

EMBODYING SUSTAINABILITY: AN EXPLORATION OF PERSONAL
SUSTAINABILITY AMONG ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS

By

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B.A., University of Victoria, 2002

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

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ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY

August 2009

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Abstract

Thomashow (1996) suggests that environmental activists are particularly vulnerable to burnout due to their limited resources and the magnitude of the environmental crisis. This study uses a combination of Appreciative Inquiry, grounded theory and phenomenology within an ecofeminist theoretical framework to understand how environmental activists maintain their well-being. The research focuses on factors relating to burnout and factors that contribute to well-being. These themes are analyzed in the context of Thomashow's (1996) four types of environmental stress as well as Macy's (2007) four environmental worldviews. This study suggests that an integral approach to environmentalism that focuses on the health of the mind and body, as well as the sustainability of the inner and outer world, is needed to develop a more holistic paradigm of environmental activism.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to Tooker Gomberg, an environmental activist whose story touched my heart with his unyielding passion for activism and his struggle to find inner peace and happiness on his journey.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my community at Royal Roads University. I offer my sincere thanks to my supervisor Dr. Elin Kelsey for your gentle guidance, inspiration, encouragement and ability to help me discover exactly what I felt called to do. To the professors in the MEEC program, thank you for your passion for environmental education and your commitment and dedication to your students. I extend a special thanks to Dr. Rick Kool for your unending commitment to the program, your willingness to answer a wide array of questions and to be both a friend and a program head. To the students in the 2006 and 2007 cohorts at Royal Roads University, thank you for sharing this journey with me and for enriching my life and learning with your stories, insights and enthusiasm. I offer special thanks to my friends Daniella Rübelling and Sandra Thompson for opening your homes and giving me quiet spaces to write, good company and inspiration. Thanks to Nadine Lefort for your encouragement and writing tips on our morning walks and to the MEEC students in Victoria for the rejuvenating get-togethers.

Thanks to the many other people that made this project possible. To the participants in this study, thank you for openly sharing your stories and for your deep commitment to your work. Thank you to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for supporting new research within environmental education. Thank you to my colleagues at work for understanding my need to work less while writing my thesis. To my parents, thank you for always having the time to listen, provide support and love and for evoking in me a sense of wonder for the natural world. Finally, thanks to my partner, Nick Stanger, for giving me support when I felt overwhelmed, space when I needed to write, adventures to bring me back to nature and constant encouragement and love.

It's honourable to work to change the world, but do it in balance with other things. Explore and embrace the things you love to do, and you'll be energetic and enthusiastic about the activism. Don't drop hobbies or enjoyments. Be sure to hike and dance and sing. Keeping your spirit alive and healthy is fundamental if you are to keep going. (Gomberg, 2002)¹.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The field of environmental education and communication relies on a body of passionate individuals who are dedicated to bringing about positive environmental change. As knowledge around environmental issues develops, the messages are becoming increasingly negative:

- The world as we know it cannot continue. We are facing immanent human-induced environmental catastrophe (Sharma, 2008).
- The Cenozoic era is ending. Humans have brought forth a new geological age: The Anthropocene (Brown, 1997; Eaton, 2007).
- This is the first time in history that a single animal species has altered the earth's processes and systems on a magnitude that has threatened the survival of the entire biosphere (Stewart, 2008).

It is difficult to remain hopeful when surrounded with such devastating environmental narratives. A caption beneath a publicly displayed painting by a 15 year-old student from Oak Bay High School in Victoria British Columbia, exemplifies this pain for the natural world. The painting is entitled, 'In the Name of Death':

¹ This excerpt is taken from a letter written by environmental activist, Tooker Gomberg on Earth Day in 2002. Gomberg was experiencing severe depression and burnout at the time of writing the letter. Tragically, he took his own life two years later in March of 2004.

Kandle created this painting because she has a sincere concern for the preservation of natural habitats and the poaching of wild animals. She fears for the extinction of more animals that are struggling to live on the earth. She has included in this image a reference to Jane Goodall's work with animals and her hope that we can give animals our full respect (Osborne, 2009).

This statement expresses the emotional response experienced by many people involved in environmental work (Macy, 2007; Thomashow, 1996; Windle, 1992). For committed environmental activists² the repetition of these messages can create feelings of despair, which may lead to health conditions such as burnout, fatigue, depression, a sense of numbness and even suicide (Brown, 1997; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Macy, 2007; Nichol森, 2002; Thomashow, 1996). There has been relatively little research on environmental activists, especially in the field of environmental education. With the exception of the work of Joanna Macy in eco-philosophy and others in eco-spirituality, there has been little focus on the emotional impact of environmental activist work. Many environmentalists, according to Thomashow (1996) “tend to underestimate the psychospiritual consequences of their work”(p. 143). I believe that investigating the health and well-being of environmental activists is integral to creating a holistic understanding of environmental sustainability.

When I think of the term, *sustainability*, the definitions that come to mind tend to focus on what we can do as a society to ensure the continued survival of the outer world. These definitions exclude the human aspect of sustainability, which I refer to as *personal sustainability*³. In my view, personal sustainability goes beyond mental and physical

² I have defined the term, *activist* as a person who is actively trying to change a culture that is already established.

³The term, “personal sustainability” has also been used in other contexts to refer to the personal choices people make to integrate environmental sustainability into their daily lives. For example, WalMart developed a program called Personal Sustainability Projects (PSP's) which encourage employees to set their own goals to improve the health of either the planet or themselves, and monitor their success over a

health. It refers to the desire to balance the factors that make up our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual bodies and thereby maintain individual well-being in the present while allowing the individual to sustain their well-being and the well-being of the environment into the future. I envision the concept of well-being as existing within the broader context of personal sustainability.

In writing this thesis I have used the term *personal sustainability* because I believe it speaks to the paradoxical challenge faced by many environmental activists in trying to incorporate the sustainability principles they apply to the environment into their own lives. Since *personal sustainability* is not a frequently used term, I developed my interview questions using the term, *well-being*, which is commonly understood and increasingly prevalent in health literature (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Thus, when referring to the interviews I have used the term, *well-being*, rather than *personal sustainability*, in order to remain consistent with the terminology used in the interview questions. In writing this thesis, my aim is to bring the concept of sustainability into our definition of well-being. Limiting the definitions of sustainability to the outer world ignores the inextricable link between personal and environmental health. This reflects a tendency among people in the western world to privilege the exterior (physical) world over the interior (emotional) world (Wilber, 1997), indicating the type of dualistic thinking which feminist theorists argue has resulted in the subordination of the body in the workplace and the academic arena (Dorn, 1998).

four to seven week period ("Thinking Green," 2008). Other groups have used the term, "personal sustainability" to refer exclusively to the personal actions that people undertake to further the goals of environmental sustainability. While these projects are commendable, it is important to distinguish the different definitions of the term. The definition of personal sustainability that I have used in this project places the focus on personal well-being rather than environmental sustainability.

Addressing issues of individual health and well-being within the context of personal sustainability brings the body into the environmental movement (and academic discourse). As Thomashow (1996) aptly states, “Environmentalists have to care for themselves, not only for the obvious reasons of self-preservation and personal growth but because they serve as role models for sustainable living”(Thomashow, 1996, p. 161).

Situated in phenomenology, I combine an ecofeminist theoretical framework with grounded theory and Appreciative Inquiry methodologies to examine the ways in which some seasoned environmental activists maintain hope and personal well-being while remaining committed to their work in environmental activism. By focusing on creating positive change, this thesis will add to a growing body of research on hope within the environmental movement (Hope & Young, 2000; Patton Thoele, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Turner, 2007).

Background

Activist Burnout

Job stress and burnout are common among many workers in the western world. A survey of workers in the United States, for example, found that 75 per cent of employees found their jobs to be stressful and felt that work-related pressure was increasing (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Environmental activists are particularly vulnerable to burnout because they face a variety of stresses that are unique to their occupation (Thomashow, 1996). Thomashow identifies four levels of stress that environmental practitioners face: (1) personal stress, (2) organizational stress, (3) moral stress and (4) environmental stress. Personal stress is expressed as the ambition to achieve, be successful and perform multiple roles, such as balancing work and family and spending

time recreating and communing with nature. Organizational stress revolves around working with limited finances, tight deadlines and staffing deficiencies. Moral stress arises from a feeling of accountability to live a life that exemplifies one's environmental values. Environmental stress comes from an intimate knowledge of the planet's distress. While many of these stresses are felt by people in other fields of work, Thomashow argues that environmental activist work brings together a unique combination of stresses which, if not addressed, may lead to burnout and various health problems.

Another factor that may contribute to burnout among environmental professionals is the motivation that brought them to this line of work. Kovan & Dirkx (2003) suggest that environmental activists are often drawn to their work by a sense of responsibility or a feeling of "being called" (p. 111). Although seemingly altruistic, this commitment to solve problems of global proportions may cause people to place unrealistic demands on their time, resulting in a lack of work-life balance and personal sustainability. Furthermore, Thomashow (1996) argues that although many activists are drawn by a sense of calling or spiritual connection to the environment, they often ascend to managerial positions in organizations that are under-funded and under-staffed. Thus they face an ecological identity crisis when they realize that they are spending their time dealing with stressful organizational issues and not engaging directly with the natural world that drew them to this line of work.

Macy (2007) suggests that the despair I described above is a common theme among concerned environmentalists. Environmental despair is not socially acknowledged, thus it is often suppressed, causing as Macy calls it "a partial numbing of the psyche" (pp. 92-

93). This suppression of natural grief responses often results in increasing emotional imbalance:

The refusal to feel takes a heavy toll. It not only impoverishes our emotional and sensory life--flowers are dimmer and less fragrant, our loves (*sic*) less ecstatic-- but also impedes our capacity to process and respond to information. The energy expended in pushing down despair is diverted from more creative uses, depleting the resilience and imagination needed for fresh visions and strategies (Macy, 2007, p. 93)

Thomashow (1996) also describes the body's emotional response to environmental despair:

Some of us become psychologically numb as we become accustomed to the litany of environmental bad news. Others experience fear and anger, are outraged by the social and environmental injustices that plague the planet. Sometimes people just tune out and ignore or avoid the negative images, rationalizing their inaction, practicing denial and apathy (Thomashow, 1996, p. 143).

Since environmental activists are working at the centre of the environmental crises, they are particularly vulnerable to the effects of environmental despair. They must therefore develop strategies to process these emotional responses and remain motivated to find innovative ways of addressing global issues.

My Journey

My personal interest in this topic arose from the realization that I was engaged in an individual contradiction between personal and environmental sustainability. In the outer world I was focused on projects that helped to build a foundation for environmental sustainability. When I began this thesis I was working as an energy advisor, performing assessments to measure the energy efficiency of houses. Part of this job was educating homeowners about the upgrades that they could perform in order to reduce their home's greenhouse gas emissions. My work was therefore focused on increasing sustainability in the outer world of residential energy use.

My inner life, on the other hand, was exhibiting a notable lack of personal sustainability, reflected in long hours spent working as an energy advisor and evenings, weekends and holidays spent completing the coursework for my Master's degree. I noticed my body exhibiting physical symptoms of poor health, including fatigue, hair loss, lowered immune system functioning resulting in an increased number of colds and flus, a lack of motivation, decreased desire to spend time with friends and an increasingly negative outlook. The following excerpt from my thesis proposal, written in the winter of 2008 after completing the majority of my coursework, expresses my feelings of imbalance:

I am a 29 year-old, female Master's student finishing my first year of studies in Environmental Education and Communication at Royal Roads University. In addition to school, I am working a full-time job with an environmental organization. In order to meet the demands of school and work, I frequently borrow time from the activities that nurture my body, such as exercising, cooking, eating and sleeping. In my effort to promote environmental sustainability, I have begun living a physically unsustainable life. My body has become the vehicle through which I operate my mind. Subsequently, my work has become the outlet for my emotions, the alternative to personal engagement and the excuse for neglecting my body's needs (Beauchamp, 2008, p. 3).

One of my goals in undertaking this project was to begin a personal journey to discover the roots of my own contradiction between personal and environmental sustainability. I noticed that my deep commitment to environmental work was amplified by a sense of despair relating to the global environmental crisis. Subsequently, my desire to create large-scale change, combined with a mounting sense of urgency was pushing me to the limits of my personal sustainability.

When I initially conceptualized this thesis, my plan was to write a personal narrative on unsustainability in the environmental movement; however, I realized that this focus on negativity could perpetuate my own feelings of burnout and despair without

exploring the opportunities for improving the health and personal sustainability of environmental activists. I therefore decided to shift my focus to explore the positive core of environmental activism.

Research Question

In my search to understand the positive core of environmental activism, I examined the following research question:

- How do seasoned⁴ environmental activists sustain their own well-being while carrying out their environmental activist work?

Through stories of hope and well-being, this research attempts to give voice to the wisdom held by seasoned environmental activists who embarked on a lesser known interior journey to incorporate the principles of sustainability that they bring to their environmental activism, into their own lives. I also hope to bring the lessons learned from this research into my own life, using the process of writing this thesis as an opportunity to bring these learnings into practice. The epilogue contains my own reflections of this process. I hope that this project will help to raise awareness about the human dimension of sustainability and will help to support the evolution of the environmental movement to a place where personal sustainability can exist alongside environmental sustainability. “Without peace and happiness we cannot take care of ourselves, other species, or the planet. That’s why the best way to care for the environment is to care for the environmentalist” (Hahn, 2008, p. 70).

⁴ I defined *seasoned environmental activists* as people who have been working to change a culture that is already established for at least ten years.

Study Delimitations

This study was delimited by a number of factors, many of which arose from my choice of sampling method. Since my study focused on environmental activists, I faced a challenge in identifying the population. Activists are not a discrete group such as employees in an organization or students in a program. Given this challenge, I used snowball sampling, which I describe in Chapter 4, to identify participants for the study.

To select my sample I used my personal contact list to send out an invitation e-mail asking for nominations of individuals who had been involved in environmental activism for at least ten years and who had been successful at maintaining their well-being, according to the person nominating them. Individuals were also invited to nominate themselves if they felt like they fit this description. The study was therefore delimited to people who defined themselves as environmental activists (see footnote 2) and who felt like they had been successful at maintaining their well-being through their activist work. I did not use a method to quantify well-being, therefore I relied on people's own subjective indicators of personal health. Although one could argue that not all participants in the study had attained the same level of well-being, I believe that the individuals themselves are the ones who ultimately know whether or not their lives are healthy and balanced. Thus I see the qualitative assessments of participant's own well-being as providing richer indicators of overall health than quantitative assessments, which are based on externally, imposed criteria.

Although I did not put geographical or other boundaries on who could respond to the invitation, the majority of my contacts were from Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, thus all but one participant came from this region. Respondents were also

predominately Caucasian, with one exception, and all but two were women. These were not delimitations that I imposed on the study, but rather delimitations that resulted from my use of the snowball sampling method.

Having used e-mail as a vehicle to convey the invitation to participate in the study, my sample was largely delimited to a set of factors relating to access to e-mail and association with my e-mail contacts. As the study was biased to individuals who actively use e-mail, I attempted to address this by including my phone number on the invitation e-mail. This gave people the opportunity to nominate individuals by telephone or in person and have them contact me by phone to express their interest in participating. This, however, did not happen. For those who did have access to e-mail, the opportunity to participate in the study was limited to whether or not they were using e-mail during the week that I sent out the invitation. Knowing from personal experience that people are unlikely to respond to e-mails after approximately a week, I waited seven days after sending out my invitation e-mail to select my sample. People who did not receive this e-mail within the week were not able to be included in the study.

I have contacts in numerous fields related to environmental activism. Based on this knowledge I felt confident that the invitation e-mail would reach a large number of environmental activists, though I realized that most of the recipients of this invitation would likely be located in and around my home of Victoria, British Columbia. This sampling method was intended to help me select individuals from the activist population but was not intended to provide a comprehensive sampling frame of all environmental activists in any given area. Furthermore, it was not my intention in undertaking this study to create a set of findings that could be generalized to all activists. My hope was that this

project would allow me to gain deeper insights into the practices and processes used by some environmental activists to maintain their well-being and that these results could eventually be shared with others who might find the information helpful in their own lives.

Researcher Bias

I came into this study with the following biases: Having experienced some degree of burnout in relation to my own involvement in environmental activism, I held the underlying assumption that most environmental activists have experienced some burnout related to their activist work. Writing from an ecofeminist theoretical framework, I also believed that patriarchal assumptions dominate our cultural beliefs such that traits related to masculinity continue to be more valued than those relating to femininity. I believe that this requires women to compete for recognition and acceptance in the work environment, and other arenas. I therefore expected the experiences of burnout to be more prominent among women, though this was also partly because I believe that women are often more willing to talk about emotions and feelings than men. Finally, I used Appreciative Inquiry in my questioning, which resulted in discussions that centered on positive experiences and well-being, rather than negative experiences of burnout. My belief was that positive questioning would encourage more discussion than questions about problems and would help build hope rather than despair within the environmental movement.

Significance and Implications of this Research

Research in environmental education has historically focused on developing effective strategies for encouraging environmentally responsible, active citizens (Hines,

Hungerford, & Tomera, 1986/1987). While this focus has provided important information about effective environmental education strategies, it has failed to explore the essential dimension of this communication: The environmental activists. The sustainability of the environmental movement relies on the health and well-being of environmental activists, yet there has been little research to date exploring this aspect of our connection to the environment. Furthermore, holistic approaches that look beyond the mind-body dualism to focus on the complete person have been largely excluded from academic discussion and environmental discourse.

