Going Back to our Roots

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Student Contributor

Ecopsychology

Intersections
A Transdisciplinary Exploration of Social Exclusion

Fall 2008

Vol. 1, No. 3

Volume 1, Number 3
A Publication of the Institute on Social Exclusion

ASSOCIATING NATURE WITH WELL-BEING GOES AS FAR BACK AS THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS AND WALDEN POND. INDEED, FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS, HUMANS HAVE LOOKED TO MOTHER NATURE TO HEAL WOUNDED SPIRITS. THAT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE BECAUSE ALL LIVING THINGS (HUMANS INCLUDED) REQUIRE FOOD, WATER, AND AIR--ALL OF WHICH COME FROM NATURE. IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, MANY COMMUNITY OR URBAN GARDENS HAVE SPROUTED IN LARGE URBAN AREAS, SUCH AS CHICAGO, TO MEET THE PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED NEEDS. BUT HOW, WE MAY ASK, DOES CONNECTING WITH NATURE ACTUALLY HELP PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING? PERHAPS, THE ANSWER LIES IN A NEW FIELD CALLED ECOPSYCHOLOGY.

“Ecopsychology, or eco-psychology as it is sometimes called, is situated at the intersection of a number of fields of inquiry, including environmental philosophy, psychology, and ecology, but is not limited by any disciplinary boundaries. At its core, ecopsychology suggests that there is a synergistic relation between planetary and personal well-being: that the needs of the one are relevant to the other” (International Community for Ecopsychology, 2004). Ecopsychologists find their roots even in the earliest theories in psychology. Multiple sources mention the ideas of prominent figures like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, but until now few, if any, have mentioned psychology’s first social psychologist, Alfred Adler (Doherty, 2008; Kineavy, 1997; Schull, 1999). With tenets centering on experiential existence, ecopsychology has a strong connection to phenomenology. Manaster and Corsini (1982) suggest that phenomenology is a subjective reality that is influenced, at least to some degree, by biology, environment, and economics. In other words, people cannot be separated from their environments. Little distinction can be made between the environment and the person in the environment.

The absence of natural environments to provide for basic human needs may be quite detrimental to communities. For example, when there is lack of fresh food the region inhabited by the community can be deemed a “food desert.” A food desert is a geographical location, usually urban, determined to have a dearth of fresh and healthy food (Cummins & Macintyre, 2002). Food deserts contribute to food insecurity, or the inability to secure sufficient nutritious food required for healthy living. Donald Acheson (1998) used food deserts as an example of a mechanism by which poverty and social inequality cause poor health. He also noted that many residents of poorer urban areas blame their problems on the “lack of supermarkets” which adversely affects their ability to make healthy dietary choices.

Food deserts often exist due to the lack of fresh food outlets such as supermarkets. The lack of access to fresh food markets is a form of social exclusion. According to Todman (2007) “Social exclusion refers to the systematic undermining of certain individuals’ and communities’ access to the rights, opportunities and resources -- such as housing, employment, education, healthcare, civic engagement, democratic participation, personal safety, and due process -- that are key to social integration.” Nutritious food is another example of a “resource.”

An abundance of research suggests that access to fresh food, along with a supportive environment and one’s occupational status, is an accurate predictor of health and dysfunction (International Centre for Health and Society, 2003). Understanding that social and economic policy can block some members of society from healthy food sources, by resulting in fewer fresh food markets in certain areas, one can clearly see the need to move beyond mere biological research to improve the quality of life. We must ask ourselves: what field is better suited than psychology to lead the way in solving such profound form of human suffering?

