

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO STANDARDIZE CONSIDERATION OF THE NATURAL
ENVIRONMENT IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN SASKATCHEWAN?

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Abstract

Social workers in Saskatchewan adhere to the Canadian Association of Social Workers' (CASW) (2005a) "Code of Ethics," which espouses social justice and client welfare (well-being). The natural environment has demonstrated implications for both well-being and social justice. Taking into consideration the current environmental crisis, scholars argue for social work to shift its anthropocentric and Eurocentric perspectives for the sake of client well-being, social justice, and the health of the more-than-human world, but the profession has been slow to act. There are recognizable gaps between considerable literature on the urgency of mobilizing the social work profession to prioritize the natural environment and the uneven ways in which this has translated in policy, education, and practice in Saskatchewan.

The goals of this study were to understand the gaps that exist between the literature and social work policy, education, and practice in Saskatchewan, and to make recommendations for addressing these gaps. This study used a policy sciences framework and drew on counter-hegemonic and Val Plumwood's critical ecofeminist theoretical perspectives to explore the research question: "What will it take for the natural environment to become a standardized consideration for social work practice in Saskatchewan?" Data informing the research findings include an analysis of trends and underlying contextual conditions and semi-structured interviews with seven social workers.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to Big Al, my cute little North Star, with me then and still.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAA – animal-assisted activities

AAT – animal-assisted therapy

CASW – Canadian Association of Social Workers

CASWE – Canadian Association for Social Work Education

FNUniv – First Nations University of Canada

HAB – human – animal bonds

HAI – human – animal interactions

IASSW – International Association of Schools of Social Work

IFSW – International Federation of Social Workers

NASW – (American) National Association of Social Workers

NE – natural environment

PIE – person-in-environment [approach]

PSF – policy sciences framework

SASW – Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers

SW – social work

U of R – University of Regina

U of S – University of Saskatchewan

Clarification of Terms

Throughout this paper, I use the terms “social work” and “social worker(s)” as a shorthand for mainstream social work with its Eurocentric roots. By “Eurocentric,” I mean embeddedness in systems based around western ways of thinking, including individualization, the creation of dualisms, neoliberal views welfare rather than holistic well-being, scientific knowledge and rationality, humanism, and specific, exclusionary ways of knowing. I also acknowledge the existence and validity of various ways of engaging in social work that lie outside this Eurocentric tradition, including some Indigenous modes (Hart, 2009; Gray et al., 2006).

For simplification in writing and not of ideology, I use the term “animal” to refer to all animals that are not human. I recognize (and embrace) humans as members of the animal world.

Although I believe that humans are not separate from the natural environment, in my work with participants, I used the term “natural environment”¹ to refer to parts of the world that are neither human nor primarily built by humans. This might include (but is not limited to) animals (mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, insects, fish), plants (trees, flowers, vegetables, weeds²), wind, the stars, the sky, soil, rocks, fields, land, water (oceans, rivers, lakes), and specific places. I have used the term as a shorthand to isolate the more-than-human from the human and to draw attention to particular parts of their work that constitutes the focus of this thesis. I recognize that

¹ This term at times feels oddly cold, given all that it encompasses. I prefer the warmth of the “more-than-human world” to describe our fellow organisms, water, and so on, but when I was designing the research questions and speaking with participants, I used “natural environment” so for consistency will follow through with that despite a later change of heart on the usage. I also recognize that the term “natural environment” may be more accessible to mainstream social workers, institutions and organizational leaders, who are a primary audience for this research.

² I realize that the characterization of certain plants as “weeds” is subjective and carries a negative connotation; however, I specifically included this word in the definition to invite discussion of a non-romanticized natural environment as well as more neutral or positive ones.

the term contains an acknowledgement of a dualistic way of looking at humans and the rest of their environment even as I believe this separation to be an illusion.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Social work is a multi-faceted profession practiced over a wide variety of settings, and it can be difficult to pinpoint the elements that mark social work ubiquitously. However, two central concepts in part define the profession: its focus on client well-being and its commitment to social justice (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005; Hick & Stokes, 2017; International Federation of Social Workers, 2018). Social work concerns itself both with clients' welfare and with working to achieve social justice for all humans by challenging systems that oppress individuals (CASW, 2005a).

Social work's emphasis has traditionally been on human-human social environments (Kemp, 2011; Zapf, 2010); however, the role of the natural environment is increasingly recognized as a foundational part of any client's well-being (Gamble, 2012; Helne & Hirvilammi, 2015). Besides the obvious realities of the importance of being able to breathe clean air, drink clean water, and have access to nutritious food, the natural environment is also relevant to the profession's social justice mandate. Its clients, often marginalized, are disproportionately affected by natural disasters, damage from extractive industries, and lack of access to resources (Gray et al., 2013a; Hetherington & Boddy, 2013). There are tangible social repercussions of issues involving the natural environment: Issues to do with the natural environment are gendered (Alston, 2013), racialized (Gray et al, 2013), classist (Dominelli, 2012) and speciesist (Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2014; Ryan, 2014).

Given these intersections between social work and the natural environment in terms of both well-being and social justice, it is salient to the profession that there is an environmental crisis occurring. Questions abound about how the profession will respond, and with what level of urgency. What are the profession's responsibilities regarding clients and the planet itself?

Specifically for this study, what is the situation for social workers in Saskatchewan? What social and hegemonic factors shape the contexts in which they practice? What do they understand about the connections between the natural environment and social work? What supports – or hinders – their consideration of the natural environment in their practice? Finally, what will it take to standardize consideration of the natural environment in social work in this province?

Statement of the Problem

Although there is a well-articulated call for the social work profession to consider the natural environment in working with clients, there appear to be gaps between scholarly understandings of the importance of the natural environment in social work and guiding policies in Saskatchewan, between policy and practice, and between theory and practice. This research aims to understand how the social work profession in Saskatchewan can standardize consideration of the natural environment in practice so that all social workers are aware of the myriad links between the profession and the natural environment.

Research Objectives

This qualitative research study used counter-hegemonic and Val Plumwood's (2002) critical ecofeminist lenses and was guided by a policy sciences framework. The objectives of this study were to:

1. Articulate contextual factors, including current trends and underlying conditions within the profession,
2. Describe and analyze study participants' current understandings and practice related to the role of the natural environment in social work by:
 - a. determining participants' levels of understanding of the connections between social work and the natural environment,

b. learning what participants do to connect the natural environment to their social work practice, and

c. identifying, from participants' perspectives, what factors might increase social workers' incorporation of the natural environment into their work,

3. Identify the problems that result in the gap between the call for greater professional emphasis on the natural environment and social work reality, and

4. Make recommendations to address the gap that exists between the stated importance of the natural environment in social work literature and the inconsistency in practice, policy, and education in Saskatchewan.

Researcher's Observational Standpoint

I am a social worker. From the moment I began the coursework for my Bachelor of Social Work degree, I felt as if I had found a deep, fulfilling career path. This feeling increased throughout my practicum and into my job as an outreach counsellor with people who experience intimate partner violence. I love to hear people's stories, to witness their resilience, and to work through problems with them.

I recognize both social work's ambitious aspirations and its complicity in unjust systems that focus on changing individuals' behaviour rather than prevailing systems themselves. This is represented, for example, by social work's history with Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan, which includes residential schools and the '60s scoop. The profession continues to be part of systems (such as medicine and child protection) that disproportionately negatively affect Indigenous peoples. Social work does not seem to question the broader society's penchant for rampant materialism, and it perpetuates the ideological separation between humans and the natural environment. These realizations are always with me, so when I say that I love social

work, I really mean that I love what I understand social work *wants* to be. I love that social work involves working with marginalized people and strives to unmask hidden powers and oppressive systems. I love that social work tries to work for the well-being of all people and attempts to eliminate discrimination. I am also not so naïve as to think that social work can transcend the systems in which it exists, but I believe in its potentials to do so.

From an early age, I was an environmentalist. As a child, I watched the nightly news, heartsick and terrified, as I learned about acid rain and mass deforestation in the Amazon region. Neither loving parents nor any amount of physical safety could protect me from the emotional devastations I felt over what humans were doing to other animals and the planet. Adult me has been unable to write/march/protest away my petrification over the climate crisis and ocean plastic. I feel heartbroken over the ivory trade and the annual dolphin slaughter in Taiji. I have difficulty watching the violence people can visit upon one another, but mostly, it is the state of the more-than-human world that keeps me up at night.

When I started my social work education, I recall being both surprised and disappointed to learn that this profession, grounded in seeing people as their whole selves and in context with their environments, seemed not to take the natural environment into account. I had expected all social workers to be default environmentalists, but very few were. The fact that a profession could consider systemic oppressions, client well-being, and social justice, without making the natural environment a big part of the conversation, raised questions that led me to this research.

In my life and in this research, I ponder such issues as power and inequality based on income, gender, species, and race. I think about the many -isms: racism, sexism, ableism, speciesism, and classism. I am aware of my overlapping identities and the fact that while I lack male privilege, in this society I experience privileges related to economic class, race, sexual

orientation, gender identity, and relative ability. Ever-present for me are concepts of privilege, power, and discourse. I think about environmental racism (Dhillon & Young, 2010) and human injustice and my complicity in upholding systems that perpetuate inequalities, at the expense of poor or racially/sexually marginalized people and for the monetary benefit of people in dominant groups. As a feminist researcher, I know that I do not shed these concepts that are so much a part of my personal life once I begin doing research. Feminism and an attention to power dynamics and social justice have shaped how I look at the process and findings of this study from the beginning.

This research is my contribution to the state of knowledge about the importance of developing a reciprocal relationship between the profession I love and the planet that I also love.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the past two decades, social work scholarship has paid increasing attention to the natural environment (Alston, 2013, 2020; Besthorn, 2011, 2013; Besthorn & Canda, 2002; Besthorn & McMillen, 2002; Boetto, 2016, 2017, 2019; Coates, 2003, 2013; Dominelli, 2012; Gray & Coates, 2012; Gray et al., 2013; Hanrahan, 2017; Jones, 2013; Kemp, 2011; Lysack, 2009, 2010, 2013; Ryan, 2011, 2014; Tester, 2013). The breadth of the topic as it relates to the profession is significant. It ranges from micro practice and the use of ecotherapies (Boetto, 2016) through meso practice and community activism and action (Case, 2017, Lysack, 2010) to macro practice and policy changes (Lysack, 2015). From having plants or nature posters in one's office (Boetto, 2016) through to acknowledging the impact of large-scale disasters and climate change-related chaos (Dominelli, 2012, 2013), there is recognized relevance of the natural environment in social work.

The profession of social work arose to address problems such as child abuse, homelessness, and poverty (Hick & Stokes, 2017). Often, these problems resulted from human-human interactions such as violence, abuse, and social inequality. As the ecological crisis has deepened, there is increasing impetus for social work to consider the natural environment as a factor in social (in)justice (Dominelli, 2012), as a resource for well-being (Lee et al., 2011; Lysack, 2010; Lysack, 2013), as a source of disasters (Dominelli, 2012; Gray et al., 2013a), and as being ignored due to anthropocentrism (Besthorn, 2014).

Scholars who engage humans as part of the natural environment recognize the need for social work to shift its intensely human-centered focus toward acknowledgement of the natural environment, both to support clients and to respond, as a profession, to environmental damage (Besthorn, 2013; Besthorn & McMillen, 2002; Boetto, 2019; Doherty, 2013; Gray & Coates,

2012; Gray et al., 2013a; Laing, 2020; NASW, 1999). Various referred to as “ecosocial work” (Molyneux, 2010; Rambaree et al., 2019), “ecosocialwork” (Besthorn, 2013), “eco-social work” (Boetto, 2019), “green social work” (Dominelli, 2012), or “environmental social work” (Gray et al., 2013a), new(-ish) kinds of social work³ in which there is greater attention to and prioritizing of the natural environment by repositioning of humans with respect to it. As Rambaree et al. (2019) point out, “. . .ecosocial work is not a specialty within social work, rather all social work can, and we argue *should*, be ecosocial work” (p. 205, authors’ emphasis). While this momentum is growing, there is limited uniformity in who considers the natural environment in practice and to what degree.

Hegemony, Dualisms, and Neoliberalism: Setting the Stage for Social Work

Central to this research is the concept of hegemony. Defined by Brookfield (1995), hegemony is: . . . the process whereby ideas, structures, and actions come to be seen by the majority of people as wholly natural, preordained, and working for their own good, when in fact they are constructed and transmitted by powerful minority interests to protect the status quo that serves those interests” (p. 15).

Hegemony’s “subtle tenacity” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 15) constantly reinforces apparent truths, notably for this research, and for the field of social work more generally, that humans are removed from and superior to non-human animals and the natural environment.

Gramsci (1971) describes how hegemony is maintained through “spontaneous consent” of the “masses,” in which people agree upon the ideologies put forth by the dominant society (p. 214). Government, education, and religious institutions reinforce hegemony, exerting a power

³ Many scholars argue strenuously in favour of their preferred term-concept, such as Dominelli’s (2012) “green social work” and Rambaree et al.’s (2019) “ecosocial work,” I am intentionally staying out of this discussion in this thesis. Also, many concepts, such as “human rights,” “sustainability,” and “environmental justice” are loaded or fraught due to their misapplication in socio-economic discourses; however, it is not possible to qualify every usage within the scope of this thesis.

that can be reproduced and transmitted. Consenting to the dictates of hegemonic power allows for the privileging of the elite and the seemingly inevitable marginalization of the less-deserving (female, colonized, non-human) “Other” (Plumwood, 2002). For example, Plumwood (2002) notes that:

A centric or colonising system typically differentiates very strongly between a privileged, hegemonic group awarded full agency status who are placed at the centre and excluded peripheral groups who are denied agency and whose contribution is discounted, neglected, denied, or rendered invisible (pp. 28-20).

Following such precepts, it becomes admissible for a society to “consent” to unrestrained destruction of the natural environment and to adopt a continued belief that humans are independent of (and superior to) it (Plumwood, 2002).

Part of Plumwood’s (2002) analysis of radical separation includes the existence of forced binary categories in the dominant society: male/female, white/non-white, reason/emotion, spirit/matter, and mind/body (Plumwood, 1993; 2002). The assignation of all entities into rigid “One”/“Other” categories allows those in power to reinforce dualisms in which one category is deemed superior, the standard against which the inferior “Other” is judged (Plumwood, 2002, p. 17). In the dominant, self-appointed “rational” culture, the “Other” is relegated to a lesser status as the marginalized, the abnormal (Plumwood, 1993; 2002). Individuals are polarized between categories to highlight differences, while within categories their similarities are emphasized (Plumwood, 2002, p. 101). Plumwood (1993) argues that dualisms are “interrelated and mutually reinforcing” (p. 42) and together form an “interlocking structure” (p. 43).

In most Eurocentric societies, the implications of dualisms are myriad; they justify racism, colonization, and sexism via the Othering of people (Plumwood, 2002). Most salient to

this research, however, are those pairs that elevate the importance of humans and separate them from the natural environment: human/nature, human/animal, and culture/nature, which allow for an anthropocentrism that both initiates and sustains humans' lack of care for the natural environment and denies its importance (Plumwood, 2002). As Plumwood (2002) points out:

The epistemic and moral limitations and dualisms associated with human-centredness are . . . harmful and limiting. . . People under their influence. . . develop conceptions of themselves as belonging to a superior sphere apart, a rational sphere of exclusively 'human' ethics, technology and cultural dissociated from nature and ecology (p. 99).

Plumwood argues convincingly that the self-imposed "hyperseparation" (1993, p. 49) between the human species and the rest of the natural environment ("larger-than-human world," 2002, p. 186) has, by virtue of accentuating differences and assigning the non-human to a lesser status, created a rupture in the continuum of life that permeates western thinking. She points out that:

There is scarcely a subject or a topic which is not entwined in the knots of dualism these conceptual structures have created. The master's logic of colonisation is the dominant logic of our time. The explanation of what is happening to the earth and its complement of life is also to be found in this problematic, in the logic of mastery, now being seared into the biosphere of an entire scarred and wounded planet as well as across its sociosphere (1993, pp. 190-191).

She also argues, "This self-enclosed outlook has helped us to lose touch with ourselves as creatures who are not only cultural beings but also natural beings, just as dependent on a healthy biosphere as other forms of life." So embedded is this "logic" of western ontologies that the severance of humans from the natural world seems immutable and obvious. Even the act of stating that humans are animals, Plumwood (1993) remarks, is enough to cause discomfort. Such

a statement stands in sharp contrast to the dominant belief that humans are “only minimally and accidentally” bound to the natural environment (Plumwood, 1993, p. 6) and far removed from resemblance to or relationship with other animals.

The logic and rationalism that characterize modern western societies allow for the maintenance of a willfully blind market capitalism (Plumwood, 2002), and social work that is bound up in neoliberalism (Alston, 2020; Boetto, 2017, 2019). Benatar et al. (2018) state that “The central values of neoliberal political economics are focused on minimally restricted freedom of the individual and of enterprise (possessive individualism, competitiveness, acquisitiveness and consumerism) (p. 3). These fiscal priorities both reflect and have ramifications for parameters for “other”ed people, animals, and natural environment, those beings devalued and positioned opposite the privileged in socially-constructed dualisms (Plumwood, 2002).

Social Work’s Limited Environment(s) and the Need for Transformation

Mainstream social work does not have a well-known model that incorporates the natural environment. Dominant thinking in social work is more consistent with people’s living “on top of” rather than “in” the natural environment (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002, p. 223). When “environment” is considered at all, it has usually been in reference to social environments (Gray & Coates, 2012; Laing, 2020). Ecosystems theory aims to contextualize clients’ lives and work with them in resolving problems that arise in their various social environments. A well-known principle of the social work profession, known as “person-in-environment (PIE),” emphasizes the social systems that surround clients, including family, school, work, and other (usually social) institutions (Besthorn, 2014; Crews & Besthorn, 2016; Kemp, 2011). Besthorn and Canda (2002) note that the term “environment” in social work usually refers to “relatively small scale

[sic] personal space and social systems” concerning a given client (p. 81). The natural environment is largely absent from the discussion. Also, the definition of “social” in mainstream social work is generally applied to human-human interactions or interrelationships, excluding other beings from the consideration they are often given in Indigenous cultures (Vásquez-Fernández & Ahenakew, 2020; Watts-Powless, 2014).

Some authors have argued for the feasibility of PIE’s usefulness if it expands to include the natural environment along with the social (Norton, 2009, 2012; Shaw, 2011). Norton (2009, 2012) appeals to social work to pair with ecopsychology in order to re-imagine a PIE that will recognize or encourage a reconnection of people with the natural environment (Norton, 2009). Alston (2013) argues for a version of PIE that uses a gendered lens to look at the natural environment.

Arguing against the utility of both the concept and term itself, Zapf (2010) asks for PIE to be “retired” (p. 38). He posits that this staple model of social work serves to separate an individual “person” from the “environment”; he even takes issue with the preposition “in,” claiming that it puts the environment in a subordinate position. In lieu of the still anthropocentric PIE, Zapf (2010) proposes “people as place” (p. 39), saying that it situates a collective people “as” an inseparable part of “place,” and “combines location and physical environment with character, meaning, and emotional significance for people” (p. 39). More than a mere linguistic exercise, Zapf (2010) considers “people as place” to be imbued with completely different meaning than “person-in-environment,” encouraging a shift in social work’s anthropocentric positioning of humans. Such a move seems also to characterize Shaw’s (2011) description of movement from the “dominant social paradigm”(p. 7) to a “new environmental paradigm” (p. 8) already underway. The wish to move beyond ecological constructions such as PIE is shared by

Dominelli (2012; 2018) and Kennedy (2018), who believe that the focus needs to shift from clients' behaviour and its modification to the systems that oppress them.

Some scholars see social work's fixation on social (rather than natural) environments as symptomatic of a fundamental professional schism in which social work's anti-oppressive, egalitarian goals are at odds with its modernist roots (Boetto, 2017, 2019; Coates, 2003). Social work arose in the midst of capitalism, rationalism, and industrialism and, according to Coates (2003), the profession aims to support individuals in adjusting to the systems that oppress them. In accepting its role within the dominant modernist society without questioning its anthropocentrism, social work is "a co-dependent on the road to ecological destruction" (p. 39). In micro-practice especially, social work's focus is on working with humans rather than whole ecosystems, and with concepts of well-being that have more to do with exploitation of, rather than connection with, the natural environment (Boetto, 2016, 2019; Coates, 2003).

Boetto (2017, 2019) further notes the need for "transformative eco-social change" (p. 63), in which the interdependence between humans and the natural environment is acknowledged. She points out the need for an alignment of social work's action and philosophical underpinnings, which are currently out of sync. Her model for epistemological-ontological-methodological coherence, intended to address social work's inherent challenge, is described in the following section.

Mainstream social work's anthropocentrism is seen by some as an ethical limitation, and some scholars call for an expansion of the beings given moral consideration (Besthorn, 2013, 2014; Hanrahan, 2017; Ryan, 2011, 2013). Anti-oppressive practice is a core element of social work, and while it aspires to look critically at oppressive systems, the framework excludes other animals from its consideration (Hanrahan, 2014; Legge, 2016). Hanrahan (2014) proposes an

“anti-oppressive biocentric approach” (p. 44) that combines the critical and social justice (social and political) lenses of anti-oppressive practice with the “ecosystem health” focus of the One Health initiative (p. 44). Ryan (2011) argues for the expansion of the Australian Association of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics to include animals and the natural environment. Hanrahan (2017) points to a need for “broadening the circle of compassion” to include other species and claims that a more inclusive code of ethics would provide a framework for attending to all species. Matsuoka and Sorenson (2014) carve out a space for “trans-species justice” in which speciesism is considered alongside other examples of structural oppression. (p. 70).

Ecosocial Work and Concepts of Well-Being

Social work lacks a universal definition of well-being. The CASW’s (2005a) “Code of Ethics” uses the term “welfare,” yet in its “Guidelines for Ethical Practice” (2005b), “well-being” is left undefined. Given the previous section’s discussion of social work’s emergence in western modernity and its enmeshment with the welfare state (Boetto, 2017; Coates, 2003), it seems that “well-being” in mainstream social work is considered in monetary or material terms. However, other ideas or models support notions of well-being that have other dimensions. Well-being can be conceptualized as including environmental, social, political, and economic facets (Gamble, 2012) or through an ecofeminist rendering in which meaning is derived from community, shared experiences, and interconnectedness with life (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002).

Boetto (2017) argues that social work’s ontology (being), epistemology (thinking) and methodology (doing) are incongruent, and proposes an eco-social work model to bring them into alignment. “Being” refers to individual practitioners’ own orientation to the natural environment and “thinking” refers to the profession’s values, ethics, and knowledge. Boetto’s (2017) core “thinking” elements include: ecological justice, “ecological literacy,” “Indigenous perspectives,”

“feminist perspectives and criticality,” and “global perspectives.” “Doing” is envisioned as a series of five nested layers, beginning with “personal growth and action towards sustainability” and fans out to “social action to facilitate economic and political change” (Boetto, 2017).