While many people working in the environmental movement are living in a contradiction between personal and environmental sustainability, others within this movement are able to maintain personal sustainability while engaging in their activist careers. I hope this research will challenge and inspire academics and environmentalists to develop a new paradigm for sustainability that integrates personal health and promotes an integral approach to environmentalism. As environmentalists, we are on the forefront of a growing movement that is rapidly gaining momentum as we begin to understand the magnitude of the global environmental crisis. As active agents in this movement, we can contribute to the creation of an infrastructure that will make the movement sustainable, both for the planet and for ourselves. I hope this research project may help to inspire others to bring discussions of personal sustainability into their environmental work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Environmental Despair

Expressions of environmental despair can be seen in the prophetic writings of concerned individuals such as Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold and Chief Seattle:

"Only within the moment of time represented by the present century has one species -- man -- acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world" (Carson, 1962, p. 5)

For one species to mourn the death of another is a new thing under the sun. The Cro-Magnon who slew the last mammoth thought only of steaks. The sportsman who shot the last [Passenger] pigeon thought only of his prowess. The sailor who clubbed the last auk thought of nothing at all. But we, who have lost our pigeons, mourn the loss (Leopold, 1948, pp. 109-110).

"What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from a great loneliness of the spirit" – Chief Seattle, 1954 (Roszak, 1997)⁵.

While feelings of despair or grief relating to the natural environment are not a new phenomenon, the sense of urgency and unceasing reports of the growing environmental crisis causes many people to feel overwhelmed, depressed and hopeless (Kool & Kelsey, 2005; Macy, 2007; Thomashow, 1996; Turner, 2007). In the field of environmental education, for example, children are encouraged to celebrate the natural world, while simultaneously being taught that the species and places they are celebrating may soon

⁵ There is some debate regarding the assertion that these were Chief Seattle's actual words. According to Roszak (1997), the screenwriter Ted Perry, who heard one of Chief Seattle's speeches quoted at an Earth Day celebration in 1970, used dramatic license with Chief Seattle's words in creating his 1972 television film, *Home*. Thus Roszak suggests that much of what is now accepted as Chief Seattle's writing has been partially re-written by Ted Perry, though Roszak suggests that the re-written quotes are a reasonable representation of Seattle's worldview. While it is important to acknowledge the complex origins of this quote, it is interesting to note that these words indicate feelings of environmental despair on behalf of both Chief Seattle and Ted Perry.

cease to exist (Kool & Kelsey, 2005). This awareness can have a devastating effect on the psyche of a child (Sobel, 1999). While children may be particularly vulnerable to shocking environmental narratives, Macy (2007) argues that the emotional effects of the global environmental crisis touches us all. Macy (2007) and Thomashow (1996) suggest that environmental despair may have particularly devastating consequences on environmental activists. “To be constantly fighting the bad guys, be they corporations or riot police, can bring citizens and grassroots activists to the point of exhaustion and hopelessness” (Macy, 2007, p. 20).

When a person experiences the loss of a loved one, there are socially accepted stages of mourning that people tend to experience (Kool & Kelsey, 2005; Windle, 1992). While the order of these stages may vary for each individual, Windle (1992) suggests that mourning generally includes shock, numbness, yearning, disorientation and finally a reorganization of life and learning to cope with the loss. Macy (2007) and Kevorkian (2006) argue that environmental despair (or “environmental grief®”, as Kevorkian terms it) is not understood or acknowledged by society. This poses challenges for people learning to cope with environmental loss. The result, Macy suggests, is that people tend to suppress their feelings of loss relating to the environment, which leads to a numbing of the psyche and a muting of emotional responses.

To counteract the onslaught of negative messages related to the current environmental crisis, one might surmise that the best way to help people cope with this grief is to encourage optimism and hope and turn the focus away from despair. Indeed this is the approach advocated by positive psychology as noted below. While this may build momentum for addressing pressing issues, Macy (2007) suggests that it is important

to acknowledge environmental despair and give individuals the opportunity to work through these emotions before turning the focus towards hope.

There are numerous ways in which individuals may choose to address their environmental despair. Macy & Brown (1998) describe a set of practices that they have developed which have become known as “The Work that Reconnects”. These exercises involve meditations, visualizations and guided role-playing activities to help people come to terms with their feelings of grief surrounding the environment. Thomashow (1996) speaks of the ecological identity work that he uses in workshops with environmental practitioners. This work is focused on helping environmentalists take care of themselves. Kool & Kelsey (2005) note that spiritual traditions have also been useful in helping people deal with despair. In the Catholic church, for example, Abercrombie (2005) describes sessions being held to allow members to express their grief for what they refer to as “the crucifixion of mother earth” (Abercrombie, 2005, p. 10).

The various paths for dealing with environmental despair discussed above indicate a growing realization that grief stemming from environmental destruction is a real phenomenon that needs to be addressed if we hope to create a holistic understanding of environmental sustainability that balances individual health with environmental health.

Ecopsychology

Much of the work on ecological despair described above arises from the field of ecopsychology. This growing field of work is in the early stages of development (Roszack, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss ecopsychology in depth, I will briefly touch on its implications for this research project.

Roszack, Gomes & Kanner (1995) suggest that the name *ecopsychology* is given to the synthesis of psychology with the ecology. Also referred to as “psychoecology, ecotherapy, green therapy, Earth-centered therapy and reearthing” (Boston, 1996, p. 2), ecopsychology is centered on the foundations of human nature, specifically the exploration of the self and where we draw the boundaries between the self and the outer world; however, Boston notes that the field is much too complex to be defined in bounded terms. A 1995 conference on ecopsychology entitled Psychology as if the Whole Earth Mattered, concluded that “if the self is expanded to include the natural world, behavior leading to destruction of the world will be experienced as self-destruction” (Roszack, et al., 1995, p. 12). Thus it is not surprising for ecopsychologists that environmental activists, who may have an expanded view of the self which includes the natural world, often suffer from severe emotional conditions such as burnout (Boston, 1996). Joanna Macy’s “Work that Reconnects”, described above, represents some of the advances in ecopsychology aimed at helping individuals deal with the pain of ecological loss.

Positive Psychology, Happiness and Hope

When despair grows in me
 and I wake in the middle of the night at the least sound
 in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
 I go and lie down where the wood drake
 rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
 I come into the peace of wild things
 who do not tax their lives with forethought
 of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
 And I feel above me the day-blind stars
 waiting for their light. For a time
 I rest in the grace of the world, and am free (Berry, 1968).

Parallel to the work being done to explore environmental despair is an emerging body of research, which looks at happiness and hope (Hope & Young, 2000; O'Brien, 2008; Patton Thoele, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Turner, 2007). O'Brien (2008), for example writes about sustainable happiness, which she suggests can offer tremendous contributions to the study of sustainability. O'Brien suggests that the individual and collective pursuit of happiness has, to a large extent, contributed to the environmental failure that we are currently experiencing. She concludes humans must take on the challenge to learn to pursue happiness sustainably.

O'Brien's work is rooted in the broader field of positive psychology. In the words of one of its founders, Martin Seligman, "The aim of positive psychology is to catalyze a change in psychology from a preoccupation with only repairing the worst things in life to also building the best qualities in life" (Seligman, 2002, p. 3). Carr (2003) further notes that according to Seligman, positive psychology aims to understand and facilitate happiness and well-being.

The field of positive psychology deals with the areas of well-being, optimism, faith, joy and hope (Seligman, 2002). Seligman suggests that since negative emotions may be more urgent, they have tended to override positive emotions, especially in the practice of psychology. Just as it is often easier for people to talk about burnout than well-being, Seligman notes that psychologists have tended to focus on solving emotional "problems" rather than building on positive solutions. Positive psychology shifts this focus to study ways in which well-being, happiness and joy can be increased.

As noted above, literature in positive psychology looks at the area of hope, which has been gaining momentum in the environmental realm. In a movement to counteract the

overwhelmingly negative messages about the ecological crisis, people across the disciplines are beginning to consider how we can nurture and build hope. Patton Theole (2004) suggests that fostering hope requires people to first focus on the health of the individual. She states, “We can’t grow hope in depleted soil” (p. 15). The author suggests that building hope requires each person to find something that nourishes their soul, whether it is quiet time at home or socializing with friends in a crowded bar. With rejuvenated minds and spirits, she suggests, we may begin to create a movement of hope.

Hope & Young (2000) in their book *Voices of Hope in the Struggle to Save the Planet* explore the relationship between faith and ecology and discuss the ways in which this bond can be strengthened. Abercrombie’s (2005) work with the Catholic Church (discussed above) suggests one of the ways that this is happening within organized religions. Turner (2007) uses the idea of hope to present the message that we have already created the infrastructure to develop the world we need. While there may be some disagreement between the ecopsychology focus on the importance of acknowledging despair and positive psychology’s focus on hope, the essence of the message is the same: People are depleted by negative information. We must focus on our individual healing if we wish to be effective in our work to heal the planet.

Dualisms and the Body

Feminist theory suggests that dualistic thinking results in the gendering of dichotomous terms, such as mind/body, nature/culture and rational/emotional. Within these dualisms, the feminized term becomes subordinated (Welton, 1998). In the mind/body dualism, for example, the mind has been privileged, while the body has been viewed as the marginalized “other” (Davis, 1997). Subjectivity has therefore remained

located in the mind, and the body has been approached in a disembodied, masculinist manner (Davis, 1997). This has implications for the production and construction of knowledge. Dualistic thinking, combined with the tendency among academics to avoid the “messiness⁶” associated with the body has resulted in a silencing of the body in academic scholarship (Dorn, 1998).

Sinclair (2005) argues that management education (and I argue environmental education), has been drawn from a pedagogical model that Grosz (1994) describes as privileging mental processes and the transmission of information and viewing the body as a “hindrance in the production of knowledge” (as cited in Sinclair, 2005, p. 91). Sinclair suggests that bodies do not exist separate from cultural or educational contexts. Instead, they are “situated” in these contexts and socially constructed to reflect the norms of these institutions. This has implications for the learners and for the knowledge that flows out of the institutions and influences on-the-ground practice.

In the environmental arena, the norms may be defined by the movement’s struggle to gain credibility next to the economic sector. The environment/economy dualism has positioned the environment as the marginalized term. In an effort to gain credibility and accomplish their goals, many environmental organizations seem to have adopted the disembodied values of the economic sector, resulting in long workdays, unhealthy stress levels, and unsustainable approaches to work. The high rate of burnout among environmentalists (Kahn & Langlieb, 2003) provides support for this theory. Although burnout is common in many occupations in the western world (Schaufeli & Enzmann,

⁶ Feminist theorists such as Longhurst (2001) and Dorn (1998) argue that bodily boundaries with their instability and permeability are inherently “messy” and do not fit into the distinct boundaries of recognized knowledge; therefore, they are often excluded from academic scholarship.

1998), environmental activists face a unique combination of factors such as environmental despair, a sense of responsibility to solve global problems, low wages, lack of job security, and the knowledge that regardless of how hard they work, the environmental crisis is continuing to worsen (Macy, 2007; Thomashow, 1996).

Environmentalists are therefore situated within a social context that privileges the mind over the body. The high rate of burnout among environmental activists (Mohai, 1992) exemplifies this imbalance and indicates that more research is needed to study the experiences of living a life of environmental activism. Research is also needed to explore stories of hope and personal sustainability within the activist world. As Rettig (2006) writes, “progressive activists are the world’s most precious resource” (Rettig, 2006, p. xiii)

Gender and Environmentalism

Research in gender and environmentalism suggests that there are differences between the environmental values and actions of women and men. Zelezny, Chua & Aldrich (2000) argue that women express stronger pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours than men. Caiazza & Barrett (2003) suggest that this is due to women’s care giving nature, which leads them to have higher levels of altruism and empathy towards the environment than men. These studies contradict previous research which states that while women may be more likely to feel concern for the environment, men are more likely to engage in environmental activism (Mohai, 1992).

According to research on work-life balance, women carry a double burden when trying to balance the pressures of their work with the needs of their families (Crompton & Lyonette, n.d.). In the environmental movement, the conflicting demands of domestic

duties and outside work provide one explanation for the gender differences in environmental activism. Tindall, Davies, & Mauboules (2007) argue that a lack of resources, domestic responsibilities and childcare demands may reduce the amount of time available for activism among women. Furthermore, balancing their personal needs with their domestic roles and the demands of their activist work may prove more challenging for women who take on a greater share of the care-giving responsibilities within their families.

Other studies in gender and environmentalism, such as Tiessen (2004) and Agarwal (2000) have looked at gender inequality within non-governmental and environmental organizations and note the lack of gender analysis of environmental institutions. These authors all note that future research is needed to explore the relationship between gender and environmentalism. I add that more research is also needed to study the lived experiences of activists in order to explore the differences in the ways that male and female activists maintain personal sustainability and well-being within the environmental movement.

Sustainability

The term, “sustainability” has been described as an “overtly ambiguous buzzword” (Hudeslson, 2008). Although it is widely used in environmental discourse, the word remains highly contested (Davison, 2001). In the environmental movement, the term, “sustainability” came into public awareness after the release of the 1987 Brundtland Report, which defined sustainable development as “development which meets the needs of the present without jeopardizing the needs of future generations” (DeSimone & Popoff, 1998, p. 3). Although the terms are related, it is important to distinguish

sustainability from sustainable development. Costanza & Patten (1995) suggest that sustainability defines a system that is able to survive or persist. While people are essential components of environmental systems, definitions of environmental sustainability ignore the fundamental element of personal sustainability.

Environmental education, according to Huckle (1993) has been promoted as a “vehicle for social change and more sustainable forms of development” (p. 43). Huckle argues that the current approach to environmental education would benefit from integrating a more holistic perspective. He suggests that education for sustainability must be “grounded upon an appreciation of the root causes of environmental problems in the global economic system” (p. 43). While Huckle is referring to philosophical issues within the larger arena of environmental education, I argue that the term *sustainability* needs to be broadened to create a more holistic concept that refers not only to the physical environment but also to the social and human environments. According to Thomashow (1996):

Many environmentalists live a life of contradiction. On one hand, they promote an environmental way of life, which involves appreciating the joys and wonders of living sustainably on earth. On the other hand, they endure stressful lifestyles, pushing their organizations and themselves to unreasonable limits (Thomashow, 1996, p. 161).

Educating environmental activists, among others, of a new, holistic form of sustainability could help to improve the health of the environment and the environmentalists.

An Integral Approach to Environmentalism

Wilber (1997) argues that throughout history, human knowledge has been subdivided into two categories: interior and exterior. Although reductionist in its duality,

Wilber's framework provides a means of broadening our understanding of human knowledge. The interior, according to Wilber, refers to the subjective world, the psyche, mind or consciousness, while the exterior refers to the objective, biophysical outer world. Wilber suggests that in order to gain a deeper understanding of human consciousness and behavior, it is necessary to integrate these two paths and realize that they are both important ways of knowing and being. Wilber suggests that through an integral approach to knowledge that incorporates the interior and the exterior, it may be possible to create a more holistic understanding of the world around us.

According to Wilber's (1997) theory, the environmental focus of sustainability has been almost exclusively on the outer world. Yet the external environment relies on the bodies, minds, emotions, and spirits of those working to protect it. As Thomashow (1996) states, "An overdeveloped, polluted, disturbed ecosystem is no different from an exploited, burned-out-psyche" (Thomashow, 1996, p. 164). In order to build a sustainable movement, we need to achieve balance between our external and internal environments. Hochachka (2005) suggests that in the field of sustainable development, practitioners are increasingly exploring *interiority* or the feelings, beliefs and worldviews that influence decisions and interventions. Focusing on the interior experiences of environmental activists promotes an integral approach to environmentalism, which encourages sustainability in the internal and the external environments.

Thomashow (1996) speaks of the importance of developing an "ecological identity", or an understanding of an individual's connectedness to the environment. In carrying out this research project, my goal is to deepen my awareness of my relationship to the natural world, while bringing to light broader issues of sustainability within the

field of environmental education and in myself. I hope that this Master's thesis can serve to support current work being done to help environmental activists balance their passion for activist work with their personal sustainability.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Longhurst (2001) speaks of a need to select a method of analysis that is congruent with the material being transcribed and with the needs of the audience and researcher. Studying the ways in which seasoned environmental activists maintain their well-being was well-suited to a combination of qualitative research methodologies. Strauss & Corbin (1998) suggest that qualitative methodologies are particularly useful in studying topics in which little research exists and are often superior to conventional (quantitative) research methods in dealing with questions surrounding thought processes, feelings and emotions. Since my research required me to immerse myself in the personal stories of the participants, a qualitative framework provided an opportunity to gently access the intimate details of the activists' lives. By meeting in person and first establishing rapport, I was able to create a safe environment for the participants to share their experiences. I chose to use open-ended, in-depth interviews as my method of data collection, grounded in a combination of qualitative research methodologies and philosophies, including phenomenology, Appreciative Inquiry and grounded theory. Each of these approaches contributed to the development of a research method that was congruent with my area of inquiry. An ecofeminist theoretical framework informed my research as well. The following section describes the four approaches that informed my research.

Phenomenology

At a broad level, the question of how environmental activists maintain their well-being is grounded in a philosophical approach of phenomenology. Phenomenology deals with questions about the nature of experience. It can be broadly defined as an approach which “focus[es] on the lived experiences of individuals and their perception and

consciousness of objects and relations, rather than the structural organization of institutions of macrosystems” (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 1997, p. 163). Thus, the aim of phenomenological research is to gain a deeper understanding of everyday life by focusing on the lived experiences of those being studied (van Manen, 1997). In asking participants to describe their lived experience as environmental activists, I am attempting to gain a deeper understanding of what it is like to ‘do’ environmental activism and maintain one’s personal sustainability through the process.

