked symbolic nature work to ritual or ceremony and the incorporation of the concept of a natural ‘sacred space’ (Berger 2008b; Berger and McLeod 2006).

Another important concept attached to this theme is that of nature as a resource to wellbeing and, as such, an important resource to aid the therapy process. Akin to Hegarty (2010), this study suggested that, if clients are open to it, it may be useful for therapists to encourage clients to embrace and embody that resource. Similar to Ottosson (2007) and Hegarty's (2010) view of 'self-healing' in nature, contact with nature was seen as a way that clients could resource themselves. One therapist states *"They are always going to have the sea and the trees and the sky and the earth"*. The importance of embracing nature's therapeutic qualities between sessions was seen as key to integrating nature's benefits to psychological process. The value of nature in terms of self care of the therapist was also highlighted in this research, particularly in relation to what it brought to them in their capacity as therapists. As such this highlighted how the therapist-nature relationship may then subsequently reinforce the three way relationship between therapist, nature and client (Berger 2008a; Berger and McLeod 2006).

This study suggested that contact with nature can foster imagination, creativity, the element of fun and evokes the sense that anything is possible. Also highlighted was that *"nature in itself does feel a bit mystical or magical"*. This finding is akin to Abram (1996) who points out that in indigenous cultures the sensual world, or nature, is seen as "the dwelling place of the gods" and "of the numinous powers" (1996, p10). The magical or mystical facet of nature is recognised in poetry and mythology as well as by many in the world of psychotherapy (Hillman 1995; Jung 1963). Findings in this study suggested that contact with nature can not only help clients connect with their spiritual dimension, as previously discussed, but also to Jung's collective unconscious and what Hollway and Brierley (2014) refer to as 'intuitive consciousness'. This numinous or mystical quality of nature was seen as adding an important dimension to the therapeutic process as one therapist stated *"it's the re-enchantment of everyday life"*.

### **5.2.3 To know ourselves**

*"I think that's one of our purposes in life is to get to know ourselves"* (Peig Interview)

The theme 'To know ourselves' describes nature's impact on emotional affect and its potential role in processing difficult emotions. The theme suggests a deepening of awareness, a reintegration of dissociated parts and an increased sense of self through contact with nature. The theme also highlights nature's role in experiencing an embodied self. The theme, 'To know ourselves' is representative of 100% of the data set.

In psychotherapeutic terms, the phrase 'to know ourselves', may be interpreted as a quest to have a deeper awareness of the 'self' through mind, body, emotional and spiritual integration. This research suggests that nature and embracing our own nature can ease that integration and awareness of self.

This study underscores the relationship between contact with nature and positive emotional affect. In line with the large body of literature on nature and wellbeing (Keniger et al 2013; Heinsch 2012; Hansen-Ketchum, Marck and Reutter 2009), all the therapists spoke of nature's potential to enhance positive feelings. Terms such as '*soothed*', '*uplifted*', '*rewired*' and '*rejuvenated*' were regularly used. Nature's value when working through, what might be seen as negative emotion was also highlighted. Nature's ability to '*hold*' emotions such as rage, fear and shame was very apparent from the interviews as was the integrative healing value of cathartic releases in nature. This is akin to the experience expressed by Devlin (2015). Various forms of cathartic release were highlighted. Similar to Linden and Grut's (2002) experience, this research suggested that digging or heavy gardening is useful for releasing "*the issues from their tissues*". Screaming in isolated places was also seen as a therapeutic form of discharge for anger and shame issues. This study highlighted that often height seems to be important for rape or abuse victims choosing to go up a hill or mountain to engage in this type of work. One could hypothesise that this represents a trauma response to finding a safe place. The significance of different types of landscape to the psychotherapeutic process was also highlighted in this study. This is in line with developing literature in both the environmental psychology discipline and that of psychotherapy (Tenngart Ivarsson and Grahn 2012; Tenngart Ivarsson et al 2010; Jordan 2009; Berger 2008a; Ottosson 2001)

This study showed that cathartic release through nature can be very spontaneous and arise from an unconscious level. One therapist described a client who, when growing up was forbidden from getting dirty, from touching nature or stepping on grass;

She walked around my garden with me and just tipped plants for months, and then she picked a flower one day and she cried and she cried and she cried and she cried (Interview Mairead).

This research suggested that nature may help us connect with our transpersonal self. This was highlighted, in the theme ‘Within us yet beyond us’. ‘To know ourselves’, focuses on nature’s role in connecting with the unconscious aspects of self, and the experiencing of an embodied sense of self.

In line with Linden and Grut (2002) contact with nature was seen to help reintegrate dissociated parts allowing clients to access deeper aspects of their inner worlds. The natural world was seen as bringing clients into deeper contact with themselves and as having the ability to centre and aid steadiness. This research suggested that this is due to the development of a more integrative sense of self. As one therapist explains nature aids contact with others, the surroundings and the self;

...as they make contact with the natural world there’s a sense of I am.... it’s a gradual integration of the self (Interview Sean).

The findings from this study also suggested that clients are able to reintegrate the dissociated parts of themselves quicker through contact with nature with terms like “*breakthrough*”, “*uprooting*”, “*fundamental switch*” being used to describe nature’s role. This study points to contributing factors such as an embodied experience and an expanded sense of self in this integration. Similar to Reese and Myers (2012) and Sahlin et al (2012) this research also suggested that contact with nature can expand clients’ ability to relate to others.

Along with the finding that nature may have a role in getting to know the self, in terms of emotional affect and dissociated processes, this study proposes that contact with nature increases awareness of an embodied self. Sensory awareness in nature was found to be very beneficial to the therapeutic process in line with much of the reviewed literature (Burns 2014; Adevi and Lieberg 2012). Practicing a mindful presence in nature was described in this study as “*stalking awareness*” and sensory



awareness in nature can help us stop “*enough to go inwards*”. This study suggested that direct experience of nature leads to an increased sense of embodiment. Throughout the data reference is made to the “*visceral*”, intuitive non-cognisant aspects of contact with nature. Coming out of a cognitive world and into an increased awareness of the body, is not only seen as useful to the therapeutic process, but vital to the development of an embodied self and a way of “*coming home to work, through nature*”. However one could argue that caution should also be practiced in relation to body work and embodiment. Staying in one’s head and not engaging with the body is often a very useful conscious or unconscious coping mechanism to avoid pain and trauma. Thus interventions by therapists focusing on such mechanisms need to be informed. Levine’s (1997) approach to trauma of focusing on positive somatic experience seems appropriate to body engagement as does much of the sensory literature referred to in this study (Burns 2014; Davis 1998). Although there is literature based on sensory experiencing in nature little reference is made in the nature related literature to body psychotherapy. Beauvais (2012) and Berger (2008a) are two, in the reviewed literature, to highlight a possible link between nature and somatic integration. This study would add weight to the potential benefits, significance and relevance of such integration.

Finally it may be said that in our quest ‘to know ourselves’ therapists in this research, similar to Hillman’s (1995) and Plotkin (2013) view suggested that, “*when we connect with nature, we connect to our true selves...your nature rests itself in nature*”.

#### **5.2.4 It’s not just a walk in the park**

*“I don’t sit with my supervisor talking about the beautiful day we had in wherever. That’s when the nuts and bolts of therapy might be coming out....it’s **not just a walk in the park**”.* (Paul Interview)

‘It’s not just a walk in the park’, relates to the over-arching theme ‘Scholars’ and is representative of 100% of the data set. This theme includes insight into facets of the therapeutic relationship in the context of integrating nature into psychotherapy. This theme also includes the experience and reflections on the methods of integrating



nature, the concept of therapist as witness and the therapist's theoretical perspectives.

The direct experience of the therapeutic value of nature for the therapists themselves, as well as ongoing phenomenological research with clients, was evident throughout all the interviews. Roger's states

neither the Bible nor the prophets – neither Freud nor research –  
neither the revelations of God nor man – can take precedence over  
my own direct experience (Rogers 1967, p.24).

Therapists in this research echoed this sentiment. While trusting their own experience, the therapists were also very well informed, in terms of grounding their experience in the theoretical processes that underpin therapeutic work. It was these personal and professional insights which led to the theme 'It's not just a walk in the park'.

This study found that integrating nature into psychotherapy had the potential to deepen various aspects of the therapeutic relationship. The therapeutic relationship is seen as core to positive outcomes in therapy (Lapworth, Sills and Fish 2007; Rogers 1967). Psychotherapy literature also highlights that there are several different aspects to this relationship (Gilbert and Orlans 2011; Clarkson 2002). This study explored the transference relationship, the real person-to-person relationship and the transpersonal relationship, in the context of integrating nature and psychotherapy.

Therapists in this study, like all therapists, were influenced by the transference relationships between themselves and their clients. Therapists' personal history and psychotherapeutic knowledge base may influence the material that they choose to emphasise in the process with the client (Gilbert and Orlans 2011). In this study all therapists felt a strong personal connection to nature. It could be argued that this personal connection could be a source of counter-transference. Some therapists referred to this possible counter-transference. The use of supervision and self reflection to explore what nature brings to the work was evident. In terms of transference, results showed that outdoor therapy can '*diminish*' projections on the part of the client. This could be construed as either positive or negative, depending

on the therapists approach. In psychoanalytic terms, working through projections may, at times, be appropriate and supportive of the work.

In this study integrating nature into psychotherapy practice, particularly through outdoor sessions, was seen as reducing perceived power imbalances between the client and the therapist. This can be attributed to a number of factors such as changes in the transference relationship, a therapist's more casual dress, and shared phenomenological experience in the 'here and now' in nature. Jordan (2015) refers to this as the democratizing of relationship. In this study this democratizing of relationship was also seen to benefit the 'real' person-to-person relationship. As one therapist stated;

...that real equalising of the relationship. It's not like this big wise therapist here and then me (client) there, as the little minion, that there is this lovely exchange, it's just lovely, you know, it's lovely to have those moments. (Rosemary Interview)

The real or person-to-person relationship is described as happening spontaneously when both parties are open to the "novel and un-orchestrated" in the relationship (Gilbert and Orlans 2011, p134). This research suggests that the frequency of such moments of meeting or I-Thou moments (Buber 1937) is increased by integrating nature into therapeutic work.

The transpersonal relationship is defined as;

...the timeless facet of the psychotherapeutic relationship, which is impossible to describe, but refers to the spiritual dimension or post-positivist scientific aspects of the healing relationship (Clarkson 2002, p.5).