Helne and Hirvilammi (2015) also push back against rampant consumption and individualism (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002; Boetto, 2017; Coates, 2003), suggesting a model in which well-being can only be conceptualized as including a rejection of “business as usual” and “an unwillingness to question the value of economic growth” and “non-relationality” (pp. 168-169). Helne and Hirvilammi’s (2015) model consists of a “relational self” that can only be considered in correlation with its ecosystem. Elements of well-being (having, loving, being, doing) are situated within ecosystems. “Resources and services” flow in and “[e]nvironmental impacts” flow out of the well-being sphere, but these elements are limited by the delineation of the ecosystem (Helne & Hirvilammi, 2015). This model is evocative of the embeddedness observed in some Indigenous ways of viewing relationships between the land and life (Gray et al., 2010; Hart, 2009).

The Mental, Emotional, Physical, and Spiritual Benefits of the Natural Environment

When considering the importance of increasing integration of the natural environment in practice, social workers can look to the wealth of literature on the benefits of ecotherapy on mental health. Ecotherapy is “an umbrella term for treatment modalities that include the natural world in relationships of mutual healing and growth, and as such is a form of applied ecopsychology” (Chalquist, 2009). In a summary study, Greenleaf et al. (2014) discuss the importance of horticulture therapy in improving emotional, cognitive, social, and physical functioning. It has been shown to have a psychological benefit for older adults in low-income housing (Wang & Glicksman, 2012) and people suffering from depression (Clatworthy et al.,

2013). Another study shows that the impacts of stress on sick leave from work can be mitigated by time spent in a nature-based course (Sahlin et al., 2014). Palsdottir et al. (2014) look at the effects of a nature-based rehabilitation garden on clients experiencing “stress-related mental disorders” (p. 7095). The study showed that people experienced the garden as restorative, empowering, and inspiring (Palsdottir et al., 2014). Greenleaf et al. (2014) and Chalquist (2009) discuss the psychological benefits of walking or conducting other activities in natural settings. McKinney (2012) discusses the subject of “walk and talk” therapy in the outdoors. Her findings show that this type of therapy, as opposed to office-based therapy, has mental and physical benefits for clients, and speeds up the determination of the presenting problem (McKinney, 2012).

Positive experiences in nature during childhood have been associated with better mental health later in life (Windhorst & Williams, 2015). Children with autism spectrum disorder who spent time in green space have been shown to have improvements in mood (decreased stress and anxiety) and improved physical control, though these same activities, it should be noted, raise some concerns as well (Li, D. et al. in press). The experience of “forest bathing” shows not only an increase in positive feelings in participants, but lowered cortisol levels and heart rates, suggesting both psychological and physiological impacts (Lee et al., 2011). Greenleaf et al. (2014) report that even looking at nature through videos or windows improved the mood and/or recovery of patients in hospitals and other institutions. Nutsford et al. (2016) found that simply viewing “blue space” (the ocean) was linked to lower psychological distress.

Louv (2009) claims that bonding with nature sets the stage for learning. He suggests that, in addition to contributing to a reduction in obesity and vitamin D deficiencies, providing children with time in nature results in a state of calm that facilitates learning (Louv, 2009). While

Louv (2009) proposes the concept of “nature-deficit disorder,” Reddon and Durante (2018) add their own continuum of “nature exposure sufficiency” to “nature exposure inefficiency” to encompass the range of health benefits and disorders experienced by people according to time spent in/observing/interacting with nature. In a later article, they outline the importance of nature exposure sufficiency for prisoners, suggesting that professionals working with this population aim for more natural views, time in nature, and even access to nature via virtual reality (Reddon & Durante, 2019).

Animals are often considered an extension of or connection to the environment and also provide benefits for people, whether as companions or in therapy programs, and bonds between humans and animals have now been studied extensively (Beetz et al., 2012; Hanrahan, 2011; Hodgson & Darling, 2011; Hodgson et al., 2015; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2014; Walsh, 2014). Animal-assisted interventions (AAI) and their effects on many dimensions of well-being are well-documented (Beetz et al., 2012), though Legge (2016) suggests that the literature is “sparse.”

In a summary study, Beetz et al. (2012) explore the role of oxytocin as an explanation for the effectiveness of human-animal interactions (HAI) across many populations. Across included studies, it was found that HAI, ranging from exposure to waiting room aquaria to petting dogs, had broad positive effects, from lowered blood pressure and anxiety to improved social functioning and empathy. Participants ranged from adults to children to people with Alzheimer’s disease to inmates (Beetz et al., 2012). Chalmers and Dell (2015) describe a range of species interacting with humans (to the benefit of the latter), by providing connections to the “natural world.” Equine- and canine-therapies have been incorporated in work with many different

populations (Beetz et al., 2012), and Chalmers et al. (2020) mention studies involving fish, rabbits, birds, and hamsters in HAI.

Not all interspecies interactions need to be formalized to be beneficial. Hodgson and Darling (2011) coined the term “zooeiyia” (para. 3) to describe the positive impacts of animals on humans. The powerful relationship between people and their animal companions can reduce loneliness, stimulate socializing with others, increase physical activity and routine, provide comfort, impart a sense of purpose, and improve cardiovascular health (Hodgson & Darling, 2011; Papazian, 2014). Hodgson et al. (2015) sum up four benefits of zooeiyia, crediting animals as “builders of social capital,” “agents of harm reduction,” “motivators for healthy behaviour change,” and as “active participants within treatment plans.” Hodgson and Darling (2011) note that people with companion animals can be inspired to change their drug use or law-breaking so that incarceration does not separate them from their pets. Slatter et al. (2012) discovered that for homeless participants, companion animals are a source of emotional and social connectedness who also provide a sense of responsibility.

While many of the above interventions seem uni-directional, using the natural environment in service of humans, ecotherapies can also foster reciprocal support. Buzzell (2016) acknowledges two levels of ecotherapies. “Level 1” therapies are for the clients’ benefit, while “Level 2” therapies involve a “Circle of Reciprocal Healing” (pp. 70-71). Buzzell (2016) does not discount the importance of the former to clients, but she acknowledges that the “using” of the natural environment can further western and colonial views (p. 71). Level 2 ecotherapies, in contrast, are tasked with “the larger healing of the human-nature relationship as it presents in a particular person or community or place at a particular historical moment” (p. 72). Reciprocal healing can be seen in interventions where humans interact with rescue horses, but only at the

horses' initiation. The element of the horses' choice is essential to this activity's designation as both a Level 1 and Level 2 therapy (Buzzell, 2016). Gardening according to permaculture principles and therapeutic relationships between veterans suffering from PTSD and animals who had been abused are also considered reciprocally healing (Buzzell, 2016).

Norton (2009, 2012) stresses the importance of the ecopsychological "cycle of connection" that can lead to eco- and mental health, which in turn can foster connections with nature and end in the desire for the humans participants to care for the natural environment (Norton, 2012). Understanding this cycle can frame the constructed divide between humans and nature in terms that can be applied to the health of social work clients (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002; Besthorn et al., 2010) and the profession more generally.

The natural environment can also play a role in spirituality. Mainstream social work has been reticent to incorporate spirituality into practice (Hanrahan, 2017), as the profession sought to distance itself from early religious affiliations in a bid to increase professional credibility in an increasingly secular society (Coates, 2007a). So successful was the separation of social work and spirituality that for decades the link was not widely explored in education or practice (Coates, 2007a; Hanrahan, 2017). Embracing multiple spiritualities can open the profession to alternative belief systems in ways that could benefit clients directly and simultaneously shift dominant social work thinking, which places primacy on humans as separate from the more-than-human world (Coates et al., 2006; Hart, 2009). Spirituality and ecology are intertwined in ways that could benefit social work clients (Coates, 2007b, Coates et al., 2006).

Spirituality can provide a window into ways of knowing the world that include holism and a sense of the interdependence of humans on other humans and the earth, by recognizing that dominant western voices need to be interrogated, decentered, and unseated to ensure social

justice (Coates et al., 2006; Coates et al., 2007b). Coates et al. (2006) envision an “ecospiritual” construct that focuses on relationships, diversity, commonality, and other factors that honour Indigenous spiritualities and knowledges (Coates et al., 2006).

In addressing trans-species spirituality and Canadian social work’s slowness to embrace it, Hanrahan (2017) notes:

. . .although HAI and HAB constitute for many an expectant topic that resonates readily in our diverse everyday lived experiences, increasingly supported by a groundswell of popular interest in our relationships to other animals and the natural environment, HAI and HAB are virtually absent from the field of Canadian social work. . . (p. 79).

In her description of both human-animal studies and spirituality’s relegation to the periphery, Hanrahan’s (2017) observation could be applied generally to Canadian social work.

In addition to the above, my review of ecopsychology literature identified several studies about people’s experiences of exploring their ways of being in natural spaces. In one study, participants spent time in nature and experienced mindfulness and a “connecting activity” which aimed to foster an appreciation for and connectedness to nature (White, 2011). White (2013) also learned about transpersonal, or spiritual, experiences in nature; the author was the sole participant and was, thus, undertaking an “autophenomenographical” approach to his inquiry. Snell and Simmonds (2012) explore participants’ spiritual experiences in nature, with participants reporting having felt more reflective, more connections, and awe.

Eco-Maladies and Disasters

The above section examined the literature that outlines the many benefits of the natural environment to human well-being, and in some cases, reciprocal contributions, which benefit both humans and the natural environment. The flipside is that, just as a healthy natural

environment is essential for well-being, it has a “darker” side (Boetto, 2017, p. 50). Negative impacts on humans include being denied access to life-sustaining physical elements of the natural environment (such as clean air and water and food security), and the upheaval and even death resulting from natural disasters (such as drought and flooding). In addition, there is an increase of eco-maladies⁴ such as “eco-anxiety”(Pihkala, 2018) and trauma or negative emotions resulting from uncertainty, grief, and loss associated with the natural environment (Lysack, 2010, 2013).

The inverse of the “cycle of connection” involves human separation from nature or witnessing its destruction and the negative effects on mental and planetary health, through a “cycle of disconnection” (Norton, 2009, 2012). The current planetary crisis is due, in large part, to humans’ ideological (and, subsequently, physical) separation from the natural environment (Besthorn, 2013). Guided by western rationality, many people have disconnected from the natural environment, viewing it through a lens of objectivism and exploitation (Plumwood, 1993, 2002). Windle (1995) describes the grief that people experience when beloved spaces or plants are lost. Emotional responses to people’s “despair for the world” (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 64) are myriad, including denial and a distancing of the self from environmental problems (Macy & Brown, 2014). This issue can be described as “phenomenal dissociation,” in which many people are distanced from the consequences of their environmentally-destructive actions (Worthy, 2008, p. 149), or “psychic numbing,” where individuals block the pain of what they witness (Bai, 2009, p. 135). Albrecht (2005) uses the term “solastalgia” to describe the keen

⁴ I have not seen this word used in the literature, but I use it here to enfold the many negative mood states that relate specifically to the natural environment. I share in others’ discomforts in positioning these conditions as disorders or in any way as maladaptive, as I believe that they are completely reasonable and understandable reactions to uncontrolled damage to the planet and its inhabitants. However, I find the terms useful in its power to highlight emerging serious mental/emotional health states directly resulting from harm to the natural environment.

sense of loss people feel when their beloved physical home/space is being damaged or is “under immediate assault” (p. 45).

The ongoing destruction of the land, animals, and water has significance to many Indigenous peoples, who consider both beings and places to be sacred, relatives, and vital to subsistence (Billiot et al., 2019; Coates et al., 2006; Gray et al., 2013a; Hart, 2009; Norgaard & Reed, 2017). For Indigenous peoples, connections to the natural environment may be deep and also linked to [colonial] trauma (Billiot et al., 2019). Norgaard and Reed (2017), for example, poignantly explore the feelings of grief, anger, shame, and hopelessness experienced by the [Indigenous] Karuk people in the face of the degradation of their local river.

That marginalized people are disproportionately affected by environmental injustice in disasters such as droughts and earthquakes, is relevant to social work (Dominelli, 2012; Hetherington & Boddy, 2013). Even in the more affluent global north, where impacts of the environmental crisis are less pronounced, women, Indigenous, racialized and elderly people, people with disabilities, and those who live in poverty are more likely to experience its negative effects (Dominelli, 2012).

“The Link”: Intersectional Abuse of Animals and Humans

There is a well-documented connection between violence toward animals, children, older people, and intimate partners known as “*The Link*” (Arkow, 2013, cited in Wuerch et al., 2016; Randour et al., 2019). A consequence of the bond between people and their animals is that such bonds can be used as leverage in abuse (Ascione et al., 2007; Flynn, 2000; Randour et al., 2019; Walsh, 2014). Ascione’s (1998, cited in Ascione et al., 2007) landmark study shows that a majority (71%) of abused women reported that their partners had threatened their pets with harm or death, and 57% said that the abusive partner had actually harmed or killed the pet. Out of fear

of leaving animals behind, women sometimes delay leaving an abusive relationship (Ascione et al., 2007; Flynn, 2000).

Awareness of *The Link* is important for several reasons. Firstly, it highlights the significance of inter-agency cooperation and cross-reporting. Abuse or violence toward one vulnerable group can provide a signal that other members of a household could be harmed or are at risk of being harmed as well. This provides opportunities for collaboration across roles such as police, animal control/protection agencies, veterinarians, physicians, and child protective services to identify abusers (Randour et al., 2019; Wasson, 2018; Wuerch et al., 2016). Wasson (2018) in particular notes a lack of comprehensive and consistent cross-reporting between human and animal services in Saskatoon.

Beyond potentially flagging situations of violence, the interrelationship between human and animal abuse and violence is also relevant in identifying ways of supporting people experiencing domestic violence (Taylor & Fraser, 2019). People leaving (or attempting to leave) violent relationships with companion animals can face barriers to accessing housing or shelter, financial concerns relating to the animal, or issues with shared custody of the animal (Laing, 2020; Taylor & Fraser, 2019). Supportive services can better assist those leaving violent relationships by considering the importance of the HAB, such as including custody of animals in restraining orders, creating shelter spaces that can include companion animals and generating funds for coverage of pet-related expenses when clients leave a relationship (Taylor & Fraser, 2019).

The human victims of domestic violence are central to support services, and when companion animals from the same house are considered, it is usually in the context of how such animals can provide either benefit or barriers to humans' experiences of the violence (Laing,

2020; Taylor & Fraser, 2019). The animals and their experiences are not often considered, but Taylor & Fraser (2019) point out that animals experiencing domestic violence can demonstrate increased aggression, anxiety, trauma, or the loss of their human companion in cases of separation. Laing (2020) laments that “all-too-human” services overlook everyone in “interspecies” families, and calls for a “critical posthumanist social work” that “recognise[s] that animal bodies need to be accommodated by service responses along with human bodies” (p. 3).

Finally, *The Link* underlines the gendered nature of violence. It is not accidental that women are far more likely to experience domestic violence and that other marginalized beings (children, elderly people, and animals) are similarly subject to violence. In the dominant culture, women are often essentialized to be closer to animals in that both are inferior to white males. A similar phenomenon is seen in the violence against the earth and its inhabitants characterized by a capitalist, industrial, technical society.

Indigenous Peoples, Land, and the Importance of Decolonizing Social Work

Mainstream social work acknowledges its fraught history with the Indigenous people of Canada. This is particularly evident in the case of child welfare services, which has served to further a colonial agenda through to the contemporary moment (Coates et al., 2006). The ‘60s Scoop is a widely acknowledged example of social work’s damage to Indigenous families and communities (Faith, 2010; Hiller & Carlson, 2018; Sinclair, 2009), but Fortier and Hon-Sing Wong (2019) point out that social work’s complicity in a neoliberal society both preceded and followed this event.

The intersection of decolonized social works and the natural environment is clear in the sense that Europeans’ displacement of Indigenous peoples from their land was the original manifestation of colonization, but this injustice continues today (Billiot et al., 2019; Hiller &

Carlson, 2018). Fortier and Hon-Sing Wong (2019) highlight the role of social work in furthering a neoliberal agenda on parallel fronts, noting: “The removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities by social workers is intimately linked to the extraction of natural resources from Indigenous peoples’ land bases for the purposes of capitalist accumulation” (p. 6).

Mainstream social work is marked by a lack of recognition of Indigenous ways of knowing or even an understanding that multiple valid ontologies exist (Coates, 2013; Coates et al., 2006; Gray et al., 2007). Within universalizing frameworks in which Indigenous perspectives are not respected, social work perpetuates colonialism (Coates et al., 2006). According to Weaver (2016), “Non-Indigenous researchers and academics must critically examine how their work supports or strives to dismantle colonization” (p. 139).

Indigenous social work provides a counterpoint to the dominant stories of the profession. It stresses balance, responsibility, and holism stemming from a relational form of spirituality (Hart, 2009). This spirituality is articulated differently in diverse First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, but often includes the component of what is understood in Cree as *mino-pimatisiwin* (“the good life”) (Hart, 2009, p. 35). *Mino-pimatisiwin*, Hart (2009) explains, presupposes that people are “one aspect of life, dependent upon those who have lived before us and upon other life” (p. 37).

Hart (2009) further discusses an understanding of the term “Indigenism” in which “an Indigenous person has the responsibility to practice kinship roles in reciprocal relationship with his or her bioregional habitat, manifested through cultural beliefs, rituals and ceremonies that cherish biodiversity; this is the context of a Native land ethic and a Native spirituality . . .” (Hart, 2009, p. 33). While it is not possible to assume that all Indigenous social work practitioners

incorporate the natural environment in their work, if they are practicing with Indigenous principles in mind, they will subscribe to principles of holism and interconnectedness⁵ (Hart, 2009). Indigenous ways of caring have arisen prior to and outside of the formalized profession of social work and are not a secondary response to mainstream social work (Faith, 2010; Hart, 2009).

It is worth noting that situations involving the natural environment and Indigenous claims to the land can be complex. For example, some resource extraction projects threaten Indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice, where practices and outcomes are at odds with the agendas of environmentalists or environmental social workers (Coates, 2013; Hiller & Carlson, 2018).

Social Justice and Advocacy in Social Work

Social justice is a vital component of social work practice, and there are many opportunities to bring environmental issues to light in support of clients (Lysack, 2010, 2013; Tester, 2013). Social inequalities are exacerbated during times of hardship, and due to systemic oppressions, marginalized and vulnerable populations are inevitably first affected by climate change, water shortages, environmental disasters, or cost-cutting disposal of toxins (Dominelli, 2012; Gray et al., 2013a; Hetherington & Boddy, 2013). People's vulnerabilities can be based on such factors as gender, poverty, and rural living (Alston, 2020), and on ethnicity (Dominelli, 2012). Those in the more affluent northern hemisphere are less affected by the environmental crisis so far, even though northern consumptive patterns are much more culpable in driving the

¹ I must note that I share others' concerns of homogenizing Indigenous voices regarding the environment or romanticizing all Indigenous people as being identically and intensely connected to the natural world. As Jeffery (2014) points out, "[r]epresentations of native and nature seem to easily slide into nostalgia and depoliticized longing for a premodern self" (p. 494). Individual practitioners of Indigenous social work and/or their clients might eschew discussion of the natural environment; however, the principles underpinning Indigenous social work includes consideration for the more-than-human world and the interdependence of life (Hart, 2009; Jeffery, 2014).

damages in the south (Dominelli, 2012). Indigenous peoples the world over experience disproportionate impacts of environmental damages, both materially and culturally.

In Canada, as around the world, Indigenous peoples face disproportionate impacts of the environmental crisis, prompting McLafferty Bell et al.'s (2019) blunt statement that "Indigenous peoples will continue to be impacted first and worst" (p. 283). The country's relationships with the Indigenous people who live here provide many examples of social injustice. The troubling history lightly treated in an earlier section has grown into a present marked by Indigenous people's overrepresentation in the prison and child apprehension systems, poverty, and Indigenous women's, girls', and LGBTQ people's increased risk of being murdered (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

These social injustices are exacerbated by harms to the natural environment, most notably in relation to Indigenous peoples' displacements from their original territories (Hiller & Carlson, 2016). This ongoing affront of loss of land and colonialist encroachments on Indigenous rights are in need of redress, as suggested in the TRC's (2015) "Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future" report:

Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, from an Aboriginal perspective, also requires reconciliation with the natural world. If human beings resolve problems between themselves but continue to destroy the natural world, then reconciliation remains incomplete. This is a perspective that we as Commissioners have repeatedly heard: that reconciliation will never occur unless we are also reconciled with the earth (p. 18).

That the land is so central to justice for Indigenous peoples underscores the importance of rethinking current western ideologies, including capitalism, patriarchy, modernism, and (resource)

extractivism (Vásquez-Fernández & Ahenakew, 2020) in social work. Some models were discussed above, and other scholars argue for frameworks based on ecofeminism, with its emphasis on interconnectedness and non-hierarchical relationships among humans and between humans and nature (Besthorn, 2011; Besthorn & McMillen, 2002), or on the feminist-based “relational cultural theory” (RCT) to provide a framework for ecosocial work (Norton, 2012). RCT’s principles of mutual empathy and empowerment speak to the interconnectedness of all living things and seek to level power relationships.

Others argue for clients’ self-advocacy (which can be facilitated by social workers), claiming that taking responsibility for a personal or community project (such as protecting a green space) can give them a sense of justice (Besthorn, 2013) or heal pain over damage to the planet (Lysack, 2013) or experiencing or witnessing environmental crises (Gray et al., 2013a). Taking action, especially collectively, can be important for client empowerment (Shepard, 2013), a sense of community (Lysack, 2013), the strengthening of connections to nature, and a sense of one’s life meaning (Lysack, 2010). Case (2016) notes that an impetus for collective action to protect water from commodification in a case study is a sense of social justice, that there is a “moral economy” of water that resists the encroachment of capitalism into “common” resources.

Social work’s social justice component is bolstered by Canada’s own obligations to international human rights documents. Canada is a signatory to human rights treaties for which the natural environment is relevant; however, regardless of intent, the standards set out by these agreements are not always met. Canada was slow to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), signing onto it in 2016 after first voting against it in 2007 over concerns about its commitment to ensuring “free, prior and informed consent” (Article

29.3) (Morin, 2017). The UNDRIP (2008) contains many references to the environment and land, such as in Article 25, which states in part:

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard (p. 10).