Phenomenology has been used by French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty to explore theories of corporeality and embodiment (Schmidt, 1985). Merleau-Ponty’s work builds on the philosophies of his predecessors, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger and specifically Husserl, the founder of phenomenology (Spurling, 1977).

Edie (1968) suggests that Merleau-Ponty focuses not simply on the body, but more specifically on perception. He places great importance on the senses, believing that they interact with each other and that they are the medium through which individuals experience the world (Grosz, 1994). The body, he believes, is therefore a “centre of action” (Rabil, 1967, p. 25), since it exists between the self and the world.

Among feminist academics, phenomenology has been used to explore the differences between the lived experiences of women and the universalist assumptions of the lived experiences of all humans (Andermahr, et al., 1997). Young (1989) suggests that by focusing on the lived body, phenomenologists locate subjectivity in the body instead of in the mind. This offers a divergence from other academic approaches which tend to reflect the Cartesian discourse that has subordinated the “lived” body to the “theoretical body” (Welton, 1998).

Phenomenology lends itself to the study of well-being among environmental activists because the exploration of well-being is inherently body-focused, in that it aims to explore the emotions and physical responses of the participants to their environmental activist work. By focusing on the lived experiences of environmental activists, I am adopting Merleau-Ponty's suggestion that the body is the "centre for action". By placing the body at the centre of my inquiry, I was able to explore the feelings, emotions and experiences of environmental activists who were able to maintain their own well-being throughout their activist work. My belief is that by giving voice to the embodied experiences of personal sustainability among environmental activists, we may learn about the broader reasons for our culture's un-sustainability and, in doing so, begin to conceptualize a more holistic definition of sustainability that puts the body at "the centre of action" and promotes an integration of personal and environmental sustainability.

Appreciative Inquiry

Exploring well-being and personal sustainability is a divergence from research that attempts to find solutions to problems. As I mentioned in the background section of this paper my decision to focus on well-being was a conscious choice, which grew out of the realization that my own mental health would be influenced by my choice of topic. As McNamee (2006) points out, "Research is a transformative process..." (p. x). I therefore decided to embrace a method of inquiry that would allow me to focus on positive stories of hope and health, rather than negative experiences of burnout and despair. In searching for a methodology that was congruent with my research I chose Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which by its very name encourages a positive focus.

Appreciative Inquiry was originally developed as a tool for consultation and has since been used in a variety of contexts, from facilitating organizational change to conducting academic research (Reed, 2006). This approach is based on the assumption that every individual or organization holds the knowledge of positive experiences that can be used to actualize change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). In the context of personal sustainability among environmental activists, an AI focus was used to structure the research questions in such a way that they could draw out the ‘positive core’ of the participant’s experiences with environmental activism. Since my focus was to understand how environmental activists maintain their well-being, this approach helped me direct the discussions from burnout and critiques of the environmental movement to look at the practices, processes and tools used by environmental activists to remain balanced in their environmental work.

Appreciative Inquiry is probably best known as a tool for organizational development. It was born out of a realization that when people were questioned about their work in a way that encouraged them to describe aspects that they valued, the participants seemed to talk in an unrestricted way. Therefore, asking positive questions was found to be a powerful approach to finding new information (Reed, 2006).

The AI process is divided into four key phases: discovery, dream, design and destiny. The discovery phase involves identifying the successes relating to a particular issue. The dreaming stage is a visioning process which focuses on enabling the participants to answer the question: “What is the world calling us to become?” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 324). The third stage in the process is the design phase where participants are encouraged to develop innovative methods for actualizing the

dream. The final phase is centered on enabling the participants to maintain their momentum and build hope in order to achieve these changes. There are numerous guidelines and strategies for using AI in organizational development but for the purpose of this project, I used AI as a tool for conducting academic research as described by Reed (2006).

In *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change*, Reed (2006) describes the ways in which Appreciative Inquiry can be used as a research method as well as an organizational development technique. The author suggests that AI can be used in a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, though she notes that the AI literature suggests Appreciative Inquiry research is inherently better suited to qualitative methodologies since they deal with phenomena that occur “naturally” rather than through experimentation. While there are a number of elements described by Reed in conducting “true” AI research, I used the AI approach on a basic level to inform the development and delivery of my interview questions and to guide my method of data collection. Grounded theory, described later in this chapter, also informed my data collection and analysis.

Developing Research Questions using Appreciative Inquiry

Conducting AI research is a generative process which allows theories to develop out of the findings (Reed & Holmberg, 2007). As I describe in Chapter 4, I developed my interview questions using an Appreciative Inquiry framework. The intent of the questions was to facilitate reflection among participants on the ways in which they maintain their well-being in their environmental activist careers by asking them to describe “high points” or things that they “most value” within their work or themselves (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003, pp. 24-25). Cooperrider et al. (2003) suggest that an AI

interview should have three sets of questions: introductory or opening questions, questions about the topic and closing questions. I followed this model in developing my interview schedule.

Using in-depth interviews as a method of data collection is also congruent with an AI approach (Cooperrider, et al., 2003). These authors suggest nine tips for conducting AI interviews, which I incorporated into my research design: (1) Explain Appreciative Inquiry to the participant before beginning the interview, (2) Respect the participant's anonymity by assuring them that the information they share will be kept confidential, (3) Manage negative comments and topics by listening, postponing and redirecting where appropriate, (4) Use the negative data to identify the positive aspect that is lacking, (5) Ask questions to draw out specific stories relating to the topic you are researching, (6) Generalize from the stories to clarify the positive forces that exist, (7) Listen for themes of positive factors, (8) Keep to the time schedule, (9) Be yourself and have fun with the interview.

Critiques of Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry has been critiqued for being idealistic in focusing on positive experiences. Other critics have suggested that an AI framework suppresses accounts of negative experiences (Reed, 2006). Proponents of an AI approach argue that problems and difficulties will inevitably surface in conversations and that by discussing difficulties in an Appreciative Inquiry framework, problems can often be resolved without blaming (Reed, 2006). In particularly emotional or negative environments, Reed suggests that problems or negative experiences may need to be addressed before the researcher can proceed with the AI questioning. Since burnout is a common experience among

environmental activists (Brown, 1997; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Nichol森, 2002), my research questions specifically asked about experiences of burnout, which allowed me to transition into questions about how the participants moved through burnout to a place of greater health or well-being. By developing a series of questions that focused on positive experiences and incorporating the nine principles of AI into my interview design I was able to develop a method of data collection that was congruent with my area of inquiry.

Grounded Theory

Within a philosophical approach of phenomenology and guided by an Appreciative Inquiry framework, I used a grounded theory methodology, described by Charmaz (2006) to structure my research style, questions and analysis. Grounded theory differs from hypothesis-testing styles of research in that it allows findings to emerge from the data, rather than forcing conclusions (Glaser, 1992). The aim of grounded theory, as Glaser in particular states, is to discover the theory implicit in the data.

Grounded theory is one method of conducting qualitative research that provides a framework for formulating questions, structuring interviews and analyzing findings. It obtains its name from the fact that in Glaser & Strauss' (1999) conception, the theory is "grounded" in the data to which it is applied. Thus, it differs from many theoretical traditions in that it does not rely on a priori assumptions, but focuses on an inductive generation of theory through a systematic analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). According to Haig (1996), grounded theory has been developing since its inception in the 1960s and has become "the most comprehensive qualitative research method available" (Haig, 1996, p. 281). Strauss & Corbin (1998) suggest that grounded theory provides not

only a methodology but "...a way of thinking about and viewing the world that can enrich the research of those who choose to use [it]"(Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 4).

Since this research arose from my own experience of unsustainability in the environmental movement, I approached the topic with inquisitiveness and the desire to learn from those who had found a way around the negativity and burnout to a place of well-being and balance. Thus, a grounded theory approach, which focuses on the emergence of themes, rather than forcing data or testing theories seemed appropriate for this project.

History of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory first appeared in the 1960s through the work of Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. Their work was informed by the realization that the qualitative research tradition within the sociological community had begun to falter in light of quantitative methodologies, which were quickly gaining dominance within the discipline. The positivist reliance on the scientific method developed into a model of research based on objective observers, quantifiable variables and a search for "truth". Quantitative ways of knowing thereby began to eclipse qualitative research, which was viewed as unscientific and anecdotal (Charmaz, 2006).

Determined to gain recognition for qualitative ways of knowing, Glaser and Strauss published the seminal text, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967. By laying out a methodical approach to qualitative research, Glaser and Strauss suggested that qualitative research could follow its own systematic and logical approach, thereby building a qualitative methodology which was in alignment with the goals of "good science" (Moghaddam, 2006). These goals, according to Strauss & Corbin (1998) are:

significance, compatibility, theory-observation, reproducibility, generalisability, rigor, verification and precision (Moghaddam, 2006).

Grounded theory exemplifies a unification of two contrasting traditions based on the different theoretical positions of Glaser and Strauss respectively: Columbia University positivism and Chicago school pragmatism. Glaser's Columbia University positivism brought to grounded theory a systematic, logical approach, which Charmaz (2006) argues is dispassionate and echoes some of the limitations of quantitative approaches. Chicago school pragmatism, on the other hand, offered a more subjective approach, which was based on emergent processes and an assumption of human agency (Charmaz, 2006).

Since its inception in the 1960s, grounded theory has developed in divergent strands. While Glaser maintained that grounded theory was a method of discovery, Strauss, who worked extensively with Juliet M. Corbin, used technical procedures to focus on bringing verification to the method. As Charmaz (2006) notes, Glaser and Strauss's original work on grounded theory emphasized the need for flexibility when using the grounded theory method. While my intention in using grounded theory aligns more closely with Glaser's assertion that grounded theory is a method of inquiry, I have used grounded theory in part to bring verification to my research. I have therefore drawn on Strauss' later work with Juliet Corbin, as well as Glaser and Strauss's earlier work in developing and carrying out my research.

'Doing' Grounded Theory

According to Glaser & Strauss (1999), grounded theory requires four stages: collection of data, coding, data analysis and development of theory. Grounded theorists

may choose from a variety of different methods when collecting their data. Possible options include ethnography, textual analysis and intensive interviewing (Charmaz, 2006). I chose to use intensive interviewing, since my research topic dealt with personal experiences and emotions, which I believed would be best explored by building rapport and conducting in-depth conversations with participants. As noted above, this was also congruent with AI research.

A grounded theory approach to intensive interviews requires that the researcher prepare open-ended questions that allow the participant's experiences to emerge in the answers. Researchers may choose more or less structured questions depending on the type of research they are conducting, though as Charmaz (2006) notes, ethics review boards often require submission of a complete list of interview questions before the research is approved, which necessitates a slightly more structured approach to interviewing.

Analyzing interviews using grounded theory requires the researcher to transcribe the interviews, code the data and analyze the transcriptions. The first step is to transcribe the recorded interview and read the transcripts (Moghaddam, 2006). Charmaz (2006) suggests that the data collection and analysis can occur concurrently, as the researcher makes discoveries, which may prompt additional questions. The body of the analysis begins with the transcriptions where the researcher begins jotting notes and developing initial codes based on themes that are occurring in the data. This stage of coding, known as open coding is unfocused, allowing the researcher to record any theme or concept that they think might be significant (Moghaddam, 2006). Charmaz suggests that initial coding can be done word-by-word, line-by-line or incident-by-incident depending on the nature

of the data and the purpose of the research. Many researchers take memos during this process to jot down ideas and insights that can be used in the generation of theory later in the process.

The second major stage of coding is focused coding. Focused codes are more directed and involve condensing the large amount of data by selecting the initial codes that will be used to develop analytic categories (Charmaz, 2006).

A third stage of coding, known as axial coding involves four analytical processes: “a) continually relating subcategories to a category, b) comparing categories with the collected data, c) expanding the density of the categories by detailing their properties and dimensions, and d) exploring variations in the phenomena” (Moghaddam, 2006). The purpose of axial coding, according to Charmaz (2006) is to synthesize and sort large quantities of data around a central theme or axis category. By this stage in the coding the data may take on a new form, differing from its initial appearance during open coding.

Another aspect of grounded theory is the constant comparative method (CCM). Boeije (2002) states that the constant comparative method is one of the fundamental aspects of qualitative analysis in grounded theory. This is the process by which data are compared, piece-by-piece. Boeiji suggests that this is necessary to insure that categories are coded appropriately. The grounded theory method involves numerous stages of data analysis. The sequential nature of the analysis makes it a comprehensive method that is well respected in the field of qualitative research.

Using Grounded Theory in my Research

The method of data collection influences the way the researcher gathers and analyses the data. When I began my research into personal sustainability among

environmental activists, I did not have a pre-conceived theory regarding the data.

Therefore grounded theory's emphasis on emergence allowed me to enter the project with an open mind and an intention to facilitate the development of a theory based on the information I gathered.

During the data collection phase of my research I had intended to interview three men and three women in order to gain a balanced perspective of the gender differences in the participant's experiences of personal sustainability. Within the first week of sending out my invitation e-mail I had received 50 nominations and nine personal e-mails from people expressing an interest in participating in my study. Seven of the e-mails were from women and two were from men. I faced a challenge of deciding whether to select individuals from the list of 50 nominations, as I had originally intended, or to interview the nine people who had contacted me directly. Nine was a larger number than I had planned to interview and the group was not evenly divided between the sexes, yet I decided that the people who had contacted me expressing an interest in the study likely also agreed that they fit the requirements of the study. I was concerned that individuals selected from the list of nominations might not agree with their nominator's perception of their ability to maintain their well-being as environmental activists. I also felt that the individuals who had contacted me directly had a story they wanted to share, and I was interested to hear what they had to say. Therefore, I concluded that in keeping with a grounded theory approach, I would allow the sample to emerge from the process and use the nine people who had contacted me directly as participants for my research. I realized that this choice would affect the type of data that I would obtain, and that this might make it difficult for me to address my secondary research question, which was to examine

whether or not there were gender differences in the ways in which male and female environmental activists maintain their well-being.

Ecofeminism

I situated my research in an ecofeminist theoretical framework. Ecofeminism draws the connection between feminism and environmentalism, suggesting that the domination of women by men is linked to the domination of people over nature (Warren, 1996). Ecofeminists such as Val Plumwood suggest that the source of the oppression of women and nature is the rationalist, Cartesian discourse which structures the world into binary oppositions or dualisms (Cochrane, 2007). An ecofeminist environmental ethic is useful in analyzing the issue of personal sustainability among environmental activists because the dualistic thinking that privileges the mind over the body could be viewed as being linked to the existence of work environments that value people's mental abilities over their bodies, thereby creating the potential for conditions such as burnout, anxiety and depression.

By combining phenomenology, Appreciative Inquiry and grounded theory with an ecofeminist theoretical framework, I was able to develop a methodology that was congruent with the data. The AI framework allowed me to structure my questions in a positive light and also supported my intention to create a project that could facilitate my own transformation towards a more sustainable way of approaching my environmental activism.

Chapter 4: Data Collection and Analysis

The research for this study was framed using the question, “How do seasoned environmental activists maintain their own well-being while carrying out their activist work?” My initial intention was also to examine whether or not there were gender differences in the ways in which male and female environmental activists maintain their well-being. Due to the limited number of men that responded to my call for interviewees, I decided not to pursue this line of investigation. However, I have made a number of suggestions for future research to explore gender differences among environmental activists.

In addressing the research question, I conducted nine semi-structured, in-depth interviews with individuals who identified themselves as environmental activists and who had been involved in environmental activism for at least 10 years. My research question used an Appreciative Inquiry framework, which encouraged the participants to talk about the positive core of their environmental activism.

Sampling Method

I defined environmental activists as people who have been working to change a culture that is already established. Since this was a broad definition, finding members of the environmental activist community required the individuals to self-identify or be nominated by other environmental activists. This issue led to a challenge in defining the limits of the sample. Since there was no pre-existing sampling frame I chose to select participants using a snowball sampling method (Trochim, 2006). This approach is useful in studying populations that are not well-defined and in exploring sensitive subject areas (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Since some of the research questions dealt with

potentially sensitive issues such as burnout and depression the snowball sampling method helped to build a trusting environment where prospective participants were introduced to the project by friends or colleagues who had a prior relationship to the researcher. I believe that this created a space where participants felt comfortable sharing their personal experiences, which allowed for greater reflection and depth within the interviews.

Snowball sampling involves having members of a group identify other members of the population. Its name comes from the tendency of the sample size to “snowball” as recently identified group members continue to suggest new people (Fink, 1995). Since I have a network of contacts that are involved in the environmental movement and I believed would be able to either participate in the study or identify other members of the environmental activist community, I decided to use my personal contact list as a basis for my snowball sample.

I collected my sample by e-mailing people in my personal contact list that I knew had an interest or involvement in the environmental movement. I created an invitation e-mail (Appendix A) which asked for nominations of individuals who had been involved in environmental activism for at least ten years and who had been successful at maintaining their own well-being, according to the person suggesting their name. People were also given the opportunity to nominate themselves.

As noted in the previous section on grounded theory, when I developed my research proposal I had planned to interview a total of six individuals, three men and three women. The response to this project, however, exceeded my expectations, highlighting the effectiveness of snowball sampling in identifying members of a group. I considered the benefits of remaining consistent with my initial proposal to select an equal

number of men and women from the list of nominated individuals and concluded that since a grounded theory approach suggests that the theory should emerge from the data, part of what had emerged in my research was my sample, slightly larger than I had anticipated and not broken into equal groups of men and women but excited about my research and willing to share their experiences.

