Widening Circles of Care:

Exploring Self-Care with Activists Using Ecological Drama Therapy

Rebekah Hart

A Research Paper

In

The Department

Of

Creative Arts Therapies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August, 2013

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the research paper prepared

By: Rebekah Hart

Entitled: Widening Circles of Care: Exploring Self-Care with Activists Using Ecological Drama Therapy

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Creative Arts Therapies; Drama Therapy Option)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the Research Advisor

_____ Research Advisor
Bonnie Harnden, MA, RDT

Approved by

_____ Chair
Stephen Snow, PhD, RDT-BCT

_____20___

Abstract

Research shows that activists as a population may be at high risk for developing

symptoms of trauma, isolation, alienation and burnout due to a host of internal and

external factors. This instrumental case study describes a ten-week intervention with a

group of female activists exploring the theme of self-care. The interventions were based

on the integration of two frameworks: drama therapy methods and processes, and a form

of socio-ecological group work known as the Work that Reconnects. Interventions are

described and analyzed in terms of the integration of methods and the development of

self-care as a guiding theme. The study draws larger implications for activist self-care

practice, including the role of honouring painful feelings as integral to self-care, and the

potential of using drama therapy to foster collective practices of self-care within activist

movements. The study suggests that drama therapists may have a special role to play in

supporting activists to find tools to engage sustainably in their work. By integrating the

Work that Reconnects and drama therapy methods, this research proposes an ecological

drama therapy: a drama therapy practice that is rooted in the perception of our

fundamental relatedness with, and responsibility to, all peoples and forms of life.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to activists – past, present and future – who act on behalf of a just, sustainable world. May you be cared for as you care.

Table of Contents

I live my life in widening circles

that reach out across the world.

I may not complete this last one

but I give myself to it.

(Rilke, 1905/1996, p. 48)

Introduction

This research began in 2011-2012, a landmark period for activism and social movements both in Quebec and globally. Popular uprisings began in 2011 with the Arab Spring in Egypt and Libya, followed by a swell of economic protests in Spain and Europe later that summer. A spirit of protest advanced westward that autumn as New Yorkers ignited Occupy Wall Street, catalyzing a national and international movement calling for popular democracy and economic justice (Rebick, 2012b). In Quebec and Montreal where this research took place, social struggle flowered as the largest student movement in North American history took hold in the winter of 2012, running full-tilt through the summer of 2012 (Christoff, 2013; Rebick, 2012a). The student movement inspired hundreds of thousands of students and citizens to take the streets, spanning months of daily direct actions, economic disruptions, creative protest and mass demonstrations. The student movement's central demand was for the provincial government to revoke its plans to increase university tuition. As repression from government and police grew, thousands continued to demonstrate in defense of civil rights of assembly and dissent. They stood in opposition to the increasing commodification of education and social services, and the imposition of neo-liberal policies. Their actions also changed public discourse, occasioning a definitional debate on the values and vision that constitute Quebec society. Swayed by the revolutionary fervor of the student movement, April 22, Earth Day, elicited one of the largest actions in Montreal history (Fiddler, 2012), with an estimated 300 000 people taking to the streets to express their environmental dismay. It was in this growing culture of mass dissent that this research project offered a 10-week *ecological drama therapy* group for activists to explore issues of burnout-prevention and

1

self-care. This case study was based on the integration of two frameworks: *drama therapy* methods and processes, and a form of socio-ecological group work known as the *Work that Reconnects*.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Defining Activism

What is an activist, and why might activists be in particular need of self-care? For the purpose of this study, I will define *activist* in terms of Macy and Brown's (1998) definition of those engaged in the "heroic work" of "holding actions in defense of life on Earth," which "include political, legislative, and legal work required to slow down the destruction, as well as direct actions—blockades, boycotts, civil disobedience, and other forms of refusal" (pp.15-16). Activists may include anyone engaging in intentional, organized efforts to effect social, environmental or economic change, particularly in support of marginalized groups or the environment. Common tactics for engaging in activism include public awareness initiatives, popular education, direct action, civil disobedience, policy involvement, and the use of the arts with the goal of engendering meaningful change based on principles of social justice and environmental integrity. Although not all activists necessarily organize actions, for the purposes of this paper, the terms activist, social activist, political activist and organizer will be used interchangeably.

Drama therapy *role theory* (Landy, 2000) assumes that human beings take on and define their personalities through roles, and being an activist frequently entails playing many roles. Mann (2012) outlines twelve essential roles of the successful organizer, including: foot soldier, evangelist, recruiter, group builder, strategist, tactician, communicator, political educator, agitator, fund-raiser, comrade and confidante, and

cadre.

Activism may be professional and paid, such as working in non-profit community organizations, or it may be grassroots, volunteer and unpaid. In either case, activism is informed by a larger analysis of systemic problems and power, a commitment to undoing systems of oppression, and a desire to create a just and sustainable world.

Activists and Mental Health – A Look at Special Risk Factors

What are the mental health risks of being an activist? At its best, activism can be a source of rich inspiration, a context for the formation of meaningful relationships, and an opportunity for the expression of passionate and creative ethical ideals. But engaging at the frontline of environmental and social justice struggles also involves risks. Activists frequently suffer from exhaustion from their work and alienation from mainstream culture, and activist groups are commonly conditioned by norms in which certain emotional responses to the state of the world, such as guilt or anger, are seen as more acceptable to reveal than others, such as grief or despair (Jones, 2007a; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy & Johnstone, 2012; Renschler, 2008; Rodgers, 2010; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). In their early guidebook to the Work that Reconnects, Macy and Brown (1998) list "activist burnout" as one of many consequences of repression of pain for the world:

> When we are courageous enough to study the available data, they turn out to be more alarming than most of us had assumed. Many peace and environmental advocates, exposed to terrifying information in the course of their work, carry a heavy burden of knowledge. It is compounded by feelings of frustration, as they fight an uphill battle to arouse the public. Yet they view their own despair as

counterproductive to their efforts. They take no time to mourn. In their role as

mobilizers of the public will, they don't feel they can "let their hair down" and

expose the extent of their own distress. The consequent and continual repression

of feelings takes a toll on their energies that leaves them vulnerable to bitterness,

depression, exhaustion, and illness. (pp. 36-37)

Many activist groups function within a climate of campaign urgency, resource scarcity,

and guilt – the latter rooted in awareness of each member's implication in systems of

social injustice and environmental destruction. This climate feeds a culture in which

workaholic behavior is implicitly valorized, and eventual burnout far too common.

Although work culture certainly varies between activist groups, Rodgers' (2010)

description of the culture of self-sacrifice in Amnesty International may have some

application to activist groups more generally:

The ubiquitous discourse of selflessness pervades the internal dynamics of the

organization, and in terms of the emotional culture of the organization, it means

that displays of personal strain, sadness, or depression, while perhaps

understandable, are viewed by a considerable amount of the staff as unnecessary

and self-indulgent. Like the acceptance of meager pay or long working hours,

emotional distress is viewed as a sacrifice for the cause, and it is not regarded as

something that either the employee, his/her supervisor, or the organization as a

whole is compelled to deal with transparently and purposively. The selfless

employee is one who recognizes their physical and emotional needs and

professional aspirations as secondary to the moral authority of the victims of

human rights abuse and the volunteer members of the global organization. (p.

279)

Rodger's study points to the intense "emotional labor" frequently undertaken by paid and unpaid activists alike. In the case of Amnesty International, anger, indignation and compassion were encouraged as motivational and unifying forces, while the culture of the organization reinforced the repression of "unproductive" emotions, vicarious trauma responses and the need for self-care. This working culture appeared to engender high burnout and turnover rates in the organization.

In addition to internalized pressures and burnout, activists may face higher than average levels of exposure to external forces of violence and stress, putting them at risk for developing symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Trauma as a result of police brutality, or vicarious trauma from working in support of highly marginalized populations, are common. (Activist trauma support, n.d.; Jones, 2007a; Renschler, 2008; Rodgers, 2010; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Unpaid activists may also experience economic hardship, as they devote much of their energies to unpaid labor, and may have difficulty finding work that does not conflict with their political ideals. Many activists risk political censorship, expensive legal battles, or in worse cases, even torture as a result of their work. Since a person's activism is typically at odds with mainstream social values, as activists become more radical (for example, by choosing to engage in civil disobedience) they may suffer from social isolation as a result of alienation from family, friends and society in general.

Activism and Self-Care

Within the context of these risk factors, it appears that the topic of activist self-care and mental health is gradually moving from the margins towards inhabiting a more central place in activist discourse. In 2004, the sudden suicide of Halifax-based

environmental/social activist, Tooker Gomberg, shook activist communities and briefly brought the issue of activist mental health and self-care to the fore in the Canadian media (Bischoff, n.d.). In the United Kingdom, Activist Trauma Support (n.d.) is a network of "anti-capitalist activists who have either experienced or been close to people who have been affected by PTSD or other forms of mental health issues" (para. 7). The network aims to raise awareness and provide resources for activists in need of mental health support. Since 2002, the Icarus Project (n.d), part of a larger umbrella of organizations working in what's known as the radical mental health movement, has also done work to raise awareness on issues of activist burnout and self-care.

Recently published works by activists that deal directly with issues of self-care, trauma and burnout include *The Lifelong Activist,* a self-care guide by Hillary Rettig (2006), *Aftershock: Confronting Trauma in a Violent World* by Patrice Jones (2007a) and *Mindful Occupation: Rising up Without Burning Out,* by the Occupy Mental Health Project (OMHP, 2012)*.* The latter resource emerged directly out of an effort by activists involved in the Occupy Movement to deal with issues of self-care, mental health and stigma that they recognized were impacting their movement:

> Fundamentally, we recognize an urgency: if we are going to shift the current paradigm, we need a movement that has both the political savvy to understand how to fight the system, and the tools to take care of each other as the world gets even crazier. (p. 11)

Eric Mann's (2011) *Playbook for Progressives: 16 Qualities of the Successful Organizer* similarly includes chapters on personal sustainability and self-care.

Other more academic sources have sought to better understand the forces that lead

activists to burn out or stay engaged in movements over the long run (Cox, 2009, 2011;

Downton & Wehr, 1998; Klandermans, 2003; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Nepstad, 2004;

Renschler, 2008; Vaccaro & Mena, 2012). For example, Renschler (2008) studied the

relationship between self-esteem, coping and burnout in women of diverse backgrounds

who were engaging in women's reproductive rights activism. She found that women with

higher self-esteem who used approach coping strategies (in which they dealt directly with

their source of stress) were less likely to experience burnout, whereas women with

avoidance coping strategies experienced more burnout. Nepstad's (2004) study on

commitment and community in the Plowshares movement argued that this high-risk

movement was able to retain activist members over time through community building

strategies and consistent material and emotional support, which helped participants

overcome barriers such as burnout. A similarly fascinating study by Kovan and Dirkx

(2003) examined the "process of learning and self-renewal in the lives of committed and

experienced environmental activists" (p. 99). Their findings pointed to the idea that such

activists' lives are "characterized by struggles that represent a profound form of learning"

(p. 99), which involves relating to their work as both a calling and an opportunity for

personal growth. Simultaneously, Vaccaro and Mena (2012) have integrated an anti-

oppression framework into this discourse. Their work examines the impact of multiple

minority identities on increasing the risk of burnout for young, self-identified queer

activists of color. Yet despite this growing pool of academic research on activist self-care

and movement participation sustainability, it is questionable how much this body of

knowledge has directly served to improve the lives of activists themselves.

Indeed, the topic of self-care has not been met without contention in the activist

world. More recently, Loewe (2012) published a controversial article in an online activist journal calling for *An End to Self-Care*. Loewe argued that the notion of self-care is based on individualist "middle-class values of leisure" that "misses power dynamics in our lives, and attempts to serve as a replacement for a politics and practice of desire that could actually ignite our hearts with a fuel to work endlessly" (para. 2). To Loewe, "Lack of care is systemic. Therefore resistance to those systems is the highest affirmation of care for oneself and one's community. Movement work *is* healing work" (para. 11). Loewe's article ignited a flurry of critical response in the activist world (Adrienne, 2012; Ambrose, 2012; BRACE, 2012; Christopher, 2012; Hoelting, 2012; Kateel, 2012, Kissam, 2012; Mann, 2012; Maree, 2012; Midnight, 2012; Padamsee, 2012; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2012; Spectra, 2012). Several writers accused Loewe of being ableist, and of dangerously simplifying the issue at hand. Yet his article also catalyzed a discourse on the meaning of self-care within activist communities. These conversations point to the need to build theory and practices that would integrate self-care within larger cultures of collective care as essential expressions of environmental and social justice movements.

Why Drama Therapy for Activists?

Drama therapy is defined as "the intentional use of drama and/or theatre processes to achieve therapeutic goals" (North American Drama Therapy Association, 2013). Jones (2007b) defines drama therapy practice in terms of eight therapeutic *core processes* utilized by drama therapists to achieve such goals, including: dramatic projection, playing, role play and personification, drama therapeutic empathy and distancing, active witnessing, embodiment, life-drama connection, and transformation. Under this larger umbrella of processes, drama therapists utilize a wide array of techniques, methods, and

interventions to achieve therapeutic goals with diverse populations.

As a mental health modality, drama therapy may be particularly suited to activists as a population in addressing issues of mental health and self-care. Drama itself is an active art, and may call forth and capitalize on similar qualities of mobilization and dramatization of issues that are inherent in activist strategies (Guard, Martin, McGauley, Steedman, & Garcia-Orgales, 2012; Prendergast, 2011). Drama is also a highly social art, and so drama therapy may be an especially appropriate modality for supporting activists in working at the cross-section of personal, interpersonal, and larger social issues and traumas (Leveton, 2010; Sternberg & Garcia, 1989). Drama therapy group work could not only offer a space for activists to explore their feelings and develop a climate of mutual support, but the dramatic medium could also provide creative opportunities to imagine and embody new ways of being, both personally and in society more broadly.

Drama therapy, as a theatre-based discipline, is also related to various practices of political, grassroots or community-based theatre (Prendergast, 2011; Sajnani, 2009). Techniques such as *Theater of the Oppressed* (Boal, 2008) and other forms of *popular theater* have long been used as a basis for social activism. Guard et al. (2012) for example, discuss the use of popular theater as a form of activism to empower workers and revive unions. Prendergast (2011) discusses the diverse applications of *applied theatre* as a means and catalyst for social activism. Social movements and labor activists have long harnessed the power of popular theatre to challenge oppressive conditions, and to imagine and embody new social possibilities (Jasper, as cited in Guard et al., 2012).

Drama therapy itself has been used as a way to address diverse social issues, including: *Playback Theatre* to explore human rights and genocide (Sajnani, Linds,

Ndejuru & Wong, 2011); *Sociodrama* and drama therapy to work with collective trauma (Leveton, 2010); and *Developmental Transformations*-based play to challenge neo-liberalism in public spaces (Landers, 2012). Both the field of drama therapy, and of the creative arts therapies more broadly, are increasingly grappling with the question of how to incorporate anti-oppressive perceptions and goals into therapeutic frameworks, and how to envision creative art therapy practice as a form of social justice (Hocoy, 2007; Jones, 2010; Junge, Alvarez, Kellogg & Volker, 1993; Landers, 2012; Levine & Levine, 2011; Sajnani, 2012; Sajnani & Kaplan, 2012). However, no research to date has been published on using drama therapy to work with activists themselves on issues of self-care, or fostering emotionally sustainable participation in social/environmental movements.

Drama therapy group work may be especially fitting to meet the needs of activists concerning issues of self-care. When addressing painful feelings in response to social/environmental issues, Macy and Johnstone (2012) discuss the importance of working in groups in order to foster a sense of solidarity, and to help participants realize that they are not alone in their feelings. This may be especially pertinent in activist communities, where "unproductive" emotions for the world such as grief and despair are frequently suppressed (Jones, 2007a; Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy & Johnstone, 2012, Rodgers, 2010). Instead of relegating mental health and self-care to the private office of individual psychotherapy, activists could benefit from a group context consisting of other activist members, which might aid in the formation of new emotional social norms (Macy & Johnstone, 2012). Working at least initially with a drama therapist instead of or in conjunction with community-based support groups may hold additional advantages.

Since activists are frequently leaders and facilitators of group processes themselves (Mann, 2012), taking a break from the leadership role may serve as a relief, and a welcome opportunity to explore personal material within a safe and supportive context. As mental health professionals, drama therapists also bring a set of unique creative tools and mental health expertise, related, for example, to working with trauma. Over time, a drama therapy group for activists could serve as a bridge towards the creation of activist-run support groups, and the development of collective practices for activist self-care.

Why the Work that Reconnects?

In order to address the specific needs of activists, this case study integrated drama therapy methods and processes with a method known as the Work that Reconnects. The Work that Reconnects is a form of group work that Joanna Macy and colleagues have developed since the 1970's to help people grapple with feelings of ecological and social despair (Macy, 2007a, 2007b; Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy & Johnston, 2012).

> A central principle of the Work that Reconnects is that *pain for the world*, a
> phrase that covers a range of feelings, including outrage, alarm, grief, guilt, dread,
> and despair, is a normal, healthy response to a world in trauma. (Macy &
> Johnstone, 2012, p. 67)

Through a range of embodied exercises, dramatic role play, critical discussion, collective ritual, and structured forms of sharing, the Work that Reconnects aims to create an environment which helps people express repressed emotions about the state of the world, recognize that they are not alone in their feelings, integrate the painful reality of our time more fully, and experience a larger sense of interconnection and belonging as source of resilience and strength.

The Work that Reconnects itself consists of a diverse array of practices that are particularly pertinent to activist burnout prevention and self-care. Work that Reconnects workshops consist of four broad stages: Gratitude work, honouring pain for the world/despair work, perceptual shift/seeing with new eyes, and going forth. The structure of a workshop is pictured as a spiral rather than a line, because the stages repeat themselves, and often contain and go back in on each other. Each of the stages of the spiral of the Work that Reconnects are based on specific insights and practices which may be seen as an invitation to widen and deepen conventional notions of self-care to address a broader, socio-ecological context.

Gratitude work consists of exercises that help participants cultivate a sense of joy and wonder in life, and connect to what makes them feel grateful to be alive. Gratitude work can frequently overlap with dramatic play, in that it is embodied and joyful. Macy and Johnstone (2012) discuss the power of gratitude to build trust, wellbeing and generosity. They also conceive of gratitude as a "radical act" in that it goes against the pervasive thrust of personal and material dissatisfaction characteristic of the "Industrial Growth Society." Gratitude is an antidote to consumerism, and conveys the essential message of personal sufficiency. As such, gratitude as a practice is the first essential self-care tool that the Work that Reconnects offers.

Honouring pain for the world or despair work is the second stage of the Work that Reconnects process, and is particularly relevant for helping activists access and work through buried feelings about the state of the world. This stage of a workshop builds solidarity and trust, and serves to reframe pain for the world as a natural, healthy and widespread response to a planet in crisis. Using collective ritual and role-play, it also

serves to help participants integrate difficult socio-environmental realities more fully. Although many activists hold back from sharing their feelings of despair for the state of the world for fear of getting lost in unproductive emotions, paradoxically, the Work that Reconnects reveals that creating safe spaces to share and normalize these emotions can release a tremendous amount of creative energy and renewed enthusiasm.

> It is our consistent experience that as people open to the flow of their emotional experience, including despair, sadness, guilt, fury, or fear, they feel a weight being lifted from them. In the journey into the pain, something foundational shifts; a turning occurs.
>
> When we touch into our depths, we find that the pit is not bottomless. When people are able to tell the truth about what they know, see, and feel is happening to their world, a transformation occurs. There is an increased determination to act and a renewed appetite for life. (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, pp. 69-70)

The stage of honouring pain for the world is the heart of a Work that Reconnects workshop, and may offer a fundamental tool to activists in maintaining their motivation and energy to engage over the long-term.

The third stage of the Work that Reconnects is known as the perceptual shift or seeing with new eyes. This stage of the workshop flows naturally and experientially out of the former stage, and is characterized by a shift in one's sense of self, personal power and feeling of connection and belonging with the larger world. This is because "pain for the world arises out of our interconnectedness with all life" and sharing feelings of pain for the world "[opens] us to a source of strength and resilience as old and enduring as life

itself." One way in which Macy and her colleagues picture the perceptual shift is in terms of "widening circles" of perception and self-conception (Macy, 2007a; Macy 2007b; Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). Harnessing tools such as imaginative role play, Work that Reconnects exercises invite participants to widen their sense of self to include, for example, identification with other life-forms (the *ecological self*), or widen their sense of time to be able to perceive our current reality from a larger perspective of past or future (*deep time*). Work that Reconnects exercises in this stage may include taking on the role of another life form, ancestor, or future human, or using our minds and bodies to perceive and enact our place in geological time. This stage of the workshop offers a bouquet of perceptual and creative self-care tools that enhance activists' sense of personal power, belonging, and creative energy in order to engage for the long haul.

