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**A Qualitative Study of Psychotherapists' Experience of  
Practicing Psychotherapy Outdoors**

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The thesis is submitted to the Quality and Qualifications Ireland  
(QQI) for the degree MA in Psychotherapy from Dublin Business

School, School of Arts

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30<sup>th</sup> June 2017

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## **Acknowledgments:**

My supervisor Mary de Courcy, who encouraged and guided me through formulating this thesis, for providing insight, ideas and encouraging my own passion for this area of research.

My group supervisor Dr Grainne O'Donohoe for her guidance and support.

My family and girlfriend for their constant support and belief in me.

Go raibh míle maith agat.

## **Abstract**

*The formal practice of outdoor psychotherapy is still relatively new and, therefore, in need of research. Much of the current research focuses on the practicalities of working outdoors and the clients' experience of being outdoors. Conversely, this study aims to explore the experience of the psychotherapist when practicing in nature and whether they experience the cathartic and regulatory benefits of their natural surroundings, while managing the difficulties that working outdoors sometimes presents. The methodology used was semi-structured interviews through video calls with three psychotherapists. This data was analysed using thematic analysis. The sample includes experienced psychotherapists who work outdoors, including one male and two females, one of whom is U.K.-based and two Irish-based. Each of the practitioners utilise the Humanistic Integrative model of psychotherapy. Five themes emerged from the data set: nature's effect on the client and on the psychotherapist's self-regulation and self-awareness, the importance of boundaries and the contract for the outdoor psychotherapist, the psychotherapist's experience of working with trauma outdoors, nature and the psychotherapeutic relationship, and the need for standardisation and cooperation. The research supports much of the current literature on the cathartic and regulatory effects of using nature within the psychotherapeutic process and highlighted that these can be experienced by both the client and psychotherapist. It demonstrated that nature is best used within an integrative model and has great potential within the area of trauma.*

# Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the last two decades there has been a growing move for adopting nature into the psychotherapeutic process (Jordan, 2014). Ecotherapy is the umbrella term for psychotherapeutic approaches that engage with the outdoors. Ecotherapy has grown out of the larger movement of ecopsychology which studies the link between humanity and nature.

Ecopsychology contends that our mental well-being is deeply related to our connection with the planet (Brazier, 2011; Adams & Jordan, 2012). Quite often the ecopsychology movement is paired with an ecological mandate to promote care and protection of our environment (Jordan, 2014), linking in with Jungian or Psychosynthesis ideas of human and the earth being connected and part of the one living organism. As Parfitt (2006) states: *“I live my life in relation to other people, other creatures and the earth herself... we are all part of a bigger relationship that includes all of life”*. This symbiotic relationship can be related to the Native American proverb:

*“We breathe what the tree exhales; the tree breathes what we exhale. So, we have a common destiny with the tree.” (Floyd Red Crow Westerman, 2012)*

This ecological goal encompasses much of ecopsychology and ecotherapy. Jordan, Marshall (2010) speak of building an attachment to nature from spending time spent with it, likening this to (Bowlby, 2005) attachment theory, with the aim of building a positive attachment to nature in the hope of creating a symbiotic relationship.

The ecotherapy movement or “green care movement” (Jordan & Hinds, 2016) refers to various approaches using natural spaces as an influence on psychological and physical well-being. These have included horticultural therapy, equine therapy and other animal assisted therapies, adventure therapy, wilderness therapy and walk and talk therapy. This research will be focussing on the walk and talk therapy. It will be setting aside the ecological goal of ecotherapy and viewing ‘walk and talk therapy’ as simply the

movement of practicing psychotherapy outdoors. Throughout this paper, this practice will be referred to as “nature psychotherapy” or “outdoor psychotherapy.”

Psychotherapists such as Linda Buzzell, Craig Chalquist (2009), Hayley Marshall, and the late Martin Jordan (2010) have helped pioneer a formal practice of Nature psychotherapy. Their work highlighted the tripartite relationship between the client, psychotherapist, and nature (Buzzell & Chalquist 2009; Jordan & Marshall, 2010), the importance of preparatory boundaries (Jordan & Hinds, 2016), and the creation of a contract within the process (Jordan & Hinds, 2016).

Theories such as the Biophilia Hypothesis (Wilson, 1984), the Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan, 1995) and the Psychological Stress Recovery Theory (Ulrich, 1984) point to a human genetic connection to nature and highlight the restorative and cathartic benefits from time spent in nature. During the last century, research has made evident the positive influence of nature on medicine (Ulrich, 1984), sociology (Kuo, Sullivan, Coley, & Brunson, 1998) and psychology (Bird, 2007; De Young, Scheuer, Brown, & Stewart, 2017; Caplan, 1967).

Culture and art also demonstrate this connection to nature. Aspects of nature, like the sun have been revered as gods. In art, we can witness the inspiration that nature offers. The poet Henry David Thoreau (1908) proclaims:

*“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”*

Hiking, camping, fishing, safaris, and sailing are enjoyed by many, as participants benefit from the calming effects of nature. Nature can provide wonderment, belonging, and perspective. The astronaut Frank Borman stated:

*“When you’re finally up at the moon looking back on earth, all those differences and nationalistic traits are pretty well going to blend and you’re going to get a*

*concept that maybe this really is one world and why the hell can't we learn to live together like decent people." (Borman, 1968)*

The movie "Good Will Hunting" (Damon & Affleck, 1997) presents the popular culture viewpoint on psychotherapy, which breaks typical psychotherapeutic boundaries, such as self-disclosure and—more pertinently—the traditional use of psychotherapeutic space. In the film's second psychotherapy session, the psychotherapist takes his patient to the park, facilitating a change of scenery and dynamic. This is what began this author's interest in nature psychotherapy.

This author's own experiences of noting a change in conversation when walking with others outdoors and his own attachments to nature and his own experience as a client in nature is what prompted his initial exploration into the area of practicing psychotherapy outdoors. From this exploration, a growing body of research was formed.

This study is being carried out as there is still a great need for further research in the area of practicing psychotherapy outdoors. Much of the current research explores case study examples of the client experience or practical guidelines for practicing outdoors. Lacking from these observations, however, is a study on the experiences of the psychotherapists as they practice outdoors. Are regulatory and cathartic influences experienced by the outdoor psychotherapist, along with their clients?

The difficult, unpredictable, and uncertain nature of the outdoors makes this area of study an important one. When the psychotherapist ventures out of the office, no longer is privacy guaranteed and weather can be unpredictable. These factors can impact the psychotherapist's ability to be fully present with their client, and thus negatively impact the quality of psychotherapy offered.

The specific aims of this research are to:

- Explore the psychotherapist's experience when practicing outdoors.
- Investigate how an outdoor psychotherapist may create and maintain the frame outdoors.
- Identify any changes in psychotherapeutic relationship when practicing outdoors.
- Explore the different challenges offered by nature psychotherapy compared to traditional psychotherapy.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1: Introduction**

This section aims to explore current literature relating to the psychotherapist's experience in bringing their clients outdoors. Initially, it will offer a justification for outdoor work, highlighting both the research and theories relating to the cathartic effect of being outdoors. In doing so, it will also highlight the current state of disconnect between humanity and nature.

Next, the literature review will place the research and theory within the context of the psychotherapeutic relationship, exploring the difficulties presented by working outdoors, along with the potential for negative impacts on the psychotherapeutic process.

Finally, this literature review will explore how nature psychotherapists alter the traditional "frame" of psychotherapy to potentially compensate for the difficulties presented when working outdoors.

### **2.2: The Case for Moving Psychotherapy Outdoors**

#### **2.2.1: History**

Even though the field of nature psychotherapy has grown exponentially over the last twenty years, it is important to recognise that exposure to nature has been part of psychotherapy since its origin. Freud, Lacan, and Jung each periodically moved psychotherapy outside of traditional spaces (Lazarus, 1994).

The use of nature as means of catharsis and assistance to well-being can be observed throughout human history. Contemplative walks are found in most religious and philosophical practices. Christian and Buddhist monasteries are often located in scenic

areas, offering a retreat from city life. Many of the early writers in ecopsychology believed in a connection between the human spirit and nature, referencing the Buddhist idea that human suffering lies in the avoidance of pain (Brazier, 2011).

Similarly, most psychotherapeutic practices aim to recognise the inevitabilities of pain and suffering rather than avoiding these realities. Nature offers an abundance of tools for exploring and facing these inevitabilities. For instance, death and decay are ever-present in the changing of seasons. Autumn and winter display the death and decay of plant life, while spring offers potential for growth and opportunity. Additionally, changes in weather exemplify life's unpredictability and our lack of control (Brazier, 2011). When observing early human dwellings, we find that a nearby spring, grove, or special rock would often be located nearby (Marcus & Barnes, 1999). Today, there are an increasing number of people engaging with historical pilgrimages, such as the Camino de Santiago, as they seek clarity, similarly there has been an increase in green spaces being added to urban settings (MIND, 2007; Lee & Maheswaran, 2010). This largely due to the abundance of research that has emerged over the last century that offers scientific evidence for the cathartic impact of the natural world on the human psyche, demonstrating its effectiveness in the areas of medicine, psychology, and sociology.

### **2.2.2: Research**

One of the most quoted studies relating to the healing effects of nature on the body (Ulrich, 1984) highlights how patients whose rooms overlooked natural landscapes healed quicker than those with a view of man-made structures. Caplan (1967) observed a reduction in psychotic symptoms of patients when temporarily housed outdoors in tents. MIND in (2007) carried out a study of 108 nature psychotherapy participants. The found that 71% reported a decrease in depressive symptoms after spending time walking. 53%

experienced a decrease in sadness and anger from time spent outdoors versus 33% from time spent indoors. 71% experienced a decrease in stress from a green walk. Overall, 81% experienced an increase in mood from the green walk, while 43% experienced a decrease in mood from walking in a shopping centre.

Time spent in nature has been shown to improve cognitive functioning with emphasis on memory (De Young, Scheuer, Brown, & Stewart, 2017; Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008; Berto, 2005). Kuo and Taylor (2004) recorded a reduction in Attention Deficit Disorder in children who spent time outdoors. Kuo, Sullivan, Coley, and Brunson (1998) also found a reduction in crime and aggression in urban settings where there are green spaces nearby. Due to the increased level of physical exertion from being outside, it has been suggested that the health benefits are due to the endorphin release from spending time in natural spaces. When contrasting physical exercise in green spaces versus indoor settings, researchers found that those who exercised in green spaces recorded increased “lower frustration, engagement and arousal, and higher meditation when moving into the green space zone; and higher engagement when moving out of it.” (Aspinall, Mravis, Coyne, & Roe, 2013).