One therapist in this study remarked "*something magical happens when you're held in a loving space*" and although this 'magic' undoubtedly occurs in many therapeutic relationships this study also suggested that this facet of therapeutic relationship can be more prevalent when integrating nature to practice.

This theme also highlighted therapists' reflections on issues related to integrating nature into practice. The therapists were very clear that client needs and wishes were of paramount importance. The importance of a client centred approach to choices around integrating nature in therapy was emphasised and, indeed, consideration given to whether nature would play a part at all. The therapists in this research

highlighted that, in their experience, not all clients will be open to nature and psychotherapy integration. As one therapist commented “*I’m conscious it’s not for everyone*”. It is therefore important that therapists make clear their orientation towards nature in therapy. This study also suggested the importance of therapists’ ability to self reflect to ensure the therapist’s ideology is not imposed on the client inappropriately.

Unlike other research reviewed, this study included therapists who worked outdoors with clients as well as therapists who worked indoors only, using other ways of integrating nature. It also included therapists who used a mixture of both methods. The varied sample allowed for difference in opinion and integrative approaches. Similar to some of the literature reviewed (Kyriakopoulos 2011; Berger 2008a) the therapeutic relationships in this study often initially developed indoors. Therapists, who engaged in outdoor therapy, described seeing some clients indoors for some time, before moving outside.

In relation to the clients perspective it was noted that, given the choice of whether the therapist would accompany the client outdoors or not, many clients choose to engage with nature without their therapist and process the experience later in therapy. This approach is similar to that of Burns (2014) which is based on asking clients to engage in nature related exercises between sessions. Ottosson (2001; 2007) and Palsdottir et al (2014) also highlighted that spending time alone in nature can be very beneficial to clients. In this study many clients chose to embark on their outdoor nature experiences alone. However there is also evidence in this research to indicate an increase in clients who were seeking therapy outdoors. In this regard it reflects the growth in popularity of outdoor psychotherapy (Jordan 2015; Berger 2008a) and broader eco-therapy interventions (MIND 2013; Stirrat, McCallion and Youell 2013; Sempik, Hine and Wilcox 2010).

In terms of working outdoors with clients and building trust in the therapeutic relationship, links can be made between this study and the literature. Similar to Devlin (2015) and Doucette (2004) walking side by side, not making eye contact and often relating to nature before deeply relating to the therapist, can, for some clients, prove to be a gradual way to build relationship and trust with the therapist. This study showed that therapy in nature, allows clients the opportunity to use their

attachment to nature as an outward focus to help regulate emotions prior to the development of the therapeutic relationship. Psychotherapeutic theory and practice suggests a number of possible reasons why clients may not feel comfortable in a room with a therapist, including trauma responses and attachment styles (Taylor 2014; Schore 2000). Endorsing sentiments expressed by Berger (2008a) and Jordan (2015) the therapist role as witness and being present to help clients integrate their experiences with nature in the here and now is also evident in this research. As one therapist stated “...for some reason I think being out in nature and the witnessing of it.... settled something in his body.”

In line with Linden and Grut (2002) this study suggested an integration of nature and psychotherapy is useful to trauma work. However, one could argue that the opposite may also be the case with the risk of traumatic memories being triggered by an outdoor experience. This study highlighted some other cautionary issues related to working outdoors. Firstly nature can sometimes be used as a mechanism to aid psychological avoidance. Also evident in this research, is the fact that, on occasion, a lot of general, non-traumatic, fear can come up for clients when they work outdoors. This seems to be related to the intensity of the direct experience with nature and with the self.

To conclude discussion of this theme, focus now shifts to the theoretical perspectives of the therapists. These theoretical perspectives were varied yet supported the therapists’ approaches on integrating nature into their practices. It is interesting to note the commonality between the approaches of therapists in this study and those highlighted in the literature. Theoretical frameworks influencing the nature and psychotherapy literature included transpersonal, Jungian, drama therapy, existentialism and eco-psychology all of which were referenced in this study. The therapists were academically grounded by their theoretical influences, well read and, in many cases, research focused. They also had extensive clinical experience, many were clinical supervisors or psychotherapy trainers, and three were accredited psychotherapists for over twenty years. This study suggests all interventions, including those with nature, should be carefully thought through.

While therapists were supported by psychotherapeutic theory an interest in the arts was also very evident. In this study therapists referenced how poetry, mythology,

tradition and art were integrated into their psychotherapeutic approaches. Interestingly, common to all, regardless of orientation, training or experience was openness to learning, creativity, flexibility and to the transpersonal elements of human existence. Thus Hamlet's declaration to Horatio "there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (Shakespeare, Hamlet Act 1 Scene 5) seems an appropriate conclusion to this theme.

### 5.2.5 That's not quite academic

*'Oh that's not quite academic woopsy!' and you'd get the feeling 'oh right, Mairead is off on her little hobby horse again'. (Mairead Interview)*

'That's not quite academic', differs from the other themes in this research as it is not reflective of what nature brings to psychotherapy practice, nor is it representative of how nature and psychotherapy can be integrated. It is however indicative of a sense of unease or dissatisfaction among participants in relation to how they perceive the integration of nature and psychotherapy is viewed by the wider psychotherapeutic community. 'That's not quite academic' is reflective of over 60% of the data set however unlike the other themes, in terms of organising structure, it is linked to both over-arching themes in this study, 'Saints' and 'Scholars'. As can be seen in the previous sections, findings in this study suggested that, in relation to nature and psychotherapy, there is a constant inter play between the academic, which might be considered as traditional psychotherapeutic principles, and the spiritual, numinous or intangible dimensions. Similarly the discussion of this theme requires fluidity between both strands.

'That's not quite academic' reflects conflicting but related aspects in the data. One being the drive to highlight nature in psychotherapy in scholarly terms and the other the need to embrace both nature and psychotherapy's healing powers as sometimes being more of an art than a science.

Firstly, related to the over-arching theme 'Scholars' this theme suggests at times therapists felt they had something to justify or deny in terms of their practice and beliefs. Some therapists seemed to encounter issues with, or felt they needed to defend or refute aspects of their integrative practice with nature on the grounds that they were not perceived as academic or scientific enough. Many completed further

study or read extensively to satisfy their own wish to ground their use of nature in therapy in theoretical principles. Similar to Jordan (2015) data suggested that some psychotherapy training courses, awarding bodies and clinical supervisors seemed hesitant to engage with or recognise aspects of nature therapy. The dearth of empirical research on the topic thus far could provide rationale for such hesitation. One could also argue that other older and more unconscious processes and cultural dynamics may also be factors in this scepticism around integrating nature into practice. Ireland's Celtic heritage, much like that of shamanic peoples around the world, placed great value on nature, honouring its seasons and traditional healers (Foley 2010). While early Christianity incorporated many of the Celtic traditions (Low 1996) it may have played a part in our subsequent denial of 'pagan' ways. Similarly, in more recent history, one could argue that the Irish cultural psyche or collective unconscious may well, for a time, have associated our rural farming tradition with the poorer less 'scholarly' aspects of our being thus taking us a step further from our natural roots.

While this theme highlighted some discord around integrating nature to practice, it is interesting to note that the main aspect of nature and psychotherapy integration which seemed to fuel dissonance around academia was that of the spiritual and numinous facets of this integration.

One could argue that the stance taken by some of the schools of psychotherapeutic thought on spirituality, could in part, have fuelled the perceived unease participants noticed on the part of the wider psychotherapeutic community, or indeed their own unconscious unease, around spirituality. McLeod (2013) and Clarkson (2002) reviewing the influences of some of the founding fathers of psychotherapy both comment on the fact spirituality was not always emphasised by many of the early theorists in an attempt to present their approaches as progressive and scientific. The more recent eco-psychological movement encompasses academics from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, with some not all, appearing to have a strong leaning towards environmental action and political lobbying (Greenleaf, Bryant and Pollock 2014; Mack 1995; O'Connor 1995). It is possible that the less than unified approach to spirituality taken by eco-psychological writers could also be interpreted as an ambiguous response to the numinous.

‘That’s not quite academic’ reflects the study finding of a desire among therapists, to tie nature’s integration in psychotherapy, along with its spiritual and numinous aspects, to academia. However, in contrast the second aspect of the data which developed this theme, and is related to ‘Saints’ also suggested the view that the over theorising of psychotherapy should be resisted. This is similar to the opinion expressed by Hillman and Ventura (1993). The fear that we have lost the ‘soul’ in psycho-therapy was highlighted in the data. The theme ‘That’s not quite academic’ therefore addresses the dissonance along the continuum of psychotherapy as a science and psychotherapy as therapy of the soul.

The Shamanic approach to the integration of nature and psychotherapy sees the natural environment, our own human nature and the spirit as being intrinsically intertwined. This is very much in line with Transpersonal Psychology, Jungian Psychology, Psychosynthesis, Existentialism, and with the view of many who were involved in the development of the Humanistic Psychological movement (McLeod 2013; Clarkson 2002). Assagioli (1965) through the integration of psychodynamics and the spiritual realm purported psychosynthesis could lead us “to the door” of the great Mystery (Assagioli 1965, p.5). Conversely, as previously highlighted, in the early development of some schools of thought in psychotherapy the spiritual aspects of human experience were not truly embraced. Person centred therapy was one such approach.

Increasingly however, the importance of the spiritual dimension is now seen across the spectrum of approaches. Thorne (2008) cites Rogers in later life as commenting

Our experiences, it is clear, involve the transcendent, the indescribable, the spiritual. I am impelled to believe that I, like many others, have underestimated the importance of this mystical, spiritual dimension. Rogers cited in Thorne (2008, p22).