I contacted the nine individuals who had responded to my invitation e-mail and sent them a letter of informed consent (Appendix B). I asked them to confirm their participation in the project by e-mail and to read the letter of informed consent and be prepared to sign it before beginning the interview.

The Participants

The participants for this project came from a variety of employment backgrounds with vocations ranging from grassroots activists to campaign directors, executive directors of non-governmental organizations, board members of environmental organizations and lawyers. The participants ranged in the length of time they had been involved in environmental activism from 12 to 40 years with the average length of involvement being just over 20 years. All of the participants were living and working in Canada with the majority of them living on Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland. This was probably reflective of the close network of environmental activists in these areas, which was elucidated by the snowball sampling method. All but one participant was Caucasian, echoing a lack of cultural diversity in the environmental field in North America, as noted by Kovan and Dirkx (2003). Seven of the participants were women and two were men. Over half of the participants mentioned having a family or a significant relationship. One of the men spoke of having a child and a significant

relationship and five of the women mentioned having children and a significant relationship.

The Interview Questions

I conducted one semi-structured interview with each participant. The interviews were approximately one hour in duration. Eight of the interviews took place in person and one was conducted over the phone due to the geographical distance between the participant and myself. Interviews were recorded using software on my computer. The interviews had 26 pre-designed questions which were developed using an Appreciative Inquiry framework described by Reed (2006) (Appendix C) and approved by the Royal Roads University ethical review board. Reed's format also follows Charmaz's (2006) suggestions for developing interview questions in grounded theory. Since the goal of Appreciative Inquiry research is to identify the "positive core" of an issue (Reed, 2006, p. 29), the questions were designed to encourage participants to discuss the high points and peak experiences, such as question 2 in section 2 of the interview questions which asked participants to describe a time in their activist work when they were the most successful at maintaining their well-being.

The interview was divided into three sets of questions, opening questions, questions about the topic and concluding questions. The opening questions were intended to set the tone for the interview and establish some basic information about the participant, both setting the context for the researcher and building rapport between the researcher and the participant.

Questions about the topic began by asking about experiences of burnout, which might seem incongruent with an AI focus. The purpose of beginning with this question

was to give the participants an opportunity to reflect on and describe a challenging time in their activism and then identify the turning point when they began to feel more balanced. This encouraged reflection and opened the dialogue about the challenging situations, which, in many cases, were identified as the catalyst for moving the participants to a place of greater balance.

The other benefit of asking questions about a difficult situation is that it allowed me to address one of the critiques of an Appreciative Inquiry approach, which is that the positive focus can prohibit any discussion of challenging experiences (Reed, 2006). By directly asking about a difficult time I was able to acknowledge the participant's challenging experiences and direct the conversation towards the turning point when they began to feel their balance returning, as well as the strategies they employed to move through the difficult times to a place of greater balance and well-being.

The concluding questions were designed to allow the participants to reflect on their experiences and also speak broadly about the direction their activism might take in the future. Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros (2003) suggest that the concluding questions should encourage participants to think about future possibilities by asking questions that facilitate the process of envisioning the best possible outcomes for the future. By asking the question, "Do you have personal goals for improving your emotional, mental or physical health?" I was asking the participants to build on the knowledge that they have gained through their life experience as environmental activists and think critically about how they could continue to improve their health and well-being in the future. In this way, the interviews created opportunities for self-reflection and personal development among participants. Charmaz (2006) suggests that the aim of grounded theory questions is to

explore the topic and foster participant reflection; therefore, I exercised flexibility during the interview to explore some areas more extensively by asking additional questions and probing more deeply for answers when I needed clarification or believed that the participant had added insights to offer.

Data Analysis

Drawing on the research approach of Ryan, Soven, Smither, Sullivan, & Vanbuskirk (1999), the interviews were recorded and transcribed by hand. During the transcription process I jotted down comments as I began to see themes emerging. This process of jotting down memos is described by Charmaz (2006) as a useful step in the process of beginning the open coding phase of data analysis. When I had finished creating the transcripts I compiled them into a single document and colour coded each of the interviews so that I could easily scroll through the document and find the section I wanted when analyzing the data.

I analyzed my data using two scales, a micro-scale analysis that looked at the responses question-by-question and a macro-scale analysis in which I looked at general themes that emerged in the interviews overall. The micro-scale analysis is similar to the incident-by-incident coding that Charmaz (2006) describes and can be used in the first stage of open coding. I created a spreadsheet with each question listed in the left hand column and the participants' names in a row across the top. I was then able to fill in the table, question-by-question, with the major themes from each interview. My next step was to condense these themes even further by drawing out commonalities in the answers of different participants. I did this by creating a list that further summarized the main themes that had emerged in answer to each of the 26 questions.

My next stage of coding was a macro-scale look at the interviews overall. I did this by re-reading and in some cases re-listening to the interviews and hi-lighting comments that I felt were important. I then copied each of these comments into a table and coded them comment-by-comment according to the themes that they represented. This is reflective of the focused coding that Charmaz (2006) identifies in her description of the phases of data analysis. Having created a long list of themes, I condensed them into main categories and created a spreadsheet that listed each category along the top and each comment that related to individual categories in the columns below. This document allowed me to re-analyze the data around central themes, which is an aspect of axial coding described by Charmaz. Re-reading the table I began to look at the broader themes that had emerged. I found that the comments I had hi-lighted fell into two broad categories: factors contributing to burnout and strategies for maintaining well-being. I organized the coding categories from my spreadsheet into these two headings. To ensure that I had captured the themes that had emerged during the micro scale analysis, I proceeded to go through the summarized answers to each question and compare them with the themes that I had distilled. This approach reflects the Constant Comparative Method that Boeiji (2002) suggests is an essential element to grounded theory. I found that I had captured the main points from the questions within these themes. With the framework I had developed and the list of quotes I was then able to begin writing up the findings.

The findings that resulted from the interviews created an intricate tapestry that covered a multitude of topics and helped to elucidate the research question. Perhaps as a

result of the positive questioning, the interviews delved deeply into issues and subsequent analysis produced both broad themes and delicate nuances.

Throughout this process I was also reflecting on my own growth and development. While I considered including these thoughts in the findings section I decided to retain my own reflections for the epilogue to preserve the flow of the interview themes. The next chapter discusses the findings that resulted from these interviews.

Chapter 5: Findings

The nine interviews I conducted provided rich descriptions and poignant stories that spoke to my primary research question, which was to discover the ways in which seasoned environmental activists maintain their well-being throughout their activist work. Through the process of coding and analysis, I distilled the themes that emerged from the interviews into two broad categories: (1) factors that contribute to burnout and (2) strategies for maintaining well-being. I have divided this chapter into two main sections based on these categories. Throughout this chapter, I have made liberal use of quotations, as I believe that the exact words of the participants infuse the writing with their passion and create a more compelling read than my own summary of their experiences.

To protect the confidentiality of the participants, I gave pseudonyms to each person, but I did not remove identifiers of the participants' gender, as I felt that this information was important in elucidating the gender differences in the participants' experiences.

While it may seem counter intuitive to begin the findings chapter with a discussion of factors contributing to burnout, given my Appreciative Inquiry focus, I realized that since most participants had experienced at least some degree of burnout in their activist careers, exploring these experiences was a useful way to begin the discussion of how participants maintained their well-being. I also learned from the interviews that for many participants, their burnout was actually the catalyst for helping them find ways of maintaining their well-being. Therefore, in keeping with the grounded theory approach, I allowed for the emergence of the themes relating to burnout in my data analysis while being cognizant of the need to take my analysis and discussions past burnout to identify

strategies for maintaining well-being. Thus this investigation begins with a discussion of the factors contributing to burnout.

Factors Contributing to Burnout

There were a variety of themes and experiences that came forth in the interviews relating to activist burnout. I have focused the majority of the findings section around the reasons for their burnout. Through the data analysis, I found three themes that captured many of the reasons that the participants burned out. I have organized this section around these categories: (1) the toxic culture of environmental activism, (2) a sense of urgency and (3) the tendency to overextend oneself. The following section details the aspects of each category. I begin with a description of the participants' physical experiences of burnout. I have also included a summary of the participant's experiences of burnout in Appendix D, Table 1.

The Experience of Burnout

Participant's descriptions of burnout fell into two categories: physical responses and emotional responses. For many people, their burnout seemed to be catalyzed by an extreme physical illness or an acute physical experience. Kim spoke of fainting and knocking her teeth out as she fell, while Susan described having Salmonella poisoning and becoming quite ill before she realized that she had to find a more sustainable way of living and working. Lisa also had a similar experience brought about by acquiring Lyme's disease and realizing that she had no choice except to slow down and let her body heal.

In their descriptions of the burnout itself, many participants identified physical symptoms such as being unable to sleep, unable to eat and losing weight. These

symptoms were combined with emotional responses such as feeling irritable, anxious, depressed, guilty, angry, unhappy, exhausted, overwhelmed and unable to concentrate. For some people these experiences led them to indulge in alcohol or food to try and deal with the pressure and stress they were experiencing. Many of the participant's descriptions of burnout pointed to a common theme of feeling over-stimulated and needing to retreat from the pressures of work and life in order to regain balance. This is described further in the section on strategies for developing well-being. The next section examines the factors that participants identified as contributing to their experiences of burnout.

The Toxic Culture of Environmental Activism

Exploitation.

Many participants spoke openly about a toxic culture that they feel exists among environmental activists. Lisa expressed her frustration at the competition between environmental activists, explaining that this leads people to stay in situations that are not healthy because they fear losing their jobs. "I think there is a sense that everyone wants to be doing this work so if you can't cut it, someone else will take your job in a second. So shut up and put up". Debra compared her activist work with one organization to domestic violence, "I was willing to do it once, but it's like being in an abusive relationship, it's like, 'Okay you can hit me once but I am not playing any more'". Jill quoted a friend's reflection on the activist culture: "You know Jill, the environmental community brings them in, they chew them up and they spit them out".

These statements express a feeling of violation and exploitation that was common among participants. There were also references to martyrdom where participants spoke

of putting up with the exploitation for the greater good. Karen linked activist burnout to the non-profit sector in general, citing the trade-offs people make to be involved in activist work:

I associate 'activism leads to burnout' when you're involved with the non-profit sector ...Partly because maybe you're already working for a lower wage or you're doing things, you're taking trade-offs, you're working for this organization, it's not the greatest location or... I'm not getting paid as much as I need or whatever it might be.

Lisa compared her feelings of exploitation as an activist to the exploitation that exists between the industrialized and non-industrialized nations, "I sometimes feel like the sector is treated like a form of domestic outsourcing. Like we do the work that the for-profit sector would never do for the amount of money we do it". This exploitation was amplified by the knowledge that her work was not being valued and she was viewed by society as an impediment to progress.

Therefore, you're doing this really hard work where you're under paid and under valued and society thinks you're a pain in the butt and doesn't really notice what you're doing. It's not a recipe for grace and happiness. It's a system failure.

Lisa continued, laughing as she noted the ways in which the exploitation in the activist world threatened to take a toll on her as she ages, "And so we don't have retirement funds, we don't have pensions, we don't have good teeth".

This statement represents a trend that exists in the non-profit sector where employers are less likely to offer benefit packages than the for-profit sector (Emanuele & Higgins, 2000). While this challenge is not unique to environmental non-profit organizations, the combination of factors that Lisa described, such as being under paid, overworked, feeling undervalued by society and not receiving benefits from her

employer, seemed to create a feeling of exploitation, which was identified by many participants as contributing to their burnout.

Activist anger.

Perhaps as a result of working within a system that does not value their work, many activists also spoke of the anger that plagues the environmental movement. Kim's description expresses the way that this anger detracts from the activism. "[A] lot of activism is displaced personal issues. So people are dealing with their anger at their fathers by being angry at the government ... It's ostensibly altruistic and that taints and reduces the effectiveness of the activism". Jill echoed this perspective, noting that being angry is exhausting, "I think [anger] is one of the things that drags you down". Ann commented, "[A]ctivists are often surrounded by anger", noting that she believes that this anger was, to a large degree, responsible for the high rate of burnout among environmental activists.

Activists as warriors.

Related to this anger was the idea that being an activist was much like being a warrior in battle. Lisa recalled her experience of being a "front line" activist and being in battle:

I learned the power of 'no'. I really lived, 'no' in an almost physiological way. I used my body to stop things. 'No!' With everything I have, everything in my body. And there was something deepening about that. And there was something sticky about that... We're supposed to be these big powerful warriors who know how to do all these things and know how to change the world and we're not vulnerable, we're steeled".

She went on to describe what it was like to be in battle, expressing the ways in which the activist culture does not have the support structures to help activists recover after the battle is fought:

[T]raditional society had ways of reconstituting warriors and weaving them back into the culture. There were processes that calmed the warrior. There were processes that forced the warrior into a different modality that loved the warrior back into the fabric of the village. We don't have that. We're not mindful enough about that. So, we set people up as warriors. We say, 'Go at it. Here's some minimal resources. Go hit it hard. And if you fall to pieces, oh, don't look at me. Pick yourself up honey.' And we don't know how to move people into that next modality yet.

Lisa's comment also spoke to a deeper issue which was an expectation that the warriors would continue to fight, regardless of how wounded they may have been in the battle. She suggested that this apathy and lack of understanding on behalf of society and the organization they work for is hurtful and alienating.

Many participants spoke of the realization that they didn't want to "be in battle" anymore. Paul stated, "I think it is a very combative type of advocacy... We need people constantly doing that but that's not my particular style". Karen also expressed a desire to get out of battle, not due to the toll it was taking on her, but because of the inefficiency of this type of work:

I've kind of given up on trying to fight the battle because the reality is that so much of what we need to do is so urgent, I'd rather surround myself with people who I know can help me make it happen.

An interesting difference between activists and the warriors in this metaphor is that many of the activists I spoke with did not fight the battle with their bodies directly, though Lisa's account of "living 'no'" is clearly a very physical experience. For many of the people I interviewed, their activism was a mental battle. The difference between a mental battle and a physical one seemed to be that people's wounds were more difficult

to see, as Lisa illustrated above: “And if you fall to pieces, oh, don’t look at me. Pick yourself up honey”. This lack of compassion may be due to a general lack of understanding and empathy by society towards people suffering from mental illnesses such as burnout and depression (Hinshaw, 2007).

Mind/body dualisms.

The societal apathy towards the participant’s burnout was illustrative of a mind-body dualism, which also emerged as a theme around the unhealthy culture of the environmental movement. Lisa described the way in which the body’s needs are disregarded when people are involved in activist work: “[W]hat we’re telling ourselves is that the body is just an instrument. The body is a vehicle through which we carry the head around.” The tendency to subordinate the body to the mind seemed to be institutionalized in the work ethic of some of the participants. Lisa later discussed the ways in which she had learned to suppress her body’s needs:

You’re not supposed to have needs. You’re not even supposed to have a body. There’s just supposed to be this floating head that comes in and does its thing. I remember years where I didn’t pee. You know? I’d have to pee for like three hours... Like that out of touch. That denying of the animal. Eating at my desk, too busy to pee. What is that?

This point was echoed by Debra, who talked about the “two foot journey from the head to the heart” as being a mechanism for bringing one’s awareness from their mind into their body. Ann, in her advice to other activists, recommended that people “explore the gifts of the spirit as well, not just the gifts of the mind”, further demonstrating the institutionalization of this dualism in the culture of environmental activism.

Sense of Urgency

The denial of the body's needs seemed to be linked to the passion the activists felt for their work and also to the sense of urgency that exists around the global environmental crisis. Many people mentioned that it was the feeling of being rushed and not having enough resources to solve the problems that led to their feelings of burnout. Ann explained the frustration she feels around the enormity of the issues and the lack of human resources available to do the work.

Activism does expect a lot of us because there's never enough people to do what needs to be done and I think I definitely have some anger about that. There's so much work that needs to be done to save this planet and there's so few people doing that work.

Paul also expressed this view in sharing the challenges he faced in maintaining a work-life balance when surrounded by problems of global proportions. "... I think there's lots of cases when the problem seems so big that it's hard not to put that extra time into it." Lee identified the feeling of always being behind in his work as being a cause of burnout. His advice to young environmental activists was, "Move at a brisk pace but don't feel rushed. It's the feeling of being rushed that creates burnout..." While a sense of urgency on its own might not lead to burnout, combined with a strong commitment to environmental work, urgency seemed to result in a tendency to do too much. This was another factor that emerged repeatedly in discussions of the factors contributing to burnout.

Tendency to Overextend Oneself

Being called.

Kovan & Dirkx (2003) suggest that many environmentalists are drawn to their work from a sense of "being called". I was interested to learn what had motivated the

environmental activists that I interviewed to engage in activist work. Congruent with the findings of Kovan & Dirkx, the majority of the participants in this study cited a sense of knowing or “being called” as the reason for their involvement in activism. Susan stated, “I never describe myself as an environmentalist because it was just how you live... So, it’s kind of like saying, you’re a fish, what draws you to water?” Debra responded to the question, “what drew you to this work?” by saying, “I came in that way.” Jill spoke of having a realization that she needed to change professions, saying, “I feel like I kind of had an epiphany... I just had this really gut level feeling that [working on environmental issues] is what I needed to do”. The fact that so many participants came to this work from a sense of being called may help to explain the commitment these people have to their environmental activist work.