The fourth and final stage of the workshop, going forth, focuses on helping participants integrate insights from the Work that Reconnects process, and apply them directly to their lives and work. In the context of integrating the Work that Reconnects within a group drama therapy process, this goal is achieved gradually throughout the therapy process, as participants engage in weekly sessions and integrate insights within their daily experience of self-care.

In sum, the Work that Reconnects holds within it an array of tools which are at once highly pertinent and at the same time radically challenging of conventional notions of self-care in activist communities. The workshops provide a safe space for activists to engage in self-care from personal, interpersonal and socio-ecological perspectives. Instead of propagating a vision of self-care which necessarily demands that activists step back from the world in order to tend to the self, the Work that Reconnects proposes an

alternative structure of support that both acknowledges the intersection of self and world, and provides avenues for a self-care that ultimately enhance, rather than detract from, an activist's engagement.

The Work that Reconnects in Context

The Work that Reconnects itself originates in an activist context. Joanna Macy is a scholar of Buddhism and systems theory, as well as a long-time peace and environmental activist (Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). Along with her colleagues, Macy developed The Work the Reconnects in order to help activists work through feelings of ecological despair, and build solidarity and a sense of empowerment. The Work that Reconnects draws its theoretical underpinnings from diverse sources of inspiration, including social justice and environmental activism, *living systems theory*, the *deep ecology* movement and Buddhist teachings.

Although the Work that Reconnects has rooted its identity primarily in social activism rather than in psychology, its focus on issues of motivation, trauma and emotional processes in relation to the state of the world associate it strongly to the emerging field of *ecopsychology*. Ecopsychology, defined as the study of human beings' psychological relationship with the rest of the natural world (Buzzel & Chalquist, 2009; Roszak, 2001; Roszak, Gomes & Kanner, 1995) is a term that came into being in 1992 with the publication of Theodore Roszak's (2001) seminal work *The Voice of the Earth.* Since then, the field of ecopsychology has continued to develop theory and interventions that respond to an era of pervasive ecological alienation and despair (Buzzel & Chalquist, 2009; Davis & Atkins, 2009; Fisher, 2002; Macy, 1995; Roszak, Gomes & Kanner, 1995; Weintrobe, 2013).

To date, relatively little research has been conducted on the Work that Reconnects per se. Only Hsu (2010) has performed phenomenological research exploring the stories of participants who have engaged in Work that Reconnects workshops. He found that the qualities of increased hope, perspective and awareness were characteristic of the workshop experience for participants, as well as high levels of empathy among participants and the release of deeply held emotions (p. 68). Latham (2010) also discusses the Work that Reconnects in the context of her work as an environmental activist, and still other authors have discussed the Work that Reconnects in the context of participatory environmental education or epistemology (Fessenden, 2007; Meacham, 2011; Meehan, 2010). Hollis-Walker (2012) has compared change processes in the Work that Reconnects and *Emotion-Focused Therapy*. No research to date has been done on adapting the Work that Reconnects explicitly within a therapy or drama therapy context. Adapting the Work that Reconnects as a form of ecological drama therapy holds rich new possibilities for research inquiry and clinical practice.

The Work that Reconnects and Drama Therapy

While the Work that Reconnects is not explicitly a form of drama therapy, the two approaches are complimentary and hold much in common. The Work that Reconnects utilizes drama therapy-like processes, including creative ritual and role play. The *Council of All Beings* (Macy & Brown, 1998; Seed, Macy, Flemming & Naess, 1988), a Work that Reconnects exercise in which participants are invited to take on the role of a non-human and share their concerns about the state of the world, exemplifies the use of dramatic ritual and role play in this method. Additionally, the Work that Reconnects emphasizes the importance of the ecological self and the capacity to widen a sense of

identification and empathy for life (which is in part achieved through role play of, for example, other life forms) (Macy, 2007b; Macy & Brown, 1998). This concept of widening self-identification is similar to the notion of expanding role repertoire and dramatic empathy that are elements of drama therapy core processes (Landy, 2000; Jones, 2007b). Moreover, the Work that Reconnects' emphasis on body-centered, sensorial experience in exercises such as the Mirror Walk (Macy and Brown, 1998, p. 88) is similar to the core process of embodiment in drama therapy. Embodiment in drama therapy "involves the way the self is realized by and through the body. The body is often described as the primary means by which communication occurs between self and other" (Jones, 2007b, p. 113). Indeed, many Work that Reconnects exercises promote the integration of conceptual, sensorial and emotional ways of communicating and integrating information.

Macy and Johnstone (2012) describe how the Work that Reconnects answers to a broad cultural need for rituals that could respond to collective and planetary trauma:

> Each day we lose valuable parts of our biosphere as species become extinct and ecosystems destroyed – yet where is their funeral service? If our world is dying piece by piece without our publicly and collectively expressing our grief, we might easily assume that these losses aren't important. (p. 71)

Drama therapists, with their specialized understanding in designing transformational dramatic rituals, could contribute to the Work that Reconnects by enhancing existing interventions or proposing new ones. Drama therapy interventions combined with the Work that Reconnects could support groups and individuals to integrate the implications of ecological destruction, social injustice and collective trauma on a highly creative,

embodied level.

Towards an Ecological Drama Therapy for Activists

The Work that Reconnects, with its emphasis on ritual, imagination, role play and embodied exercises, holds much in common with drama therapy processes, and introduces a powerful framework for working with feelings related to socio-ecological despair. Drama therapy, similarly, offers a distinct set of techniques and perceptions that could serve to enhance and deepen the Work that Reconnects model. The meeting of these two approaches is a fertile ground for cross-pollination. This case study is an exploration of the integration of the Work that Reconnects with a group drama therapy process, with the goal of helping a group of activists explore issues related to self-care. The drama therapy approach itself consisted of diverse methods and processes, including Jones' (2007b) core processes, Playback Theatre, Emunah's (1994) *Five-Phase Model* of drama therapy and Silverman's *Story Within* (2004).

In combining these two frameworks, this I am proposing the creation of an ecological drama therapy. The word *ecology* is rooted in the Greek word *oikos*, meaning home. This research is an invitation to create and engage in drama therapy practice that is rooted in the perception of our fundamental relatedness with, and responsibility to, all peoples and forms of life with which we share this planet home.

<center>**Chapter Two: Methodology**</center>

Purpose of the Research

The goal of the research was to integrate the Work that Reconnects with drama therapy processes in order to facilitate exploration of the theme of self-care with a group of environmental/social activists. For the purposes of this study, self-care was defined as

<center>18</center>

the capacity to be self-aware of one's feelings and needs, and to proactively choose to look after one's emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing, both in daily life and in stressful situations. Simultaneously, using an ecological framework invited a larger conception of self-care, one that regards the self as embedded and interconnected within larger ecological and social systems and communities. One intention, in integrating Work that Reconnects and drama therapy frameworks, was to begin to imagine and realize the beginnings of an ecological drama therapy. Rather than focusing primarily on the client as an individual self, ecological drama therapy would aim to address both personal and collective responses to social and ecological suffering.

Because activists position themselves on the edge of social/ecological struggles, it was assumed that they could derive particular benefit from a group ecological drama therapy approach. Indeed, the literature reveals that activists' needs for self-care may be accentuated by higher than average levels of exposure to external forces of violence and stressful situations (such as police brutality) (Jones, 2007a), as well as internalized pressures augmented by knowledge of painful injustices, and activist cultures the valorize personal martyrdom or workaholic behavior (Renschler, 2008). These external and internalized factors may lead to increased vulnerability to developing symptoms of burnout, isolation, alienation, trauma and post-traumatic stress (Cox, 2011; Jones, 2007a; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy & Johnstone, 2012; Renschler, 2008; Rodgers, 2010; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Instead of propagating a vision of self-care that necessarily demands that activists step back from the world in order to tend to the self, an ecological drama therapy model would aim to provide an alternative structure of support which could ultimately be integrated within larger activist movement(s). An ecological

vision of self-care would acknowledge the intersection of self and world, with the aim of enhancing, rather than detracting from, an activist's long-term engagement.

The research inquiry took the form of an instrumental group case study, and utilized qualitative data gathered from a short-term, ten-week ecological drama therapy process. Sub-goals of the therapeutic process were: to support participants to take part in critical dialogue about the role of self-care in activist culture(s); to create a safe space for participants to share and normalize feelings of pain for the world; to deepen participants' connection to nature and to their own creativity as a source of renewal; and to share a set of ecological self-care tools and practices that could support participants in their activism and lives.

Through a series of group sessions interweaving theory and practices from drama therapy with the Work that Reconnects, the research aimed to adapt the Work that Reconnects to a group drama therapy context, as well as highlight similarities, compatibilities and differences between the two approaches. The ultimate goal of the research was to take steps towards developing a model for ecological drama therapy: a framework that would incorporate strengths, insights and processes from both drama therapy and the Work that Reconnects. This approach aimed to support the mental health of individual clients/participants, while acknowledging, and even encouraging participants to engage emotionally with, the larger social/ecological realities of our time. While this form of work was especially pertinent to addressing the needs of social activists, the research suggests the possibility of adapting the approach to suit other populations as well – arguably, anybody who is affected, disenfranchised or disheartened by the current state of our world.

The Research Questions

The primary research question was as follows: "How can the Work that Reconnects be integrated with drama therapy processes to facilitate exploration of self-care with social activists?"

Along the same line of inquiry, the subsidiary research questions were:

1) How would the Work that Reconnects need to be adapted to suit a therapeutic context?

2) How can drama therapy core processes and models (particularly Emunah, 1994; Jones, 2007b; Silverman, 2004) both compliment and enhance the practices found in the Work that Reconnects?

3) What are the general therapeutic needs of social activists, and why might the Work that Reconnects and drama therapy be particularly relevant methods of addressing these needs?

4) How is self-care perceived within activist cultures and contexts, and which tools and ways of envisioning self-care are useful to activists in supporting them to engage in their work over the long-term?

These questions guided the case study interventions and design, as well as the data collection and analysis.

The Clinical Setting and Forming the Group

The group took place in a free space generously provided by a church in Montreal. The sessions were offered in a large empty carpeted room, featuring colorfully painted murals of animals in their natural habitats from around the world. Although this decoration was incidental, the walls complimented the ecological theme of the group, and

served as an invitation to imagine the participation of the more-than-human world in the sessions. Additionally, the church was located not far from a large urban park. The outdoor setting was used for a portion of session 5, in order to engage in outdoor, embodied activities related to the ecological self. Although several participants shared that they initially felt some ideological trepidation about meeting in a religious setting, they were soon able to let go of this initial discomfort. On the other hand, participants were eager and delighted to work outside in session 5. In this case, he safety that had been developed in the group seemed to allow participants to engage in the exercises without hesitation or self-consciousness, even in a public setting.

In order to form the group, a one-page description of the project advertising "a free Ecological Drama Therapy group for social activists, exploring issues of self-care" (see Appendix A) was created. The advertisement was circulated in both French and English, although it specified that the group would be offered in English. The advertisement outlined the nature and purpose of the 10-week research case study group, and invited interested activists to contact the researcher for more information. The advertisement was promoted via a variety of electronic activist networks in Montreal, including QPIRG McGill and QPIRG Concordia listserves, the Centre for Community Organizations' (COCo) monthly news bulletin, and Occupy Montreal and the McGill School of Environment listserves, as well as through social media and word of mouth. Although the above contact list was certainly Anglophone-centric and by no means exhaustive, the outreach was intended to draw interest from a variety of social justice and environmental activist communities. By drawing participants from diverse activist communities, it was hoped that confidentiality levels in the group would increase, and the

chances of participants knowing each other outside of the group would be minimized. Additionally, some people who received the advertisement forwarded it to additional activist networks (for example, several members of the Raging Grannies of Montreal contacted me after someone had passed the information through their electronic network).

Following the dissemination of publicity material in late January 2012, interested parties were asked to email the researcher by mid-February for more information. Approximately twenty-six email inquiries were received from interested parties, many of whom seemed excited by the very fact that this form of work was being offered. Perhaps the group was answering to a need for activist self-care that was not being adequately addressed in the larger public and activist communities. Following initial contact by email, potential participants were contacted by phone and informed about the group goals and logistics, in order to determine whether the group would be a good fit for them. Approximately twenty potentially interested participants were contacted. Some of these individuals automatically withdrew themselves from the pool of potential participants because they were not able to make the time commitment or the three potential weekly time slots for the group; others were disqualified from participating because they did not engage in activism.

Following the phone conversation, if a prospective participant was interested and seemed like a good fit for the group, he/she was sent an electronic copy of the consent information letter and form (see Appendices B and C), and an in-person pre-group-interview was arranged. The bulk of the pre-interviews were conducted over a two-week period in late-February, in an office space generously provided by a church in Montreal. At the onset of the interview meeting, each interviewee read the consent information

letter and was invited to ask any questions; he/she then signed the consent form to participate in the research before engaging in the interview. The interviews were documented through hand-written notes, as well as by audio recording. The pre-interviews took the form of a semi-structured topical interview, following the set of 20 questions listed in Appendix D (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Marshall and Rossman, 2011).

The interview questions aimed to gain insight into participants' activist backgrounds and their relationship to self-care. The structure of the questions was not rigid. At times, new questions were added or skipped according to the context and flow of the interview (in the case for example if the interviewee had already answered a question). On average, the pre-interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour in length. Seven pre-interviews were conducted in total, and six out of seven interviewees were selected to join the group. One participant was excluded due to mental health needs that were beyond the scope of the therapeutic intervention of the research. Suitable referral information was provided.

The Case Study Group

The case study group began with six female activists, but after the second session one participant chose to withdraw from the group, thus reducing the group to five participants who committed to the entire process together (see the discussion of the early sessions in Chapter Three concerning Lorraine's choice to leave the group). Although the group had been open to male and female participants alike, only four of the initial twenty-six people who emailed with interest in the group were male. Of these four, three were not available during the group times or able to make the commitment, and the remaining

one was not suitable for the group. Thus the group ended up being an all-female group, perhaps contributing to a sense of safety and cohesiveness in the group. This possibility was supported in the closing interviews, when April shared that having an all-female group "made the space feel much safer for me and allowed me to open up in a way that I don't know if I would have been able to if a man was present." Additionally, the high ratio of females interested in this work potentially reflected a documented tendency for women to be more likely to seek psychological support (Koydemir-Özden, 2010; Nam et al., 2010; Sheu & Sedlacek, 2004).

In terms of diversity, the group was relatively homogenous in other respects too: all participants were university-educated, and only one participant (Jackie) identified as an immigrant woman of color. Although no information was collected with regards to participants' gender identities, five out of six of the participants identified that they were in heterosexual relationships at the time of the group. With the exception of one participant, Lorraine, who decided to discontinue her participation after the second session, all of the ongoing members were in their twenties or thirties, and were English speakers.

In terms of activism, the group participants represented a diversity of progressive interests and backgrounds, including: international human rights solidarity; refugee and migrant worker solidarity; working with survivors of sexual assault; environmental activism, particularly against oil and gas; organizing a conference on creating a sustainable economy; First Nations solidarity, peace activism with the Raging Grannies, and the student movement. Only one of the six participants identified as a "career activist" and was paid for *some* of her activist work (Jackie), while *all* of the participants

engaged in volunteer activism. The activist participants represented a diversity of issues and causes within the larger umbrella of social justice and environmental activism.

The Case Study Participants

The following descriptions of the group participants are based on the information gathered in the pre-group interviews. The descriptions aim to outline the basics of each person's activist background and relationship to activism, as well as their relationship to self-care and intentions and expectations at the time of entering the group. Please note that names of individuals have been changed, and certain identifying personal details have been left out, in order to help preserve the confidentiality of the participants.

April. April was an undergraduate student in her early twenties. She saw herself as an activist and defined activism as "a general awareness" and "constant effort to learn more about [her] environment," and to "make society better." Her activist experience included doing human rights solidarity work in Latin America, migrant worker and refugee solidarity, organizing anti-oppression workshops for students, popular education work on sexual and reproductive health with young girls in a developing country, and general student activism at her university. She defined self-care as being aware of her limits in order to stay healthy, and said that she frequently works too much and has trouble asserting or identifying her limits. Taking walks on Mont Royal, eating healthy food, creative writing and seeing a therapist regularly over the last year were actions that April identified as integral to her self-care. April had started seeing a counselor because she had received a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), following a very stressful experience she had lived through in Latin America. She described friends who were kidnapped, and knowing someone who had been murdered within the context of

Latin American human rights solidarity work. Since then she had struggled with symptoms of anxiety, paranoia, feeling dissociated from reality, easily triggered into overwhelming sadness, and nightmares. The recent death of a professor's friend, and the university's calling in of riot police to brutally control student protestors on campus, had caused her to feel increasingly unsafe in Montreal as well. She described feeling burnt out "a couple times this year," and had struggled with feeling that she did not want to be involved in activism anymore. April's motivation for joining the group was that she had seen a lot of people close to her go through the pattern of "being so involved and then burning out and becoming suicidal... We know this isn't sustainable." She was excited about working in a group context, meeting interesting people and learning new strategies for self-care. She thought of the group as "an excuse to engage in more creative thinking" and creativity, which were important to her.

Jackie. Jackie was in her late twenties and had engaged in multiple environmental, feminist and social justice struggles. She considered herself to be both a career activist and a volunteer activist. Her work over the last three years had centered on working in a rape crisis centre, as well as doing migrant justice solidarity work for people without status in Canada. She described her relationship to self-care as an everyday struggle, and at the time of starting the group she said that she was struggling with burnout and compassion fatigue. She described having had a few weeks of acute symptoms a couple months before, marked by a sense of failure, feelings of depression and not want to get out of bed. She also described how the political climate following the re-election of the majority-Conservative government had been an alienating factor leading to her burnout, and that she tended to take politics personally. Jackie described

struggling with feelings of anger at injustice, guilt for her privilege, as well as personal isolation (including from her family) as a result of her activism. She described struggling with vicarious trauma and feelings of emotional fragility and discouragement about the world as a result of her work in a rape crisis centre. She defined self-care as "being balanced," which included spending time with friends and being in nature. She described nature as a peaceful place where she could be relieved of all the pressures she carries, where she could feel connected to "something bigger," and to a "resilient beauty that will remain." She did not feel she was in a state of balance on entering the group, although she had made helpful commitments to herself in the last year to go to bed early, to cook each week, and to journal daily. She hoped attending the group would help her be accountable to her own needs for self-care over a sustained period. Her reasons for wanting to enter the group were to explore her interest in the links between creativity and healing, and to meet and connect to others who were going through similar struggles. She expressed her wish for a sense of solidarity in the group, and her need for the group to be a safe and confidential space.

Jessica. Jessica was a woman in her early twenties, a part-time university student, and identified herself as a passionate radical activist. Despite her energy and enthusiasm, Jessica described how her ideals had caused her to have difficulty maintaining a job, and that she struggled with ongoing depression. At the time of starting the group, she felt she was on the edge of burnout, and experiencing financial stress. Jessica appeared to be on a steep learning curve about environmental issues, and expressed both feelings of intense despair as well as impassioned motivation to engage in activism. Her activism primarily consisted of volunteering on the organizing team of an upcoming conference on creating

a sustainable economy at a local university. She believed her involvement in organizing this conference had put strain on her relationship with her boyfriend, and had led her to be fired from a corporate job "due to [her] radical views." Jessica defined self-care as being active, eating healthy and "getting out there and meeting people." At the time of entering the group, Jessica felt that she was "failing at self-care." Jessica described symptoms of burnout, depression, social isolation and feeling easily overwhelmed. At times she struggled with suicidal thoughts and feelings that "it's too late" for the planet to survive. Losing her last job had been a traumatic experience for her, and she described a recurrent demoralizing cycle of job searching and job loss, which she attributed to her political beliefs. Jessica was self-aware about needing to work on team-work skills and boundaries, and that sometimes certain topics could make her feel sensitive and "need to take a breath of air" or "be reminded to take a step back." She identified some of these issues as related to her diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Her goals for participating in the group were to overcome isolation and "feel surrounded" by people with similar interests, and to find out how others are coping. She also talked about wanting to increase her level of self-awareness, and "learn to love myself more."

