Chapter 11
Hiking With Heidi:
A Multicultural Approach to Ecotherapy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following chapter describes the experience of counseling a woman named Heidi (name and identifying details changed to protect confidentiality) using Ecotherapy and the Multicultural Counseling Competencies. The chapter describes Heidi and her presenting problems, an introduction of the author, and the author’s unique approach to counseling, the application of theory to her work with Heidi using existential and systems theories, as well as practicing in nature. The goals and progress that was made in their journey together through the counseling relationship is described. Throughout their journey together, Heidi utilized her strengths, which empowered her to make changes in her life that were beneficial for her growth, health, and happiness by implementing changes in her life that fully honored the complexity of her humanity.
INTRODUCTION

The following chapter describes the experience of counseling a woman named Heidi (name and identifying details changed to protect confidentiality) using Ecotherapy and the Multicultural Counseling Competencies of Ratts, Singh, Nassar, Butler, and McCullough (2016). Heidi is a woman in her early thirties who came to counseling for debilitating depression, a poor work/life balance, and a lack of joy and purpose. The chapter describes Heidi and her presenting problems, an introduction to myself and my unique approach to counseling, the application of theory to my work with Heidi using existential and systems theories, as well as practicing Ecotherapy, or counseling in nature. The goals and progress made in our journey together through the counseling relationship is described. Throughout our journey together, Heidi utilized her strengths, which empowered her to make changes in her life that were beneficial for her growth, health and happiness by implementing changes in her life that fully honored the complexity of her humanity.

Heidi

Heidi is a woman in her early thirties from California. Having grown up in a small town with an Irish-German and Catholic background, she was one of many siblings in her home. Heidi was a bit shy, and reluctant to see a counselor. She mentioned that it was the first time she had tried counseling and came at the encouragement of her psychiatrist. Heidi is a white woman of petite build. She dressed formally, and her attire matched the expectations of her role as an attorney. I noticed almost immediately how difficult it was for her to decipher what was causing her depression in our first session, except that her work was stressful and tedious, and that she had been unhappy at her job for some time. Heidi seemed disconnected from her emotions and had a hard time vocalizing her feelings. She had trouble sharing hobbies, things she enjoyed, or personal interests. It is as though she had never found the things she enjoyed, or that she had forgotten them. People who experience depression often lose pleasure in activities that were once enjoyable.

Heidi stated that she had been struggling with depression that she described as “medication resistant” for the better part of a year, and that at one point she had experienced suicidal ideations. She did not attempt to take her own life, but the thoughts scared her, and eventually led her to seek the help of a psychiatrist. Heidi was prescribed a variety of high dose medications, that were helping some, but Heidi still had very low life-satisfaction. Heidi struggled to sleep at night and to wake in the morning, and she met each day with dread. On the weekends she spent most of her time in bed watching reality television. At times she “forced” herself out of the house for dinner with friends or her husband, but she stated that she did not enjoy