Not having access to healthy food sources can lead to poor mental and physical health. The practice of Alfred Adler’s individual psychology, however, can perhaps play a role in combating the suffering caused by unhealthy environments. Adler coined the term, Gemeinschaftsfühl, which may be translated to mean community feeling, social interest, social feeling, or social sense (Adler, 2006). Adler also proposed that a major aspect of one’s mental health depends on how he or she connects to his or her environment. Adler’s “Individual Psychology” is centered on holism. Manaster and Corsini (1982) go as far as to retranslate “Individual Psychology” to “Indivisible Psychology,” indicating that, despite the fact that humans and the environment are made of many different parts, neither can be viewed accurately outside of the context of the other. Dreikurs (1971) says the following of man: “Biologically, man is a creature of nature. He (or she) is a part of it. Not only does nature surround him (or her),
but forces of nature are at work within him, as in any plant or animal” (p. 153). With this in mind, we can see that if we separate people from healthy environments, we should expect to see poor mental health.

Three major pillars of ecopsychology revolve around “cooperation,” a word connected directly with Adler’s use of social interest (Adler, 2006). Schull (1999) suggests that healthy individuals exhibit high levels of cooperation with plant life, with animals, and with environmental elements. Because of our connection to nature, “environmental-care” may constitute “self-care”. What could be a better extension of Adlerian theory? Projects like “urban” or “community” gardening promote health in ways that can be better understood with an Adlerian lens. Borelli (2007) not only suggests that community gardens are a means to increase environmental justice; they also are means to connect people to nature while simultaneously providing fresh food and job skills.

With community feeling in mind, members of the Adler School’s Institute on Social Exclusion-Student Chapter set out with tools in hand to search for Gemeinschaftgefühl in an urban garden. Over the course of a month, we pulled weeds, moved dirt, watered plants, and cleared debris in a plot of land north of Chicago’s Loop. During those four weeks, students were able to interact with community members and other volunteers. As we were told by one of the Growing Power representatives, “those who work in the garden are free to pick and harvest from the garden.” This collaborative process between the environment and community members supports Gemeinschaftgefühl, a basic tenet of Adler’s Individual Psychology. As noted by Manaster and Corsini (1982), Adlerian psychology is a theory of practice not possession. In our time at the garden, we learned that community gardening serves as a very effective tool for uniting troubled communities, promoting social inclusion, beautifying run down and forgotten urban areas, teaching community members new skills (e.g., gardening, horticulture, and even cooking), and improving physical and mental health. There is definitely much community interest in such projects; in my short time volunteering, several passers-by stopped to ask what we were doing and how to get involved. If you, too, are interested in urban gardening please visit www.communitygarden.org.

References


Scull, J. (1999, March). Ecopsychology: Where does it fit in psychology? This paper was presented at the annual psychology conference, Malaspina University College.


Social exclusion is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. Therefore, efforts to address it must be informed by a wide range of perspectives. For instance, they must be informed by what is known about exclusionary processes and structures in the fields of sociology, political science, economics, law, urban planning, medicine, public health, psychology, linguistics, environmental sciences, theology, philosophy, theater and the fine arts, to name a few.

One of the barriers to transdisciplinary approaches to addressing exclusion is language. In our analysis of the literature, we have noted innumerable references to exclusionary processes and structurally-induced social disadvantage. We have also noted that the language used to refer to these phenomena varies across professions and perspectives, often obscuring common themes and potential points of collaboration, synergy and coalition building. As part of our effort to encourage a more transdisciplinary approach to addressing social exclusion, we have developed this graphic that highlights the language used in various disciplines and professions with the aim of helping to forge ideological linkages that can serve as the basis of coalition building around efforts to address the problem of social exclusion.

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<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Language</th>
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<td>Psychology</td>
<td>“Ostracism”</td>
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<td>Political Science</td>
<td>“Disenfranchisement”</td>
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<td>Health Science</td>
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<td>Urban planning</td>
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<td>Speech/Language Pathology</td>
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The Right Honorable Hilary Armstrong, MP, delivered the keynote address at the third annual conference of the Adler School of Professional Psychology’s Institute on Social Exclusion. Armstrong, a Member of Parliament since 1987, served as Minister for the Cabinet Office and Social Exclusion during the New Labour government of Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The gathering was held on Friday, October 3, 2008, in the auditorium of the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, 610 South Michigan Avenue in Chicago. Approximately 200 students, faculty, staff, and guests attended the conference.