Lorraine. Lorraine was a Francophone woman in her late seventies at the time of entering the group. She had heard about the group through her participation in The Raging Grannies, a progressive political group of women seniors. Lorraine's definition of an activist was "a person who really gets involved, manifesting beliefs about important issues." Lorraine had indeed been involved in many social justice struggles over the course of her life. Over the last four decades she had organized a one-week peace march, protesting missile cruisers; she had been active about issues of racism in her community;

and she had been involved in numerous anti-war protests. Despite her long-term engagement, Lorraine had grown disillusioned with the peace movement, and seemed to be struggling with feelings of disappointment about her political work. Although she still defined herself as a pacifist, she had withdrawn from protest work in favor of involving herself politically through more creative means, as a musician and singer/songwriter. Lorraine defined self-care as "to be happy to do what you're doing," including to sleep well, to sing, and "to be able to let go." She described her daily discipline of meditation, prayer, exercise and making music as essential to her self-care practice. Lorraine's goals for joining the group were to get involved, learn, explore and to give to others without taking on the role of "savior."

Megan. Megan was an undergraduate student in her early twenties. Though she saw the title of activist as a problematic label, she still considered herself an activist, and aimed to "incorporate resistance into day to day life." She defined activism as "diverse forms of resisting to normative cultural," saying that for her the label had progressive, anti-neoliberal implications. Megan had been involved in various activist campaigns since high school, but most recently, in university, had gotten involved in a student activist group that worked in solidarity with newcomers to Canada, including refugees and migrant workers. Additionally, she had organized direct actions as part of the student movement, and had been active generally in student organizing around campus. In terms of self-care, Megan felt that she had not been engaging in much self-care recently, although she described her living situation with roommates as a source of support. Having regular dinners with her roommates, drinking enough water, and doing more exercise were all activities she engaged in to take care of herself and were a source of

happiness for her. Megan described coming from a "close extended family" and a "healthy happy childhood," although she also reported feeling misunderstood by them, particularly her father, who did not understand why she would be "willing to risk physical harm" by engaging in direct actions. In terms of her physical and mental health, Megan described struggling with frequent migraines, which she attributed to feeling afraid and angry since witnessing police brutality against her friends the previous autumn. She described having had a difficult first couple years in university, in which she had felt extremely isolated, and had struggled with depression. She linked these feelings to the transition of moving to another city, away from her family, as well as to despair about social issues. This year, her third year, Megan felt more supported by friendships in the activist community, but continued to struggle with feelings of burnout, depression, emotional desensitization, and loneliness, primarily in response to social struggles that she was involved in. She said she was "distraught" and "terrified" that "peaceful revolutions don't usually work," and described how painful it was to "see friends beat up [by police]." Megan appeared to be riddled with feelings of guilt over her own social privilege as a white woman, and had "trouble justifying why I deserve to be in this group." She also described feeling guilty that many of her family members were suffering with mental and physical health issues, while she was studying away and focused on activism. She described engaging in a "life of extremes" in which she tended to either completely throw herself into an activist project, or to completely drop out of organizing for periods of time. In entering the group, she said she wanted to learn to approach her work from a more balanced perspective, feel motivated, form new relationships, gain new perspectives, and learn to be a better support to others. Megan had some concerns about

31

the fact that she and April were close mutual friends, and worried that that fact might impact the group dynamic, although she was happy for April to join the group. (Since she had been the first to contact me, I gave her the option that I could not interview her friend, but she declined this offer.) She felt assured by the fact that I said she could be transparent to the group about this on the first day, and discuss any dynamics that might arise, but that I was confident it would be fine.

Sarah. Sarah was an Anglophone professional in her early thirties, and was in her second trimester of pregnancy with her first child when she first started the group. Sarah had participated as a volunteer activist in a number of social justice and environmental struggles, including trying to start a free school and protests against oil and shale gas exploitation. She also had strong relationships with two First Nations communities in Quebec, and some of her activism had been done in solidarity with these communities. At the time of starting the group, Sarah did not necessarily relate to the title of "activist," but rather thought of her engagement as simply an expression of "what it means to be human," "to care," "to take responsibility" and "to see everything as family, as a relation." Part of the way Sarah had grown towards embodying these values had been to begin to learn and practice Native spiritual ceremonies and understandings, which she felt were difficult to practice in a city. At the time of the group, Sarah was in a period of transition with her partner as they awaited the birth of their first child, and prepared to move to the country. Sarah's definition of self-care was to "take a moment to balance myself" and to be "self-aware." She stated in the opening interview that, "If I am not okay, I cannot realize my role." She described struggling with burnout and that in the past she had had a lot of anger, but that her spiritual practices had been a help to her in

calming her anger. Practicing daily ceremonies and being in touch with the cycles of nature were a source of strength for her. Here intention in joining the group was to take time for consistent self-care, and to connect, share and learn with others about how to stay balanced, even in times of stress. She expected to attain insight, to learn to assert herself and communicate her needs better, and to "stay calmer."

Research Design

Participants took part in a series of 10 ecological drama therapy sessions of approximately two to three hours each. The sessions were initially two hours, but this did not seem to be enough time, so mid-way through the series the session times were increased to two and a half hours, with the exception of session 9, the Council of All Beings, which was increased to three hours. In addition, each participant took part in an hour-long pre- and post-interview before and after the series. These interviews allowed me as a therapist/researcher to screen and select the participants, get to know participants' needs, begin to form trust with participants before the sessions, and gather feedback about the impact of the sessions after the series was complete.

In terms of participation, the group began with six participants, but dropped down to five after the second session. Following session 7, two of the participants (Megan and April) ended up terminating early with the group due to unforeseen schedule changes and demands in preparation for their trip to Latin America for the purpose of human rights solidarity activism. Megan terminated after session 7, and April terminated after session 8. Although all participants participated in the post-group interviews, Megan and April answered the questions in written form, by email, since they were in a developing country where access to telecommunications was limited.

The sessions were designed to support participants to explore and enhance their practice and understanding of self-care in their lives and activism. Drama therapy processes such as dramatic ritual, role-play, embodiment and improvisational play (Jones, 2007b) were utilized in combination with activities and processes adapted from the Work that Reconnects to achieve this goal.

Methodology: Instrumental Group Case Study

The research methodology used was the instrumental group case study. Case study research "involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). In the instrumental case study, the researcher studies a particular case in order to provide insight into a larger issue or theoretical question (Berg, 2007; Stake, 2005). The case serves to advance and demonstrate the researcher's understanding of a particular question or theoretical stance. This particular approach was pertinent because the research aimed to investigate the integration of two frameworks (drama therapy and the Work that Reconnects), as well as the larger social issue of self-care within activist communities. Thus the case study was conducted as a way to gain insight into these larger issues and frameworks.

Data Collection

Research data was collected with full participant consent in the form of participant pre- and post-group interviews, therapist/researcher observations of the group process, process and progress notes of the researcher, audio recording of each of the sessions, video recording of session 9, photographs and, in some cases, collecting of participants' artwork, including drawings, masks and creative journal entries. (Participants were encouraged to take their artwork with them at the end of the series,

however some participants chose not to take certain pieces.) Other research data included historical and theoretical research into relevant topics that could inform the therapy practice such as activist self-care, ecotherapy, environmental philosophy, popular education, and drama therapy processes.

The collected data included semi-structured interviews with clients before and after the therapeutic process, observations in the form of progress notes, reflective journaling in the form of process notes, participants' visual artwork, creative writing and photos of participants' artwork, audio tapes of sessions and a video tape of session 9. (Please see Appendices for sample copies of the research instruments, including advertising material, informed consent forms, and interview questions.) Throughout the entire research process, special care was taken with regards to ethical considerations, and appropriate measures were taken in order to minimize risks and prevent harm to participants in the study. Particular attention was given to protecting participants' confidentiality in the recorded data.

Data Analysis

The methods used to analyze the collected data included: therapeutic interpretations, identification of patterns within the experiences of the participants in the case study, and making naturalistic generalizations (Creswell, 2007). Naturalistic generalizations involved examining the data and using analytical induction to draw larger generalizations and conclusions, which either support or challenge the theoretical point of view of the researcher. In addition, data such as the progress and process notes were analyzed according to specific guiding themes (Yin, 2009), which had been established by the goals of the instrumental case study design. These guiding themes were the

development of the theme of self-care, and the integration of drama therapy and Work that Reconnects methods. Theoretically, the analysis and discussion of the case study data were informed by multiple frameworks, including ecopsychology, deep ecology, the Work that Reconnects, and drama therapy theory, particularly Jones' (2007b) core drama therapy processes, Silverman's (2004) Story Within, and Emunah's (1994) Five-Phase Model of drama therapy group work.

Finally, the research was also informed by feminist standpoint epistemology (Brooks, 2007), given that the research had overt political implications and goals. The research aimed to empower individuals by building psychological self-care resources that would allow them to more fully take part in social justice and environmental activism for a better world.

Reflexivity and Subjective Positioning

Core assumptions. As an individual researcher, I entered into this research with a number of assumptions, some of which I was aware of, and some of which I became aware of through the process of research inquiry. Assumptions that I was aware of bringing into the research were as follows:

- That people do feel pain on behalf of our world;
- That we are living in a time in which the earth's life-support systems are severely compromised and in crisis;
- That many people carry strong and difficult feelings and responses about the state of the planet including despair, hopelessness, anger, apathy, numbness, disassociation, fear, worry and depression, and that these feelings are a natural response to a planet in crisis;

- That acknowledging, and witnessing others acknowledge, these painful feelings about the state of the world can be a source of empowerment;

- That in order to connect to the natural world, it is helpful to cultivate a sense of embodied play and presence;

- That taking action on behalf of the world is desirable and necessary;

- That there are diverse ways of engaging in activism;

- That we are a living part of a living planet that is intelligent and self-organizing, and therefore our personal responses to the state of the world are part of that living intelligence;

- And finally, that the self is a flexible construct, and that it is possible to widen our sense of empathic self-identification to include the natural world.

Many of these assumptions were based on the core assumptions and goals of the Work that Reconnects (Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 58-60), and my experience as a Work that Reconnects facilitator. These assumptions both impacted the types of interventions I used, and my interpretation of the participants' responses. For example, I interpreted participants' sharing of feelings of despair about social issues as an important part of the self-care process, connecting them to their sense of relatedness to the larger world. Indeed, many of the interventions I chose were aimed to foster insights and experiences that followed from my assumptions.

Social positioning, power and privilege. I was equally aware that my position as a white, middle-class, university educated, female environmentalist/feminist would create a certain bias in my research towards values that emanate from such a privileged and specific social context. As a researcher, I aimed to be alert to and interested in how my

biases and assumptions might affect my approach to the research, and be equally aware that participants in my study may not share those same assumptions. These biases seemed to particularly come to light, for example, when I chose to speak to the group's discomfort with Lorraine's use of stereotyping language about First Nations people. In this case, though I did try to reach out to Lorraine and minimize her alienation, I may have tacitly identified more with other participants in the room, who were younger and informed by more current social justice frameworks.

Similarly, many of the interventions I proposed in the second half of the series, particularly with regards to the ecological self, were based in a more ecological, rather than a social-justice-informed framework, which is a reflection of my own environmentalist background. Nevertheless, my experience working in feminist organizing also impacted my work, and despite the ecological focus, I was conscious of trying to work from a social justice-informed point of view. I believe most of the interventions created a context that was equally relevant to social justice and environmental activism.

Entering the research, I was aware of expecting that the social activists in my group were likely to possess increased awareness around issues of oppression and power dynamics, both in the group and within society more broadly. Thus I assumed that my self-reflexive attitude and transparent naming of my position of power as a therapist would be especially important in building participants' trust in the group process. Awareness of my own biases and assumptions, through journaling and self-inquiry, were an ongoing component of my research.

I was indeed right that the activists in the group were sensitized to issues of

oppression and power dynamics. However, ultimately I found that the participants were much more concerned about creating a safe and non-oppressive space as peers within the group itself, than they were about my specific role as a therapist. For example, April and Megan were conscientious about wanting to be transparent to the group that they knew each other from outside of the group. Similarly, the group explored the issue of avoiding oppressive language in session 2. Even though I possessed a different power role than the group members, my role was explicit, and in choosing to take part in a therapy group, it seemed that participants had tacitly agreed to allow me to play this role. Moreover, participants appeared to appreciate not being in a leadership role within the group, and seemed to draw a sense of comfort and containment from allowing me to guide them through a process as therapist/researcher.

The dual role of therapist/researcher. Prior to beginning the group, I was aware of a potential ethical concern in the fact that I would play a dual role as both therapist and researcher. I was conscious that this dual role could pose some ethical dilemmas at times, since the two roles may have differing goals; the researcher is concerned with data collection in relation to her theoretical framework, while the therapist is concerned about maximizing therapeutic value for the participants. However, in the end this dual role did not appear problematic or contradictory. Since my methodology was a case study, it made sense for me to primarily play a therapist role in the group process. Part of my aim of the research was to investigate a certain set of interventions within a given framework. For the most part, however, these interventions felt pertinent to the needs of the group, as they were guided by the participant's needs and process around the theme of self-care. Despite wanting to test these interventions, a sense of flexible adaptability was built into

my intervention style, and I was able to retain my ability to improvise and adapt sessions to meet emergent needs of participants.

In general then, when leading the therapy sessions, I conceived of my primary role as that of a therapist, while my researcher role came more into play more through the recording of data, largely through taking notes after the sessions. Although my researcher role was also evident in the sessions in the fact that I audio-recorded each session, this fact did not seem to disrupt the flow of the group. Of course, the population I was working with was high functioning, and the group participants themselves, emotionally sophisticated. They seemed to have no trouble understanding the dual nature of my role. On the contrary, the gratitude that participants expressed for being part of the group, and the benefits they seemed to derive, appeared to outweigh any inconvenience at my need to collect data. Participants were highly supportive of my researcher endeavors, and went out of their way to furnish me with the information I needed (for example, by attending the post-group interviews).

The dual role of therapist/facilitator. Perhaps the most interesting dual role that I found myself grappling with over the course of the research was the contrast between approaching the group as I would have as a facilitator of the Work that Reconnects, versus as a therapist. I seemed to have a preconceived notion that a therapist must be at once more personally opaque, play the role of witness, and be more responsive to the emergent emotional needs of the participants. By contrast, I seemed to perceive the role of facilitator as one in which it would be appropriate to reveal more about his or her relevant personal history, focus less on personal issues of participants, and pursue a more structured, at times didactic, approach to foster group learning.

Though I conceived of my primary role as a drama therapist, my history as a Work that Reconnects facilitator, and the context of working with activists, definitely impacted my therapeutic style. Although my interventions maintained an element of improvisation and flexibility, I also employed a more structured approach as a result of integrating the Work that Reconnects framework. There were moments when I worked more didactically – stepping into a "teaching role" as I shared cognitive frameworks from the Work that Reconnects that I hoped would support the participant's experiential learning. In general, it was most helpful when these more theoretical pieces were integrated into the natural flow of group discussion and insight. The Work that Reconnects exercises were also potentially more emotionally suggestive than many therapeutic interventions might be, in that they were designed to explicitly invite the expression of feelings in relationship to the state of the world.

In retrospect, my preconceptions, which differentiated the role of therapist from that of facilitator, did not hold true. I realized that a therapist does not necessarily have to be a witness outside of her interventions, refrain from engaging in psycho-educational moments or the suggestion of therapeutic material, or be totally improvisational and unstructured in her approach. Likewise, a good facilitator is able to read and work with emotional responses, and be adaptive to emergent needs. Indeed, my conflict between the role of therapist and facilitator, it seemed, had been a reflection of my own internalized image of what conventional therapy looks like. Drama therapy, in its myriad varied, interactive and embodied forms, frequently contradicts these conventional protocols. As drama therapists, we are trained to work flexibly, spontaneously, interactively, and play multiple roles in dramatic interventions. Indeed, role theory (Landy, 2000) would state

that an expanded role repertoire, and the capacity to engage in a role that is appropriate to any given situation, is a sign of good health. Using improvisational approaches such as Developmental Transformations, drama therapists may intentionally suggest, evoke and introduce new material that is deemed therapeutically relevant (Johnson, 1991; 2000). Ultimately, the role of drama therapist and Work that Reconnects facilitator were complimentary. My use of the facilitator role within the therapist role was an appropriate intervention choice given the specific context and needs of the participants.

Chapter Three: Findings

Summary of the 10-Week Series

Integration of drama therapy and the Work that Reconnects. The series as a whole was composed of a medley of drama therapy techniques and Work that Reconnects exercises. Each session was contained individually in a ritualized format similar to Emunah's (1994) description of the development of an individual drama therapy session in the Five-Phase Model (pp. 79-84), with key ritualized opening and closing elements repeating from week to week. Simultaneously, the types of activities we did from week to week, particularly in the middle of each session, were diverse. The interventions I employed were inspired by theory and techniques from the Work that Reconnects (Macy, 2007b; Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy & Johnstone, 2012), Playback Theatre (Salas, 1996), Developmental Transformations (Johnson, 1991; 2000), the Five-Phase Model (Emunah, 1994), and the Story Within (Silverman, 2004), as well as my own creative interventions, improvisations, and elaborations. Overall, my drama therapeutic approach increased my tendency to be adaptive in following and changing plans according to the spontaneous needs of the participants. By contrast, when I facilitate purely Work that Reconnects-

based workshops, I generally adhere more to a pre-established framework.

In addition to drama therapy processes, the sessions took inspiration from the four stages of the spiral of the Work that Reconnects as a larger structural framework, and thus moved from gratitude work to honouring our pain/despair work to perceptual shift/seeing with new eyes and finally to going forth (Macy, 2007b; Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). In the Work that Reconnects framework, the structure of a workshop is pictured as a spiral rather than a line, because the stages repeat themselves, and often contain and go back in on each other. This non-linear quality was clearly present in the ten-week series, perhaps even more than would be the case in a shorter Work that Reconnects workshop. The sessions meandered in and out of following the stages of the spiral in a strict sense, both in individual sessions and in the development of the 10 sessions as a whole. Nevertheless, awareness of the spiral was a driving force, and elements of the spiral were touched upon in each session.

Development of self-care as a guiding theme. Self-care was a guiding theme in the unfolding development and design of the sessions, as well as in the group process and progression of individual group members. Growing perceptions, awareness and reflection on the core theme of self-care were woven through the entire ten-week series. Key insights around self-care emerged at various moments in the sessions, and the closing interviews furnished further insight into the impact and significance of the series on the individual participants' relationship to, and integration and practice of, self-care in their daily lives. One common response that participants seemed to share was that the sessions elevated their awareness of the importance of self-care in their daily lives and activism. This awareness in turn appeared to lead to conversations with peers around self-care, as

well as an increase in prioritizing self-care habits and practices.

Structural Design of the Series

The larger structural design of the whole series of sessions may be analyzed in four phases, as follows:

The early sessions (1 & 2). Sessions 1 and 2 were focused on helping the group members get to know each other, creating safety and belonging, establishing group norms and introducing the primary theme of self-care. The main Work that Reconnects stage that characterized these sessions was gratitude, the first stage of the spiral. Gratitude was introduced through the "gratitude stone-check-in," and this exercise was maintained as a self-care practice throughout all the sessions.

The early to mid-sessions (3 & 4). Sessions 3 and 4 focused on elaborating and defining participants' relationship to the themes of self-care; sharing key motivating stories of what had initially brought participants to activism; developing trust and vulnerability; interweaving political and personal realities; overcoming isolation; and sharing their pain about the state of the world and the political/social/environmental realities they come in contact with through their activism. The key Work that Reconnects stage that characterized these sessions was honouring pain/despair work (the second stage of the spiral), but gratitude work also permeated throughout. Aspects of these sessions also ventured into the perceptual shift (the third stage of the spiral).