### **2.2.3: Theories**

There are three dominant theories that attempt to understand why humans gain catharsis from time spent in nature: The Biophilia Hypothesis (Wislon, 1984), Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan, 1995), and the Psychological Stress Reduction Theory (Ulrich, 1984).

### *2.2.3.1: Biophilia Hypothesis*

The Biophilia Hypothesis (BH) introduced by Wilson (1984) suggests that humans are genetically programmed to respond to nature. For Wilson, this connection is directly linked to our evolution and survival over the last 10,000 years. Historically, trees and high ground offered shelter and refuge, rivers provided water and transport, lakes were a sign of fertile land, and the sun provided heat and light- becoming revered as a god by many cultures (Kahn, 1997; Bird, 2007).

Despite humanity's migration from the wilderness into cities and our increasing dependence on technology, Wilson (1984) suggests that the connection to nature runs deep and would be hard to erase. He points to the existence of bio-phobias which are genetic fears to aspects of the natural world, such as snakes.

Critics argue that the genetic imprint positioned by Wilson (1984) could be better explained through nurture, saying fears can be passed down through generations via myth and legend. Similarly, children are shown to exhibit phobias that mimic their parents' own fears. Natural selection also fails to explain acts of altruism that threaten a person's wellbeing (Kahn, 1997). Research suggests that this genetic response to nature helped create a desire for aesthetic satisfaction, highlighting the lower stress, increased relaxation, and satisfaction of life from those who lived nearer natural settings (Bird, 2007; Beery, Jonsson, & Elmberg, 2015; Kaplan, 1995). These findings, however, can be better explained by the next two theories.

### *2.2.3.2: Attention Restoration Theory*

The second theory aimed at understanding the effects of nature on the mind is the Attention Restoration Theory (ART), which relates largely to the concepts of meditation

and mindfulness. It highlights that once attention is removed from something that is taxing (a computer screen or work demands) to something that is non-taxing (birds, clouds, rivers), cognitive functioning improves. As stressors occupy our cognitive resources, the ability to focus on a task is reduced. Our resources become exhausted by tedious work, but ART proposes that nature restores the resources (Siniscalchi, Kimmel, Couturier, & Murray, 2011).

ART highlights two forms of attention: “involuntary” or “fascination” attention is captivation or focus on something that is effortless and enjoyable. These responses can often be witnessed as a person observes the stars on a clear night, comes across wild animals, or watches clouds. These are moments when attention is stolen in a restorative manner, removing focus from the taxing work at hand (Bird, 2007). The second is Directed Attention (DA), which involves focusing on tasks that drain our cognitive or physical resources, such as driving, working at a computer, or problem solving.

Kaplan (1995) highlights four key factors that are necessary for activating ART: away, extent, fascination, and compatibility. Being away removes the situations that demand our attention. This removes presenting stimuli, such as workload or daily responsibilities. Kaplan (1995) points out, though, that being “away” doesn't necessarily remove stress-filled thought processes (Bird, 2007).

The second factor is that the environment must have “extent.” Extent is the environment's provision of sufficient stimuli to fill one's head space. The environment must encompass enough stimuli to replace the stressful stimuli left behind.

Contained within this factor is “fascination.” Fascination is a captivating scene or image that grabs one's attention, silencing all other thoughts. This could be a bird gliding through the air, a waterfall, or a deer walking through the forest—it is that element in which an individual is lost.

The final factor proposed by Kaplan (1995) is “compatibility.” This is a meeting between the chosen environment and a person’s purposes and desire. These purposes or desires must be separate from the DA left behind. They can be the desire for fresh air, to see birds, hear the wind, or get exercise. This is what sustains the person in the environment, as they are satisfying an overt goal or desire. Kaplan (1995) points out that these desires can be different for each person, suggesting that the possibility of seeing a snake may evoke fear in one and fascination in another. A non-compatible environment may offer the need for problem solving, thus involving more DA than a compatible environment.

#### *2.2.3.3: Psychological Stress Recovery Theory (PSRT)*

The final theory supporting the positive impact of the natural world is the PSRT introduced by Ulrich (1984). The PSRT encompasses elements of both previous theories, embracing the evolutionary aspect of the BH and the stress-reductive elements of ART. Showing similarities with Levine (1997), the PSRT proposes that in response to trauma or stress—a need to quickly regulate would be required. After survival from a predator, the ability to recover from stress allows one to be better prepared for the risk of another impending attack. In cities, the likelihood of being attacked by a predator are slim, but the PSRT highlights that this response to nature is still present when dealing with modern stressors such as work stress, traffic or crowds.

The research of Ulrich, Alvarsson, Wiens, and Nilsson (2010) shows how simply looking at *images* of nature promotes internal regulation. Greater stress reduction was recorded from videos of nature versus videos of urban settings. Similarly, subsequent research demonstrated that walking through a nature reserve led to a significant decrease in stress compared to walking through an urban environment (Hartig, Evan, Jamner, Davis, &

Garling, 2003). This study also illustrated that a room with a view led to a quicker reduction in stress than a windowless room.

#### **2.2.4: Current State of Disconnect**

Despite these benefits, much of humanity finds itself in an abusive, ambivalent, or avoidant relationship with nature. The recent push for protection of the planet through the Paris Climate agreement demonstrates a collective effort to make up for damage we have inflicted on the planet. Jordan (2009) built on Bowlby's attachment theory, highlighting how our early experience with natural spaces may dictate our adult relationship with nature. Carl Jung stated:

*Through scientific understanding, our world has become dehumanised. Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos. He is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional participation in natural events, which hitherto had a symbolic meaning for him. Thunder is no longer the voice of a god, nor is lightning his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit, no tree means a man's life, no snake is the embodiment of wisdom, and no mountain still harbours a great demon. Neither do things speak to him nor can he speak to things, like stone's, springs, plants, and animals. He no longer has a bush-soul identifying him with a wild animal. His immediate communication with nature is gone forever, and the emotional energy it generated has sunk into the unconscious. (Kinder, 2001, p. 255)*

Louv (2005) coined the term "Nature Deficit Disorder" to explain the current state of human disconnectedness from nature. Not only are people spending more time indoors, but when they are outdoors, time is often spent on phones or listening to music. In Dublin, it is interesting to observe passengers on public transportation staring at their phones, rather than the scenic coastline out the window.

Despite research demonstrating the health benefits of nature, studies show that we are choosing to spend more and more time indoors or engaging with technology. The Global Web Index (2015) (GWI) reports that, on average, adults spend 1.72 hours a day on social

media. In Australia, 37% of teenagers spend over two hours a day watching television (Wen, Kite, Dafna, & Rissel, 2009). In America, less than 20% of teenagers engage with nature at least once a week (Nature Conservancy, 2011) and American adults spend 7.6% of their time outdoors. Humans have become “...an indoor species. In a modern society, total time outdoors is the most insignificant part of the day, often so small that it barely shows up in the total” (Klepeis, et al., 2001, p. 2).

Ecopsychology suggests that our connection to nature encourages our care of nature and as we care for nature, it can care for us (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009; Jordan, 2009; Brazier, 2011). By embracing this thinking, the human disconnect from nature can be easily observed by the state of our natural spaces. Deforestation is happening at a rapid pace, oceans, and rivers are polluted with chemicals and plastic waste and the planet is suffering severely from the effects of global warming. Jordan (2009) offers that the by-product of ecotherapy is not only a greater sense of self-worth, but also a greater sense of care for the planet.

### **2.2.5: Conclusion**

While the research and theories clearly outline the positive effects of nature on the body and mind, the question remains whether these effects are experienced by the clients as well as the psychotherapists during a session. While fascination may help reduce client anxiety, can it also distract from the process? The research points towards the benefits for the client, but the psychotherapist is simultaneously faced with the challenge of creating a holding environment whilst dealing with many unknowns.

This is the question that most relates to this research: does the psychotherapist also experience the benefits of nature during a session, or do the extra difficulties and uncertainties increase the stress on the psychotherapist, therefore making the practice less

worthwhile? For many psychotherapists, the possible difficulties provide justification for remaining indoors where they can ensure privacy, comfort, and a controlled environment. These hesitations are understandable and deserve to be given time and consideration.

The next part of the literature aims to shed further light on these questions. First, it will explore the importance of the psychotherapeutic alliance, paying attention to the regulatory relationship between psychotherapist and client. Next, it will consider the psychotherapeutic frame, consisting of the location, boundaries, and the contract, showing how these factors are altered by moving the psychotherapy outdoors.

## **2.3: Nature and Psychotherapy**

### **2.3.1: Introduction**

The aim of this section is to explore how the previously discussed benefits can translate into a psychotherapeutic session. This section will begin by exploring the importance of the psychotherapeutic relationship within a Humanistic Integrative approach and how this may be affected while working outdoors. Next, it will explore the typical frame of psychotherapy and how this is altered by moving outside, paying attention to how the psychotherapist should adapt boundaries, the contract, and the space. Each of these sections contrast the traditional space and the outdoor space, paying close attention to the impact they have on the psychotherapist.

### **2.3.2: The Psychotherapeutic Relationship**

The psychotherapeutic relationship (PR), or working alliance, is widely recognised across most approaches as the foundation for psychotherapy (Fonagy & Allison, 2014; Horvath & Symonnds, 1991). Rogers (1980) identified this as the basis for change, stating that it

is not the psychotherapist's knowledge or technique, rather his "way of being" that initiates action. He highlighted attributes such as empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard, likening these to fertile ground in which an acorn can take root.

These attributes help form what attachment theorists and object relations theorists refer to as a "holding environment" (Winnicott, 1960). This holding environment consists of an inter-regulatory relationship between therapist and client. Inter-regulation allows the client to transfer their uncomfortable, painful, or unwelcome feelings and emotions onto the psychotherapist and have them be accepted rather than rejected. For Wallin (2007), this, over time, promotes creativity and spontaneity in the negotiation of stressors, which are hallmarks of the development of self-regulation (Winnicott, 1960).