There is evidence that the articles of the UNDRIP are not being upheld. Diabo (2017) points out that the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has expressed concern about Canada's "continuous violation of the land rights of Indigenous peoples," especially because: "environmentally destructive decisions for resource development which affect their lives and territories continue to be undertaken without the free, prior and informed consent of the Indigenous peoples, resulting in breaches of treaty obligations and international human rights law" (Diabo, 2017). The declaration is also not legally binding in Canada; Pam Palmater (in Morin, 2017) notes that until fundamental principles, many of which revolve around land and territory, are enforced, reconciliation between Canada and its Indigenous people is impossible.

Canada is also a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes a child's right to safe drinking water and nutritious foods, "taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution" (Article 24.2.c) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). As of August 8, 2018, there were 39 short-term drinking water advisories (Government of Canada, n.d.- a), and on August 2, 2018, there were 72 long-term drinking water advisories on First Nations in Canada, with 8 in Saskatchewan (Indigenous Services Canada, 2018 and n.d.). The Government of Canada also acknowledges that women are "disproportionately affected by

the effects of climate change” and has been encouraging women and girls to participate by sharing knowledge and taking part in international discussions (Government of Canada, n.d.- b).

Canada is also part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’s (UNFCCC) 2015 Paris Agreement, a multi-country accord whose chief goal is to keep international greenhouse gas levels to a maximum of 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, n.d.). Canada has committed to the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is “an action plan for people, planet, and prosperity” (United Nations, 2015). Linking several aspects of human rights, environmental protection, and economic equality, the Agenda aspires to empower vulnerable people, make significant changes to global consumption and production patterns, recognize the UNFCCC as the primary means for negotiating climate change matters, and protect water and lands (United Nations, 2015). Signing onto many international conventions on people’s rights demonstrates Canada’s stated commitments and priorities, providing context to the documents that shape the field of social work in Canada.

Social Work’s Guiding Documents

Anchoring the social work profession are its codes of ethics. These documents include national and international standards of practice, and policies. Social workers in Saskatchewan are licensed by the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers (SASW). The SASW adheres to the CASW’s (2005a) “Code of Ethics” and other documents; the CASW in turn subscribes to principles set out by the IFSW. The CASW’s (2005a) “Code of Ethics” gives a cursory nod to the non-social environment in Value 2: “The Pursuit of Social Justice.” It states: “Social workers believe in the obligation of people...to provide resources, services and opportunities for the overall benefit of humanity and to afford them protection from harm. Social workers promote

social fairness and the equitable distribution of resources...” (p. 5). A supporting principle asserts that: “[s]ocial workers promote social development and environmental management in the interests of all people” (CASW, 2005a, p. 5).

Section 8.0 of the CASW’s (2005b) “Guidelines for Ethical Practice” is most relevant to the intersection of social work and environmental issues. It provides more detailed, though still unclear, professional direction for social workers to “advocate for change in the best interests of clients and for the overall benefit of society, the environment and the global community” (p. 24). This section underlines the importance of advocacy to the profession, calling on practitioners to participate in public and political arenas in service of marginalized and vulnerable people (CASW, 2005b). Section 8.5 highlights a duty “to advocate for a clean and healthy environment and advocate for the development of environmental strategies consistent with social work principles and practices” (p. 25). Given the importance of the profession’s commitment to human rights and social justice, as outlined in the “Code of Ethics” (2005a), environmental advocacy is necessary for good practice.

In contrast to Canada’s relative silence on the topic in its documents, the Australian Association of Social Workers’ (2010) “Code of Ethics” places the natural environment alongside the social environment to a degree that mirrors its importance as outlined in the literature.⁶ Section 1.3 claims that “The social work profession also recognises that social work takes place in a context whereby social systems have a mutually interdependent relationship with the natural environment” (AASW, 2010). Section 3.2 says that social work “promotes the protection of the natural environment as inherent to social wellbeing” (AASW, 2010).

⁶ I did not conduct an exhaustive look at national codes of ethics but noted where social work associations in other developed countries were ahead of Canada on this topic.

The British Association of Social Workers' "Code of Ethics" (2014) mentions that "[s]ocial workers should be concerned with the whole person, within the family, community, societal and natural environments. . . "(Principle 2.1.4, p. 7). Further, the BASW's (2014) code's "Working definitions of ethics and professional ethics" recognizes the application of ethics beyond humanist constraints: "Although the subject matter of ethics is often said to be human welfare, the bigger picture also includes the flourishing of animals and the whole ecosystem" (p. 14).

For its part, the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers' (2019) "Code of Ethics" identifies the following among its "Ethical Principles": "We promote social development, environmental wellbeing, sustainability and justice, and care and protection of the natural world" (p. 13). Social workers in the Asia Pacific Region (including Aotearoa New Zealand) are to "[e]ncourag[e] innovative, sustainable social work and social development practices in the preservation our [sic] environment" (ANZASW, 2019, p. 8). The code (ANZASW, 2019) also states: "We recognise the sentience of animals and ensure that any animal engaged as part of our social work practice is protected," as part of the Maori concept of manaakitanga ("respect, generosity, and care for others") (p. 11). The ANZASW's website contains numerous resources on animals in relation to social work.

The United States' National Association of Social Workers' (2017) "Code of Ethics" contains a reference that is equally nebulous as the CASW reference; ethical standard 6.01: "Social welfare says that Social workers should promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and the development of people, their communities, and their environments." Perhaps the natural environment is being considered here, or the term could be assigned to the usual social environments. In 1999, the NASW featured a document entitled

“Environmental Policy” in its publication, *Social Work Speaks*. The document catalogues impacts of the environmental crisis on clients, and bluntly states that the profession’s lack of interest in the natural environment “is ironic because individuals and the social environment depend on the natural environment for survival” (NASW, 1999, p. 1). The NASW released a newsletter highlighting the impacts of climate change and offering practice suggestions related to it (NASW, 2019).

This consideration of the natural environment shows up in some of the organization’s other documents, including its (2016) “Standards for Social Work Practice in Health Care Settings,” in which it acknowledges “a mutually influential relationship with [clients’] physical and social environment and cannot be understood outside of that context” (p. 14). Significantly, it mentions health inequalities based on a variety of factors including (among others) ethnicity/race and gender, underscoring the link between systemic oppression and health status (NASW, 2016, 11). Other documents mention “environmental” factors, but often, as with this one, it is difficult to determine what is meant by this ambiguous term.

The IFSW recognizes the need for integrating the natural environment into the social work profession in its goals. “The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: A Commitment to Action” (2012), a joint collaboration of the IFSW and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) outlines goals that cross national borders. A key goal is “[w]orking toward environmental sustainability” (p. 1). The agenda (2012) also asserts that the three organizations will “promote...standards in education and practice that facilitate sustainable social development outcomes” and “encourage and facilitate research into the social work role in relation to disasters and environmental challenges” (p. 4).

In its (2004) “Ethics in Social Work: Statement of Principles,” Sec. 4.1.3, the IFSW says that “social workers should be concerned with the whole person, within the family, community, societal and natural environments, and seek to recognise all aspects of a person’s life.” The organization’s “Globalisation and the Environment” (2012) document points out the impacts of “economic, social and cultural influences coming from many different sources” (para. 17) on local communities; these factors can affect (among other things) income equality, access to clean water, and pollution. While the IFSW can “not claim to offer unique solutions” to the problems arising from globalization, it “is committed to working in partnerships which aim to promote human rights and the social and environmental well-being of individuals and communities” (para. 23). On June 5, 2019, The IFSW launched its “Climate Justice Program,” whose pillars are education, advocacy, and change in addressing issues of climate change (IFSW, n.d.-b).

Research on Social Work(ers) and the Natural Environment

Several studies have been done that are germane to this research. For example, the exploration of social workers’ attitudes, practices, and perceptions about the natural environment (Marlow & Van Rooyen, 2001; McKinnon, 2013; Nesmith & Smyth, 2015). They highlight that a majority of responding social workers in these studies are interested in environmental issues. Nesmith and Smyth (2015) found that their social work participants believe the study’s topic, environmental justice, to be important to the profession, with a mean response of 3.93 (on a 5-point scale) to the statement “Environmental justice should play a significant role in social work practice.” Marlow and Van Rooyen’s (2001) reported that 92.8% of the participants in their study indicated environmental issues to be personally important and 71.1% thought them relevant to social work. Inclusion criteria for McKinnon’s (2013) study required all participants to be self-identified as pro-environmental. Participants were interviewed to determine whether

they found environmental issues relevant to social work and what supported or limited their inclusion of environmental values professionally.

Despite the fact that a majority of participants in all studies found the natural environment personally (Marlow & Van Rooyen, 2001; McKinnon, 2013) or professionally (Marlow & Van Rooyen, 2001; Nesmith & Smyth, 2015) relevant, they encountered factors that limited their practice regarding the natural environment. Participants cited lack of time, lack of resources, and support (Marlow & Van Rooyen, 2001; Nesmith & Smyth, 2015), and too heavy a workload (Marlow & Van Rooyen, 2001). Some participants did not see the relevance to their profession (Marlow & Van Rooyen, 2001), and even though McKinnon's (2013) participants were pro-environmental, they were unsure about how the natural environment fit into their practice. Interestingly, while McKinnon (2013) notes that her (pro-environmental) participants did not feel entitled to "impose" their values on clients, she contends that, according to the Australian Association of Social Workers' "Code of Ethics," they have an "ethical responsibility" (p. 166) to do so.

Marlow and Van Rooyen's (2001) participants found ways to incorporate the natural environment into their work, including "[t]herapeutic contact with nature" and "political action." Social workers also found other – presumably self-motivated – outlets for bringing their environmentalism to work, such as recycling (Marlow & Van Rooyen, 2001; McKinnon, 2013), water use issues (McKinnon, 2013), volunteerism, and philosophy (Marlow & Van Rooyen, 2001). While her participants were not yet practicing social workers, Kominetsky's (2018) thesis explored Saskatchewan undergraduate social work student participants' understanding of the [natural] environment. As with the participants in other studies, they cited a lack of education/training and/or a wish for more education on the topics (Kominetsky, 2018; Marlow &

Van Rooyen, 2001; Nesmith & Smyth, 2015). Similar to McKinnon's (2013) participants, Kominetsky's (2018) participants demonstrated a split between the personal and the professional regarding environmental issues and values, prompting Kominetsky's (2013) creation of a model as a beginning step to in part address this identified gap.

The Importance of an Ever-Transforming Self

The dubiousness of the concept of a discrete "self" as separate from the natural environment has already been discussed; however, as beings with agency, social workers make choices about what they do in their personal and professional lives. One of the most powerful sites of transforming social work is the individual practitioner (Coates, 2003; Lovell & Johnson, 1994). As Coates (2003) suggests, "perhaps the most important part of a social work education will be a process of self-exploration regarding one's own beliefs, values and lifestyle (p. 134). An examination of one's involvement in modernist society or views of human's place in the world can lead to changes in consumptive patterns or in an understanding of what constitutes meaning (Coates, 2013). Lysack (2010) stresses that environmental education must "[c]ultivate a moral framework" to engage people's values and commitments to motivate them to advocacy.

According to Boetto (2017), "Inevitably, our ontology. . . which is made up of personal morals, beliefs and attitudes, influences our behaviour and approach to professional practice" (p. 52). Personal attention to the state of the natural environment or recognition of the importance of the human-animal bond could spark a practitioner to ask different questions. Papazian (2014) says that "incorporating the question 'Do you have any companion animals?' into psychosocial assessment allows us to further explore and identify protective as well as risk factors associated with companion animals" (p. 180).

In addition to the unearthing information about patient health, Hodgson et al. (2015) advocate for physicians to ask patients about their companion animals because “Talking about pets is a nonthreatening way to build rapport” (p. 530). Boetto (2016) maps out how to twin the themes of inclusion of the natural environment in everyday practice and sustainability, with a critical lens, during every phase of the therapeutic relationship. Harrison et al. (2016) discuss Bonnycastle’s use of the terms “thin” and “thick” to describe how socially just micro-practice would entail both a basic approach to a topic and a much deeper exploration that involves the practitioners’ exploration of her own social location and the therapeutic relationship (p. 261). Lysack (2013) suggests that the presence of emotions such as helplessness, helplessness, or anxiety over environmental damage, can motivate people to greater advocacy on its behalf. As the “cycle of connection” (Norton, 2012) posits, people care more for things with which they have meaningful relationships.

Summary

Scholars make a compelling case for: 1. the importance of the environment to human well-being, 2. social work to incorporate engagement with the natural environment into practice, and 3. policies (and education) addressing this need. It is apparent from the literature that while some social workers consider the natural environment important for the sake of client well-being and/or see a role for social work to help address the planetary crisis, such practice is certainly not universal. Steps have been taken by some individual counsellors, universities, and professional associations, but engagement with the natural environment is still not a cornerstone of social work practice for everyone.

Social work scholars have made strong arguments to draw connections between social work and the natural environment. There are many practical examples, particularly in the fields

of ecopsychology and animal-assisted interventions, yet there has been limited study of how these connections are or could be taken up in mainstream social work education, practice, and policy. Furthermore, there has been only one study done that is specific to Saskatchewan (Kominetsky, 2018). As Molyneux (2010) points out, “research is desperately needed to explore the practical realities of ecosocial work. Without this, it is unlikely that ecocentric practice will reach the attention of policy-makers and enter mainstream social work as an evidence-based practice” (p. 67). This research aimed to ask how the social work profession in Saskatchewan can standardize consideration of the natural environment in practice so that every social worker is aware of the myriad links between the profession and the natural environment. It contributes to understanding the gaps between the knowledge about the importance of the natural environment to social work, and *vice versa*, to encourage changes in policy, education, and practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology, Methods, and Theoretical Lenses

Methodology

Methodological Framework: The Policy Sciences Framework

This research used the policy sciences framework (PSF) (Clark, 2002). The PSF provides logical and comprehensive scaffolding leading to policy recommendations via a systematic examination of relevant social and contextual factors. This “stable frame of reference” includes the following four functions, which will be further explained below. The first function is the primary focus of this thesis: figuring out what the problem is, what underlies it, and how to address it (problem orientation). Other components include: understanding the values and perspectives of participants (social process), clarifying the researcher’s orientation, biases, and position within the problem, as well as ontological and epistemological orientations (observational standpoint), and understanding how policy decisions are made, and by whom (decision process) (Clark, 2002; Clark et al., 2001; Lasswell, 1970; Scheuer & Clark, 2011).

This robust framework can be used even when certain functions are not explored thoroughly, since data can always be added to provide a bigger picture. Most notably for this study, the importance of the decision process has been recognized, but is not fully analyzed because it will become more relevant when stakeholders meet to address this issue. In addition, the social process analysis is limited in scope due to the practical constraints of a master’s thesis. The main PSF elements are:

1. Problem Orientation
 - a. Goal clarification
 - b. Trend description
 - c. Condition analysis

- d. Trend projections
 - e. Alternative invention, evaluation, and selection
2. Social Process
 3. Observational Standpoint
 4. Decision Process

Problem Orientation: Identifying Reasons for the Gap. This dimension of the PSF involves analyzing problems generating solutions (Clark, 2002; Staples et. al., 2013). Orienting to the problem at the heart of the issue is essential to ensuring that the correct problem, or problems, are identified. As Clark (2002) points out, “Without a clear [problem] definition, there is no basis for even talking about solutions, much less choosing and implementing them” (p. 100). Rather than suggesting a negative fixation on problems, the problem orientation dimension is only one part of a framework that includes finding alternatives. In addition to the central process of problem definition, problem orientation has 5 steps: 1. goal clarification, 2. trend description, 3. condition analysis, 4. trend projection, and 5. alternative invention, evaluation, and selection (Clark, 2002). This dimension situates the problem in its broad context to provide understanding of the background in which the problem has arisen and extrapolating the problem’s course going forward in the absence of an intervention.

Goal Clarification. This component of the problem orientation involves having enough background information (gleaned from the social process) to be able to answer the question, “What do people want?” (Clark, 2002, p. 90). Knowledge of who participants are and what their perspectives and values are can lead not only to an articulation of goals but also to the discovery of commonalities or differences among participants (Clark, 2002). Three criteria used to determine whether a common interest is present, and being addressed in a policy process are: 1.

inclusivity and breadth of participants, 2. whether participant expectations are met, and 3. responsiveness and adaptability in the face of change (Cromley, 2001, as cited in Clark, 2002, p. 14). A common interest goal does not need to be palatable to all participants, but actions that arise in its pursuit must “conform...with existing rules decided by the community based on members’ shared expectations” (Clark, 2002, p. 57).

Trend Description refers to examining the historical and chronological background to the problem (Clark, 2002). Trends in people’s perspectives, in the social environment, and in the natural environment can illustrate whether the community is moving closer to or away from their desired goal(s) (Clark, 2002).

Condition Analysis involves looking at the relationships and situations that have led to the observed trends (Clark, 2002). They name the underlying issues behind the trends. Trends result from an interplay of conditions that can be mapped out to predict whether goals will be realistic (Clark, 2002).

Trend Projections are made to estimate what will happen with the problem if there is no intervention (Clark, 2002), and to identify possible interventions, if the trends are not moving in a desirable direction. Clark (2002) points out that looking at the trajectory of trends into the future can be challenging and relies on an understanding of trends and conditions, which must be “systematically organized” (p. 95). As Clark (2002) points out, “If trends are not moving toward the goal, then a problem exists and alternatives must be considered” (p. 87).

Invention, Evaluation, and Selection of Alternatives is the final function of the problem orientation, completed after the problem is clearly defined (Clark, 2002). This step is predicated on knowledge gained from the above analyses. Based on an assessment of recommendations including the feasibility, sustainability, or other qualities, a plan is made (Clark, 2002).

This research follows the problem orientation dimension from goal clarification through the trio of trend description, condition analysis, and trend projections. To complete this analysis, however, social and decision process analyses must also be considered. The invention of alternatives is undertaken in preliminary recommendations in Chapter 5, with an acknowledgement that there is much work left to be done, and by many stakeholders, in order to gain a better picture of what is needed and how action can be implemented.

Researcher observational standpoint. This element of the framework attends to my own values, my identity as a social worker and as a citizen of the planet, and my orientation toward the problem (Clark et al., 2001). I tried to be vigilant about the ways my own values and perspectives could influence (and potentially distort) how I view the research process and products (Clark et al., 2001, p. 260). Core elements of my standpoint have already been identified in the introduction. This knowledge of standpoint guides me in the questions I ask, how I conduct interviews, and how I analyze data. It also includes attention to my theoretical lenses: feminist and critical perspectives, and the understanding that humans are but part of a larger, living, breathing world. This “self-scrutiny” gives me pause about assuming, for example, that everyone agrees that we are experiencing a global environmental crisis. It is here that I account for being an “inside” researcher, as a social worker interviewing my fellow professionals (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Ontology. I subscribe to Wilson’s (2008) definition of ontology as “the theory of the nature of existence, or the nature of reality. Is there one “real” world that each of us experiences differently through our own senses, the point of view of the observer?” (p. 33). For this research, even as I believe in the existence of a serious and multi-layered environmental crisis as an objective reality, I accept that there are multiple ontological positionings around this belief.

Epistemology. This study is rooted in a constructivist knowledge paradigm. I believe that researcher and participants share in the generation of knowledge, and that both have influence on the research outcomes (Hays & Singh, 2012). As Crotty (2002) points out, “[t]ruth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (p. 8). I did not expect nor seek a universal truth in the research; rather, I expected to hear multiple truths from participants.

Axiology. As described above, I bring the lenses of a social worker, environmentalist, and feminist to this topic. I have noted that these corrective lenses are essential to my research and have followed Hays and Singh’s (2013) advice regarding the importance of a reflexive axiology, in which researchers are asked “to reflect on what role, if any, their values play in the research process” (p. 36). As mentioned in the methodology chapter, I kept a critical reflection journal during the research journey to keep track of my thinking and emotional processes during the research.

Insider Status. As a social worker conducting interviews with social workers, I identify as a research “insider” (Corbyn Dwyer, & Buckle, 2009; Hays & Singh, 2012). I believe that the interview experience was enhanced as a result. I enjoyed the rapport facilitated by our common understanding of (for example) levels of practice or shared terms such as “anti-oppressive” practice. I approached the interviews with an awareness of the power dynamics involved and felt confident that while I had some power as the interviewer, participants knew that I was a fellow social worker whose education was equal to or sometimes even less than theirs. Sean and Alison had fewer years of experience in the profession than I, but we have the same degree. I believe my own relative newness to social work and my having a base education in the field contributed to decreasing the power imbalance inherent in interviews.

Theoretical Lenses: Counter-Hegemonic Orientation and Challenging Dualisms.

These two lenses – counter-hegemony and Plumwood’s ecofeminism – are important to this study because they help make visible the deep anthropocentric roots that pervade not only rationalized western societies but also the professions, such as social work, that arose from and still function within them. Also, as I read through the participant data, these lenses were always at the back of my mind, as they are part of how I see the world. They allowed me to recognize absences of the natural environment in social work discourse, and they were useful when I articulated the underlying conditions and generated recommendations.

These lenses provided insight into the participant data, as the application of these broad concepts can demonstrate how it might be possible (or even likely) for social workers to be educated in social work and practice it without paying much heed to the natural environment. Hyperseparation and dualistic thinking that keep humans separate from the rest of the earth community make it difficult to foreground the idea that “human well-being is only possible in the context of the well-being of all life – a healthy and thriving Earth” (Gray et al., 2013a, p. 8). The natural environment remains a blind spot in Eurocentric cultures.

Decision Process. The decision process helps locate who makes decisions and how they are made, implemented, and assessed (Clark et al., 2001). Mapping the decision process in the social work community is essential in understanding how the implementation of policies might support social workers in their learning and application of the importance of the natural environment. Taken together, the environmental scan and the interviews provided decision-makers with a sense of the societal context of social work and the natural environment as well as such factors as barriers, supports, and values as represented by the individuals with whom I have spoken. Although the decision process is not a major component of this research, the

recommendations set out in the discussion will need to be made in the context of understanding what decision processes and which institutions can effect change.

Social Process. The social process maps out who the participants are, as well as their perspectives and values (Clark, 2002). Social process analysis involves looking at what participants want, and strategies participants use to get what they want. This, together with decision process analysis, described in the next section, and problem orientation described above, helps determine what the actual problem is (Clark, 2002). While this study illuminates some ways that social workers incorporate the natural environment in their practice, a more expansive social process mapping including a wider range of participants needs to be done to arrive at a more complete picture. This includes what social workers as a group want regarding this topic, as well as what other stakeholders, such as clients, agencies, and governing organizations value.