This sense of calling, combined with a passion for the environment and a commitment to create positive change seemed to be linked to a feeling of devotion to their work. It is understandable that people would feel a greater commitment to work that they felt “called” to do than work that they were doing for financial gain, prestige or power because “being called” implies a sense of duty and the presence of a higher power. Many participants indicated that they were in service to something greater than themselves. For Kim, her work seemed to be an act of spiritual devotion:

[I]t’s a feeling of doing what needs to be done and being present and the work happening through me instead of trying to make something happen. So it’s a feeling of really being in service and the listening and the being able to bring forth what is necessary because I’m open and connected.

Linked to this devotion, however, was the martyrdom, expressed above, that seemed to come with believing that they were living a life of service. Jill, who also spoke of feeling called to environmental activist work, expressed her guilt for taking time out

from her work, which, she later explained resulted in a serious burnout that she believed stemmed from her tendency to suppress her own needs:

15 years ago I was very focused on my work. I wasn't doing a whole lot else, or maybe if I was doing it I didn't feel like I should be doing it. That feeling of, I've got so much to do, I shouldn't be taking time out to go skiing for a day.

Suppression of emotions.

Although many people identified feeling called to do environmental work, some people seemed better suited to “on-the-ground”, combative activism than others. Lee described the satisfaction he felt from ‘fighting the battle’: “I don't get tired by conflict with government corporations. In fact I get energized by it”. Other people's relationship to conflict was much different, as Lisa described above when she spoke of the exhaustion that came from being in battle. Thus, it seemed that one of the reasons for burnout was being involved in work that did not fit the individual's personality. Lisa spoke of activism as pushing her to do work that was not in alignment with her personality,

It's not the way I'm wired. So I would just turn [the emotional side] off. I would just shut that down and I learned not to cry no matter what was said, I learned not to feel, no matter what was said, I learned how to make the arguments from my head... And I amputated some of my greatest gifts, which is my heart, which is my sensitivity, which is my compassion.

Her use of the term, “amputated” strongly conveys her experience of forcefully cutting off her emotions and a part of herself in order to meet the requirements of the activist work. Similar to the way that people may try to shape themselves into the person they believe their partner desires, it seemed that many of the participants were also molding themselves into roles that they did not feel suited their personalities. In many cases, this led to a feeling of being “out of alignment”. Lisa described the times in her life

when she burned out as periods when she had lost touch with her intuition: “The times of pain are when I lost myself. The times of burnout are when I lost my connection with my intuitive knowing and my kind of inner compass about what was good, right, wrong, for me”.

Narrowing of the self.

Lisa’s experience of losing connection with her intuitive knowing, relates to another element of the tendency to overextend oneself, which I describe as a ‘narrowing of the self’. Some of the activists I interviewed associated burnout with the tendency to let go of aspects of themselves that were not related to activism. Ann spoke of her partner, who shared her commitment to activism, when describing the experience of burnout. This was the only time during the interviews that a participant spoke about experiences of personal sustainability and burnout shared by others in their lives. While Ann stated that she did not experience burnout herself, she gained insight from watching her partner struggle with burnout and drew a number of conclusions from observing his challenges. Ann suggested that her partner’s burnout was partly due to the fact that he let go of his personal interests and passions,

[H]e sort of dropped a lot of his involvements outside of his activism, so he didn’t play any instruments, he dropped his hobby of photography... When the crash happened, he didn’t have anything else to sort of cushion the fall.

Not all participants described this narrowing of the self in negative terms. When asked if he felt like his current work schedule gave him enough time for the other things he wanted to do in life Lee replied, “There’s not that much else in my life that I like doing except for environmental stuff”. Paul echoed this point as well when he spoke about his relationship to environmental activist work: “It’s something I kind of

constantly think about... In the evenings when I'm reading, I read what's going on in the world of environment". While both Lee and Paul did describe other things that they wanted to focus on, it was clear that their priorities were their activist work. Leisure activities seemed to be viewed as ways of restoring themselves to allow them to be more focused in their activist work. Paul and Lee, for example, both talked about doing things to "recharge", which might suggest that for them, the purpose of engaging in extracurricular activities is to build up energy for their work rather than to enjoy the activity itself. While this may appear to be a gender specific response, it is difficult to attribute this theme to gender given the small number of men that were interviewed.

Work-life balance.

Paul and Lee's comments are reflective of a deeper theme, which emerged in a number of interviews as the difficulty in finding a work-life balance when your work is your life. Debra explained the difficulties in defining the boundaries of her activist work by saying, "So it feels like my entire life is activism..." Karen described this theme in relationship to her activist identity, "I believe I'm an activist at my job every day and I also believe I'm an activist in the work I do in the community." Paul posed a question when reflecting on this theme:

[P]robably for a lot of us, you know, work and life... it's not just our work, it's a personal philosophy. It's how people feel about.... It's integrated into what they do and how they live. So the work and life are so intertwined that it's hard to separate. So then how do you find work life balance?

This difficulty in describing the boundaries of activist work seemed to be closely tied to the experience of burnout. Susan explained her experience of feeling like whatever she was doing was not enough, "[T]he major source of stress was no matter what I was

doing, I was always feeling like I should be doing something else...” Therefore it was difficult for her to justify taking time out because she felt like there was always something else that she should be doing and there was no way to single out “life” in the work life balance because the work *was* her life.

The experiences of the activists I interviewed illustrated the interaction between a number of themes that together seemed to create the conditions that led to their burnout. Drawn to their work by a sense of duty or calling, many people ended up feeling exploited by their working conditions and frustrated with being involved in an environment of anger and constant struggle which, for many people, seemed to be not in keeping with their personalities or their reasons for being involved in environmental activism. The passion and devotion to answer “the call” also seemed to lead people to martyr themselves to their work, often resulting in a feeling of being “out of alignment” with their inner knowing and a narrowing of the self away from interests and hobbies that did not support their activist work. As a result, many people expressed a difficulty in attaining a work-life balance when they realized that their work *was* their life. I believe it is a combination of these factors that led many of the participants in this study to burn out from their work. Interestingly, for many people, the experience of burnout itself seemed to be a catalyst for finding a healthier balance. This next section explores the factors that the participants identified as helping them to sustain their internal balance and well-being.

Strategies for Maintaining Well-being

Just as there seemed to be a number of elements that created the conditions for burnout, there were also numerous factors that allowed participants to maintain their

well-being. Some of the reasons for this came directly out of my question, “Is there anything that you regularly do to sustain your well-being?” Other themes emerged through my analysis of the interview transcripts. Table 2 in Appendix D summarizes some of the actions and practices that participants found useful to help them maintain their well-being. For the purpose of this discussion, however, I have chosen to focus on the broader strategies that participants employed to help them maintain their well-being. There were five main themes that developed out of the interviews which expressed the processes participants used to maintain their well-being: (1) taking breaks, (2) being in alignment, (3) re-defining their work, (4) celebrating their accomplishments and (5) letting go. This next section breaks down these themes into sub-categories and describes them in relation to the participant’s experiences.

Taking Breaks

Breaks during the work day.

One of the challenges that seemed to result from the difficulty in separating one’s work from one’s life, was a tendency among participants to avoid taking breaks. This was true on a number of different scales. In the short term, participants described getting so caught up in their work that they would put off their physical needs, as Lisa described above when she said, “Eating at my desk, too busy to pee.” Paul also noted that he did not take enough breaks during the day and that he thought he would be probably be healthier if he made more of an effort to take regular breaks.

Vacations.

This theme of neglecting to take breaks also emerged on a larger scale. Karen, for example, spoke about the vacation days she had accumulated over the last year by not taking time away from work:

I have 57 vacation days right now banked. 57. Like what am I going to do with 57? ...Like take the fricking vacation days. So, that is actually one of my goals...to take more vacation days because I think if I had more regular vacation days I would feel more rejuvenated to even do more.

Paul also mentioned that he recently came to a realization that he actually needs to take vacations from his work. He said that he has finally come to a point with his work where he can take vacations and not feel the need to bring work with him.

Breaks from 'serious' work (having fun).

There was also discussion about the need to take mental breaks from the activist work to have fun, laugh and play. Many people spoke of the importance of laughter and joy. Debra mentioned that one of the changes she has made is that she now allows herself to be happy. Part of her commitment to this goal seemed to be allowing herself to have a life outside her activism. Lee echoed this theme in describing his own strategies for maintaining his well-being:

More naps are key, and having fun, I think generally. Your job can be interesting but at a certain point too, you also have to be able to just have fun and let loose. That aspect I'm sure is probably rooted in our biology.

Since the activists' sense of commitment to their work was often so strong, many people had to make a conscious effort to allow themselves to have fun. This was a way of acknowledging that their inner well-being was an essential aspect of being a successful

activist. Making time for laughter and fun also seemed to help the participants manage the serious nature of their activist work.

Weekly breaks.

A number of people spoke of the importance of taking breaks from their activist work each week. Many people suggested taking at least one day each week off work. While this might seem obvious, many of the people I interviewed spoke of times in their careers when they worked between 60 and 90 hours a week, indicating that taking weekends off was often not a common practice. Susan explained her recent commitment to observing the Sabbath as a way that she takes a regular break each week,

[I]n two hours I'll be turning off my computer, I'll be turning off my Blackberry, I won't cook dinner tonight. I won't answer the phone tomorrow. If somebody calls I won't return the call unless I feel like I want to. It's a time that I don't do anything because I should. And I have permission to sleep in and to go for a long walk, so the rules are, if there are any rules, pray, get exercise, make love, eat food that you like, spend time doing nothing, get out into nature, those kinds of things.

Although not everyone attributed this time to a spiritual practice, many people echoed this need to have unstructured time once a week. Lisa's description of her Sunday is a time to nurture herself and be free from the schedules of her work:

I try to never work on Sundays... [M]ostly Sunday is a day with nothing fixed. I float. There's space to talk and walk, there's space to take two baths if that's what I really want to do. I like having very big unstructured windows.

Breaks from technology.

One of the other elements of taking a weekly break seemed to be taking a break from technology. With the emergence of the digital age and the ability to connect via e-mail, cell phone, instant messaging, blogging, twittering and social networking, it seemed

that disconnecting from the digital world is becoming increasingly necessary. For Susan this came from turning off her computer each week on the Sabbath, but for Karen it was a commitment to stepping out of the digital world when she realized she needed a break:

I needed to get away from the city and I needed to be able to go, “Ahhh” where there was no e-mail and phone. I do feel like in the last few years, especially with the technology the way it is and wikis and e-mails and all of these things it definitely builds up faster than it used to.

Karen’s use of the term “builds up” refers to the overstimulation that she experiences with the expectation to constantly be in communication with others through the use of technology. Both Susan and Karen mentioned the telephone as a source of stress. Lisa also described realizing that she needed a break and deciding to ignore her incoming calls, “And then I took time and I breathed and I stopped and I didn’t touch the phone”. It seemed that one of the reasons that the phone in particular caused stress was that because of the noise it makes, it has a way of interrupting and invading one’s space. While a person could choose to leave the computer turned off, there seems to be an expectation that we will always be available by phone. Deciding to turn off the phone seemed to be a way that the participants were able to regain control over their lives.

Breaks from being inside.

For some participants, taking a break was also a way of making space for physical activities and time outside, away from work. Paul spoke of getting outside and surfing as a way that he was able to take a mental break from his activism. He suggested that surfing was a good activity for him because it gave him a “physical release” from the mental work that he does all week. Commuting by bike was another physical activity that many people mentioned as providing a break in their daily schedule and an opportunity to

recharge. Cycling seemed to be a unique activity in that it fulfilled a number of different needs for the activists. It allowed them to get outside on a regular basis, it was a way of “living their activism” by demonstrating that they were not reliant on automobiles for transportation, it provided an opportunity to exercise every day, resulting in improved physical health and it allowed them to save money by reducing gas, insurance and vehicle maintenance costs. Karen described the benefits she gets from commuting to work by bike:

I cycle to work, which is a really important part of my balance every [day]. That is a physical activity for me but it's also a mental clarity activity. And it's also a chance for quiet...[When] you're taking the bus or you're driving or whatever, there's constantly things happening. But [on the bike] it's quiet. You can only hear you. You know, it's you breathing. It's you moving.

Breaks from the activist community.

While cycling provided one break from the mental work of environmental activism, many participants also expressed the need to take breaks from the activist community. Both Paul and Karen described the benefits of having friends outside of the activist community. Karen's comment expresses the intellectual benefits she receives from socializing with people who are involved in different work than her own:

Some of the other things that I like to do is also go out with people who are, maybe very different than me, who have really nothing to do with activism... Let's say one's a teacher and the other one's a librarian and another one is a arts person and being able to kind of hear that whole new realm of maybe their own type of activism that I'm not necessarily active in myself, you know, that's kind of nice.

Jill also spoke of the importance of having friends who were not environmental activists. She mentioned needing to surround herself with “people that love me for who I am, not because I'm an activist”. This comment suggests that Jill's activist community may have a narrow understanding of who she is, due to the fact that much of her work is

tied in with her activist identity. She noted that she needs the support of other friends who appreciate the multiple aspects of her personality.

While taking breaks may seem like an obvious way to avoid burnout, it became clear from speaking to the participants that there were many reasons for taking breaks and, in fact, a number of different things that activists needed breaks from. It was also interesting to note that people expressed the need to take breaks not only from activist work but also from their activist community, and from technology. In summary, taking breaks, daily, weekly and yearly was identified as being an essential element for helping environmental activists remain healthy and balanced. The participants indicated that taking breaks allowed them to enrich their lives with the other elements that were important to them. This ties into another factor that emerged in the maintenance of well-being, which was “being in alignment”.

Being in Alignment

Listening to the inner knowing.

There was a notable shift in the activists’ awareness of their inner needs between the times when they felt burned out and the times when they felt they were maintaining their well-being. When they spoke of being burned out, they discussed being unaware of their inner needs. As they took steps to improve their well-being, many activists mentioned becoming increasingly aware of their inner dialogue. Despite expressing an awareness of feeling called towards activist work, during their times of burnout, many activists expressed a tendency to ignore their body’s signals, indicating that they were doing more than they could comfortably sustain. As they became more aware of their body’s needs, a number of participants mentioned the importance of listening to their

“inner knowing” and “being in alignment” with their heart and their spirit. This seemed to require a realization that even if they were doing what they felt called to do at one time, their needs might have changed, and they mentioned it was important to stay in dialogue with their inner selves. Lisa expressed this sentiment when asked for her advice to young environmental activists:

Ultimately, stay in dialogue with your inner knowing. You’re going to know when you’re too tired, if you listen. You’re going to know when something hurts your soul, if you listen. You’re going to know when you’re compromising who you are, even for something that you care about when you’re doing it.

Kim gave similar advice for young environmental activists,

Is what you’re doing really what you’re called to do? Take a deep breath and relax into whatever it is you’re doing enough that you can really listen to other people and be kind to other people, be kind to you.

Finding work that aligns with personal strengths.

Another element of being in alignment seemed to be ensuring that the work they were doing was utilizing their individual strengths, rather than pushing them beyond their boundaries. Lee noted that one of the reasons he believes he does not burn out is that his work “perfectly matches” who he is. His comments on the warrior culture of environmental activism support this, as he noted that he feels energized by conflict rather than drained from it. Other participants expressed the realization that they did not want to fight anymore, and therefore had moved into less combative types of activism. Contrary to Lee’s affinity for conflict, Paul acknowledged the different types of advocacy and noted that he has chosen a path that suits his personality style, “I mean there’s a combative type of advocacy, I guess, which I’m glad there’s people doing that. We need people constantly doing that but that’s not my particular style”. Paul described his style

of activism, or advocacy (he used the terms interchangeably), as being about educating citizens to make positive environmental change and creating partnerships rather than fighting battles. For some participants, the realization that their work was not suited to their personality type required them to re-define their work in order to establish a work-life balance.

Redefining Work

The challenge of finding a work-life balance when one's work is one's life was expressed above. Kim suggested that if her work and her life were intertwined, she needed to re-define her work so as to allow it to encompass the many aspects of her self that are important to her.

[The way] I resist feeling guilty is by re-defining what constitutes my work. And my work is just as much about having an intimate relationship. That's important. Now it's about having time for parenting, building an interesting, supportive, loving community, getting outside, all those things. That's all part of my work.

Paul explored this idea when reflecting on the challenges of balancing work and life, "So if your work and life are totally integrated completely, is there a balance there?" Paul's question poses an interesting challenge in the discussion of personal sustainability. While one could argue that a person who has integrated their work with their life is highly balanced, I would suggest that this depends on whether the work has become the life or the life has become the work. If there is no division between work and life because one's work has subsumed one's life, this individual might lack balance; however, if an individual has found a way to define their work to include all elements of their life, as Kim described, this could indicate a high degree of balance. This need to re-define one's

work seems to suggest a need to re-define activism so that people realize the importance of nurturing the multiple aspects of themselves alongside their activist work.

Celebrating your Accomplishments

Reflecting on the progress.

The importance of celebrating accomplishments was another common theme that emerged when the participants talked about strategies for maintaining well-being. This seemed to be particularly important in environmental activist work since the problems that are being addressed are seemingly boundless in scope and therefore, it is often difficult to identify progress and successes. Lee noted that one of the ways in which he maintains his well-being is taking time to remember how far we have come.

[P]rior to Clayquot sound, the 1993 blockades, maybe I could have been the sort of guy who could have burned out, but after Clayquot, every day there was like at least three or four people blocking logging roads and the rallies were like three thousand people after putting up a hundred posters on street poles. It was such a massive, momentous upheaval. And then I watched the ripple effect of the Clayquot protests in 1994-1995. There became a whole torrent of new protected areas right across the province.