The mid to late sessions (5 through 9). Sessions 5 to 9 focused primarily on the third stage of the spiral known as the perceptual shift/seeing with new eyes, while still touching on ongoing despair and gratitude work. These sessions were primarily focused around preparing and engaging in a deep ecology process inspired by the Council of All

Beings from the Work that Reconnects (Macy & Brown, 1998; Seed et al., 1988). Deep ecology is the environmental movement that aims to ask "deeper questions" about humanity's essential needs, wants and fundamental relationship to the Earth (Macy & Brown, 1998). Deep ecology as a philosophy challenges people to move beyond an anthropocentric paradigm, towards acknowledging the intrinsic value and right to exist of all life forms. The Council of All Beings is a dramatic ritual in which participants are asked to take on the role of a nonhuman (in this case, I specified, an animal) in order to gather and speak their concerns about the state of the world. By integrating the drama therapy core processes described by Jones (2007b; particularly dramatic projection, empathy and distancing, role playing, interactive witnessing, embodiment, playing, life-drama connection and transformation), as well as elements of Silverman's (2004) process of the Story Within, the Council of All Beings process took on a deeper, more layered significance.

   The final session (10). Session 10 was focused on closure and termination. We reviewed where we had been together and revisited elements from various sessions, interweaving themes of self-care, dramatic ritual and role play, storytelling, celebration, gratitude, appreciation and gift-giving. The elements of the spiral of the Work that Reconnects that were especially highlighted in this session were gratitude, the perceptual shift, and going forth. Going forth was embodied through the participants' sharing of gifts and reflecting on insights, as they prepared to leave the group and continue to integrate self-care into their lives and activism.

Specific Outlines and Analyses of Sessions

   What did the individual sessions look like? The structure of a typical session was

as follows: participants would arrive, greet and join each other sitting in a circle on cushions on the carpeted floor. Our formal beginning would start with the "stone check-in with gratitude," followed by the "stretching like a tree warm-up" and the "world ball" (see session outlines for more detailed descriptions). We would then enter into the main action for the day, which differed from week to week. In closing, we would come together in a circle and pass a hand-squeeze around the circle, often with each participant sharing a word about how they felt at the end of the session.

In order to give an idea of the texture and richness of individual sessions in the series, this manuscript will outline each session's interventions, followed by a discussion of the Work that Reconnects and drama therapy methods employed, as well as the development of the theme of self-care. In order to highlight the way in which individual sessions flow into the larger structure of the series, the sessions will be analyzed in four distinct phases, as follows: early sessions (1-2), early-to-mid sessions (3-4), mid-to-late sessions (5-9) and the closing session (10).

Session Descriptions: Early sessions (1 & 2)

Session 1 outline: Starting with gratitude and intention

1. Introduction: Introducing myself, welcome to the project, project goals

2. Gratitude stone check-in: Passing a soft speckled stone around the circle, I invited participants to share how they were doing, as well as something specific that recently made them feel grateful to be alive. I introduced the stone by explaining that it had been given to me by a dear activist friend nearly a decade ago, and came from the other side of the continent, where it had been rounded by the waves of the Pacific coast. It was a "magic stone," I

said, because I had brought it to almost every workshop I had led for the last 10 years, and in each workshop, when people had held the stone, they had "spoken the truth." I invited participants to imagine they could feel the hands of the others who had spoken holding this stone as they shared. This exercise was a way of fostering a sense of belonging, as well as introducing the concept of gratitude as a self-care practice (drawn from the Work that Reconnects). I talked briefly about gratitude as a self-care practice and "a radical act," because it goes against the prevalent message of insufficiency inherent in our consumer-economy (Macy & Brown, 1998).

3. Name game: Sound and gesture with name and mirroring

4. World ball: This exercise is adapted from Emunah's imaginary circle ball-throw (1994, pp. 177-178), except that the ball turns into the world and we project global images of beauty or concern onto it. Eventually, the world grows bigger, and with the groups' permission, we choose to step into the world. Once in the world, participants and therapist continue walking around the room, while sharing images as if they are travelling to different parts of the world. With the guide and encouragement of the drama therapist, participants continue to play with the emergent images. After a few minutes, the drama therapist works with the arising images to foster a transition to a main activity for the session (for example, gathering back in a circle). This warm-up exercise emphasized participants' choice to be in and engage with the world, and served as a brief invitation for developing the capacity for improvisational play.

5. Sharing personal objects in pairs: Objects represented participants' intentions for the group. Partners introduce each other and their objects to the whole group.

6. Collective alter/sculpture of intentions: Created using personal objects and fabrics

7. Collective group contract (agreeing on and drawing or writing key concepts using paper, markers and pastels)

8. Closing: Say a word, and take personal object back from the sculpture.

Session 2 outline: Building safety, connection and play

1. Gratitude stone check-in

2. Name games: Name with gesture and mirroring, name with adjective

3. Revisiting objects/intentions from session 1 (especially for new participant)

4. Winds of Change: In this classic icebreaker, participants sit on chairs or cushions in a circle and one person stands in the middle. The person in the middle says "The winds of change blow for anyone who…" and share something about themselves. For example, "The winds of change blow for anyone who has ever gone to a protest." Those who have gone to a protest must change their seats, and a new person ends up in the centre.

5. Briefly revisiting the group contract: Additions/amendments

6. Group fluid sculpture (Salas, 1996 pp. 31-33) of the collective contract: Each group member embodies an element of the contract that is important to them to form a collective sculpture, which may include sound and repetitive movements.

7. World ball and walk in the world (improvisational play)

8. Stories with fluid sculpture responses: Individual participants shared personal stories about feelings they carry about their activism or the state of the world. Other group members reflected back what they had heard using fluid sculptures.

9. Group discussion/resolving group conflict

10. Closing circle: Pass a hand-squeeze around the circle

Discussion of Early Sessions

The early sessions (1 & 2) were focused on helping the group members get to know each other, creating safety and belonging, establishing group norms and introducing the primary theme of self-care.

Integration of drama therapy and the Work that Reconnects. The main Work that Reconnects stage that characterized these sessions was gratitude, the first stage of the spiral. Gratitude was introduced through the "gratitude stone-check-in," and this exercise was maintained as a self-care practice throughout all the sessions. Aside from the theme of gratitude, most of the exercises in these sessions were based in drama therapy, and activities such as name games, icebreakers, warm-ups and building a collective contract were similar to activities that would usually be integrated into any early drama therapy group process. Although Emunah (1994) suggests that dramatic ritual is best used at the end of a series, in this case, a collective ritual such as the collective alter/sculpture appeared to facilitate a sense of containment and offer structure for expression, providing a potent metaphor for the beginning of group cohesion and collaboration. Other drama therapy influences were particularly evident in the use of Playback Theatre-inspired

sculptures, sound and movement (inspired by Developmental Transformations, Johnson, 1991; 2000), and imaginary improvisational play in the world ball exercise. Core processes that were highlighted in these sessions included dramatic play (world ball), embodiment (stretching, fluid sculpts), life-drama connection (especially in the ritual, and fluid sculpts), active witnessing (particularly in the fluid sculpts, ritual), empathy and distancing (group intentions ritual/sculpture, contract, group contract sculpts, fluid sculpts), and transformation.

Guiding theme: Self-care in an activist context. The context and culture of working with activists around issues of self-care was evident right from this early stage. One theme that I perceived in these early sessions related to activist culture and self-care was the sense that participants felt especially privileged and grateful to be a part of the group. Many of the participants expressed awareness around the fact that not everyone (including those with whom they work in solidarity in their activism) would have the luxury of attending such a group. This theme of awareness of privilege would resurface throughout the series, and later would intersperse with themes of "activist guilt" for the social privileges that each person had inherited.

Another significant theme that appeared to be characteristic of activist culture was a high level of sensitivity to issues around language, consent, power and being politically correct. This was evident in Lorraine's insistence that we not use male gender pronouns to refer to the group (she did not like it when I habitually referred to the group members as "guys"), and on April's asking the group to avoid using words that were rooted in "rape language" (for example, "she got screwed over"). Additionally, because Jessica and April knew each other from outside the group, it was important for them to be transparent

about this fact with the whole group during the contract, and to make sure that this was okay for everyone. Making these issues around language, oppression and power explicit appeared to be an important element of creating trust in the group, and establishing the group cultural norms and identity as an activist-member group that would embody anti-oppressive values, while being self-reflexive, responsive and transparent about issues of power and language. These issues also revealed a high level of conscientiousness in many of the group members, which may be characteristic of activist circles and ideals.

There were also times in which politically correct language ideals seemed to become excessively controlling or even obsessive. Lorraine for example requested that the group not use male-pronouns, and initially made an agreement with the group that she would say "beep!" every time someone referred to the group incorrectly as "guys," for example. While I tried to accommodate this request in the first session, by the second session Lorraine's request began to feel disruptive to the group process. I eventually said that while I appreciated her request and agreed with her, I was not sure I would be able to always remember, and she seemed willing to let go of challenging me on that. Later, in the contract, Lorraine talked again about language and how important that is, how we get lazy in our language use, and how her husband had helped her learn to speak proper French. As a group, we reflected on the importance of language awareness, but I also brought up the idea of tolerance, which Sarah renamed as "acceptance," which we added to the group contract.

Some notes on group process and establishing a safe space. In terms of group process, I noticed that there seemed to be a high level of group cohesion and trust right from the start. This may have been enhanced by selection process; each participant had

already begun to develop some trust and connection with me through both an initial phone conversation, and a pre-group interview in which they had shared information about their background and relationship to self-care. The fact that all group members were activists and had gone through this screening process, I believe, created a stronger initial sense of safety and common ground. Many of the group members seemed especially grateful to be in the group, and themes of belonging and overcoming isolation through the group were immediately apparent through participants' sharing.

The group also seemed to progress through the initial stages of group formation (from the "entrance" and "inclusion" stages, to "conflict," Earley, 1999) quite quickly. By session 2, the group was faced with a tension or conflict, which arose as a result of Lorraine's portrayal of First Nations people in the fluid sculpt when she responded dramatically to Sarah's story. Sarah had shared a story about feeling heartbroken about conflict between two Native communities she was connected to, and Lorraine's embodiment response was to dance and sing in a circle around Jessica, imitating an "Indian dance." Later in the group Lorraine talked about how she had spent with Native people, and had appreciated the "savage" culture and the dances of the "Indians." By their body language, I could tell that others in the group were visibly uncomfortable with Lorraine's use of language and portrayal of indigenous people.

I reflected sensing participants discomfort, and asked how group members were feeling, which provoked a discussion. Lorraine seemed to have trouble understanding Megan, April, Jackie and Sarah's analysis of why her expressions had been uncomfortable for them. (The other participants also appeared to be speaking in somewhat indirect, diplomatic ways, I believe because – being the early stages of the

group -- they did not want to offend or alienate Lorraine.) When I wondered aloud about whether there was a generational difference at play, or an English/French language gap with different discourses operating in the room, Lorraine said that she felt that she was being "picked on," and felt alienated by my comment. I tried to support Lorraine and diminish her sense of alienation by highlighting the fact that each person in the group comes to the group with a different set of experiences and background. Several members in the group affirmed how important it was to them that Lorraine was in the group as an elder (Jessica especially expressed this strongly). However Lorraine emphasized that she felt she had lots to learn from everyone too, and that she did not want to be seen as the elder, necessarily, or as different. By the end of the group Lorraine seemed to be put at ease by the discussion, and gave me a hug when I checked in with her.

Before the third group, however, Lorraine contacted me and said that she did not want to continue the group. The other group members and I were sorry to lose her. When I talked to her by phone, she expressed that she wanted to be involved in things that were "easy" for her, and she did not feel prepared to be involved in a demanding group process. She wished us well. I believe that Lorraine felt alienated by the fact that she was the only senior in the group, and the only Francophone. As a facilitator, I wondered if I could have done something differently to include her. Lakey (2010) discusses how the role of the facilitator in progressive, experiential education is to reach out and bring those who are most alienated in the group into the centre. I tried to facilitate this possibility, yet it also seemed that Lorraine was not prepared to engage in a group process that might challenge her personally. Despite my efforts to reach out to her during and after the second group, her decision to leave the group was firm, and the group continued without

her.

With regards to establishing group norms around activist culture, I believe this conflict was particularly important to address, in that the members' discomfort with Lorraine's portrayal and use of language were a reflection of their own values as activists. Although the other participants seemed shy to confront Lorraine with this issue, they also seemed relieved when I broached the subject. Discussing this tension openly was an important step in establishing that the group would be a safe space for participants to bring forward issues and dynamics that are central to their values and perceptions as activists (regarding racism or stereotype for example) and to create an social justice-informed culture within the group (Sajnani, 2012; Sajnani & Nadeau, 2006).

Session Descriptions: Early to Mid-Sessions (3 & 4)

Session 3 outline: Defining self-care

1. Gratitude stone check-in

2. "Get-to-know you go-around" on activist backgrounds, what brings participants to the group

3. Embodied sculptures on "What is self-care?"

4. Small group scenes: Dramatizing self care versus the opposite of self-care

5. World ball and walk in the world (improvisational play)

6. Initial spark stories and group fluid sculpt responses – What first motivated you into doing activism?

7. Closing: A breath together, each share a word, hand-squeeze around the circle

Session 4 outline: Honouring our pain as a practice of care

1. Gratitude stone check-in

2. Tree stretch warm-up: This exercise consisted of several rounds stretching and reaching towards the ceiling, and bending forward and releasing our arms to hang down. I invited participants to breathe deeply as we stretched, and to sigh on the release. Meanwhile, I guided participants to visualize themselves as trees reaching up to the sky, with roots extending from their feet down into the earth.

3. Spectrogram (Sternberg & Garcia, 1989) and embodied sculptures: Participants placed themselves on a self-care versus self-neglect continuum; took a posture and spoke a line to express their current relationship to self-care

4. World ball and walk in the world (improvisational play)

5. Open Sentences (Macy & Brown, 1998, pp. 98-100): In pairs, participants take turns listening and speaking, and complete the following questions:

   a. "What first inspired me to do the activism work I do was…"

   b. "What I find hard about the work I do is…"

   c. "What keeps me going in my work is…"

6. Group debrief and discussion: The second stage of the spiral of the Work that Reconnects, the function of honouring our pain or despair work, and how this is linked to self-care.

7. Elm Dance story and dance (Macy, 2009): Responding an emergent question in the group about the role of despair work in working with marginalized communities, I told Joanna Macy's story of the Elm Dance. This is a story about a town in Russia, Novozybkov, which was poisoned with radioactive

fallout during the Chernobyl disaster. As the story goes, after the accident, radioactive clouds were heading towards Moscow, and the Russian government seeded the clouds to prevent them from raining over the capital, causing them to precipitate over this town. For years, officials denied that this had happened, despite the obvious health and social impacts on this community. This is the story of Joanna Macy's work with the people of this town, using the Work that Reconnects, and the dance that was meaningful to them. It is a story about the power of sharing stories and honouring pain in community, even in the face of hopelessness and disaster. After telling the story, we danced the Elm Dance. The Elm Dance is a healing dance that has been used by activists around the world. It is meant to "strengthen our intentions to take part in the healing of our world." It connects us to others in the world who are struggling for justice, including the community of Novozybkov. We danced to a Latvian song, whose lyrics call for the healing of the elm trees and resistance to Soviet oppression. The steps are simple, and involve raising our arms up and swaying together like elm trees. In the second half of the dance, as has tradition with this dance, I invited participants to call out names of places, people(s), or species that need healing.

8. Closing: Pass a hand-squeeze around the circle, and touch our hands to the ground/earth.

Discussion of Early to Mid-Sessions

Early to mid-sessions (3 & 4) focused on elaborating and defining participants' relationship to the themes of self-care: sharing key-motivating stories of what had

initially brought participants to activism; developing trust and vulnerability; interweaving political and personal realities; overcoming isolation; and sharing pain about the state of the world and the political/social/environmental realities participants come in contact with through their activism.

   Integration of drama therapy and the Work that Reconnects. While session 3 activities were more rooted in drama therapy methods, session 4 activities took most of their inspiration from the Work that Reconnects, although aspects of improvisational play and dramatic ritual permeated both sessions. Drama therapy methods in session 3 included the use of embodied sculptures, storytelling and small group scenes, whereas session 4 made use of the spectrogram from Sociodrama (Sternberg & Garcia, 1989), along with embodied sculptures. (Of course, many of these elements, storytelling and dramatic ritual particularly, are common to both Work that Reconnects and drama therapy methods.) At the same time, some Work that Reconnects exercises, such as Open Sentences, appear to be rooted more in a contemplative quality of presence and listening, rather than a more exuberant quality of embodied play. The key Work that Reconnects stage that characterized these sessions was honouring pain/despair work (the second stage of the spiral), but gratitude work also permeated throughout. Aspects of these sessions also ventured into the perceptual shift (the third stage of the spiral). Key Work that Reconnects exercises featured in these sessions included Open Sentences, the Elm Dance story and dance, and group discussion on the spiral and the function of honouring our pain for the world. It was my impression that the drama therapy interventions that were employed in first three sessions served to warm participants up and create safety to facilitate entering into the more intense Work that Reconnects exercises on Honouring

Our Pain. The first stage of the Work that Reconnects (Coming from Gratitude) seemed to compliment and be enhanced by the first two phases of the Five-Phase Model (Emunah, 1994), highlighted in sessions 1 to 3: dramatic play and scene work.

The honouring our pain stage of the spiral was highlighted in the Open Sentences activity, initial spark stories, and in the story of the Elm Dance. Participants seemed to be really grappling with self-care themes related to guilt and awareness of privilege, dealing with painful feelings about the world, and how to support those who are disenfranchised. As the participants were able to feel safe enough to be vulnerable in sharing these feelings, as well as engage in a process of reflection about the role of honouring painful feelings, the process appeared to foster a sense of gratitude and connection between group members (and thus touched on the perceptual shift stage of the spiral).

It seemed helpful to participants to hear me explain the basic theory behind the Work that Reconnects, especially since their experiential context affirmed what I was sharing. In line with the Work that Reconnects approach, I reframed and affirmed their despair as a natural response to the social/environmental realities we face. I also highlighted Joanna Macy's argument that the fact that they could feel these feelings was evidence of their interconnection with each other and the world (Macy, 2007a; Macy, 2007b; Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy and Johnstone, 2013), and reflected how this interconnection could be a source of empowerment.

Another theme that began to emerge was the idea that in activist circles, difficult emotions such as grief or despair are often repressed, because they are seen as a threat to competency and full engagement. The Elm Dance story (Macy, 2009), and the content of our group discussions, seemed to offer another perspective: that creating collective

spaces, and a culture to acknowledge these feelings as normal and natural, can actually open doorways in a community's capacity to respond resiliently to crisis. Group members seemed to be integrating the idea that this insight could be applicable for activists as well as even for highly disenfranchised communities (such as Novozybkov, in the Elm Dance story). Harnessed within a social justice framework, the group started to perceive the potential function of despair work as an aid, rather than a distraction, to their activist work. Indeed, in her workshops, Joanna Macy calls despair work a "radical act," because it flies in the face of the values of the mainstream "Industrial Growth Society," and the endless impetus for avoidance, distraction and consumption it fosters (Macy, 2007b).

Development of self-care as a guiding theme. By the fourth session, several group members, particularly Jackie and April, began to express that they were starting to think more about self-care in their daily lives. Jackie also shared how helpful it had been for her to share her story in session 3, and to have it reflected back to her – how she felt it had moved something for her, even if it was a hard or sad story to share. Jackie seemed to connect to my education piece around the structure of the Work that Reconnects, and particularly the function of despair work. The Elm Dance seemed to really speak to her, offering new possibilities for processes of collective healing with traumatized and marginalized groups. Similarly, in session 4 April shared that she felt that the previous session's theme around defining our relationship to self-care had permeated her week, and she'd taken more time to go for walks, and really do some enjoyable things that felt good.

In the Open Sentences, April was my partner and shared traumatizing experiences she had had as an activist in South America, where people she knew had been kidnapped

and murdered, and she herself had been pursued for kidnapping at some point. She talked about how these experiences have affected her life in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder, and how certain situations can cause her to go into panic attacks and feel quite vulnerable. In the Open Sentences, she spoke of about feelings of hopelessness and alienation from mainstream culture—that she does not see a way to really change things, and that people don't seem to really understand why issues like violence towards women are important. Her feelings seemed to echo feelings of alienation that are perhaps typical of activist circles, and perhaps in part a result of traumatic experience. Despite talking about painful experiences, April seemed comforted by being able to share. Later, she seemed to really appreciate the story of the Elm Dance, expressing that she hadn't expected she'd like the dance, but she did. She had found it beautiful and relaxing.