Methods

Problem Orientation

Before I began my master's program, I noticed that there was limited discourse in social work education and practice about the natural environment. It was apparent to me that there was a gap between the literature on the importance of the natural environment in social work and what I had experienced in my program and work. I noticed this problem based on my personal experience as a social worker, as a member of the SASW, and as the colleague of other social workers employed in Saskatchewan. Also, given that I have a pre-disposition to considering the natural environment in all parts of my life, I had done reading in this field. The extent and conceptualization of this problem has been refined through this thesis work, based on analysis of

trends, conditions, participant perspectives, and some limited yet significant insights into decision processes in the field of social work.

Goal Clarification. Clarifying the common interest goal (as distinct from my personal research goals) was determined by drawing on the social work document analysis, participant interviews, trends, and knowledge of the field. Due to the scope of the study, clarification of a common interest goal remains tentative, and further study is needed to determine feasibility.

Trend Description. Analysis of trends included the following: 1. conducting a thorough literature search on the topic, 2. reviewing codes of ethics and other documents guiding social work, such as practice guides and mission/value statements in the province, in Canada, and internationally, contacting and/or looking at the websites of social work programs across Canada (both graduate and undergraduate), and 3. looking at news stories, literature, programs, and conferences relevant to the topic of social work and the natural environment. Participants' data about current practices also contribute to the trend description.

Condition Analysis. An understanding of underlying conditions was informed by a review of relevant literature as well as my theoretical lenses and my own experience in the field. Participant responses were also integrated into the final condition analysis.

Trend Projection. A brief discussion of trend projections (direction and speed) follows the examination of trends to assess the discrepancies between the desired outcome and current events and activities.

Invention, Evaluation, and Selection of Alternatives. According to the PSF, the creative process of imagining alternatives, which eventually lead to recommendations, take into account everything that is learned from the problem orientation, the social process, and the decision process analyses.

Decision Process

My experience as a social worker in Saskatchewan has provided me with an understanding of key decision-makers within the profession, and while this function is not explored deeply in this research, many with influence are identified. Knowledge of these entities, listed briefly in Chapter 4, is important in knowing to whom recommendations will be made and who can effect change. As noted above, effective implementation of recommendations will require attention to decision processes within the field of social work.

Social Process

Participant Recruitment. Participants were recruited through the following strategies: 1. purposeful sampling (through professional connections or awareness), 2. postering in places known to employ social workers (via email, mail, or in-person), and 3. advertising on the University of Saskatchewan website. Four respondents (Leah, Alison, Sean, and Mady) were unknown to me and responded to the research invitation via email. Of the others, one, Rosa, was a former colleague and friend, and another, Hanna, a former fellow student. I intentionally recruited one participant (Erin) due to her high-profile and relevant employment in the community. Erin chose to use her real name, while all others requested pseudonyms. Participants were invited to provide a pseudonym if they had a preference, or one was provided.

Participant Demographic Information. All participants identified as registered social workers. Six participants identified as female, and one as male, and six identified as European/Caucasian while one preferred not to say. Participants identified as working in the following fields (either as primary, secondary, or additionally): counselling (5), advocacy (3), education (2), medical (1), mentor (1), community development (1), mental health (1), and other – justice with families (1).

Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Primary/Secondary/Tertiary Field	Years as a Social Worker	Gender	Ethnicity (self-identified)
Erin	Counselling/Community development/Education/Advocacy	8	F	European/Caucasian
Rosa	Counselling/Education	11	F	European/Caucasian
Hanna	Counselling/Mentor	7	F	European/Caucasian
Leah	Medical	20	F	Prefer not to say
Sean	Advocacy/Counselling	5	M	European/Caucasian
Alison	Advocacy/Counselling	3	F	European/Caucasian
Mady	Mental health/Justice with families	18	F	European/Caucasian

Table 3.1: Participant Demographics⁷⁸

Participant Data Collection Procedures. I conducted seven semi-structured interviews⁹. Six were approximately 30 to 60 minutes and one was approximately 90 minutes long. Due to scheduling considerations, one participant’s interview was broken up into two parts: one approximately 60 minutes, with a 90-minute follow-up on another day. Interview length seemed related to participant familiarity with the topic.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim soon after completion of the interview. All interviews were transcribed by me, and this provided my first opportunity to familiarize myself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After each interview, I wrote a short summary of key points and my initial impressions. Important points from these notes were later

⁷ At the time of data collection (2017), all seven participants worked in Saskatoon; thus, I feel comfortable claiming to address a provincial gap. While study size does not allow for significant extrapolation, all social workers in Saskatchewan work under the same provincial, national, and international professional organizations.

⁸ I did not ask participants which institution(s) they attended for their social work education, nor whether they had practiced social work outside of Saskatchewan. While no participant explicitly mentioned having completed a BSW program outside Saskatchewan, or having practiced elsewhere, I think it is important to consider that participants may have been exposed to education (degree-oriented or professional) or professional organizations that were not explored in this research.

⁹ One participant requested to be removed from the study after receiving the transcript of their interview; that participant’s data were not included.

added to each transcript for inclusion in data analysis. I emailed each participants' transcript to them to ensure they felt it was accurate.

Throughout the data collection period, some questions were added or slightly modified, either for clarity or to add depth to existing questions. These changes were made in response to participant reactions, such as hesitation over the lack of a "not applicable" option in the tick-box for question 12, which asked how often participants incorporate the natural environment in their work. To improve accuracy, this choice was added. Additionally, realizing that I had not included a question about grief about the loss of an animal, plant, or space, I added question 12c. Such changes were minor but resulted in a smoother interview process and provided prompts for participants to speak about these issues.

Participant Data Analysis. After I transcribed interviews, I reviewed the transcripts, making margin notes on each. I then prepared a master document, grouping responses from all participants according to objective and related interview questions. I included one additional section of data that were of interest, although I could not yet see where they fit. This process included reviewing the transcripts many times, making sure that all content was transferred, and that I was not missing anything important. These chunked data became the basis for my more in-depth, second round of analysis.

I then looked at each data chunk, wrote more notes and summaries of what participants said, and added reflections on what I noticed, such as places where participants became more animated or seemed to be apologetic. I noted key themes, repeating patterns, and anomalies. I also reviewed summary notes made immediately after the interviews and added pieces into the master document where appropriate. I read over this master document many times, critically analyzed the initial categories established by the research objectives, and began to create new

ones where data had not previously fit. These data led to inductive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006); while they did not directly address specific research objectives, they generated some of the most interesting findings in the study, such as some participants' lack of translation of the importance of their own relationships with the natural environment to their practice with clients.

I take Ely et al.'s (1997, in Braun & Clarke, 2006) point that themes do not “emerge” from the data fully formed. Although the data were sorted in groups to answer research objectives, I had to make choices about these arrangements. I am aware that someone else approaching the data could well have decided to separate or amalgamate data differently than I did.

I returned many times to review the transcripts against what I was synthesizing in the master document to ensure that I was not just finding what I wanted to see, overlooking anything vital, or over-interpreting. As Braun and Clarke (2006) point out, thematic analysis is a “recursive” rather than a “linear” process that takes time and consideration (p. 86). I spent a lot of time with the data, considering it from many angles, and refining themes with my supervisor. I also did peer debriefing with two members of my graduate student cohort to clarify my own thinking and to engage in sharing of ideas (Hays & Singh, 2012)..

Trustworthiness of the Research

I took steps to ensure that my research is reliable and accurate. Lincoln et al. (2011) point out that when one has a constructivist understanding of knowledge generation, the goal is not to find and confirm a single truth. To help ensure the trustworthiness of this project, I kept a journal to record my own assumptions and thoughts. I took extensive notes and thought critically about all aspects of the research. This reflexivity allowed for a more informed understanding of the research (Creswell, 2016; Hays & Singh, 2012).

I checked and cross-checked data for themes to refine them. I looked for “disconfirming evidence” in order to present the information accurately even when it was not consistent with my expectations (Creswell, 2016, 192). I member-checked with participants, emailing them their transcripts and asking them to ensure accuracy (Creswell, 2016; Hays & Singh, 2012), and I was able to debrief with my advisory committee and supervisor formally, as well as with members of my peer cohort informally. There was triangulation in the sense that I was able to check for resonance between participant data, research on trends, and the literature review.

A Note on the Framework and a Feminist Perspective

I note here that while a crucial component of the PSF is the observational standpoint which calls for the researcher to render transparent her values and biases, I have found that infusing all dimensions of the study with this subjectivity is difficult. At times, I have found it somewhat problematic switching between more personal ways of relating to the study material and what is required for the methodical approach of PSF. Both in writing and in thought, I have wondered whether it has been distracting for the reader that I have chosen to switch between first- and third-person writing.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to engaging in any interaction with participants, this study received approval from the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Participants were given information on the study and interview process. Informed consent was reviewed with each participant prior to the interviews (Hays & Singh, 2012). Participants were advised about all potential risks known by the researcher, and that they were only being asked to provide answers with which they were comfortable. As part of the consent process, participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time until data amalgamation (Hays & Singh, 2012), without any

consequences. They were told that after aggregation, their data would be included in the study. I discussed confidentiality with participants and let them know that I would remove identifying details except where explicitly not required, such as in Erin's choice to use her own name.

In acknowledgement of the power dynamics inherent in an interview relationship, I took steps to mitigate imbalances, such as requesting that participants choose meeting times and locations that suited them. I have represented participants' voices and intent with as much fidelity as possible (Hays & Singh, 2012). From personal experience, I know that thinking about the state of the natural environment can evoke feelings of anger, frustration, fear, and sadness. I was mindful to include time for a debrief with each participant after each interview if necessary, and I provided participants with written and verbal reminders of support agencies to contact, should they wish to speak with a counsellor later. This information was included on the research ethics consent form.

Digital data (audio recordings) were stored on a password-protected phone, laptop, and jump drive that were accessible only to researcher and supervisor. Hard copies of notes or other papers were kept in a locked room when unattended. Audio recordings were kept on these devices and on the University of Saskatchewan secure server until after transcription, at which point they were erased. All hard copies (including master list of participants) will be destroyed after completion of the thesis defense and approval of the thesis. As per research ethics guidelines, digital copies will be kept by my supervisor for 5 years post-publication, before being deleted beyond recovery.

While the aim of my research was not necessarily to improve the lives of participants in an obvious way (Hays & Singh, 2012), I believe that during the study, some participants learned something new about this topic.

Chapter 4: Findings

Review of Research Objectives

1. Articulate contextual factors, including current trends and underlying conditions within the profession,

2. Describe and analyze study participants' current understandings and practice related to the role of the natural environment in social work by:

a. determining participants' levels of understanding of the connections between social work and the natural environment,

b. learning what participants do to connect the natural environment to their social work practice, and

c. identifying, from participants' perspectives, what factors might increase social workers' incorporation of the natural environment into their work,

3. Identify the problems that result in the gap between the call for greater professional emphasis on the natural environment and social work reality, and

4. Make recommendations to address the gap that exists between the stated importance of the natural environment in social work literature and the inconsistency in policy, education, and practice in Saskatchewan.

Problem Orientation

Goal clarification: The Common Interest Goal

The PSF's problem orientation process relies upon the clarification of participants' goals. Depending on the divergent perspectives of stakeholders, it can be difficult to arrive at a goal that secures the "common interest" (Clark, 2002, p. 14); however, this research hinges on the assumptions that regardless of personal goals or desires, participants share a professional affiliation and that social work has its own goals. Two ubiquitous goals of the profession are client well-being and social

justice, and while homogeneity of thought is not expected, it follows that social work participants would see them as “common interests,” or “those that are widely shared within a community and demanded on behalf of the whole community” (Clark, 2002, p. 13).

Client Well-Being. A core commitment of social work is to that of client well-being, as evidenced by the edicts of the CASW and the IFSW, which direct the professional ethics of practitioners in Saskatchewan. The preamble to the CASW’s (2005a) “Code of Ethics” opens with the statement that, “The social work profession is dedicated to the welfare and self-realization of all people.”¹⁰ The “Code of Ethics” (2005a) other aspirations for clients include (for example): respect, dignity, worth, freedom from violence, equality, access to resources, and freedom from discrimination and prejudice. While still providing a rather minimalistic depiction of well-being, taken together, these elements comprise some elements of client well-being. Elsewhere, the organization’s description of social work includes this term directly, claiming it as “a profession concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being” (CASW, n.d.).

For their part, the International Federation of Social Workers’ (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work’s (IASSW) joint definition of the profession, accepted globally, includes the assertion that it “engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing” (IASSW & IFSW, 2014). Boetto (2017) notes that in this new definition, there is no mention of the natural environment.

Social Justice. Social justice enjoys a less ambiguous prominence in both the CASW’s (2005a) “Code of Ethics” and in the IFSW/IASSW’s (2014) global principles of the profession. “The Pursuit of Social Justice” is the second (of six) of CASW’s ethical values. That organization’s

¹⁰ While the term “welfare” is used here, I prefer the synonymous “well-being” to describe a state of optimal wellness, eschewing the more limited financial and state-dependent connotations of the former term. Further, well-being as described in mainstream social work can be considered problematically Euro- and anthropocentric. The quest for a more meaningful definition of well-being is included in the literature review.

definition of social work claims that: “[h]uman rights and social justice are the philosophical underpinnings of [its] practice” (CASW, n.d.). Similarly, there is international emphasis on social justice in the profession. The IFSW and the IASSW (2014) claim that “Advocating and upholding human rights and social justice is the motivation and justification for social work.”

Given the central importance to social work (ers) of client well-being and social justice, and given the arguments for the importance of the natural environment in both, it follows that consideration of the natural environment is potentially a common interest goal, even though it is often not explicitly a stated goal.

Trend Description (Objective 1).

There exists some overlap between the contents of the literature review and the identification of trends and conditions. While the literature review is a thematic review of the scholarship on this topic, analysis of trends demonstrates (or maps out) the trajectory of the field over time. There are noticeable trends in the following categories: academic literature, education, conferences, professional organizations, and ecotherapies.

Literature. The groundbreaking work of Hoff and McNutt, *The Global Environment: Implications for Social Welfare and Social Work* (1994), galvanized the field of social work and its positions relating to the natural environment. In the ensuing decades, scholars have written about nature therapies, interventions involving animals, the ethical imperative for social workers to engage with the natural environment, the role of social work in environmental disasters, the role of the natural environment in mental health, social work’s advocacy pillar related to the natural environment, and the importance of the natural environment for social work in relation to issues of human rights and social justice. Krings et al. (2018) summarized environmental social work literature published between 1991 and 2015, covering articles ranging from such sub-topics as ecospirituality, pollution/toxins, climate change, and human relationships with the more-than-

human world. The authors affirm previous authors' assertions that this branch of research has been both "marginalized" and "growing exponentially," comprising 2.1 percent of total social work publications in 2015, up from 0.7 percent in 1991 (Krings et al., 2018). They conclude, "[W]hile limited in scope, social work research priorities and resources are increasingly allocated to environmental concerns" (Krings et al., 2018, p. 12).

Specific examples include a special issue in the online journal *Critical Social Work*, entitled, "Building Bridges and Crossing Boundaries: Dialogues in Professional Helping" (2010). This volume features articles on sustainability, the importance of place, ecological citizenship, and other facets of the natural environment in social work. In 2015, the journal *Social Work Education* featured the issue "Environmental Justice, Green Social Work or Eco Justice." *International Social Work's* July 2018 issue is on "Promoting Community and Environmental Sustainability," while the interdisciplinary *Journal of Community Practice* produced a special issue on "Ecosocial Work and Social Change in Community Practice" (2019). Recent edited volumes on social work and the environment by Gray et al. (2013b), Matthies and Närhi (2017), and McKinnon (2016) join books on the importance of animals to the profession (Ryan 2011, 2014). While much of the literature's main focus is on the theory and idealism of, and the ethical impetus for social work to consider the natural environment (Molyneux, 2012), there has also been an expansion of scholarship addressing practical aspects (Boetto, 2016; Gray et al, 2013a; Dominelli, 2012).

It is apparent that while social work literature was neither an early nor particularly vociferous leader on considering the natural environment, there has been a movement (stronger in the last decade) to address the importance of the natural environment to the profession.

Education. Whether or not there are significant tangible differences recently, there is some movement in education regarding the natural environment. At the level of University strategic planning, there has been acknowledgement of the importance of the natural environment in ways that has implications for social work. The mandate of University of Regina's 2020-2025 strategic plan, "All Our Relations – kahkiyaw kiwâhkômâkaninawak," applies to the Faculty of Social Work (FSW), and includes "Truth and reconciliation" and "Climate action and environment" as two of its 5 "areas of focus" (University of Regina, n.d., p. 4). A stated goal is the 25% reduction of the university's "ecological footprint" (University of Regina, n.d., p. 15). The FSW's own strategic plan (2015) explains that for the university and for the faculty, "sustainability is deeply rooted in social justice and is taken to encompass economic, cultural, social, and environmental sustainability" (p. 4). Another part of the FSW's (n.d.) Strategic Plan is "indigenizing" its program, which includes (for example) improving students' "understanding of Indigenous ways of being and their practice with Indigenous peoples" (p. 10), which seems to be an attempt at offering alternatives to mainstream principles.

In the June 2016 issue of the SASW's newsletter, the U of R's FSW Dean wrote, "Given our commitment to addressing the needs of disadvantaged, marginalized and oppressed peoples, it makes sense that social work would be more vocal about the issue of environmental justice" (SASW, 2016, p. 15). These steps are very encouraging, and important; however, striving for environmental justice remains an anthropocentric goal and does not signal the will to transform social work from its current western, individualistic orientation into a profession based on the interrelationships among living beings.

First Nations University of Canada's opening paragraph of its vision statement (n.d.) has a more ecocentric and overtly spiritual focus:

Indigenous people view the world through lenses of interconnectedness and interrelationships of all life. We view all of Creator's gifts as being equal and interdependent. We rely on plants, animals, birds, fish, land, rocks for life – and each of these is imbued with spirit. All of these are equal and interdependent, part of the great whole. We view the world with the acknowledgement and awareness of our impact on all life, with the understanding that we live in cycles, of seasons, phases of the moon, animal migrations, etc. (FNUniv, n.d., p. 6).

That these principles are embedded in the institution's vision suggests a holistic understanding of humans' role in the world that would, by definition, challenge the "values of individualism, dualism, domination and materialism" in mainstream social work (Coates, 2003, p. 58).

In 2014, 2016, and 2020, the U of R's FSW ran the graduate-level course "Social Work and the Environment: Theory and Practice." This course was also offered in 2018 but was cancelled because of low enrollment. The faculty also offered a course entitled "Animals, Social Work and Society" in 2018 and again in 2020. Currently, the natural environment is not a component that is woven through all courses, nor is it a core course.

Across Canada, the picture is varied. Of the 43 university social work programs explored, many, including Lakehead University, Memorial University, University of Manitoba, and University d'Ottawa, University of British Columbia (Vancouver), do not offer courses specifically linking social work to the natural environment. In addition to the U of R's courses mentioned above, other universities offer courses addressing some aspect of the broad topic, such as York University's "Critical Social Work and Animals: Trans-Species Social Justice" and Universite de Moncton's "Travail Social et Environnement."

Notably, sustainability underpins MacEwan University's Bachelor of Social Work program, its website reading: "Unique to this degree is the focus on sustainability – how social, environmental, and economic issues interrelate – and how we all fit in to the larger community" (Macewan University, n.d.). The variation in uptake of this topic among universities, at least in terms of course offerings, suggests that there is institutional movement in some cases and not in others. The overall picture of Canadian social work programs does not support a uniform professional prioritization of the natural environment.

Professional Organizations. Professional organizations are beginning to notice the planetary crisis, with varying degrees of speed. As mentioned briefly in the literature review, the IFSW has led globally with a very holistic view of social work that includes the natural environment (IFSW, 2004). Given the IFSW's global mandate, it is unsurprising that this organization has recognized the need for social work to respond to issues of the natural environment. People living in developing nations are often the first affected by drought, poverty, pollution, and other negative effects of environmental degradation and resource extraction.

The CASW has not been a leader on the topic of the natural environment, but it is becoming more aware of its importance. The association's 2005 "Code of Ethics," with its near silence on the natural environment, is currently in the revision process and had an expected completion date by June 2020 (F. Phelps, personal communication, 2019). According to Fred Phelps, CASW's Executive Director, this new document will be "grounded in the principles" of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report (2015), and he expects it to have greater mention of the natural environment than the previous version (F. Phelps, personal communication, 2019). Phelps also claims that the CASW will be looking at the natural environment as a public health concern, adding that, "It's a priority issue for [CASW], as it is for

the world” (F. Phelps, personal communication, 2019). CASW also offered two recent webinars to its membership entitled, “Global Warming: A Social Work Response” (Rauh, 2019) and “Social work for a sustainable future: The deep impact of environmentalism for social work” (Coates, 2019). In 2020, a webinar entitled, “Animal-Assisted Interventions: Partnering with Animals in Practice” provides an additional indication of the association’s interest in educating its members on the linkages between the environment and social work and the environment, in its many forms.

In July 2020, just as this thesis was going to defense, the CASW released a position statement, “CASW: Climate change and social work” (Schibli, 2020). The association’s acknowledgment of the science of climate change and its impact on social work and its clients, particularly Inuit peoples, is significant. The paper touches on such issues as climate justice, eco-anxiety and ecological grief, the disruption that climate change causes to people in the far north and in the global south, and the need for social workers to advocate for clients on issues relating to climate change. The position statement appeals to social workers’ ethical obligations, noting that: “As a profession founded in principles of social justice, CASW acknowledges the reality of climate change and encourages social workers to educate, advocate, and be the change they want to see in the world” (Schibli, 2020, p. 3). The publication of this paper is an exciting development and bodes well for the revised code of ethics, and for acknowledging the importance of the environment in social work practice.

For its part, the provincial registration body, the SASW, has recently made moves to address the natural environment. Its Saskatoon branch held a topical workshop in spring of 2019. This will be discussed further in the next section. At the provincial level, the SASW is considering the generation of an environment committee and I have been approved to write a

series of articles in its newsletter, *Saskatchewan Social Worker*. SASW members will adhere to the CASW's revised "Code of Ethics" when implemented.

Conferences and Professional Days. Many events at the provincial, national, and international levels signify an increasing recognition of the importance of the natural environment to social work. 2017's theme for World Social Work Day was "Promoting Community and Environmental Sustainability." The theme of 2018's Social Work, Education and Social Development conference was "Environmental and Community Sustainability: Evolving Solutions in Human Societies." In September 2018, the Saskatchewan Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA) hosted a conference on the link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence (a phrase known among many people working in the fields of abuse and violence as *The Link*).

