WALKING THE WALK:
ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTALISM AND VIEWS OF THE WORLD

By

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ABSTRACT

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The health of the natural environment is critical to life on earth. Over the years, we have grown increasingly aware of the damaging consequences of human actions on the environment. As a result, many scientists, educators, and activists have proposed the need for a shift in the way we view the natural environment and our relationship to it in order to initiate changes in the way we treat the environment.

To determine the general public's perspective, research has involved the assessment of people's ecological knowledge, attitude, and behavior. Findings indicate that much of the American public express pro-environmental values. However, in most cases, people do not exhibit pro-environmental behavior, raising questions about the discrepancy between attitudes and behavior.

Yet, there are those who not only engage in pro-environmental behaviors but lead a lifestyle consistent with their environmental ethic. Little is known about their perceptions regarding the environment and what has led them to such dedication. This study explores the beliefs and influences that guide the behavior of active environmentalists. Findings indicate that a variety of factors work together to fuel a passion for the environment. Chief among these are the internal factors of morality, self-knowledge, and self-confidence, which appear not only to influence one's actions and dedication to the environment but also active participation in community life, as well.

To those who went before me: grandparents I've known –
Elsie Suffron and Ken and Frances Runciman –
and one I never met – Raymond Suffron, and my parents –
John and Kay Suffron. I love and admire you.

To all those who, despite the pendulum swing
of powerful politics and the seductive forces of
consumerism, still believe in the importance of
a vibrant, healthy, sustainable lifestyle on a
vibrant, healthy, priceless earth.

And to the active environmentalists in this study.
Thank you for shining your light.

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They each touched my life and will remain inspirations to me as I seek my own path. I hope I have done some justice to their voices. Thank you!

PREFACE

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us."
- Aldo Leopold

Few things are as fraught with obstacles as the environmental cause. Nearly everything about it – from the enormity and still-unfolding complexity of the natural world to the number and disparity among stakeholders (every living thing on the planet) to the very definition of the *environment* itself – makes for tremendously confusing and contentious struggles.

Yet, with its fragile resilience, this combination of elements and vapors helps sustain life on planet earth. We exist because it exists. Indeed, few things deserve our attention as much as the natural environment, and yet it seems that so many other things occupy our minds and efforts. How often do we truly feel the wind in our hair and the sun on our face? How often do we take a deep breath and taste the tingling oxygen as it enters our bodies? How often do we dance in the summer rain or hear the robin's song? How often do we feel – really feel – alive?

On a daily basis, we juggle multiple responsibilities and demands on our time from work, school, and family life and are bombarded by a plethora of technological advances that boast nearly limitless entertainment and "connectivity." Good things, perhaps, but with potentially damaging side effects, as well. We may, in fact, be losing a more grounded and real connection to ourselves, others, and the environment around us. We may neglect to feed our soul. We have learned how to ignore this void so well we hardly know it exists at all until we take a moment to reflect. Scared and overwhelmed, we grasp at other distractions until we feel better – back to skimming the surface, comfortably numb. Perhaps we have grown so good at this existence that we have forgotten how to really live. I wonder, do we sell life short? Do we sell ourselves short? In our frantic daily lives, do we take the time to question our place in the world? Do we wonder whether or not we are helping to make the world a better place?

This disconnect is dangerous and may allow us to subscribe to powerful cultural assumptions that we are superior to other living things – both as human beings and as members

of our society. With little appreciation for our role in the balance of nature, we think only of the short-term benefits gained by manipulating nature and exploiting the earth's natural resources. Why? Because as Aldo Leopold (1966) and Daniel Quinn (1992) point out, we believe the world belongs to us, and therefore, is very literally ours for the taking.

We have already begun to see the results of our alienation and arrogance. While some may debate the extent of environmental degradation, there is little argument that both the conscious and unconscious human footprint of environmental damage is significant. Furthermore, it has become increasingly evident that people view the natural environment, our role as humans within the environment, and our individual and collective responsibility to care for the environment in very different ways. These conflicts are often politicized and reveal the strength of deeply-held ideologies (Thompson, Gonzalez, 1997). In many ways, this is not a new debate. Arguments over the merits of preservation versus conservation have long suggested that people interpret stewardship differently.

Because of continued environmental harm, many have argued the need for some sort of paradigm shift in the way we typically view and treat the natural environment (Capra, 1996; Beatley, Manning, 1997; Leopold, 1966; Maloney, Ward, 1973). However, even those who believe the argument is valid and want to help turn the tide face a daunting challenge, as numerous obstacles exist to behaving in environmentally-sustainable ways (Gladwin, Newburry, Reiskin, 1997).

Nonetheless, there are people who manage to exhibit pro-environmental behavior beyond taking aluminum cans to the market for a refund or holding membership in an environmental organization. There are those who make lifestyle choices based on their understanding of the environment. Who are these people? Why have they chosen such dedicated stewardship? What can we learn from their stories? And how might this help us connect with others so that the natural world is appreciated and protected for the beautiful and life-giving source that it is?

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Introduction: One Earth

"The ecological crisis is a crisis of maladaptive behavior."
- Maloney and Ward (1973)

Background to the Study

Mention the word *environment*, and it probably conjures up as many definitions as there are people in any given room, providing a glimpse of the enormity and complexity involved in trying to discuss – let alone reach consensus on – caring for the environment. And that is just with the hypothetical group of people "at the table." There are, of course, the flora and fauna of the planet to consider, as well.

I begin this study with the understanding that the international scientific community is continually engaged in research involving the natural world, frequently bringing new knowledge to bear, and that there is widespread agreement that the human impact of centuries of consumption and degradation have contributed to significant environmental damage.

The history of environmental concern on small scales and in isolated pockets dates back many centuries. Greater general consciousness of the effects of human harm can probably be attributed to specific instances, events, or policies that resulted in obvious public or wildlife health scares – for example, the nuclear meltdown at Three-Mile Island or the excessive, sanctioned use of DDT in cities and communities throughout America painstakingly researched and brought to light by Rachel Carson in the 1960s.

National awareness has increased since then, as researchers continue to shed light on the complexities and connectedness of nature, and politicians and other high-profile celebrities and dignitaries take up the torch on the world stage. Today, the fact that there are organizations numbering in the thousands, and operating at the local, state, regional, national, and international levels, with some kind of environmental focus is evidence of both great stewardship and significant harm.

The development of environmental concern on a grand scale has had a unique and rocky evolution and one that, due to the "nature" of the environment and its complexities, as well as the importance of the human relationship to the environment, necessitates interdisciplinary approaches that address both the science of nature and that of human behavior as well.

It was 1973 when Maloney and Ward criticized the research efforts of their day and called for a change in the way environmental problems were perceived. They argued that "the solution to such a problem does not lie in traditional technological approaches but rather in the alteration of human behavior" (583). They concluded that we need to turn to the people to gain a better understanding of their behaviors. We need to find out what people know, think, and feel about ecology, the environment, and pollution. "These are the necessary antecedent steps that must be made before an attempt can be made to modify critically relevant behaviors" (584). To that end, they developed a scale that measured ecological knowledge, affect, and behavioral commitment. Since then, their scale has been used in multiple studies and adapted for many more, and research has focused primarily on assessing these variables in different situations and looking for possible patterns (Borden & Schettino, 1979; Maloney, Ward, & Braucht, 1975; Shean & Shei, 1995).

With little consensus, studies have also attempted to determine the role socio-demographic variables (age, gender, education, income, and political ideology) play in ecological affect and behavior (Buttell & Flinn, 1978; Dunlap, 1975; Klineberg, McKeever, & Rothenbach, 1998; Schahn & Holzer, 1990). The sample populations of these studies have consistently been drawn from high school students or college students in introductory psychology courses, student members of environmental organizations, and non-college or other adult residents. Although studies typically indicate that differences do exist among the sample populations for each of the variables – knowledge, affect, verbal commitment, and actual commitment – results are inconsistent, correlation weak, and little has been done to investigate in greater detail those who score particularly high or low on these scales. Learning more about what people think who score extremely high or low on the actual commitment scale may help researchers, educators, and environmental advocates in their efforts to understand and initiate behavioral change.

To date, researchers have primarily focused on quantitative studies as they try to assess what people think, know, and do about the environment. Little emphasis has been placed on pursuing greater depth and/or focusing on specific populations. Some recent research has begun to expand the inquiry in these directions. In a study that involved interviews with an initial small sample and surveys of a larger sample, Kempton, Boster, and Hartley (1995) examined the views of a wide cross-section of the American public regarding the environment. Another growing field of research initially focused on the significant life experiences of environmental educators through surveys, questionnaires, and structured interviews. It has recently expanded to include people working in the conservation field and members of environmental organizations.

Research in education, psychology, communications, and mass media has greatly increased our understanding of the cognitive processes that lead to actual behavior. For years, the assumption was that behavior was influenced in a relatively linear fashion: knowledge affected attitudes which affected behavior. More recent research suggests that this is not necessarily the case (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Manfredo, 1992; Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Petty, McMichael, & Brannon, 1992). Information about a concept or issue does not an environmentalist make (Glover & Deckert, 1998). In recent decades, more complex models of behavior adoption – ones that take into account attitudes, social norms, efficacy, and intention have been introduced, tested, and refined (see Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Perhaps the truest measure of success for behavioral change is the maintenance of the new behaviors. Common sense and research indicates that this is not a simple process. Because adopting and maintaining a particular behavior, or set of behaviors, frequently involves more than one or two attempts, as well as persistence when direct external reinforcement is gone, it appears that one must be internally motivated to sustain the new behaviors (De Young, 1993; Dwyer, Leeming, Cobern, Porter, & Jackson, 1993). This implies that one's beliefs and values play a more crucial role in maintaining pro-environmental behavior than external incentives.

The theory of cognitive dissonance supports this research by contending that people do not like their beliefs to differ from their actions and vice versa (Festinger, 1957). In fact, we will strive to reconcile them. It follows, then, that emphasis should be placed on careful examination of the values and beliefs of those people who have adopted pro-environmental behaviors and maintain them.

Studies of behavioral change have also contributed to research in the field of environmental education. Attempting to communicate effective ways of fostering pro-environmental behavior, Hines, Hungerford, and Tomera (1986-87) conducted a meta-analysis of literature on behavioral research in environmental education, and by examining published empirical data, they developed a model of responsible environmental behavior. This model, as well as other studies of behavioral change, has influenced subsequent research, including that of Hungerford and Volk (1990) who developed a behavioral flow chart for "environmental citizenship behavior." These studies emphasize the importance of developing a sense of individual responsibility in the students – a factor that has begun to appear in the literature on maintaining pro-environmental behaviors as well (Eden, 1993).

Even with well-designed environmental education courses and advocacy programs, the reality is that we live in a society that has not truly embraced an environmental ethic. We face profound obstacles to behaving in sustainable ways, and Thompson and Gonzalez (1997) discuss some of the primary ones. For example, bounded rationality makes it difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend the concept of the environment and its complexity. Indoctrinated in us from a very early age is the assumption that the world was made for us; therefore, humans are superior and can do what we please to the earth and its resources. Market forces tend to drive most of our decisions, and we either fail to see, or are discouraged from believing, that making environmentally-friendly decisions can also be economically beneficial. Techno-optimism makes us confident that there can be a technological "fix" to any damage we may cause, and psychological defenses allow us to block out disturbing ideas so we do not have to confront things we think we cannot change.

The nature of the environment itself makes it difficult to clearly distinguish normal fluctuations from changes resulting from human behavior. Rarely do people actually witness drastic positive or negative changes in the environment as a result of human action. Confronted with little sense of urgency and unable to see a convincing link between human behavior and environmental changes, people may lack motivation and conviction to take pro-environmental actions.

These are powerful forces that affect us both consciously and subconsciously on a daily basis. Combined, these forces appear to have fueled a dominant anthropocentric worldview in our society – one that drives many of our decisions on an individual level as well as on a national policy-making level.

Nonetheless, some recent research indicates that people have gradually shifted away from hard-line anthropocentric views to more environmentally-conscientious ones, such as the belief that there are limits to growth and that we should live in harmony with nature (Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978; Kempton et al., 1995; Scott & Willits, 1994). These beliefs, however, are both vague and generalized – making it unclear to what extent they actually translate to action on a societal scale. Indeed, in numerous studies, including their own, Scott and Willits (1994) note that relationships between environmental attitude and behavior are inconsistent and modest, at best.

While beliefs and attitudes may be a crucial piece of the puzzle, behaviors are what make the tangible impact. Many people may call themselves environmentalists, belong to environmental organizations, and broadcast their concern on bumper stickers. Yet, environmental degradation continues, and SUV ownership and suburban development projects continue to increase. Many people recycle their soda cans. Yet, most of the waste that ends up in landfills can be recycled (City of St. Louis, 2000).

What about the people who *do* take the extra step of aligning their behaviors with their beliefs? Despite cultural premises and other obstacles to acting in sustainable ways, there are those who manage to do just that. These are not people who are members of the "Environmental

Gang" in name only. These are people who lead their lives according to their environmental ethic.

Although previous studies provide a helpful baseline from which to advance, other researchers also note the importance of employing different methods and asking different questions. O'Riordan (1981) points out the inadequacy of even the most carefully-crafted surveys to find out why, and in what way, people behave the way they do. Scott and Willits (1994) note that the inconsistent relationship between attitudes and behavior reveals a need for further research into the sources and meaning of citizen concern for the environment.

We know a great deal about what survey respondents do or don't do, know or don't know, think or don't think, about the environment. We know quite a bit about attitude and behavioral change theory, the nature of environmental values and conflicts, and the current direction of environmental education. We know very little about what makes active environmentalists tick. These are people for whom the environment is not a passing whim or socially-trendy cause. These are people who, regardless of actual membership in environmental organizations, have made the commitment to adopt a lifestyle based on their environmental ethic. Their stories may offer valuable insights.