Additionally, participants were able to draw connections with the Open Sentences questions (about what they find hard, and what keeps them going) to the theme of self-care. Megan appeared to really like the Open Sentences, saying how helpful it was to ask these essential questions. She talked about how she realized she often only asks such questions when she's really low, and burning out, and how it could be helpful to ask these questions at other times, too. Similarly, Jessica had entered the fourth session sharing that she felt depressed. She positioned herself on the extreme low side of the self-care spectrogram, collapsing face-down on a pile of cushions. Yet through the session, Jessica's mood seemed to improve. The group was empathetic and supportive towards her, and despite the "despair work" element of the Open Sentences, she said that she felt a bit better after the exercise, and that it felt good to listen and to share.

Summary of early to mid-sessions: The group in context. Trust, group

cohesion and integration of the theme of self-care seemed had deepened significantly by the end of the fourth session, compared to the early sessions. Participants were sharing more about their personal realities in relation to larger social and political realities. Overcoming isolation and alienation was becoming a major theme, and a backdrop for this theme was the fact that in Montreal, in the spring of 2012, the student movement was gaining massive momentum. Several of the group members returned to the group in session 4 feeling elated about having participated in the March 22nd student demonstration, which was reported to have drawn nearly 300 000 students from across Quebec: one of the largest student demonstrations in North American history (Rebick, 2012a). This was an exciting time to be engaging in activism, which added a heightened sense of pertinence to our group process.

Session Descriptions: Mid-to-Late Sessions (5 through 9)

Session 5 outline: Widening circles

1. Gratitude stone check-in

2. Self-care statues/postures with coloured fabrics

3. Warm-up: Guided movement with scarf, imagining the scarf as an animal

4. Participants' life-story-telling with group fluid-sculpt responses: Activist "spark" stories, stories on activist self-care inspiration and resilience

5. Group discussion on activist burnout and normalizing pain for the world

6. Widening Circles exercise, as found in Macy and Brown (1998). I began with a brief discussion on the ecological self, and widening our perspectives (ecologically, socially, temporally) as a tool for self-care and burnout prevention. Sitting in a circle, one at a time, a participant shared about a

particular social/environmental issue that concerns them. Taking a pause between each role, that participant then spoke for a few minutes from four different perspectives: their own, that of an adversary, a nonhuman (such as an animal, mountain or tree), and a future human. After each person, the other group members shared their personal responses to witnessing.

7. Closing: We closed by passing a squeeze and sharing a word.

Session 6 outline: The embodied ecological self

1. Gratitude stone check-in

2. Discussion the theme of the ecological self and our relationship with the more-than-human world. Introducing *felt ecology*— a term I coined to convey the idea that awareness of our bodies and our senses is a nourishing and self-caring way to be in relationship with the world, increasing our capacity to be present and to feel gratitude and connection with ourselves and the living world.

3. Silent walk of the senses: We went outside and walked to a nearby park. For each block of the walk, I invited them to become aware of a different sense: touch, smell, sight, and sound. For the final block I instructed them to become aware of all of the senses together, as well as their "internal, felt sense" (Gendlin, 1981) that they might be feeling in the centre of their body (heart/belly area).

4. The Mirror Walk: This is similar to the classic blindfolded partner trust walk (Emunah, 1994, p. 173), except that Macy and Brown (1998, pp. 88-89) have adapted to include the concept of the ecological self. The blindfolded partner

imagines she is walking in her "larger body of the Earth," or ecological self. Partners guide each other in a natural setting, bringing the "blind" partner natural objects to touch and smell, and every once in a while inviting her to "open her eyes to look into the mirror" for a few seconds. Partners switch, then the group debriefs.

5. Return silent walk of the senses to our indoor drama therapy space

6. The Remembering (Macy & Brown, 1998, pp. 154-158): A guided visualization into imagining and embodying the evolution of life on earth, from the big boom and formation of planet Earth, to the advent of single-celled creatures, mammals, our own ancestor humans, and this modern day. Part of the theme of the imagery highlighted the gifts and strengths that we inherited from our evolutionary heritage, as well as noticing how much has changed—i.e. touching on the ecological dangers we face in the present day. I used recorded nature music and dimmed lights for atmosphere, as participants were guided to visualize and embody the evolutionary journey.

7. Writing or drawing individual creative responses to the Remembering, group sharing and debrief.

8. Homework: Choose an animal for the Council of All Beings
    I talked about the second half of our work together, how it would be focused around a particular character. I said today was an introduction to that work, as we explored widening into deep ecology perspectives, and using our imaginations to enter the perspective of other life forms. I talked about how, in the coming weeks, participants would be invited to choose an animal

63

character to work with. I suggested a homework assignment this week: to make time to go for a solitary walk, preferably in a natural setting, with the intention of finding one's character. I instructed participant's to pay close attention as they had today to their senses. I also suggested that journaling, or that paying attention to dreams, might help them find their character, too. I assured them that if they had trouble finding the character, they could contact me. I invited them to let the animal come to them, let it surprise them, let themselves become intrigued, and use their intuition to let themselves sense into it. I suggested that this would be an animal they would develop a special relationship to, and it would perhaps serve as a protector of some kind. I also discussed how this animal would be invited to play a role in the Council of All Beings, where she would be able to express her concerns about her experiences and the state of the world.

9. Closing: Each person shared a word, expressing what she was taking with her from today's session into her week. I read "Lost," a poem by David Wagoner, as a symbolic blessing and inspiration to participants in helping them find their animal.

Session 7 outline: Meeting the animal in its natural habitat

1. Gratitude stone check-in

2. Following on the check-in, impromptu group sharing/discussion on activist experiences this week, inspirations and things that were hard, while integrating insights on self-care.

3. Sharing animal characters: Each person shared which animal they had chosen,

and how they had found it.

4. Stretch like a tree

5. Meeting your animal in its natural habitat: Milling about the room, I led the group in visualizing visiting their animal's habitat and imagining and sensing their animal in detail. With nature music as a backdrop, participants were invited to find a space in the room and using scarves, pillows, art supplies and natural objects, and to "ask their animal" to guide them in recreating its natural habitat. Once participants were finished creating and simply being in their animal's habitats, I invited them to draw a portrait of their animal, or to journal from the point of view of their animal about her special qualities, significant relationships, and what her life is like.

6. Tour of animal habitats: Participants returned to the circle, and agreed that their animals would like for us to go for a tour of their habitats. One by one, participants showed us their animal's habitats, and shared the writing that we imagined their animal had done through them.

7. Closing: We thanked all the animals for coming today. After I photographed their creations, participants put away the material they had used to create the habitats. We shared a word and a hand-squeeze around the circle to close.

Session 8 outline: Delivering the invitation and making the mask

1. Gratitude stone check-in, and talk about termination approaching

2. We talked about concepts behind the perceptual shift, the third stage of the Work that Reconnects spiral. We touched on questions such as what does self-care mean from an "ecological-self" perspective, and how could working with

animal character be connected to self-care?

3. Embodied guided visualization process: I guided participants on an imaginary journey of visiting their animal and delivering an invitation to participate in next week's Council of All Beings. The participants were guided to ask the animal how she would like to be represented at the Council and to ask permission to help represent her. Participants thanked their animal and returned to the room to make their animal masks.

4. Mask making: Using natural objects and arts and crafts supplies, participants made masks of their animals in preparation for the Council of All Beings. I played recorded nature music in the background to enhance participants' creative focus and facilitate the sense of being in a multi-species, ecological atmosphere.

5. Homework: If they had time, I asked participants to make a ritual for invoking the animal, and to journal again from the animal's point of view. I invited participants to journal about anything their animal wants them to know about her, or wants them to say in the Council.

6. Closing: We each shared a word and passed a hand-squeeze around the circle

Session 9: The Council of All Beings

1. Stone check-in with gratitude

2. Group discussion talk about feelings around termination

3. Stretch like a tree

4. Placing the mask: I guided participants to walk around in the room, and imagine that their animal is on its way to the Council. I invited participants to

use fabric to create a place in the room to place the mask, in preparation for their animals' arrival. The mask was envisioned as a "portal," a bridge through which the animal would arrive.

5. *Breathing Through* guided meditation (Macy & Brown, 1998): As a tool to be able to be present with painful feelings that could arise both in the ritual process today but also in their lives and work, I guided participants in a meditation practice called Breathing Through. This meditation is based on the Tibetan Tong Lin practice of breathing in suffering, breathing out compassion, except that it involves imagining breathing in images of world-suffering on a stream of air, passing them through one's heart, and then back out into the web of life.

6. Invoking the Beings of the Three Times (Macy & Brown, 1998, pp. 136-137): An invocation of inviting ancestors, present and future beings into the ritual space. Using voice and instruments, participants read and sang the invocation with me, and called out people who they wished to be with us in spirit.

7. The Bestiary (Macy & Brown, 1998, pp. 158-159): We've called in the humans, now to call in the animals. I talked about "The Bestiary" – a poem by Joanna Macy that names animals on the endangered species list. I specified that this poem was not intended to foster guilt, but to honour the beauty and qualities of each species. We sat and collectively read the poem "The Bestiary," taking turns. I played a drumbeat between each animal name, and participants joined in with other instruments.

8. The Council of All Beings, adapted from the process described by Macy and

Brown (1998, pp. 161-165): Wearing an animal mask myself, I guided participants in an extended ritual process, using a drum, and my character's voice. The ritual consisted of:

a. Approaching the mask, invoking the animal, asking permission, becoming the animal

b. Moving and sounding as the animal, eventually introducing yourself to other animals

c. Being called to gather in council by the guide, and ceremonial introductions.

d. Speaking one by one about their experiences as the animal and their ecological concerns. After each animal speaks, other animals chorus in "We hear you, [animal name]!"

e. Inviting a few participants at a time to take off their masks and listen to the animals "as humans" from the centre of the circle, then return to their animal roles.

f. The guide talks about human being scared, for all their apparent power, and how this does not serve us. She asks group if they would like to share their gifts with the humans, to help them wake up to their place in the web of life.

g. The group shares their gifts with the humans by symbolically picking a coloured scarf to represent their gift, stating their gift and placing the scarf in the centre of the circle. We created a collective scarf collage of animal gifts.

h. Appreciating the individual humans who brought us here, and adopted us. Each person speaks to that individual human's struggles (i.e.: themselves), and the gift she would like to give her as the animal.

i. Make animal noises, music and dance for the humans to hear us and receive the gifts. Raise the energy up!

j. To close, bring the energy down by touching the earth, thanking the animals, thanking the earth.

k. Participants de-role by slowly going back to the place where they had put on the mask, thanking the animal character, removing and placing the mask where they had first put it on.

9. We gather in a circle for group debrief and sharing with talking stone. I connect this process to the third stage of the spiral, the perceptual shift, which connects us to wider perspectives and to our own innate wisdom. I encourage the group to imagine they can take their animal's gifts with them to support them in their work.

10. I read Thich Nhat Hanh's poem, "Please Call Me by My True Names," introducing him briefly by talking about his work as a social activist in the Vietnam War, and how Martin Luther King Jr. nominated him for a Nobel Peace Prize. The themes of the poem are about interconnection and embracing joy and pain together.

11. Closing: We pass a hand-squeeze around the circle, sharing a sound, a word or a breath.

Discussion of Mid to Late Sessions

Integration of drama therapy and the Work that Reconnects. Mid-to-late

sessions (5 through 9) focused primarily on the third stage of the spiral known as the

perceptual shift/seeing with new eyes, while still touching on ongoing despair and

gratitude work. These sessions were primarily focused around preparing and engaging in

a deep ecology process inspired by the Council of All Beings (Macy & Brown, 1998;

Seed et al., 1988). Yet by integrating the drama therapy core processes described by

Jones (2007b, particularly dramatic projection, empathy and distancing, role playing,

interactive witnessing, embodiment, playing, life-drama connection and transformation)

as well as elements of Silverman's (2004) process of the Story Within, the Council of All

Beings process took on a deeper, more layered significance.

The deep ecology concept of the ecological self, a theoretical building block of

the Work that Reconnects, was a guiding motif throughout these sessions. Joanna Macy

(2007a; 2007b) explains the ecological self as the idea that the self is a construct, and is

elastic, meaning that we can shift our sense of what we self-identify as me, from the

individual body, to our family and close friends, wider community, nation, ecological

niche or planet. Deep ecologists such as Arne Naess (1995) describe the capacity to

identify with other life forms as a sign of human maturity. He promotes moving away

from a the moral admonishments of the environmental movement, towards taking action

on behalf of life on earth out of a mature sense of self-identification with all life, and

therefore as a form of self-love and self-defense (also see Macy & Brown, 1998, pp. 45-

48).

Starting in session 5, we began exercising the capacity to widen our self-

identifications through the exercise called Widening Circles, in which participants spoke of an issue from multiple points of view (themselves, an adversary, a nonhuman natural element or animal, and a future human). In session 6, participants began to experience the ecological self from a more sensory, embodied perspective, through exercises such as the sensory walk and the Mirror Walk. In the Mirror Walk, participants were specifically guided to use their imaginations to widen their sense of perspective ("Imagine you are a child, going for a walk in the world, discovering the Universe for the first time… Imagine you are going for a walk in your larger body of the Earth, your ecological self… Open your eyes and look into the mirror"). From the foundation of widened ecological identification through sensory awareness, participants moved increasingly towards the integration of embodiment and imagination through character work. The Remembering helped participants begin to forge this connection, of actively imagining and acting out the ecological journey, while embodying various life forms over imagined geological time. Sessions 5 and 6, therefore, set up a platform for the character preparation and enactment of the Council of all Beings process, which extended from sessions 7 through 9.

For sessions 7 through 9, I was inspired by Silverman's (2004) process of the Story Within. Yet instead of working with a fairy-tale character, participants were asked to choose an animal. Although I have facilitated several Council of All Beings processes in Work that Reconnects workshops over the last 10 years, my tools as a drama therapist allowed me to guide participants into connecting with their characters, and elaborating this relationship on a deeper level. Processes such as choosing the animal through intuition, creating the animal's natural habitat, creating rituals to invoke the character,

putting on the mask within the context of ritual and intention -- were inspired by

Silverman's Story Within Process, in which a client develops an intimate relationship

with a character from a myth or fairy tale. As Silverman explains,

> In the Story Within the client identifies with and develops a deep relationship
>
> with a single character. This makes the persona projection onto the character
>
> particularly intense and creates a setting in which the client can identify
>
> uncomfortable feelings without being threatened. There is also reassurance: here
>
> is a character who feels the same way he or she does. Working fictionally
>
> provides the client with new therapeutic options (p. 128).

Indeed, the drama therapeutic process of working with role and the manipulation of

distance hold much in common with Macy's concept of using role and archetype in order

to widen the sense of ecological self. As Jennings (as cited in Silverman, 2004) states:

"…the nearer we work to a person's own life, i.e., the more proximity, the more

limitations we impose on the exploration of their life story. The greater the dramatic

distance we create, the greater the range of therapeutic choices available" (p. 128).

Similarly, Macy (2007b) discusses how taking on an archetypal role such as an animal in

the Council of all Beings can free participants to speak their knowledge and feelings

about the state of the world, without the sense of having to be an expert. Taking on the

role of an animal in the Council is a projective platform: both an invitation for the

expression of creativity, connection and play, and for the expression of pain, despair or

anxieties that participants may be holding about the state of the world, or of how their

personal experiences intertwine with that larger reality.

    In the case of my adaption of the Council process over sessions 7 to 9, elements

of the Story Within were modified to suit an ecological context (the character's environment became the animal's habitat, for example). I additionally enhanced the process through my own dramatic proposals and invitations, for example by beginning with embodied sensory processes to open the imagination, using guided visualization processes to imagine delivering an invitation to the animal and the animal's journey, using nature music to create atmosphere, building up the ritual moment of the council over several weeks, and ritually entering the animal character. Normally, a Council of All Beings process takes place over the course of an afternoon only, but I believe integrating and extending the character relationship and ritual moment created a sense of intensified magic for the participants.

Additionally, integrating drama therapy processes in the Council process itself (in session 9 itself) added new levels of complexity and relationship, adding layers of meaning to the embodied encounter. Although participants are normally asked in the Council to share their gifts with the humans, I added the element of thinking of the particular human who had invited the animal to the council, who "adopted us"; I invited participants to speak of her struggles and to give specific gifts to aid that human (i.e.: as animal characters, participants spoke in the third person about themselves). In this way participants were invited to perceive themselves from a distanced yet compassionate point of view, expressing empathy and care to themselves through embodying an animal-protector role. This is similar to the idea of an internalized caring parent (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003; Wallis & Poultin, 2001), but through the projection of an animal character and its gifts. Coloured scarves were used by participants to symbolize the gifts from the animal self to the actual self, and, placing them in the centre of our circle, they formed a

73

collective colourful scarf-collage which was reminiscent of the scarf-and-object collage they had made on their first session, representing their intentions for the series. In this way, we harnessed the power of dramatic ritual and metaphor, crafting a rich tapestry of layered meaning and whole-series symmetry in the Council of All Beings. The Council was the climax of our ecological drama therapy process, an integration of both drama therapy and Work that Reconnects methods, an embodied dedication to the healing and intersection of self and world.

Development of self-care as a guiding theme. As participants explored the ecological drama therapy process in more depth through sessions 5 to 9, they continued to deepen in their relationship to the central theme of self-care. The sessions included the sharing and integration of specific self-care tools that I introduced through the various interventions. Simultaneously, participants shared with each other in group discussions with increasing levels of mutual support, trust, insight and personal intimacy around the theme of self-care. These sessions were rich and complex. For the purpose of this paper, I will outline here what I see to be some of the key moments in the development of the self-care theme in these sessions.

Some of the key "self-care tools" which I shared in these sessions included: the idea and practice of "widening circles" or "widening perspectives" (such as deep ecology exercises) as a source of insight, connection and empowerment; the use of sensory awareness as a way to practice presence, gratitude and joy in life. Other self-care tools included developing the projective relationship to a caring animal character/protector; facilitating a sense of play, wonder and magic in the creative process; and encouraging participants to make contact with nature. Making contact with nature was achieved, for

example, through the sensory exercises in session 6, or by encouraging participants to go for a walk outside to find their animals. The use of "homework assignments" (to find your animal, journal, or create a ritual to invoke the animal) were used as a way to help participants deepen their relationship to the projection, as well as to enhance their level of engagement in the process and the integration self-care themes in their daily lives. Participants in particular seemed to really enjoy the homework assignment of finding their animals. Though that week ended up being a full week of activism, including demonstrations and some traumatic events, all of the participants still made the time to find their animals. When I asked them to share their animals and how they found them, participants shared with a mixture of shyness and excitement. It seemed the process of finding an animal had been a very intuitive one for each of them, and reconnected them to a sense of magic, connection to the natural world, and play.

Some of the key moments in the sessions around the theme of self-care were as follows: In session 5, participants continued to build trust and intimacy as they shared key "spark stories" about what led them into activism. Embedded in these stories were insights about self-care. For example, April told her story of campaigning in the United States before President Barak Obama's election, and of the different perspectives the old-timer activists had versus the younger activists once President Obama won. The older activists' attitude was, "We worked hard and now we're going to rest," whereas the younger activists were euphoric and wanted to party, despite their exhaustion. April and the group reflected on this difference, assessing that the older activists had a more long-range view of a situation which included both wins and losses, acknowledged their own effort, and prioritized rest and self-care; whereas younger activists seemed more likely to

live from "win to win," get deflated in the face of losses, and risk burnout. Another story April shared was about the capacity to hold conflicting realities of despair and joy. She talked about an American activist friend of hers who was visiting her. Her friend had talked about how bleak the future looks, and how Canada and Europe were becoming more repressive like the United States. Nonetheless, her friend had shared how much she loved her country, and April reflected on how her friend continues to pursue her activism, and enjoys her life despite the dangers and climate of political repression.