The CASWE's 2018 conference (held in Regina in May 2018) featured sessions on social work in the context of trans-species social justice (Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2018), incorporating sustainability in practice (Firang, 2018), animals as "indicators, barometers, and protective mechanisms" (Wasson, 2018), climate protection (Lysack, 2018), and other topics directly relating the profession to the natural. That same conference's 2019 theme, "Circles of Conversation: Engaging in Social Justice through Transformative Action" included the sub-theme "Eco-justice and Environmentalism" (CASWE-ACFTS, n.d.). Its Call for Proposals (CASWE, 2019) summed up the links by stating:

Ecological or environmental social justice is an emerging area of interest and necessity in the social work field. It focuses on the intersection of the effects of climate change and environmental degradation and the lives of individuals, groups, and communities, especially those that are already the most vulnerable and marginalized (p. 3).

In May 2019, the SASW's Saskatoon branch hosted "Sustaining Health," featuring the keynote speaker Dr. Mishka Lysack, who focused on the impacts of the climate crisis and social work (SASW, 2019). The workshop invited participants to learn about links between health and the natural environment, and environmental advocacy in practice.

Ecotherapies. As noted above in the literature review, an area of great growth in connecting social work and the natural environment is the increasing use of ecotherapies, including animal-assisted interventions and activities, horticulture therapy, and spending time in nature. On the flipside, there is growing recognition of the rise (or naming) of mental illnesses such as grief and anxiety directly related to the natural environment.

There is also a significant upsurge in the inclusion of animals in therapy and activities, as well as considering the role(s) that animals play in people's lives. "The Link" conference (mentioned above) reflects the growing understanding that there is a strong relationship between the abuse of animals, children, elderly people, and intimate partners (Wuerch et al., 2016), and the need for interdisciplinary collaboration. In March 2016, the Saskatchewan Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA), the Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS), and STOPS to Violence published a report on the impact of animals in the decision-making processes of people wanting to leave situations of interpersonal violence. Roughly concurrent with the release of this report, entitled "The Link: Interpersonal Violence and Abuse and Animal Safekeeping," the SSPCA added an Animal Safekeeping Coordinator to its staff. The coordinator is responsible for educating others about "The Link" and the connections among abuse of different groups. This role involves speaking to members of different disciplines, such as veterinary technicians, social workers, police officers, and the public (L. Sillers, personal communication, 2019).

As mentioned above, animals are recognized as being instrumental in some forms of ecotherapy, including canine and equine therapies. Through the St. John Ambulance's Therapy Dog Program, dogs are brought into homeless shelters, the airport, prisons, and the University of Saskatchewan campus to offer comfort, friendship, and stress relief. Murphy the dog has comforted people in the emergency room at the Royal University Hospital since 2016 (Dinh, 2016). A seminar entitled, "Why Do Dogs Make Us Feel Better?" was offered at the University of Saskatchewan as part of its One Health Discussion Series in 2017 (Chalmers & Dell, 2017).

Condition Analysis (Objective 1)

Four conditions emerge from the data: 1. Mainstream social work is anthropocentric, 2. Mainstream social work is Eurocentric, 3. We are experiencing an environmental crisis, and 4. There is a strong counter-current to the previous conditions. These conditions arise from all components of data collection, including participant interviews, the literature review, an examination of trends, and even my own personal experiences. They will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

Trend Projections (Objective 1)

There is definite movement in the social work community to take the natural environment in practice seriously. In every category outlined above, there is consistent, positive momentum toward closing the gap between the state of the profession now and the ideal. It is both interesting and exciting to note the number of events that have occurred even since I first began my master's research. Still, while progress has been noted in the literature, education, conferences, professional organization, and the implementation of ecotherapies it is also apparent that pace of this momentum is not rapid. Rather than being a leader regarding the natural environment, social work has been slow in taking mitigating action.

Decision Process Analysis

Pivotal to enacting change is understanding areas of influence and processes for decision-making, implementation, and evaluation of any proposed actions. Some key decision-makers and decision-making institutions who have power or are involved in Saskatchewan's implementation of any recommendations are listed below, accompanied by a brief description of their role(s) and jurisdiction(s):

- The Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers (SASW) is the province's professional organization. The SASW is a member organization of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) and sets out a "Standards of Practice" document for its approximately 1700 members (SASW, 2020.).
- The CASW is the national professional organization of social workers. Members of the SASW adhere to the CASW'S "Code of Ethics" and "Guidelines for Ethical Practice."
- The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) is social work's global organization, of which the CASW is a member. The IFSW has members in 141 countries and "striv[es] for social justice, human rights, and social development" (IFSW, n.d.-a).
- The Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) is responsible for national social work education policies, standards, and accreditation (including for the U of R's FSW and the FNUniv's School of Indigenous Social Work) (CASWE, n.d.)
- The University of Regina's (U of R) Faculty of Social Work offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees in social work in the province.
- Under the broader administration of the University of Regina, the First Nations University of Canada's (FNUniv) School of Indigenous Social Work (SISW) offers Indigenous Social Work certificates, and bachelor's and master's degrees (FNUniv, n.d.).

- Major employers of social workers include the Saskatchewan Health Authority and the Ministry of Social Services, and smaller community-based organizations and counselling agencies such as Family Service Saskatoon or Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Service.

8. Social workers and social work students. This group is directly affected by how much they are informed about the role/importance of the natural environment in their practice and what role(s) they can play personally and professionally in shaping the future of the profession.

Social Process: Participant Perspectives (Objective 2)

This section provides insight into the degree to which interviewed social workers in Saskatchewan consider the natural environment in relation to their profession. Through interviews with participants, I have learned something about: what they understand about the connections between the natural environment and social work (Objective 2a), how they incorporate the natural environment into their social work practice (Objective 2b), and what factors might increase their incorporation of the natural environment in their work (Objective 2c). Participants also shared thoughts about their own personal experience(s) with the natural environment.

Contextualized by an examination of prevailing trends and conditions that situate the participants socially, these data reveal a range of responses that underscore the lack of consistency in social workers' understanding of the role of the natural environment in their work. The data also revealed that while participants are often able to understand the connections between their own well-being and the natural environment, this understanding does not always translate into considering this a vital part of their practice.

Understanding of the Importance of the Natural Environment to Well-Being (Objective 2a)

Participants¹¹ all recognize the importance of the natural environment to well-being, that it can be essential for emotional/mental well-being (E, H, S, M), spiritual well-being (H, M), embodiment, groundedness or meditative states (E, H, L), socializing (H), relaxation (M), and comfort (A). Many consider the physical importance of the natural environment, such as food access or water or air (E, R, H, L) or freedom from pollution (R).

For Hanna, the effects of the natural environment on well-being are myriad: “I feel like [the natural environment] can definitely impact our mental well-being, like 110%.” She points out the social aspects of the natural environment and the importance of community gardens or “even having a barbeque in the summertime.” She adds: “I think about the difference in even how I feel when I think about the time I spend outdoors versus the time when I get sucked into the Netflix or the social media or whatever, it can have a tremendous impact.” There is resonance on this point for Erin, who says, “The natural environment is the core of well-being.” She explains the importance she places on spending time doing activities such as hiking and swimming: “And so activities that involve the natural world often put us back into our bodies and force us to have a look at what's going on in there. And then also allows a mechanism to ground ourselves and . . . deal with that.” She also says. “We need people [to] talk about their relationships with their animals . . . because those animals are some of their most uncomplicated relationships and their places of total safety. . . .”

Mady says that for her, the natural environment provides “connections to a higher power.” Describing her relationship with her dog, she says:

¹¹ In this and subsequent sections, participants are designated either by their first name/pseudonym, or by their corresponding initials: thus, Erin = E, Rosa = R, Hanna = H, Leah = L, Sean = S, Alison = A, and Mady = M.

I very much believe in a power greater than myself, and that power comes through in the natural environment that I can connect with, so that does come through my dog for me. Probably other animals too, but for her, it's just a connection that doesn't make sense otherwise. Why two species would have such an amazing and innate connections to one another, to me speaks to something greater than ourselves, that there's a healing on a level that I don't understand, that she [my dog] can provide.

Sean notes that the natural environment and well-being are “inextricably connected,” adding, “I’ve noticed that in my own life, leaving the city to be among the natural environment is definitely – I’ve noticed an improvement on my emotional and mental health.”

Interestingly, there were two groups of responses: those considering the question primarily in terms of clients (Rosa, Leah, and Alison), and those relating it primarily to their own experiences with the natural environment (Erin, Hanna, Sean, Mady). The latter group produced significantly more robust answers than the former, except for Sean, whose response (noted above) was succinct.

Understanding of the Connections Between the Natural Environment and Social Work (Objective 2a)

As previously indicated, participants noted the links between well-being and the natural environment, however, this did not automatically equate to understanding the relevance to their practice. There was wide variation in how familiar participants were with the topic of the natural environment and social work. Many participants report having heard nothing or very little about the topic; in response to the question, “Can you please tell me, what have you heard about the role of the natural environment in social work practice?” Leah responded, simply, “I’ve heard nothing.” Alison responded: “The natural environment, no. I wouldn't say necessarily in social

work practice.” Sean said he has not heard “very much,” and others responded about spatial or social (Rosa) and built (Alison), rather than natural, environment. Other participants were aware of the connections between their profession and the natural environment, either vaguely (Mady) or to a high degree (Erin, Hanna).

Table 4.1 <i>Participants’ level of understanding of the connections between social work and the natural environment</i>	
Low (Rosa, Leah, Alison, Sean)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have not heard of the connections (L) or not very much (S) • make connections between social work and primarily other kinds of environment (built (A), spatial and social (R))
Medium (Mady)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is somewhat aware of the connections (M)
High (Erin, Hanna)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are aware of the connections in a thoughtful and ongoing way (E, H) • are aware of the CASW Guideline 8.5.1 (E, H)

Table 4.1: Participants’ level of understanding of the connections between social work and the natural environment

There seemed to be a rather sharp demarcation between participants who had had little exposure to the connections between the natural environment and social work and those who had a great amount. For Erin, a veterinary social worker, the natural environment is a foundational part of her daily work, and her job exists because of the value some people place on the natural environment (specifically, animals):

I think about environment in kind of the way you're describing; I don't just think about it in terms of the social environment, which is how we traditionally talked about it in social work practice. I think about it much more broadly and about people's relationship and connections [to animals] . . .

Hanna's job is not focused on the natural environment, but she is mindful of bringing her awareness of its importance to her profession, noting that ". . . [The natural environment] can affect things on all three levels of social work practice, so it can affect things on a macro level down to an individual level and in-between." Both Hanna and Erin claim to have a personal interest in the natural environment that spills into their work; they clearly express the melding of their personal and professional lives. While Hanna notes that being a social worker is part of her identity, Erin states, "I mean the personal is professional is personal is professional." Both Hanna and Erin make many connections between their profession and the natural environment. It is important to note that Erin's job revolves around the natural environment, while Hanna's job is not predicated on it. Thus, although there is a large difference in the amount of inclusion of the natural environment in their practice, these participants are placed in the same category.

Sources of Information About Social Work and the Natural Environment (Objective 2a)

Participants were asked what sources had helped them develop an understanding of the links between social work and the natural environment and provided with a list of potential responses. "Social work colleagues and peers" was the most common response, with six participants selecting it (E, R, H, S, A, M); only Leah did not cite this as a source. Five participants responded for each of "social work educators" (E, R, H, S, M), "books, articles, or other reading materials" (E, R, H, S, A), and "a pre-existing tendency to consider the natural environment in your life" (E, R, H, L, M). Notably, this last category was Leah's sole source. Four participants (E, R, H, S) claimed a "university course" as a source, while that same number (E, H, S, A) said they had learned from a "workshop, lecture, or public event." Two participants (E, H) cited the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) as a source, and none selected either the SASW or the CASW. Only Erin included responses in the "other" category, noting "family of

origin,” the “veterinary community,” the “animal welfare community,” specific people, and NGOs (non-governmental organizations). Of ten categories, Erin and Hanna cited all sources excluding the SASW and CASW and (in Hanna’s case) “other.”

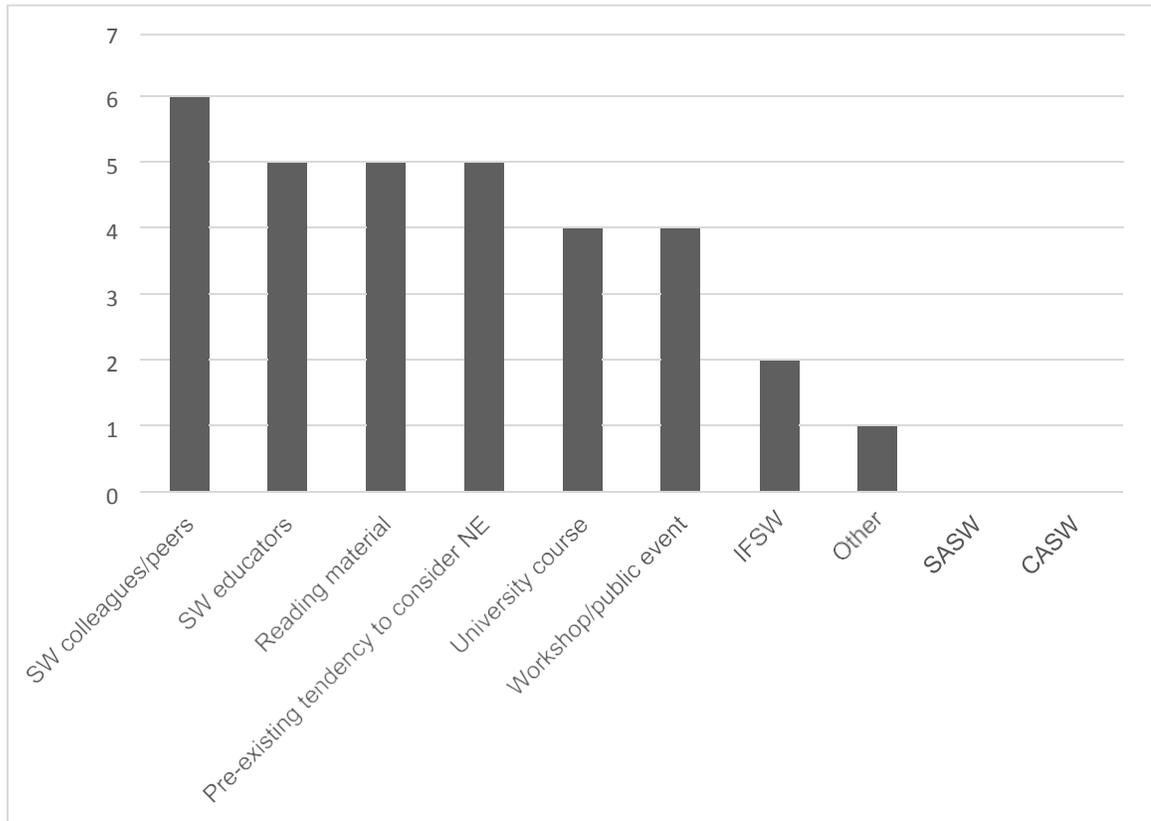


Figure 4.1: Sources of information about social work and the natural environment (by number of participants)

Most participants were aware of social workers who purposefully incorporate the natural environment in their practice, or of programs that facilitate such incorporation. The leading category of such programs were animal-related, such as animal-assisted activities (E, R, H, M). Erin also mentioned social workers who are involved with the [Saskatchewan Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] animal safekeeping program, professors from the Faculty of Social Work (University of Regina), and a social worker who she believes allows pets to be brought into counselling sessions. Leah mentioned a co-worker who does “animal rescue,”

although she did not say whether this is a personal endeavour or as part of a broader program with clients. Sean said that he is aware of programs where clients are taken camping or to reserves where there are ceremonies that incorporate the natural environment.

Understanding the Importance of Social Justice and Advocacy to the Profession (Objective 2a)

Participants were asked questions relating to the role of social work's response to environmental damage and crisis in clients' lives (as well as the significance of CASW's (2005b) "Guidelines for Ethical Practice" 8.5.1: Advocate for the Environment) to them. These questions elicited answers that focused on the advocacy and social justice components of social work. Participants gave a variety of responses to the above questions, citing social work's role as including: being aware of the importance of food security (H, M); access to clean water (E, L, H); "air quality" (L); "land issues" (E); advocating for safe housing (M, L) or hospitals (A); responding to environmental crises (R); acknowledging the importance of clients' relationships with animals or land (E, M); amplifying clients' voices (R, S, M); working for social justice (E, H, M); lobbying or advocating for policy changes (R, H); striving to have a pro-environmental or social justice orientation in one's personal life (E, H); and having a larger professional presence at protests (H).

Many participants acknowledged the importance of working with their clients on whatever issues are important to them, whether they were related to the natural environment or not. Working on a client's distress in response to environmental crises, for example, would be the same as working through any other crisis. While not providing any examples about the natural environment, Alison also points out that social workers can work with clients to lessen trauma in clients who have experienced disasters. Mady echoes the necessity of voice amplification and of leveraging one's power as a social worker by pointing out the role of social

justice and advocacy in the profession: “I’m wondering if, at times, social work[ers] carr[y] more opportunity or power than those who are impacted by environmental crises, and so using that voice to be heard at a level that maybe our clients wouldn’t be able to be heard.” For Hanna and Rosa, lobbying the government or advocating for policy change is a key point of intervention.

Hanna explains:

I think as we're presented with things I assume that many social workers are already doing the work on an individual level. If somebody presents with something like a flood or some other type of natural impact on an individual client or family, I think we probably just do that work without really thinking about it. But I think in terms of politics and policy, there's more for social work to do . . . [T]here has been things here, like protests for certain pipelines and things like that in Saskatoon, for example, where I'm fairly certain the SASW did not have a presence, or things like that, right? . . . [I]f you're gonna have social justice for other human rights, how do you not have social justice around climate change and the environment?

Rosa explains that she sees the importance of “[social workers] taking a look at what would be beneficial -- with [clients’] involvement: what do you need, how do we make changes on a big level, but starting small, I guess maybe.” These participants seem to suggest that if topics relating to the natural environment do come up, social workers would have an important advocacy role to play.

Asked whether they have heard of a subsection of the CASW’s “Guidelines for Ethical Practice”: Advocate for the Environment (CASW, 2005b, p. 25), five participants did not recall having heard of this guideline. Erin and Hanna are aware of the guideline and said that it has significance to them. For Erin, the guideline provides an important confirmation of the

significance of the work she does, saying it “gave sort of a credibility or rationale or reason why I was allowed to practice in the way I was.” This legitimization, she explains, is important because of something she has noticed about her work:

. . . [P]eople in my own field were really disconnected and actually outwardly dismissive of the relationship between human beings and environment and human beings and animals, until I could show them “research”. . . that proved to [them] that this was worthy of their attention . . .

In addition to recognizing the guideline’s confirmation of her own work, Erin also understands its broader implications. She adds that it makes her think about “crises associated with the natural world, water crises or issues with the land . . .” and that “the people who are most negatively impacted by that are vulnerable populations and people who are living with oppression and typically people in the developing world.” The guideline also prompts her to “think about [her] own impact on the natural world and . . . the social justice component of social work and what are [her] responsibilities as a social worker to be social justice-oriented towards [the] natural world.”

Hanna says that for her, the guideline has resonance on both personal and professional levels: “. . . I feel like it’s more informally influenced my practice, like in the fact that I think of social work as kind of a part of my identity, so it affects how I behave in my personal life. . .” Similar to Erin, Hanna is aware of the connections between environmental advocacy and social work, and for her, the guideline addresses this. She notes:

Yeah, when I think about advocacy and about a natural environment, I think about social work, I think about social justice, and I think about how environmental rights are human rights as well. . . [P]eople should have access to things like clean drinking water and

there's so many layers to why it's important as a social justice issue and social work is a social justice practice so you can't - I don't think you can separate the two. It means a lot to me, but I don't think that it's taught enough. . . [H]opefully it'll come down the pipe for future social workers that it will become something that's more prevalent and taught across curriculum and not just in one specific course that's an elective choice, you know?"

The fact that only two participants recognized this guideline suggests that if it is taught at all in general social work courses, it is neither reinforced nor emphasized.

Table 4.2 <i>Awareness of CASW's Guideline 8.5.1</i>	
Participant	Y/N
Erin	Y
Rosa	N
Hanna	Y
Leah	N
Sean	N
Alison	N
Mady	N

Table 4.2: Awareness of CASW's Guideline 8.5.1

Awareness of a Planetary Crisis (Objective 2a)

When asked, participants all responded that they believe we are experiencing a planetary crisis.

Current practice (Objective 2b)

Objective 2b seeks to learn how participants incorporate the natural environment in their own practice. For this question, participants were given a checklist and asked how frequently they incorporate particular actions relating to the natural environment in their practice. The range of responses echoes those of the first objective: for some people, the natural environment does not inform their practice at all, while for others it is an essential consideration. In some cases, the

gulf between those for whom this is a relevant and important topic and those for whom the topic is seldom considered, if at all, is great.

Table 4.3								
<i>Frequency of participants' inclusion of the natural environment in their practice</i>								
Participant	Incorporating natural elements into space	Exploring importance of places, animals, plants with clients	Encouraging "homework"	Making links between environmental justice and violence	Supporting clients with AAT or AAA	Participating in a nature-based activity	Advocating for a client in a situation involving NE	Exploring pain or trauma related to environmental damage/crisis
Erin	S	A	A	A	S	A	A	A
Rosa	A	S	S	N	S	S	N	S
Hanna	A	A	U	S	S	S	N	A
Leah	A	A	U	S	U	A	U	U
Sean	S	N	N	S	S	N	S	S
Alison	S	N	N	S	S	S	S	U
Mady	A	S	S	N	N	U	A	N/A

Note: N = never, S = sometimes, U = usually, A = always, N/A = not applicable

Table 4.3: Frequency of participants' inclusion of the natural environment in their practice

Participant responses indicate that, whether they had previously thought about certain activities or actions as including the natural environment in their practice, all include it to some extent. Their responses to the Likert scale questions indicate that all participants incorporated some natural elements into the workspace with "always" and "sometimes" as the only responses; similarly, there were no "never" responses to the frequency of exploring trauma related to environmental damage/crisis with clients. In contrast, "making links between environmental justice and violence" and referrals to or use of animal-assisted activities is not named as a

common practice, with five and four “sometimes” and two and one “never” responses, respectively.

There was a wide variation in participants’ responses. Leah reported the highest combined number of “always” and “usually,” with a single “sometimes.” Erin had more “always” responses (six to Leah’s three) and fewer “usually” (zero to Leah’s four); both Leah and Erin reported no “never”s. Erin’s response to the tick-box questions about her practice yielded only “always” except for two “sometimes.” In explaining the “sometimes” response to the referral to/use of animal-assisted therapy or animal-assisted activities, Erin points out that her work is with clients and their own animals, so she is not “creating or fabricating a relationship between them and animals, I’m more attending to the existing relationship that they’ve already got.” Erin’s job involves supporting clients in their grief over the loss of animals, from pets to farm animals, as well as emotions clients experience based on their relationship with the land.