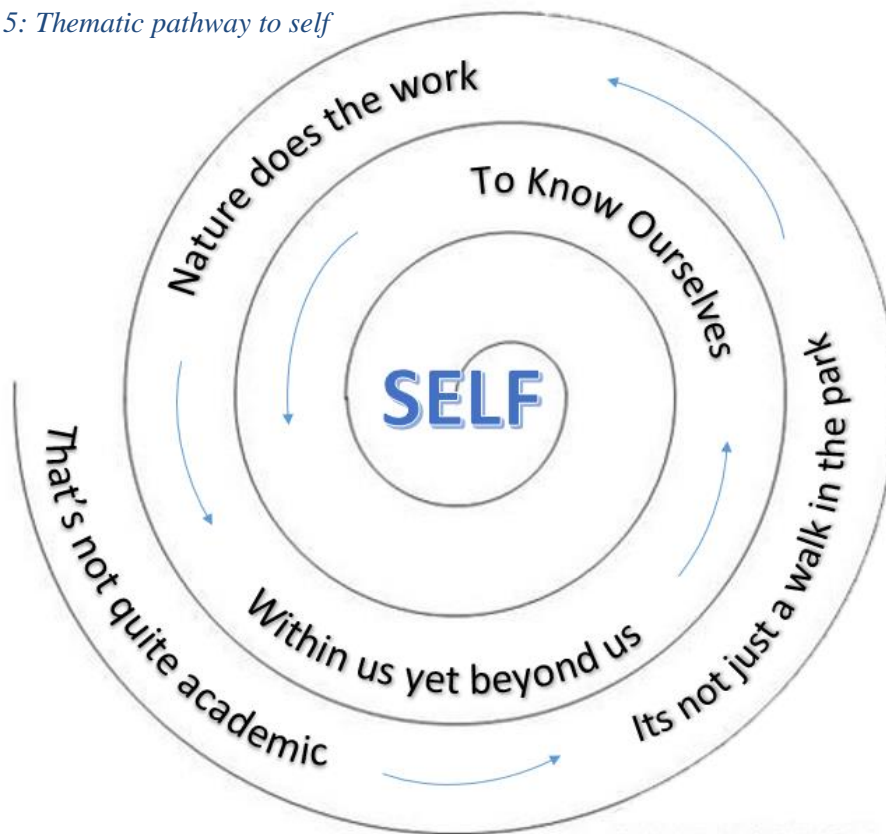
Similarly, the wider world of psychology and psychotherapy are beginning to recognise the importance of the spiritual. Hollwey and Brierley (2014) suggest that the numinous realm and psychological science are essential parts of our existence and need a reliable bridge to join them. This research would suggest that nature and its integration into psychotherapy may provide one such bridge between science and soul.



### 5.3 Integration of Themes

The discussion of the themes has allowed for the significance of integrating nature and psychotherapy to be highlighted in relation to the spiritual, the symbolic, the embodied process and the dimensions it adds to practice. It has also shown that integrating nature in therapy can be seen as not quite academic by the psychotherapy community. Braun and Clarke (2013, p.287) refer to the ‘story’ of the data. The story of the data in this study is represented diagrammatically in fig. 5.

*Figure 5: Thematic pathway to self*



This diagram depicts a pathway from external perceptions through therapeutic theory and experience to an integration of nature and psychotherapy leading to a deeper awareness of self. However the story of this data does not just refer to themes but to an integration of the research, analysis and findings. Throughout this discussion attention is drawn to the links between the themes. This is representative of the complex and integrative quality of psychotherapy in general and it also signifies the many facets which nature brings to the work. This section focuses on some of the similar concepts addressed through the themes discussed thus far. This highlights the overall integration of the themes including the three way relationship between therapist, nature and client.



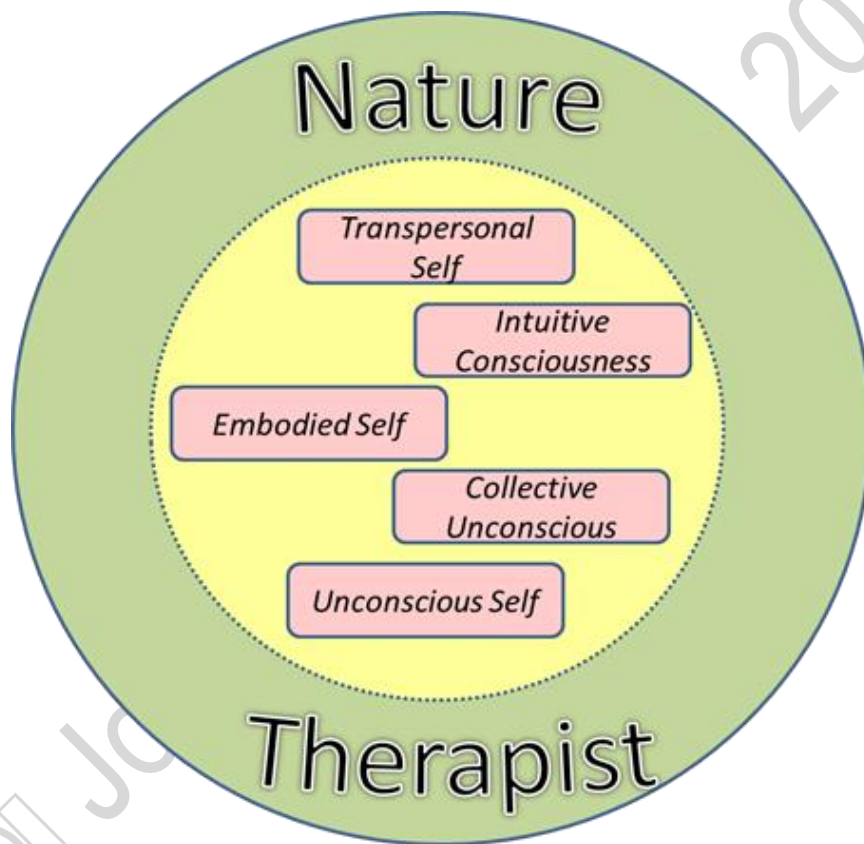
Jung, on writing of his experience of living in “modest harmony with nature” in Bollingen on Lake Zurich, describes his sense of “repose and renewal” and of being “most deeply myself” (1963, p.225), through connection with nature. In psychotherapeutic terms there are many aspects to the self which Jung may have been referring to. Three of the themes discussed have drawn attention to nature’s possible role in deepening awareness of different aspects of the self. Findings suggested nature contact can help us ‘know ourselves’ through contact with unconscious aspects of the self and development of an embodied sense of self. Similarly at a spiritual level it would seem in this study that contact with nature can lead to the experience of what Assagioli (1965) termed as the transpersonal self. An exploration of ‘Nature does the work’ adds yet another dimension to the expanded sense of self which nature may contribute to, suggesting links to Jung’s (1968) collective unconscious and concepts such as Hollwey and Brierley’s (2014) intuitive consciousness.

However, while the focus of psychotherapy is generally to deepen the awareness of the various aspects of self, in its attempts to encourage real and congruent relationships, this process is not without pain, fear, avoidance and at times, resistance to change. Similarly, and as one would expect, this struggle is also reflected across the themes in this research. While the possible positive effect of being able to reintegrate dissociated parts quicker through contact with nature is highlighted in ‘To know ourselves’ the issues around fear and trauma of embodied experience are also addressed. Similarly therapist’s observations of process avoidance and fear relating to nature work were mentioned in ‘It’s not just a walk in the park’. In these cases this research would point to the direct experience of nature as expanding and deepening awareness of self. This, consequential, engagement with self, at times, may also fuel fear in relation to psychotherapeutic process work.

The skill and knowledge base of the therapist is always of paramount importance in psychotherapy to ensure the safe navigation of unconscious process. This applies to therapists across all modalities and approaches. Based on the many clear links to therapeutic process and deepening of awareness which integrating nature and psychotherapy facilitates, therapeutic skill is a highly important dynamic in the therapist nature and client relationship.

The integration of themes in this research is evident with each relating to aspects of the others. Similarly in relation to nature and psychotherapy, there would appear to be a constant inter play between the academic, which might be considered as traditional psychotherapeutic principles, and the spiritual, numinous or intangible dimensions. Findings in this research also highlighted that by integrating nature into psychotherapy practice there develops an intrinsic link between therapist, nature and client which can led a deeper awareness and expanded sense of self. This finding is depicted in fig. 6.

*Figure 6: Therapist, Nature and Client Relationship*



#### **5.4 Summary**

This chapter provided an in depth discussion of the findings of this research and highlighted how they pertain to the current literature. Firstly it discussed two of the themes related to the over-arching theme ‘Saints’. It explored the theme ‘Within us yet beyond us’ in the context of the research finding that the natural world evokes a sense of spirituality, interconnectivity, and inspires feelings of awe. The theme ‘Nature does the work’ examined the finding that contact with nature not only aids

the therapy process, but in some ways, can provide more to the client than the therapist can alone. This theme incorporated what might be considered as intangible aspects which nature brings to therapeutic work such as symbolic and metaphorical learning, nature as a resource and the magical and mystical qualities of nature.

The chapter then addressed two of the themes associated with the over-arching theme 'Scholars'. The theme 'It's not just a walk in the park' explored psychotherapeutic theory in the context of nature work and the importance of therapist experience and insight. The theme 'To know ourselves' included what might be considered as the more traditional aspects of psychological process, investigating nature's role in areas such as emotional affect and discharge, dissociation and embodiment.

The theme 'That's not quite academic' addressed the sense of unease among therapists in relation to how the integration of nature and psychotherapy sits within the context of psychotherapy. This included two ends of a continuum, linking nature work to academics at one end, and at the other end the risk of over theorising psychotherapy. As such it also addressed another aspect of the over-arching themes that of the dissonance between psychotherapy as a science and psychotherapy as a therapy of the soul.

Finally, an integration of themes was presented showing an overview of some of the research findings. Discussion and analysis of the themes highlighted the interplay between themes and the corresponding association between what one could call the traditional scientific or academic aspects of psychotherapy and the more intangible spiritual and numinous aspects when working with nature. Analysis of themes emphasised the three way relationship between the therapist, nature and the client. The integration of nature into psychotherapeutic practice was found to potentially deepen awareness and expand the sense of self. Analysis suggested that the integration of nature into the therapeutic work could develop an embodied sense of self, deepen awareness of unconscious aspects of self, increase experience of transpersonal self, and, potentially, help connection to levels such as the collective unconscious and intuitive consciousness.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

## **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter brings this research project to its conclusion. It reviews the central aim and objectives of the study and highlights how these were addressed throughout the research. Suggestions for further research are made and reflections are included on the strengths and limitations of this research. Plans related to research dissemination are highlighted and the research implications and recommendations for theory development and clinical practice are summarised.

## **6.2 Review of the Central Research Aim**

The healing qualities of nature have been recognised throughout the ages, and at a scientific level the benefits of contact with nature have also been established (Keniger et al 2013; Heinsch 2012; Hansen-Ketchum, Marck and Reutter 2009). Based on this, in chapter one of this thesis, a question was posed; given psychotherapy is a human science supporting psychological healing, what of the integration between psychotherapy and nature? This study has addressed this question.