Evincing a strong commitment to fairness, equal opportunity, and social justice, Blair appointed Armstrong to the cabinet post to lead his administration’s attempts to tackle disadvantage and deprivation in British society. In his letter of appointment, Blair directed Armstrong to coordinate a new cross-government effort to break down the barriers for those excluded from society and to expand ways in which government works with volunteer organizations.

Recognizing that this social exclusion agenda represented the government’s ‘core values,’ Armstrong immediately proved to be an able advocate for children in care, teenage parents, families confronting complex socioeconomic problems, and persons affected adversely by mental illness. Armstrong emphasized the need for the state to be an empowerer instead of simply an enabler, and she consistently brought a message of hope to the British citizenry, urging that “no one should be written off, no one is too hard to reach.”

Building upon her exceptional reputation for credibility on community issues, Armstrong favored government prevention and early intervention when dealing with social exclusion issues, saying: “If we are serious about breaking the cycle of disadvantage, then we need to look carefully at how we anticipate the challenges faced by many families, not simply react to them.” Continuing in a similar vein, she urged that: “If we fail to intervene early enough, we risk slamming the door of opportunity in people's faces.” On setting forth the New Labour government’s proposal for addressing exclusion, Armstrong stated: “Thousands of people in our country will literally inherit a life with countless obstacles and barriers to taking advantage of opportunities most of us take for granted. The Social Exclusion Action Plan launched today is our attempt to break this cycle once and for all.”

Educated at the University of Birmingham, Armstrong is a former social worker and college lecturer who spent two years with VSO teaching in Kenya prior to beginning her political career. VSO is an international charitable organization that works through volunteers to carry out its vision of a world without poverty in which individuals work together in harmony to fulfill their maximum potential. She is the daughter of the late Ernest Armstrong, MP, former Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons and the wife of Paul Corrigan, a university professor.

Although Armstrong left the British Cabinet when Prime Minister Blair resigned, she remains a Member of Parliament representing the district of North West Durham. Recently, she was named a trustee of VSO.

During her presentation at the Adler School’s conference, Armstrong focused on system-wide actions to support transformation in education and health care. She advocated a holistic approach to social support systems based on five guiding principles enacted by the United Kingdom’s Social Exclusion Task Force including: early intervention, systematic identification of successful strategies, multi-agency collaboration, personalized services, and incentives to support achievement and manage individual under-performance.

The morning presentation kicked off on a somber note as Dana Starks, City of Chicago Commissioner of Human Relations, asked for a moment of silence in memory of fallen Chicago police officer Nathaniel Taylor Jr. before formally introducing Armstrong.

Armstrong was also joined by Lynn Todman, Ph.D., director of Adler’s Institute on Social Exclusion, in calling for Americans to rethink the way they look at the disadvantaged. “We need a better balance between individual and social responsibility in addressing disadvantage – this flies in the face of our underlying American tenets,” said Todman, alluding to the American tendency to blame the individual for his or her circumstances.

When asked by a forum participant how she would address potential reluctance to embrace this approach in the United States, Armstrong responded: “I would say to your officials, ‘you need to get people to see this as an economic imperative as well as a moral imperative.’ If you can get people to see that the two go together, then it makes perfect sense.”

She added, “I think you’ve got to seize the moment; it may just be your moment now.”

Editor’s Note:
A copy of Hilary Armstrong’s presentation slides is available at www.adler.edu/about/ISE3rdAnnualConference.asp
Recent ISE Fall Conference
On Tuesday, September 2nd, the ISE kicked off the new academic year by presenting Hip-Hop Poet Kevin Coval to a packed house at the Adler School. Reading selections from his newest book, *Everyday People*, the North Shore native dazzled the large audience with his poignant verses and energetic delivery. Following the program, Coval spent almost an hour answering questions posed by the students, faculty members, and guests in attendance. He completed the day’s activities with a book signing.

Currently serving as the poet-in-residence at the Jane Addams Hull House Museum and on the faculties of both the School of the Art Institute and the University of Illinois-Chicago, Coval also holds the post of Minister of Hip-Hop Poetics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has appeared at hundreds of schools, theaters, and other venues in seven countries on four continents. He has performed with Amiri Baraka and Cornel West, and has been featured on Russell Simmons’ HBO Def Poetry Jam.