Statement of the Problem

In hopes of mitigating negative human effects on the environment, research to date has involved the assessment of people's ecological knowledge, affect, and behavior (Maloney & Ward, 1973). Other efforts have involved examining theories of attitude and behavior change (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and studying the role of personal responsibility and internal motivation in taking pro-environmental actions (De Young, 1993; Dwyer et al., 1993; Eden, 1993). Researchers have also applied various theoretical frameworks to develop educational strategies to foster a sense of responsibility for the environment and encourage people to adopt pro-environmental behaviors (Hines et al., 1986-87; Hungerford & Volk, 1990).

However, little research has taken the extra step of actually going to the people who defy the odds and already exhibit environmentally-responsible behavior – those who go the extra mile, so to speak, and make the environment a priority in their lives. *How do active environmentalists view the environment and their relationship to it, and what do they believe has influenced their active environmentalism?* These questions will be examined in an exploratory, theory-building study. By going to the people who already exhibit pro-environmental behaviors, we can better understand their worldviews and how they developed, shedding new light on the theory base and providing a touchstone from which further research and educational efforts can spring.

Research Directions

In order to gain insight into the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of active environmentalists, I employ a qualitative, exploratory approach in examining the following question: How do active environmentalists view the environment and their relationship to it, and what do they believe has influenced their active environmentalism?

Using current theory on environmental ethics, worldviews, attitude and behavior adoption, environmental education, and the experiences of other environmentalists to ground the study, inquiry will revolve around the following questions:

- What sparked the active environmentalist's (AE) passion for the environment, and what continues to fuel it?
- How does the AE experience the environment?
- What underlying values does the AE hold regarding the environment?
- How does the AE understand the role of human beings in the balance of nature?
- How does the AE understand his or her personal role in the balance of nature?
- What has influenced these beliefs?
- What led to the adoption of the AE's pro-environmental behaviors?
- How does the AE think he or she differs from the average citizen in thinking about and valuing the environment?
- What motivates the AE to maintain a pro-environmental lifestyle?

These questions will be explored through one-on-one, in-depth interviews with active environmentalists in the Greater Lansing area of Michigan.

Following each interview, participants will be asked to complete a brief environmental survey that measures ecological knowledge, affect, and behavior. By including this process in the study, I will explore the following aspects:

- How the AEs – people specifically selected for their commitment to a pro-environmental lifestyle – compare with a much larger sample size of the general student population
- How the perceptions and beliefs of active environmentalists translate to paper in survey responses

These considerations may shed light on the usefulness of both survey instruments and interviewing approaches when examining environmental topics, as well as suggest ways in which either, or both, could be improved.

Significance of the Study

This study breaks from previous research in three important ways. It explores a new group in a new way with a new approach. It also provides a unique perspective by employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. It is my hope that these contributions can help future research and improve practice, as well.

For all the efforts made to understand what people think about the environment and encourage them to take environmentally-responsible actions, very little research has actually involved speaking with them--and perhaps more importantly, listening to them--about the issue. This study looks at a group that has not been examined in detail to date – specifically those who are dedicated to caring for the environment and make decisions based on their beliefs about it. I single out individuals who consistently lead a lifestyle according to their environmental ethic, people who actually perform pro-environmental behaviors and make the environment a priority.

Proceeding with my inquiry in a way that is rarely used in this field, I interview each individual – offering depth that more commonly-used methods cannot. Using the participants'

own words, the study goes beneath the surface to investigate in greater detail what people think about the environment, how they experience it, and what has influenced their ethic.

This study takes a different approach by putting it all together. It not only asks *what* the participants think, feel, and do but *why*. Previous research frequently examines one or the other, providing only part of a much larger picture and making it impossible to determine how participants view the environment and their role in it and how those same participants came to those beliefs and began taking action. By examining attitudes, values, *and* influential experiences of people who make environmentally-responsible decisions, this study builds on previous work and offers a unique contribution.

The exploration involved in this study contributes to the knowledge base by offering an in-depth and well-rounded look at people who exhibit many of the behaviors we attempt to encourage others to take. It offers valuable insight into future avenues for research as well. Different and/or larger sample populations could be interviewed in a similar manner. For instance, how do the views, values, and influences differ from, or correspond with, those who are not as dedicated to the environmental cause or do not think it should be a concern at all? Where are the similarities, and where are the differences? Is there some kind of "typical" profile? Findings of the present study may help guide expanded research in which larger and more diversified populations could be examined in light of the findings here.

A pilot study in many respects, this research acts as a stepping stone for further research as well as environmental advocacy and education efforts. While the study does not claim to offer a "how-to" manual on becoming an active environmentalist, it does provide a rare glimpse into the worldviews of those people who work daily – in personal and professional life – to do what they can to preserve the natural environment. Such an approach may offer a candid and realistic look at the attitudes and beliefs actually held by active environmentalists. If attitudes and beliefs *are* integral to adopting behaviors, insight gained from this study could be valuable for advocates, educators and even policy-makers as they work to foster certain ethics in, or assess the beliefs of, various populations. The study also provides interested parties with a glimpse of

the journeys some people have taken, experiences they've had, careers they pursue, and ways they have found to promote a healthier environment as they work to honor their convictions.

Thesis Organization

The following pages deal with the study in greater detail. Chapter two offers a more in-depth examination of the current literature on environmental ethics, worldviews, attitudes and behavior, and environmental education to provide the framework on which this study builds. It will investigate what research suggests are the primary values at work in forming beliefs about the environment and ways to foster environmental concern in others. It also introduces some of the experiences of other environmentalists to help give perspective when placing this study's active environmentalists in the broader population.

The third chapter provides an extensive discussion of the project as a qualitative exploratory study that also incorporates quantitative methods. Both qualitative and quantitative assumptions are introduced. The chapter addresses methodological choices and procedures, data collection and analysis techniques, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and limitations.

The fourth chapter introduces the reader to each of the active environmentalists and presents the findings and initial analysis from the interviews and survey reports.

The last chapter offers a summary and interpretation of what the findings suggest for future practice and research, discusses limitations of the study, and provides some concluding remarks.

Chapter Two

Literature Review: Glimpses of the World

Giant trees cover the lush hillside as the heavy mist pauses before lifting to reveal deep shades of blue and violet that will give way to brighter teal and silver as the sun rises throughout the morning. Wildflowers anxiously flex their vibrant petals to capture the light and warmth from the sun. Asian elephants lumber through the forest undergrowth, their enormous ears swaying as they walk. In the distance, voices are heard – soft at first and then louder as the group nears its destination. Slowly the nature of the excursion becomes clear to the observer. Huge chains grip the legs and necks of the elephants, allowing the men to manipulate them to do their work. Today, and for many days to come, the men will supervise and control the gray giants as they topple down tree after tree – thousands of acres – so the timber can be used for homes and other products. Day after day, in the name of progress, economic growth, and national and international political pressure, more land is cleared of its trees while the elephants are forced to demolish their own livelihood.

A young woman, distraught at plans to fell a growth of thousand-year-old giant redwoods by the Pacific Lumber Company, honors her convictions by sitting vigil in one of the trees and living there for two years – effectively halting the logging project. Not long after her protest, it was discovered that somebody had girdled the roots of the redwood she called home.

Despite technology making improved gas mileage possible and reports indicating the extent of pollution in the exhaust from sport utility vehicles, congress fails to pass a bill that would place tighter restrictions on the emissions of SUVs, and public demand for the vehicles continues to increase.

These scenarios hint at the complexity of environmental conflicts. They also reveal some of the dramatically different beliefs and values people hold regarding the environment and the importance of trying to gain a better understanding of these values.

This chapter provides an overview of relevant research and literature to date, beginning with a condensed history of environmental consciousness in western minds. It then introduces and discusses what have been identified as the most common worldview philosophies. The chapter also addresses the arguments for a significant change in the way we view planet earth, and it touches on current advocacy trends as well as influences on present-day environmentalists. By recognizing where we've been and how we could move forward, it is my hope that these discussions will ground the rest of the study in a deeper and broader context.

The Long Road

The human relationship to nature is a story of conflicting shoves and tugs in opposing directions. After all, much of our own nation was settled by agrarian Europeans who had to fight to survive, which often meant battling nature to stay warm, healthy, safe, and eke out enough sustenance to survive another day. Nature was seen as an unforgiving force to be feared, if not controlled – definitely not to be embraced, as it was cold, forbidding, and harbored countless terrors.

Personal observation and experience suggest that public awareness of environmental issues and concern for the environment, in general, have increased in recent decades. Beginning in the late 1960s when social movements gave significant attention to the natural environment and major legislation passed in the form of the National Environmental Protection Act, public concern, fueled by subsequent legislation such as the Clean Air and Clean Water acts, grew in the wake of the energy crisis in the 1970s. Several studies indicate that the general public is more concerned about the environment and understands the interaction between humans and the natural environment in a different way than earlier generations (Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978; Kempton, Boster, & Hartley 1995; Scott & Willits, 1994). The existence of this rather general environmental ethic has not been an easy road. The following discussion begins with an overview of the evolution of environmental ethics, informed primarily by Hargrove (1989).

Throughout history, philosophers have periodically failed to address the physical existence of the earth. Dating back to ancient Greece, philosophers believed that "the world as we experience it was not real" (Hargrove, 1989; p. 3). Even modern philosophers have often questioned its existence. Consequently, the environment was omitted from intellectual discussions for years. When philosophers did attempt to bring the environment into ethical and philosophical debates in the 1970s, noted Australian philosopher, John Passmore (although he believed people needed to change their attitude toward the environment) denied intrinsic value for nature and argued, along with others, that the natural environment had no place in ethics and should be kept out of discussions of values. Hargrove (1989) claims that this in not the case and

proceeds to suggest quite the opposite – that the concept of dominion over nature has less of a foundation in western philosophy than environmental and stewardship ethics do.

The development of environmental ethics in the past four centuries owes part of its struggle and part of its success to the evolution of the sciences – particularly botany, biology, and geology – and the arts, such as poetry, landscape painting, photography, and journalism. As botanists made observations, they began noting aesthetic qualities as well as factual information in their notebooks, effectively moving value judgments into the lab, and they often brought artists with them to portray the area and scenery they were studying. This practice resulted in the development of a shared worldview between artist and scientist that was often communicated to the public in travel publications and artwork.

Greater travel possibilities sped changes in horticulture. Although scientists and wealthy citizens were generally the only people who could travel long distances, their experiences influenced new ideas upon their return. Instead of formal gardens with precisely-designed geometric shapes, world travelers brought new species of plants and began allowing them to stretch their limbs in more natural ways.

As scientists observed and classified numerous plants, animals, water properties, rock forms, and fossils, they gained greater appreciation for the diversity and complexity of life and natural works. Gradually those in the scientific community began to recognize the scope and nature of geologic time. Coupled with earlier scientific theories of a heliocentric solar system, these advances put human existence on earth in a completely new perspective. As scientists began using geologic time to express the history of life forms and the time involved in seeing those species again, living things came to be seen as virtually irreplaceable.

Before, and simultaneous to these scientific developments, poets, writers, and painters began focusing much of their work on nature, expressing love and appreciation for the natural environment. With impressive observational skills, nature poets painted pictures with words, paying tribute to the mysteries and beauty of nature. As artists emphasized the majestic, almost

holy, qualities of the natural world in increasing numbers, they helped bring attention to the aesthetic features in the environment and the notion that it is God's work.

These developments served to influence public perception of the natural environment. People grew more impressed with the open wilderness and began questioning whether the world was really made for humans alone. Fear of, and the need to control, a hostile natural world began to dissipate as understanding of the environment and appreciation for God's creation and its beauty grew.

The establishment of America's early National Parks, Yellowstone (in 1872) and Yosemite (in 1890), also strengthened public appreciation of wild places. These parks were unique national treasures and became a source of pride for Americans by exhibiting raw, majestic beauty. Hollywood's cinematography and novelists' prose further romanticized the beauty of the "wild west."

However, a rift gradually emerged within the scientific community. By using artists' renditions of natural objects and incorporating value-oriented descriptions in their work, ecologists and other professionals in the natural sciences were often not considered as accomplished as those in the physical sciences. Ecologists used "fuzzy" language, appealed to emotions and aesthetic qualities, and brought subjectivity to their field. With growing disrespect, physical scientists distanced themselves from the sciences that involved interaction with the lay public and influence from the arts. The "hard sciences" were the "true" sciences, and as such, these professionals took on renewed commitment to be "objective" and "value-free" in their work. Consequently, ecologists, social scientists, and other "soft scientists" were pushed to the fringe as the work of fact-oriented scientists was emphasized as more accurate.

Although the ancient Greeks generally appreciated the world for its order and structure, the notion of intrinsic worth also dates back to that time when philosophers determined that something could have value simply because of its own beauty and merit. However, when the concept of intrinsic worth was applied to nature, some of the prominent intellectuals in more recent centuries opposed such arguments.

In his *Two Treatises of Government*, written in the late seventeenth century, political philosopher John Locke (1988) introduced a radical concept of property ownership. He forcefully argued that every man should have his own land and that its only value came out of man's labor on it and improvement to it. Land was not valuable in its own right. It could; rather, it *should* be improved upon by man. The only value came from land used for human purposes.

Hargrove (1989) explains that American leaders made similar arguments, including Thomas Jefferson and Gifford Pinchot, a conservation leader in the early nineteenth century. Land and other natural resources should be used. That which was not used was wasted. Everything, including aesthetic value, should be valued in terms of its usefulness to humans. Rejecting the notion of intrinsic worth, Pinchot and his followers, stressed the instrumental value of natural resources and rejected arguments for preservation. Pinchot's influence helped advance various theories in relation to environmental value, beginning with utilitarianism.

Infatuation with "objective" science and human progress drew criticism of its own from those who believed that scientific inquiry should be tempered by appreciation for a larger purpose in life (O'Riordan, 1981). In the quest to understand things by taking them apart and studying the pieces, scientists commonly disconnected themselves from the big picture and lost a sense of awe for the whole. Pieces and parts were valued for their instrumental worth. Resources were valued for their ability to aid in the progress of humankind. The human fascination with making logical decisions resulted in the measurement of the costs and benefits of the various options. With basic democratic principles underlying the theory, utilitarianism attempted to promote that which brought the most pleasure to the most people.