The central aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the integration of nature into therapeutic practice. This was achieved through a number of different academic pursuits. Firstly a detailed analysis of the current, most relevant, literature provided insight into the therapeutic value of nature and implications for practice. This review highlighted not only the dearth of relevant research but also the current research limitations. Gaps in the empirical research were also identified. These research gaps included little focus on the integration of nature and psychotherapy, a lack of voice given to psychotherapists with varied traditions and influences and a research focus on outdoor psychotherapy as opposed to a broader interpretation of the integration of nature to psychotherapy.

Based on the analysis of the literature this study was designed. Through the design process the aim of the study was addressed for the second time. Careful planning and consideration was given to method and sampling. A deeper understanding of the integration of nature into therapeutic practice was then developed through engaging in semi-structured interviews with nine psychotherapists. One of these interviews

was used as a pilot interview and therefore the data was not included in the analysis, however it also provided valuable learning in addressing the study aim. The participants had varying theoretical backgrounds and influences and represented a mixed approach to integrating nature into practice. Thus the sample was both appropriate to the study aim and to filling a participant profile gap highlighted through the literature review. The method of analysis chosen and its appropriateness in meeting the aim and objectives was also given consideration.

The third pursuit which enhanced the achievement of the study aim, and also the attainment of the study objectives, was the analysis of the interview data. The process of analysis not only represented the identification of themes but continued through the theme development, discussion and re-engagement with the literature. The interview data and the analysis of that data proved to be the most significant key to unlocking knowledge about the integration of nature into therapeutic practice. Thus the research analysis was fundamental to achieving the study aim. Analysis revealed the many values of integrating nature into psychotherapy including symbolic meaning making, embodied here and now processing and a deeper awareness of self. Analysis also highlighted different approaches to integrating nature to practice along with some cautions related to this practice. Interesting insights into perceptions around integrating nature and psychotherapy were also uncovered.

### **6.3 Review of the Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research were identified in chapter one of this thesis. These objectives were:

- To explore the experience of integrating nature into psychotherapy practice.
- To conceptualise the theoretical links of this practice.
- To examine the therapeutic value of nature from psychotherapists' perspective.
- To identify further areas for research in psychotherapy.

This section will now give focus to each of these objectives briefly summarising the objective outcomes.

### **To explore the experience of integrating nature into psychotherapy practice**

The experience of integrating nature into psychotherapy practice is highlighted in this thesis through the literary review, data analysis and subsequent development of themes related to this research. This objective is specifically addressed in the themes ‘It’s not just a walk in the park’ and ‘That’s not quite academic’. The objective was also addressed by the inclusion of examples of client interventions, where appropriate in the discussion and in Appendix L.

This study showed that integrating nature into psychotherapy practice added many positive dimensions to clinical practice. It was found to have a deepening and enriching influence on the therapeutic relationship. This research highlighted the significance of nature as a resource to therapists, their clients and ultimately to the therapy process. As such, a therapeutic partnership including nature was found to be greatly beneficial. This is in line with much of the current literature and empirical research in this area (Jordan 2015; Burns 2014; Berger 2008a; Berger and McLeod 2006).

While the many benefits of integrating nature into psychotherapy practice were discussed throughout this thesis the difficulties and cautionary notes on this integration were also included, as were reflections on the methods of integrating nature.

The objective to explore the experience of integrating nature into psychotherapy practice was also developed beyond its originally anticipated scope. The personal and professional experience of integrating nature to practice was explored in ‘That’s not quite academic’ and raised interesting questions in relation to perceptions around this practice.

### **To conceptualise the theoretical links of this practice**

The theoretical links of integrating nature to psychotherapy were highlighted in this research. This objective was addressed by highlighting theoretical approaches in the reviewed literature, presenting therapists’ theoretical approaches in chapter four and through discussion of the theme ‘It’s not just a walk in the park’.

Therapists seamlessly integrated nature into practice with mainstream approaches such as Person Centered, Psychodynamic and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. They highlighted direct theoretical links to very common approaches such as Gestalt and Existentialism. However similar to Berger (2008a) and Davis (1998) this research also points to the fact that integrating nature into psychotherapy includes embracing creative and transpersonal modalities and a holistic approach to psychological healing.

### **To examine the therapeutic value of nature from psychotherapists' perspective**

The third objective of this study was to examine the therapeutic value of nature from psychotherapists' perspective. The therapeutic value of nature was highlighted in the literature review but the objective was predominately achieved through analysis and discussion of the research themes.

The examination of psychotherapists' perspective on the therapeutic value of nature was reflected across all the themes but presented, to the most part, in 'Within us yet beyond us', 'Nature does the work' and 'To know ourselves'. Many facets of the therapeutic value of nature were addressed in this research. In line with much of the literature (Palsdottir 2014; Advei and Martensson 2013; Linden and Grut 2002) contact with nature was seen as initiating change in clients, providing comfort and meaning, fostering creativity, promoting positive affect and supporting cathartic discharge.

This research suggested that integrating nature into psychotherapy could aid the development of a deeper awareness of self. This included reintegration of unconscious aspects of self, awareness of an embodied self and the experience of the transpersonal self. This research also posited that a possible deeper connection with the collective unconscious and intuitive consciousness may represent other therapeutic values of nature.



### **To identify further areas for research in psychotherapy**

The final objective of this study was to identify further areas of research in psychotherapy. These were identified through engagement with the literature and analysis of the findings in this research and include the following suggested list:

- A study of the client experience of integrating nature into their therapy would greatly enhance the knowledge base on this topic.
- The scope of this exploratory study limited the depth to which each theme could be developed. Further research, possibly an IPA study, could focus on and expand any of the themes presented in this study.
- Further research into various types, and effectiveness of interventions used in integrating nature to psychotherapy, would be useful to clinical practice.
- While representing diverse backgrounds and approaches to nature integration, participants in this study were predominately Humanistic and Integrative in their approach to psychotherapy. Further research on integrating nature into psychotherapy could include psychotherapists from other modalities such as constructivist therapy, couple and family therapy, psychoanalytic therapy and those involved in group therapy.
- Further research into potential links between integrating nature and trauma work in psychotherapy would seem to be appropriate as would the integration of nature to body psychotherapy.
- Based on findings in this study further research related to the perception of the role of spirituality in psychotherapy appears to be warranted.

### **6.4 Research Strengths**

Analysis of the literature on integrating nature into psychotherapy highlighted the current research gaps and limitations and these were listed in chapter two. This research addressed some of these limitations and gaps. It included experienced therapists with varied approaches to integrating nature to practice. Approaches included engaging in outdoor sessions, adopting a homework style approach to contact with nature between sessions, integrating the use of natural materials to sessions indoors, and drawing on the benefits of a room with a view.

Also addressing identified limitations in the current literature, this study included psychotherapists with varied backgrounds and influences meeting a wide variety of clients and presenting issues. The integrative approach of the psychotherapists in this study represented a strength. The varied theoretical approaches such as Person Centered, Psychodynamic, Cognitive Behavioural, Gestalt, Existentialism and Jungian Therapy integrated by the therapists into their practices enriched the study. Similarly the inclusion of therapists with varied influences ranging from ancient shamanic, newer eco-psychological principals, drama and art therapy represented diversification in this research.

Based on the literature reviewed it appears that the research on, and concept of integrating nature and psychotherapy is relatively new internationally and certainly in Ireland. Therefore the number of experienced therapists, who responded to the recruitment advert, warranting a purposeful sampling strategy, also represents a strength of this study. Those who participated included five women, three men and a further male who engaged in the pilot interview thus representing a gender balance. Similarly, from a demographics perspective this research presented balance. Of the eight therapists whose data was included, four practiced in urban settings, two in rural and two practiced in both urban and rural centres. Therapists from three of the four provinces of Ireland were represented.

The richness of the data collected due to the openness of the therapists interviewed added a further strength to this research. Furthermore, at the analysis stage of this research a thorough methodical and embodied approach was taken to the analysis. This resulted in a research piece with clearly identified themes and contextual analysis.

## **6.5 Research Limitations**

While a detailed list of methodological limitations and learnings is provided in chapter three, some of the potential limitations of this research in its entirety are presented below:

- The participants in this research all had very positive personal experience of connection to nature and were enthusiastic about integrating nature to

psychotherapy practice. This may represent a positive bias towards integrating nature to practice.

- The method of analysis chosen, based on Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) framework though flexible, provided little scope to include examples of nature related therapeutic interventions in the thematic structure. The framework was strictly adhered to by the researcher and client interventions did not meet the framework's theme definition.
- The number of themes identified, along with the scope of a Master's level study in terms of time and word restriction, impacted the depth at which themes could be discussed and further analysed.
- Due to the focus on nature generally rather than on outdoor therapy this study does not address issues around boundaries, confidentiality and contracting to engage in outdoor sessions.

## **6.6 Research Dissemination**

The importance of research dissemination is wide ranging. Research informs both clinical practitioners and scholars embarking on further related research. Therefore this researcher proposes to disseminate findings from this research in the following ways:

- The researcher has applied for, and been accepted to present the study findings at the Irish Association for Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy (IAHIP) annual conference in March 2016.
- The researcher intends to submit related articles on the study findings to be published in both peer reviewed and non peer reviewed journals.
- The researcher hopes to have this research published as part of the Turning Point Training Institute monograph series.
- The researcher plans to have this thesis accessible via university online databases.
- A summary of the results of this study will be provided to all the participants and to the therapists who expressed an interest in this study but were not included in the purposeful sample.

## 6.7 Implications and Recommendations for Theory Development and Clinical Practice

The role of nature in embodied experience was very significant in this research. However, there would appear to be very little research on the integration of body psychotherapy approaches and nature. This presents as a potentially important area for theoretical development. Similarly this research would suggest that theoretical development based on an integration of nature in approaches to trauma would warrant attention.

In terms of clinical practice this study presents useful insights to both those who have integrated nature into their therapy practice and those who may consider it. This research highlights the clear benefits of contact with nature, along with showing that this contact can enrich the psychotherapeutic process. Therefore, based on the research findings that the therapeutic benefits of integrating nature to therapy outweigh its limitations, this study would propose that psychotherapists embrace nature in practice. Clinical recommendations on such a practice include:

- Self-reflection on the part of therapists on the role nature plays in their own lives.
- A gradual examination on ways which nature may be appropriately integrated to practice.
- A client focus, with clear understanding and consideration given to the client's needs.
- Consideration given to each individual client in relation to nature based interventions, timing of such interventions and possible drawbacks.