Relational psychotherapy contends that a person is motivated through meaningful interactions and their participation in them (Jordan & Marshall, 2010). In a therapeutic sense, the relationship with the psychotherapist is purposeful and introduces new ways of being (Jordan, 2009). Often, a certain "mutuality" is found in the formation of relationship between the client and the therapist over a common purpose and with common regard for each other. The interchange introduces reciprocity, community, and unity (Aron, 1996). The relationship does not necessarily involve symmetry or equality. Aron (1996) uses the example of a teacher and pupil who both hold each other in high regard, but who have very different roles, which are not symmetrical. Asymmetry allows the client and psychotherapist to remain separate beings, avoiding collusion and allowing a greater sense of autonomy to develop for the client.

Behaviourist and, later, cognitive behaviour therapy argued against the PR, insisting that the psychotherapist is the expert, but their stance has shifted in the last twenty years with the introduction of more personnel approaches (Wright & Davis, 1994). This shift is due

in large part to the breadth of research available on the efficacy of the working alliance (Orlinsky, Grawe, & Parks, 1994; Wambold, 2011; Lambert & Taylor, 2001).

Mirroring neurons identified through neural imaging have shed light on the unconscious communication that happens between people, along with our sensitivity to nonverbal communication (Berrol, 2006). The importance of mirroring and regulatory systems relates to this study, as working outdoors offers many more uncertainties and difficulties than working indoors. If the psychotherapist struggles as a result, it poses the question: is the holding environment impacted so much as to negate the positive effects of nature mentioned in the previous chapter?

Some argue that nature adds so much to the psychotherapeutic alliance that it acts as a second psychotherapist (Jordan, 2009; (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009; Jordan and Marshall, 2010). The natural world provides the stress-reducing factors mentioned in the previous chapter, but it also provides rich material for discussion that may take months to emerge in the room. The rising and setting of the sun be an allusion to one's own birth and death (Berger & McLeod, 2006). Autumnal change and leaves falling can draw attention to the end of a season in life. A simple breath of wind can be a reminder that one is alive. Nature in its unpredictability can be evocative and inspiring, providing opportunity for questions a psychotherapist might not normally feel free to ask. "This way of working can expand the process into additional spiritual and transpersonal dimensions, allowing the client to connect to the 'larger than self', providing a fresh meaning, a sense of partnership." (Berger & McLeod, 2006).

Jordan (2009) suggests that by working with nature in a relational way, internal processes emerge through the interaction with the external landscape of nature. This sustains, challenges, and supports the work of the psychotherapeutic process, dispelling the perception that we are separate from nature. Jordan (2009) elaborates further on this by

exploring how our early attachments in life can be reflected by our attachment to nature. Nature as a co-therapist changes the dynamic to a tripartite psychotherapeutic partnership (Hegarty, 2010). Each participant in this tripartite relationship can affect the other. This makes the psychotherapist a facilitator as they mediate the client's experiences with the surrounding environment (Jordan and Marshall, 2010).

### **2.3.3: The Frame**

When considering the psychotherapeutic relationship, it is important to recognise that this is a unique relationship, different to other human interaction. In this instance, factors such as the space, time, payment, and boundaries help create a delineation. These factors create the "frame". This frame, within psychotherapy, consists of the ethical and professional actions of the therapist to promote safety within the therapeutic process for both the client and the psychotherapist (Jordan and Marshall 2010).

Boundaries, including the psychotherapeutic space, play an essential role within the treatment process. Boundaries provide structure and a format in which psychotherapy can take place. By not engaging in touch beyond a handshake, there is a clear delineation between psychotherapist and client. The exchange of money acts as another distinction between the two rolls. "The boundary clarifies the point at which the client moves from the ordinary, everyday work into the space that the therapeutic activity happens" (Brazier 2010).

### **2.3.4: The Space**

Typically, the first experience the client will have of the "frame" is the place in which the session happens. This is typically a private room, behind a closed door. The popularity of

this setting is partially due to psychotherapy's early days in a physician's office as Freud and Breuer introduced "the talking cure" to their medical practice. Since then, psychotherapy has rarely moved outside. "In most cases, therapy is addressed as an indoor, verbal, and cognitive activity, with the relationship between therapist and client at its centre" (McLeod, 2013).

The room offers discretion and privacy. This leads to a feeling of containment. Just as the client feels that the psychotherapist can handle and hold their inner world, it is important that they feel that the room can also contain these things. The room offers a protection and separation (Langs, 1998) from the outside. Nature, on the other hand, offers no protection from the real world. It is quite possible to meet familiar or unfamiliar faces while working outdoors. This prospect is intensified when working in urban areas or small towns. This exposure can challenge the sense of containment, both psychologically, as there are others around, and physically, as, instead of walls, there is expanse.

While these realities can pose difficulties for the client, they also create problems for the psychotherapist. How are they to create a holding space when their client's voice is robbed by the wind, or other people are within earshot during a potentially vulnerable moment? Creating this holding environment can be difficult enough, even in the room, as the psychotherapist negotiates their own transference, emotions, and feelings. The introduction of the outdoors intensifies these already powerful forces, potentially affecting the holding space (Jordan, 2010).

One possible solution may be to create "groves", which can provide a sense of containment, even outdoors (Jordan & Hinds, 2016). The maintenance of clear boundaries in nature offers clients many new opportunities to express autonomy. This can be seen in negotiations on where to walk or how strenuous the walk may be. Nature provides a cohabited space, allowing an expression of the mutuality that has been formed

between the client and the psychotherapist. Berger and McLeod (2006) used the example of a client choosing when to be in the room or out in nature. While out of doors, this client built an area they coined a “home in nature”. By allowing for this cohabited space, the client can reach a point of greater comfort, safety, or grounding that they may not find within the confines of an indoor space (Berger & McLeod, 2006). While the client was dealing with difficult emotions, Berger and McLeod found they would often move toward their “home in nature” as they engaged with the work at hand. Not only does this allow a greater mutuality to develop, it also allows the client a greater sense of empowerment in their own process.

The traditional indoor setting usually has the client and psychotherapist facing each other. Here, micro-expressions can be picked up, whereas outdoors walking or sitting will be typically side-by-side. For many, this will enhance the psychotherapeutic experience, as eye contact can be overwhelming (Jordan & Hinds, 2016; Berger & McLeod, 2006).

### **2.3.5: The Contract**

The contract is essential when working both indoors and outdoors. This is the agreement that outlines the practicalities of sessions, including time, location, payment, cancellations, confidentiality, and safety. The contract outlines explicit boundaries for the protection and safety of both the client and psychotherapist. When working outdoors, this contract becomes imperative.

Walking outdoors offers the potential for injuries, therefore a contract becomes necessary to highlight the potential risks and the need for appropriate clothing. As Jordan & Marshall (2010) highlight, a clear contract allows for circumstances to be pre-empted and accounted for beforehand. For example, the anxiety of dealing with meeting others can be lessened by an agreement on how to greet them (Jordan & Hinds, 2016).

## **2.4: Conclusion**

The literature review has laid out the research pertaining to the practice of psychotherapy outdoors. Plenty of the literature points to the effectiveness of the work for the client and gives practical advice for administering treatment outside of the traditional indoor space. What is lacking, though, is research on the psychotherapist experience while practicing outdoors. This is what the research section will aim to add to the area of nature psychotherapy.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1: Methodological Approach

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach. Polkinghorne (2005) offers that this approach aims to “deepen the understanding of the experience”. McLeod (2011) describes two types of knowing: *paradigmatic knowing* refers to the causal effect to understanding and is best suited to the physical sciences. In contrast, *narrative knowing* is associated with the human experience and the account of an event or action. Paradigmatic knowing refers to a deterministic world, whereas narrative knowledge offers a world which can be affected by human action. Narrative knowledge begins with stories and experiences which can be objective. Qualitative research follows the narrative knowledge framework (McLeod, 2011).

McLeod (2011) refers to the qualitative process as an exploration of the meaning people apply to their experiences. Gorman & Clarke (2005) argue that humans carry out this type of enquiry instinctually and, therefore, qualitative methodologies have been implemented to add an understanding of how the world is constructed and how our experiences shape the meaning we place on our constructs. The key assumption in this method is that the meaning of events and practices can only be understood by those who have had the experience themselves. It is for these reasons that the qualitative approach has been chosen, as this research aims to understand the experience of practicing outdoors from the psychotherapist’s perspective.

Conducting the research with this approach allows an exploration into how each psychotherapist constructs the frame of their practice, along with an understanding of how they have negotiated the difficulties faced when moving psychotherapy to the outdoors. The elements of a qualitative design focus on individual experience and

engagement, context sensitivity, open-ended data, purposeful sampling, emergent design flexibility, and inductive analysis (Patton, 2002).

### **3.2: Aims**

The specific aims of this research are to:

- Explore the psychotherapist's experience when practicing psychotherapy outdoors.
- Investigate how an outdoor psychotherapist creates and maintains the frame outdoors.
- Identify any changes in psychotherapeutic relationship when practicing outdoors.
- Explore the different challenges offered by nature psychotherapy compared to the traditional psychotherapy session.

### **3.3: Research Sample**

Purposive sampling was used for this research. This style is often used when carrying out qualitative research, as it leads to the selection of participants who have directly experienced the area of research. The criteria set for this study required that each psychotherapist has been practicing for more than five years, are full members of an accrediting body (such the Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapists (IAHIP), and have practiced psychotherapy outdoors for at least two years. The study also required that the psychotherapists chosen, engage in one-to-one psychotherapy.

The target for this study included three psychotherapists who practice in urban environments and three psychotherapists who practice in rural environments. However, this had to be reevaluated due to; a) the difficulty in finding participants, and b) the unavailability of psychotherapists who practice in urban environments. As a result, a decision was made to eliminate comparisons between the experiences of urban-based outdoor psychotherapists and rural based outdoor psychotherapists.

The research population consisted of two female psychotherapists and one male psychotherapist. All participants practiced in rural environments, two of which were in Ireland, and the other in England. One participant had, on rare occasions, practiced in an urban setting. Each of the participants had been practicing for more than five years in private practice and came from differing backgrounds of training, including Transactional Analysis, Existentialism, and Humanistic Integrative. All participants offered both indoor psychotherapy and outdoor psychotherapy.

| Pseudonym | Gender | Years Practicing as a Psychotherapist | Years Practicing Psychotherapy outdoors | % of work that takes place outdoors | Original Training      | Based   |
|-----------|--------|---------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------|---------|
| Ingrid    | F      | 22                                    | 10                                      | 33%                                 | Transactional Analysis | England |
| Karen     | F      | 5                                     | 2                                       | 20%-30%                             | Humanistic Integrative | Ireland |
| Nicholas  | M      | 12                                    | 6                                       | 10-20%                              | Existentialism         | Ireland |

Table 1: Overview of sample

### **3.4: Recruitment**

The criteria that the participant must have practiced psychotherapy outdoors for at least two years made recruitment quite difficult. Due to the formal practice of outdoor psychotherapy being so new, such practitioners are rare in Ireland.