In practice, however, utilitarianism equated pleasure with human happiness – a system that is clearly problematic – as some people pleasure in doing bad things. Furthermore, pleasure may be considered good, but no discernment was made on the ethical or moral goodness of a decision. Similarly, pragmatism also emphasized the instrumental value of all things and in doing so, changed the way people conceptualized them.

Modern economics attempts to explain the actions of "rational man." Humans are expected to act in a rational manner, as defined by economists, through acts that center on the benefits to that individual. Things are expressed and understood in terms of their market value. Everything is quantifiable and measured by its monetary value so the rational person will know which choice is best for him or her. The focus on money is a relatively new one. Hargrove (1989) argues that our society's preoccupation with money, acquiring things, and finding the best value would have been abhorred in previous centuries but is the modus operandi today. However, "rational" theory presupposes that man and woman act in a vacuum, assuming that the only factors people weigh in making decisions are the costs and benefits to themselves. We know, however, that this is not the case. Numerous other factors are at play when a person chooses a product or makes a decision.

Emphasis in modern economic theory is placed on identifying the monetary value of things so different goods can be compared. Translating this concept to the environmental arena is murky, at best, when attempting to assess how much the public values certain environmental features. This often involves asking people what they are willing to pay (WTP) to keep certain natural features or what they are willing to accept (WTA) to give up the natural areas (Ritov & Kahneman, 1997; Hargrove, 1989). This kind of measurement is an exercise in futility as it asks people to make a number of hypothetical calculations and give market value to something many people find priceless or difficult to express in monetary language. Ironically, these kinds of questions would never pass the rigorous standards applied to survey questionnaires in most academic fields.

These calculations are fraught with problems (Hargrove, 1998; Ritov & Kahneman, 1997) – not the least of which is any socio-economic inequality among participants resulting in significantly different responses from people, according to their income levels, even though they may value natural features fairly similarly. Furthermore, forcing people to give dollar values to things that are not usually thought of in economic terms is something with which people have no practice or reason for doing and, consequently, are ill-prepared to give meaningful, consistent

responses. People are rarely sure if their actual income level needs to be tied to their response or not, and if not, they are uncertain how much money will indicate a strong value and still be included in the researcher's analysis. This example reveals how inappropriate it is to try to "objectively" evaluate the natural environment and people's feelings regarding it in any kind of economic terms.

Against the Stream

While many people subscribed to utilitarian and economic theories, others have fought against, or disregarded, the influences of those principles and retained a sense of wonder and respect for nature, an appreciation of its beauty, and a belief in its right to exist. One of the most well-known, pioneering advocates for a stronger focus on preservation in the mid-twentieth century was Aldo Leopold, who argued with almost boyish enthusiasm for people to spend time in nature, delight in the unfolding experiences around them, and work to preserve valuable wilderness. He did not suggest that preservation should mean the exclusion of all other uses. Rather, he wanted to see an end to the careless exploitation of the earth and its resources. He called for people to adopt a new land ethic which meant a new appreciation for humankind's place in the balance of nature and a sense of responsibility for leaving as small an impact as possible. Leopold saw those who adopted such an ethic as possible sources of grassroots advocacy for the environment when direct political strategies failed.

Leopold (1966) addressed the dangers of continued over-consumption in a new and compelling way, challenging people to think more earnestly about their impact on the environment through profound and poetic observations. Lamenting the loss of the passenger pigeon, he suggests, "Perhaps we now grieve because we are not sure, in our hearts, that we have gained by the exchange. The gadgets of industry bring us more comforts than the pigeons did, but do they add as much to the glory of the spring?" (p. 116). Leopold's essays remain powerful testimonies to his developing appreciation of nature, and they continue to influence environmentalists today.

Several other citizens, including John Muir, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, Fritjof Capra, Daniel Quinn, David Suzuki, Ansel Adams, and Wendell Berry also chose to share their knowledge, concern, and awe for the natural environment with the general public. Through their work, as well as the work of other ecologists, writers, and artists, they contributed to an ever-evolving image of nature by communicating a vision of the environment as an intricate web of life – a precious force of unparalleled wonder and beauty, worthy of our admiration and protection.

The debate between the hard and soft sciences has continued for decades (O'Riordan, 1981). Old habits die hard, and many scientists still champion the "value-free" research that has excluded environmental studies and ecology from mainstream science for years. Gradually, the myth of impartiality and objectivity in all sciences has eroded (O'Riordan, 1981). Many scientists now take ethical considerations into account and acknowledge value judgments. Moreover, there may be a shift, albeit a slow one, from deconstruction and focusing on specific pieces, traits, or functions of natural objects and living things to recognition of the whole, its complexity, and a need to look at nature in a more holistic manner.

Nonetheless, the perception of the fuzzy, emotional qualities of environmental science still plagues advocates of environmental protection today as they constantly battle those who would prefer that scientists, policy-makers, and educators ignore emotions related to nature and disregard the value educational institutions imply by offering environmental studies (Williams, 2000). Ironically, those who desire to leave values out of education reveal the impact of their own every bit as much as the educators themselves.

The World According to …

The fact that human actions affect the natural environment is acknowledged with little dissent today. More contentious are the theories over the extent of degradation and the environment's ability to absorb damage and recalibrate as a result of it. These disagreements give way to significant differences of opinion on what, if anything, humans should change about

their habits of living and patterns of consumption. Data on the health of the earth's natural and social systems indicate deterioration of the earth's physical condition, biological base, and human quality of life according to Brown, Flavin, and French (2000) of the Worldwatch Institute. Certainly every living thing, and many natural phenomena such as wind, affect the environment to varying degrees. However, the scope and depth of human impact appears unprecedented. As humans, we hold a unique position in our capacity to live under a code of morality and our ability to reason consciously. It matters, then, how we make decisions regarding the natural environment and what moral codes suggest about environmental issues.

While many of the same philosophies have influenced our national consciousness over the years, it is evident that people think about the environment in very different ways. We frequently hear about conflicts related to environmental quality and use. Surely, hundreds occur around the country at any given time, and we very likely know somebody involved in one or have been a participant ourselves. Water diversion, development proposals, waste dumping allowances, emissions loopholes, and resource extraction are only some of the common sources of conflict involving the environment. These situations most often take place on local or state levels, affecting local residents directly, and the cumulative effects of these actions can have national, and perhaps even global, implications.

Environmental conflicts can be long, embittered battles and can prove difficult to resolve. Stakeholders establish sides – typically characterized as those supporting progress and economic development versus those supporting environmental preservation – and find themselves in a heated debate. Thompson and Gonzalez (1997) suggest that these conflicts are so contentious because they are rooted in deeply held ideologies. It appears that these ideologies develop from a person's understanding of the relationship between God, humankind, nature, and science – an understanding reflected in the way each of us views the world.

Concern about the state of the environment and continued degradation as a result of human actions has led researchers to investigate the way people view and make sense of the world around them as well as the different ways people understand the environment and

humankind's relationship to it. Frequently referred to as a *worldview*, this outlook is one's general conception of the nature of the world, particularly with reference to a set of values. O'Riordan (1981), a prolific researcher in the environmental field, offers an in-depth analysis of some of the primary worldviews people hold regarding the environment. He begins by describing characteristics that he associates with an ecocentric worldview and a technocentric worldview.

Rooted in the transcendental philosophies of the mid-nineteenth century, an ecocentric view "preaches the virtues of reverence, humility, responsibility, and care" (O'Riordan, 1981; p. 1). Although not anti-technology, ecocentrics are skeptical of too much reliance on high-tech systems and prefer low-impact technology. Disturbed with what they perceive as a trend toward multi-corporations and impersonality, they seek permanence and stability. Emphasis is placed on the ends and not the means to living a productive life with nature.

Technocentrics, on the other hand, are confident in humans' ability to "understand and control physical, biological, and social processes for the benefit of present and future generations" (p. 11). Technology can, and should, be used to manipulate nature to serve humankind's purposes. They are optimistic about the use of scientific knowledge to aid further progress and solve problems, and they favor efficiency and rationality in employing new means to reach their goals. For the technocentric, the energy crisis was not a matter of how we live, distribute, or waste scarce resources, it was primarily a matter of supply. No obstacles should inhibit human progress.

While these worldviews represent fundamental differences in perception, many authors point out that distinctions such as these are not nearly so black and white in real life (Kempton et al., 1995; O'Riordan, 1981; Wenz, 1988). In fact, people often hold values from many different perspectives or fall somewhere on a continuum between ecocentric and technocentric poles.

O'Riordan (1981) goes on to suggest that transcendental philosophy has influenced two lines of thinking – bioethics and self-reliance. Supporters of bioethics seek to "protect the integrity of natural ecosystems, not simply for the pleasure of man but as a *biotic right*" (p. 4).

Nature has its own purpose and should therefore be protected on ethical principle. It does not merely exist for use and enjoyment by humans and should not be viewed in terms of what it can provide us. Significant moral implications suggest that humans limit or restrict their use of space and resources whether or not biological roots for conservation exist. Bioethics has influenced practice in the real world. Management efforts at national parks have shifted from emphasis on prestige and tourism to decisions that are best for the park and its inhabitants – a "parks first philosophy." In the form of environmental protection acts, many states have passed legislation providing people with legal standing to represent the environment and sue for its preservation.

According to O'Riordan (1981), the self-reliant school is a response to the draining effects of the megalopolis. Self-reliant supporters tend to feel disenfranchised by the fragmentation and dehumanizing aspects of rapid industrialization and denounce the economic and political systems that stunt people emotionally and intellectually. Large industry and the frenzy of urban living rob people of creativity, vitality, and calm, and alienate them from others and nature. Too much focus on production and growth wastes energy and resources. Self-reliant supporters favor smaller communities removed from large industrial centers that function with shared space, rely primarily on locally-produced goods and services, and work to foster communication and a more ecocentric frame of mind. However, in their efforts to distance themselves from an unhealthy system, people frequently disengaged from civic life and adopted an apolitical stance. In recent years, however, they place greater emphasis on participatory democracy.

Another way of conceptualizing worldviews regarding the environment involves a fairly common distinction between anthropocentric values and biocentric values (Capra, 1996; Gladwin, Newburry, & Reiskin, 1997; Kempton et al., 1995). Discussion of values is tricky business. "Values" is a frequently-used, but rarely defined, term and one that people often use interchangeably with beliefs, principles, and attitudes. For the informal interactions of everyday life, it may not need precise definition as people appear to understand the use of the term. For the discussion here, Kempton et al. (1995) offer succinct definitions. Beliefs refer to "what

people think the world is like." Values are "guiding principles of what is moral, desirable, and just" (p. 12).

Capra (1996), Gladwin et al. (1997), and Kempton et al. (1995) summarize characteristics associated with anthropocentric and biocentric worldviews. An anthropocentric worldview is one that, literally, focuses on human beings. From this perspective, humans hold a special status, and decisions are made based on how they would benefit us. Similar to the technocentric worldview, nature exists for human use, and natural resources and wildlife are valued in terms of their economic worth to humans. Future generations are considered, but the focus is primarily on providing them with material wealth and technology that can solve future environmental problems. They emphasize control of objects and resources and the virtues of relying on logic and technology to aid their goals.

A biocentric worldview elevates nature to a different plain. From this perspective, the natural environment is respected for its own sake, above and beyond its usefulness and relationship to humankind. Similar to an ecocentric worldview, the biocentric worldview sees nature as having intrinsic value and rights of its own. People consider future generations and hope to leave them a cleaner, healthier environment and a chance to see the animals and natural wonders that exist today. They emphasize respect and appreciation for nature and the moral obligation to preserve the health of the planet.

The notion of deep ecology extends from a biocentric worldview. Originally introduced by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in the early 1970s, it has become a buzz phrase in recent years. Deep ecologists believe that natural laws dictate human morality, and nature itself is necessary for the humanity of humankind. Capra (1996) explains how deep ecologists do not see the world as "a collection of isolated objects, but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life" (p. 7). In fact, it has been argued that people have a real, perhaps "primal" need to spend time in nature as we all have a deep biological connection to it (Beatley & Manning, 1997; Kellert, 1996).

A concept that has gained increasing attention as a result of environmental concern is the idea of sustainability. Gladwin et al. (1997) explain that numerous organizations around the world have adopted the definition advanced by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p. 234). Sustainability is a term that carries a simple message while touching nearly every aspect of life. Sustainability means living within the earth's carrying capacity, protecting and improving natural and social systems, and respecting people and other living things – all with significant implications for behavior (Capra, 1996; Gladwin et al., 1997). It follows, then, that sustainability brings with it a sense of obligation. To live in a sustainable manner is to live responsibly – recognizing limits to the earth's resources and commitment to the present and future health of the planet.

Although sustainability is most often associated with ecocentric values, people who are more technocentric are not automatically adverse to the idea; rather their faith in technology and scientific discovery may allow them to view sustainability as either a non-issue, since problems can be handled as they arise, or a goal that can be reached in a different manner. It is important to remember that technocentrics, in general, do appreciate and care about the environment, however differently they may view humanity's role in it.

The above discussion addressed many of the most common interpretations of the world and our relationship to it. However, each individual is unique in their relationship to, and interpretation of, the world. Different people, childhood backgrounds, experiences, events, attitudes, education, and values influence each of us in different ways. Definitions of worldviews are, therefore, generalizations. While it is helpful to ground this study in a discussion of worldviews and values regarding the environment, it is important to remember that people and their beliefs rarely, if ever, fit into tidy, well-defined boxes. We are always in flux – constantly evolving as we mature, experience new things, and learn more about ourselves. Attributing specific worldviews to people can limit the likelihood that the researcher and his or her audience will recognize subtle nuances or diversions from the established characteristics, and it

makes little allowance for the fact that people are dynamic, vibrant individuals – not bound by predetermined categories.

The Judeo-Christian Debate

"Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen… It has not only established a dualism of man and nature but has also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends" (White, 1967; p. 1205). With this claim, White touched off a heated debate that continues to this day (O'Riordan, 1981). Specifically referring to verses in the Book of Genesis, White argues that the Judeo-Christian ethic is, in essence, responsible for much of the human-imposed environmental damage.