Recommendations from the therapists, whose experience brought this research to fruition, include seeing the *'magic in life'*, tapping in to *'the wonder of a child'*, and having *'fun with it'*. As one therapist concluded *"we're there to stimulate curiosity and get people in touch with themselves. Connected back to self"*.

Finally from the first email responses to the participant recruitment advertisement and right through the interview stage in this study, the title of this thesis regularly evoked positive comments. It seemed to touch into something that was essentially of essence to this project. This research suggests that as therapists and their clients connect with nature and *'back to self'*, they embrace an expanded sense of self. A

self which includes embodied spiritual and collective aspects. A partnership between nature and psychotherapy presents healing possibilities from psychological pain and ‘weeping’. It encourages symbolism and increases the experience of awe, wonder and a sense of magic. Thus in the context of this research the W.B. Yeats lines may present new meaning and it seems fitting to conclude with them;

*“Come away O human child, to the waters and the wild, with a faery hand and hand,  
for the world’s more full of weeping than you can understand”.*



*Figure 7: Integrated Healing Through Partnership*



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## **Appendices**

## **Appendix A: Researcher reflective statement**

I am qualified integrative psychotherapist working in private practice. My professional background includes maths teaching and almost twenty years experience of school career guidance and counselling.

I grew up in suburbs on the outskirts of a city. In the 70's and 80's Irish suburbs were still very much surrounded by farm land so my childhood memories are of playing in 'forts' claimed under trees and in the hedgerows. Many summer days were spent going on 'hikes' up the fields on my uncle's farm, rolling down the hill in the 'top field' and catching 'pinkies' in the stream which we called the 'river'. Family holidays brought us to Kerry, Connemara, Inis Mor and Achill Island. In my teens my father introduced me to the Kerry Mountains. Climbing Carrauntoohil, the highest mountain in Ireland, I literally felt on top of the world!

As an adult my husband and I began to spend as much time as work would allow in his childhood holiday destination, a small fishing village in County Clare. Each time I visited, the sea air and the rugged countryside brought an intense feeling of 'homecoming'. In 2012 my husband, children and I re-located from a Limerick suburb to that village. As the removals trucks delivered our belongings I ran, skipped and twirled on the beach in the winter sunshine overjoyed with the sense of having arrived home to myself and home to this place.

At that period in my life I was mid way through my psychotherapy training and thus engaging in much personal reflection. I knew that nature played a positive part in my own therapeutic journey and enriched my understanding of many aspects of psychotherapy. I had integrated Jungian symbolic work in my practice through the use of Sand Therapy and I had incorporated natural materials into sessions indoors. However, prior to beginning this research I had no experience of outdoor therapies, eco-therapy or shamanism. I had a strong background in education and a bias towards academic principles. I decided I wanted to try to make meaning of my personal experience of contact with nature, and learn how I could further integrate it into my psychotherapy practice. Thus the inspiration for this study was born.

## Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Email

If you are a psychotherapist who has integrated nature in a significant way into your therapeutic practice you may be interested in participating in this research project.

**Title of research project:** ‘Come away O human child to the waters and wild’: A qualitative study into the role nature can play in psychotherapy.

**Researcher:** Joanne Hanrahan MSc student in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy

**Supervisors:** Dr Mary Rabbitte Turning Point Training Institute  
Dr Liam MacGabhann School of Nursing & Human Sciences DCU

Dear colleague,

I am a psychotherapist living on the west coast of Ireland and am currently completing a MSc in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy with DCU and the Turning Point Training Institute. I am interested in learning more about the integration of nature and psychotherapy.

The main objectives of the research will be to explore the experience of integrating nature into psychotherapy practice, to conceptualise the theoretical links of this practice, and to examine the therapeutic value of nature from the perspective of psychotherapists.

I wish to interview a number of psychotherapists who are accredited members of IAHIP, IACP or accredited with a discipline recognised by the Irish Council for Psychotherapy ICP and work from a dominant theoretical model. In addition the I hope to find psychotherapists who;

- see their own connection with nature as being important to them personally,
- believe that nature can play a valuable role in psychotherapy,
- have completed further study in the use of nature in psychotherapy and/or
- include work with nature as a significant part of their psychotherapy practice (eg working outdoors with clients).

Participation in the study will involve engaging in a one-to-one interview which will take approximately one hour, will be audio recorded and will take place in a venue that suits you, the participant. Participation is voluntary and will be confidential and anonymous.

I hope that the wide range of experience and approaches used by therapists working with nature will enrich this study and look forward to hearing from you.

If you are interested in learning more about this research or if you are interested in taking part please contact me, Joanne Hanrahan on 087-713 3737 or email me at [joanne.hanrahan6@mail.dcu.ie](mailto:joanne.hanrahan6@mail.dcu.ie)

Many thanks,  
Joanne Hanrahan

## Appendix C: Participant Profile Form

VERSION 1.0  
MARCH 6, 2015



### PARTICIPANT PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE

*'COME AWAY, O HUMAN CHILD TO THE WATERS AND WILD': A  
QUALITATIVE STUDY INTO THE ROLE NATURE CAN PLAY IN PSYCHOTHERAPY*

PRESENTED BY: JOANNE HANRAHAN  
MSC. RESEARCH STUDENT  
DCU

## ▲ PARTICIPANT PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE

### Title of research project:

*'Come away, O human child to the waters and wild': A qualitative study into the role nature can play in psychotherapy.*

### Researcher:

Joanne Hanrahan MSc student in Integrative Counselling & Psychotherapy

### Supervisors:

Dr Mary Rabbitt, Turning Point Training Institute

Dr Liam MacGabhann, School of Nursing & Human Sciences DCU

Dear colleague,

Thank you for taking the time to respond to my 'Call for Participants' recruitment email and for agreeing to complete this participant profile questionnaire. The purpose of this study is to learn more about the integration of nature and psychotherapy. The main objectives of the research will be to explore the experience of integrating nature into psychotherapy practice, to conceptualise the theoretical links of this practice, and to examine the therapeutic value of nature from the perspective of psychotherapists.

The research will involve interviewing a number of psychotherapists who are accredited members of a discipline recognised by IACP, IAHIP or an association recognised by the Irish Council for Psychotherapy and who work from a dominant theoretical model.

You have been identified as a Psychotherapist who fulfills part or all of the below criteria.

- sees their own connection with nature as being important to them personally,
- believe that nature can play a valuable role in psychotherapy,
- has completed further study in the use of nature in psychotherapy
- includes work with nature as a significant part of their psychotherapy practice (eg working outdoors with clients).

Participation in the study will involve engaging in a one-to-one interview which will take approximately one hour, will be audio recorded and will take place in a venue that suits you. Participation is voluntary and will be confidential and anonymous.

I hope that the experience and approaches used by therapists working with nature will enrich this study. In the event that there is an excess of interested participants, this participant profile form will be used to perform a purposeful sampling strategy to ensure the widest range of experience and approaches are considered in this study.

/

## PARTICIPANT PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE

### PERSONAL DETAILS & DEMOGRAPHICS

Name	
Gender	
County of Practice	
Urban or Rural Practice	

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

No. of Years Accredited	
Professional Membership(s)	
Dominant Theoretical Approach(es)	

### EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

*Please provide details of any Psychotherapy or other training related to this study*

Institution	Course of Study

### NATURE INTEGRATION

Approximate percentage of practice which involves nature related work (Mark X)	0 – 10%	11 – 30%	31 – 50%	51 – 70%	70%+

*In the event that there is an excess of interested participants, this participant profile information will be used to perform a purposeful sampling strategy to ensure the widest range of experience and approaches are considered in this study. By completing this form you also agree that the data may be used in aggregate and without personal identification, for the purpose of statistical analysis.*

---

### NATURE INTEGRATION – YOUR PRACTICE

How is Nature Integrated into your Practice? (Mark 'X' all that apply or add additional detail\*)

Outdoor work with Clients		Therapy Room with View of Nature	
Use of Stones/Shells/Natural Materials indoors		Therapy Room Specifically Designed to Include Aspects of the Natural World (eg Plants, Water Feature etc)	
Giving Clients "Homework" Involving Nature		Other (please provide details in box below)	

---

### NATURE INTEGRATION – PERSONAL IMPORTANCE

How is Nature Important to you personally?\*

---

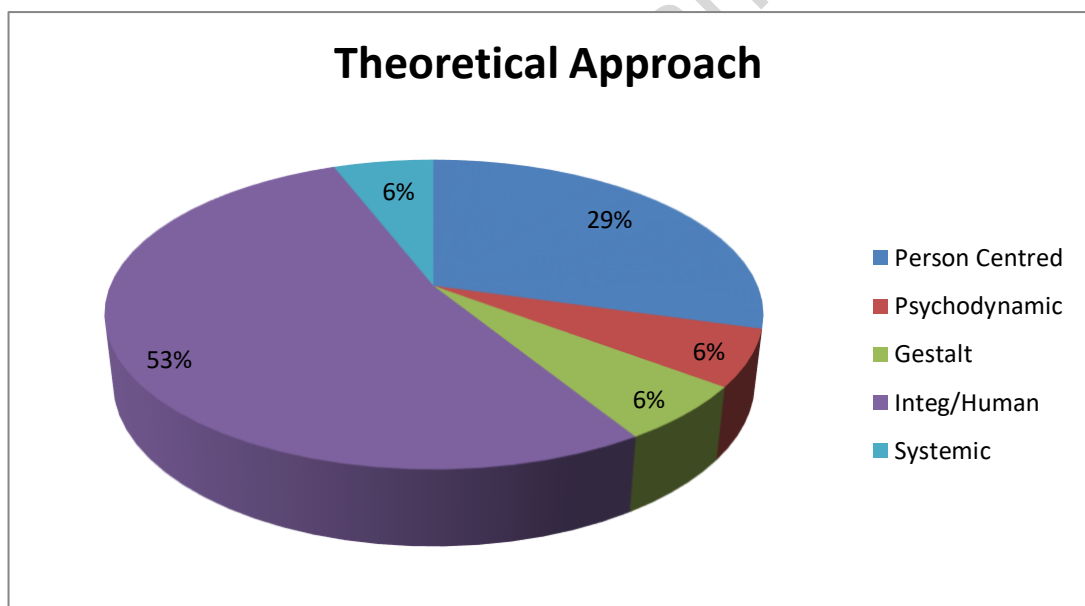
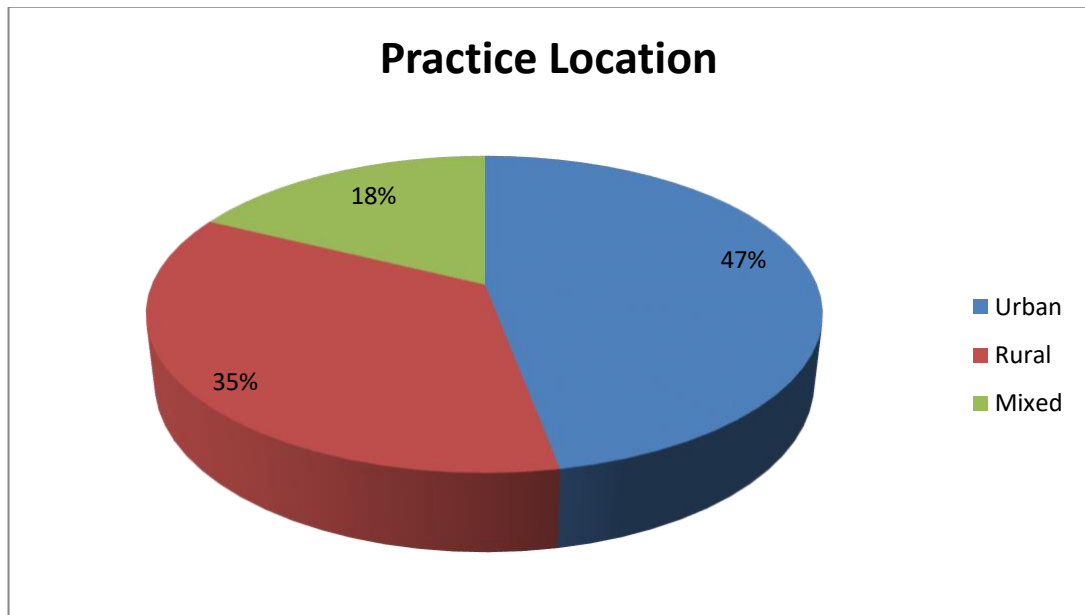
### NATURE INTEGRATION - OTHER INFORMATION/ EXPERIENCE