Karen also acknowledged the importance of reflecting and seeing how far we have come, although she also mentioned that it can be difficult to stay hopeful when the issues are so large. Kim made a similar point, saying that she maintains hope by knowing that things are changing. She suggested that taking a broad view of the issues helps her to realize that the work she is doing is making a difference. Jill also spoke of looking for “little sparks and little successes” and celebrating these successes.

Establishing goal posts.

Since it can be difficult to identify the successes in some issues, Lee described the importance of establishing goal posts to allow people to see how far they have progressed towards their targets. Part of celebrating the accomplishments for Lee was also the positive perspective he chooses to take when tackling large issues, “It’s inevitable in my mind that we always succeed in our bigger goals. So you’ll lose some of the battles, but the ultimate war, if you want to think of it in those terms...we are going to triumph”. Lee’s perspective leads to the fifth element in maintaining well-being which relates to a decision to trust that the work he is doing is ultimately creating positive change, and a commitment to letting go of the things he cannot control.

*Letting Go**Letting go of the outcome*

The intense passion and commitment that many activists feel towards their work can inspire them to undertake transformational projects but it can also be overwhelming and disempowering when attempting to tackle problems beyond their control. In light of this, Paul suggested that one thing environmental activists can do to maintain their well-being is to learn “not to worry about the things that they can’t control.” Others made similar points, acknowledging that it is important to set goals and work hard but also to acknowledge what is realistic and avoid the tendency to solve all the world’s problems. Jill suggested that in her view, the key to avoiding burnout is to maintain perspective on what is attainable and what is not. Having defined the boundaries of what each activist

can do, Anne suggested that one of the keys to remaining healthy was to “let go of the outcome”.

Having a sense of empowerment.

Establishing goals and boundaries can also lead to a feeling of empowerment when individuals realize that they can achieve their goals. Lee suggested that having a sense of empowerment was crucial for success. He identified the difference between passionate people and empowered people, stating that people who are empowered are much more likely to succeed, “This is fundamentally important, in fact, because there’s all sorts of passionate people but you also have to have a sense of empowerment. That’s key.”

I explored Lee’s distinction between passion and empowerment through the definitions of these terms provided by *The Oxford English Dictionary*. The term, “passion” is defined as being “a very strong emotion”. This is contrasted with the definition of “empowerment”, which includes “[having] strength and confidence” (“AskOxford.com: Oxford dictionaries,” 2009). Lee’s suggestion that empowered people are more likely to succeed could be re-worded using these definitions to read: “People who approach an issue with confidence and strength are more likely to succeed than those who approach an issue with very strong emotions”. While this point could be debated, the key idea is that empowerment, or confidence and strength, are crucial to success. Therefore, letting go and having a sense of empowerment about what can be achieved emerged as essential elements, within a collection of strategies, that the participants identified for helping environmental activists maintain their well-being.

Listening to the stories of seasoned environmental activists provided some fascinating insights into the factors that contribute to maintaining one’s well-being. The

suggestions ranged from acknowledging the body's fundamental biological needs, such as physical exercise and mental rejuvenation, to acknowledging the inner dialogue and the spiritual and emotional aspects of self and listening to messages the body is sending. By making choices that support their needs it became clear that some people may end up re-defining "work" and re-establishing their activist identity. Finally, the findings pointed to the importance of celebrating accomplishments and developing a realistic assessment of what each individual can actually accomplish.

The interviews I conducted provided some inspirational advice for other environmental activists, including lists of reasons for remaining hopeful and suggestions of books, such as Paul Hawken's *Blessed Unrest*, movies, such as *An Inconvenient Truth* and other factors that participants found to be catalysts for change. I have condensed these findings into a set of tables that can be found in Appendix D, Tables 1 and 2, noted above. These tables describe participants' experiences of burnout and practices for maintaining their well-being, respectively. Tables 3 and 4 list books and movies that many participants found inspirational and helpful in encouraging them to find more sustainable ways of working. Tables 5 and 6 explore the turning points and catalysts that helped activists shift from burnout to balance. Table 7 presents some of the reasons that participants identified as allowing them to remain hopeful. Finally, Table 8 shares the advice that these seasoned environmental activists had to offer to other activists to help them maintain their personal sustainability. I hope that readers may find inspiration in the wisdom offered by the participants and that these words may help others as they have helped me to seek new and healthier approaches to their environmental activist work.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

The previous section details the factors that contributed to burnout among the environmental activists I interviewed and strategies that these activists found helpful for maintaining their well-being. I have focused this discussion on some of the main themes relating to the research question: “How do seasoned environmental activists sustain their own well-being while carrying out their environmental activist work?” I have explored the relevance of these findings in terms of the existing literature, as well as their broader implications for research and practice. I have also included my reflections on the research methodologies I used, suggestions for how the research could be improved and recommendations for future research.

Relevance of Findings

I begin this section by locating the findings from this research in the broader context of the literature on environmental activist burnout and well-being. Thomashow (1996) suggests that environmental activists face four different types of stress. Using this as a framework, I explore the results of my research to examine the relevance of my findings in light of the existing literature. I then move on to explore some of the themes which emerged in this research by using the four worldviews that Macy (2007) suggests structure our relationship to the environment.

Thomashow's Four Types of Stress

Thomashow (1996) describes four types of stresses that environmental activists often face. As noted in the literature review, these are personal stress, organizational stress, moral stress and environmental stress. I explored these four types of stress in relation to the findings from my research.

Personal stress.

Thomashow (1996) suggests that personal stress results from the challenges of balancing work, family and recreation activities. Karen's thoughts relating to the "triple burden" that environmental activists face is an example of personal stress. She explained that environmental activists who choose to have children must take on the roles of activists, mothers and career people, which places a large degree of stress on the individual. She explains this with her comment, "I never really understood [the triple burden] until now and [I'm] kind of going, "Okay, where's my third hand?" I don't have that third hand, and so it's like constantly the juggle, something is always in the air."

Organizational stress.

Organizational stress, according to Thomashow (1996), refers to stress that results from the limited finances, tight deadlines and staffing deficiencies of many organizations that employ environmental activists. An example of organizational stress can be seen in Lisa's comment that compared the environmental sector to a type of "domestic outsourcing". This passage explains the challenges she found with balancing her desire to do environmental activist work with the stresses of working in low paying jobs with limited or nonexistent benefits- a point she makes when she states, "[W]e don't have retirement funds, we don't have pensions, we don't have good teeth".

One element of organizational stress that came up in the interviews was related to the competition and lack of compassion among colleagues in the environmental movement. Lisa's description of having to "put up" with unhealthy working conditions in order to avoid losing her job was evidence of this. Furthermore, one could argue that the activist anger that many people identified as contributing to their experience of burnout

was a result of the organizational stress felt by other activists because many of the participants I interviewed expressed frustration at having unhealthy working conditions, low pay and no benefits as a result of working in environmental organizations that were under-funded.

Environmental stress.

Environmental stress, or the stress that arises from the knowledge that the planet is in distress, was evidenced through the discussions of grief and despair that the activists expressed when reflecting on the state of the environment. Jill spoke about a “deep pain” that she feels in knowing that politicians are making “terrible” decisions, exemplifying her manifestation of environmental stress. As the Oak Bay High School student’s statement about her painting expresses (Chapter 1, p. 2), environmental stress is moving beyond the activist community and is affecting youth and adults on an emotional level.

Lee expressed environmental stress through the sense of urgency related to the environmental problems we are now facing. This urgency was identified as a factor that contributed to burnout because it resulted in feeling like the work was never complete and there was not enough time or enough resources to do what needed to be done. As Lee suggested in his advice for other activists, “Move at a brisk pace but don’t feel rushed. It’s the feeling of being rushed that creates burnout”

Moral stress.

The pressure many participants felt to answer the “calling” to work on environmental issues was an example of Moral stress, which Thomashow (1996) describes as the stress that results from needing to live a life that is accountable to the

individual's environmental values. There was a sense among participants that they felt morally obliged to work on environmental issues and that they would therefore accept exploitation and unhealthy working conditions, sometimes becoming martyrs, in order to fulfill their moral obligation to live a life of service.

Although many authors such as Brown (1997), Kovan & Dirkx (2003), Macy (2007), NicholSEN (2002) and Thomashow (1996) suggest that there is a high rate of burnout among environmental activists, I was surprised to find that although I had selected environmental activists who believed they had maintained their well-being, many of them spoke of experiences of severe burnout. Thus it seemed from the interviews that for many people their burnout was the catalyst that forced them to seek new ways of working that were more sustainable. My findings clearly demonstrated Thomashow's (1996) theory that environmental activists face a multiplicity of different stresses and that these stresses can often contribute to burnout if people are unaware of the need to develop practices that promote personal sustainability as well as environmental sustainability.

Macy's Four Worldviews

The four types of stress identified by Thomashow (1996) provide support for many of my findings relating to the factors that contribute to burnout among environmental activists. I have used the work of Macy (2007), to explore four worldviews that she argues shape people's interaction towards the environment. These worldviews are, (1) world as battlefield, (2) world as trap, (3) world as lover and (4) world as self.

World as battlefield.

The first view, world as battlefield, is described by Macy as the idea that there is an ongoing struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. She states that this is a view commonly held by politicians, but that anyone who views themselves as “constantly fighting the bad guys” (Macy, 2007, p. 20) has ascribed to this worldview.

In the interviews I conducted, the theme of “world as battlefield” emerged repeatedly in relation to the “activist as warrior” metaphor that many people mentioned. Participants’ use of the terms, *being in battle* and *fighting* and being *warriors* suggests that many of the environmental activists I interviewed held the view of the world as a battlefield, or at least had held this view at some point in their activist careers. The fact that so many people mentioned anger and fighting as being causes of burnout suggests that these participants were choosing to shift their worldview to other ways of conceptualizing their role in the environmental movement.

World as trap.

The second worldview that Macy suggests is commonly held is that of “world as trap” (Macy, 2007, p. 21). Macy describes this worldview as being one in which the individual believes that they need not immerse themselves in the struggles of the planet but rather should separate themselves from the problems of the world and ascend to a higher level. In this view “mind is seen as higher than nature, and spirit is set over and above the flesh” (Macy, 2007, p. 21). The challenge with this worldview, as Macy states, is the tendency to subordinate the body to the mind and the spirit. She suggests that this worldview creates a relationship that sees the mind and spirit as separate from the natural world and, in fact, superior to it.

This theme was clearly demonstrated in the discussions of the mind/body dualism that many participants mentioned in relation to their activist work. While they did not speak directly of “escaping” the world’s problems, there were numerous examples of situations where participants had privileged their minds over their bodies. This was evidenced by comments such as Lisa’s where she spoke of eating at her desk and being too busy to take care of her body’s fundamental needs. Furthermore, many people spoke of wanting to spend more time outdoors, and more time taking care of themselves. Lee, for example said that he would like to spend more time “eating, napping and traveling”. This statement expresses the way in which the intellectual nature of his activist work had taken precedence over some of his fundamental needs, as well as his desire to explore the world.

Some participants described physical experiences such as having children as allowing them to reconnect with their bodies and to spend more time outside. Lisa’s comment about feeling very embodied when she was a mother demonstrates this idea. Paul spoke about his son’s love of the outdoors, noting that spending time with his son encourages him to spend time outside, “The kid loves being outside, so even in the rain you go get a rain suit and go spend time outside.”

World as lover.

The third worldview Macy speaks about is “world as lover” (Macy, 2007, p. 23). Macy describes the world from this perspective as being “an essential and life-giving partner”. This theme was less apparent in my interviews than the other three themes discussed above; however, there was evidence of this perspective in the discussion of women’s compassion and empathy for the earth. In this context, the participants spoke of

taking care of the earth much like one might speak of taking care of a child. Jill's comment that "...we take on a responsibility that isn't necessarily ours" describes the way that this empathy, love and compassion became a factor that contributed to burnout as it was tied to the tendency of people to do too much. Thus, it appears that just as there is a balance in personal relationships between giving and giving oneself away, this was also true in reference to people's relationship to the environment.

World as self.

The fourth worldview that Macy (2007) describes is "world as self" (Macy, 2007, p. 27). This worldview describes a oneness that exists when individuals fall in love with the world and, in turn, fall in love with themselves. This theme forms the basis of this thesis, which is to integrate our desire to protect and care for the world with our need to protect and care for ourselves.

The "world as self" theme emerged in the interviews with reference to the need to "be in alignment". Lisa's comment below demonstrates the idea that the activists need to love themselves as they love the planet: "You're going to know when something hurts your soul, if you listen. You're going to know when you're compromising who you are, even for something that you care about when you're doing it."

For many participants the key to transitioning to a worldview that allowed them to acknowledge their own needs was to begin seeing themselves as an integral component of the planet. Lisa noted that one thing that would have helped her develop a healthier balance in her own life would have been to realize that her personal growth could co-exist with her environmental work. She stated, "I think it would have been really great to have figured out earlier that it wasn't inner development or outer change. That there

always was a place for those to meet.” This theme is summed up by the writings of Buddhist poet and philosopher Tich Nhat Hahn: “The best way to take good care of human beings so that they can be truly healthy and happy is to take care of other beings and the environment” (Hahn, 2008, p. 72).

The findings from my research supported Macy’s (2007) theory that there are four worldviews that people have, in relationship to the environment. It was evident that people who had begun to integrate their concept of the world “out there” with the world “in here” had also moved to a place of finding greater balance in their lives. The next section describes some of the implications of the findings and poses a number of questions for future research. I begin by furthering the discussion of the integral approach to environmentalism.

Implications

An Integral Approach

One of the themes that emerged in the factors contributing to the maintenance of well-being was the idea of being in alignment. The participants spoke of the need to listen to their hearts and to their inner knowing. Many people indicated that being out of alignment was demonstrated by having an unbalanced approach to work and life. As Paul mentioned, he found it difficult to know how to have a work-life balance when his work *was* his life.

Kim’s suggestion that she needed to re-define her work so that it included all of the aspects of her life is reflective of Wilber’s (1997) integral approach, which describes the need to acknowledge the interior as well as the exterior and to integrate these two paths in order to develop a more holistic understanding of the world in which we live. Thus the

integration of the self with the natural world and the mind with the body seemed to be essential elements in supporting the health and well-being of environmental activists.

Embodiment

Applying Wilber's (1997) integral approach to environmental activism, one could add that in addition to integrating the inner self with the outer world, there is also a need to integrate the mind with the body. Bringing the body into the discussion of environmental activism challenges the dualistic nature of Cartesian thought and places the body at the "center of action" as phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty suggests.

The theme of embodiment emerged numerous times in the interviews in relation to people's experiences of burnout and well-being. Many people expressed the times when they burned out as being times when they were disconnected from their bodies. Lisa's comment, "I learned not to cry no matter what was said, I learned not to feel, no matter what was said, I learned how to make the arguments from my head..." demonstrates the disembodied approach that she found herself taking in her environmental activism. This is contrasted with a time in her life when her son was young and she felt very embodied, which was also the time when she said she was the most effective at maintaining her well-being.

Therefore, I would suggest that an integral approach to environmentalism might include an integration of the self with the world and an integration of the mind with the body. Personal sustainability would therefore be understood as an integral component to environmental sustainability and the body would be treated as being equally important to the mind. In an environmental organization, this might include education and professional development opportunities to learn about ways of maintaining personal

sustainability and well-being in the workplace. Managers and leaders of organizations could also focus on modeling personal sustainability in their own lives. An awareness of embodiment might be expressed through work plans that encourage employees to participate in workshops on physical activities such as cycling, kayaking, yoga, gardening and dancing. While this may sound utopist, an integral approach to environmentalism could make for a healthier environmental movement that could sustain its success and maintain its supporters and workers into the future.

Biological/Cultural Predisposition to Environmental Activism

The idea of being “out of alignment” with one’s work was linked to the realization that some of the people involved in environmental activism were engaged in a combative type of work that was not reflective of their individual personalities. Lisa’s comment “It’s just not the way I’m wired” and Paul’s realization that being in battle was not the type of activism that worked for him, seems to suggest that some personality types may be better suited to combative environmental activist work than others. If Caiazza & Barrett (2003) are correct that women are culturally/biologically “wired” to act in more nurturing, care taking roles, and therefore have a higher level of altruism and empathy towards the environment, this brings forth a question that warrants future research: Are men better suited to the combative type of environmental activism than women? If so, what are the implications for women who are involved in this type of work? I explore these questions further in the next section.

Other issues that arose in relation to different personality types in environmental activism were the various ways in which some participants appeared to maintain balance. While some people spoke of finding balance in their lives each day, others spoke of

overextending when a project or deadline was looming and then taking time out to “recharge”. Kim suggested that the latter approach does not allow for the same level of personal growth as the former:

[A] lot of activists that I know do the latter model. They burn the candle at both ends and then they unplug and enrich themselves. And I don’t think that that is the most transformational path of self that they can take ... I don’t think you can grow a ton as a person, but I think you can maintain.

Kim’s argument suggests one interesting question for future research. “What does balance mean to different people?” It would also be interesting to explore the difference between people’s assessments of their own personal growth throughout their lives depending on which of these two models most accurately represents their work patterns. I explore additional questions for future research in the next section.