All other participants reported more “never” and “sometimes” responses than Erin and Leah. Rosa’s, Alison’s, and Sean’s responses were all “never” or “sometimes,” with the exception of one “usually” (A) and one “always” (R). Mady and Hanna fall between the two groups in their mixture of responses; Hanna has an equal number of “never/sometimes” and “usually/always” while Mady has a similar profile with the question’s lone “not applicable” response.

Some participants stated that they do not purposefully apply the natural environment in their practice at all (R, S). In between these poles are the social workers who focus on the importance of a physically safe environment (air and water quality, L), have a plant (M), have brought a pet to work on an informal basis (M), spend time outside during sessions (H, E), invite clients to talk about animals during assessment (L) as a source of support and resiliency (or

conflict) (H) and invite clients to talk about time spent outdoors (H). Leah mentioned some elements of her workplace that might not be directly due to her own planning, but nonetheless make up part of her environment: “The workplace here has lots of plants, and that is by choice of the workers, and the large windows to allow for natural light and just well-being for our patients that we work with . . .”

Alison mentions being aware of clients’ surroundings, providing privacy, and trying to minimize chaos. She did not appear to distinguish between the built and the natural environment, even when prompted. Throughout the interview, both Alison and Rosa seemed to focus less on the natural (versus the built or social) environments. It is not clear whether this is due to the novelty of this topic for these participants, or something else.

I note briefly here that some participants say that they do not feel that the natural environment fits into their role; this note will be expanded below, in the section on barriers and supports. Alison seems not to see tangible ways to incorporate the natural environment into her work at the hospital, noting:

I guess bringing forward the topic [of social work and the natural environment] demonstrates that it's important, although I don't really put a lot of thought into it, but maybe something that needs a little bit more thought and to be brought forward . . . But it's hard working for the government, because you're so restricted in a lot of things and there's a box of guidelines and beliefs..... In our work it's not heavily promoted.

Mady also says she feels somewhat constrained by her role, saying that her “job’s very administrative” and that “there’s great importance in the role we play, but in terms of direct social work clients, that is just not there in the same way”

Barriers to/Supports of Incorporating the Natural Environment in Practice (Objective 2c)

Participants were asked to identify elements of their professional lives that either supported the incorporation of the natural environment into their practice, or those elements that were not supportive or were active discouragements. Participants viewed many categories in two ways, as both what they represent currently and what potential they have as supports. In this way, for example, colleagues might be seen as not currently helpful but as a resource that, if developed, could provide considerable support.

Workplace Support. Erin's responses reflected the most robust workplace support in incorporating the natural environment into her practice. Her position as a veterinary social worker not only accommodates but also requires attention to the importance of the natural environment. She says, "My whole job is about the interface of human beings and animals, but beyond that, my job is also about the interface of human beings and the role that the natural environment plays in their lives." Erin points out how her work is as varied as working with clients on grief over the loss of animals to paying attention to farming clients' mental health and its potential impacts on their cattle, to noting feelings of displacement people might feel in moving from a remote/rural setting to an urban setting.

In contrast to Erin's experiences where her workplace provides constant support in her incorporation of the natural environment in her work, other participants did not report having a high degree of support from their workplace. Alison, Sean, and Rosa report not having had the role of the natural environment been made explicit in their workplace. Leah, Mady, and Hanna fall between the two poles and report some amount of support from the workplace. Leah says that in her position as a medical social worker, the natural environment factors into risk assessment and that "the natural environment is not only something that we assess for any risk, we also use [it] as an important resource in strengthening our patients' ability to ground

themselves and feel well.” Hanna says that she has some autonomy to incorporate elements of the natural environment into her work, but without explicit leadership. She says that there is recycling at work, that some programs take place outside, and that “[my workplace is] kind of open” to things relating to the topic, but that “. . . there’s none of it written in stone this is what you should be doing.” Mady says that her agency runs a day program that includes tending to a garden and then cooking and preserving the produce. She adds that her workplace has a culture of ensuring that employees get outside for a walk on a regular basis:

. . . [T]he understanding is that you need to leave the building to re-charge and be well.

And so the vast majority of us at some point in the day will literally leave to go for a walk for 15 minutes or half an hour, and that’s done in a community of people, with full support that we aren’t supposed to be at our desks all day, every day. . .

Even while describing workplaces in which the natural environment was not foregrounded, most participants were able to envision how agencies could add support in this area. Participants suggested the importance of agency support in the form of time (R, H), funding for professional development (R) or projects (H), having more education/ideas on the issues (R, H), and increasing flexibility for such projects as community gardens (H). Mady expressed that in particular she would like her employers to understand the importance of animals in an informal setting: “. . . That would be great. . . if they could have a more broad sense of equine- or canine-assisted therapy, that it doesn’t have to be a clinical setting for there to be healing, just the energy of that other species in the building, for many of us, is incredibly healing.” Leah and Sean said they did not know how their workplace could be more supportive in this regard, while Alison said that “relevant information” could be shared at her workplace’s daily morning meetings.

Colleagues and Peers. While most participants reported not experiencing much support from colleagues and peers on this topic, everyone except Leah could see a role for this category of supporters. Responses ranged from practical to ideological. Sean noted, “I do have colleagues in hospital who go out of their way to make sure there’s potted plants in our offices. And that’s about it.” Mady said that her co-workers find not only the presence of plants in their office a “bonus,” but also being in the presence of animals and being in nature. Alison noted that some of her colleagues/peers do pet therapy, but that for her, there is a bigger picture:

I guess just being supportive of the idea, ‘cause everybody has different ideas, different practices and obviously, well from my perspective, it isn’t something that’s really taken into serious consideration; so if everybody as a whole tried to even do a little bit to incorporate some of that, maybe it would be different . . . working together as a whole to bring in some different ideas.

Rosa and Mady echoed Alison’s feelings on the importance of the creative or collaborative participation of colleagues, noting the importance of sharing new ideas (R, M), “brainstorming” (R), “open[ing] those conversations up” (M), “exploring my ideas” (M) and having a “more open mind about working together differently” (R).

Hanna, Mady, and Erin all expressed the significance of having colleagues provide support in the form of normalizing the topic within the profession, indicating that they have each experienced a sense of not being sufficiently supported in this way. Hanna sees that, if supported regarding this topic by the SASW, “. . .colleagues would be able to also come out and be like, okay, this is equally as important as talking about creating awareness around mental health or poverty or women’s rights or whatever.” Erin says that she feels “isolated” in her work at times, because some people see her work as “fluffy”:

. . . [T]here are people out there doing the work. . . but there's still a pretty stronghold of people who really minimize the importance of relationships with the natural world with animals, and I think if they started to attend to that stuff, and really see where that could go, they would see the benefit of it. But it also would support me by, you know, not being seen as one of the only people, quote, who will talk to me about my dog and understand and give credibility to that relationship.

Social Work Educators/University. Participants see a role for social work educators in teaching them more about the issue. Educators in the social work field can provide information on the topic (R, L, S, A, M) and make tangible links between the natural environment and participants' practice (R). Hanna says that she would like to see educators talk to her group at work:

I feel like I've kind of got a grasp on [the topic], and there's definitely more that I could be doing, but I feel like if. . . my team was supportive in that or my manager understood, or things like that, it would be more likely to be just like what we do, part of our everyday practice. . .

Ideas for universities' response ranged from including a mandatory/single course on the topic (H, S, M), incorporated across many or all other courses (H, M), or having a more practical approach to teaching the topic. Hanna and Mady suggest having the natural environment embedded in other courses. Mady points out that at one time, anti-oppressive practice was taught as an elective course that is now "a dominant undercurrent of every class, pretty much." She adds that if a similar initiative happened regarding the natural environment, students would learn about such things as the physical and emotional benefits of connecting with dogs: ". . . I think the more social work educators and social workers could see that there's threads of this in everything we

do, then more conversation could be invited around well let's do that purposefully, instead of just being what we do happenstance if we believe in it.”

For Sean, having the connections between the natural environment and social work addressed at all would be a place to start: “. . . I don't recall it in any of my training as a student that it was every really brought up in a concrete way, or in an applicable way.” He adds: “If it was, it would've maybe – just the idea that this is valuable, and if you have flexibility and freedom in say a non-profit, where you can actually take your clients out there, then sure, do it.” Like Sean, Alison said she had not learned about this topic in her social work program, but simultaneously acknowledged that the natural environment “might be one of those life factors that would just be a little bit more important” to be educated about.

Professional Organizations. Participants' responses suggest that the SASW, the CASW, and the IFSW can play some role in supporting social workers in incorporating the natural environment, although it was clear that, for some participants, there is little to distinguish the role of one from the other. When asked about the potential supportive role of the CASW, Alison said, “I don't know. I honestly didn't know that it even existed.” Mady says that her affinity with the SASW is stronger than that with the CASW, which is in turn greater than that with the IFSW. Sean says that he does not “bother too much with CASW or the international federation too much.” Overall, however, given that I did not ask any questions about how significant a role these organizations play in participants' professional lives in any capacity, it is difficult to know whether some participants do not find the professional organizations supportive on this topic, or whether these groups are viewed as not relevant to them in other ways as well. Some participants did, however, have specific comments related to their expectations for these organizations.

- SASW. Erin says she expects a lot from the provincial association in developing the topic for its membership. When asked about its potential impact, Erin replied:

Huge. Huge role. I feel like the SASW is in a position to be a leader. . . I think that they have a role in supporting this by putting as much emphasis on the natural world and the impact that animals play in relationships. . . as they do in the context in which people live and keeping environment narrowly focused on the social environment, like we're beyond that.

- CASW. Hanna wonders whether the CASW could use its influence and create a national campaign relating to the natural environment. Hanna notes the necessity of having a well-publicized event:

[Every] single social worker I know posted something about mental health on Mental Health Awareness Day. . . [W]e have a poverty awareness week; why can't we have an environmental awareness week or things like that, where it's kind of a bigger deal not just like a random, '[I]f you open this email you might find out this information.

- IFSW. The IFSW seems more distant for some participants (S, M), while Hanna says that the global nature of the organization allows it to have a strong influence on social workers around the world. She also wonders whether they can influence curricula.

Other. There seems to be an emphasis here on how other community members can be supportive, including, within the health care professions/One Health (H), veterinary-related and humane organizations (E), and across disciplines (R). Self-education is also mentioned (A), specifically via books (M). Erin notes that she has she received more support from animal-

related groups than from fellow social workers, as the latter tend to take the importance of her work lightly.

Table 4.4 <i>Factors increasing social workers' incorporation of the natural environment in practice</i>	
Social work educators/university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a course, (possibly mandatory) on the topic of the natural environment and social work (H, M) • have the topic infused across courses, as with anti-oppressive practice (H, M) • address/emphasize it more (H, S, A, M)
Agency/place of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide: time (R), funding for professional development (R) or projects (H) • increase education/ideas relating to the topic (R, H) • increase flexibility for projects such as community gardens (H) • cultivate broader understanding of importance of animals in workplace (M)
Social work colleagues and peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide plants (S) or share appreciation of plants, animals, and nature (M) • increase “buy-in” on the topic, lend credibility to clients’ relationships with natural environment (E) • “brainstorming” • share new ideas (R, A, M) • “explor[e] my ideas” (M) • “open. . . these conversations up” (M) • have a more “open mind” (R) • help normalize the topic (M, E, H)
SASW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthen connections in the “Code of Ethics” • practice standards, guidelines (E) • emphasize the natural environment as much as the social (E) • provide more newsletters, emails, workshops, and information on the topic (R, L, S, M, A) • put out official statements on the topic (H) • have a “clear presence,” show up at events (H) • give tangible ways to make connections between the natural environment and practice in locations far removed from the natural environment (S) • promote relevant book(s)(M)
CASW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide leadership on this topic, and the “interfaces” between the NE and other issues (E) • play similar role to SASW (E, R, H, S) • provide education/information/webinars (H, L, M)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have media releases/social media posting (H) • educate current social workers (H) • make links between topic and practice tangible (H) • initiate national campaign (H) • promote relevant book(s)(M)
IFSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attend to trickle-down effect – if IFSW does something, CASW and SASW might follow (E) • recognize potential for farther reach than other associations (R), could influence social workers around the world (H) • do work in this area (H) • provide information and education (L, A), including tangible and practical information on how to incorporate the natural environment in practice (S) • influence curricula (H)
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • veterinary and humane associations (E) • people in different colleges/disciplines (R) • other health professionals, especially as under One Health (H) • personal education (A) via books (M)

Table 4.4: Factors supporting social workers’ incorporation of the natural environment in practice

While the above discussion suggests that participants are aware of how they might be better supported in trying to incorporate the natural environment in their practice, they outline several reasons for not doing so currently, or for not doing it so much as they would like. This question does not distinguish between whether participants wish they were doing more or whether they are simply stating that they do not incorporate the natural environment but without a value attached to that fact. When participants were asked the following question: “If you do not make purposeful connections between the natural environment and your social work practice, or you don't do it as often as you'd like to, can you think of any reasons?” Leah responded “No,” while Erin said, “Yeah. . . that question’s] probably non-applicable.”

Other participants were able to pinpoint their reasons based on not knowing much about the connections between social work and the natural environment, logistics, or their own or

others' attitudes. Sean, Hanna, and Rosa explain that they do not know how practically to apply the natural environment to their practice. Rosa sums up her feelings:

I guess I don't really think about the connections in my work. Not that I'm not interested. I should know more about it. I feel obviously not educated about it at all, but I guess I just get used to doing what I do and I don't know how, like what would I do? Or how do I start? Or is it gonna make a difference? Or does it make a difference to my client work, or to my self-care, or, I guess I've never really thought about in that way. Like how could that be? And I guess for me, like where would you start? Like what do you do? Or would it matter, you know?

Rosa's questions seem to outline the problems that some participants have in incorporating the natural environment in their work. Not knowing where to start, or what to do, seem to be fairly common (R, H). Time constraints influence Hanna and Alison, as do resource limitations (H, A) and space (A). The job itself can be perceived as a barrier, whether it is because the participants' role is administrative (M) or the location or clientele do not seem to support incorporation of the natural environment (S). The fact that others might not place value on the natural environment in practice or that they would consider doing so "fluffy" (M, E) or "hokey" (E) is a consideration for Mady and for Erin, though the latter does not indicate that this limits her practice. Based on her responses to early questions, Leah suggested a lack of awareness of the link between the natural environment and social work. However, in subsequent questions she demonstrated knowledge of this connections.

Some participants' barriers straddle more than one category. As mentioned elsewhere, Sean feels constrained by both location and clientele. Although he expresses an interest in learning more about the topic, he does wonder how to make it relevant when his clients are

“locked in a stone building and unable to leave” and his job is “inextricably medical.” At another point, he mentions that:

The only situations I can think of is when I’ve had patients who’ve been transferred to [hospital and city] and they come from northern communities, and some who live on reserve where water isn’t necessarily sustainable or consistently good quality. I’ve only met one other patient who talked consistently about oil and mining disrupting migratory patterns of animals and birds, which they rely on as a food source.

He also mentioned that with his clients, “[t]here’s definitely been grief and experiences of loss over death or apprehension of pets.”

Table 4.5		
<i>Participants’ stated barriers to incorporation of the natural environment in practice</i>		
Barrier	Lack of/lower awareness of the topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R, L, A, S
	Logistical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role (administrative) (M) • clientele (S) • location (S) • by time (H, A), resources (unspecified, A), space (A) • lack of direction or knowledge of practicalities of incorporation (R, H, S)
	Attitudinal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concern that topic is seen as “hokey,” “fluffy” (M); a point also shared by E although she indicates this does not limit her practice • topic not commonly mentioned or normalized (E, R, H, M)

Table 4.5: Participants’ stated barriers to incorporation of the natural environment in practice

Personal Relationships with the Natural Environment (Not mapped to an objective)

Participants were asked to describe their personal relationships with nature. In response to that question, which included prompts about animal friends, special places, time spent in nature, childhood experiences or mentors, caring for plants, or participating in environmental activism, many participants became visibly animated in their discussions. Participants with higher levels of understanding of the connections between social work and the natural environment seemed to have enthusiasm throughout the interview, including this question (E, H, M). Interestingly, this question also drew out more enthusiastic responses from some participants who did not know so much about the connections between social work and the natural environment, such as Sean and Rosa.

The following themes emerged: nostalgia of place (E, R, H, S) or people (E, R, S), time spent outdoors (E, R, H, L, M), peace/calm/relaxation/mindfulness/escape/grounding (E, R, H, L, M), fun (M), importance of animal friends (E, R, H, S, M), importance of wildlife (R), resiliency (L), well-being (E, L) gardening/growing food (E, R, M) value around connecting to environment and passing that value to children (M), supporting environmental causes (E, R), grief over loss of animals (E), plants (H), childhood activism (E), and honouring the earth (M).

Alison was a notable exception: “I would say I have none of that. I don’t have pets, I don’t have plants. . . none of that. I don’t have any childhood memories that would deal with my natural environment. None of my mentors, even that. Yeah.” Leah’s response, while not lengthy, was insightful and came quickly: “. . . [F]or my well-being, and in my own resiliency, being in nature is important. . . I do a lot of things outside. I canoe, I kayak, I cross-country ski, I cycle, so I intentionally spend time in nature.”

Sean recounts childhood memories of time spent outdoors:

I spent a significant portion of my young life. . . a half an hour north of Prince Albert, where my grandparents lived, just spent a lot of time there in . . . the woodland areas of Saskatchewan, so all through my [childhood] very much connected to nature and steeped within it. I grew up with a pet dog, whom I had a relationship with that I valued greatly. He also spoke of having learned about the importance of medicinal plants, home remedies, and berry-picking from his former spouse's family, who had a strong connection to the natural environment.

For Erin, the length of time spent on all the other questions combined was not significantly longer than that spent on this question alone. She also spoke throughout the interview of her own relationship with the natural environment, with significant breadth. She mentioned animals who had influenced and supported her, of time spent in childhood in activist camps, of horseback riding since being "*in utero*," and of swimming and spending time at Beaver Creek. She talked about her love of the prairies and her need to get to the mountains sometimes, and about how her cat "chose" her husband. She also spoke about supporting such movements as *Idle No More* and of not wanting "pipelines in anyone's backyards." Near the conclusion of the interview, Erin said, "I guess in my core, I'm still a bit of an environmentalist . . . and it's part of who I am and it's part of how I live my life. And it's part of how I think I've come to see the work that I do."

Hanna also gave detailed examples of time spent in the natural environment, and with pets. Both Erin and Hanna became emotional in speaking about this question. For Erin it was primarily over the loss of her beloved horse, Nicker. When asked the very general question, enough emotion was raised in Hanna that she told me I was going to make her cry [by asking the question]. She said:

My relationship with the natural environment. I think it's really something that's super important to me. I don't know why it's making me emotional . . . Not in a bad way, but just a reflective way . . . [T]his morning I was walking my dogs, which are a huge part of my life, and how animals, especially dogs, have always been a big part of my life, and I do think they're my family, and that is really important to me. And I was walking them, and I mean it's nice now, so it's easier to be enjoying those things. But I just think that that's one thing that keeps me grounded and connected and I feel like the whole . . . environment, like people, nature, it's all connected. It's the one thing that we all share, and so I don't know, it's peaceful for me . . . I have a lot of gratitude for the environment and for nature and I have a little bit of fear about where we're headed, and what if that doesn't exist for me. . .

Hanna also mentioned time spent outdoors as a child in a yard with trees and flowers that remains a place of peace for her today. When a particular tree in the yard was cut down, she felt a sense of loss, and she says, “. . . I probably didn't know it at the time, but in that way I can reflect back and be like wow, that's always been important to me.” She also spoke of the role that the natural environment plays in keeping her grounded and centered.

Mady's response to this question was also enthusiastic, describing the importance of camping to her and her family, of her relationship with dogs, and her relationship with gardening:

I love that we can give to the earth and the earth gives back, and I love canning and preserving what the earth gives, and cooking from scratch. That to me is connections to the natural environment that we're not processing things, they're not chemical-based, that they're from our backyard and we're canning them and then eating them in the winter and

talking about how these potatoes came from our yard and our kids see that connection. So to me, that's a big part of being connected to the natural environment, is the gardening and eating things that are local.

Rosa also became noticeably moved by the question about her personal relationship with the natural environment. While she had been apologizing earlier for not knowing more about the interview topic, here she seemed to be at ease, talking about relationships with the natural environment:

I have animals now in my life all the time. I love being in nature, I love being alone in nature, just feeling like solitude and fields and water and ocean have a really calming effect on me. I love digging in the dirt and planting and growing things and then there's something about that that's very calming to me and it reminds me of, I guess growing up watching my grandparents with these huge gardens and farms and just that peace of running through and picking things and eating things from the land. There's something about that I love.

What struck me about the responses to this question was that all participants (except Alison) seemed to be able to access the importance of the natural environment to themselves easily. Participants (except Alison) seemed to enjoy this question, even when their responses were relatively short, such as Leah's. Perhaps the reason for this is in part a reflection of the comfort they felt in discussing personal experiences instead of thoughts on a topic with which they claim not to have much familiarity. In addition, this question was intentionally large in scope, and simply contained potentially many elements for discussion.

Responses to this question overlapped somewhat with the earlier question about the connections between well-being and the natural environment. In an earlier section, all

participants identified at least one facet of the natural environment that is important to well-being, and most recognized more. Similarly, all participants except Alison spoke of a relationship with the natural environment, and in all cases, this relationship had a positive influence on their well-being.

Some participants described the benefits of the natural environment to their own well-being in different ways from that of their clients. When describing its importance to clients' well-being, they tended to focus on physical safety/lack of safety, while for themselves they spoke a lot about mental/emotional/spiritual aspects. For her clients, Mady emphasized the importance of access to safe housing and food; she referenced Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, saying, "And then if we can secure that, other connections that they might have, such as connecting to animals or connecting to the land . . . might become more readily acceptable because some of the foundations are secure for them." Rosa also mentioned its impact on physical health, mentioning food, water, and pollution, while describing the mental health impact on her.

Self-placement on an Anthropocentrism/Ecocentrism Scale (Not mapped to an objective)

To get a sense of some of the broader context for participants' thinking, participants were asked to self-identify on a scale of anthropocentrism versus ecocentrism, where 1 = wholly anthropocentric and 5 = wholly ecocentric, given the following definitions: 1. *Anthropocentrism* – The belief that humans are the dominant species, and "human interests are central in environmental matters. . . It is the evaluation of all reality and all action through an exclusively human perspective" (Gray et al., 2013b, p. 319) and 2. *Ecocentrism* - A belief in "a nature-centered, as opposed to human-centered, system of values" (Gray et al., 2013b, p. 320). It is the evaluation of all reality with an understanding that there is no division or hierarchy between

humans and other entities of nature and that all entities in the natural world have intrinsic worth or value (Adapted from Gray et al., 2013b, p. 320).