In another key discussion, group members seemed to want to normalize their pain for the world, and asked me if I came across these same types of feelings (of despair for the world) in my other work with clients. To me, affirming participants' pain for the world as natural and normal felt restorative, and an important part of the self-care process. Indeed, part of the goal of the Work that Reconnects (particularly the function of despair work) is to normalize this pain, create a culture where participants can share openly about these feelings, and support participants to gain a sense of strength and power through experiencing their interconnection with each other and the web of life. In this instance, I responded to their questions by sharing my belief that most people feel this pain for the world, but respond in different ways. I mentioned Joanna Macy's idea that the pivotal psychological reality of our time is the loss of hope that there will be a future, as previous generations have assumed (Macy, 2007a), and affirmed that even if these feelings are not talked about, they still condition our existence. Group members seemed to resonate with this thought. Increasingly, the group was beginning to create an alternative activist culture in which participants could feel safe to expose their emotional vulnerabilities about their work and world. This experience seemed to come in contrast to

normal activist contexts in which, as participants shared, sharing feelings other than anger about the world can be seen as a sign of weakness or incompetence. Within the group, participants were beginning to form an alternative activist culture in which it was not only safe to share feelings of despair, but participants were beginning to see this sharing, in turn, as a source of solidarity and empowerment. Rather than taking them away from their activism, participants were starting to value the inclusion of these processes as part of creating an activist practice that is both personally meaningful and emotionally sustainable.

In session 6, the Mirror Walk appeared to be a strong experience for all the participants; several participants in the closing interviews named this exercise as one of their favourite experiences. The Mirror walk is at once an exercise in sensory awareness, imagination, play and gratitude. In this walk, participants worked in pairs, as one participant guided their "blind" partner with eyes closed to encounter the natural world through smell, touch and hearing. At the same time, the blind partner is invited to imagine that she is going for a walk in her larger ecological self. This idea is enhanced by the fact that every once in a while, the seeing partner points her partner towards a specific site, and invites her to "open her eyes and look into the mirror." The blind partner then opens her eyes, and takes in the site for several seconds, imagining she is looking at a reflection of herself. We did this walk together in an outdoor park, on a beautiful spring afternoon. Participants guided each other with deep care, gentleness and visible delight. After the walk itself, participants appreciated the simplicity of the exercise, and how it brought them in contact with a sense of love for life. April, who had come to the group that day tired after writing papers all week, said that she felt revitalized after the Mirror

Walk. All the participants described wanting to share this activity with loved ones. This sharing of joy and presence in the body offered an important vista of self-care: the simplicity of cultivating embodied presence with the living world as a source of nurturance and joy.

Session 7 was marked by some key conversations about activism and self-care. Although only three participants were able to be present for this session, each had come to the group after an activism-filled week, with group members participating in various actions such as the Earth Day march (the largest in Quebec history, Fiddler, 2012) and some more intense direct actions and confrontations with police against the Quebec government's plan to further develop the north ("Plan Nord"). April and Megan described the joy of the Earth Day march, as well as the police response to their anti-Plan-Nord actions, which had created an atmosphere that was "like a war zone." Despite this fact, Megan shared that she had felt more at ease and safer in her activism than she normally would have during this action.

In addition, Jackie shared about how she had come away from last session feeling happy and positive, but that once she had returned home, she had been met with some shocking and traumatic news: someone she knew, and had stood in solidarity with in her activism, had been deported. She shared how many emotions she'd gone through all week, how powerless she and her activist colleagues had felt, the sense of injustice, and the small hopes that he would be okay. She also shared about how her partner had gotten involved in a case with her for the first time, and how much it had helped to have his support and share this experience with him.

The group's sharing provoked some curiosity in me about their experiences had

been related to self-care. I asked Megan what had been different this week that had helped her feel safer and more positive, despite potentially traumatizing confrontations with police forces. I also asked Jackie what she had felt had supported her to get through this week. I wanted to help participants pull out and highlight any self-care learning and insights that they could glean from their experiences. What followed was a poignant discussion about supportive factors for sustaining the practice of environmental and social justice activism.

Jackie responded by talking about the importance of being able to share these difficult activist experiences and emotions with supportive friends and loved ones, such as her partner. She talked about how usually in organizing circles, even though everyone is feeling intense feelings under the surface, these feelings are not really talked about. She also shared that in the court, they were not permitted to testify about "humanitarian" reasons for not deporting her friend. It was painful to her that the personal, human aspect of the issue had been shut down by the system, and how, from her perception, it seemed that organizers would generally respond by trying to work within that framework, and thus cope by keeping their feelings at bay. This week she said it was helpful to be able to get really mad, to break down emotionally, and to share this with her partner. She felt it made the experience more bearable, and that it also brought them closer together. Jackie seemed to be really integrating the idea that creating spaces and cultures to be able to express painful emotions could be a support, rather than a hindrance, to activism.

Megan's response to my question was also interesting. The action she had engaged in involved interrupting a political meeting against Plan Nord. She shared how it "just felt so good" to be next to other activists, using their very bodies to disrupt the

provincial government's destructive development planning. It felt "so right" to be taking action. She described feeling connected to this passionate, higher sense of belief in the justice of their actions (what I reflected as a sort of unshakeable conviction), and she felt supported by this belief. She admitted it's not always like that, but it's great when she is able to be in touch with this. Megan seemed to be connecting to what motivates her to take action – it seemed helpful to highlight this essential spark, which could sustain her willingness to take action even in the face of violent and repressive forces. In his work on trauma, Levine (2010) talks about mobilization as the opposite to trauma. Indeed, what Megan was describing, in a sense, was the opposite of the traumatic response, which would cause one to freeze or fight from a place of helpless rage. Megan's action was rather an intentional response, a healing mobilization.

There was much excitement as stories were shared about actions in this session, and group members also responded to Jackie's sharing with a great deal of caring and empathy. There seemed to be a lot of mutual support and admiration between the three participants. Within the context of the group, this discussion felt like a key moment in the development of trust and intimacy, and a source of collective self-care.

Finally, the process of working with an animal character in the Council of All Beings process, extending from sessions 7 through 9, also presented key opportunities for the exploration and integration of self-care. The participants appeared to take a lot of joy in choosing their animals, and revealed a mixture of embarrassment and delight in this process. The very process whereby participants willingly made time in their week to intuitively find an animal seemed to me to be evidence of participants' willingness to engage with the creative process as a source of self-care in their personal lives. The

Council process itself was similarly magical and playful, and I believe a source of creative nourishment, empowerment and self-care.

Participants reported incorporating their animal character as a protective figure into their daily lives to varying degrees. Jackie in particular reported at the end of the Council that in the previous two weeks she had found herself thinking of her animal, and invoking it at times. Indeed, Jackie seemed to really connect her mask. In the week prior to the Council, she reported that she had taken her mask with her to various places throughout the week, and had even worn it at a demonstration. In the demonstration, she had delivered a speech wearing her mask, and talked about how wearing a mask was a symbol of her solidarity with refugees and others who have no status in Canada, and who are forced to hide their real identities. Thus the mask took on both a political, and a personal meaning for Jackie.[1]

Overall, sessions 5 through 9 offered a diverse bouquet of experiential tools designed to invite participants to explore new practices, and ways of perceiving self-care. As participants continued to integrate these themes into their lives, a growing sense of trust between group members appeared itself to be a source of mutual support and collective self-care.

Early terminations. It should be noted that Megan and April ended up terminating early with the group due to unforeseen schedule changes and activist demands. Both participants were preparing for their summer trip to Latin America to engage in human rights solidarity activism. After session 7, Megan terminated earlier

---

[1] Interestingly, just a few weeks later, mask-wearing would take on a widespread political meaning with the passage of Bill 78 in Quebec, a repressive law which limited students' power of assembly and banned the wearing of masks in public demonstrations (CBC News, 2012a; CBC News, 2012b).

than expected because her family had offered her a ticket to visit them before her travels. April, on the other hand, terminated abruptly and apologetically before session 9 when she realized she had to take care of some legal issues with regards to her passport and Canadian student visa (as she was an American citizen). Both participants expressed regret at leaving the group early, and the other participants were sad to see them go. Nevertheless, Megan and April's leaving did not seem to be a great rupture in the group process. By session 7, it seemed that the sense of intimacy between group members was strong enough to contain the loss of these members' physical participation in the group. Indeed, there was a sense that they were still participating in the process "in spirit," as they had both really wanted to be able to stay. Both of Megan and April had chosen animals for session 6, and as a group we acknowledged their animals in the Council of All Beings process, saying they had wanted to be there, but could not make it. We also remembered them in the terminating session, and sent them imaginary blessings and gifts. Both Megan and April followed up with me by email to complete the closing interview questions. Although neither of them had been able to stay for the whole process, both of them gave me the feedback that for the future they thought this process could be extended by the number of weeks to be even longer.

Session Descriptions: Closing Session (Session 10)

Session 10 outline: Gifts for going forth

1. Stone check-in, gratitude while thinking of termination today and the whole process we've been on together

2. World ball

3. Improvisational dramatic tour of where we've been together. (We revisited

and briefly acted out different activities we had done together)

4. We used embodied sculptures to dramatize what self-care means to participants before the group, now, and what their self-care intention is for the future.)

5. Animals' messages/blessings: We brought out the animal masks again, and I invited the participants to put on the mask, and come up with a movement and a message that their animal would like to give to them. In pairs they were instructed to share this movement/message with their partner, and then partners switched masks and witnessed their animals delivering their messages to them.

6. **Circle of gifts:** We gathered in a circle and imagined a big block of imaginary clay in the centre of the circle. With this clay, I invited participants to imagine that they could fashion any gift they would like to give to the other participants. Each participant gave an imaginary gift to each of the others in the group.

7. **Closing:** At participants' request, we did the Elm Dance. In the second half of the dance we called out things that we are grateful for about being alive.

8. **Hand-squeeze around the circle and share a word, breath or gesture.**

Discussion of Closing Session

The final session (10) was focused on closure and termination. We reviewed where we had been together and revisited elements from various sessions, interweaving themes of self-care, dramatic ritual and role play, storytelling, celebration, gratitude, appreciation and gift-giving.

Integration of drama therapy and the Work that Reconnects. The elements of the spiral of the Work that Reconnects that were especially highlighted in this session were gratitude (in the check-in and gift-giving circle), perceptual shift (with the final mask-exercise), and going forth (preparing to enter with new gifts into the world). The fourth stage of the spiral, "Going forth" was particularly embodied through the participants' sharing of gifts and reflecting on insights, as they prepared to leave the group and continue to integrate self-care into their lives and activism.

Simultaneously, session 10 featured typical themes and processes that one might see in any drama therapy closing session. Emunah (1994) for example, discusses themes of review and celebration as primary features of closing sessions in her Five-Phase Model. Reviewing the journey we had been on together, and specifically highlighting the animal role and mask, were important ways of symbolizing our whole journey together, and the culminating ritual of the Council of All Beings. The process of putting on the mask and then witnessing a partner wearing one's mask was inspired by Silverman's (2004) "In the director's chair" intervention in the Story Within. As Silverman describes,

> At this stage of the process the therapist asks the client to direct someone else in the role of his or her character. The character is then witnessed as embodied by someone else. Clients have the opportunity to direct the other person exactly how they want them to be. They also hear the feedback of the person playing the role (p. 132).

Inviting participants to direct another group member to don their mask was designed to enhance participants' a sense of power, as well as their aesthetic distance from their role. Additionally, asking participants to instruct their partner in giving them a blessing as the

animal, served to echo the giving of gifts that participants had undertaken in the Council of All Beings. It is my hope that this process supported participants to further integrate the animal character as a protector figure, which they could continue to draw upon after the group ended.

The gift giving with imaginary clay process itself was an incredibly moving process to witness. The gifts that group members chose to give to each other were at once highly imaginative, and reflected a deep sensitivity to each other's needs, strengths, vulnerabilities and longings. It was a privilege to witness.

Integration of self-care as a guiding theme. As a culminating session, session 10 primarily served a summarizing and internalizing function with regards to the guiding theme. Reviewing where we had been together, and embodying participants' current state of self-care, as well as their future intentions, was meant to enhance the sense that each participant's self-care process would continue to unfold after the group ends. In a sense, the session ended symmetrically where the series had begun: with gratitude and setting of intentions. This time, however, the participants were leaving our session with a much fuller basket of self-care tools and experiences. There was a lot of tenderness in the group, and many of the participants told me in their closing interviews that the gifts they received from other group members were some of the most meaningful moments in the whole process for them. From the closing session, participants were invited to take the leap of bringing their self-care insights and process into their larger lives.

<div align="center">

Chapter Four: Discussion

</div>

Impact of the Series: The Closing Interviews

The 10-week series represented an integration of drama therapy methods and the

Work that Reconnects to support a group of activists to explore issues of self-care. The closing interviews with participants revealed that participants had indeed gained much from their experience. Across the board, participants reported that they had enjoyed the group and creative process, and that it had increased their awareness, practice and appreciation of self-care.

The group appeared to serve a self-care function in itself, while inviting participants to redefine and incorporate self-care more profoundly into their daily lives. "It forced me to take time each week for self-care, to set time aside for that, it was a gentle reminder" (Sarah). Additionally, the group appeared to support participants to increase interpersonal awareness and self-confidence in activist practice. For example, Jessica noted that the group helped her to "realize that if you're not okay, you take it out on others," "give myself recognition" and "become more brave."

The series offered participants a practical set of self-care tools and perceptions that they found useful in their work and lives:

> I think different things were helpful in different ways. For example, the nature walk was very helpful both in the moment and as a more long-term self-care concept I can draw upon for relaxation, while passing the rock around at the start of each session was helpful to set the tone and see where everyone else was coming from that day. Every exercise seemed to serve its own purpose in that way, and I enjoyed the mixture of personal creativity (drawing, writing, making our habitats, etc.) with group work. (April)

In general, participants were impressed by the diversity and creativity of activities that were offered over the course of the series, finding it "exciting… and totally different and

non-traditional" (Jackie).

Some of the exercises that participants identified as particularly transformational included the Mirror Walk, the Elm Dance, the process of finding one's animal and building its habitat, Widening Circles, Open-sentences, and mask-making, the world ball combined with improvisational play, and the spectrogram. The Mirror Walk in particular appeared to have a strong impact on participants, and multiple participants identified this exercise as a turning point in reawakening their relationship with nature as a source of renewal. The practice of Earth-based sensory awareness reconnected them to a sense of child-like wonder, and joy, and seemed like a concrete tool that they could share and use. Participants also reported feeling deeply moved by the Elm Dance story, which demonstrated the possibility of a collective healing response to social/ecological destruction.

The group exercises helped participants reconnect to nature, their bodies and to their creative selves as a source of refuge and renewal. Megan, for example, identified finding her animal, the bear, as the most powerful moment in the series for her. "Lying next to my 'cave' and actually feeling like a bear, actually understanding, feeling so deeply connected, feeling like I could escape." She commented that the group impacted her in the following way:

> I have prioritized time with the natural world much higher than before; it has affirmed the importance of my relationships with non-human things. … I think this process helped give me the words to describe a relationship I feel like I already had to the earth and to describe my suffering, too. The process absolutely addressed the intersection of self and world, and changed the way I am able to

understand this relationship on a day-to-day basis. Sometimes I use the exercise where I focus on one sense at a time; it helps remind me of what I've learned. Similarly, both Jackie and Sarah emphasized how the group inspired them to continue to integrate art into their community work and activism.

As a result of the group, most participants reported being able to set better limits to prioritize self-care. While for some participants this meant that they had chosen to pull away from participating in as many actions as they had before, they also admitted that they felt their level of engagement was becoming more sustainable. "[The group] encouraged me to take a step back and not engage in as many different things at once. It also has made me feel much more positive about self-care and more confident about seeking it out" (April). Megan similarly reported that:

I think this experience has solidified the belief of mine that there are many diverse forms of activism and that I should participate in those that I can, without getting to a point where I'm producing more negativity than I am being constructive. I think this process has made me feel less guilty of saying no, less judgmental of myself. …By the end of the process I was not going to demonstrations and making sure I had enough sleep, hugely different from before starting the group. Also, I think I feel much less guilty about being in [Latin America this summer] and missing the summer [and student movement in Montreal] than I would have without the group. I feel really proud to be a part of the movement, enraged at the government, but not guilty.

As Megan hints at in the above quotation, the group seemed to invite the participants to widen the scope of their definition of activism. Significantly, Megan also noted: "I will

take away the importance of taking care of myself as a necessity and a form of activism. I think it has helped me be a little gentler on myself and a little gentler on everyone else." As a result of the group, Megan and others were beginning to see self-care as a part of activism, rather than a distraction from it.

Several participants noted that the timing of the group had been particularly important for them, and had served to alleviate symptoms of mounting burnout:

> It is difficult for me to imagine the past semester without it, as I classify it as one of the most stressful, heavy semesters of my life. I think that it came along just in time, when I really needed to be reminded of my own value, the part I play in the greater scheme of things, and the beauty in the world (Anna).

Indeed, the participants who had said they were struggling with burnout at the onset of the group (Jessica, April, Megan and Jackie) reported that they felt they were in a much healthier place by the end of the group.

In terms of establishing emotional safety, it took time for participants to warm up to the group and the new context. "I felt shyer in some exercises, but I liked the challenge" (Sarah). Nevertheless, all participants described the group as a safe space, characterized by a sense of trust and mutual support. This was especially significant in the case of April, who had been concerned about triggering her symptoms of post-traumatic stress:

> At the beginning I was very nervous about participating in some of the activities and how they would make me feel... I can sometimes have intense reactions to memories and did not feel prepared or comfortable dealing with those reactions in front of a group. However, that ended up never being an issue and over time I felt

more comfortable.

The group also seemed to foster safety by helping participants overcome a sense of isolation. In her closing interview, Jessica talked about how healing it was for her to feel a part of the group: "Usually I feel excluded from groups. …I felt included and wanted." (Jessica). She talked about the group being a place of "transparency" and freedom of expression in which "there was no censorship." Meeting and relating to others with similar experience appeared to provoke a sense of excitement, relief and belonging for participants.

The participants did not separate their experience in the group from their larger work in the world. Instead, they tended to think about the larger implications of this work for other populations that they work for in their activism. For example, Jackie and Megan were inspired by potential of incorporating exercises from the group into their work with other activists and with marginalized communities. Yet for some participants, awareness of these communities also seemed to cause conflicting emotions about benefiting from participating in the group, and provoke a sense of discomfort about taking up space. Megan, for example, shared that:

> Sometimes I was really excited to go and felt comfortable, and safe. Other times, I felt like I was occupying space I didn't deserve, or like my sorrows and frustrations were not significant enough to warrant the group. Sometimes I felt like talking about things wasn't helping and I should be out demonstrating or mobilizing. … I didn't like talking about past experiences. I know it is important and I think it probably is to other people. I really appreciated listening to other people's stories, but whenever I spoke it felt a little indulgent, or maybe

dishonest.

Similarly, April noted:

> [The group] made me more aware that we were still a privileged group to be able
> to take part in this type of therapy, and that many people can't participate in this
> same type of self-care. I think that's what I was referring to the day you asked us
> to each share our feelings or one word about self-care and my word was 'angry'.
> The more lucky I feel to be benefitting from this learning process the more unfair
> and unjust it seems that others can't.

Despite these conflicting emotions, the above responses reflect a growing appraisal of self-care as an essential value and practice.

Perhaps what was most impressive in the closing interviews was the fact that participants' individual conceptions of self-care seemed to have shifted and had become more complex compared with the pre-interviews. In the pre-interviews, participants had defined self-care primarily in terms of engaging in actions to care for basic personal wellbeing, including eating well, sleeping enough, spending time with friends and in some cases, art-making. But from their definitions and descriptions of self-care in the closing interviews, participants seemed to have redefined and integrated a wider vision self-care and its role within their movements by the end of the group. Megan, for example, defined self-care as follows:

> Self-care is the acknowledgement that you are integral part of the system you
> simultaneously love and brings you pain, and you should always treat your 'self'
> as such. It is self-respect and self-love in action. It is activism in and of itself,
> because it is acknowledging that you are both important and insignificant.

For Lena, "self-care [meant] being aware of my limits, respecting them, and respecting myself enough to take actions I know will make me feel better." Jackie's reflections on self-care and activism were as follows:

> Self-care means avoiding the trap that activism can be of being very results-based, of being very reactionary… Self-care is about being honest. Being honest with myself, with my loved ones, with my fellow activists about how I'm feeling. And also making it a safe space so that anyone else can [be honest]. So it's about creating that trust, in a community, and I would say it's about really trying to build a *culture* of self-care, and that self again being that larger self where there are processes of rituals and we've built into our [movement]… Self-care means finding refuge in nature and creation…

> Being an activist means being open, opening our eyes, which means always witnessing the destruction that so many people would rather just become numb from or just blind themselves to. But we've made this engagement as activists to witness that. But at the same time, we don't always have to witness it. We can also surround ourselves with things that are beautiful, things that are growing, things that are hopeful, and that… is actually important to. I'm thinking of some of the activists in my circles who don't practice self-care or who don't see its use. Who almost see it as a distraction, it's taking time away doing that. …But actually for me anyway and I feel for a lot of people, it's part of having the energy to go fight that fight. And also the part that's still shocked about destruction is the part that still believes in the possibility of a world that's not based on that.