The initial approach to research involved contacting local accrediting bodies such as IAHIP and IACP and using referrals from colleagues, which resulted in securing one participant. Due to the difficulty in finding Irish practitioners, the next participant was found in England by researching accrediting boards in the United Kingdom, along with searching personal practitioner websites. In attempting to find a third participant, numerous psychotherapists were contacted in the United Kingdom, United States, and New Zealand. Many outdoor psychotherapists volunteered their time, but of these volunteers, many did not meet the criteria and others failed to commit. The final participant was located in Ireland through referrals. Participants were given two documents: an information sheet and a consent form (see Appendices I and II). These were forwarded in advance of the interviews. Participants were informed only that this was an interview based on their experiences of practicing psychotherapy outdoors.

### **3.5: Method of Data Collection**

The data regarding the psychotherapists' experience of practicing outdoors was collected in the form of in-depth, semi-structured interviews over Skype. Skype was used due to the distance of the participants from the researcher. This allowed for the research to be scheduled at a convenient time for participants and meant that their commitment was restricted to the time of the interview, eliminating travel. In one interview, technological issues caused a five-minute disruption.

Ideally, research would have been conducted in-person, in their place of practice. This would have allowed for a greater observation of the participants and their work environment. An hour was requested of each participant prior to the interview via email. Two of the interviews finished in the required time (56 minutes, 58minutes). The interview that experienced technical issues went seven minutes over the allocated time.

Before each interview was conducted, interviewees were reminded of the details in the consent form including data protection, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw from the interview at any stage. Participants were then given the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the interview before recording commenced. Interviews were recorded using the MacOS application GarageBand. These files were stored on encrypted USB flash drives, under pseudonyms. The interviews were transcribed for coding. The transcripts were also stored under pseudonyms and kept on an encrypted USB flash drive.

Each interview involved ten formal questions, some of which included pre-prepared follow-up questions, which were only to be used if the participant response presented opportunity (see Appendix III). Prior to the interviews, the list of questions was explored with colleagues and the programme facilitator and thesis supervisor, at which time changes to the order were made. These questions were then piloted in a test interview. No changes were made after this. Qualitative interviewing allows flexibility, encouraging the participant to elaborate or change direction if they wish (McLeod J., 2011; Patton, 2002). As a result, the researcher is able to gather a broader body of data based on the participant's interpretations and experiences.

### **3.6: Method of Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis (TA) was chosen as the research design method. This is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008). The patterns were data-driven and an inductive approach necessitates that themes are dictated by data, rather than the author's preconceived ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Braun and Clarke (2008) suggest that TA can be used within many psychotherapeutic approaches, which supports the diverse training of the participants chosen for this research.

Using this approach made it necessary to become familiar with the data through repetitive listening to and reading of the interviews as they were transcribed. Coding involved creating labels to identify important features of the data pertaining to the research in question. Several key themes and sub-themes emerged within each interview. Microsoft Excel (see Appendix IV) was used to organise and identify emerging themes. The data was then reviewed and merged to give a combined and overarching view of collective findings.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

A research proposal was submitted to the DBS Psychotherapy Ethics committee in May 2016 and was approved without change. Participants were provided with information regarding the topic of the research, the purpose of the design, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw.

In many cases, potential participants ceased responding when informed that the research was to be based on their own experiences. One participant began sharing an example from their practice, but stopped due to feeling that they were breaching their own ethical

boundary with regards to confidentiality. When it came to confidentiality, interviewees were put at ease by being informed that the content of the research would be carefully stored and managed.

### **3.8: Limitations of the Research**

Ideally, the research would have had one to three additional participants. Due to the difficulty in finding participants, this was not possible. A second limitation to the research was the inexperience of the researcher as an interviewer. An inquisitive and curious approach was employed by the researcher, however, the ability to balance follow-up questions while remaining within time restrictions and respecting the semi-structural nature of the research was difficult.

### **3.9: Conclusion**

This qualitative study aims to explore the psychotherapist's experience of working outdoors. Semi-structured interviews were held with three participants and reviewed using thematic analysis. Two participants came from different provinces in Ireland and one resides in England. Each participant has been practicing outdoors for at least two years and practices both indoors and outdoors. While this research studied enough participant experience for a beneficial exploration of the topic, it might have benefited from the inclusion of a larger number of interviewees.

So far, this document has reviewed existing literature on outdoor psychotherapy and how this may impact the psychotherapist. It has also outlined the structure of additional research conducted. Next, this report will explore the findings resulting from gathered data.

# Chapter 4: Findings

## 4.1: Introduction

In this chapter, the results and findings of the three semi-structured interviews will be examined. In each interview, the interviewees were asked about their experiences of working with clients outdoors. Many themes and sub-themes emerged from details of the data collected from the three interviews. Of these themes and sub-themes, four were chosen based on their prevalence within the data and one was chosen from the process of finding participants. A theme is described as a topic that relates to the research question and has a pattern within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Semi-structured interviews allowed for a certain openness during conversation and, as a result, many interesting topics emerged that may be worth exploring at a future date.

The five themes to be discussed are:

1. Nature's effect on the client and psychotherapist's self-regulation and self-awareness.
2. The importance of boundaries and contracts for the psychotherapist when working outdoors.
3. The psychotherapist's experience of working with trauma outdoors.
4. Nature and the psychotherapeutic relationship.
5. The need for standardisation and cooperation.

## **4.2: Nature's Effect on the Client and Psychotherapist's Self-Regulation and Self-Awareness**

The literature review highlighted the theories and research relating to the benefits of engaging with nature. This new research was aimed at exploring the psychotherapist's experience of practicing outdoors. Three questions related to this topic presented during research interviews were:

- Question 4 – “Do you notice a difference in yourself when you practice outdoors compared to when you practice indoors?”
- Question 5 – “What are the benefits, if any, that you have experienced from bringing psychotherapy outdoors?”
- Question 8 – “Do you feel that nature affects the psychotherapeutic alliance and, if so, how?”

Throughout the answers to these questions, the theme of nature's impact on the client and psychotherapist's self-regulation and self-awareness emerged.

### **4.2.1: Nature's Positive Effect on the Psychotherapist's Regulation and Presence**

As has been shown, the key for change within psychotherapy is often the psychotherapeutic relationship. Rogers (1980) highlighted the importance of the psychotherapist's “way of being” and their ability to be present with the client while displaying empathy, congruence, and self-awareness. Each of the participants referred to the effect nature had on their own ability to be present and create a holding environment for clients in the absence of the holding provided by a room. It became clear that in the absence of potential stressors, such as other people or poor weather, the regulatory aspects of nature provided great depth to the work.

Two of the participants emphasised in detail the positive effect that nature had on their own process and regulation. Ingrid, for example, stated:

*“I tend to be...hmm...more physically present. I’m more conscious of my own body...and how that is being impacted by the client, so I tend to pick up—I mean, I think I’m pretty good at doing this in the room anyway—but I tend to pick up the client’s physical process in a lot more of an intense way.”*

*“All those regulatory ideas about what’s happening outdoors definitely affect me, you know, in that way. I’m less agitated, if I had to name it.”*

Karen also pointed to this effect stating:

*“I felt my own process was more alive and that I understood the theory as well. I could get in touch with myself better outdoors”*

*“I am more present. I’m more present to myself and I’m more present, therefore, to my client. So, I feel, obviously, that has to have a benefitting effect to the therapy itself. I’m also slower, I’m more relaxed, I’m more... for me, I’m more embodied, I’m less in my head.”*

Nicholas mentioned the regulatory aspects of nature, emphasising that it is different from practising indoors. He felt that he is present in a different way—more conscious of the client’s way of being in the world or to the non-human aspects of the world around him.

#### **4.2.2: Nature’s Negative Effect on Regulation and Presence**

After highlighting the positive effects of nature on their ability to be present and calm, each of the participants also emphasised the negative impact that nature can have on their ability to be present or calm. Each client referred to the negative effect that nature can have on the process, highlighting that when coldness or dampness sets in, they often lose the ability to focus.

Ingrid stated that:

*“Walking around trying to talk about someone’s inner world when the rain is horizontal and it’s freezing cold, it tests my resolve on that score—I find it hard to focus. Even if the client is fine with it.”*

Nicholas echoed this, stating:

*“I have to be able to attend to my client and if I’m too cold or, you know, if they’re—if they’re, if going outside would mean, for whatever reason, that I couldn’t attend to my client, then I’d be, I’d be saying—no point, you know.”*

Another aspect of outdoor practise that seemed to affect the participant’s ability to be fully present was the anxiety experienced when meeting others during a session. Ingrid, for example, referenced a moment where she panicked after meeting a former client during a session. When mentioning these difficulties, each of the participants pointed to the importance of the contract for managing possible anxieties. The contract will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

While the presence of others may increase the anxiety of psychotherapist, a point of interest was the observation that it did not seem to cause anxiety for clients. Participants noted that clients may be quieter in these instances, but not necessarily anxious. Ingrid relayed that moments which caused her anxiety were met with curiosity by her clients.

#### **4.2.3: Nature and the Client’s Self-Awareness and Regulation**

While this research is primarily concerned with the psychotherapist’s experience of working outdoors, it is often the case that the client’s process can help the psychotherapist to be more present. Similarly, the process can also evoke counter-transference, projection, and anxiety, and is therefore relevant to this chapter.