O'Riodan (1981) explains that by suggesting that Judeo-Christian teachings are the "cause of western man's alienation from nature, his objectification of natural objects and process, his anthropomorphism, and his quest for progress at all costs," White's thesis may act as a way for people to justify their actions (p. 203). However, Black (1970) contends that this kind of rationalization did not originate with Judeo-Christian beliefs; instead, it is made *post hoc* to express that what is happening is what should be happening. He also suggests that these religious traditions actually advance a stewardship role, pointing to the steward's role of balancing short-term gains with long-term viability in Biblical times. It was considered sacred work to be given the moral responsibility of tending the earth.

Hargrove (1989) offers yet another perspective by arguing that western civilizations already subscribed to the view of human dominance over nature before Genesis was written, and while these passages may have contributed to the maintenance of this belief, they are not the initial cause. Passmore (1974) concurs, arguing that Genesis was written as justification for the already-occurring human manipulation of the environment, thereby helping to clear collective conscience. Hargrove (1989) believes that although religion is often criticized as the basis for environmentally harmful ideas, much of it actually originated with western philosophers who could not possibly envision the number of people that would eventually make demands of the earth and its resources.

In recent years, many people appear to be interpreting Judeo-Christian influence in a manner more closely associated with Black's stewardship ethic mentioned above. Kempton et al. (1995) indicate that the general public identifies religious beliefs as a guiding principle *for* environmental concern. They also express a connection between nature, creation, and God – that the environment is worthy of respect because it is God's creation.

Many authors address spirituality in relation to environmental concern and sustainable practices (Beatley & Manning, 1996; Capra, 1996; Gladwin et al., 1997). Nature is often said to hold spiritual qualities, and spending time in nature can elicit spiritual feelings. Furthermore, one's own sense of spirituality and/or religious faith can instill a sense of responsibility for protecting the earth. Kempton et al. (1995) reveal that many people express a sense of spiritual connection to nature, and that this feeling affects people of religious faith as well as those who are agnostic. Their expressions of appreciation for nature appear the most strong when discussing the religious and spiritual aspects of direct contact with nature, and being in nature seems to give these people a sense of awe and reverence for the creation around them.

A Paradigm Shift?

> *Ultimately these problems must be seen as just different facets of one single crisis, which is largely a crisis of perception. It derives from the fact that most of us, and especially our large social institutions, subscribe to the concepts of an outdated worldview, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our overpopulated, globally interconnected world*
> (Capra, 1996; p. 4).

Numerous explanations have been advanced as reasons for our strong adherence to an anthropocentric worldview, including modern political philosophers who argued for private property rights and rejected the notion of intrinsic value (Hargrove, 1989), and Judeo-Christian traditions that elevate man as distinctly separate from, and dominant over, nature (O'Riordan, 1981).

Many authors suggest that prevalent anthropocentric values contribute to human degradation of the environment (Capra, 1996; Gladwin et al., 1997) and call for a shift in the

way we view the environment and our relationship to it (Capra, 1996; Carson, 1962; Gladwin et al., 1997, and Leopold, 1966). They advance a biocentric worldview with the hope that pro-environmental behavior will follow (Capra, 1996; Gladwin et al., 1997; Leopold, 1966).

This "crisis of perception" affects the way we view the environment and its condition, our role in the balance of nature, and our ability and willingness to address the issue. The fact that some people believe there is an ecological problem while others do not emphasizes the extent of differences in perception alone. Moncrief (as cited in O'Riordan, 1981) contends that our failure to resolve these ecological concerns stems from our cultural ethos and that western economic tradition has created:

> a lack of personal and moral direction about environmental responsibility which is partly a product and partly the cause of our present inadequate management, a collective inability to identify and resolve the resulting moral dilemma, and an abiding Micawberish faith that something will inevitably bale us out, more often than not that 'something' being technology (p. 206).

White (1973) enters the fray again, arguing that man's alienation from nature is deeply rooted, and "until it is eradicated not only from our minds but also from our emotions," we will be "unable to make fundamental changes in our attitudes and our actions affecting ecology" (p. 62).

What these people and others call for is more than simply trying to appreciate nature to a greater extent. What they call for is a fundamental shift in the way we view our place on the planet, our role in the web of life. What they call for is not easy. It involves replacing deeply-rooted and long-held assumptions with different beliefs. More than that, it involves recognizing our assumptions as just that – assumptions, and not objective truths. You cannot change what you do not recognize.

In one of his most powerful and provocative works, Daniel Quinn (1992) reveals some of the primary myths by which we live, such as the notion that the earth belongs to us, and he challenges us to turn these myths on their heads and work to build a new ethic. If perceptions can be powerful, then divorcing ethical inquiry from most of our cultural dialogue and viewing nature as separate from humankind and something to fear, conquer, and modify because it is ours does not bode well for the protection of the natural environment.

Evidence of environmental awareness and concern

Even as concerned environmentalists call for a paradigm shift toward biocentric values, research indicates that, in fact, people do hold pro-environmental values. Many early opinion polls in the late 1960s and early 1970s tested public interest in environmental problems, such as pollution, and found that most people were concerned about the state of the environment, desired to see it improved, and expressed willingness to make monetary sacrifices for regulatory measures (O'Riordan, 1981; see Erksine, 1971).

As a result of a similar study, Dunlap and Van Liere (1978) concluded that the public has shifted from a fairly anthropocentric paradigm to a "New Environmental Paradigm." Their study involved a general public sample of adults in the state of Washington and an environmental organization sample from the same state. The first half of the study included a wide range of items, beginning with quality-of-life questions. The second half focused on the environment with twelve items established to measure the NEP. On a Lickert-type scale, participants were asked to respond to the following:

- We are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support.
- The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset.
- Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs.
- Mankind was created to rule over the rest of nature.
- When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences.
- Plants and animals exist primarily to be used by humans.
- To maintain a healthy economy we will have to develop a "steady-state" economy where industrial growth is controlled.
- Humans must live in harmony with nature in order to survive.
- The earth is like a spaceship with only limited room and resources.
- Humans need not adapt to the natural environment because they can remake it to suit their needs.
- There are limits to growth beyond which our industrialized society cannot expand.
- Mankind is severely abusing the environment.

In each instance, a majority of the general population supported the pro-NEP stance, and as the researchers expected, the environmental organization members supported the NEP to a greater extent than the general public. The authors conclude that the general public accepts

the emerging paradigm more than they expected, and the environmentalists strongly support it. They find that concepts such as "limits to growth" and "balance of nature" have reached national consciousness – a development that Dunlap and Van Liere (1978) think amazing considering that these concepts were practically unheard of at the time, and they represented a dramatic departure from the dominant worldview. To test the validity of the NEP scale, participants were also given a list of pro-environmental behaviors and asked the extent to which they engaged in the activities. While eight of the behaviors indicated an acceptable scale and people do appear to subscribe to the NEP, Dunlap and Van Liere (1978) warn against drawing overly optimistic conclusions from their study considering the nature of attitude-behavior links.

Dunlap and Van Liere's NEP sparked a number of follow-up studies in which many researchers found that rather than acting as a one-dimensional scale, the NEP may act as a multi-dimensional scale – testing the acceptance of different concepts within the NEP itself (Scott & Willits, 1994; see Arcury, 1990; Geller & Lasley, 1985). Scott and Willits (1994) argue for a two-dimensional interpretation. Reviewing survey data from a random sample of Pennsylvania residents, Scott and Willits found one factor that assessed the concept of humans' relationship to nature and another that focused on balance of nature/limits to growth. Only one item did not receive a pro-NEP response from a majority of participants. Although forty-five percent believed that "We are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support," twenty-five percent were undecided, leaving thirty percent who disagreed. Scott and Willits (1994) explain that ultimately, there was "little evidence of a dramatic or systematic difference between overall acceptance of the ideas contained in the NEP in these (1990) data and the findings of Dunlap and Van Liere a dozen years earlier" (p. 249).

Through interviews and survey questionnaires with a cross section of the American public, consisting of representatives from the general public, industry, grassroots and radical environmental agencies, congressional staff, engineers, and sawmill workers, Kempton et al. (1995) also conclude that environmental values in the US have shifted. They cite numerous studies, including Gallop polls and Dunlap and Van Liere's (1978) NEP findings, as well as

voting data, market data, ad campaigns, and terminology shifts (swamp becomes wetland and jungle becomes rainforest) as evidence of a shifting national consciousness. Results of their own study reveal that "despite differences at the opposite extremes, there is a remarkably strong consensus across this wide spectrum on a core set of environmental values" (12). They argue that many of our environmental values are already connected to core American values, such as religious faith and parental responsibility, and that scientific information, as well as informal interaction among the lay public influence our views about the environment.

With respect to cultural models of nature, Kempton et al. (1995) suggest that the American public perceives *human reliance on a limited world*, often coinciding with pragmatic reasons for protection such as survival, health, and basic well-being. However, they argue that the public also perceives *nature as interdependent, balanced, and unpredictable*, resulting in a tendency to favor nonintervention. Because nature is so interconnected, and balance is important, human intervention could set off a chain reaction that cannot be predicted and therefore changes should be made cautiously, if at all. The authors note some discrepancy between the way the general public understands nature and the views of scientists, particularly with respect to the predictability of intervention. They point out, however, that even scientists disagree with each other, and outside of their specialties, they also express concern about the ability of the ecosystem to withstand repeated stress.

Kempton et al. (1995) find that both anthropocentric and biocentric values appear to motivate environmental concern. Anthropocentric arguments include protection for the sake of future generations, aesthetic value, and utilitarian reasons (plants for medicinal purposes, existence for the people who want to know that wilderness exists, etc.). Although some people express belief that nature exists for the benefit of man, this is not the predominant sentiment. More common is the argument for human use as *one* reason for environmental protection, but not the only reason.

Biocentric arguments involve the belief that humans should not harm nature because we are part of it, that species have a right to continue their existence, and that nature, itself, has

intrinsic rights that extend beyond species survival, implying a moral obligation to help protect the environment. Although the environmentalists were more likely to include non utilitarian arguments as reasons for environmental protection, the authors were impressed with the strength and diversity of environmental concern, suggesting that it may not be a passing fad. The fact that people currently express environmental concern based on both anthropocentric and biocentric values may have significant implications not only for their behavior, but also for the methods educators and advocates choose to employ when encouraging pro-environmental behavior. After all, if the end goal is environmental protection, then appealing to both anthropocentric and biocentric values seems to cast the widest net.

Researchers disagree on whether or not socio-demographic factors influence environmental concern, and if so, to what extent. However, because so many researchers address demographic variables, it may be helpful to comment briefly on the topic here. Researchers typically examine the effects of age, education, income, political ideology, and gender on environmental attitudes and behaviors with the expectation, and some supporting evidence, that young, educated, upper income, liberally-minded citizens will express greater environmental concern and exhibit more pro-environmental behaviors than the rest of the sample population (Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978; Scott & Willits, 1994; see Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980). Other research indicates that these correlations are weak and/or inconsistent, at best (Kempton et al., 1995; Samdahl & Robertson, 1989; Schahn & Holzer, 1990; Scott & Willits, 1994).

One of the variables that receives extensive formal and anecdotal attention is the role that income plays. While it is difficult to isolate the effects of the variables since income frequently affects education, and education, in turn, affects income, many researchers find that those with higher socioeconomic status are more knowledgeable and concerned about environmental issues than those with lower income and social status (O'Riordan, 1981; see Marsh, 1969; Devall, 1970).

O'Riordan (1981) discusses the prevalent belief that as income and social status improve, people often develop fairly liberal opinions about many social issues, including environmental

causes. Similar to Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, people with higher income levels have secured their basic human needs and reached a comfortable standard of living. They are able to expend time, money, and/or effort on causes not directly related to personal and household concerns. In essence, they can afford to concern themselves with environmental problems. Furthermore, these people believe they can do something about the issues without significant changes in their own lives. Eden (1993) agrees: by decreasing economic constraints and shifting priorities, "Privilege is enabling" (1749). Indeed, membership in environmental organizations consists primarily of people with higher income (O'Riordan, 1981; Eden, 1993) and social status (Eden, 1993). O'Riordan (1981) suggests this could happen because higher income earners feel a sense of peer pressure to join these groups. However, because of its low correlation to behavior, Eden (1993) notes that 'privilege' variables "do not explain why pro-environmental behavior is adopted. Although they may suggest reasons why people are prevented from undertaking it" (1749).

The study of environmental ethics, values, and concern is complex. Ethics can be fuzzy, values can conflict and are susceptible to numerous cultural premises, religious beliefs, and socio-demographic variables, and concern constantly fluctuates depending on the experiences, interest level, and even daily moods of the individual. Nonetheless, an abundance of research suggests that perhaps the American people have, indeed, shifted their thinking, or are in the process of doing so, since a wide range of American citizens express strong pro-environmental values.

Rise of the SUV

Just what does the acceptance of a new environmental paradigm or the development of environmental concern mean? The discrepancy between attitude and behavior has plagued many a scholar and practitioner. Present-day researchers invariably warn against anticipating pro-environmental behaviors as a result of pro-environmental attitudes (Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978; Kemper et al., 1995; O'Riordan, 1981; Scott & Willits, 1994). Relying on the expanding

fields of social and behavioral psychology, they are aware that attitudes do not affect behavior in a direct, linear fashion. Rather, as the theory of reasoned action suggests, it is a less straightforward process in which individuals weigh the importance of subjective norms and personal beliefs about a behavior prior to forming the intention to act (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

First introduced in 1967 by Martin Fishbein and further developed by Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, the theory of reasoned action (TRA) attempted to predict behavior by examining the relationship between beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. While several variations have been introduced, the TRA grounds many of these extensions and provides the framework for inquiry into behavior and its determinants.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) theorized that a person's intention to perform a certain behavior was the best predictor of that behavior. This behavioral intention is the result of the individual's attitude regarding the behavior and subjective norms about it. One's attitude about the behavior is influenced by beliefs about the outcomes of the behavior and evaluations of those outcomes. One's perception of the subjective norm is influenced by beliefs that certain people think the individual should or should not perform the behavior and the individual's motivation to comply with these social pressures. In essence, the individual weighs the relative importance of his or her attitude about the behavior against that of the subjective norm and either does, or does not, form an intention to act.