As shown in Table 4.6 below, responses clustered strongly toward the ecocentric end, with one person identifying as “wholly ecocentric” (S) and three identifying as 4s (R, H, M). Erin chose a split answer, giving herself a 4 personally and a 5 professionally. Alison identified as “wholly anthropocentric,” and Leah declined to answer this question. Most participants identified more on the ecocentric end of the range, with one 5 (S) three 4s (R, H, M), one 1 (A), and one declined to respond (L). Erin placed herself personally at a 4-4.5 and professionally at a 5.

For Erin, Hanna, and Mady, there is an aspirational quality to their responses, suggesting a belief that to be closer to the ecocentric end of the scale is preferable. Both Erin and Hanna spoke of not being “perfect.” Hanna speaks both of how things are and how she thinks they should be, pointing out that, “I know humans are the dominant species by virtue of the culture we live in, but I don't believe that that’s necessarily right or true.” Mady says she would “like to be more 5,” but that the “hustle and bustle” prevents her from placing herself there. She adds:

[W] live in a world where humans are considered the dominant species, but I don't think that I believe that. I struggle with how to answer. Though I don't see my dog as a human, she has no less value as a dog than she would if I did see her as human, if that makes sense, and I think aspects of Mother Nature and spirituality have intrinsic worth and value equal to my experience as a human being.

Erin split her value between the personal and the professional, noting:

As a social worker I'm probably a 5. Meaning that when I'm doing my social work stuff, I'm sort of held to a different standard, whereas as a person, I fully acknowledge that

there are. . . areas of my life where I am more centered on my own comfort as opposed to being centered on the needs of the natural world . . . I drove my half-ton truck to work today. I could've ridden my bike. It'd be better for the world if I rode my bike, but I didn't, right?

Rosa’s response indicates that she sees a schism between what is and what should be:

“[Ecocentrism]’s more my belief that it's not just about human beings, it's about the whole world and . . . even though there is a division, clearly, for some people, I don't really think there is, maybe. Shouldn't be, anyway.” As with Rosa, Sean, the only participant to report an unqualified 5, seems to agree ideologically with ecocentrism while recognizing that this is not current reality:

I think interacting with the natural world, valuing all life and treating it with equality, witnessing the detriment that humanity causes on the natural world. . . [t]he finiteness of humanity. . . there's no inherent value to being human, there's no good, there's no bad, and apply that to the rest of nature, nothing's inherently good nor bad, we exist. So, I think with that idea there'd be no reason to create a hierarchy where humanity sits at the top.

Alison’s placement of herself on the anthropocentric end of the scale was a matter of which statement made the most sense to her: “Cause I have the beliefs that humans are the dominant species and that humans are the center of our environment. I do believe that. When I read through it, I strongly believed in this and don't really relate to the ecocentrism at all, really. I mean I see it, but . . . it didn't reach out to me.”

Table 4.6	
<i>Participants’ self-placement on anthropocentrism/ecocentrism scale</i>	
Participant	Value
Erin	4-4.5 personal/5 professionally
Rosa	4

Hanna	4
Leah	declined to respond
Sean	5
Alison	1
Mady	4
1 = wholly anthropocentric, 5 = wholly ecocentric	

Table 4.6: Participants' self-placement on anthropocentrism/ecocentrism scale

This question was not intentionally ambiguous but when asked what factors contributed to their placement on the scale, participants interpreted it differently, with some responding how they think things are (E, R, H, A, M), how they believe things should be (E, R, H, S), how they feel they personally should act (E, H, M), which statement resonates most (R, M, A), or a combination of these responses.

Condition Analysis

Four conditions emerge from the data: 1. Mainstream social work is anthropocentric, 2. Mainstream social work is anthropocentric, 3. We are experiencing an environmental crisis, and 4. There is a strong counter-current to the previous conditions. These conditions arise from all components of data collection, including participant interviews, the literature review, an examination of trends, and even my own personal experiences. They will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This thesis research examined social work's consideration of the natural environment in policy, education, and practice in Saskatchewan. The study included investigation into current practice and challenges from the perspective of seven Saskatchewan social workers and included an analysis of current trends and underlying conditions that support those trends. It then arrived at a potential common interest goal and recommendations for action. The study revealed a picture of a social work that is becoming increasingly engaged with the natural environment, with identified gaps remaining in policy, education, and practice.

Summary of Key Findings

Common Interest Goal Highlights

An analysis of literature and current policy positions client well-being and social justice as being of central importance to social work. Guiding documents in Canadian social work confirm the importance of client well-being¹² and social justice to the profession (CASW, n.d.; CASW, 2005a; IASSW & IFSW, 2014). It has been well established in the literature that the natural environment is a crucial element in achieving well-being and social justice.

Consideration of the natural environment as a likely common interest goal was further reflected in interviews, where participants recognized the importance of the natural environment to well-being and many identified the importance of social justice (advocacy) in the social work profession. With myriad arguments for the importance of the natural environment to both, it follows that consideration of the natural environment is a likely common interest goal for this profession.

¹² Earlier in this paper, it has been pointed out that a definition of “well-being” is nebulous, and that the CASW’s (2005) “Code of Ethics” is parsimonious; the search for a more meaningful definition of the term is noted as an important endeavour but outside the reach of this research.

Trend Analysis (Objective 1, Part 1)

The sheer number of articles being published concerning the natural environment in the profession has increased (Krings et al., 2018, meta-analysis). Similarly, there has been movement in social work institutions, professional organizations, and conferences toward inclusion of topics of the natural environment. Social work has experienced an uptake of ecotherapies and recognition of eco-maladies, even if recognition of these phenomena has been generated by other disciplines and, to some extent, seem to be happening *to* social work, rather than being generated *by* it. These trends are heartening and point to a social work that increasingly prioritizes consideration of the natural environment; however, targeted interventions will be required to ensure that the profession moves forward, ideally at a much quicker pace.

Social Process: Participant Interviews (Objective 2)

Understanding of the Connection Between Social Work and the Natural Environment (Objective 2a). All participants acknowledge the natural environments' importance to well-being, either to themselves or to clients. Their responses ranged from recognizing the importance of time spent outdoors to accessing healthful food, to spending time with animals. Interestingly, however, there was a difference between their responses when focusing on themselves and clients. When considering clients and the natural environment, participants sometimes focused on physical safety, water, food, and housing. When asked about their own experiences with the natural environment, they tended to focus on its mental/spiritual/emotional aspects.

These differences between self versus client in relation to the natural environment are compelling; given the passion with which some participants discussed what the natural environment means to them, it seems surprising that they might not consider the natural

environment in their practice. For some participants, acknowledgement of the importance of the natural environment to well-being did not necessarily translate immediately to an understanding of its importance to social work *practice*. This split between what is known personally but not transferred to the professional seems indicative of a profound failure on the part of university social work programs and continuing education in the field of social work, as well as workplace leadership, to illuminate and support ways in which the natural environment could fit into practice.

Despite all participants having an awareness of the connections between the natural environment and well-being, familiarity with its applications to the profession varied tremendously. Certainly, there are those for whom the natural environment is either a foundational part of practice, or their personal consideration of the natural environment spills over into their work. Conversely, some participants do not make intentional and consistent connections between the natural environment and their practice.

It is significant that no participants credited the SASW or the CASW as sources of their understanding of social work and the natural environment. Participants were not asked about the relevance of these professional associations to them in general, thus it is difficult to know whether they consult or engage with them for other things, or simply not for this topic.

What Participants Do to Connect the Natural Environment to their Practice (Objective 2b). The participants in this study did incorporate the natural environment in their practice, as outlined in Table 4.3. Responses varied across participants and even within a participant's own answers when asked to assign frequencies with which they undertook certain activities with clients (never/sometimes/usually/always/not applicable). A majority (five of seven) participants responded in the affirmative (sometimes, usually or always) about how

frequently they encouraged “homework” involving time in or with the natural environment. Boetto (2016) also sought ways to twin the concepts of incorporating nature and raising awareness of sustainability throughout the therapeutic relationship.

There are several incongruities between responses to this question and “Have the following been a part of your social work practice?” For example, Rosa says that she does not apply the natural environment in assessment or planning, yet mentioned sometimes exploring the importance of places, animals, or plants with clients and encouraging “homework” involving the natural environment, or participates in a nature-based activity with clients. There are similar apparent discrepancies for Sean and Alison. Five out of seven participants said that they at least sometimes make links between violence and environmental justice, even if they said they did not know much about the connections between social work and the natural environment.

Participants’ Identified Barriers to Incorporation of the Natural Environment into Practice (Objective 2c). Participants outlined several ways to feel more supported in incorporating the natural environment in their work. Broadly, participants felt that they could be better supported by universities and social work educators, colleagues and peers, their agency or place of work, professional organizations (SASW, CASW, IFSW), and collaboration with others.

Barriers were identified by asking participants about what would support them in increasing their incorporation of the natural environment in their practice; in doing so, they unearthed the barriers that they face. The first type of barrier arises from the natural environment’s generally not being on practitioners’ radar. The other key types of barriers, logistical and attitudinal, seem to be relevant for those participants who already link social work and the natural environment, or for those who wish to increase its incorporation into their practice. These are discussed in greater detail in the Practice Gap section below.

Participants' Place in the Natural Environment. All participants strongly agree that we are experiencing a planetary crisis. In addition, a majority (five of seven) identified much more closely with ecocentrism than with anthropocentrism. The ecocentrism/anthropocentrism question was broad and ideally would be explored further to tease out whether participants' alignment to ecocentrism is due strictly to their perception of their current position, or their aspirational positioning. reality, or ideological. While no important conclusions can be drawn based on this question, it is interesting that the concept of ecocentrism resonates with participants, either as a current or an aspirational view.

Questions about participants' own relationships with the natural environment produced many of their most animated responses. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given the power of concepts of biophilia (Besthorn & Saleeby, 2003) and phytophilia (Reddon & Durante, 2019), an affinity for life and vegetation, respectively. Buzzell (2016) found a similar phenomenon when speaking with clients, noting that questions about their relationships with the natural environment usually "open[s] a very emotional conversation" (p. 75). Hasbach's (2016) use of exploring clients' relationships with the natural environment seemed reminiscent of my own experiences with participants:

Over the years, clients have shared experiences about their relationship with a favourite pet, recollections of hunting with their grandfather, memories of gardening with their mother, stories of family camping trips . . . in sharing these and other accounts, clients talk about childhood memories of pleasure, awe, fear and compassion; and in the telling, often seem more relaxed during that initial counselling session (p. 139).

Hanrahan (2017) uses the term "trans-species spirituality" mirrors some participants' feelings of interconnectedness to other animals or the natural world. She notes, "Many people spontaneously

feel an innate affinity or mystical connection with other animals and/or the natural world, which they interpret as a spiritual experience” (Hanrahan, 2017, p. 90). Further, she quotes Gay Bradshaw in an interview: “Western civilization has really broken the backs of animal societies’ (trans-species living) [sic] and many humans have grown accustomed, even oblivious to, the myriad contradictions characterizing hierarchical and anthropocentric animal taxonomies and our relationships with them” (Bradshaw, in Hanrahan, 2017, p. 90). This observation could account for the lack of connection to the natural environment that some participants describe.

Summary of Conditions (Objective 1, Part 2)

Four conditioning factors underlie the trends and current situations regarding social work and the natural environment in practice: 1. Mainstream social work is anthropocentric, 2. Mainstream social work is Eurocentric, 3. We are experiencing an environmental crisis, and 4. There is a strong counter-current to the previous conditions.

Mainstream Social Work Is Anthropocentric. Mainstream social work has a narrow focus on a single (human) species, and with a very limited (human – human) definition of the word “social.” Even where social workers aim to work with clients within their environments, the focus is on the social sphere, looking at people in the contexts of family, school, work, church, and community. The centrality of the natural environment to client well-being and social justice, the interdependence and connections between people and other species, and morality or responsibility are not given much consideration in mainstream social work in Saskatchewan. There are exceptions, such as the increasing recognition of the importance of service and companion animals and of the impacts of the natural environment on human health. However, these insights seem to have been generated around social work rather than by it. Generally, social

work practice and description of practice prioritizes people and has limited focus on the natural environment.

Mainstream Social Work Is Eurocentric. In Saskatchewan, the title “social work” is a product of its modern origins and Eurocentric ways of thinking. Other ways of knowing the world were not considered on par with Eurocentrism, which is embedded in systems based around western ways of thinking, including individuation, the creation of dualisms, fiscal rather than holistic views of well-being, and specific, exclusionary ways of knowing. As such, it is informed by modernist Eurocentric notions of well-being, of family, and of community. Social work operates in a society and economy that privileges men over women, white people over people of colour, and humans over other animals and the natural environment. These binaries, even when not consciously registered by a social worker, are present in the surrounding hegemony and have impacts on practice. These include such effects as the frequent exclusion of non-human animals as community and family members or kin, lack of attention to the intersections between planetary and human well-being, and the frequent treatment of the natural world as a collection of objects rather than a community of subjects (Berry & Tucker, 2006). There are other ways of practicing social work that take such intersections and relations into account, such as Indigenous ways of caring (Hart, 2009).

Despite aspirations of exposing power, striving for equality, and making systemic changes, under these conditions, social work can simply overlook or ignore the natural environment; it remains invisible. Furthermore, the uneven ways in which social work has taken up the call to consider the importance of the natural environment can be explained by Plumwood’s (2002) assertions that in anthropocentric – Eurocentric - ways of thinking, the

natural environment can be “backgrounded.” The entire spectrum of the more-than-human world is seen as something superfluous to human existence, and to social work.

There Is an Environmental Crisis Underway. The environment is currently undergoing an upheaval so massive that it is a threat to all life on Earth. That this damage and its fallout is due largely to human activity has led to this geological moment’s being designated the “anthropocene” (Benatar et al, 2018; Dylan, 2013). The climate is changing, leading to disrupted weather patterns. The 2018 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated that there were fewer than 12 years to limit greenhouse gas emissions so that the global temperature would not increase by more than the 1.5°C rise beyond which there will be unbearable flooding, drought, and temperature increases (IPCC, 2018). Exacerbating the effects of the climate crisis are deforestation, mass species extinction, and pollution.

Already marginalized and vulnerable people are and will continue to be disproportionately affected in ways that are gendered, racialized, and classed. These impacts are concrete. A manifestation of this crisis is the increased severity and intensity of forest fires in Saskatchewan, leading to the displacement of people from northern communities, and placing Indigenous women, girls, and trans people at even greater risk of experiencing violence. When oil spills occur, downstream communities’ fishing and use of the water are affected. Increased drought and flooding could further displace people. Then, there are considerations of those outside this province, especially those in the global south, who may not directly be social work clients but whose lives are impacted by the choices that we make in our hemisphere.

There Is a Strong Counter-Current to Anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism. There are also powerful counter-hegemonic elements that enable mainstream social work to move away from the anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism that characterize its approaches. Both in research

and in action, ecofeminism, decolonizing movements, Indigenous resurgence, and environmental activism stand in opposition to narratives in which the natural environment is subjugated or overlooked. Scientific evidence of the importance of the multi-faceted impacts of the natural environment on well-being and the need for reciprocity in relationships between humans and the more-than-human world underline its importance to social work.

Space is created for redefining well-being according to Indigenous or other models that are not rooted in individual adaptation to oppressive systems, narrow definitions of “welfare” and the incidental existence of the natural environment. There is resistance to white supremacy, climate change, violence, and poverty in ways that are interconnected and link social work to the natural environment. Even where it has not been a leader on matters of the natural environment, some social workers bring elements of this counter-narrative to their practice, decision-making, and education.

The CASW’s webinars on natural environment topics and its recent position paper on climate change and social work (Schibli, 2020) are promising steps in generating awareness and a sense of responsibility for social work to consider climate change in their work. The SASW’s 2019 annual meeting workshop, the presence of relevant, if limited, coursework, at the U of R’s FSW, and other events outlined in the trends analysis section, demonstrate that there is movement toward making connections between the profession and the natural environment. Further, growing awareness in mainstream social work of Indigenous concepts of well-being and other re-conceptualizations of well-being focus on relationships and kinship, harmony with the more-than-human world, community, balance, and sustainability, rather than the more typical neoliberal framework of mainstream social work which emphasizes individual adaptation to oppressive systems, and concerns itself with financial success or security. The U of R’s (n.d.)

strategic plan and the anticipated changes to the CASW's (2005a) "Code of Ethics" to be grounded in principles of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) recommendations (Phelps, 2019), orient the profession away from the strictly anthropocentric and Eurocentric.

Taken together, these conditions explain the imposition of constraints upon social workers and their practice, but also how, in some instances, they choose and are able to navigate outside of limitations imposed by Eurocentrism, anthropocentrism, and the environmental crisis linked to them, to consider and incorporate the natural environment in their work. Beyond individual social workers, there are also those in positions of decision-making, research, education, and policy development who understand the importance of the natural environment to the profession, and take action to rectify its previous (near-)erasure from the profession.

Anthropocentrism, Eurocentrism, the environmental crisis, and counter-currents to them, explain and are supported by participant data. These findings contextualize mainstream social work's limited definitions of well-being and social justice in which both can be achieved without consideration of the natural environment, to detrimental effect (Besthorn, 2014; Boetto, 2017; Coates, 2003; Dominelli, 2012). They describe, in part, mainstream social work's hegemonic position regarding the natural environment.

An anthropocentric focus, criticized by many social work scholars, is twinned with Eurocentric traditions that mark social work in Saskatchewan. Consequently, participants find their exposure to the topic of the natural environment, as well as their choices to incorporate (or even consider) it in practice, limited by blindspots (Plumwood, 2002), and fiscal/time/resource constraints (Boetto, 2017; Coates, 2003). Despite the anthropo- and Eurocentric traditions of mainstream social work, some participants resist them, carving out space to acknowledge or consider the importance of the natural environment in their practice.

Problem Identification (Objective 3)

The findings of this research demonstrate that while some progress is being made by social work scholars, policy-makers and practitioners in considering the importance of the natural environment in the profession, there remain key gaps between aspirational statements and on-the ground practice. These gaps stem from the underlying conditions of anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism. The fallout from these systemic conditions is that social work has been slow to prioritize the natural environment, resulting in major gaps in policy, education, and practice.

Policy Gap

This research demonstrates a lack of policy regarding the natural environment and social work. The CASW's (2005a) "Code of Ethics" does not make explicit reference to the natural environment, and its "Guidelines for Ethical Practice" (2005b) makes a brief and undefined reference to it. Its position paper on climate change and the profession (Schibli, 2020) is a positive stance for the association to have taken, but it is not necessarily directive. For six of seven participants, organizational (workplace) culture also did not provide policy about considering the natural environment in practice. For these participants, if the natural environment was brought to the workplace, it was through their own initiative or interest, rather than through formal policy.

Education Gap

The University of Regina, the only social work degree-granting institution in Saskatchewan, occasionally offers courses on the natural environment and about social work and animals; however, courses on the topic are not mandatory according to the CASWE. It is also not yet a core component of all courses, such as anti-oppressive practice. Three out of seven participants say that they did not learn about social work and the natural environment in a

university course. Further, responses to other interview questions indicate that the topic was not necessarily prominent even for participants who say that they learned about it in their program, suggesting that whatever they were exposed to had limited impact.

While there have been some recent improvements with continuing education opportunities on social work and the natural environment, including CASW webinars and the SASW workshop in 2019 (noted in the Trends section in Chapter 4), these events are optional and can be easily be missed as they are not mandatory. Social workers may also miss such continuing education offerings for many reasons. As one participant noted, without a larger supporting frame prioritizing the natural environment in the profession, such opportunities are piecemeal and may be missed if someone did not open a particular email. Even when social workers identify the natural environment as being of personal or professional interest, they may not take advantage of continuing education opportunities that are provided.

Practice Gap

Participants unearthed many reasons for the gap between theory and practice in social work regarding the natural environment in the barriers they identified. Barriers fall into three different categories. The first type of barrier arises from the natural environment's generally not being on practitioners' radar (1). The other key types of barriers, logistical (2) and attitudinal (3), seem to be relevant for those participants who already link social work and the natural environment, or for those who wish to increase its incorporation into their practice.

The first type of barriers manifests in responses indicating that participants have not heard of connections between social work and the natural environment. Mainstream social work, focusing on social (human – human) realms, can be successfully conceived of and practiced without considering the natural environment. If the natural environment is not a part of social

work discourse, if co-workers and places of work and learning institutions do not speak of its central role in client well-being and social justice, it can simply be missed.

The second type of barriers, logistical, concerns the day-to-day realities of practice. If they do think about connections, participants may still not see where and/or how the natural environment could be incorporated into their work. In looking at the integration of HAI into practice, Chalmers et al. (2020) identify this stumbling block as the “how to” piece that needs addressing. Workplace setting role, time/resources, or client type constrain participants’ ability to see how the natural environment fits into practice, or how they might make it fit.

If social workers lack a personal pro-environmental orientation, they will not be sent the message that consideration of the natural world is a workplace expectation or an essential part of robust practice. Many barriers to incorporating the natural environment in practice such as time, resources, and support, were shared by participants in Marlow and Van Rooyen (2015) and Nesmith and Smyth’s (2015) studies. These results reflect Boetto’s (2017) belief that “Welfare organisations are increasingly constrained by reduced resources and funding, which may ultimately reduce the capacity of social workers to practice in an ecologically mindful way” (p. 64).

Thirdly, participants mention attitudinal barriers, in which they have either experienced or are concerned that their attention to the natural environment, notably to the importance of animals, is not taken seriously by others. There is a sense of trepidation in bringing up the natural environment with colleagues or supervisors in case it is seen as a superfluous or even weird thing to mention or explore. They are bound up in the culture of mainstream social work (anthropo- and Eurocentrism), in which the topic of the natural environment is (or could be) considered (according to two participants) “fluffy,” and that to give voice to them seriously could undermine

one's credibility. The tension that participants feel between their personal environmentalism and how (or whether) to express this at work echoes that of some of McKinnon's (2013) participants. They also found that the topic of the natural environment is not considered "legitimate" or that people with whom they work do not find it "relevant," leading them to be "effectively silenced in the workplace in regard to an issue that is personally very important to them, and which they see as relevant to professional practice" (McKinnon, 2013). A lack of credibility has also been noted by people who use AAI in their work (Anna-Belle & Dell, 2015; Legge, 2016).

It is not the norm to discuss and consider the natural environment in social work in Saskatchewan, and it is not made a priority in a uniform and comprehensive way in education or by professional associations, workplace organizations, or in everyday collegial exchanges. There continue to be social workers who do not encounter mention of the natural environment in university, in continuing education, at work, or with colleagues. This absence in professional discourse can make it difficult for social workers to feel that environmental consideration is supported, normal, and expected in their practice.