Each of the participants noted a depth to the client’s process outdoors. Karen referred to the role the senses played on connecting the client to their unconscious, sometimes triggering past bereavement and causing distress or regulation for the client:

*“We started walking down his little road and he suddenly became overwhelmed by the smell. Now, the smell, to me, wasn’t particularly pungent at all. There might have been some silage, but it wasn’t overwhelming. But for him it was almost unbearable. And he was going, “Oh my God, oh my God.” Very... getting quite distressed, until we came down closer to the sea and then there was a different—a different breeze and a different scent and he was able to go around himself and come out of that.”*

Karen pointed out the benefits of these experiences, stating:

*“But it’s much easier to be embodied—be in the present, be in the now, be mindful—outdoors. And that is a huge benefit at slowing people down.”*

Ingrid mentioned how the clients seemed to get a more holistic sense of themselves:

*“People who it’s working for tend to get inside their own experience. They get a felt sense of... what they are doing in the world, how they are managing themselves.”*

Much of the data pointed to the difficulties in practicing psychotherapy outdoors. It is these difficulties that have the potential to cause anxiety for both the psychotherapist and client, but it is important to note that the participants continue to practice outdoors due to the benefits they have experienced as a result. In mentioning the difficulties, each of the participants returned to the contract and boundaries set beforehand with the client. It is this aspect of treatment that we will explore next.

### **4.3: The Importance of Boundaries and the Contract for the Psychotherapist When Working Outdoors**

The literature review highlighted the importance of the psychotherapeutic frame. During the interviews, there was one directly frame-related question, but, interestingly, each of the participants referred to the topic before the interviewer even brought it up. There were four main areas of focus from the data: containment, practicalities, meeting others, and

the importance of the contract. The first three can be grouped under boundaries. The contract is the agreement by which the client and psychotherapist adhere to these boundaries.

The questions that brought forth the most data relating to this theme were:

- Question 6 – “What are the difficulties, if any, that you have experienced from bringing psychotherapy outdoors?”
- Question 7 – “How do you contract for these difficulties?”
- Question 7.1 – “How do you create privacy for the client outdoors?”

#### **4.3.1: Boundaries and Practicalities**

Boundaries are the rules and guidelines that protect the psychotherapeutic space and help separate the psychotherapeutic relationship from other relationships (Amis, 2017). Boundaries traditionally refer to the psychotherapist's self-disclosure, touch, exchange of gifts, bartering and fees, length and location of sessions, and contact outside the office (Zur, 2004). Of these, payment, the length and location of the session, and contact outside of the space all emerged during the interviews. The topic of location was most prevalent.

#### **4.3.2: The Location**

For each participant, the decision to work indoors or outdoors was largely client-led. In the instance of undesirable weather, each participant stated they would be willing to follow the client's wish to work outside, so long as it was safe to do so and would not affect their ability to work with others (self-care).

Each of the participants pointed to the client's own preferences as being of utmost importance when working outdoors. Many clients have no desire to work outdoors. Ingrid reported the highest rate of outdoor work, stating that one-third of her work is outdoors. Two of the participants said that initially, they always meet their clients indoors to get a sense of the client's ability for containment. Nicholas stated:

*"I start indoors because of that kind of containment issues and I think having an indoor space to return to, um, can be very important."*

Karen echoed this, stating that she begins indoors to get a sense of the client, only suggesting outdoor work later. In most cases, this came down to containment and wanting to know that the client felt protected and secure before moving the work outdoors. Ingrid stated that she would meet clients for the first time outdoors, but:

*"I might have a bit of phone contact with somebody if I have some doubts about them."*

#### **4.3.3: Containment and Confidentiality**

Each of the participants referred to the safety and containment that the room offers. While recognising the stress-reductive elements of nature, they all expressed occasions where working outdoors may not offer enough of containment for the client. Nicholas regularly pointed to the room offering comfort. Ingrid stated that:

*"People who are struggling to do a lot of internal containment—I've found that that has been less helpful to take them out. I think there is a case for having a more contained, less-alive space, if they are already a bit overloaded."*

None of the participants held dogmatic views that outdoor psychotherapy is best. Rather, they recognised that many clients require the security and containment of four walls. The

decision to add the element of nature into their psychotherapy was largely made on a client-by-client basis.

The subject of accidentally running into other people in an outdoor space brought up the boundary of confidentiality. Nicholas spoke of meeting a client's friend while working outdoors. Similarly, Ingrid spoke of meeting a former client and noticing her next client arriving before a session had finished. In each of these occasions, the client's right to privacy was challenged. The presence of others having an impact on disclosure was mentioned only once, when Nicholas referenced the difficulty in working on his local beach during the summer months.

Each of the participants mentioned the advantages of witnessing clients out in the real world. Nicholas, however, highlighted the client's right to privacy when it comes to the psychotherapist-client relationship. Referring to an incident where the client met a friend during a session, Nicholas stated that:

*"Yeah although I would try not to I would try not to kind of look too much or I try not to look at all that's the other part now keeping myself absent is that with therapy generally um what's most helpful is that I can understand my client's world as they understand it or as they present it rather than you know the reason why generally we aren't therapists to our friends because we have an invested interest and also we know stuff about their world that they might not know and so I try to minimize that um so I wouldn't yeah I would try to minimize that. Obviously if I've seen the way if I've if I've been with someone and I've seen or overheard even a snippet of how they are in the world that's information and I don't pretend that I won't have that information but I would try to minimize that um that form of information"*

#### **4.3.4: The Space**

Each participant highlighted the need to understand the space beforehand and necessary awareness of potential issues that may affect the session. They all spoke of the issue of

time, stating that familiarity with the outdoor space means they know, for instance, when to turn back. Ingrid highlighted the absence of a clock and the potential effect that looking at a wristwatch may have on the process. Nicholas emphasised the need to respect the space and not treat it in a consumerist way. Ingrid pointed out that clients sometimes have access to the same space outside of psychotherapy sessions. She felt that due to her work being on public land, she couldn't restrict this or place a boundary around it, therefore is presented with the chance of clients overlapping during a session.

Each participant also emphasised the importance of recognising the beginning and end of a session. This was deemed especially necessary due to the session taking place in the outside world rather than in the psychotherapist's space.

#### **4.3.5: The Contract**

What became apparent through research on the frame was the importance of the contract. The contract is the agreement between the client and the psychotherapist to adhere to the boundaries. Research showed that when working outdoors, this contract becomes fluid and ever-changing. Nicholas highlighted the fluidity of the contract, saying:

*“It's not a piece of paper with all the rules that you sign. It's alive. How are we doing moment-by-moment? What do you need? What do I think you need? What do I need? How do we negotiate this together?”*

Similarly, Karen offered:

*“I leave them some control as well, that they don't feel that they are obliged to do it my way. They can...it's their session, you know, so they can choose to change it if they want to. So that would be how I contract it, I don't have a written formal anything, we just...we just talk about it. We just talk about it, just like any part of our relationship; in the now, in the real. How are we with this? How are you with this? And, how will it be?”*

Prior to beginning outdoor sessions, each of the participants agree on the practicalities of payment, allotted time, and location. They then attempt to predict some of the potential difficulties that may be encountered. As Ingrid said:

*“I think that people need to have some method of heads-up about what the possibilities are...but you can’t nail it all down, that is one of the beauties of it.”*

It is interesting that none of the participants use a written contract with their clients.

#### **4.4: Psychotherapist’s Experience of Working with Trauma Outdoors**

In the presence of a strong psychotherapeutic alliance and containment, each of the participants recognised the effectiveness of nature when working with trauma. While this was not a direct question, each of the participants brought it up on their own in the interview. Trauma had been included as a potential follow-on to question nine:

- Question 9 – “Have you found that clients with certain backgrounds or certain difficulties respond better to psychotherapy outdoors?”
- Question 9.1 – “How have you found working with trauma outdoors?”

##### **4.4.1: The Real World**

Each of the participants spoke of the effect that nature had on the client’s ability to work through their trauma. Ingrid spoke about how, by working with her clients outdoors, trauma was addressed in a mutual space, giving her client a greater sense of control and protection:

*“They specifically want to be outside. Some of that can be because that is there, sort of, comfortable terrain, and some of that is defensive—it is a protective thing.”*

Karen also referred to a client who used the expanse of nature to work through the trauma of being trapped in a car after a crash:

*“I mentioned that guy this morning who’s had trauma in the car accident and, for him, all he wants to be is out. Right now, like, he’ll wake up in the middle of the night and he wants to go out. I’m wondering, is it a re-enactment? Because he says when he was in the car he just wanted to get out because he had the baby in the back seat...to see was the baby ok, but yeah, that ‘out’ feels like a freedom for him.”*

Both and Nicholas and Karen spoke of the link between shame and trauma. They highlighted the importance of this being witnessed by the psychotherapist in the traditional setting, but both also referred to the witness of the “other-than-human”.

Nicholas offered:

*“There is huge shame when there is trauma, ah, and part of the therapeutic work for me around trauma is having that witness, um, having that trauma witness. And, of course, there are all kinds of difficulties around that and it's a very contentious area, ah, this...this drive to avoid traumatizing the clients. And I have a lot of sympathy to that, um, and not shaming the clients around their trauma any more than is already there. And yet, for me, therapeutically, there is something about having it witnessed in therapy.”*

*“I think being outdoors and having that trauma witnessed not only by the person of the therapist but by the other than human, um, in its entirety is risky but also hugely, when it works, hugely powerful”*

#### **4.4.2: Safety and Trauma**

Each of the participants mentioned the need for safety when working with trauma; either directly or indirectly referencing the work of Babette Rothschild. This involves slowing down, regulating through the senses, creating a holding space, and avoiding re-traumatisation (Rothschild, 2011).

Karen spoke of the benefits of the senses in re-orienting the client:

*“Then smell—as I said there was gorse happened to be here. There’s herbs that I get people to rub their fingers on. It’s all bringing the body and the system, slowing down the trauma, connecting with where you are in the present. Which is ok. It’s ok to just be smelling herbs, right now, I’m ok.”*

Karen went on to explain that:

*“It’s much easier to be embodied—be in the present, be in the now, be mindful—outdoors. And that is a huge benefit at slowing people down.”*

The participants also spoke of the importance of the experience being client-led. Ingrid referenced bringing a client who had been sexually assaulted outdoors, into familiar places. She said this was done slowly and based on the client’s own process of moving into these places herself. Each of the participants referenced the dangers and risks involved when working with trauma—especially when working with trauma outdoors. Two of the participants emphasised this being the reason they begin indoors. The third said they would return indoors if any risks presented. Nicholas stated:

*“That’s why I start indoors because of those kind of containment issues—and I think having an indoor space to return to can be very important.”*

Karen and Ingrid both spoke of how nature’s ability to connect to the senses may move the pace of the session along too quickly. Ingrid referred to the way nature can act as a direct pathway to the subconscious. Karen echoed this, saying:

*“Being outdoors with a client isn’t always a fabulous experience for both you and the client. It can bring up fear, trauma, you know, people can be a lot more afraid, because I think because they’re inclined to be more in their process”*

Conversation around trauma also highlighted the containment issues discussed in the previous sections. Participants spoke of the regulation that nature can offer, but both Karen and Nicholas referred to the vessel that nature can be in holding someone’s shame, rage, or trauma. They both spoke of asking the sea for permission to take their clients’

trauma away. They also referenced the ability of nature to move trapped, traumatic energy through climbing and running.