For Jackie, the group experience stimulated a whole series of reflections on activist practice, and the "concept of healing collectively." In her closing interview, she talked about the importance of incorporating collective healing processes as part of movement-building in general:

> Especially in a context where I feel that the people in power are so anti-activist let's say, or anti-social, anti-people, you can be in a very adversarial role, with a lot of anger and a lot of reaction. But at the same time, the reason *I* do activism is also because I believe in healing. And that the part of me also feels very feminine... In the sense that I'm in shock or indignation and that later becomes this adversarial anger, but at the core it's the shock that someone can so callously break things and destroy things, … lives and people and just the complete non-regard for the destruction… I feel that *that's* the side of me that reacts to that: the side that believes in healing and creation and growth. And yet because we're often reacting to that I feel like we often tend to mirror that in our reactions and then not feel completely satisfied. So talking as healing, coming together even after the wound's been broken open, even if one person is missing from the circle, like even if the central person [is missing, as with deportation]… [I see] the importance of still making that effort to seek each other in healing rather than just um kind of isolating ourselves… I also just think that's important for resilience building in general.

Intertwined, then, with these definitions, were perceptions about the implications of collective healing processes as a radical alternative to individual psychotherapy, which can strengthen, rather than detract from, the power of activist movements:

My impression is that the Work that Reconnects is a way for people to heal and

gain awareness that is different from the "mainstream" opportunities offered like

one-on-one counseling or class lectures on the environment. I think the main thing

I will take away is that I am part of a greater whole and while I have a

responsibility to that whole I can also draw upon it for strength. (April)

The group experience appeared to provoke a foundational shift in values related to self-

care for many of the activist participants. It pointed to the power inherent in ecological

drama therapy to inform the creation of larger cultures of collective care in activist

communities.

Ecological Drama Therapy: An Integration of Methods

The process as a whole was a successful integration of two methods: drama

therapy and the Work that Reconnects. Each of these methods contributed a diverse array

of interventions. Although the diversity of interventions risked saturating participants

with an overflow of possibilities, the group did seem to flow well. Drama therapy

techniques such as storytelling, Playback Theatre and the use of dramatic play seemed to

combine well with the early stage of group formation, as well as the initial stage of the

Work that Reconnects structure (gratitude). These interventions, in turn, served to create

a foundation of personal trust and intimacy sufficient to guide participants into the second

and third stages of the Work that Reconnects Framework (honouring pain and the

perceptual shift).

The second half of the series focused on Work that Reconnects exercises that

widened participants' perspective on their current realities and concerns. Exercises such

as Widening Circles, the Mirror Walk, the Remembering, and the Council of All Beings

served to invite participants into a wider sense of self (the *ecological self*) and time (*deep time*). Additionally, throughout this second half of the series, dramatic therapy methods and processes served to extend and deepen participant's capacity to project into these wider frames of view. The integration of these two frameworks resulted in an extended form of magic, which culminated in the ritual process of the Council of All Beings. Not only did the workshop furnish participants with a diverse array of self-care tools rooted in both methods (including gratitude, play, honouring pain, witnessing each other, creative process, and widening perspectives), it also served as a deeply embodied process of insight and transformation.

Personal Reflections and Learning

As a student drama therapist with nearly a decade of experience facilitating the Work that Reconnects, combining these two frameworks in leading the therapy group was deeply rewarding and inspirational. I felt continually moved by the participants' openhearted courage and generosity of spirit. On a personal level, offering this group felt like an important stepping-stone towards developing this work future, and an expression of my own deepest calling. Although I have long considered myself an activist at heart, I have likewise always been fascinated with internal processes of personal growth and motivation in relation to social/ecological movements. When I first discovered The Work that Reconnects, I often found that my interest in the work and other "spiritual" approaches to activism were marginalized and disqualified in the student activist groups I frequented. Over time I departed somewhat from direct forms of activism in order to focus more on learning about healing work, Buddhist practice, and processes of embodied learning and creativity. I continued to facilitate Work that Reconnects

workshops for the broader public, and longed to engage once again within a more explicitly "activist" context. Though I had departed from the activist world to learn about healing, my ultimate intentions had always been to apply my learning towards supporting the creation of a just and sustainable world. Offering this group to activists felt like a return to a community and an orientation that reflect my own essential values. This time, I had a broader array of tools to offer than I had had before.

Although I came to the group already with a good deal of experience and understanding of the activist world, the process helped me clarify more about how to convey the tools of the Work that Reconnects in a way that feels practical and accessible to activist communities. For example, by focusing on the theme of self-care (rather than, say, "despair work") the work seemed to resonate more clearly with activists, and meet an essential, growing, and largely unmet need. The theme of self-care itself was a key, which opened a doorway into many wider perceptions and vistas. I saw that offering self-care group work to activists is my essential form of activism, an expression of my gifts and passions. It was exciting to bring these frameworks together, and to feel that I was working on the edge of some new understandings and radical visions for self-care practice. Coming to understand the Work that Reconnects as a form of collective self-care, which can enhance, rather than detract, from an activist's participation in environmental/social movements, was exciting way of articulating the work that emerged over the course of the group. As a drama therapist, interweaving drama therapy with the Work that Reconnects felt exhilarating and magical to me. Like a good marriage, each element of this union seemed to grow and become more itself through intertwining with the other.

Like any course of therapy, this process was imperfect, and offered opportunities for learning. Understanding how to seamlessly integrate the two frameworks was not always evident. Although in general the two frameworks mixed well together, the Work that Reconnects process does usually include a certain amount of conceptual learning and teaching. In particular, during session 8, I elected to give a talk on the ecological self, and some of the other key ideas in the Work that Reconnects framework. In retrospect, the teaching-format did not seem to flow well with the drama therapy group. Although participants were interested in the information I was sharing, they had trouble paying attention. They later gave feedback that it had been "a lot to take in," and difficult to integrate so much information at once.

Instead, using the Work that Reconnects theory as a transparent guiding framework and set of tools throughout the sessions seemed to flow better, and be more appropriate to the drama therapy context. I found that participants responded when I shared an idea from the Work that Reconnects as a response to thoughts or emotions that were naturally arising in the course of the process. Of course, in the Work that Reconnects itself, these "teaching" moments are designed to follow and respond to participants' direct experiences in the exercises. Yet with regards to the sharing of theory, perhaps the drama therapy medium and weekly group format calls for a more emergent and fluid approach. In general, it seemed like the progression of interventions that were framed in light of the spiral, and interspersed with group discussion, provided the best balance of cognitive and experiential learning for this group.

A second lesson from the group process is that my initial instinct to try to create a group of activists who do not already know each other was a good one. I did however

allow Megan and April to join the group, even though they were good friends and co-organizers. In making this choice, I was careful to discuss this with each of them, and to alert them to any potential issues that could arise as a result. The two participants elected to be in the group together, with the understanding that they would be transparent to the group about their prior relationship. I believed that these two group members had a strong enough relationship and level of maturity to be able to be in the group together. The fact that the intervention was a research project focused on activist self-care, and not a traditional psychotherapy group, made me think that this would be okay, even helpful to them in their work together. In the closing interview, however, I received feedback from Megan that she felt that having had her friend in the group had hindered her in some ways from taking full advantage of the group, and sharing as openly. For future, she shared that she would not elect to go through such a process with a close friend again. Although I believe there were likely benefits and drawbacks to either scenario, this was good learning. In future, I may try to refrain from including friends or co-organizers in an activist therapy group. At the same time, the relatively small activist population in any given locality might make it difficult to adhere strictly to this rule.

Limitations and Future Avenues of Inquiry

This research was characterized by several inherent limitations. As with any case study, these findings were specific to the participant group, and may not be replicable in or generalizable to other activist groups. The group itself was not representative of all activist populations. Indeed, with regards to gender, age and cultural diversity, the group was somewhat homogenous as a population (consisting of primarily white, university-educated women in their twenties and thirties).

Moreover, the interpretations of the data were a product of my own perceptions and biases. In selecting and describing data, the themes of self-care and the combining of the Work that Reconnects and drama therapy frameworks guided me. Nevertheless, my choice and description of data was in no way systematic or value-free.

While this study aimed to propose a new method of drama therapy work, known as ecological drama therapy, the method would have to be further elaborated and applied within a diversity of contexts and populations in order to develop to full maturity.

Future researchers may wish to pursue similar interventions with a diversity of activist populations, including co-ed groups, male groups, and various minority-identified groups. Practitioners may also choose to work with groups of activists who work together or who know each other. Such work would likely involve working through more established inter-personal dynamics in relation to a specific cause, within the larger goal of developing collective self-care practices.

Another potential field of interest would be to apply the proposed ecological drama therapy approach to a non-activist group, for example, for those who are not engaged in environmental/social movements but who are suffering with despair about the state of the world. In this context, ecological drama therapy could perhaps play a catalyzing role in inspiring participants to become more politically active.

In the closing interviews, most of the participants in the group shared that they would have been interested in a longer group process. Future researchers and practitioners may be interested in extending the group process over a longer number of weeks or months.

Finally, if more ecological drama therapy group processes are offered over time, it

would be interesting to try to facilitate more links between therapy groups and ongoing community-based groups and practices. It is my hope that this practice could go beyond the therapy room and the therapeutic relationship, to seed and foster a larger culture and movement of collective self-care within social and environmental movements at large.

Conclusion

This case study was a singular event: an attempt to address issues of self-care with activists using an ecological drama therapy model. It was an event that took place under unique circumstances. Riding on the heels of the Occupy Movement, and with the Quebec student movement at full force, offering a drama therapy group for activists seemed extremely timely and pertinent. Yet whether or not activist struggles are highlighted in mainstream media or the public eye, activists as a population continue to position themselves on the edge of difficult and ongoing struggles, often characterized by painful social injustice and horrifying environmental decimation. And although one might easily dismiss activist causes as a matter of special interest, these struggles belong to all of us; they are the shadow of our culture.

Activists are our canaries in the coalmine. Many of them, facing trauma and internalized pressures, lack the tools to deal with the immensity of the pain and pressures they regularly encounter. Activists indeed may have much to gain from therapists, but therapists may have equal gifts to glean from activists. If activism is a healing response to destruction, then activists are mobilizers of healing. Drama therapists, on the other hand, are healers of action, and can play a special role in working as allies of activist struggles. We live in a broken world. How, as therapists, do we engage? Ecological drama therapy is a call to activists towards healing, and to therapists towards action. It is an invitation to

come home to our world, to inhabit this healing – like a stone dropped in water – to

widen circles within circles of care.

References

Activist trauma support. (n.d.). *Activist Trauma Support*. Retrieved from

    https://www.activist-trauma.net/

Adrienne. (2012, October 15). How about a beginning to self-determined care? [Web log

    post]. Retrieved from http://adriennemareebrown.net/blog/2012/10/15/how-about-

    a-beginning-of-self-determined-care/

Ambrose. (2012, October 17). An end to able bodied rhetoric [Web log post]. Retrieved

    from http://poeticoverthrow.blogspot.ca/2012/10/an-end-to-able-bodied-

    rhetoric.html

Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Boston, MA:

    Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

Bischoff, A. (n.d.). Interviews and articles. *Greenspiration!* Retrieved from

    http://www.greenspiration.org/memorial/mart.htm

Boal, A. (2008). *Theater of the oppressed*. London, England: Pluto.

Brooks, A. (2007). Feminist standpoint epistemology. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy

    (Eds.), *Feminist research practice* (pp. 53-82). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

    Publications.

Building Radical Accessible Communities Everywhere (BRACE). (2012, October 17).

    On gimp-time: Activism and commitment [Web log post]. Retrieved from

    http://radicalaccessiblecommunities.wordpress.com/2012/10/17/on-gimp-time-

    activism-and-commitment/

Buzzell, L., & Chalquist, C. (Eds.) (2009). *Ecotherapy: Healing with nature in mind*. San

    Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

CBC News. (2012a, May 18). Montreal bans wearing masks at protests. *CBC News*.

>   Retrieved from

>   http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/story/2012/05/18/montreal-masks-

>   bylaw-ban.html

CBC News. (2012b, May 18). Quebec adopts emergency law to end tuition crisis. *CBC*

>   *News*. Retrieved from

>   http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/story/2012/05/18/quebec-student-

>   protest-law-bill-78.html

Christoff, S. (2013). *Le fond de l'aire est rouge*. Montreal, Canada: Howl Arts Collective.

Christopher, B. (2012, October 17). My response to "An end to self care" In *Facebook*

>   [Public note]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/notes/brunhilda-

>   christopher/my-response-to-an-end-to-self-care/10152210543650232

Cox, L. (2009). "Hearts with one purpose alone"? Thinking personal sustainability in

>   social movements. *Emotion, Space and Society*, *2*, 52-61. Retrieved from

>   http://eprints.nuim.ie/1538/1/LCHearts_with_one_purpose_alone_LBedited.pdf

Cox, L. (2011). *How do we keep going? Activist burnout and personal sustainability in*

>   *social movements*. Retrieved from

>   http://eprints.nuim.ie/2815/1/LC_How_do_we_keep_going.pdf

Creswell, J. W. (2007). Case study research. In *Qualitative inquiry and research design:*

>   *Choosing among five approaches* (pp. 73-75). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

>   Publications.

Davis, K., & Atkins, S. (2009). Ecotherapy: Tribalism in the Mountains and Forest.

>   *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, *4*(3), 272-282. doi:

10.1080/15401380903192747

Downton, J., & Wehr, P. (1998). Persistent Pacifism: How Activist Commitment is

Developed and Sustained. *Journal of Peace Research*, *35*(5), 531-550. doi:

10.1177/0022343398035005001

Earley, J. (1999). Developmental stages of group process. In *Interactive group therapy:*

Integrating interpersonal, action-oriented, and psychodynamic approaches (pp.

219-235). Philadelphia, PA: Brunner/Mazel.

Emunah, R. (1994). *Acting for real: Drama therapy process, technique, and*

performance. New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel.

Fessenden, L. (2007). *On the way to interbeing: A co-operative* (Doctoral dissertation).

Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (Order No.

3296095)

Fiddler, R. (2012, April 25). A look at the massive student movement shaking up

Quebec. *Rabble.ca: News for the Rest of Us*. Retrieved from

http://rabble.ca/news/2012/04/massive-student-movement-quebec

Fisher, A. (2002). *Radical ecopsychology: Psychology in the service of life*. Albany, NY:

State University of New York Press.

Gendlin, E. T. (1981). *Focusing*. Toronto, Canada: Bantam Books.

Guard, J., Martin, D., McGauley, L., Steedman, M. & Garcia-Orgales, J. (2012). Art as

activism: Empowering workings and reviving unions through popular theater.

Labor Studies Journal, *37*(2), 163-182. doi: 10.1177/0160449X11431895

Hanh, T. N. (1999). Please call me by my true names. In *Call me by my true names: The*

collected poems of Thich Nhat Hanh (pp. 72-73). Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

Hocoy, D. (2007). Art therapy as a tool for social change: A conceptual model (F.

    Kaplan, Ed.). In F. Kaplan (Ed.), *Art therapy and social action* (pp. 21-39).

    Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hoelting, K. (2012, October 23). An end to self-care? [Web log post]. Retrieved from

    http://insidepassages.com/category/mindfulnesswithactivism/

Hollis-Walker, L. (2012). Change processes in emotion-focused therapy and the Work

    that Reconnects. *Ecopsychology*, *4*(1), 25-36. doi: 10.1089/eco.2011.0047

Hsu, K. (2010). *Ecological consciousness: Exploring the experience of stories and the*

    work that reconnects (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest

    Dissertations and Theses database. (Order No. MR55201)

The Icarus Project. (n.d.). *The Icarus Project: Navigating the Space between Brilliance*

    and Madness. Retrieved from http://www.theicarusproject.net/

Johnson, D. R. (1991). The theory and technique of transformations in drama therapy.

    The Arts in Psychotherapy, 18, 285-300. doi: 10.1016/0197-4556(91)90068-L

Johnson, D. R. (2000). Developmental Transformations: Toward the body as presence. In

    P. Lewis & D. R. Johnson (Eds.), *Current approaches in drama therapy* (pp. 87-

    110). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Jones, P. (2007a). *Aftershock: Confronting trauma in a violent world: A guide for*

    activists and their allies. New York, NY: Lantern Books.

Jones, P. (2007b). Dramatherapy: Therapeutic core processes. In *Drama as therapy:*

    Theory, practice, and research. London, England: Routledge.

Jones, P. (2010). The social and political contexts of dramatherapy. In *Drama as therapy:*

    Clinical work and research into practice (Vol. 2). New York, New York:

Routledge.

Junge, M. B., Alvarez, J. F., Kellogg, A., & Volker, C. (1993). The art therapist as social

activist: Reflections and visions. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art*

Therapy Association, *26*(3), 107-113. Retrieved from

http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ863469

Kateel, S. (2012, October 17). Care is the core of change. *Organizing Upgrade*. Retrieved

from http://organizingupgrade.com/index.php/modules-menu/community-

care/item/737-care-is-the-core-of-change

Kissam, J. (2012, October 20). Care/work [Web log post]. Retrieved from

http://domesticleft.blogspot.ca/2012/10/carework.html

Klandermans, B. (2003). Disengaging from movements. In J. Goodwin & J. M. Jasper

(Eds.), *The social movements reader: Cases and concepts*. Malden, MA:

Blackwell.

Kovan, J. T., & Dirkx, J. M. (2003). "Being called awake": The role of transformative

learning in the lives of environmental activists. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *53*(2),

99-118. doi: 10.1177/0741713602238906

Koydemir-Özden, S. (2010). Self-Aspects, Perceived Social Support, Gender, and

Willingness to Seek Psychological Help. *International Journal of Mental Health*,

39(3), 44-60. doi: 10.2753/IMH0020-7411390303

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research*

interviewing. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Lakey, G. (2010). *Facilitating group learning: Strategies for success with diverse adult*

learners. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Landers, F. (2012). Urban play: Imaginatively responsive behavior as an alternative to

    neo-liberalism. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, *39*, 201-205. doi:

    10.1016/j.aip.2011.12.006

Landy, R. (2000). Role Theory and the Role Method of Drama Therapy. In P. Lewis &

    D. R. Johnson (Eds.), *Current approaches in drama therapy* (pp. 50-69).

    Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Latham, K. B. (2010). *Renewing the cultural and environmental commons: Creating*

    communities of mutual care, solidarity and reciprocity (Doctoral dissertation).

    Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (Order no. 3434149)

Leveton, E. (2010). *Healing collective trauma using sociodrama and drama therapy*.

    New York, NY: Springer.

Levine, E. G., & Levine, S. K. (Eds.). (2011). *Art in action: Expressive arts therapy and*

    social change. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley.

Levine, P. A. (2010). *In an unspoken voice: How the body releases trauma and restores*

    goodness. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Loewe, B. (2012, October 16). An end to self-care. *Organizing Upgrade*. Retrieved from

    http://organizingupgrade.com/index.php/modules-menu/community-

    care/item/731-an-end-to-self-care-%7C-b-loewe

Macy, J. (1995). Working through environmental despair. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, &

    A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*. San

    Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books.

Macy, J. (2007a). *World as lover, world as self: Courage for global justice and*

    ecological renewal. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

Macy, J. (Writer). (2007b). *The Work that Reconnects training dvd* [Video]. Gabriola

    Island, Canada: New Society. Retrieved from

    http://www.turntowardlife.tv/joanna_macy_workshop_video/about.htm

Macy, J. (2009). Joanna Macy. *The Elm Dance*. Retrieved from

    http://joannamacy.net/theelmdance.html

Macy, J., & Brown, M. Y. (1998). *Coming back to life: Practices to reconnect our lives,*

    our world. Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society.

Macy, J., & Johnstone, C. (2012). *Active hope: How to face the mess we're in without*

    going crazy. Novato, CA: New World Library.

Mann, E. (2011). *Playbook for progressives: 16 qualities of the successful organizer*.

    Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Mann, E. (2012, November 08). Community care: Self-care, organizational care, and

    movement-building. *Organizing Upgrade*. Retrieved from

    http://organizingupgrade.com/index.php/modules-menu/community-care

Maree, A. (2012, October 17). How about a beginning of self-determined care?