The attitude-behavior conundrum

Actions speak louder than words – an oft-used phrase that, in fact, speaks volumes. Attitudes and values lie at the heart of one's worldview, and while attitudes may not directly determine behavior, they are still thought to influence it. Consequently, researchers are clearly interested in the extent to which the American public expresses environmental concern. They are also interested in tangible behaviors since actions, not thoughts or feelings, affect the health of the environment (Malonely & Ward, 1973).

However, despite impressive expressions of pro-environmental attitudes, few people consistently exhibit pro-environmental actions. Scott and Willits (1994) found that for only three

of ten behaviors did the majority of respondents indicate that they had ever (even once) engaged in the activity. Yet, eleven of twelve NEP attitude measurements showed majority support. Certainly the relationship between attitude and behavior is tenuous, a finding consistent with past results (Scott & Willits, 1994; see Dunlap, 1989; Maloney & Ward, 1973).

Aside from social, economic, and material limitations, researchers offer several explanations for the weak association between attitudes and behavior. Beginning with factors that encourage widespread environmental concern, common sense would suggest that public concern for environmental issues increases when specific events – particularly negative ones – occur. Evidence indicates that this may be the case as public concern appears to have begun shifting in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Kempton et al., 1995; O'Riordan, 1981). This time period saw pollution reach unprecedented levels with extreme degradation at Love Canal, the Cuyahoga River, and Lake Erie. It saw a fairly critical energy crisis resulting in conservation practices across the country. It also witnessed the first Earth Day, a publicized formal appreciation of the earth and its resources.

Events such as these are often considered turning points in raising public awareness – both negative events (Chawla, 1998) and other significant events such as the 1970 Earth Day (Bengston, 1994). These are events that people can see and/or feel. They are not hypothetical, and while most were the result of incremental harm over a period of time, what the public saw was severe devastation. The impact of specific events such as these is made more powerful by the role of the media. Media coverage has a significant influence on public perception of environmental issues (Kempton et al., 1995; O'Riordan, 1981), affecting both public awareness by deciding what to show and public opinion by deciding how to report it.

By its impact on the national consciousness, the media also influence the social climate. As public awareness increases, and we're told that we should be concerned about the environment, pro-environmental attitudes become expected. Responsible attitudes and behavior are considered "socially desirable" (Babbie, 1992), and in an atmosphere that expects pro-environmental sentiment, people are likely to express their support. However, that is where the "concern" may end.

In studies examining different techniques to encourage people to engage in environmentally-responsible behaviors, Dwyer et al. (1993) conclude that while external reinforcement (such as incentives, penalties, demonstrations, and social support/peer pressure in the form of curbside blue boxes) may help with short-term behavior change, "the only factor thought to influence long-term effectiveness is whether intrinsic behavior controls are involved" (p. 316). In Dwyer's study, intrinsic control came in the form of some type of expressed commitment.

In another study, De Young (1993) suggests that it may be most effective to employ both other-initiated and internally-initiated approaches to behavior change, but he emphasizes the potential of internally-initiated change. These studies reveal that behavior adoption, and certainly its prolonged maintenance, requires more than external encouragement; it requires some form of internal motivation.

The influence of expressed commitment on actual behavior raises further questions about the link between attitudes and behavior. In the studies mentioned above, the behavior was initially prompted by an outside source who obtained written or verbal commitment and not by the individual him/herself. As indicated by the research, because the individual promised to commit to the behavior, it was sustained after the intervention was removed as a result of wanting to honor his or her word.

The theory of cognitive dissonance contends that continued performance of a behavior is likely to result in beliefs that would support the behavior and vice versa (Festinger, 1957). In fact, O'Riordan (1981) points out that some others, including Bem and Heberlein, argue that the attitude - behavior model should be turned around to indicate that behaviors influence one's attitude. The implication here is that as the individuals in Dwyer's study continue performing the behavior, they will eventually adopt attitudes in support of it. These attitudes, in turn, strengthen their commitment to maintain the behavior. On the other hand, O'Riodan (1981) promotes a third model developed by Burton, Kates, and Kirkby – a "transactional model of environmental cognition" that offers a more cyclical model with feedback loops between attitude and behavior as well as personal, social, and situational influences.

Cognitive dissonance theory also implies that people will eventually bring their behaviors in line with their attitudes (Festinger, 1957), so it seems that other obstacles hinder those who express concern from taking action. Much of the research to date has focused on, and elicited fairly general attitudes from the public. Pro-environmental behaviors involve specific actions. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and O'Riordan (1981) point out the importance of measuring attitudes and behavior on the same scope. In essence, they argue that not doing so is like comparing apples and oranges since a general statement of concern does not indicate performance of, or intention to perform, specific behaviors. People may support pro-environmental goals in general, but apply different goals in their own lives (Cotgrove & Duff, 1981). For example, people may express general concern about population growth but have no intention of applying zero population growth guidelines to their own lives (O'Riordan, 1981).

Directly related is the fact that people often hold conflicting motivations and values that may also help account for the discrepancy between attitude and behavior (Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978; O'Riordan, 1981; Wenz, 1988). People can hold pro-environmental values and still modify critical wildlife habitat in their own yards because they also value private property rights. Similarly, an individual can believe that people should try to live in cities so as not to contribute to urban sprawl while he or she moves into a house in the suburbs because that person also values the space and other comforts. O'Riordan (1981) notes that even environmentalists can act in inconsistent ways. While they seek to protect wild spaces from human intrusion, they often recreate in those same places and/or lead groups of people into these areas so they, too, can experience nature in its "pristine" state.

It also appears that people are less likely to adopt a pro-environmental behavior if it will be much of an inconvenience, so even if they do support the goals of a certain action, they will not adopt it themselves. For instance, Dunlap (1989) points out that people are more willing to make some changes (recycling in their homes) than others (taking public transportation instead of their car).

Expressed environmental concern may very well be a valid indication of pro-environmental sentiment, and environmental surveys and interviews naturally trigger those values. When confronted with a situation that affects people directly, however, different values – ones that are more salient in that particular situation – are triggered, and people respond to those values. Employing cognitive dissonance theory, Eagly and Kulesa (1997) contend that reminding people of their pro-environmental attitudes will trigger those attitudes, and noting the discrepancy between their environmental attitudes and actions may help motivate behavioral change.

Dunlap (1989) suggests that people may lack knowledge of specific environmentally-responsible behaviors. Without a clear idea of possible actions, people are unlikely to act. It follows, then, that it would also be important to have some basic knowledge of ecological principles and environmental issues (Hungerford & Volk, 1990) as well as the consequences of one's actions (Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Schwartz, 1970). People need to see the relevance between their attitude and a particular behavior (Eagly & Kulesa, 1997). Knowledge gives context and meaning to the situation, reasons for responding, and direction for taking action. As crucial as it is, however, knowledge is not enough on its own (Glover & Deckert, 1998). It does not make lifestyle decisions – people do – and research indicates that people must be interested, willing, and able to attend to information monitoring and retrieval (Petty, McMichael, & Brannon, 1992).

Closely associated with knowledge is a sense of personal efficacy. Several scholars acknowledge the importance of efficacy or locus of control (Glover & Deckert, 1998; Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Peyton & Miller, 1980). If a person does not believe that he or she has the skills, knowledge, and/or political influence to take appropriate action, the individual will not be motivated to do so. Likewise, if someone does not think that what he or she does will have an impact, they may be less compelled to bother taking action (Eden, 1993). Perceiving a weakness in the theory of reasoned action, Ajzen (1985) modified the model to include one's perception of control (as well as actual control), calling the new model the theory of planned behavior (TPB).

Tied to both efficacy and the notion of internal motivation is individual responsibility. Dunlap (1989) contends that people view institutions as the primary source of environmental degradation, and therefore they believe the responsibility for improving the environment rests with the corporations, not individuals. In research conducted in England, however, Eden (1993) found that people who are actively involved in environmental organizations tend to ascribe responsibility to themselves. A strong sense of personal efficacy reinforces the feeling of responsibility, and in contrast to the general public, moral obligation may continue to motivate their actions even if those actions are perceived as futile. Furthermore, these same individuals perceive others as being unable or unwilling to take their own responsibility, thereby strengthening the activist's obligation to be the responsible agent. In contrast, people who are nonmembers or not as actively involved tend to attribute responsibility to others and believe that "they" will handle the issues.

The role of internal motivation – beliefs, values, responsibility, and moral obligation – in influencing behavior remains somewhat unclear. Through ongoing research, Ajzen (1991) has suggested that personal norms – an individual's moral judgment of a behavior – be included as a variable affecting one's intention to act. However, empirical studies show little evidence that personal norms contribute much to the process (Ajzen, 1991). One explanation is that internal motivation plays a greater role in the *maintenance* of behaviors than in their initial adoption. Another explanation may be that just as pro-environmental values alone do not move one to take action, one's moral judgment of a behavior may not, on its own, be a great enough influence, but coupled with other internal motivators, it could be a very important factor.

Humanity's alienation from nature is frequently suggested or implied as a cause for lack of environmental concern or action (Carson, 1962; Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Kempton et al., 1995; Leopold, 1966). Never, or rarely, spending time in nature may bring with it a sense of disconnection, indifference, fear, and an inability to relate to it. Without much experience to draw on, it is difficult to evoke a sense of wonder at the marvels of nature and appreciation for its life-giving qualities. We do not protect that which we do not know or value. While we may

express socially-preferable ideas, we may lack any real sense of connection to the environment, resulting in little motivation to change our actual behaviors.

The link between attitude and behavior acts in mysterious ways. All of the above explanations reveal the attempt researchers make to better understand and encourage behavior – a challenging endeavor. These factors do not act in isolation; rather, they work together. A person armed with a great deal of knowledge may not believe that he or she can make a difference by changing a behavior. At the same time, education can give direction to someone with a sense of self-efficacy, but the individual should also feel a sense of connection to nature and responsibility to take some action. Furthermore, both external reinforcement (such as continued education, social cues, and experiences) and internal reinforcement (such as strengthening beliefs, moral obligations, and a sense of fulfillment) may also help augment certain behaviors. The interactions among these variables are rarely straightforward, but as researchers continue to explore different avenues, greater insight is gained.

It is easy to call oneself an environmentalist and espouse trendy cultural sentiments. It is quite another to adopt and maintain specific practices on behalf of those attitudes, let alone a lifestyle consistent with them. Many Americans express general awareness of, and concern for, the health of the environment. Most of these people do not exhibit pro-environmental behaviors consistent with their attitudes. For example, note the popularity of the sport utility vehicle and the SUV owner who drives a highly-polluting vehicle while projecting an image of "outdoorsiness" and proclaiming his or her environmental concern with a bumper sticker.

What about the few people who do engage in pro-environmental behaviors? The above discussion suggests that the primary difference for the "true believers" lies in a closer alignment with a biocentric worldview; sufficient knowledge of ecology, appropriate behaviors, and their consequences; a strong sense of personal efficacy, responsibility, and moral obligation; and a well-nourished connection to nature. Although active environmentalists might be few and far between, the apparent increase in public sentiment may signal a significant step towards translating beliefs to action.

Environmental Education

As indicated earlier, environmental education has rarely been enthusiastically welcomed into school programs. On the contrary, although it experienced a brief period of general acceptance in the 1970s, it now faces harsh criticism from powerful individuals and groups who fear its agenda (Williams, 2000). For ideological reasons, critics of EE attack it for its activist stance, demanding that values be left out of the courses entirely and that educators stick to the facts alone.

Unfortunately, in many cases, they have succeeded. Threatened by the backlash to EE, some programs have reverted to dealing solely with scientific data. Usually, though, if one hopes to change the world, he or she must provide others with more than just information on how the world operates. As the previous discussion indicates, it takes more than knowledge of an issue to change attitudes and behavior, and providing students with scientific principles is unlikely to light the fire of passion in them (Glover & Deckert, 1998; Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Petty, McMichael, & Brannon, 1992).

Proponents of EE argue for a different kind of education (Glover & Deckert, 1998; Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Williams, 2000). Since environmental educators generally attempt to motivate pro-environmental behaviors, they also struggle with the complexity of behavioral change. Even a fairly brief review of articles and journals reveals the discouragement and confusion many educators face as they try to effect behavioral change and are confronted with many of the obstacles addressed above. Clearly, a no-fail recipe for behavioral change does not exist. However, recent EE researchers have begun to make use of attitude-behavior theory in their efforts.

Upon reviewing examples of EE guidelines, a meta-analysis of behavior research in EE, and other pertinent studies, Hungerford and Volk (1990) developed a behavior flow chart of environmental behavior. Emphasizing many of the aspects mentioned above, they contend that different sets of variables build on one another to ultimately influence a person to take environmentally-responsible actions.

Entry-level variables provide the foundation. Similar to the arguments for connecting with nature, Hungerford and Volk (1990) argue that it is critical for people to develop sensitivity, or concern, for the environment. By doing so, perhaps students' environmental attitudes and values will change or strengthen. They also recommend that students have knowledge of ecological principles. As discussed, knowledge can provide the basis for concern, including how and why to act.

Ownership variables involve students gaining in-depth knowledge of an issue or issues and understanding the positive and negative consequences of behavior. While influencing one's attitude, this kind of knowledge can also help develop a person's sense of efficacy and personal responsibility. Through careful curriculum design and opportunities for student choice, the hope is that students will become invested in the issue and committed to helping improve the present situation.

Empowerment variables focus on preparing students by arming them with confidence in their ability to perform certain skills and the belief that they can make a difference in the "real world." This involves learning the skills and actions that people can take, recalling the potential consequences of such actions, and giving them the opportunity to practice the skills. By this stage, students have developed a sense of responsibility to care for the environment, and now the focus is on strengthening their perceived efficacy.