Ingrid mentioned that nature can also be a distraction for clients from dealing with their trauma, especially in cases where they have used nature outside of sessions for self-regulation. What was very clear in the interviews was each participant's opinion that working with trauma outdoors can be incredibly powerful, but must be done so with great care and on a client-by-client basis. As Karen states:

*“Yeah, exactly, so that it's not all positive and rosy in the garden, in that there are...also there's risk and I am aware that there's risks for having clients outdoors in terms of what can come up, because, I think, sometimes, unconscious processes are easier to access outdoors. So, you have to be mindful as a therapist of what actually may happen, that it could be unexpected and you're faced with different things that are out of your control.”*

#### **4.5: Nature and Psychotherapeutic Relationship**

The next theme explored here will be the impact of nature on the psychotherapeutic relationship. This was directly addressed with the participants, but, additionally, the theme of client relationship with the psychotherapist and with nature was a constant throughout the data.

- Question 8 – “Do you feel that nature affects the psychotherapeutic alliance, and if so how?”

### 4.5.1: Tripartite Relationship

Each participant acknowledged the “other therapist” that nature can become, changing the psychotherapeutic relationship from client-therapist to client-therapist-environment, or, as Nicholas referred to it as: the “other-than-human”.

Two of the participants spoke of often becoming a facilitator or witness to the client’s relationship with nature. Ingrid spoke of constantly feeding what is evoked from these experiences back into the process. Meeting people, animals, or changes in weather are viewed as interventions from nature. Karen speaks about how a bird can suddenly appear nearby. Ingrid refers to this as a “vibrant alliance”.

Nicholas emphasised throughout his interview that, for him, the most important aspect to outdoor sessions is the client’s interaction with the natural world. The way in which they treat the non-human gives insight into how they treat their human relationships.

*“That I would be looking for the client to be aware of their relationship with the other-than-human world and that if we were, um, sorry, to go back to that example of the sea: if we were looking for the sea to be helping us with something, we would be asking rather than simply assuming that the sea would take whatever grief we wanted to give it. I have numerous experiences where the human therapist was a kind of facilitator of a process, but the other-than-human was the therapist.”*

Ingrid also highlighted this insight saying:

*“People who it’s working for tend to get inside their own experience. They get a felt sense of what they are doing in the world, how they are managing themselves and others, and their relationship with the environment.”*

Ingrid built on this further, saying that it enhances the client-therapist relationship by allowing the psychotherapist to see the world through the client’s eyes:

*“You are not looking at the client, you are looking, not with the eyes of the client, but in the same direction and viewing things possibly more the way they might.”*

#### **4.5.2: Mutuality and Control**

All participants made reference to the sense of mutuality that is experienced between the client and psychotherapist. This became apparent as the participants spoke of the difficulties that can be experienced outdoors and how opportunities for working together to confront struggle do not present themselves as often in the room. Ingrid offered:

*“I think mostly it does intensify the connection. I think there is something about nature, or being out in a more, democratic space. It can bring the relationship...there is less of the asymmetry.”*

Karen similarly emphasised this point stating:

*“There’s that very human side that we are both out there together, and there’s no, ‘This is your chair and this is my chair’. You know, so that kind of changes the dynamic when you’re outdoors. And it’s useful for people to know in both contexts, so they come back to the room but they know me in a different way. It’s not that we necessarily continue all our work outdoors, but that they have a different knowing of me. Also, I suppose walking side by side — things can come up that may not...like I know one girl talked to me about masturbation when we’re walking side by side. She told me about it—she never would have been able to say that to me face-to-face”.*

#### **4.6: Standardization and Cooperation Within the Field of Nature**

##### **Psychotherapy**

The theme of standardisation did not emerge from the data collected, but rather from the search for participants. Two interesting factors revealed themselves during this process: Firstly, there was the occurrence of professionals commenting or advising on outdoor psychotherapy who had no personal experience of the practice. Two psychotherapists offered to be part of this research who had never practiced psychotherapy outdoors. Similarly, there were a number of psychotherapists offering this work to clients who have

never practiced or attended training for working outdoors. Research also showed a number of individuals who were leading trainings and workshops in this area, despite having never practiced outdoors.

A second observation was psychotherapists' resistance to cooperate in research. In total, 21 psychotherapists that offer outdoor work were contacted directly. An unknown number were contacted indirectly through cooperating participants, governing bodies, or forums connected to Nature Psychotherapy. From this, thirteen interactions took place directly and only three ultimately participated in the work. These interactions point to a lack of cooperation between current psychotherapists and researchers. The highest number of interactions were gained due to a leading writer in the area of outdoor psychotherapy who passed on the request for participants. Interestingly, none of these responses yielded any participation, despite the author's repeated support.

#### **4.7: Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed emergent themes from the data set. It is important to note that in addition to the four themes identified, participants continued to emphasise that outdoor work is to be determined on a client-by-client basis. At no point did any of the participants hold a rigidly positive or negative view towards outdoor psychotherapy. The next chapter will discuss the themes in greater detail and how they relate to or enhance previous research on working outdoors.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1: Introduction**

The aim of this research is to explore the psychotherapist's experience of bringing psychotherapeutic work outdoors. Working outdoors presents the psychotherapist with many difficulties and challenges that can subsequently impact their ability to be present with their client. In this chapter, the themes highlighted in the previous sections will be discussed as they relate to the literature, overarching theories, and research questions. The chosen themes are:

1. Nature's effect on the psychotherapist's and client's self-regulation and self-awareness.
2. The importance of boundaries and the contract for the psychotherapist when working outdoors.
3. The psychotherapist's experience of working with trauma outdoors.
4. Nature and the psychotherapeutic relationship.
5. The need for regulation and cooperation.

### **5.2: Nature's Effect on the Client and Psychotherapist's Self-Regulation and Self-Awareness**

The research conducted aimed to explore the psychotherapist's experience of working outdoors. Paramount to this is the psychotherapist's ability to be present with their clients. While the research points to client benefits from outdoor work, this research is aimed at exploring whether the psychotherapist also feels the regulatory benefits of nature. It was determined that the psychotherapists questioned all benefited from the restorative and

regulatory aspects of the natural world previously introduced (Bird, 2007; Kaplan, 1995; Ulrich, 1984; Wilson, 1984).

The participants reported feeling more embodied, more self-aware, and less agitated. They relayed how this awareness helped them become more attuned to the client process. They noted responses similar to those of mindfulness practices—of slowing down and becoming more relaxed. Each participant mentioned that the regulatory benefits could potentially be nullified by the physicality of the work and the weather. Being cold, tired, or damp from working outdoors affected their ability to be present. Similarly, strong winds or heavy rain negatively impacted their ability to hear their clients. The participants each pointed to their own need for self-care in scheduling and dealing with poor weather. It seems that many of the practicalities, such as time keeping, distance, and encountering other people were initially stressful for the participants, but through experience these obstacles have become part of the work, adding to the spontaneity of working outdoors. They each mentioned the contract as being the container for dealing with these uncertainties and, ultimately, allowing them to be participants in this new approach to their work.

A limitation discovered in research, however, is the fact that each participant began outdoor work as a result of their own positive association and interactions with nature. This related to Jordan's (2009) idea that responses to the outdoors will vary depending on early attachments to the natural world. This appeared to be true for the participants of this study and also applied to their understanding of their individual clients. This discovery poses the question for further exploration: would psychotherapists who do not regularly engage with nature in their own time record similar experiences of working outdoors? The participants also felt that this attachment (Jordan, 2009) rang true for the

client. If the client did not have a positive relationship with nature prior to these sessions, the participants felt that they would be less inclined to work outdoors.

The recognition that not every client will engage well with or even benefit from exposure to nature due to his or her own attachments and associations was reiterated by each participant. What became clear is that despite the restoration and regulation associated with nature, these were not always appropriate or beneficial for every client in their current process. Participants regularly referred to returning to the room at times of distress or when clients needed a greater sense of containment, saying that outdoor psychotherapy seems to work best within an integrative model of psychotherapy, thus reiterating the findings of Jordan and Marshall (2010).

Rogers (1980) proposed the psychotherapist's "way of being" as the catalyst for change, while Winnicott (1960) and Wallin (2007) speak of the importance of the psychotherapist creating a holding environment or container onto which the client can pass their anger, pain, trauma, shame, and hurt. This research added to previous work (Jordan & Marshall, 2010; Brazier, 2011; Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009; MIND, 2007) in demonstrating how, in the right conditions and settings, both the psychotherapist and client can benefit greatly from the restorative and regulatory aspects of nature (Ulrich, 1984; Kaplan, 1995; Bird, 2007). The next section will discuss how this research helps to create a psychotherapeutic environment outdoors using boundaries and the contract.

### **5.3: The Importance of Boundaries and the Contract for the Psychotherapist when Working Outdoors**

An interesting pattern found within the data showed participants wavering between advocating for outdoor psychotherapy and weighing its benefits with the difficulties often

encountered outside the room. Boundaries such as time, location, weather, space, and unwanted company were all identified as potential problems. This reinforces previous research that indicates the need for planning when working outdoors (Jordan & Marshall, 2010; Jordan & Hinds, 2016).

The research seemed to show that these possible hindrances were eventually absorbed into the process existentially. Participants were able to recognise their own lack of control over the environment and thus used the unexpected as part of their client's process. The previous section highlighted the recorded restorative and regulatory aspects of nature. In the right circumstances, the unpredictable and unexpected events were recognised by the participants as being of equal value. Each of them reported this as one of the strengths of working outdoors, as they resulted in moments and breakthroughs that would not have happened indoors.