In discussing the position of spirituality and human-animal studies on the "periphery" of social work in Canada, Hanrahan (2017) could be speaking of the plight of the natural environment in social work generally:

. . . This is the case regarding the education of social workers and practice, wherein spiritually sensitive work is left up to the inclination of individual practitioners, agencies and faculty members. The realm of the spiritual is generally not professionally viewed as a critical dimension of life, additional and complementary to the physiological, psychological and social spheres of a person's development, which make up the scope of professional practice (p. 80).

Hanrahan's (2017) ably describes how topics marginal to social work can be overlooked, creating gaps to client service that are often not even recognized as such.

An Observational Standpoint Note on Recommendations

These recommendations are of the “bolt-on” variety, a term mentioned in Jones (2013, p. 217) in relation to education but applicable more broadly to this research. Unlike transformative change, “bolt-on” improvements require minimal change to the system, and there is valid contention that such approaches do not do enough to address the urgency of ecological collapse (Jones, 2013, 217). More desirable but, as this research has demonstrated, more elusive, are truly “transformative” solutions (Jones, 2013, 219).

In the spirit of transparency, I confess that I feel that at best, enactment of these recommendations alone will be too little, too late. At worst, “bolt[ed] on[to]” (Jones, 2013, 217) existing institutions of the hegemon, they will serve as an innocuous – and insufficient – offering that may appease some while failing to address the root conditions of anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism (Gramsci, 1971; Plumwood, 2002). I do not mean to be bleak, and I make the above the recommendations with certainty that they would begin the de-centering of humans in the profession and have positive effects on some individual animals, plants, and people. However, I share Jones' (2013) belief that asking what social work students or practitioners need to know about the natural environment to practice social work is asking the wrong question. A better question, perhaps the only question from which productive answers will fall, is “[W]hat do we need to know in order to survive on this fragile planet?” (Jones, 2013, p. 219).

Recommendations (Objective 4)

The idea behind the following recommendations is not that every social worker will be forced to integrate the natural environment into practice regardless of situation and context;

rather, the goal is that all social workers have exposure to the importance of the natural environment to their profession. Given the urgency of the environmental crisis, as well as the demonstrated importance of the natural environment to well-being, many different approaches must be taken by social work(ers). This includes “Acknowledging the inter-dependence between personal, individual, collective, community and political dimensions of eco-social practice provides the opportunity for social workers to identify a range of strategies conducive to transformative change within the profession and broader society” (p. 62). In this spirit, the aims of the recommendations are that:

1. Social workers will have “ecoliteracy” (Jones, 2013), including at least a rudimentary understanding of the interconnectedness of humans and the rest of the natural environment. By extension, being an ecoliterate social worker means knowing about the natural environment’s importance in issues of social justice, advocacy, decolonization, and client well-being,

2. Social workers will be given tools and a tangible understanding of how meaningfully to integrate the natural environment in practice,

3. Social workers will understand that there is an ethical imperative to consider the natural environment in practice, and that part of attending to client well-being is to consider its multi-faceted significance as a potential source of strength, resilience, tension, joy, grief, identity, and pain,

4. Social workers will be aware of the opportunity to offer clients invitations to explore aspects of this topic in assessment (automatically) and planning (if relevant to client goals),

5. Social workers will have among themselves and with colleagues across disciplines, both locally and globally, an understanding of the importance of the natural environment to client well-being, policy development, and education, and

6. Social workers will be exposed to the concept of their professional and personal responsibility to the natural environment, and that the natural environment has inherent, rather than strictly instrumental, value.

Together, these elements provide a fluency and responsive competency for social workers. With them in mind, looking at the trends and conditions analysis, the social process, and knowing some of the entities involved in the decision process on this topic, I make the following recommendations:

Policy:

- Convene key stakeholders (as identified in the decision process) to discuss next steps, including people from CASW, SASW, CASWE, the University of Regina, FNUniv, and key major employers in the province such as the Saskatchewan Health Authority and the Ministries of Justice and Social Services.
- Strengthen guidelines and policies defining and recommending natural environment integration into social work by:
 - updating documents: CASW’s (2005a) “Code of Ethics” and “Guidelines for Ethical Practice” to include explicit references to the centrality of the natural environment (an update is happening soon, but it is difficult to know how much the natural environment will appear)¹³.

¹³ If, as CASW’s Executive Director Fred Phelps (2019) suggests, the upcoming revision of the CASW’s code of ethics is to be “grounded” in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC’s)(2015) report, and given the report’s stated importance of the natural world to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, the new code presents a major opportunity. Using the TRC’s (2015) report as a central component of the revised code of ethics could serve to address, in part, social work’s anthropo- and Eurocentrism. Conversely, to omit explicit and significant mention of the natural environment would signify a failure to take the principles into full consideration.

- developing and implementing an educational action plan where the CASW and SASW taking a leadership role in teaching about this topic via webinars, book recommendations, newsletter articles, providing ideas about how to incorporate the natural environment across job sites and roles, and
- CASW's and SASW's taking a leadership role in taking public/community action on this topic – increased presence in themed weeks and initiatives

Education:

- Strengthen and standardize education on the topic at the BSW, MSW, and PhD levels (CASWE) This can be done by integrating the topic meaningfully into all courses, as with anti-oppressive practice and making a course on the environment a core (mandatory) part of the program
- Provide students with the skills to be critically self-reflective about their practice, their personal lives, and the alignment between them
- Provide continuing education and mandate continuing education hours dedicated to this topic
- Encourage the establishment of a specialized association of social workers that serves as a hub for education, resource sharing, and networking about environmental issues¹⁴

Practice:

- Encourage agencies/places of work to create organizational cultures that support social workers to consider the natural environment in their work by:

¹⁴ Other professions have such associations, including the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) and the Canadian Association of Nurses for the Environment (CANE)

- revising intake forms and protocols to include mention pets or other beings considered part of the family
- ensuring that assessments, interviews, and interventions include invitations to discuss or explore the natural environment clients' lives, as sources of strength or as barriers to well-being
- expecting that, as a matter of course, social workers will be prepared to explore the natural environment in client planning
- providing resources for ongoing training and education on the natural environment in practice for social workers
- encouraging collaboration with other disciplines to increase awareness of potential areas of shared action regarding the natural environment, such as connecting social work with healthcare professions regarding climate change or ecotherapies

Many of these recommendations are in alignment with the literature, such as Ryan's (2011) call for professional codes of ethics to expand to include animals and the "natural world" (p. 166), Boetto's (2016) incorporation of the natural environment at every stage of the client/practitioner relationship, and a plea for collaboration and working across disciplines (Dominelli, 2012, 2018; Laing, 2020). The recommendations' originality lies in their rootedness in the local with possible implications for the country and internationally, contextualized by data gathered using the PSF. They have been generated by integrating participant data alongside an examination of trends and conditions in this province and beyond and keeping in mind the key organizations that have influence on the decision process in Saskatchewan. The PSF has been instrumental in contextualizing social workers' understanding and incorporation of the natural environment and their work.

If implemented, these recommendations would, hopefully, improve client well-being and social justice; they also have implications for the fields of sustainability and the environment. Their realization would mobilize social work as a profession that acknowledges and addresses the environmental crisis. Having gained a heightened awareness of the importance of the natural environment through social work education, policy, and practice could lead social workers themselves to be more mindful of it and to apply their tools in addressing environmental crisis.

This research underlines that a shift from piecemeal individualistic application to wholesale attention to the environment is crucial if social work is to be an active agent of change regarding the natural environment. Participant data, together with the underlying conditions, render visible the systemic nature of social work. While it is important for individual social workers to be reflective about their own practice, it is clear that that this individual action will be insufficient to bring about meaningful professional change. Indeed, even the profession itself is operating within systems that have particular notions of well-being, fiscal priorities, and the relevance of the natural environment to humans.

Based on the multi-pronged approaches needed in addressing the environmental crisis, the recommendations from this thesis focus not only on personal awareness and reflection but also on the need for greater leadership at the policy and educational levels.

Review of Research Objectives Met

This qualitative research used a counter-hegemonic theoretical lens, as well as the theory of Val Plumwood, and a policy sciences framework to meet 4 objectives:

1. Articulate contextual factors, including current trends and underlying conditions within the profession,

2. Describe and analyze study participants' current understandings and practice related to the role of the natural environment in social work by:
- a. determining participants' levels of understanding of the connections between social work and the natural environment,
 - b. learning what participants do to connect the natural environment to their social work practice, and
 - c. identifying, from participants' perspectives, what factors might increase social workers' incorporation of the natural environment into their work,
3. Identify the problems that result in the gap between the call for greater professional emphasis on the natural environment and social work reality, and
4. Make recommendations to address the gap that exists between the stated importance of the natural environment in social work literature and the inconsistency in policy, education, and practice in Saskatchewan.

Table 5.1 <i>Summary of objectives met using PSF</i>					
Objective	Problem Orientation			Social Process	Decision Process Analysis
	Observational Standpoint ¹⁵	Trend Analysis	Condition Analysis		
1	X	X	X	X	X
2	X	-	X	X	X
3	X	X	X	X	X
4	X	X	X	X	X

Table 5.1: Summary of objectives met using PSF

¹⁵ Note that I consider the observational standpoint to have mediated this research at every stage, through every objective. As noted in previous sections, I have done my best to represent participants' perspectives and the contextual picture as accurately as I can, but I acknowledge that my own lenses are present throughout.

Limitations

Interview Sample Composition

The homogeneity of participant ethnicity is a deeply disappointing feature of this research, as I believe that diversity of voices is important in research. Specifically, I feel that the inclusion of Indigenous participants is essential in research about social work, the natural environment, and the twinning of the two topics. One of my participants preferred not to state their ethnicity, and none of the rest identified as Indigenous or as a person of colour. I feel a responsibility as a social worker, as a settler, and as a researcher, especially in this province and in a time when we know so much about the pain and damage that colonialism has had and continues to have on Indigenous peoples, to include their voices whenever possible. Without meaning to collapse all Indigenous perspectives into a preconceived whole, my experiences while reading and learning about some common Indigenous ways of knowing suggest that the study would likely have had an additional richness of perspectives had it included Indigenous participants' perspectives. I believe there must always be a place setting at the table for Indigenous participants in shaping the future of social work.

Further to this point, I made a deliberate choice to limit the sample to registered social workers because their requisite adherence to Canadian "Code of Ethics" (CASW, 2005a) and the "Guidelines for Ethical Practice" (CASW, 2005b) presents a compelling challenge for them to consider the natural environment as part of their practice (in order to provide optimum support to clients). The unfortunate tradeoff of this restriction is the reality that the participant pool might have been *ipso facto* preventing those with BSWs who specifically do not identify with mainstream social work from responding to recruitment attempts. While I appreciate much about

the SASW's role in protecting the public and in regulating the profession, I share the concerns of Collins et al. (2002) who suggest that:

Opponents . . . argue that legal regulation of social work creates elitist groups and erects inequitable and discriminatory barriers against professional status for minority groups. Barriers to regulation therefore discriminate against minority groups who are less likely to possess the established educational credentials” (p. 211).

Thus, while comfortable with this inclusion criterion, I recognize the possible consequences of having made that choice on the research.

A Note on Consistency

This section is perhaps the most confusing for me to discuss, as it is about incongruities in participant responses. Significantly, discrepancies were apparent between participants' initial statements about how they incorporate the natural environment in practice and later responses, when they identified specific ways they incorporated it. For example, in the chart summarizing possible choices (Table 4.3), some participants such as Alison and Sean, who earlier reported that the natural environment did not play a major role in their practice, nonetheless said that they did all but three (S) and two (A) of the tick-box items with clients at least sometimes. I would have expected such frequencies of incorporation of the natural environment by participants for whom it was a major consideration, but these participants' responses were not supported elsewhere in the interview. I have considered several possible reasons for these discrepancies:

1. Question sequence, as when broad questions led to the more specific, and participants were simply becoming more familiar with the topic or being prompted by examples,
2. Practices that participants might not have initially considered to incorporate the natural environment were revealed to be relevant in later questions,

3. These questions were simply to respond in the affirmative, as they were single-word answers and, while elaboration was invited, it was not required, and/or

4. “Social desirability” (Lavakras, 2008), whereby participants, especially those who had earlier expressed that they felt they should know more about the topic, were inspired to answer some questions as they felt they *should*, or as they felt I would want them to.

Some participants expressed a wish to have known more, or to have been more helpful, regardless of how often I tried to reassure them that all responses were valuable. Such exchanges indicate that despite my attempts to show no negative (nor overly positive) judgements, participants were feeling some tension to respond in particular ways. I acknowledge that I struggled at times striking a balance between setting a positive tone with participants and being overly enthusiastic when, for example, they described their relationships with animals. I feel concern that if I were less effusive about a later question, that participants would read this as an indication of feeling less supported by me.

Directions for Future Research

There are many relevant and important directions for future research to build on this study, including:

- expanding the research to include more participants to increase diversity of voices
- expanding the research to include more participants identifying as Indigenous
- expanding the research to include more participants identifying as persons of colour
- adding to the research by exploring participants’ own feelings about the topic
- further exploring the importance of reciprocity, specifically the responsibility of the social work profession to the natural environment as well as to clients

Dissemination

This information provided by this study, while necessarily incomplete from a PSF perspective (see methodology section), has significant value in providing an analysis of the context for the issue and by giving voice to social workers. In addition to this thesis's being available at the University of Saskatchewan library, I hope to publish some of the findings in a widespread journal, such as the *International Journal of Social Work* or *Canadian Social Work Review*.

In addition to adding to academic publications, a summary of findings will be shared with relevant decision-makers, notably professional organizations. Convening a meeting or workshop involving key people who will be able to identify, prioritize, and be able to implement both short- and long-term solutions to address the research gap is planned for the future.

Conclusions

This research asked: "What will it take to standardize consideration of the natural environment in social work practice in Saskatchewan?" Answering this question is relevant given the natural environment's importance to client well-being, social justice, and the health of the planet. Due to an explosion of literature on the topic, social work can no longer feign ignorance, but until very recently, the profession in Saskatchewan (and Canada) has been a laggard in prioritizing the natural environment in policy, education, and practice. This study used a policy sciences framework (PSF) for the organization and contextualization of research data, so that it can be used as a stepping-stone for further research and action.

Data included a literature review; an environmental scan of trends and underlying conditions; interviews with seven social workers; and identification of key players in social work decision-making processes. Results provide decision-makers with key data and

recommendations for discussion and action. A trends analysis revealed that social work in Saskatchewan has been taking modest steps toward prioritizing the natural environment, but the trends' pace does not match the urgency of either the literature or the environmental crisis.

Four conditions were identified as having a push/pull effect on the speed and quality of social work's actions regarding the natural environment: that mainstream social work is anthropocentric, that it is Eurocentric, that we are experiencing an environmental crisis, and that there is a strong counter-current to the first three conditions. The first two conditions have led to a kind of social work in which the importance of the natural environment is understood, taught, and applied inconsistently, in non-standard ways, or not at all. Anthro- and Eurocentric societies are blind to or in denial of humans' impacts on the natural environment, subscribing to neoliberalism, creating binary categories in which one group subjugates another, and denying humans' interrelationships with and interdependence on, the more-than-human world. Social work that has arisen in such a society has a constricted notion of what constitutes a relationship, an environment, social justice, and well-being.

On the other hand, the fourth condition describes the profession's recognition of the importance of the natural environment. Movement towards a more standard consideration of the natural environment is driven from within the profession by specific researchers, faculty members, or practitioners who prioritize it. Scholars from other disciplines, activists, and communities have also generated research or taken actions that impact social work. The recent publication of the CASW's position statement on climate change and social work is significant and positive. The need for movement is also applied externally by the urgency of the environmental crisis, whose impacts will be disproportionately borne by social work's marginalized and vulnerable clients.

Participant interviews bore out the realities of anthropo- and Eurocentrism, as there was great variation in their understanding of the importance of the natural environment to their work and in their incorporation of it in practice. Limited leadership about the natural environment in their education, by professional organizations, and in workplaces has resulted in social workers' feeling isolated in their experiences with the natural environment, in practice. Absent a robust place in social work discourse, the natural environment is relegated to the documents, offices, and classrooms of individuals who consider it essential to social work.

Research findings indicate that social work's consideration of the natural environment in Saskatchewan has been piecemeal and may rely on a particular social worker's interest in it, rather than resulting from significant and multi-faceted exposure to topics relating to the natural environment. Limited professional leadership, education, and discourse on the natural environment leaves gaps in consistent consideration of the natural environment. However, recent movements by the CASW in its climate change statement suggests that at the national level, social work is making a move towards stronger leadership, and could potentially a role model for other professions in making the natural environment a pivotal part of professional codes of ethics.

This research provides a snapshot of social work's engagements with the natural environment in Saskatchewan. It provides concrete data to inform decision-makers and leaders as they consider generating next steps or models to address how the profession can standardize the consideration of the natural world. The stage is hopefully set for social work to embrace the natural environment as a core part of practice, to recognize its central role in client well-being and social justice, and to accept its responsibilities to the more-than-human world.

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Appendix

Social Work and the Natural Environment in Saskatchewan Interview Guide

Question 1

What are your PRIMARY and (if applicable) SECONDARY fields in your current social work job(s)?

- Counselling
- Education
- Social services
- Justice
- Advocacy
- Medical
- Program development
- Research
- Family violence
- Policy creation
- Community development
- Child protection
- Other _____

Question 2

How many years have you practiced as a social worker?

Question 3

I identify my gender as:

- Female

- Male
- Transgender
- Other (please specify) _____
- Prefer not to say

Question 4

What is the ethnicity with which you most closely identify?

- African
- Indigenous
- Caribbean
- European/Caucasian
- East Asian
- South Asian
- Latino/Latina
- Middle Eastern
- Chinese
- Mixed ethnicity/ancestry
- Something else not mentioned (please specify) _____
- Prefer not to say _____

Question 5

Can you please tell me what have you heard about the role of the natural environment in social work practice?

Question 6

What sources have helped develop your understanding of the links between social work and the natural environment?

- A university course
- A workshop, lecture, or public event
- The Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers
- The Canadian Association of Social Workers
- The International Federation of Social Workers
- Social work colleagues/peers
- Social work educators
- Books, articles, or other reading materials
- A pre-existing tendency to consider the natural environment in your life
- Other (please specify) _____
- None _____

Question 7a

Section 8.5.1 of the CASW's (2005) Guide to Ethical Practices (Advocate for the environment) states that "[s]ocial workers endeavour to advocate for a clean and healthy environment and advocate for the development of environmental strategies consistent with social work principles and practices" (p. 25). **Previous to my reading this question to you, were you aware of this guideline?**

Question 7b

If yes above, has this guideline influenced your practice?

Question 7c

What does this guideline mean to you as a social worker?

Question 8

How do you purposefully apply the natural environment in your social work (including, for example, in client assessment and planning), if at all?

Question 9

What is the connections between the natural environment and well-being?

Question 10

What, in your view, is the role of social work in responding to the impacts of environmental damage and crisis in clients' lives?

Question 11

How has the role of the natural environment been made explicit in your workplace, if at all?

Question 12a

Have the following been a part of your social work practice? (Never, sometimes, usually, always)

- Incorporating nature into your work/practice space (such as plants or water features)
- Exploring (intentionally) the importance of places, animals, or plants with clients/students
- Where applicable, encouraging "homework" that involves time in/with nature
- Where applicable, making links between environmental justice and human violence/racism/injustice explicit to clients
- Where applicable, supporting clients with (or referring them to resources involving) animal-assisted therapy or animal-assisted activities

Participating in a nature-based activity (such as walking or gardening) with clients during sessions (or referring them to resources that facilitate this)

- Where applicable, advocating for a client in a situation involving the natural environment (such as chemical contamination or water/land issues)
- Where applicable, exploring any pain or trauma a client experiences that may be related to environmental damage or an environmental crisis

Question 12b

Please describe any examples of the above interventions that you think are relevant to this topic.

Please include additional interventions or actions in your practice that include the natural environment if I didn't mention them above.

Question 12c

Can you describe a time when a client's presenting problem or significant reason for seeking counselling was grief over the loss of an animal, pet, or space, or negative feelings about what is happening to the natural world?

Question 13

Do you personally know of any social work programs or colleagues that involve the natural environment somehow? If yes, please describe.

Question 14a

I am interested in hearing your thoughts about how the following might support you in connecting your social work practice with the natural environment.

- Social work educators
- Your agency or place of work
- Your social work colleagues and peers
- The Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers
- The Canadian Association of Social Workers

- The International Federation of Social Workers
- Other (please specify)

Question 14b

If you are no longer a social work student, how might your social work program at university have supported you in connecting your social work practice with the natural environment?

Question 15

If you do not make purposeful connections between the natural environment and your social work practice, or if you do so less than you would like, can you think of reasons?

Question 16a

The framework that I am using for this research outlines eight principal values that people hold.

Thinking of yourself in your role as a social worker, which three values do you consider most important?

Paraphrased and quoted from Clark (2002, p. 34), they include:

power – “is to have the capacity to make and carry out decisions.”

enlightenment – “is to have knowledge.”

wealth – “is to have money or its equivalent.”

well-being – “is to have health, physical and psychic.”

skill – “is to have special abilities.”

affection – “is to have family, friends, and warm community relationships.”

respect – “is to show and receive deference.”

rectitude – “is to have ethical standards” and be motivated by issues of justice.

Clark, T. W. (2002). *The policy process: A practical guide for natural resource professionals*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Question 16b

In the context of your role as a social worker, which three of these do you have lots of?

Question 16c

In the context of your role as a social worker, which three do you desire more of?

Question 17a

Please consider the following two orientations to the world: anthropocentric and ecocentric. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being wholly anthropocentric and 5 being wholly ecocentric where would you place yourself?

a) **Anthropocentrism** – The belief that humans are the dominant species, and “human interests are central in environmental matters. . . It is the evaluation of all reality and all action through an exclusively human perspective” (p. 319).

b) **Ecocentrism** - A belief in “a nature-centered, as opposed to human-centered, system of values” (Gray, Coates, & Hetherington, 2013, p. 320). It is the evaluation of all reality with an understanding that there is no division or hierarchy between humans and other entities of nature and that all entities in the natural world have intrinsic worth or value.

Definitions adapted from Gray, M., Coates, J., & Hetherington, T. (2013). *Environmental social work*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Question 17b

What factors influenced your decision to place yourself there?

Question 18

Can you please describe your relationship with the natural environment? Please include anything you consider relevant, such as special places, time spent in nature, having animal friends, caring for plants, significant childhood experiences or mentors, or participating in environmental activism).

Question 19

To what extent do you agree that the planet is experiencing an environmental crisis?

(Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree)

Question 20

Is there anything relating to this topic that I have not yet asked that you would like to share?