Some researchers suggest that environmentalism is closely tied to civic responsibility or democratic citizenship, and thus well-designed environmental education programs can help promote active citizenship, as well (Bragaw, 1992; Hungerford & Volk, 1990; O'Riordan, 1981; Thomashow, 1995; Williams, 2000). By engaging students in active inquiry, helping them develop knowledge and skills, and challenging them to recognize their capabilities and responsibilities, students may be more enthused about, and better prepared to stand up for, causes important to them and actively participate in civic life. Proponents of EE endorse bringing values back into environmental education programs because of the unique position EE holds to reconnect people with the rhythm of life. Michael Frome, environmental educator and author, asserts:

> Education, with only a few exceptions, is about careers, jobs, success in a materialistic world, elitism, rather than caring and sharing; it's about facts and figures, cognitive values, rather than feeling and art derived from the heart and soul; it's about conformity, being safe in a structured society, rather than individualism, the ability to question society and to constructively influence change in direction. A change in direction is critical and imperative…Our most precious gift to the future, if you will ask me, is a point of view embodied in the protection of wild places that no longer can protect themselves. Conservation education thus must enlist not only rational recognition of the problem but human concern, distress, and love (Williams, 2000; p. 49).

Environmental Advocacy

The abundance of environmental organizations also contributes to social acceptance and public awareness. Repeated exposure to a message heightens awareness and activates relevant attitudes. As a result, these attitudes become increasingly accessible which makes an attitude more likely to influence action (Eagly & Kulesa, 1997). Numerous environmental advocacy organizations exist across the United States – many of which are national agencies with field offices throughout the country, strengthening name recognition.

These organizations exist by maintaining current members and adding new ones (donations, fees, volunteer assistance) so they can go about the work of preserving the environment and wildlife habitat. A quick search on the internet reveals hundreds of environmental/conservation organizations. Three well-known national organizations serve as examples of common approaches to environmental advocacy.

Founded in 1892 by 182 charter members and John Muir as its first president, the Sierra Club is one of the oldest and most influential grassroots organizations. Established to help "Explore, enjoy, and protect the planet," their formal mission statement (Sierra Club, 2001) employs both anthropocentric and biocentric values:

- Explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth.
- Practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources.
- Educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment.
- Use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.

To help people connect with nature (explore and enjoy), the Sierra Club offers several outdoor trips – from major national and international excursions to shorter trips with local chapter offices. To educate people about various issues, the Sierra Club provides information about numerous campaigns from urban sprawl and habitat loss to energy concerns and drilling in the Alaskan Arctic Refuge to air and water pollution. The agency also offers updates on the progress of its efforts. The website gives suggestions on how to make small pro-environmental changes in our daily lives such as energy conservation tips: "By using energy more efficiently we can cut our consumption of gas and electricity, save money, and reduce pollution" (Sierra Club, 2001). In this manner, the Sierra Club appeals to both pragmatic (monetary) and ecological (consumption and pollution) reasons for taking certain actions.

The organization encourages people to become members by explaining: "When you join or give to the Sierra Club you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are helping to preserve irreplaceable wild lands, save endangered and threatened wildlife, and protect this fragile environment we call home. You can be sure that your voice will be heard through congressional lobbying and grassroots action on the environmental issues that matter to you most" (Sierra Club, 2001). Here again, the Sierra Club appeals to our biocentric values and the resulting desire to protect these natural areas and precious wildlife. By offering tangible examples of actions we can take and ensuring that our support will help effect change, the agency strengthens a feeling of efficacy. Furthermore, by joining a group of over 700,000 members, we see how popular the organization is and may feel empowered by strength in numbers.

Membership offers other benefits as well – an expedition pack, one-year subscription to *Sierra* magazine, members-only ecotravel adventures, membership in the local chapter, and discounts on Sierra Club merchandise. The agency works to tap into internal motivation and also uses external incentives – a combination that shows great promise according to De Young (1993) – particularly the positive reinforcement of thank you gifts and the frequent communication that the magazine provides. Services, such as the Environmental 911 program that give people the chance to call and report environmental degradation in their communities, also bolster

efficacy by giving people a way to feel they are making a direct impact. Joining is made easy by submitting a form over the internet, calling, or writing their membership offices.

Similarly, The Nature Conservancy has brought its message to the national stage. Known for "saving the last great places," The Nature Conservancy has been working since 1951 to "preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive" (The Nature Conservancy, 2001). Sprinkled with vibrant and colorful pictures of beautiful natural features, the website educates people on current events in the conservation field, updates them on the agency's successes – acknowledging the public's help in making these triumphs possible, emphasizes tangible results, explains that over 88% of their funds are used for conservation work, and encourages people to join over one million members in protecting the world's vital habitats. Members also receive an umbrella, the Nature Conservancy magazine, invitations to special field trips, events, and local chapter activities.

The Natural Resources Defense Council, known as "the earth's best defense," strives to "safeguard the Earth: its people, its plants and animals and the natural systems on which all life depends" (Natural Resources Defense Council, 2001). Their mission statement continues:

> We work to restore the integrity of the elements that sustain life – air, land and water – and to defend endangered natural places. We seek to establish sustainability and good stewardship of the Earth as central ethical imperatives of human society. NRDC affirms the integral place of human beings in the environment. We strive to protect nature in ways that advance the long-term welfare of present and future generations. We work to foster the fundamental right of all people to have a voice in decisions that affect their environment. We seek to break down the pattern of disproportionate environmental burdens borne by people of color and others who face social or economic inequities. Ultimately, NRDC strives to help create a new way of life for humankind, one that can be sustained indefinitely without fouling or depleting the resources that support all life on Earth.

The NRDC also emphasizes both anthropocentric and biocentric values, making specific reference to human welfare as well as that of the planet and all living things.

They, too, educate the public on numerous environmental issues (including the progress of environmental campaigns in Washington DC), provide information on past victories, and offer incentives for joining their 500,000+ members, such as a colorful bulletin, scenic screensavers, a canvas tote bag with the NRDC logo for grocery shopping (an item that encourages a pro-environmental behavior), and "the satisfaction of protecting wilderness and wildlife" (Natural Resources Defense Council, 2001).

In addition, NRDC focuses a great deal on why and how people can take action on specific issues that concern them. Postcards are prepared and ready to sign and send with the click of a mouse, people are encouraged to contact their representatives and senators by e-mail, phone, or letter, about current legislation, alternative solutions are given to wasteful policies, and Robert Redford encourages members through snail mail and the website to contact national decision-makers regarding important environmental issues.

With impressive membership numbers contributing to their reputations, these organizations, and others like them, act as a powerful force in environmental protection. Taking a relatively middle-of-the-road stance likely serves them well as they do not alienate themselves from the majority of the population. Often, groups that are considered radical suffer in the public's image and consequently lack credibility, influence, and/or membership.

The organizations discussed here apply much of what is currently known about attitudes, behavior, and environmental values. They are careful to address environmental concern and sensitivity by offering wilderness outings, field trips, colorful outdoor pictures, and/or descriptive prose. They inform the public about current issues and the results of their efforts (results which were aided by members' donations). They make it incredibly easy for people to take local and national action on numerous issues by providing the necessary platform and tools to do so. They also provide information on membership numbers, an account of how much of a member's contribution goes to environmental protection programs, and other services seemingly directed at increasing a sense of personal and collective efficacy. It appears that these organizations (and groups like them) have made an impact – exhibiting the results of a public shift toward pro-environmental attitudes as well as fueling it.

Turning the Tide

A relatively new but growing field of research, that of Significant Life Experiences (SLE), examines the antecedents of environmentalism. In studies employing surveys, questionnaires, or structured interviews, researchers investigate the experiences that have affected the attitude, sensitivity, interest, and dedication of environmental educators, conservation workers, and environmental group members (Chawla, 1998). Beginning in 1980 with Tanner's survey of conservation workers, the field has expanded as other researchers build upon his efforts.

Chawla (1998) reviews the body of SLE research, including some of her own work, finding that although there are differences in methodology, the type of questions asked, the sample populations, and the manner in which results are analyzed, significant similarities exist. With attention given to the way the significance of experiences is construed, she explains that most respondents offer multiple reasons for their interest and actions. In general, people attribute their concern, choice of career, and actions to "positive experiences in natural areas, adult role models, environmental organizations, education, negative experiences of environmental degradation, books and other media, and on-the-job experience" (p. 378).

These findings are similar to those reported by *Sierra* magazine, in its own off-the-cuff survey that asked its readers – as well as some environmental activists – "what inspired them to stand up and join the fight to save the planet" (Slater, 2001; p. 49). Their efforts revealed no evidence of a "typical" environmentalist with responses ranging from devastation over nearby pollution to inspiration from powerful authors such as Leopold to outdoor adventures with family members or interaction with someone whose dedication was contagious.

Former head of the Bureau of Land Management under President Clinton, Jim Becca recalls that while reporting as a television journalist on an Apollo space mission, the crew commented that the air over the southwestern United States looked hazy. Disturbed, Becca investigated the reasons for the haze, and ultimately, the Four Corners Power Plant installed high-quality scrubbers that greatly improved the air quality.

After surviving a serious car accident, Julia Butterfly Hill decided to re-prioritize her life and find her purpose. In the redwoods of California, she experienced a powerful, sacred connection. After seeing a clearcut shortly thereafter and realizing she could not walk away from this, she decided to protest and moved into a tree for two years.

David Suzuki, environmental activist, author, broadcaster, and geneticist, cites Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* as having a profound impact on the way he viewed the world. Another significant moment came when he interviewed a Haida leader for his show, "The Nature of Things." When Suzuki asked the leader why he opposed logging when there was such high unemployment in his community and many Haida were loggers, the man responded that cutting the trees down would mean that they wouldn't be Haida anymore; they'd be like everybody else. It took a while for Suzuki to realize that the Haida leader was expressing an entirely different way of viewing the world and relating to the natural environment, but now he no longer thinks of the environment as being "out there." He explains, "We are the environment" (p. 57).

The insights gained from research on significant life experiences and the turning point experiences in the lives of other environmentalists may offer interesting comparisons and serve as a point of departure when discussing the findings of my own study.

Chapter Three

Research Design, Procedures, and Considerations

Generally speaking, the methodology chosen for a study reflects the kind of question being asked, and the question that is asked frequently reflects the perceptions and beliefs of the researcher. Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1995) contend that one's choice of method is often "influenced by the assumptions that the researcher makes about science, people and the social world" (p.9). Therefore, the way we search for understanding and knowledge and the way we attempt to gather evidence is directly related to our perception of social reality. Typically, one's methodological paradigm reveals much about where a person stands regarding ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the relationship between the researcher and that which is being researched) and methodology, (the process by which the researcher conducts his or her inquiry) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Creswell, 1994). Where the researcher stands regarding these issues is fundamental to the kind of research questions he or she will tend to ask and the type of research in which the individual will engage.

Quantitative and qualitative – the two main approaches to research – offer very distinct characteristics and are generally applied to very different research questions. Quantitative studies generally assume that reality is objective, distinct from the researcher, attainable, and measurable. The researcher is presumed to be separate and independent from the object(s) or people being studied. Quantitative studies involve deductive processes that attempt to define cause and effect in context-free situations and generalize findings in order to predict, explain, and understand. The research focuses on discovering facts about social, or other, phenomena and assumes a definitive and measurable reality (Minichiello et al., 1995).

On the other hand, qualitative studies assume that reality is subjective and specific to each individual. The researcher is assumed to be linked to research participants as they interact. Consequently, the researcher can both influence, and be influenced by, that relationship. Qualitative studies involve inductive processes in which understanding emerges throughout the

research process as the researcher interacts with participants. Patterns and themes are sought in context-bound situations. Qualitative research attempts to understand human behavior from the informant's perspective and assumes a more dynamic and subjective reality (Minichiello et al., 1995).

Creswell (1994) also notes differences between quantitative paradigms and qualitative paradigms in axiological (the role of values) and rhetorical assumptions (language used). Quantitative methods assume a value-free and unbiased representation of reality. Qualitative methods assume a value-laden and biased interpretation of one's world and experiences. Quantitative studies are generally written in a formal and precise manner, using widely accepted words and definitions. Qualitative studies tend to be written with a more informal and personal voice, explaining decisions as they were made.

Because the underlying assumptions associated with these worldviews and the kinds of questions put forward by quantitative and qualitative researchers are different, it follows that the process of collecting data, analyzing it, and reporting the findings are different as well. Quantitative studies are characterized by measurement instruments, such as questionnaires, surveys, and experiments. Data are analyzed through numerical comparisons, calculations, and statistical applications. Findings are reported on the basis of the statistical analysis. Qualitative studies involve direct interaction with participants and/or their natural surroundings through interviews, participant observations, and document or artifact analysis. Data are analyzed by recognizing themes and patterns as well as inconsistencies, and when possible, findings are reported in the words of the participants.

A Qualitative Study

Naturally, both methods of inquiry have advantages and disadvantages. When specific information is desired from large populations or certain variables must be measured and counted, it is difficult to imagine the wisdom behind conducting a qualitative study. However, when a researcher wishes to explore the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings experienced by

individuals and study the meaning people attach to their lives and how this influences their actions, qualitative methods offer unique opportunities (Minichiello et al., 1995). Specifically, qualitative methodology "facilitates an understanding of the informants' perceptions. The focus of qualitative research is not to reveal causal relationships, but rather to discover the nature of phenomena as humanly experienced. It is a deliberate move away from quantification and testing of hypotheses" (Minichiello et al., 1995, p. 10-11).

Maxwell (1998) suggests that one of the research purposes for which qualitative designs are most appropriate is "understanding the *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with, and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences" (p. 75). Another purpose is that of "identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and generating new, "grounded" theories about the latter" (p. 75). Although research to date has included surveys to measure attitudes, behavior, and knowledge, questionnaires designed to track a specific behavior (usually recycling), and meta-analyses of prior studies to identify objectives for environmental education, studies have not focused on the people who have chosen to take pro-environmental actions and make lifestyle choices based on their environmental ethic. Because I am interested in these people – their views, beliefs, experiences, and how they make sense of their relationship to the environment – a qualitative design is best suited for this study.