Research (Jordan & Marshall, 2010; Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009; Jordan & Hinds, 2016) has spoken of the need for boundaries when it comes to coming across outside persons during the process. The traditional psychotherapeutic space is typically free from intrusion. This research identified that when working in public spaces (in parks, on beaches, etc.), not only do others have access to the spaces, but the clients can return to these places outside of their sessions. Participants felt this is not a boundary they can include in the contract, as the land is shared space. Clients being in the psychotherapeutic space outside of therapy risk them returning into process unsupervised. For clients who do not have a holding capacity within themselves, this poses issues of containment. Although meeting others during a session can provoke a certain level of anxiety, this research showed the potential for meeting other clients, former or current, can be a more intensely anxious moment.

According to this research, the end of the session is also an important boundary. As mentioned previously, outdoor work is done in a shared space. Typically, psychotherapy clients leave the room at the end of a session, whereas in nature, the client has the ability to remain in the therapeutic space. By acknowledging an end to the session, a separation is drawn between the psychotherapy session and the real world.

Participants all recognised the important, grounding impact that the contract offers when navigating the potential difficulties and uncertainties of working in nature. Jordan & Marshall (2010) highlight the need for a fluid contract and this was confirmed throughout the research. The contract, in the studied cases, was a verbal agreement outlining how the pair were to work outdoors and potentially react to difficult situations. The contract addressed changes in weather, meeting other people during a session, time specifications, location, and how they would begin and end the work. The research has demonstrated, in congruence with previous literature, that nature is unpredictable, hence the need for a fluid contract. For instance, it may be agreed that when it comes to meeting others on a walk, the psychotherapist acknowledges the third party and both everyone continues on. However, the client may alter this arrangement during a session by initiating the greeting, possibly indicating a moment of growth.

It is clear that the contract is an agreement to be worked out in tandem when dealing with the uncertainties of working outdoors. It should be treated as a living entity within the process, allowing for a moment-by-moment or “here and now” aspect to the work. The contract is not a way of communicating exactly how the psychotherapist works. Rather, it should be used as a way of transferring control and power to the client, ensuring agreement on their method of work. Existing literature (Jordan & Hinds, 2016; Jordan & Marshall, 2010) speaks extensively on the development and mutuality of the contract, with which this research clearly agrees.

This fluid and living contract was unanimously recognised as one of the strengths of outdoor work, but it may also provide a risk for the psychotherapist. The research showed that the contract was generally a verbal agreement between the client and psychotherapist. Due to the increased risk of injury from working outdoors, it is surprising that a written agreement or safety waiver was not put in place. The psychotherapists interviewed regularly spoke of self-care regarding scheduling sessions or poor weather conditions. They mentioned verbal presentation of the risks to clients, but the addition of a written acknowledgment and acceptance of the risk may be of use for the protection of both the client and psychotherapist.

What is clear, though, is that differing boundaries and a flexible contract may introduce challenges to the process, but, more importantly, they provide depth to the client-therapist relationship, along with a deepening of collaboration between the two parties. The contract in and of itself acts as a container for many of the emotions that may arise outdoors. Key to this is the psychotherapist's relationship with client. This contract is grounded in their ability to honour agreements and yet also be flexible when it may be appropriate to make changes to the contract. This research seems to coincide with previous findings on the importance of the contract in protecting the client. There is, however, a need for further study on the importance of the contractual relationship for the psychotherapist.

## **5.4: The Psychotherapist's Experience of Working with Trauma**

### **Outdoors**

The topic of working psychotherapeutically with trauma outdoors was not intended to be a major part of this research, however, as each of the participants introduced this topic to the data, it seems pertinent to mention the profound effect that nature can have on

treatment in this area. Rothschild (2011) argues for the importance of stabilisation and slowing down when working with trauma. In her steps for trauma work, she emphasises the need for safety. This can be difficult when working outdoors due to the unpredictability previously mentioned. Yet, the participants all agreed on the effectiveness of nature when working with trauma, for instance, the impact of a sexual assault that happened outdoors, or trauma from a car accident. In each of these cases, the participants were acutely aware of the positive impact of nature on the client.

In each case, participants emphasised a prior connection and attachment to nature, along with a need for pre-established time and space affecting their capacity for working with the trauma. Also important is establishing the window of tolerance within which they are capable of working—where behaviour and thinking are not disrupted by increased arousal (Siegel, 2012). If such a window of tolerance is in place and an attachment to nature exists, then the regulatory aspects of nature can be used for the client as a way of resourcing (Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006). This regulated state (Rothschild, 2011; Levine, 1997; Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006) allows for increased self-awareness and self-containment. The participants confirmed this. As Ingrid and Karen noted:

*“People who it’s working for tend to get inside their own experience...they get a felt sense of...what they are doing in the world, how they are managing themselves and others.” – Ingrid*

*“It’s much easier to be embodied—be in the present, be in the now, be mindful—outdoors, and that is a huge benefit at slowing people down.” – Karen*

This research also found that it is important for both the psychotherapist and nature to witness the client’s process. Part of the strength of indoor psychotherapy is the container and separation it provides from the outside world. The enclosed space acts as a protective

barrier against potential stressors. As effective and important as this can be, it is, as Nicholas described, an “artificial environment”.

The participants also brought up the common link between trauma and shame. Sharing one’s experiences with others can transform the experience of shame; if one’s shame can be accepted and held by others, it can lessen its negative effect and the effect of the inner critic (Newman & Goldberg, 2013). For the participants, having nature or the outside world witness their client’s trauma and pain was another positive way for their client’s to “share”. The experience permitted the clients’ feelings and emotions to exist in the real world, witnessed by a human as well as the “other-than-human”. This connection between trauma and shame has been highlighted in studies such as (Platt & Freyd, 2012; Øktedalen, Hoffart, & Langkaas, 2014). Again, each participant pointed out that this type of engagement may not be appropriate for every client and that care must be taken when working in this way. Nicholas stated that this approach can be, while Karen referenced that working with trauma outdoors should be carefully explored with a supervisor beforehand.

The findings of this research highlight an area that could be explored further. Aspects of somatic experiences and releasing of energy stored in the body could be introduced to outdoor psychotherapy. There is the potentiality for research on moving negative energy out of the body through physical exertion. In moments where “flight” is not possible, clients could potentially explore safely running outdoors to expel this energy. This would involve the integration

## **5.5: Nature and the Psychotherapeutic Relationship**

This study added to the existing research into the effects of nature on the psychotherapeutic relationship (Jordan & Hinds, 2016; Jordan, 2009), demonstrating both the recognition of nature as a third entity within the psychotherapeutic process, as well as the increased mutuality between the client and psychotherapist. This research found that the risk of the client-therapist relationship becoming blurred was not present; participants were able to keep relationships with their clients strictly psychotherapeutic.

The research also identified the benefits experienced from witnessing the client in the outside world. When working indoors, we can only know what the client shows us, consciously or unconsciously. They may speak of their love for nature, but out on a walk, for example, they may openly litter. The client may speak of being outgoing and friendly, but become anxious in the presence of others. Having the ability to witness the client in the outside world adds richness to the work, deepens the relationship, and allows both to be experienced in a more holistic way.

The sense of increased mutuality within the psychotherapeutic relationship offers many benefits. Clients who have felt out of control now have the opportunity to give input. They are allowed take ownership of the space around them and recognise their right to a place in the world. Haugh and Paul (2008) point to three factors in a strong psychotherapeutic alliance: The collaborative nature of the relationship, the affective bond between the psychotherapist and the client, and the ability to agree on goals. The participants indicated that wildness and unpredictability of working in nature strengthen each of these three factors.

The act of cooperation removes the illusion of power between the client and psychotherapist. This presents another question that could benefit from further research: is the illusion of a power imbalance necessary in the beginning of the psychotherapeutic

alliance? Clients often come to psychotherapy looking for an answer or cure. Within the humanistic approach to psychotherapy, there is the understanding that the clients have an innate desire to grow and self-actualise and require the right environment to do so, therefore psychotherapists act more as a guide than an expert (Rogers, 1980). The hope is that, over time, this illusion of power is replaced with a strong, more mutual psychotherapeutic relationship.

In an age where a quick fix is often sought through medication or short term psychotherapies, this illusion of power or a “you can fix me” attitude toward the psychotherapist may actually be needed to develop the psychotherapeutic alliance. Its dissolution into premature mutuality may not provide the holding the client needs in order to build a strong psychotherapeutic alliance. This is an area that would benefit from further study.

## **5.6: Standardization and Cooperation**

The formal practice of nature psychotherapy is still relatively new. Researchers like Buzell, Marshal, Brazier, and the late Martin Jordan have attempted to bring forward a more formal and regulated practice. This research found three practitioners who believe in the practice of bringing clients outdoors. In Ireland, David Staunton has written articles for the Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy and created a forum for eco-therapists to connect. While these writers have offered insights and guidelines to working outdoors, in particular (Jordan & Hinds, 2016), there is a need for standardisation or regulation for those wanting to introduce the outdoors to their practice. This research has highlighted the benefits but similarly it has highlighted the difficulties. One option may be for governing bodies such as IACP or IAHIP to require psychotherapists who wish to practice outdoors to attend workshops beforehand.

Despite the work of these writers, it was curious that despite the recognition of a) the positive impact that nature can have on the psychotherapeutic process, b) the lack of research, and c) the newness and need to network, it proved extremely difficult to find participants for this study. This field of nature psychotherapy needs further recognition and research. For this to happen, there is a need for pioneers of this work to cooperate and collaborate.

## **5.7: Conclusion**

The research conducted clearly shows that the introduction of nature into an integrative model of psychotherapy can have powerfully positive results for clients. This new environment offers a dynamic way of working, which can add a strong sense of mutuality, control, and regulation for the client.

In examining the psychotherapists' experience of working outdoors, this research has verified much of the findings outlined in previous studies. The regulatory and cathartic aspects of time spent in nature have shown to translate to both the client *and* psychotherapist when there is a previously existing and positive attachment to nature in addition to sufficient boundaries and a clear, but fluid, contract.

This research has also highlighted the potential for working with trauma outdoors. Trauma work is often the area that requires the most safety, but the potentiality for this work outdoors has been identified strongly in this research.

### **5.7.1: Strengths and Limitations**

One of the strengths of this study was the demographic of the three participants. Each of them came from a diverse background training. Two were in located in different parts of

Ireland, while the other practices in England. This allowed for recognisable themes to emerge across various micro-cultures.