    Organizing Upgrade. Retrieved from

    http://organizingupgrade.com/index.php/modules-menu/community-

    care/item/739-how-about-a-beginning-of-self-determined-care?-|-adrienne-maree

Meacham, E. E. (2011). Emerson, Macy and the evolution of participatory epistemology

    (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses

    database. (Order No. 3457731)

Meehan, L. (2010). *Our birth as holo sapiens navigating our passage through climate*

    change (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses

database. (Order No. 3407647)

Midnight, D. (2012, October 17). More healing, more of the time [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://midnightapothecary.blogspot.ca/2012/10/more-healing-more-of-time.html

Naess, A. (1995). Self-realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World. In G. Sessions (Ed.), *Deep ecology for the twenty-first century* (pp. 225-239). Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Nam, S. K., Chu, H. J., Lee, M. K., Lee, J. H., Kim, N., & Lee, S. M. (2011). A Meta-analysis of Gender Differences in Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help. *Journal of American College Health*, *59*(2), 110-116. doi: 10.1080/07448481.2010.483714

Nepstad, S. E. (2004). Persistent resistance: Commitment and community in the Plowshares movement. *Social Problems*, *51*(1), 43-60. doi: 10.1525/sp.2004.51.1.43

Norgaard, K. M. (2006). "People Want to Protect Themselves a Little Bit": Emotions, Denial, and Social Movement Nonparticipation. *Sociological Inquiry*, *76*(3), 372-396. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-682X.2006.00160.x

North American Drama Therapy Association (NADTA). (2013). What is Drama Therapy? *North American Drama Therapy Association*. Retrieved from http://www.nadta.org/what-is-drama-therapy.html

Occupy Mental Health Project (OMHP). (2012). *Mindful occupation: Rising up without burning out*. Retrieved from http://mindfuloccupation.org/files/booklet/mindful_occupation_singles_latest.pdf

Padamsee, Y. M. (2012, October 31). A round-up and re-frame of the community care conversation. *Organizing Upgrade*. Retrieved from http://organizingupgrade.com/index.php/modules-menu/community-care/item/755-a-round-up-and-re-frame-of-the-community-care-conversation

Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. (2012, October 16). For badass disability justice, working-class and poor lead models of sustainable hustling for liberation [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://www.brownstargirl.org/1/post/2012/10/for-badass-disability-justice-working-class-and-poor-lead-models-of-sustainable-hustling-for-liberation.html

Prendergast, M. (2011). Applied Theatre and/as Activism. *Canadian Theatre Review*, *147*, 18-23. doi: 10.3138/ctr.147.18

Rebick, J. (2012a, March 22). Maple Spring: Quebec students protest tuition hikes in massive numbers [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/judes/2012/03/maple-spring-quebec-students-protest-tuition-hikes-massive-numbers

Rebick, J. (2012b). *Occupy This! Roots and wings of the Occupy movement* [Digital e-book]. Toronto, Canada: Penguin.

Renschler, A. (2008). *Sustaining the effort: Investigating the relationship between self-esteem, coping and burnout in pro-choice women activists* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (AAT 3345516)

Rettig, H. (2006). *The lifelong activist: How to change the world without losing your way*. New York, NY: Lantern Books. Retrieved from http://lifelongactivist.com/

Rilke, R. M. (1996). "Ich lebe mein leben in wachsenden ringen" (A. Barrows & J. Macy,

Trans.). In *Rilke's book of hours: Love poems to God* (p. 48). New York, New

York: Riverhead Books. (Original work published 1905).

Rodgers, K. (2010). "Anger is Why We're All Here": Mobilizing and Managing

Emotions in a Professional Activist Organization. *Social Movement Studies*, *9*(3),

273-291. doi: 10.1080/14742837.2010.493660

Roszak, T. (2001). *The voice of the earth: An exploration of ecopsychology*. Grand

Rapids, MI: Phanes.

Roszak, T., Gomes, M. E., & Kanner, A. D. (Eds.). (1995). *Ecopsychology: Restoring the

earth, healing the mind*. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books.

Sajnani, N., & Kaplan, F. F. (2012). The creative arts therapies and social justice: A

conversation between the editors of this special issue. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*,

39, 165-167. doi: 10.1016/j.aip.2011.12.003

Sajnani, N., & Nadeau, D. (2006). Creating safer spaces for immigrant women of color:

Performing the politics of possibility. *Canadian Woman Studies Journal*, *25*(1-2),

45-52. Abstract retrieved from Gender Studies Database. (Accession No.

22746121)

Sajnani, N. (2009). Theatre of the oppressed: Drama therapy as cultural dialogue. In P.

Lewis & D. R. Johnson (Eds.), *Current approaches in drama therapy* (pp. 461-

482). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Sajnani, N. (2012). Response/ability: Imagining a critical race feminist paradigm for the

creative arts therapies. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, *39*, 186-191. doi:

10.1016/j.aip.2011.12.009

Sajnani, N., Linds, W., Ndejuru, L., & Wong, A. (2011). The Bridge: Toward Relational

Aesthetic Inquiry in the Montreal *Life Stories* Project. *Canadian Theatre Review*, *148*, 18-24. doi: 10.3138/ctr.148.18

Salas, J. (1996). *Improvising real life: Personal story in playback theater* (3rd ed.). New Paltz, NY: Tusitala Publishing.

Seed, J., Macy, J., Flemming, P., & Naess, A. (1988). *Thinking like a mountain: Towards a council of all beings*. Philadelphia, PA: New Society.

Sheu, H., & Sedlacek, W. (2004). An Exploratory Study of Help-Seeking Attitudes and Coping Strategies Among College Students by Race and Gender. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, *37*, 130-143. Retrieved from http://mec.sagepub.com/

Siegel, D. J., & Hartzell, M. (2003). *Parenting from the inside out: How a deeper self-understanding can help you raise children who thrive*. New York, New York: Penguin.

Silverman, Y. (2004). The Story Within – myth and fairy tale in therapy. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, *31*(3), 127-135. doi: 10.1016/j.aip.2004.05.002

Spectra. (2012, October 17). Response to "An end to self care": How about "An end to the activist martyr complex?" [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://www.spectraspeaks.com/2012/10/response-to-an-end-to-self-care-community-care-how-about-an-end-to-the-martyr-complex/

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sternberg, P., & Garcia, A. (1989). *Sociodrama: Who's in your shoes?* NY, NY: Praeger.

Vaccaro, A., & Mena, J. (2011). It's not burnout, it's more: Queer college activists of

color and mental health. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health*, *15*(4), 339-367. doi: 10.1080/19359705.2011.600656

Wagoner, D. (1999). Lost. In *Traveling light: Collected and new poems* (p. 10). Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Wallis, K. C., & Poulton, J. L. (2001). *Internalization: The origins and construction of internal reality*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Weintrobe, S. (2013) (Ed). *Engaging with climate change: Psychoanalytic and interdisciplinary perspectives*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Appendix A

Bilingual Advertisement

(Français ci-dessous.)

Ecological Drama Therapy Group for Social Activists

Are you a social Activist?

Have you ever had symptoms or worried about trauma, burnout, isolation or other difficult feelings as a result of your commitment to help the world?

Do you ever feel that you could use some support in self-care?

You may qualify to participate in a free Ecological Drama Therapy Group for social activists, exploring issues of self-care.

Ecological Drama Therapy is a creative therapy process that is informed by an awareness of the interconnection between the individual self and the larger ecological/social realities of our time. Sessions will include drama and theatre based therapeutic exercises, art-making, collective rituals, going outside to local parks/gardens, and sharing in a supportive atmosphere.

This group will consist of 4-8 participants, and will involve 10 free weekly 2-hour sessions in ecological drama therapy beginning in late February/early March. The group will be confidentially offered at a convenient downtown location in Montreal. The group will be led by a master's student in Drama Therapy, from Concordia University's Department of Creative Arts Therapies, as part of her master's research project.

Spaces are limited. For more information, please contact Rebekah Hart at your earliest convenience, or by February 15th, at (email) or (phone number).

Dramathérapie de groupe écologique pour les activistes sociaux

Êtes-vous un(e) activiste sociale?

Avez-vous déjà eu des symptômes ou des inquiétudes au sujet du traumatisme, de l'épuisement, de l'isolement ou d'autres sentiments difficiles par rapport à votre engagement à aider le monde?

Vous arrive-t-il de penser qu'un soutien pourrait vous être bénéfique pour prendre soin de vous?

Vous pourriez être admissible à participer à un groupe de dramathérapie écologique gratuit pour les activistes sociaux, explorant les questions de la préservation de soi.

La dramathérapie écologique est un processus de thérapie créative qui se base sur une prise de conscience de l'interconnexion entre le soi individuel et les grandes réalités écologiques/sociales de notre temps. Les séances comprendront des exercices thérapeutiques théâtraux, de la création artistique, des rituels collectifs, des sorties à l'extérieur dans les parcs locaux/jardins, et un partage dans une atmosphère de soutien.

Le groupe sera constitué de 4 à 8 participants, et durera pendant 10 séances hebdomadaires gratuites de 2 heures en dramathérapie écologique. Le groupe commencera à la fin février ou au début mars. Le groupe sera offert en toute confidentialité à un endroit pratique du centre-ville de Montréal. Le groupe sera dirigé par une étudiante de maîtrise en dramathérapie, du département de thérapies par les arts de l'université Concordia, dans le cadre du projet de recherche de fin d'études.

Le groupe sera principalement offert en anglais, mais les francophones sont les bienvenus.

Les places sont limitées. Pour plus d'informations, s'il-vous-plaît contactez Rebekah Hart dès que vous le pouvez, ou avant le 15 février, à (adresse courriel) ou (numéro de téléphone).

Consent Information Letter

Ecological Drama Therapy for Social Activists: A Group Case Study

Drama Therapy Student: **Rebekah Hart**
Department of Creative Arts Therapies
Concordia University

Research Supervisor(s): Professor Bonnie Harnden
Department of Creative Arts Therapies
Concordia University
Telephone: 514-848-2424 ext. 5460

PURPOSE:
According to research on the stress factors and culture of social activism, social activists may be at higher risk for developing symptoms of burnout, trauma, or isolation. Yet for various reasons, activists may not always seek out the mental health care they need as a result. Addressing this need, this research project will facilitate activist participants' exploration of self-care through engagement in a group therapeutic context informed by *ecopsychology* and *drama therapy* frameworks.

Ecological drama therapy is a creative therapy process that is informed by an awareness of the interconnection between the individual self and the larger ecological/social realities of our time. Sessions will include drama and theatre based therapeutic exercises, art-making, collective rituals, going outside to local parks/gardens, and sharing in a supportive atmosphere.

Ecopsychology and drama therapy are both emerging fields related to mental health practice, but few authors have yet to combine these two frameworks. One specific form of creative ecological group work that has emerged out of an activist context is the *Work that Reconnects*. The Work that Reconnects aims to help participants explore their inner responses to the state of the world and go through a process of empowerment. It is my hope to combine the Work that Reconnects with drama therapy processes in order to begin developing a new form of ecological drama therapy that could benefit activists to sustain themselves in their work.

PROCEDURES:
A series of 10 weekly group drama therapy sessions, each 2 hours long, will be lead by the researcher/therapist. The group will consist of approximately 4-8 social activist participants. Participants will be invited to share their experiences of being an activist, self-care, and feelings they carry about their work and the state of the world. Exercises may include drama and theatre based therapeutic exercises, art-making, collective rituals, going outside in nature, and structured and unstructured forms of sharing.

Before the series of sessions begins, each participant will be asked to take part in an individual interview with the researcher/therapist to determine whether such ecological drama therapy sessions would be beneficial for the participant and to gather background. This interview will be audiotaped and will last approximately 50 minutes. Unfortunately, participation in the initial interview will not guarantee entry into the group, however participants who are not selected will be offered information about alternative resources for creative arts therapies and mental health support. Selected participants will be notified as soon as possible of their acceptance into the group, and asked to commit to attending all 10 sessions and a follow-up interview. Participants will be asked to let the facilitator know in advance of any absences, insofar as possible.

The series of 10 sessions will be audiotaped, and one or more sessions may be videotaped with the group's consent. Agreement to audiotaping (but not videotaping) is a condition of participation in this research project. Consent is requested from participants for the photography of their artwork for future educational presentation and publication. Participants are also requested to give consent to allow descriptive data collected from the study to be published in the future by the researcher, while strictly respecting the confidentiality of the participant. Videotapes and audiotapes will not be published.

Following the completion of the sessions, each participant will be asked to participate in another individual interview with the researcher/therapist. Its purpose is to offer each participant an opportunity to discuss her experience of the sessions and how s/he currently feels about her experience of self-care as an activist. The interview will also be audiotaped, with the participant's consent.

The researcher/therapist will keep any artwork produced by participants for the duration of the series of sessions, after which it will be returned to the participants.

The final research paper will include narrative accounts of the sessions, describing aspects of participants' experiences using pseudonyms, in keeping with the respect for confidentiality described above.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Participants' confidentiality will be respected in every way possible. Their names and identifying information will be kept under lock and key, separately from the tapes and artwork. Only the researcher, and possibly the researcher's advisor or supervisor, will hear the tapes of the sessions. If the participant does not want the tapes to be heard by the research advisor, transcripts of the tapes may be made with pseudonyms to share with the advisor/supervisor. Participants may withdraw their consent for photography of their artwork without penalty, and still participate in the remaining sessions of the research study. Participants may withdraw their consent to participate in the study at any time, without giving a reason, by phoning the researcher/therapist at the telephone number above.

RISKS:
To the researcher's knowledge, participation in this group holds no significant risks for participants. However, certain persons could find that they may have reactions or feelings that are uncomfortable because of the personal nature of the exploration. If a participant finds that these feelings persist, the facilitator will be available to discuss these concerns and provide a referral, if needed, in consultation with the research advisor.

Also, since the activist community is relatively small in Montreal, there is a risk that the participant may find that they know someone else in the research study, including someone in their field of work. Steps will be taken by the researcher to minimize this possibility, including selecting participants from a variety of settings. However, if that is the case, a participant is welcome to choose to continue or terminate.

BENEFITS:
The aim of the series of sessions is to provide a supportive group setting in which participants can discuss and explore creatively and emotionally about their experiences of being an activist and self-care. This may help participants both accept and understand their feelings about their work, the world, and themselves. They may also learn more about theirs and others' experiences, and gain tools and self-understanding for self-care. Participants will experience how they can use their creative abilities to communicate with others and for personal growth and connection to the natural world. Through sharing their experiences in this research inquiry, participants can feel they are contributing to the development of an ecological way of working in drama therapy that can be of special benefit to support activists sustain their work.

If you have any question regarding this research study, please call the student or supervisor listed above.

Thank you. If you have any questions about this study, please contact the Master's student or her supervisor.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Yehudit Silverman, Department Research Chair, in the:

Creative Arts Therapies, Concordia University
1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. West, VA-270
Montreal, Quebec, H3G 1M8
Phone: 514-848-2424 ext. 4231
Email: yehudit@alcor.concordia.ca

Student: Rebekah Hart, (phone number)
Supervisor: Prof. Bonnie Harnden, 514-848-2424 ext. 5460

Appendix C

Consent Form to Participate in Research

Ecological Drama Therapy for Social Activists: A Group Case Study
Drama Therapy Student: Rebekah Hart
                                  Department of Creative Arts Therapies
                                  Concordia University

Research Supervisor(s):   Professor Bonnie Harnden
                                  Department of Creative Arts Therapies
                                  Concordia University
                                  Telephone: 514-848-2424 ext. 5460

I agree to participate in the research inquiry conducted by Rebekah Hart, entitled *Ecological Drama Therapy for Social Activists* **as part of her Master's studies in the Department of Creative Arts Therapies at Concordia University.**

I have carefully read and understand the consent information about the above study. Its purpose and nature have been explained to me, I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it, and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.

Before the series of sessions begins, I understand that I will be asked to take part in an individual interview with the researcher/therapist to determine whether such ecological drama therapy sessions would be beneficial for me as a participant. This interview will be audiotaped and will last approximately 50 minutes. I understand that unfortunately, not all participants who are interviewed will be selected for the group, but that if I am not selected, I will be given information about other available resources. Selected participants will be notified as soon as possible of their acceptance into the group, and asked to commit to attending all 10 sessions and a follow-up interview. Participants will be asked to let the facilitator know in advance of any absences, insofar as possible.

I understand that I will participate in 10 weekly, 2-3 hour sessions, during which I will have the opportunity to discuss and explore creatively about my experience of and feelings about activism and self-care within an ecological drama therapy framework. Another 50-minute individual interview with the researcher/therapist will take place within a few weeks after the end of the series of sessions in which I will be given an opportunity to share reflections on my experience of the group and moving forward after the group. I can discuss my experience of the sessions and ask any further questions I may have regarding the research project.

I understand that my identity will be kept confidential, and I agree to protect the confidentiality of the other participants by not mentioning their names, the experiences they have shared, or their creative process to persons outside the group.

I understand that the sessions will be audiotaped, and that one or more sessions may be videotaped with the whole group's consent. No one except the student researcher and her research advisor/supervisor will listen to the audiotapes or see the videotapes. The tapes and the artwork will be stored separately under lock and key without any participants' names attached to them. The final research report will include narrative accounts of the sessions, describing aspects of participants' experience, with identities kept confidential. Artwork describing my experience in the sessions will be used but my name not disclosed in the research paper, or in any future presentations or publication of the research. No artwork will be photographed without my written permission. I understand that at the end of the project, my artwork will be returned to me.

I am willing to agree to allow the researcher to publish descriptive information or data collected from this case study in the future. I understand that audio and video recordings will not be published.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time. I understand the purpose of this study and that there is no hidden motive of which I have not been informed.

I understand that copies of the research paper, once complete, will be available in the Concordia Library's online database.

I freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

_____ In addition, I authorize _Rebekah Hart_ to photograph my artwork under the conditions of confidentiality outlined above.

_____ I reserve the right to make my decision regarding consent to having my artwork photographed until after I have participated in a number of sessions.

_____ I consent to allowing _Rebekah Hart_ to videotape at least one session.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

120

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Pre-Group Interview Questions

1. What is your name, age, date of birth and address?

2. Do you define yourself as an activist? What does that mean to you?

3. What kinds of activist activities have you taken part in?

4. What does self-care mean to you?

5. What do you do to take care of yourself, emotionally and physically as you engage in this work?

6. Have you ever struggled with difficult feelings with respects to your work and/or the state of the world (such as despair, loneliness, alienation, burnout, anger, hopelessness, depression)?

7. Why do you want to be in this group?

8. Have you suffered from any burnout trauma as a result of your activism?

9. How would you describe your relationship to nature?

10. Do you engage in any spiritual practices that support your work?

11. Do you have any particular concerns about taking part in this group?

12. Are there any topics that would be particularly difficult for you to talk about or hear others talk about in the group?

13. What are you needs and expectations for taking part in this group? What are your hopes?

14. What are your availabilities to take part in the group (dates, times)

15. Is there anything that could keep you from being able to attend the group

regularly?

16. Do you have any physical or mental health concerns?

17. Have you ever done any sort of therapy, including individual or group therapy?

18. Optional question: Have you taken part in any other group processes (such as creative workshops, self-help groups) that were therapeutic in nature?

19. Do you have any questions for me?

20. Is there anything you want to tell me?

Post-Group Interview Questions

1. What was your overall experience of taking part in this group?

2. How did you feel in the group?

3. What were your favourite exercises/concepts?

4. What was/were the most powerful moment(s) for you during the sessions?

5. What did you find the most helpful/like most? The least helpful/like least?

6. How do you feel this experience will inform your work as an activist?

7. Do you feel that this process has been supportive to you in your activist work?

8. What does self-care mean to you?

9. How has this experience influenced or changed your relationship to self-care?

10. Do you feel this process could have been shorter or longer?

11. Do you intend to pursue therapy following this group?

12. What is your experience of the other group members?

13. What will you take away with you from these sessions?

14. Do you have any suggestions for ways that you would have liked things done differently?

15. Do you feel that this process deepened your relationship to Earth, to your cause, or to other people? Did the experience address the intersection of self and world?

16. What is your impression of The Work that Reconnects? Are there any specific ideas or experiences you will take away from you from what you know of The Work that Reconnects?

17. Do you have any other questions, comments?

18. Is there anything else you want to share with me or want me to know?