Qualitative methodology is a fluid, rather elusive approach that evolved as a result of some researchers' frustration with the limitations and assumptions of the more "objective," "scientific," widely-accepted quantitative approach. Disagreeing with many of the fundamental ideas promoted by quantitative researchers, those drawn to qualitative inquiry understood a different picture of what research involves.

The qualitative approach to research has met with skepticism as its proponents have tried to gain academic acceptance of its merits. Yet even among those who consider themselves qualitative researchers, there appears to be little consensus as to how this kind of inquiry should be conceptualized. While this confusion may actually serve to support many of the contentions

about relativism and socially-constructed meaning made by qualitative researchers, it makes the task of articulating a succinct vision of it difficult, if not impossible.

The use of qualitative methodology has grown out of diverse fields (including anthropology, sociology, and psychology). To add to the confusion, even within the methodology itself, there are numerous and various kinds of qualitative approaches that are applied, depending on the study. This has resulted in distinct opinions among researchers about the way in which various qualitative traditions should be used. Smith (1987) contends that such divisions have created separate schools of thought among researchers – implying severe tensions between "hard-core" single-tradition researchers and "jack-of-all-trade" researchers who might mix and match traditions to suit the question at hand.

The number of various traditions alone suggests impressive differences of opinion over the various forms of inquiry. Creswell (1994) explains that a number of scholars have identified and tried to elucidate the characteristics of differing typologies. He presents a table highlighting the works of nine authors and the 30+ categories resulting from their work. Few labels seem to have generally-accepted definitions. For example, ethnography, ethnomethodology, case study, observations, qualitative studies, and interpretive studies are terms which might be used interchangeably, *or* they could refer to distinct methodological approaches, depending on the author.

Furthermore, differences exist over the purposes for which qualitative research should be used. For instance, some argue that qualitative studies do not seek to identify causal relationships (Minichiello et al., 1995), while others argue that developing causal explanations is, indeed, one of the purposes, and the practice is increasingly accepted (Maxwell, 1998).

While "qualitative research defies simple description," there are traits that distinguish it from other forms of inquiry as indicated above (Smith, 1987; p. 174). Researchers do not seek an objective "truth." Instead, they interact on a personal level with participants and seek to gain greater insight into their perspectives, views, thoughts, experiences, and feelings. "Quality is the essential character or nature of something; quantity is the amount. Quality is the what; quantity

is the how much. Qualitative refers to the meaning…while quantitative assumes the meaning and refers to a measure of it" (Dabbs, 1982; p. 32).

Suffice it to say there are few specific rules to designing a qualitative study. As Maxwell (1998) points out, the answer to many methodological questions in qualitative research is the ever-popular "It depends." He explains that the value and feasibility of qualitative research does not depend on sticking to certain rules. Instead, "they depend on the specific setting and phenomena you are studying and the actual consequences of your strategy for studying it" (p. 85). Keeping this in mind, and rejecting the notion of unbiased neutrality, qualitative researchers frequently take great care to explain the methodology chosen, reasons for their decisions, alternative possibilities, and the biases and assumptions they bring to the study.

Interpretive Exploratory Approach

Because it is difficult to find consensus in the literature on specific characteristics of the various qualitative traditions, it can be a daunting prospect to try to articulate them, particularly since the traditions often overlap and intertwine. It can also be a unique opportunity. This study, for instance, explores the ways active environmentalists experience the environment, making that component of the study phenomenological. However, the study examines not only how they experience it, but also how they conceptualize it, interpret their relationship to it, and identify those experiences that influenced their views, making the study as a whole more of an interpretive, exploratory one.

Partially influenced by hermeneutics, a method of interpreting meaning in texts, the interpretive approach has been influenced more recently by German intellectuals, such as Dilthey and Husserl, who rejected positivistic assumptions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Minichiello et al., 1995). With the emergence of ethnographic studies, anthropological interpretivists, including Geertz, further developed interpretivist studies and held that the goal of theorizing in research should be gaining "understanding of direct lived experience rather than construction of abstract generalizations" (Minichiello et al., 1995, p. 5). Smith (1987) explains:

> that the idea underpinning interpretive approaches is the belief that the mind creates reality and that an objective world separate from the perceptions of the person cannot be known. Social knowledge is gained by Verstehen, or subjective, participative understanding and cannot be verified by appeal to external criteria. There are no universal laws to search for; instead, the goal is to understand particular action and meanings in particular contexts. Data are primarily emic (p. 176).

Consequently, interpretivists study the "acts and meanings ascribed to events by actors in a particular social setting" (Smith, 1987, p. 176).

Working with this framework, my study takes a decidedly exploratory direction. Exploratory studies offer a great deal of freedom to focus on personal areas of interest and investigate hunches (Maxwell, 1998; Minichiello et al., 1995). Rather than test pre-existing hypotheses, such studies expand the knowledge base by helping to gain greater insight into the perceptions and beliefs of others and build theory. Maxwell (1998) explains that exploratory studies can be used to "generate an understanding of the concepts and theories held by the people you are studying…" (p. 79). It is not merely a source of additional concepts for a theory; rather, "it provides you with an understanding of the *meaning* that these phenomena and events have for the actors who are involved in them, and the perspectives that inform their actions" (p. 79-80).

While exploratory research relies on hunches and inductive processes to a certain extent, it is not divorced from existing theory by any means. Minichiello et al. (1995) explain that exploratory studies, similar to pilot studies and grounded theory, naturally develop from the context of existing theory. The researcher may not think that current research adequately addresses particular phenomena, does not take the theory far enough, or fails to explore different angles or perspectives. In these cases, researchers typically go to the people they are studying, gather data, and build theory based on their interactions with the participants in the study. The grounded theory, then, may be interpreted in light of existing literature, describing when and where the emerging ideas correspond and conflict with existing theory.

Rather than testing a formal hypothesis or employing predetermined categories, the researcher is there to learn from the participants and chooses methods that will encourage the

participants to educate the researcher – allowing categories and themes to emerge from their descriptions. Findings and conclusions rest on the explanations of the participants. While there is no formal hypothesis being tested, hunches and suspicions likely exist, and others may develop throughout the study – offering possible avenues for future research.

In-Depth Interviewing

If the hope is to catch a glimpse of another person's world and gain insight into the way the individual views the world, the meaning he or she gives to experiences, and the beliefs that have prompted certain actions and decisions, interviewing provides that opportunity. Minichiello et al. (1995) suggest that "qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviewing and participant observation, are said to allow the researcher to gain access to the motives, meanings, actions, and reactions of people in the context of their daily lives" (p.10).

Specifically, interviewing people allows the researcher to ask questions, to find out how and why people believe what they do and make the decisions they make. In contrast to participant observation, interviewing allows the researcher to find out what leads to certain actions and what is going on in the individual's mind. It is a unique glimpse "behind the scenes," shedding light on those experiences and influences that have helped guide the interviewee down his or her present path – experiences to which the researcher has not necessarily been privy.

Furthermore, interviewing people provides the opportunity to learn how the participants understand their own decisions, experiences, and actions. Who better to turn to in order to find out more about certain perceptions and actions than those individuals who exhibit the actions?

> We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe… We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (Patton, 1990; p. 278).

As explained by Patton (1990), we interview people because there is much to be learned about people that cannot be observed. We interview people because they can communicate with us and explain decisions, actions, experiences, and opinions. As these statements suggest, underlying the decision to interview people is the belief that "the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 1990; p. 278).

Yet there is more to interviewing than asking questions and receiving answers. People are at the core of qualitative research, and certainly the very nature of interviewing deals with people – each with his or her own subjective views, experiences, and interpretations. Words hold different meanings for each of us. We hear and interpret questions differently. We choose our responses differently. Fontana and Frey (1994) argue that "the spoken word has always a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and report or code the answers" (p. 361). However, they maintain that interviewing is a powerful way to improve our understanding of human beings, and Minichiello et al. (1995) suggest that interviewing is commonly used in exploratory studies as a way to gain greater understanding of the field and develop theories instead of test them.

Semi-structured Interviews

Most authors identify three approaches to in-depth interviewing – distinct from each other in the extent of their formality. Structured, or standardized, interviews are carefully designed on an interview form with specific wording and a pre-determined order to the questions. Structured interviews may include open-ended as well as closed-ended questions and are helpful when the researcher is looking for the same information from a number of people and/or when multiple interviewers are gathering data so that the discrepancy among personal interviewing styles is reduced. Little, if any, room exists to pursue certain topics or explore a unique experience in greater depth with the participants.

Unstructured, or informal, interviews are primarily conversational in nature and rely on information elicited during the discussion. Consequently, entirely different conversations may unfold with each individual, and participants may not even know they are being interviewed.

The interviewer attempts to let the conversation unfold naturally while gearing it to his or her research interests. The approach is responsive to individual needs and situations. However, because each conversation is so individually tailored and lacks structure, it takes a great deal of time to gather systematic data from participants to be useful for any type of analysis and interpretation – affecting the researcher's, as well as the participants' valuable time.

Semi-structured, or focused, interviews attempt to benefit from the advantages of both formal and informal styles. The researcher develops a protocol to guide the interview. The protocol identifies the topics that the researcher wishes to address, and it may or may not include some of the questions he or she plans to ask. No specific wording or order is established, and flexibility exists for the researcher to pursue individual experiences and lines of questioning that could not be anticipated, and therefore, are not included on the interview guide. This approach allows the researcher to explore certain issues in greater detail while focusing the interview on certain topics, saving time for both the researcher and participants and saving effort as the researcher weeds through the data following the interview.

Since I focus in this study on the perspectives, feelings, experiences, actions, and meaning that certain individuals give to their behaviors and experiences, I chose to conduct in-depth interviews with the participants. Because this is primarily an exploratory study and I am interested in finding out what stories unfold from each individual and what patterns, themes, or inconsistencies emerge throughout the interview process, a tightly structured interview would not offer the flexibility needed to explore certain avenues further or investigate unplanned topics that arise. Yet time and experience is still an important factor. The amount of time required to conduct completely informal interviews is not always feasible, and it puts a fairly heavy burden on participants as well. Moreover, with little, if any, direction to the interview, it is difficult to focus the inquiry and cover the same topics with each participant – not to mention having to wade through unwieldy transcripts that lack cohesion.

Patton (1987) suggests that "the fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms" (p. 115). I chose a semi-structured approach for this study. Interviews were guided

by a protocol (Appendix A) since I was interested in learning how the active environmentalists would respond to similar questions. I designed the protocol to address the research questions, focusing on environmental experiences, values, views, influences, relationships, and perseverance.

The semi-structured interview helps the researcher cover the general topics he or she wishes to address with each interviewee, while allowing for individual expression and identification of themes to emerge from the participants themselves. A well-designed interview guide helps the researcher think through the topics and questions that are important to the study, and it helps focus the interview and makes analysis and interpretation more feasible for researchers who have not had much experience with data collection, analysis, and documentation of unstructured interviews.

A Combined Approach

Creswell (1994) explains that the tendency to link paradigms with methodology leads researchers to choose one type of methodology rather than combine them. The focus on the differences between qualitative and quantitative paradigms has encouraged people to pick one camp over the other, fueling the paradigm debate and de-emphasizing the possibilities that exist by incorporating the two in the same study. In fact, Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989; as cited in Creswell, 1994) suggest five advantages to combining the different methodologies including triangulation which helps strengthen a study's results by offering more than one source of data collection. The other benefits they identify include:

> complimentary, in that overlapping and different facets of a phenomenon may emerge; developmentally, wherein the first method is used sequentially to help inform the second method; initiation, wherein contradictions and fresh perspectives emerge; expansion, wherein the mixed methods add scope and breadth to a study (p. 175).

Although it is not the predominant style, several researchers have conducted studies that combine the different approaches, and Creswell (1994) discusses various ways of tackling this, such as the two-phase design, the mixed-methodology design, and the dominant-less

dominant design. As the name suggests, the two-phase design involves a qualitative phase and a quantitative phase of the study. The paradigms are kept separate throughout the study. For example, distinct purpose statements, research questions or hypotheses, and results are developed for each phase of the study, in accordance with the assumptions of each paradigm.

A mixed-method approach uses both qualitative and quantitative methods throughout the design. Both quantitative and qualitative research questions are posed. Theory and literature from both paradigms inform the study, and patterns and themes, as well as statistical analysis are presented as findings.

This study employs a dominant-less dominant design in which the inquiry primarily revolves around one methodological paradigm (in this case, qualitative), utilizing data collection methods associated with that style and including a small component from the other paradigm (quantitative). Information is provided and theory drawn primarily from the dominant paradigm. Questions are posed in language consistent with the main design, but attention is paid to the questions the alternative design helps address, as well as the methods, results, and relationship of the findings to those of the dominant paradigm.

Mail-back Survey

While the primary method of data collection in this study is through in-depth interviews, participants also responded to an ecological survey (Beckwith & Rayl, 2001; Appendix B). Developed during spring 2001 by a professor and undergraduate student in the Department of Resource Development at Michigan State University (MSU), the survey was designed to assess the ecological attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors of students in Resource Development compared with students in other departments. Beckwith and Rayl (2001) utilized previously published survey questions, including many from Dunlap and Van Liere's 1978 NEP scale, as well as original questions based on current literature to construct a nine-page questionnaire that involves measurement on Lickert-type scales as well as some multiple-choice, open-ended, and demographic questions.

Including the survey as part of this study can offer a number of important benefits. It can help in the triangulation of results, reveal information that may not have been elicited during the interviews, show areas of convergence and divergence between the interview and survey responses, and provide information on how active environmentalists look on paper – shedding light on the use of interviews and surveys in this field of study. After hearing their perspectives, do they respond to the survey questions the way I would expect? Do their responses differ from those of the student population gathered in 2001, and if so, in what areas? What can this tell us about the advantages and disadvantages of only conducting interviews, only conducting surveys, or combining the different data collection methods?