Suggestions for Future Research

Due to the evolution of my research questions through the process of conducting this research project, I have offered some initial observations relating to gender differences among environmental activists. These are not intended to be read as findings, but should be seen as suggestions to spark questions and inspire further research in the field of gender and environmental activism. I have focused on women in writing this section since the majority of my participants were women, thus many of their comments related to their gendered experiences as environmental activists. My ecofeminist theoretical framework also supports this focus on women.

Two particular areas warrant further research with respect to gender: (1) biological and/or cultural factors that supported women’s environmental activism and (2) biological and/or cultural factors that hindered women’s environmental activism. As it is beyond the

scope of this paper to enter into a debate between the roles of nature vs. nurture in shaping people's identity I have included both terms and suggest that the reader use whichever one they prefer in reading this section. I begin by detailing the biological and/or cultural factors that supported women's environmental activism.

Biological/Cultural Factors that May Support Women's Environmental Activism

It is not surprising, given the role that women often take as mothers and caregivers of children, that women might be drawn to work that requires them to utilize this caretaker role. Indeed, some of the activists I interviewed suggested that women were biologically/culturally suited to activist work echoing the findings of Caiazza & Barrett (2003). This idea pointed to an interesting relationship between the role of caretaker that caused some women to feel the need to care for or protect the environment, and the role of warrior that seemed to require the individuals to fighting battles in order to achieve their goals of environmental protection. Jill's comment describes the effect of her compassionate nature on her activist work: "It's the caretaking role that we feel. We take on responsibility that isn't necessarily ours maybe. That compassion that we feel, the empathy for the people or empathy for the earth". Her statement, "We take on a responsibility that isn't necessarily ours..." suggests that the caregiving and empathetic aspects that many women demonstrate, may cause them to take on a warrior role in order to try and protect the environment, contributing to the toxic culture of environmentalism discussed above. Since many people mentioned the challenges of being a warrior, it seemed that these caregiving aspects that many women expressed could be both an asset and a challenge to their work as environmental activists. For this reason I have also

included this theme in the next section on factors that may hinder women's environmental activism.

Jill's comment also indicates that the caretaking role and the empathy that women feel for the environment, can be of benefit to women's activist work. From the participants' responses it seemed that many of the women I interviewed entered into their work through a feeling of being called. Though this suggestion could be seen as reaffirming a dualistic framework of women as emotional and men as rational, one could view the women's feeling of "being called" to activism as a biological/cultural draw towards work that utilized their caretaking abilities. The women's responses included phrases such as "a calling", "I think we are all asked", "I just knew", "I had an epiphany", "it's just how you live" and "I came in that way". The men that I interviewed also spoke of being drawn to their work but used words such as "interest", "inclination" and "attraction" to describe their reasons for becoming involved in environmental activism. It is interesting to note, however, that the two men I interviewed, Lee and Paul, also spoke of the difficulty in distinguishing between their lives and their work. This could also be interpreted as an expression of their commitment to "answering a calling".

As a challenge to this dualistic concept of women as emotional and men as rational, it is worth noting that not all of the women I interviewed used these terms. Two women cited other factors such as their generation, experiences in nature, an attraction to the intellectual nature of activist work and a desire to engage the world as being the reasons for their involvement in environmental activism. Although the feeling of "being called" was not consistent among all of the women I interviewed, over half of them spoke of feeling drawn to activist work. While there are many men who are also inclined towards

caretaking roles, the two men I interviewed seemed to be drawn to their work for different reasons, suggesting a need for future research to explore the gender differences in the reasons for becoming involved in environmental activist work.

Women as the bearers of children tend to take on a large proportion of the tasks related to childrearing. While this can create challenges for women in maintaining their activist identities when they transition into motherhood, it can also provide an opportunity to connect with their own bodies and step back from their activist work to focus on raising their children. Lisa spoke of the years when her son was young as being some of the most rewarding and productive times in her activist work and in her personal life.

He's like a little Buddha child and always has been. So I literally felt like I have this spiritual teacher that I have constant contact with, who's totally loving, and I love to be with and I have this high-impact work. And I'm a woman. And it just felt like this enormous gift. I was so embodied. I mean, I nursed for three and a half years. I was very into being a mom and I was very into doing my work. And it was cool.

For Lisa, being a mother was an opportunity to be fully embodied, as she noted by explaining that she had breastfed for three and a half years. This was a marked transformation from her explanation of her relationship to her body during the times when she was experiencing burnout, where she spoke of ignoring her body's needs in order to allow her to focus her attention exclusively on her mental work. Karen also echoed the point that having a family had allowed her to find balance in her activist work, "I think over the last two years, particularly since I've started a family, that's really where I've started to find that groove with finding the balance". Having a child was also mentioned by one of the male participants as being helpful in allowing him to find balance. He mentioned that having a son forces him to leave work at a regular time each

day because his son goes to bed at 7:00 PM and he wants to have time to spend with him before his son goes to bed. While there is a need for future research to determine whether or not this is common among activist men in general, it was clear from the people I interviewed that the act of creating and raising a child was beneficial in helping activist women and men maintain their well-being by allowing them to reconnect with their bodies and take a break from their intellectually-focus activist work. Another interesting area for further research could be to investigate whether having children benefitted men and women equally in their lives.

A second biological/cultural factor that emerged in the interviews as being helpful for women's ability to maintain their personal sustainability was their emotional intelligence. Ann suggested that women learn from an early age how to communicate their emotions with female friends and other people. She stated that this ability to both understand their emotional experiences and share their feelings with others was essential in providing her with the support she needed during difficult times in her activism. "[G]irls have a certain sense of ability to communicate with girlfriends, right? Like I grew up talking to my girlfriends, whether it was gossip or whatever, but I learned a sense of how to talk about my emotions". She suggested that this is not necessarily the case for men. "But guys, certainly Patrick and other men in my life who I've known, don't have that same dialogue with their guy friends. They don't talk about relationships or how they're doing emotionally".

While this suggestion also runs the risk of re-affirming the male/female dualism, it does suggest that women and men may be either genetically or culturally different in their abilities to communicate with others about their emotions. This skill was identified as an

important strategy for helping the women I interviewed maintain their well-being. Six of the people I interviewed spoke of the importance of having a community of like-minded individuals, not only for the purpose of achieving goals, but also for celebrating accomplishments and providing support during challenging times. While the men I interviewed also spoke of community, they did not mention a need to discuss their emotions with other people, suggesting that whether learned or pre-determined, women and men seemed to have different abilities and or needs for communicating their emotions with others. It would be interesting to explore the effect of personal relationships and emotional intelligence on the abilities of men and women to maintain their well-being.

There were a number of elements described by participants that suggested that women were well-suited to environmental activist work. While their caregiving roles, their compassion and empathy may have drawn them to their work, their ability to communicate with others and share their emotions seemed to provide them with a means of processing challenges as they arose. In addition, a woman's role in growing, giving birth to and raising children seemed to provide an opportunity to break from their often intellectually-focused activist work to re-connect with their bodies. Since expressing their emotions was identified as being an important aspect in maintaining well-being, this elucidates the internal conflict some women experienced when feeling the need to "amputate" their emotional responses in order to work in the warrior culture of environmental activism. While there appeared to be some potential reasons for women's predisposition to environmental activism, there were also a number of factors that seemed to provide challenges to women involved in this field.

Biological/Cultural Factors that may Hinder Women's Environmental Activism

The examples above describe some opportunities for future research to explore the ways in which women's caretaker tendencies may make them well-suited to environmental activism. However, as Jill's comment, "We take on responsibility that isn't necessarily ours ..." implies, this empathy, compassion and desire to care for the planet can also create challenges for female environmental activists. One of the ways that this may be most prominently felt is in relation to experiences of environmental despair that Macy (2007) describes. With the tendency towards compassion and an acute awareness of their emotions as expressed by the women I interviewed, as noted in the previous section, women may be more likely to experience environmental despair than men, though more research is needed to provide adequate support for this assertion. Jill, for example, spoke of the pain of watching the politicians make decisions that she knew were damaging the planet, "And you talk about the grief, it's that deep pain that knowing that the decisions that they're making are terrible. I think that might well be true right across the board and in activism as well". Jill also spoke of the difficulty in working in a group of people when their anger and pain were not being addressed. She noted that in her opinion, these emotions build up over time and "wreak havoc" on the individual.

Kim explained that in her experience, acknowledging and processing pain was an important aspect of her personal development, " So I think a lot of people actually try to do a bypass. Like they get overwhelmed with information and they don't spend time actually feeling any of it". The challenge for women involved in environmental activism seemed to be taking the time and making use of the support structures they had developed to allow themselves to experience the pain and grief that they may feel and work through

these emotions in order to remain healthy as individuals and effective as caretakers and activists. Future research is needed, however, to explore this idea more thoroughly.

Another aspect of environmental activism that appeared to be difficult for many of the women I interviewed (as well as one of the men) was the confrontational environment of some activist work. Many of the activists I interviewed likened their work to being warriors engaged in an ongoing battle. In the section that discusses the culture of environmental activism, Lisa described, in depth, her experience of being a warrior in her activist work and the challenges she faced with this role. Lisa continued, noting that she believed the warrior role was very difficult for women to sustain,

I really think that I was a warrior for a long time. And I'm actually working very much right now on not using that language and stepping out of that model and actually moving to a place where my work is done from a devotional place. A softer, actually embodied, feminine place, where it's about, "How do I really open my heart in this work? How do I do what it is that I'm doing from a place of compassion and a place of openness and invitation, as opposed to dogmatism and judgment and discernment and fight?"

She continued, describing that she felt the warrior role was unsustainable for men but even less sustainable for women, "And if it's unsustainable for men, which I think it is, it's highly, remarkably unsustainable when you're in a feminine body. It's not the way I'm wired". Her quote in the section on the culture of environmental activism adds to this idea. She describes learning not to cry, not to feel, and to make arguments from her head rather than her heart. Part of the problem that Lisa described was western culture's neglect of the warrior's need to be celebrated and nursed back to health after a fight. Lisa argued that the environmental activist movement could be strengthened if it came from a "softer, embodied feminine place" where the accomplishments of the warriors were

celebrated and the warriors were shown society's gratitude for the work they were doing, rather than being mocked and ridiculed.

The men that I interviewed expressed differing perspectives relating to the warrior culture of environmental activism. As described above, Lee spoke of enjoying the conflict and getting energy from it, whereas Paul suggested that there was a need for a combative type of advocacy but noted that this was not his particular style. So, while it is difficult to say whether there was a general theme related to women's or men's compatibility with a warrior approach to environmental activism, there was a general acknowledgement that the combative, arguably masculinist approach of being in battle and fighting contributed to burnout for a large number of people. Another area of future research could be to explore the masculinist culture of environmental activism.

Karen, Lisa and Paul identified having children as being one of the factors that helped them to find a balance between their activist work and the other aspects of their lives. There was, however, a challenge presented in relation to having children, which Karen defined as the triple burden. This refers to the difficulty she experienced in juggling the demands of work, family and activism. While some participants stated that their activism was contained to their workweek, other participants described their activism as accounting for a significant amount of time outside their regular work. Karen expressed that it was only after having a child that she realized the magnitude of the challenge women face when balancing activism with work and family life.

...[I]t is the whole idea of being a mom, and a career person and a volunteer. That I think is a very interesting connection and I never had appreciation for before I became a mom because really, truly, mothers do keep the day to day world together, but it is the whole dichotomy, I guess, that comes when either you're a mom or a career person, that double thing that most women are now at least facing.

It's almost like there is a third level now put into it. Are you a mom, a career person and an activist? And how do you fit all three of those?

It is possible that many of the issues that Karen spoke of may be shared by men in families where they are the primary caregivers of the children and are also working to balance their activist work with their careers and their roles as fathers. While more research is needed to explore the gendered relationship between environmental activism and personal sustainability or well-being, it was evident from the stories of the seven women I interviewed that while women were in some ways well-suited to environmental activism, there were also numerous factors that challenged their ability to balance their well-being with their activist work.

Future research is also needed to explore questions relating to balance and the activist culture, as noted above. New research projects in this field would be strengthened by interviewing more men, as this would allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the gender differences between environmental activists. Future studies could also employ different research methodologies such as case study or participant observation. Broadening the sample to study people from a larger geographical base would also be useful, as it would include a greater number of participants from different ethnic backgrounds, abilities, ages and sexual orientations. As a preliminary study, however, this project was successful in identifying the signs of burnout, strategies for working through burnout and ways of maintaining personal sustainability in the environmental activist community.

Relevance

Shocking environmental narratives continue to permeate our conscience through stories in the news, discussions with friends, government policies and human-induced changes to the face of the earth. As the global environmental crisis continues to deepen, it may become increasingly challenging to remain hopeful and healthy as individuals. The emergence of the “green economy” in recent years, however, is one reason to be optimistic. Indeed, the labour market for many environmental jobs is projected to expand (City Green Solutions, 2009)

The combination of increasing environmental challenges and a growing community of environmental workers and activists illustrates the necessity for further research to explore the intricate connection between personal and environmental health. In order to ensure that the environmental movement is, itself sustainable, it is essential to focus attention on the individuals who are working within this movement. This points to a need to shift our paradigm surrounding sustainability so that we may begin to realize the importance of personal sustainability as an integral component of environmental health.

Reflections on the Research Process

Phenomenology

While it played a relatively minor role in my actual research process, I found the experience of using a phenomenological framework useful in that it allowed me to focus my investigation on the body and to explore the lived experiences of environmental activists. The questions were structured to allow participants to speak specifically about experiences rather than asking them to think about or analyze situations. I found that this introduced a narrative quality to the interviews, which encouraged participants to tell

stories and share personal learnings from these times. As a result of the narrative quality of the interviews, I used many quotes in the findings and discussion chapters, which allowed me to convey the lived experiences of the participants to the audience. The positive questioning that resulted from my use of an Appreciative Inquiry research framework may also have strengthened these narratives.

Appreciative Inquiry

Reflecting on the process of using Appreciative Inquiry as a research methodology, I found the positive questioning useful in providing an environment in which participants were able to openly share their experiences. Reed (2006) suggests that positive questioning used in Appreciative Inquiry research has the benefit of allowing participants to talk in an unrestricted way. Whether it was the therapeutic aspect of positive questioning that allowed people to open up or simply the experience of being asked to tell their story, many participants noted that they found the interview process to be beneficial. Some of the comments were:

- “Thank you for the questions.”
- “It was a good process.”
- “It’s a privilege to be able to think this through and I thank you for giving me the opportunity.”
- “I’m really honored that you spent the time listening to me talk for an hour, I mean how often does that happen?”
- “I’m going to go home and think about some of these things.”

Given that some of the questions dealt with emotional issues it was encouraging to see that the participants appreciated the opportunity to reflect on these personal experiences. Perhaps because Appreciative Inquiry is both a research method and an organizational development technique, the interview experience was thought provoking

and gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their own lives and vocalize their plans for continuing to improve their own well-being.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory, which focuses on the emergence of theory rather than the forcing of data, was a useful way of investigating the research question. I found that the analysis unfolded as I went and that each stage deepened my understanding of the data. It was useful to combine a question-by-question analysis with an overall analysis as it allowed me to affirm my findings and contextualize the information. I appreciated the process of letting the theory unfold from the data because it encouraged me to approach the information with inquisitiveness, rather than a desire to affirm my hunches or prove my hypotheses.

Analyzing the data using grounded theory allowed my inquisitiveness to emerge as I read and re-read the transcripts, condensing themes, drawing out quotes and distilling findings. I enjoyed the process of taking memos and watching the theory emerge and deepen as I became more familiar with the transcripts. While there could be many interpretations of this research, and other researchers using grounded theory might draw vastly different conclusions, my analysis was useful in my own personal journey, and I hope the findings may also be useful to other people who are beginning to explore the personal dimension of sustainability.

Conclusion

O'Brien (2008) acknowledges the challenge of defending her work with positive psychology and happiness studies in the midst of the global climate crisis. Some might also question the relevance of a study on personal sustainability and well-being in the

field of environmental education when environmental issues seem to be increasing in urgency and demanding new and innovative approaches in environmental education and communication. My intention in undertaking this research project has been to bring ‘the body’ into the academic discourse by positioning it as “the center for action” in my investigation of the ways in which seasoned environmental activists maintain their well-being. While this thesis takes a different perspective than many research projects in the environmental education field, I believe that this work may help to address a significant lack of inquiry into personal health and sustainability in the environmental community. In order to be effective as communicators and educators, we must also be healthy as individuals, and in order to build hope and happiness, I believe, we must also build health. O’Brien notes that “Researchers have demonstrated that an individual’s subjective experience of happiness corresponds with numerous positive health outcomes.” Thus, there seems to be an intricate relationship between health, happiness and personal sustainability and well-being. As Jill noted, “I think the more connected you are, the more all the parts are connected, then the healthier you will be.”

While the stories of the participants in this study indicate that the culture of environmental activism has not traditionally supported health and well-being, many participants also suggested that there was a change occurring in the activist culture, in which people were beginning to recognize the importance of personal development within the field of environmental activism. Whereas Kim noted that in previous years there would have been little support for personal development work, there is now a growing awareness of the importance of recognizing the multiple aspects of the self and an unfolding awareness of the need to integrate personal health practices into one’s

environmental work. This awareness does appear to be growing, which is evidenced by an increasing number of workshops and conferences that are now being offered to people who work in environmental professions.