Is there any other information or Clinical Experience that you feel would be beneficial to include at this stage of the process?\*

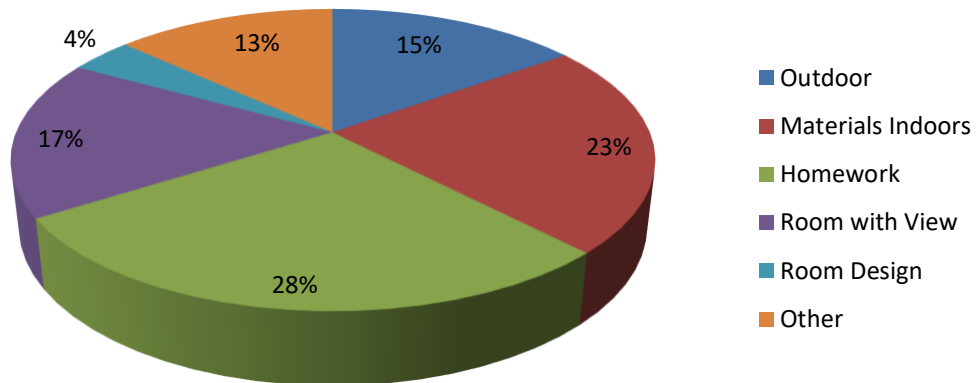
\* Please feel free to use as much space as you feel appropriate to provide at this point of the research.



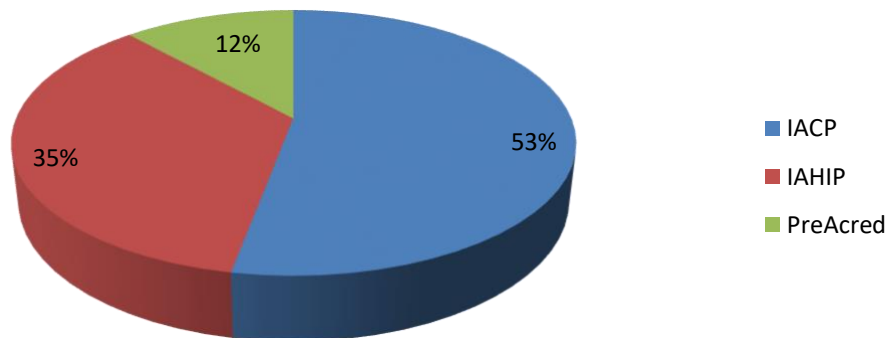
## Appendix D: Profile of the 17 Initial Respondents



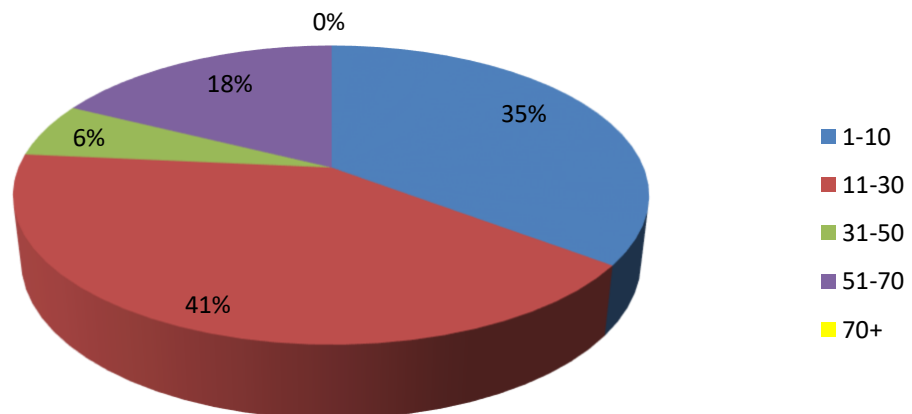
### Method of Nature Integration



### Professional Membership



### % Nature within Practice



## Appendix E: Interview Schedule

### Background

- Can you tell me about your personal experience of and connection to nature?
- How did it come about that you integrated your experience of nature to your therapeutic practice?

*Possible prompt:*

- *Did you complete extra training or did you purely integrate your own personal philosophy?*

### Integration to practice

- Can you explain in what ways you integrate nature into your practice – what does it look like?
- What is your experience of using nature a part of psychotherapy practice – what does it bring to the work?

### Therapeutic value

- In your experience how can the use of nature impact the clients' process?

*Possible prompts:*

- *Can you give me an example of client work or interventions that stayed with you?*
- *What is the clients' experience in terms of feedback?*

### Theory

- What theories or models do you draw on in your work?
- How does your theoretical framework link in with your use of nature?

### Conclusion

- Is there any advice you would like to give other therapists interested in using nature as a resource?
- Are there further areas of research that you feel should be done on integrating nature and psychotherapy?

## Appendix F: Research Ethics Committee Letter of Research Approval

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



Dr Liam MacGabhann  
School of Nursing & Human Sciences

11<sup>th</sup> February 2015

REC Reference: DCUREC/2015/006

Proposal Title: Come away oh human child to the waters and the wild'. A qualitative study into the role nature can play in psychotherapy.

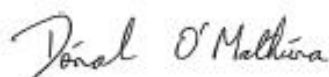
Applicant(s): Dr Liam MacGabhann; Ms. Mary Rabbitte ;  
Ms. Joanne Hanrahan

Dear Liam,

Further to expedited review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal. Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Dónal O'Mathúna'.

Dr Dónal O'Mathúna  
Chairperson  
DCU Research Ethics Committee



Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht  
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath,  
Baile Átha Cliath, Éire

Research & Innovation Support  
Dublin City University,  
Dublin 9, Ireland

T +353 1 700 8000  
F +353 1 700 8000  
E [research@dcu.ie](mailto:research@dcu.ie)  
[www.dcu.ie](http://www.dcu.ie)

## Appendix G: Plain Language Statement



### INFORMATION FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

MSc. 2015

**Title of research project:** 'Come away O human child to the waters and wild': A qualitative study into the role nature can play in psychotherapy.

**Principal Investigators:** Joanne Hanrahan Turning Point Training Institute/DCU  
Dr Mary Rabbitte Turning Point Training Institute  
Dr Liam MacGabhann School of Nursing & Human Sciences DCU

#### Introduction

My name is Joanne Hanrahan and I am conducting this research project as part of a Masters in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy with Dublin City University (DCU) and Turning Point Training Institute.

You are being invited to take part in this research study. However, before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This Information Sheet tells you about the purpose, risks and benefits of this research study. If you agree to take part in this study you will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form, however you will have the right to withdraw, without consequence at any time throughout the project.

Throughout this study I will be supervised by the Principal Investigators Dr Mary Rabbitte who can be contacted on 01-2807888 or by email at [mary.rabbitte2@mail.dcu.ie](mailto:mary.rabbitte2@mail.dcu.ie) and Dr Liam MacGabhann on 01-7008805 and at [liam.macgabhann@dcu.ie](mailto:liam.macgabhann@dcu.ie).

#### Purpose of the study

The aim of the study is to gain an understanding of the integration of nature into therapeutic practice. This will be achieved through an exploration of the lived experience of participants who have integrated nature both as part of their personal process and into their clinical practice.

#### Why you have been chosen to take part

Thank you for responding to my call for participants in this study and for completing the Participant Profile form. You have been chosen to take part in this research due to your significant experience in psychotherapy and due your indication of integration of nature both as part of your own personal process and as part of your clinical practice.

#### What you will be required to do

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any point throughout the process. If you choose to partake in the study you will be asked to:

- Sign an Informed Consent Form
- Be interviewed by myself, Joanne Hanrahan for approximately 1 hour at your work place. This interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed.
- Answer questions relating to the integration of nature into your clinical practice, the therapeutic value of nature and your theoretical framework.



## INFORMATION FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

MSc. 2015

### Risks and benefits of being involved in this study

The risks to you of being involved in this study are minimal as questions being asked of you and the topic being examined are not of a sensitive nature. The interview questions will encourage reflection on your connection with nature and your clinical practice. This reflection and experience of the interview may prove to be beneficial to your own personal integration of your relationship with the natural world and how you bring it to your work.

It is hoped that the study will contribute to academic research in psychotherapy and raise awareness of the therapeutic values of nature. Findings of the project will be forwarded to the participants on completion of the research piece.