Coval is the founder of *Louder than a Bomb: The Chicago Teen Poetry Festival*, the largest youth poetry festival in the world. His work has been published by numerous organizations including: Columbia University Press, Source Books, and the Soft Skull Press. His writings and his own life story have appeared in or been reviewed by the Chicago Tribune Magazine, the Chicago Reporter, C-Span and WGN. He can be heard regularly on Chicago Public Radio.

Hailed by Chicago Tribune columnist Rick Kogan as the "Voice of the New Chicago," this smart, funny, and warm-hearted community activist speaks for the socially excluded in every poem that he writes.
There exists in the United States certain “hidden” medical conditions caused by a variety of debilitating bacterial, congenital, and parasitic infections called the “neglected infections of poverty.” As their name suggests, these infections disproportionately affect minority, under-served, and impoverished people in our country. Occurring mainly in the country’s urban areas and parts of the South – e.g., in the Mississippi Delta and along the US – Mexico border – these diseases tend to attack people of color, immigrants, and disadvantaged white populations. (For this reason, we may aptly describe these medical maladies as the diseases of social exclusion.) In this article, Dr. Hotez identifies the particular diseases involved, defines the geographic regions where they are prevalent, and makes specific public policy recommendations for addressing the health problems that they cause.

Editor’s Note

Peter J. Hotez, M.D., will speak at the Adler School on Thursday, March 19, 2009, at 4:00 P.M. on the “Neglected Infections of Poverty.”

Peter Hotez, M.D., Ph.D. will be speaking at the Adler School of Professional Psychology’s Institute on Social Exclusion on Thursday, March 19, 2009, on the Neglected Infections of Poverty. Dr. Hotez is President of the Sabin Vaccine Institute, The George Washington University Walter G. Ross Professor, chair of the Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Tropical Medicine, and professor of global health.

Dr. Hotez is internationally renowned for his work on the neglected tropical diseases, which he links with poverty on a national as well as international scale. He has called upon policy makers to place these infections as a priority on the public health agenda. “The fact that these neglected infections of poverty represent some of the greatest health disparities in the United States, but they remain at the bottom of the public health agenda, is a national disgrace,” says Dr. Hotez.

On June 25, 2008, Dr. Hotez published an analysis in PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases showing that diseases very similar to those plaguing Africa, Asia, and Latin America also occur frequently among the poorest people in the United States, particularly among women and children. “In the United States, there is a largely hidden burden of diseases caused by a group of chronic and debilitating parasitic, bacterial, and congenital infections known as the neglected infections of poverty. Like their neglected tropical disease counterparts in developing countries, the neglected infections of poverty in the US disproportionately affect impoverished and under-represented minority populations.”

These parasitic and bacterial occur in hundreds of thousands of poor Americans concentrated primarily in the Mississippi Delta (including post-Katrina Louisiana), Appalachia, the Mexican borderlands, and inner cities, and represent some of the greatest health disparities in the United States.

“Neglected tropical diseases are chronic and disfiguring, disabling, and stigmatizing. They impact childhood development and promote poverty,” according to Hotez. He points out that infection with hookworm can lead to a 40 percent reduction in future wage earnings, and that a 23 percent drop in school attendance has been demonstrated in children with hookworm.

In addition to his faculty positions, Dr. Hotez is director of the Human Hookworm Vaccine Initiative, a partnership between George Washington University and the Sabin Vaccine Institute, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which is developing a new recombinant hookworm vaccine to prevent hookworm anemia and disease in children, and ultimately in pregnant women.