A limitation of the research was the small sample size of participants. The initial goal of six participants was small to begin with and only three participants actually took part in the end. In addressing limitations, the researchers bias should also be acknowledged. The researcher, who is a trainee psychotherapist, had prior knowledge of the area of nature psychotherapy and a desire to work outdoors once qualified. As a result, there may have been a desire for recognition of the effectiveness of bringing psychotherapy outdoors.

### **5.7.2: Recommendations for Further Research**

This study on the psychotherapist's experience of working outdoors highlighted multiple areas that could benefit from further research:

Firstly, there is a need for a study of psychotherapists who work in larger, more populated areas. This research had initially aimed to explore this and the researcher still recognises this as an area that would benefit from further development. There is a common phrase heard in psychotherapy training: "You shouldn't ask your clients to go places you are not willing to go". This study recognised that the psychotherapists' attachment to nature is what motivated the move to work outdoors. While this phrase offers wisdom, it would be interesting to observe sessions facilitated with psychotherapists' that have no previous relationships with nature, therefore the psychotherapist would be encouraging clients to go places they have gone, this would most likely work best in a training environment with the use of 'triads' or 'fishbowls'.

The study also demonstrated the potential benefits to the client experience when it comes to working outdoors within an integrative model. Two areas of additional research might

include a) the psychotherapist's experience as a client outdoors, and b) the experience of psychotherapists who do not have a strong connection to nature practicing outdoors.

This study highlighted the need for further research on working with trauma in an outdoor setting. Each of the participants recognised the powerful impact that nature had when working with traumatised clients, while also admitting the difficulties and risks that this method presents. Further research would be required in order to form a framework or methodology for finding effective and safe ways of working with trauma outdoors.

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# Appendices:



## Appendix I: Information Sheet

### INFORMATION FORM

My name is Robert Lewis and I am currently undertaking an MA in Psychotherapy at Dublin Business School. I am inviting you to take part in my research project, which is concerned with Nature Therapy. I will be exploring the experiences of practitioners like your self who practice Psychotherapy outdoors.

What is involved?

You are invited to participate in this research along with 5 other people because you have been identified as being suitable, being a psychotherapist who practices in Nature. If you agree to participate in this research, you will be invited to attend an interview with myself in a setting of your convenience or over Skype, which should take no longer than an hour to complete. During this I will ask you a series of questions relating to the research question and your own work. After completion of the interview, I may request to contact you by telephone or email if I have any follow-up questions.

Confidentiality

All information obtained from you during the research will be kept confidential. Notes about the research and any form you may fill in will be coded and stored in a locked file. The key to the code numbers will be kept in a separate locked file. This means that all data kept on you will be de-identified. All data that has been collected will be kept in this confidential manner and in the event that it is used for future research, will be handled in the same way. Audio recordings and transcripts will be made of the interview but again these will be coded by number and kept in a secure location. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any point of the study without any disadvantage.

#### **DECLARATION**

**I have read this consent form and have had time to consider whether to take part in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary (it is my choice) and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time without disadvantage. I agree to take part in this research.**

**I understand that, as part of this research project, notes of my participation in the research will be made. I understand that my name will not be identified in any use of these records. I am voluntarily agreeing that any notes may be studied by the researcher for use in the research project and used in scientific publications.**

**Name of Participant (in block letters)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date**    /    /

## Appendix II: Consent form



Protocol Title:

**An exploration of the psychotherapist's experience of practicing outdoors**

### **Please tick the appropriate answer.**

I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Leaflet attached, and that I have had ample opportunity to ask questions all of which have been satisfactorily answered.

Yes

No

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely **voluntary** and that I may withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

Yes

No

I understand that my identity will remain confidential at all times.

Yes

No

I am aware of the potential risks of this research study.

Yes

No

I am aware that audio recordings will be made of sessions

Yes

No

I have been given a copy of the Information Leaflet and this Consent form for my records.

Yes

No

Participant \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature and dated

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name in block capitals

### **To be completed by the Principal Investigator or his nominee.**

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explained to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that he/she could understand. We have discussed the risks involved, and have invited him/here to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name in Block Capitals

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix III: Semi-structured interview questions**

### **Intro Questions:**

How long have you been practicing psychotherapy?

How long have you been practicing psychotherapy outdoors?

What did you complete your formal training in?

### **Questions:**

1. What led you to begin practicing psychotherapy outdoors?
2. Do you primarily practice in an urban (city park) or rural settings?
  - i. What made you choose this area?
3. Do you ever work indoors with clients?
  - i. How do you make the decision to offer a client psychotherapy outdoors?
  - ii. Do you have a preference in where you work?
4. Do you notice a difference in yourself when you practice outdoors compared to when you practice indoors?
5. What are the benefits, if any, that you have experienced from bringing psychotherapy outdoors?
6. What are the difficulties, if any, that you have experienced from bringing psychotherapy outdoors?
7. How do you contract for these difficulties?
  - i. How do you create privacy for the client outdoors?
  - ii. Where do you begin and end each session?
8. Do you feel that nature affects the psychotherapeutic alliance, and if so, how?
9. Have you found that clients with certain backgrounds or certain difficulties respond better to nature psychotherapy?
  - i. Why do you think that they respond better/worse/have a stronger immediate reaction?
  - ii. How have you found working with trauma outdoors?
  - iii. Have you noticed any differences between the genders when working outdoors?
10. Are there any clients who do not seem to respond well or are not suitable to nature psychotherapy?

## Appendix IV: Example of transcription and coding

|    |   |  |   |
|----|---|--|---|
| 48 | <b>So, we were talking about the preferences of where you work and looking after yourself I think last... with the cold weather. So, question four is; do you notice a difference in yourself when you practice outdoors compared to when you practice indoors?</b>   |  |   |
| 49 | Em, yeah... I tend to be hmm more physically present, I'm more conscious of my own body... and how that is being impacted by the client, em, so I tend to pick up, I mean I think I'm pretty good at doing this in the room anyway, but I tend to pick up the client's physical process in a lot more of an intense way... Em, which is very useful in the work, I use it a lot in the work. Em, so I tend to feed that back in, it gives me a lot of information about them, em, I think I'm probably a bit calmer outside as well. All that regulatory ideas about what's happening outdoors definitely affect me, you know, in that way. I'm less agitated, if I had to name it. Em, yeah... those are the main things, em... I mean I do tend to prefer it, I mean that's my preference is to be out there moving around and living the client's experience a bit more, so helps me get inside of that which I really like, em, so yeah those are the main differences I think.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ↑Self-aware</li> <li>• ↑Presence</li> <li>• ↑Awareness</li> <li>• ↑Calmness</li> <li>• Preference</li> <li>• Living the Clients Experience</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• + Regulation</li> <li>• + Bias</li> <li>• Real world</li> </ul>  |
| 50 | <b>Can you give an example of being aware of the client's body?</b>   |  |   |
| 51 | Em, well obvious examples are in things like someone's pace, how fast someone is walking, how their... the kind of energy they are bringing into the session. So, you know... a classic would be someone who is, em, not giving themselves enough space to start to connect with what they need will classically be motoring on in the therapy and I will be semi running after them... trying to get hold of what they are saying. Em... that a kind of obvious example. Em... you know how they are mirroring what they are talking about really... em, so I've worked with someone quite long term outside who the whole theme of the therapy is about how she manages feelings and regulates those... she has some eating issues... not exactly a disorder but along those lines em... and has got early trauma and so there is a connection between those two. Over the time, we have worked together the pace of the therapy has slowed right down and the amount of terrain has changed, we are in a much smaller loop than we were originally. Things like that are very distinctive, there is a very obvious mirroring between what's someone processing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clients pace indicating their energy</li> <li>• Avoidance seen through pace</li> <li>• Mirroring: Process and Energy</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of clients energy</li> <li>• Defenses-Avoidance</li> <li>• Real world giving insights</li> </ul> |
| 52 | <b>That's interesting, I hadn't come across that. You are beginning to cover this question: What are some of the benefits if any that you have found from psychotherapy outdoors?</b>   |  |   |
| 53 | For the client, you mean?   |  |   |
| 54 | Yes   |  |   |

|    |   |   |   |
|----|---|---|---|
| 55 | <p>Well... I think people get in touch... not everybody obviously but people who it's working for tend to get inside their own experience... they get a felt sense of... what they are doing in the world, how they are managing themselves and others... and sometimes the environment you know their relationship with the environment... and that sort of transformational process... I think there is something about how someone internalises that...it starts kind of. it's a very physical process, I think that changes how someone what they are taking away. so, it not on a very kind of cognitive level... there is a lived experience, so the transformation is lived out and think that's what they carry off with them into the work... so there is that, em... And a lot of that is around regulation... how people manage their internal world emotion, sometimes trauma, em, but also how they are managing relationships, so what they are doing in relationships and em... yeah... so how they regulating their relationships with someone else fundamentally... a lot of people who come to me have typically used the outdoors as a way of managing intensity really, and often that has been about their relationship with someone else... a significant person in their history... so learning about that is pretty important and you can do it live... that's what appeals to me about it, and seems to work for the clients... you know so it is that lived experience... you are out in the world with the client, instead of inside talking about what they are doing outside of the therapy room</p> | <p>Client</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ↑ Self-awareness</li> <li>• Experienced in real world</li> <li>• Regulation</li> <li>• Embodied</li> <li>• Lived Experience</li> <li>• Real world</li> </ul> | <p><b>The Client</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Real world</b></li> <li>• <b>Regulation and embodied</b></li> </ul> <p><b>The work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relationship to Nature – Link to relationship others</b></li> <li>• <b>Alive in real world with client</b></li> </ul> |
| 56 | <p><b>So, there is a bit more of a reality to it as opposed to the strangeness of a room.</b></p>   |   |   |
| 57 | <p>Yeah, I think so, I think so, obviously, things do come alive in the therapy room, between therapist and the clients, but this is much more of an active process, I think it puts people into a process mode, they are on the move things are on the move basically. so, you know, typically when we got to therapy things have become stuck in some way and that's what prompted me to go out... I want to be on the move. I wanted things to be moving em. so, I think it helps with that eh yeah. there is loads more I could say but they are the main things really.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• + of room</li> <li>• Nature activate process</li> <li>• Dynamic</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>+ve towards room</b></li> <li>• <b>Dynamic on the move</b></li> </ul>   |
| 58 | <p><b>Eh ok... The reverse of that question is what are the difficulties you have experienced... if any from bringing people outside?</b></p>   |   |   |