### Confidentiality anonymity and data protection

Confidentiality will be respected at all times subject to legal limitations. Pseudonyms will be attached to all data collected and will be used if quoting from or referencing your material in the write up of the finished thesis and in any other presentations or publications on the findings of this research. Any identifiable information such as your place of work will also be excluded from the study although it must be noted that total anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small population of psychotherapists from whom this sample is being selected. I undertake to keep all data collected confidential, and in a secure location for the duration of the study, with digital files password-protected. When the study is completed in September 2015, the digital files will be deleted and all raw data, notes and transcripts will be stored at Turning Point Training Institute, 23 Herbert Street Dublin 2, complying with legal protection requirements for a minimum of 5 years. Thereafter, all such materials will be destroyed under the direction of the MSc Programme Director and a Confirmation of Data Destruction form completed.

### Further Information

If you would like to speak to me further about any questions or concerns regarding the interview or study, please feel free to contact me on 087-7133737 or at [joanne.hanrahan6@mail.dcu.ie](mailto:joanne.hanrahan6@mail.dcu.ie)

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

**The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000**



## Appendix H: Participant Consent Form



### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

MSc. 2015

**Title of research project:** 'Come away O human child to the waters and the wild': A qualitative study into the role nature can play in psychotherapy.

**Purpose of study:** The aim of the study is to gain an understanding of the integration of nature into therapeutic practice. This will be achieved through an exploration of the lived experience of participants who have integrated nature both as part of their personal process and into their clinical practice.

**Please complete the following – circle yes or no for each statement**

I have read and I understand the Information Sheet (or had it read to me) YES / NO

I agree to participate in the study and to the study plan as outlined in the Information Sheet YES / NO

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study YES / NO

If I have taken this opportunity I have received satisfactory answers to my questions YES / NO

I agree to an individual interview which will be audio-taped YES / NO

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice, penalty or giving a reason YES / NO

I understand that my participation in the study will remain anonymous and confidentiality will be assured subject to legal limitations YES / NO

I am aware that due to the small population from which I have been chosen for study anonymity cannot be guaranteed YES / NO

I trust that all data will be stored securely and digital files will be password protected. Raw data will be stored for five years in line with legal data protection requirements YES / NO

I understand that I can request a summary of results when the study is completed YES / NO

I understand that the results from this study may be published in a scientific journal, presented to other psychotherapists or used in additional studies but my identity will remain anonymous YES / NO

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore I consent to take part in this research project.

**Participants Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

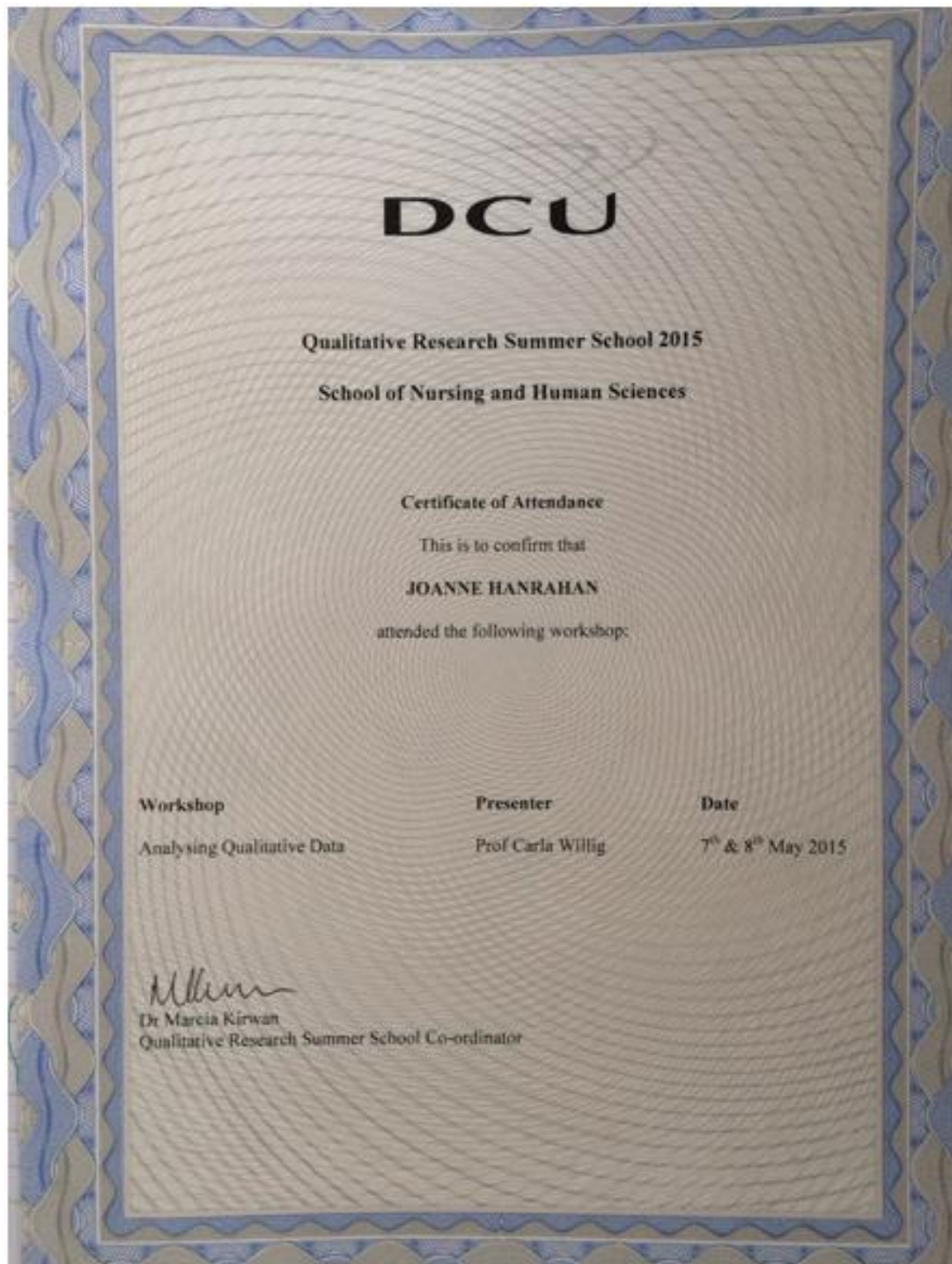
**Name in Block Capitals:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Witness:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



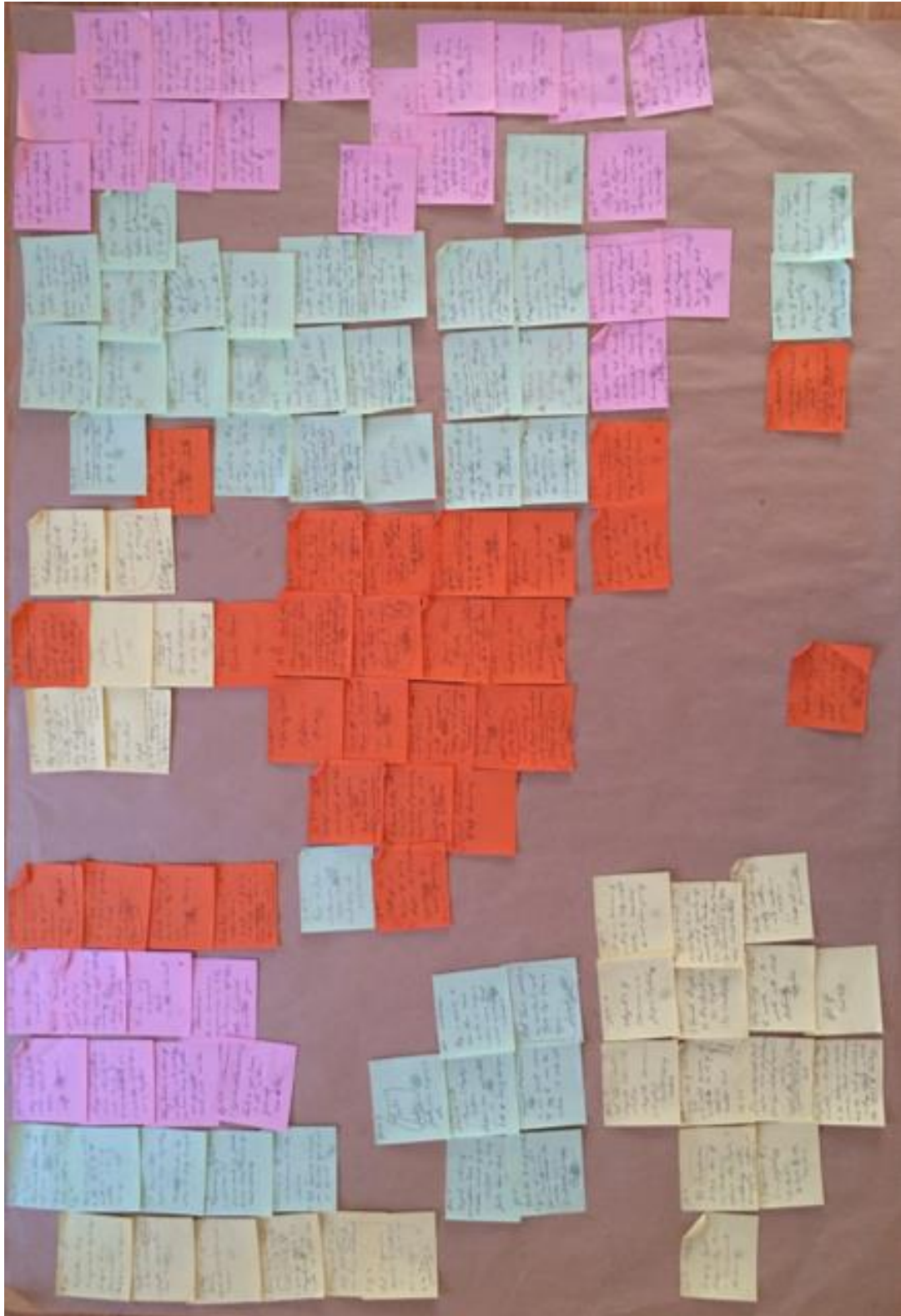
## Appendix I: Certificate of Attendance at DCU Qualitative Research Summer School