A featured speaker at three Clinton Global Initiative conferences, Dr. Hotez was recently elected to the Medical Mission Hall of Fame. He is an author on 250 publications, a past recipient of the Leverhulme Medal of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, the Bailey K. Ashford Medal of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, and the Henry Baldwin Ward Medal of the American Society of Parasitologists. His most recent book is titled Forgotten people, forgotten diseases: the neglected tropical diseases and their impact on global health and development. His articles on international science policy have appeared in The Washington Post, Scientific American, and Foreign Policy.
“American Indians and the American Dream”

John N. Low is the Executive Director of the Mitchell Museum of the American Indian in Evanston, Illinois. Mr. Low will talk about the multiple “American Dreams” of American Indian populations and how those “Dreams” differ from those of the mainstream. He will also talk about the ways in which American Indians have been systematically excluded from the wide range of the rights, resources and opportunities that comprise the mainstream American Dream.

An enrolled member of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, he has served as tribal council member and tribal attorney and continues to serve on the Traditions Committee of the Tribe. He earned his B.A. in liberal arts at Michigan State University (1978), a law degree at the University of Michigan (1981), a second B.A. in American Indian Studies at the University of Michigan (1998), an M.A. in Social Sciences at the University of Chicago (2000), a Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies from the University of Michigan (2006) and is completing his Ph.D. in the Program in American Culture at the University of Michigan (ABD). His dissertation is an exploration of the intersections of law, policy, memory, history, imagery, identity and representation that emerged in the claim of the Pokagon Potawatomi to the Chicago lakefront and Lake Michigan—a claim taken to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1917.

“Neglected Infection of Poverty”

Peter Hotez is Professor and Chair of the Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Tropical Medicine at The George Washington University, where his major research and academic interest is in the area of vaccine development for parasitic and tropical diseases, and the role of vaccines in international diplomacy. In his presentation he will discuss neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), a group of primarily 13 infections that are chronic and disabling in their nature, and occur almost exclusively among the world’s poorest people, while almost unheard of in the industrialized world. There is a growing recognition that an invigorated effort to prevent these diseases and their resulting disability and dysfunction could have an enormous impact on improving the quality of life and alleviating poverty in many nations.

Dr. Hotez is the author or co-author of over 120 scientific and technical papers in molecular and immunoparasitology and tropical disease, as well as two books, Parasitic Diseases (Apple Tree Press) and Krugman’s Infectious Diseases of Children. His articles on international science policy have appeared in The Washington Post, Scientific American, and Foreign Policy. He is the recipient of the Henry Baldwin Ward Medal from the American Society for Parasitologists and a Young Investigator Award from the Pediatric Infectious Disease Society, and a Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics (FAAP).

He obtained his B.A. degree in Molecular Biophysics phi beta kappa from Yale University (1980) and his M.d. and Ph.D. from the medical scientist-training program at Cornell University and The Rockefeller University. After completing his residency at the Massachusetts General Hospital, Dr. Hotez returned to Yale University where he was on the faculty for 12 years, before joining George Washington University.

“American Hologram”

Joe Bageant is a social commentator and author. In his recent book, Deer Hunting with Jesus: Dispatches from America’s Class War, Bageant discusses the lives of poor rural Whites in the United States. The book is mainly centered on his hometown, Winchester Virginia – reviewed as a wise, tender, and acerbic look at life among America’s working poor.

Returning to his hometown of Winchester, Virginia, after 30 years of life among the elite journalistic class, Bageant sought to answer the question of why the working poor vote for Republicans in apparent opposition to their own interests. On a broader level, he examines issues of economic class distinctions as he drills below the middle-class claims of his hometown. The reality is that two of five residents do not have high-school diplomas and virtually everyone over 50 has serious health problems in a town—and nation—with poor and failing schools and health systems. Through the lives of his friends and family, Bageant explores the importance of hunting, religion, and redneck pride in what he describes as the “American Hologram.”

Joe Bageant writes an online column that has made him a cult hero among gonzo-journalism junkies and progressives. He has been interviewed on Air America and comments on America’s long history of religious fundamentalism in the BBC/Owl documentary The Vision: Americans on America. Until recently he worked as a senior editor for the Primedia History Magazine Group. Bageant and his wife recently downsized their lives in America so that Joe could spend half the year in Belize, where he writes and sponsors a small development project with the Black Carib families of Hopkins Village.

For information about ISE events, contact: TheInstitute@adler.edu.