In May of 2009 I attended The International Eco-Conference in Calgary, Alberta. The purpose of this conference was to bring together people working in the healing professions, such as counseling and therapy, with people working in the environmental field. During a keynote address with Joanna Macy, participants were asked how they kept their spirits up while doing their environmental work. I recorded their answers and have listed them below as I believe they not only re-enforce the findings of my study but also reflect a growing awareness of the importance of inner work. Their responses demonstrate their unceasing hope, commitment, passion and love for the work that they are doing as well as a love and appreciation for themselves:

- “Knowing that I don’t have to take the whole thing on myself”
- “Slowing up and taking the time to connect with nature every day”
- “My best therapy is my dog”
- “Making things for myself... It feels good not to have to buy”
- “Letting go of judgment... It’s the way to burn out”
- “For me it’s dancing and celebrating the joy and hope we create”
- “Experiencing children who are critical thinkers”
- “Not giving up when discouraged”
- “You always make a difference when you move in the direction of goodness”
- “Having a community of peers to lean on when times are tough”
- “Staying in touch with nature and planting and growing food”
- “Riding my bicycle every day, everywhere I go. I see so many amazing things when I go slow through the world”
- “Getting old gracefully”
- “Dances of universal peace, meditating and stroking my cat”
- “I try to have spontaneous conversations with perfect strangers. It’s just [a way of] getting the conversations going”
- “One of the things for me is making music and listening to music”
- “Seeking guidance from all those forms [of life] that aren’t visible”
- “Connecting people in groups... when they need to be connected”
- “Going on canoe trips”

“Being shameless”

“Eat food, mostly vegetables, not too much”

“What I get support from is all the people”

“This is tough work but we’re doing it together” (Participants, 2009)

Epilogue: My Journey Continues

Undertaking this research project was, in part, a meta-cognitive journey to explore the roots of my own un-sustainability as an environmental activist. As I described in the background section, I was drawn to this project from a personal realization that my life exemplified a paradox of un-sustainability which I saw reflected in many people working in the environmental movement. I realized that part of the challenge for me in delving into this research would be to use the wisdom that I gained to help me maintain my own well-being through the journey of writing this thesis.

When I started the process of submitting my thesis proposal and began my thesis work I had just transitioned out of working as an energy advisor where I was essentially self-employed and had reduced my schedule to three days a week, to working a full-time job with the BC Provincial Government. Concurrently, I had moved out of my studio apartment where I had lived for the past three years and into an apartment with my partner Nick, who I had started dating 5 months earlier.

The first months following this transition in September 2008 were quite challenging for me, as I struggled to find a balance between a new relationship, new job and an unfolding thesis. I began to feel tired and unhealthy, which was expressed in a series of colds and flu viruses that lasted from September until February. My sleep was beginning to be affected and I found myself waking in the night and being unable to fall back asleep. I was feeling emotionally unstable and physically exhausted. I realized that this was an opportunity for me to explore some of the pieces of wisdom that I had gained through the research process.

The turning point for me came when I was sitting in a meeting at work one Monday morning and realized that I was not paying attention and I did not care about what was being discussed. I saw that I was succumbing to the challenges of balancing work and life and I was not maintaining my own well-being. I realized that I needed to find a way to regain my balance and personal sustainability. I spoke to my supervisor at work and described my situation. I asked to take a week off to rest, work on my thesis and reflect on what I needed to change in my life in order to maintain my personal sustainability as I continued to work on this research project.

I spent a week working on my thesis and resting, though I realized during this time that I was more fatigued than I had initially realized, and I needed more than one week off if I intended to finish my thesis and stay healthy in the process. I asked to change my schedule to three days a week and to take two more one-week periods off work over the next two months to allow me to focus on writing. My supervisor and co-workers were supportive of this decision and starting April 1st, 2009, I began a new schedule. One of my goals in making this change was to take time for myself as I began writing this thesis. I realized that my previous schedule of two days off each week gave me only enough time to work on my thesis and prepare for the next week. It did not allow me to nurture the other aspects of my being, such as my physical needs, my desire to spend time in nature, to adventure, and to spend time with my partner and my friends. My new schedule allowed me to work two to three days a week on school and still have one or two days for myself. This was an essential element in helping me maintain my health during the thesis writing process.

One of the themes that emerged in the interviews that I found especially compelling was the idea of spending one full day each week without any technology. This meant no e-mail, no Internet, no phones, no TV, no movies, and no computers. My partner and I began taking a full day off each week without technology. We were surprised to discover that we felt somewhat lost at first when we shut everything down, but we later found ourselves exploring nature together, reading for pleasure, and connecting with each other on a deeper level. We realized that “unplugging” from our digital world, even for a short period of time, left us feeling re-invigorated and allowed us to start the next week with increased clarity and balance.

I also realized that in the many years of being a student, I had successfully managed to eliminate aspects of my life that I deemed as non-essential, such as art, outdoor recreation and social time with friends. Thus, part of seeking this new balance was making a conscious effort to regularly spend time exploring these other aspects of myself. I found myself singing out loud for the first time in my life, drawing again after many years, journaling, snorkeling, mountain biking, exploring islands I had not seen before and spending much more time with friends. I have my partner, Nick, to thank, in part, for this transformation because he encouraged me to take breaks, to make time for new adventures and to explore the many non-academic aspects of my self.

With my shortened workweek and some additional time off, I decided to leave my home office and find some quiet retreats in which to write. One week found me in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta where I stayed with a friend and wrote while looking out over the snow-dusted peaks. Two long weekends took me to Gabriola Island, where I stayed with another friend and wrote on the deck in the dappled sun of her wooded

acreage. These trips combined my need to be outside with my desire to strengthen friendships and to have some time away from the demands of my city life. They gave me space to be alone with my thoughts and time to focus on the process of writing this thesis.

While I still have sleepless nights, emotional days, and feelings of burnout I have taken pieces of wisdom from the interviews with the environmental activists that participated in this study. I am learning about my own cycles of balance and imbalance, but I am also learning the importance of living a full life and allowing myself to find joy amidst the challenges and despair surrounding much of the work that we do. Through this process, I have emerged from my academic cave and have begun to face the world as a whole being, realizing that as one participant put it, “if you’re not full and whole and solid physically and emotionally and spiritually, you give less well.” As my journey continues to unfold, I want to continue to give to the outer world by using my passion and ideas to help bring about positive change, but I want to also give equally to my inner self, deepening my connection to the world around me, my community, my physical body, and my spirit, and to broaden my definition of my work to include the many aspects of myself that I have begun discovering.

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Appendix A

Invitation E-mail

This invitation e-mail was sent out to 49 people in my personal e-mail list as part of the snowball sampling method used in my data collection.

Dear friends, family and colleagues,

As many of you know I am working on my Masters of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication at Royal Roads University. My research is focused on gaining a deeper understanding of environmental activists, burnout and personal sustainability.

I am looking to interview seasoned environmental activists who have been identified by their friends or colleagues as being successful in maintaining their own well-being while remaining committed to their activist work. I have defined seasoned environmental activists as people who have been actively trying to change a culture that is already established for at least ten years.

I know that everyone experiences ups and downs and that there is probably no one who has been completely healthy and balanced throughout their careers but I am looking for people who seem to have found a generally healthy balance between activism and their personal health and well-being.

A request for support

Please take a moment to think about people you know in the environmental activist community and, if you choose, send me the names and contact information of anyone that you think might be a good candidate for this research. Feel free to suggest more than one person or even yourself.

You can also forward this message to people that fit this description and have them respond directly to me if they are interested in participating. If you do this, please indicate in the body of the e-mail that you think they would be a good candidate and that they should reply to me at joy.beauchamp@royalroads.ca or (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

This is an entirely voluntary process. All names and personal information will be kept strictly confidential. Information I obtain from my interviews will be used only for the purpose of this research. I will send prospective participants a letter of invitation that clearly outlines the voluntary nature of participation in the research, the details of the research project and the confidentiality of their personal information. I will only proceed with the research if I received their informed consent.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this research project. If you would like to speak to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Elin Kelsey, you can reach her by phone: (831)-333-6730 or e-mail: elin@elinkelseyandcompany.com.

Joy Beauchamp
Masters of Environmental Education and Communications Candidate
Royal Roads University
joy.beauchamp@community.royalroads.ca

Appendix B

Letter of Informed Consent

This letter of informed consent was provided to each of the nine participants that expressed an interest in participating in this study. All participants signed this letter of informed consent prior to beginning the interview.

Date _____

Dear _____,

You are invited to participate in an interview with Royal Roads University Masters student Joy Beauchamp (the researcher). The interview will last approximately one hour and will be used in completing a Masters thesis, a requirement for fulfillment of the Masters of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication at Royal Roads University (RRU). You may contact the supervisor for this project, Dr. Elin Kelsey by phone: (831)-333-6730 or e-mail: elin@elinkelseyandcompany.com for more information about this project. Richard Kool is the Academic Lead of the MEEC program and can confirm my enrolment at Royal Roads University. He can be reached by telephone at (250) 391-2523.

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which some seasoned environmental activists maintain personal well-being while remaining committed to their work in environmental activism. Your responses will be audio-taped (given your permission) and the researcher may take written notes as you are speaking. If you do not wish to be audio taped, your answers will be recorded by the researcher in note format.

Some of the questions in this study deal with personal issues such as your emotional well-being including any experiences of depression and burnout. If you are not comfortable participating, you may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without consequence. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Quotes or excerpts from this interview may be used by the researcher (named above) in writing a Masters thesis as a requirement for the Masters of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication at RRU. The Masters thesis that results from this research will be provided to you upon requests after the research project is completed. Any notes or tape-recorded material will remain anonymous and confidential. A pseudonym will be used to identify you in any communication or reference, either written or verbal. Code numbers will be used to identify the results obtained from your interview in order to protect your confidentiality. The information obtained from this study, including written

notes, transcripts, audiotapes and computer files will be stored in a locked cabinet. Information relating to this interview will be archived after October 1st, 2009. Only I will have access to this information. You choose to withdraw without completing the interview, any notes or audiotapes taken will be destroyed immediately.

By signing this form, I am giving my informed consent to participate in an interview that will last approximately one hour.

Informant Name

Date

Researcher Name

Date

I give my permission to be audio taped during this interview (initials) _____

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

This interview schedule was used in the semi-structured interviews with nine environmental activists.

Interview Questions

Opening questions

1. I have defined environmental activists as people who have been working to change a culture that is already established. With that definition in mind, what type of environmental activist work do you do?
2. What do you think drew you to this line of work?
3. How long have you been involved in environmental activism?
4. How many hours do you usually spend doing activist work each week? Keep in mind that in this context, activist work is any work related to bringing about environmental change.
 - a. Do you feel like that gives you enough time for the other things you want to do in life?
5. One of the reasons you were invited to be part of this study is that you were nominated as someone who has managed to sustain their own well-being while carrying out your activist work. Do you think you fit this description?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. Can you think of any other environmental activists who may approach their work in a different way from you but who you would say are able to maintain a healthy activist work-life balance?

Questions about the topic

1. Have you ever gone through a time when you felt burned out or particularly unhealthy as a result of your environmental activist work?
 - a. What was that like for you?
 - b. Can you identify a specific incident or time when you began to feel more balanced or more positive?
 - c. How did this positive shift occur?
 - d. Do you think you could have come to this place of balance without experiencing burnout or feeling unhealthy?
 - e. Do you continue to experience episodes of burnout and balance?
 - f. What is the nature of the relationship between these two states for you?
2. Can you give an example of a time in your environmental activist work when you felt like you were the most successful at maintaining your well-being?

- a. What were the elements that made this experience stand out in your mind?
3. There is a general assumption that environmental activism causes or leads to burnout. Do you think this is true?
 - a. Why or why not?
4. What gives you the support you need to help you through difficult times in your environmental activism?
 - a. Is there anything that you regularly do to sustain your personal well-being?
5. Tell me about something that keeps you hopeful when you are confronted with upsetting information about the state of the environment.

Concluding questions

1. How do you envision your environmental activism changing or developing in the future?
2. Do you have personal goals for improving your emotional, mental or physical health?
3. What advice would you give to young environmental activists to help them maintain their own well-being?
4. Was there anything that came up for you during this interview that you want to explore further?

Appendix D

Compilation of Tables

This appendix is a compilation of tables that summarize some of the thought provoking findings from the interviews including personal experiences of burnout, suggestions for maintaining well-being, catalysts for change, reasons for remaining hopeful and advice to other activists.

Experiences of Burnout
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cranky • Irritable • Grumpy • Unable to deal with difficult people • Apathetic • Nervous • Anxious • Overwhelmed • Emotionally exhausted • Nervous breakdown • “Shell shocked” • Disconnected from emotions • Difficulty sleeping • Exhausted • Unable to eat • Weight loss • Drinking more than usual • Depressed • Despair • Guilty • Angry at oneself • Disappointed with themselves • Toxic • Isolated • Betrayed • Neglecting their feminine sides • “Out of alignment” with their body’s needs • Unable to concentrate • Unhappy • Overwhelmed • Desire to withdraw from projects and activities

Table 1: Participants’ experiences of burnout

Participants' Practices for Maintaining Well-being	
Process or Activity	Examples⁷
Physical activity	Bike riding, surfing, dancing, hiking, aerobics, sit-ups, push-ups, yoga
Creativity	Playing music, cooking, doing art projects
Spirituality	Meditation, Buddhist practice, yoga, going to Church, spending time in nature,
Spending time outside	Hiking, surfing, bike riding, walking, gardening, learning about nature
Eating well	Lots of vegetables, organic, local food, eliminating excess sugars, alcohol, and fats
Sharing experiences and challenges with others	Seeing a counselor or therapist, talking with friends, family or partners, seeing a personal coach
Sleeping well	Getting enough sleep, getting good quality sleep
Time to reflect	Meditation, journaling being alone, spending time outdoors
Having fun	Spending time with friends, playing games, learning new hobbies, reading, watching movies
Taking breaks	Spending time outside, taking at least one day off each week, spending time with people who are not involved in activism, going on holidays, reflecting, engaging in a spiritual practicing
Setting boundaries	Learning when to say "no", knowing when to take breaks

Table 2: Participants' practices for maintaining well-being

⁷ Some of the examples in the table occur in more than one place due to the challenge of separating actions into discrete categories.

Books that Inspired Change for Participants	
Title	Author
Silent Spring	Rachel Carson
The Weather Makers	Tim Flannery
How to Change the World: Social entrepreneurs and the power of new ideas	David Bornstein
Blessed Unrest: How the largest movement in the world came into being, and why no one saw it coming	Paul Hawken
To Hear the Angels Sing: An odyssey of co-creation with the devic kingdom	Dorothy Maclean
The Four-Fold Way: Walking the paths of the warrior, teacher, healer and visionary	Angeles Arrien
Integral Life Practice: A 21 st Century blueprint for physical health, emotional balance, mental clarity and spiritual awakening	Ken Wilber

Table 3: Books that inspired change for participants

Movies that inspired change for Participants	
Title	Director
An Inconvenient Truth	Davis Guggenheim
If You Love this Planet	Terre Nash
From New Age to New Edge	Bill Weaver
The Milagro Beanfield War	Robert Redford
Testament	Lynne Littman
Veer	Greg Fredette

Table 4: Movies that inspired change for participants

Participants' Turning Points in Recovering from Burnout and Finding Balance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having children • Having employees or friends point out their imbalance • Remembering their body: realizing that they were operating in their minds and neglecting their body's needs • Reading influential books • Realizing that they had "hit bottom" • Having suicidal thoughts • Taking a break: getting out of the city and into nature • Realizing that they were not being productive at work

Table 5: Participants' turning points in recovering from burnout and finding balance

Participants' Catalysts for Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of spirituality and its role in fostering happiness • Making their body's needs the priority (exercising, therapy, creativity, sleeping, eating healthy food, having massages, hiking) • Shifting their perspective of the world from the negative to the positive • Learning the importance in being aligned with spirit • Asking for help • Talk therapy and support from friends • Letting go of the "activist" identity • Realizing that they don't have to be in charge all the time

Table 6: Participants' catalysts for change

Participants' Reasons for Remaining Hopeful
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The young people in the environmental movement • Barrack Obama • Stories of people returning to their higher aspirations • Writing and reading poems • Spiritual faith that everything has meaning and a connection to the divine • Celebrating their accomplishments • Looking at the bigger picture: marking successes and watching the growth of the environmental movement • Knowing that there are like-minded people working with them on these issues • Maintaining a positive outlook • Knowledge that the momentum is growing • Seeing kids in nature excited about things • Allowing themselves to experience pain and despair before grasping for hope

Table 7: Participants' reasons for remaining hopeful

Participants' Advice to Help Other Activists Maintain their Well-being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat well: lots of vegetables and fruits, limit fat and sugar intake • Exercise regularly • Eat at home • Listen to your heart and your body • Don't lose yourself in your work • Love yourself • Love what you do • Avoid feeling burdened by a sense of urgency • Let go of your attachment to the outcome of your work • Be the change you want to see in the world • Stay well-rounded: develop outside interests and don't give everything up for the activism • Maintain your connection with your spiritual, mental and emotional being: Explore the gifts of the spirit, not just the gifts of the mind • Maintain friendships with friends, family and lovers • Stay positive and know that you can create change • Know that although it may be difficult, you will succeed • Reach out to a lot more people • Know what recharges you and do those things • Find out what you're passionate about. You will be more creative when you're doing what you're passionate about • Find outlets outside of work to provide a mental break • Keep in mind why you are doing the work: get clear on your purpose • Find out what your triggers are and be conscious of these things • Do your own inner work: therapy, journaling, self analysis, meditation etc. • Listen and learn from other people: go to conferences, talk with friends, support each other • Find a mentor • Don't reinvent the wheel

Table 8: Participants' advice to help other activists maintain their well-being