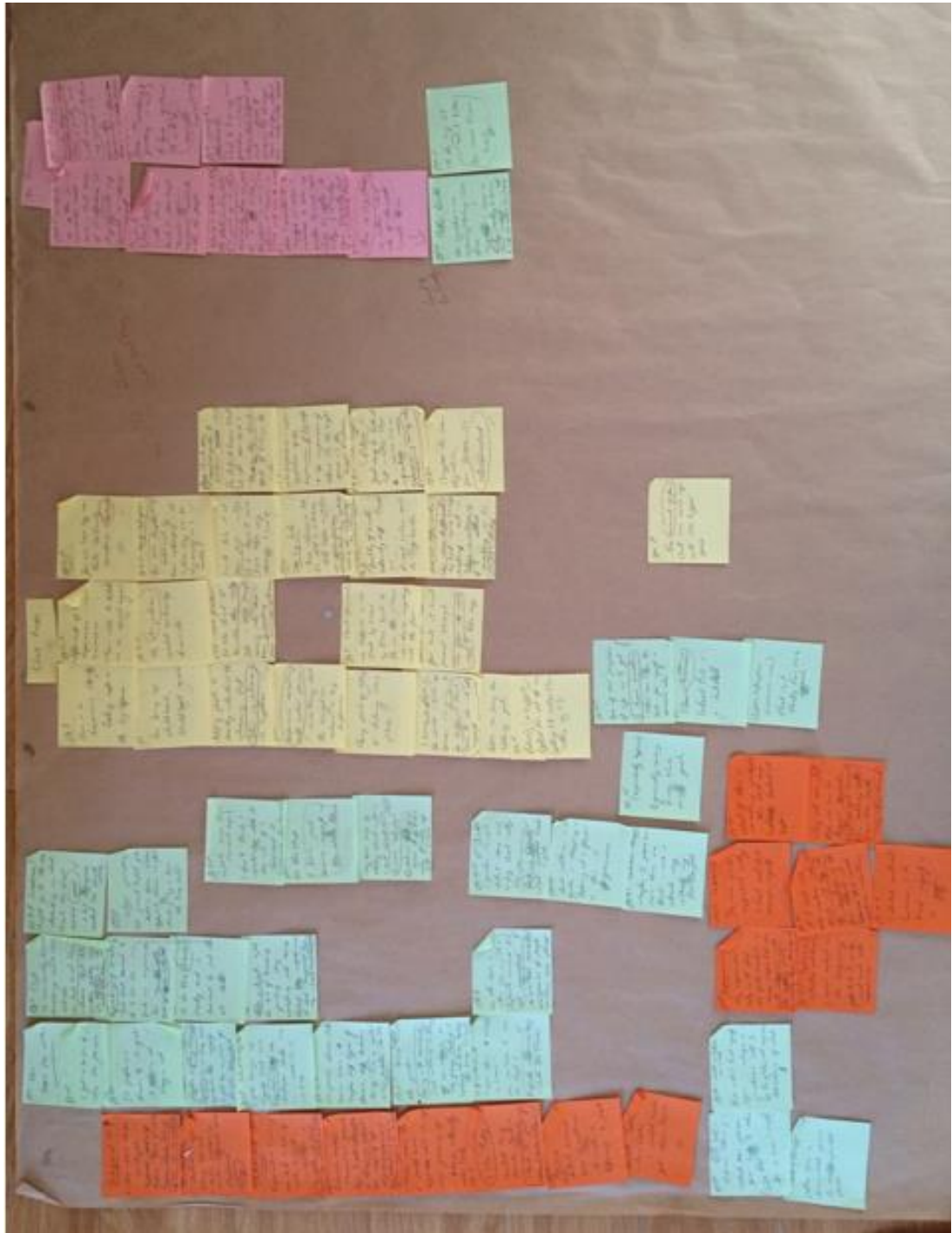


## Appendix J: Visual Representation of the Data

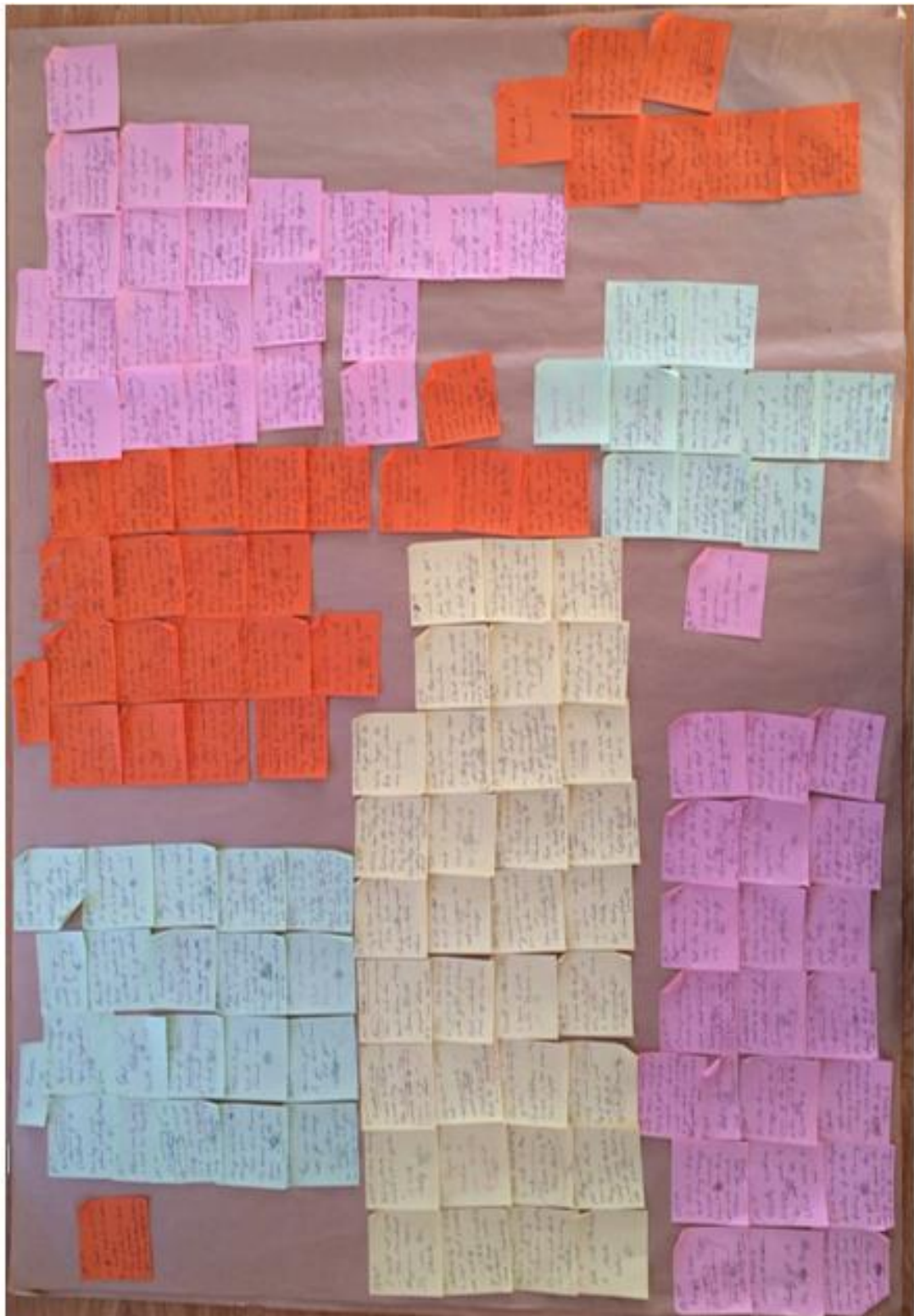
### J.1 Fionn Interview



## J.2 Peig Interview



### J.3 Mairead Interview





[illegible]

## Appendix L: Client Interventions

**Methods involved:** Outdoors sessions, outdoor 'homework' between sessions, room with a view and use of natural materials indoors.

**Examples of indoor materials and room set up:** Stones, shells, leaves, sand tray, flowers, plants, water feature, bird song recording in waiting area, wind chimes outside, pictures, pieces of wood or seaweed, tactile natural and symbolic items, potted scented herbs, invite clients to bring something from nature to session.

**Therapist recollection of a clients words re experience of therapy room with a view:** "When I come here I feel like I just go away to someplace, because when I look out here I see nothing but trees and the sky so it's like I get transported to this other place and not only that but I get to do some therapeutic work there as well!"

### Interventions

**Client 1:** Adolescent boy afraid to go out at night, afraid of dark and resulting lack of socialisation. He requested therapy outdoors in dark – gradual process – rural therapy room - initial short walks along drive way culminating after months, in therapist and client lying on rugs in field adjacent to therapy room looking up at stars. Therapist reflections: He was a very anxious, hyper aware and overly cognitive teenager sitting in the darkness he could know nothing...increased awareness of body, how air felt how ground felt. He was facing his own fear and I was accompanying him and seeing to his safety – we worked with breathing and I could almost feel him getting command of his fear in the process of the session. After course of therapy mother and teachers said he had relaxed and was completely different boy, but he wasn't he had just conquered his fear – he had command of it.

**Client 2:** Teenage girl history of abuse. Male therapist working in a school – client asked if therapy could be outside. Sessions – walking around school garden. Therapist reflections: For me it was a really powerful difference there, just from going sitting face to face to standing side by side faced in the same direction and going in the same direction. I thought it was a really big change to the dynamic. I found myself more vulnerable in that space and I think she picked up on that and was able to feel more confident. This worked and we did this for maybe three or four months and then eventually there were rainy days and we just had to sit inside and she was able for it then.

**Client 3:** Woman with cancer. Doing a sand tray and client suggested what she needed was outside. She gathered moss, sticks, leaves and twigs from outside and brought them back in to do her sand tray. Therapist reflection: The tray was all about healing – covering the dry stuff –which she said was the cancer, and bringing the healing from outside bringing the healing from nature. The smell of the wet moss in the room she couldn't get over the intensity of it, the beauty of it.

**Client 4:** Man extremely anxious before his session in therapy centre. He met the therapist and asked could they go to the garden. Session held sitting on garden bench, client had panic attack therapist talked him through. Therapist reflection: He had been experiencing panic attacks before that but for some reason I think being out in nature and the witnessing of it, settled something in his body. He was different after that something had moved.

## **Appendix M: Braun and Clarke 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis**

1. The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
2. Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
3. Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
4. All relevant extracts for each theme have been collated.
5. Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
6. Themes are internally coherent, consistent and distinctive.
7. Data have been analysed, interpreted, made sense of rather than just paraphrased or described.
8. Analysis and data match each other - the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
9. Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.
10. A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
11. Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over lightly.
12. The assumptions about the specific approach to thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
13. There is good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done-i.e. described method and reported analysis are consistent.
14. The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
15. The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

## Appendix N: Personal Photo Collage ‘Embodied Research’