Parameters of the Study

The study was conducted in the Greater Lansing area. The capitol of Michigan, Lansing is located in the central part of the Lower Peninsula and is a city of approximately 135,000 residents. Immediately adjacent to Lansing is East Lansing, home to Michigan State University – one of the Big Ten schools with a combined graduate and undergraduate student population of roughly 47,000. One of the largest universities in the country, Michigan State University holds classes and conducts research year round, employing thousands of administrators, faculty, and staff. East Lansing gives way to several other municipalities that make up the suburbs of Lansing with about 60,000 residents.

The participants in the study are ten residents of the Greater Lansing area who are actively involved in environmental protection and pro-environmental behaviors. The focus of the study is the exploration of the views, beliefs, and experiences of active environmentalists as well as the meaning they attach to their experiences and actions. How do they view the environment, their relationship to it, and the experiences that have led them to adopt their ethic?

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was primarily collected during July and August 2001. One in-depth interview was conducted with each of ten participants. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and

expanded shortly after each interview took place. Interviews were guided by a protocol and lasted an average of two hours each. I contacted seven of the participants for follow-up or clarification questions by e-mail as I began to transcribe and work through the data. I made note of observations, perceptions, and hunches on individual interview guides during, immediately following, and/or as I transcribed each interview.

Upon completion of the interview, participants were given an ecological survey (Beckwith & Rayl, 2001) and were asked to respond to it and mail it back in a postage-paid envelope within seven days. Completing the survey takes approximately 15 – 20 minutes. Each of the participants responded to the survey and returned it.

As might be expected, data analysis does not follow strict rules in qualitative studies. It is far more intuitive in nature and artistic in presentation. Initial analysis prepares the data for interpretation and starts to make sense of what is stated explicitly and what is not – balancing the art of specific descriptions and quotations with that of reading between the lines. Typically, analysis involves a detailed review of field notes and/or transcripts and the identification of patterns and themes by coding the data into categories (Patton, 1987).

Several authors argue that analysis actually begins in the field while the researcher is collecting data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 1994). By diligently recording observations, ideas, and hunches during the data collection process, the researcher is able to capture initial impressions and suspicions that may be lost if not written down. Furthermore, identifying perceptions and ideas during data collection helps with continued generation of new ideas (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992), and it seems it would assist in subsequent collection efforts as the researcher attempts to explore these observations in greater detail by looking for reinforcement and/or alternative responses.

After data collection, the researcher reviews the material for the existence of patterns and themes – noting those that keep surfacing in the vocabulary of the participants as well as those that the researcher observes beyond verbal communication (Patton, 1987). The researcher identifies general categories that describe the kinds of data that will fall under each heading,

such as activity codes, event codes, strategy codes, and relationship codes. Quite often, the purpose of the study and the research questions help define the categories of a particular study. The researcher may also choose to create sub-categories to help further focus the data into manageable topics. The researcher then begins coding, or labeling the data according to category. Again, the process is not an exact one, and certain words, phrases, descriptions, and allusions may fall into more than one category. From here, the researcher can begin focusing more intently on the patterns and themes that emerge – expressions that keep recurring, commonly shared sentiments and experiences – as well as common omissions and/or diverging points of view and inconsistencies.

In this study, taped interviews were transcribed, and data coded according to the topics (categories) discussed during each interview (see Interview Protocol, Appendix A; actions, experiences, impressions, influences, relationships, and values) as well as any that emerged from the participants themselves. Transcripts were then coded and analyzed for themes, patterns, and variations within and across interviewee responses. When analyzing the data, sub-categories helped clarify and refine some of the themes. Field notes on observations, hunches, and ideas during the data collection phase were consulted throughout the analysis process as well.

Surveys are typically all or part of a study with a large sample population. Analysis usually involves statistical computations in which nominal, ordinal, interval, and at times, ratio data are identified. The mean, mode(s), and frequencies are determined. Responses of groups and subgroups may be compared, and a number of well-defined statistical tests may be run to determine relationships, correlation, probability, and predictability. The power, or accuracy, of the results is also tested to reveal the confidence interval.

As this study is primarily a qualitative study and only involves ten participants, the purpose is not to determine the statistical significance of the findings, nor does the design lend itself to thorough statistical analysis. Instead, the survey offered a different way of examining the perceptions of the participants. The purpose was not to investigate each detail but rather to glean any major patterns or surprises from the responses of the participants. Responses were

analyzed for similarities and differences across participants in this study and examined against the survey responses of the MSU students who completed the survey in spring 2001. Responses were also reviewed in light of the data gathered during each interview. How do the attitudes and beliefs of active environmentalists translate to paper? Are the survey responses what one would expect to see after the in-depth interview? Are they noticeably different from the student respondents?

The Role of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers acknowledge the researcher as the primary data collection instrument and argue that studies are not neutral, objective projects separate from the investigator. On the contrary, a researcher's opinions, beliefs, and experiences can not be divorced from the inquiry. Our biases influence what we hear and see during inquiry as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly customary for researchers to recognize their biases and explicitly state them in their studies (Creswell, 1994).

In recent years, I have grown increasingly aware of the degradation we cause the natural environment, our insatiable drive for comfort and convenience, and our alienation from the environment which, with disturbing irony, allows us to push our homes and towns ever closer to "nature" while manipulating it to suit our desires. I am interested in becoming an active environmentalist myself. Speaking with people who are already active environmentalists has been a fascinating experience and a real privilege. As I have seen my own views shift, knowledge increase, and commitment strengthen, I was very interested in the stories and experiences of those who dedicate much of their daily lives and work to protecting the environment and behaving in environmentally-responsible ways.

As a result of my personal views and the literature on the various ways of conceptualizing the environment, I believe that most active environmentalists do not think of the environment as a separate entity. Rather, it is the foundation from which everything else emerges. In fact, the

environment is so important and interwoven that it is difficult to discuss "it" as a concept. I think that the natural environment holds intrinsic worth for these people, and they have developed some kind of significant relationship with it that draws them to take the actions they do.

Verification

Again, in qualitative studies, there is not consensus on an established procedure for ensuring validity and reliability (Creswell, 1994). However, it is essential for the researcher to indicate how he or she plans to portray information as accurately as possible. Creswell (1994) suggests addressing both internal and external validity.

Different methods of data collection were used to find convergence in the material. Triangulation, initially promoted by Denzin, provides the opportunity to investigate the same phenomenon from different angles (Creswell, 1994). This study includes both in-depth interviews and a mail-back survey. While triangulation, even across paradigms, helps strengthen credibility of the findings and may introduce fresh insights, it is important not to expect the same results from each method or source (Patton, 1987). Particularly in studies where qualitative and quantitative methods are used, convergence of data can be tricky because different aspects may be measured in the data collection techniques. However, Patton (1987) argues that these problems do not invalidate either method; rather, exploring the results and working to resolve differences when they do exist can provide a powerful interpretation for the study.

I included member checks at various points throughout the data collection and analysis phases. I asked follow-up questions during each interview and contacted participants after the interviews for further clarification and follow-up questions, when necessary. In this way, participants were able to clarify responses and elaborate on certain points. Each participant was also asked to review his or her specific interview profile before I included it in the final report for submission to the University. This provides interviewees the chance to read their profiles as I understood them and make any corrections to the information. Each participant responded to this request.

Qualitative studies, by their very nature, are unique to specific people and contexts. One cannot generalize the results. However, by being explicit about the researcher's role, purpose of the study, methods chosen, participants involved, and decisions made throughout the study, the researcher provides a foundation for limited replication (Creswell, 1994). Careful, detailed description of process, procedure, and findings helps reveal the context in which the researcher is operating. Triangulation of methods and analysis provides a deeper and expanded picture. I included the above techniques in this study which should help strengthen validity and reliability. The study was then subject to external scrutiny by three university faculty committee members highly knowledgeable and experienced in research design, one of whom is an expert on qualitative methodology.

Ethical Considerations

"Speaking" for another person can be difficult, and it involves ethical concerns, as well as concerns about verification. Numerous authors emphasize the importance of conducting ethical research and safeguarding the rights, needs, values, desires, worries, and voice of the participants (Creswell, 1994; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990; Minichiello et al., 1995). Participants give of their time, effort, and selves to help the researcher investigate his or her own interests. Beyond that, certain information elicited from participants can be difficult, or worrisome, to deal with, and what may be a sensitive issue for one individual may not be for another. It is the obligation of the researcher to respect the concerns and privacy of the participants.

While the general focus of this study is fairly innocuous, the issue is a contentious one in our society, and in situations where participants hold highly visible or well-known positions, as is frequently the case in this study, it is particularly important to respect the wishes of the informants. To that end, I clearly explained the purpose of, and procedures involved with conducting the study to each participant prior to each interview. Written consent was obtained before any interview took place. A consent form (Appendix D) officially describing

the study and explaining that participants' responses would remain confidential was given to each participant at the beginning of their interview. An application for expedited review by the Institutional Review Board, the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, was filed and approved. Participants were also asked to review the written reports of their interviews. To protect their identity, I used pseudonyms and omitted any specific identifying details throughout the report. I worked to uphold the wishes of the participants during the entire process.

Criteria for selection of "active environmentalists"

Perhaps for the sake of ease in identifying sample populations for extensive surveys, past research typically used membership in an environmental agency as the only criteria for sample environmentalists. One of the claims made in this study is that pro-environmental behavior is not necessarily related to club membership. In fact, instead of selecting participants based on organization membership, I select them based on their exhibited dedication to the environment, which may or may not include membership in an environmental group. My knowledge of the local environmental community and the recommendations of others helped identify participants who met a combination of criteria.

The criteria require that each individual be a leader and take the initiative concerning environmental matters in the community through programs or groups they chair, jobs they hold, and/or activities they develop and coordinate – efforts that suggest the environment is a priority to them. Examples include spearheading an environmental organization or leading political advocacy endeavors.

Each activist must "practice what they preach" in their own lives by exhibiting pro-environmental actions on a consistent basis and across activities. Examples include energy conservation practices, car-pooling or bike riding, recycling whatever is currently accepted at the local recycling center, and composting.

Each individual must also exhibit commitment over time. For the purposes of this study, an environmental lifestyle should not be a new experience for these people. Rather, their leadership in the community and environmentally-responsible behavior should have been a part of their lives for at least a year. In the case of my participants, most behaviors dated back well beyond a year, indicating dedication to that lifestyle.

Limitations of the Methodology

Despite the advantages of in-depth interviewing, it comes with limitations as well. Great care needs to be given in designing appropriate questions, coding and analyzing subjective data, creating a comfortable environment for the participants, and knowing when and how to handle non-responses and keep the conversation going (Minichiello et al., 1995). Conducting a pilot interview on this same topic helped prepare me for many of these challenges as a researcher.

Bias is always a concern in research, and in-depth interviewing is frequently singled out for being prone to this consideration (Yin, 1998). One's worldview influences the way an individual approaches and makes sense of the world. As we interpret others, we often impute beliefs and motives to them (Elster, 1998). While interviewing may offer greater detail and depth than other methods, we should not ignore the bias that a researcher may bring to the interview. The limitation is significant because while we know that it exists, sometimes we do not know to what extent it is playing a role as we listen to the interviewee, expand our notes, and recall the interview during data analysis. A relatively easy way to combat this is to do some cross-checking during and after the interview by asking the interviewee to respond to inconsistencies and clarify other questions the interviewer has. Furthermore, it helps to ask the interviewee to review the initial analysis or write-up to make sure the interpretation is perceived as accurate (Minichiello et al., 1995).

Discussing values can be a difficult process. Even our most concrete values can shift or waiver at times. Moreover, people can hold conflicting values about an issue at the same time (Wenz, 1988). For example, as mentioned earlier, we value the common good, but we also value

private property and individual liberty. These values are often at odds in our society and in any given person, particularly in relation to the environment.

Being able to articulate one's values, beliefs, and the factors that have influenced them implies the individual has given these concepts some serious thought. In this case, perhaps because the interviewees are proactive, have chosen to make the environment a priority in their lives, and have managed to resist societal influences, they seemed to have already contemplated their pro-environmental stance, and for the most part, were able to discuss their values in an articulate manner. I also chose to provide them with some background information about the study beforehand, hoping that would give them a chance to think about it prior to the interview itself.

It is also important to note that although a researcher may want to include as much information about the participants and their responses as possible, it is simply not practical or appropriate to do so in the confines of most studies. Some information must be omitted by necessity. To present the findings in a way that makes sense, the researcher sifts through a great deal of information, interprets it, and shares it. Obviously, the researcher must decide which information that will be. This involves choosing quotes, experiences, and examples that best represent each participant's worldview and correlate with the themes of the study. These are inherently subjective decisions, though.

A person is so much more than the words they speak or the anecdotes the researcher puts on the page. While I attempt to shed light on what drives my participants to lead the lives they do, it is just that – a *glimpse* of their thought process and value system, as it is impossible to capture anyone's entire persona in prose. As before, I confront these limitations by openly addressing them, carefully limiting and defining the aims of the study, and requesting the participants' input on their individual stories.

Surveys come with their own limitations including non-responses, differences in interpreting the questions, and the researcher's inability to obtain any in-depth information or follow up on interesting responses. Because this study combines a survey instrument with

interviews, it is possible to explore the topics in detail. Indeed, that is one of the primary purposes. The survey is not the major data collection method, and the study is not designed to make statistical claims based on the results of the survey. I discussed the survey, why it was designed, and the purpose of it with respect to my study with each of the participants, and as mentioned above, each of the participants returned the survey.

Chapter Four

Walking the Walk

Close your eyes and think back. You can probably recall various experiences that you have had in the natural environment – hiking in the woods, kayaking in the Great Lakes, skating at the pond, biking in the mountains, swimming at a summer cottage, hitting the slopes, strolling through the park, chasing fireflies, roasting marshmallows, making snow angels, playing frisbee, jumping in the leaves, lying under the stars, sledding down the hill, gazing at the sunset, climbing trees, enjoying a snowball fight, laughing in the summer sun.

Now try to focus on a specific experience that really stands out for you. At first it might be just a glimpse, but as you continue thinking about it, the memory might grow clearer. What are you doing? Where are you? Are you alone or with somebody else? What time of day is it? Take a deep breath. I see that smile! What do you see around you? What do you hear? What do you smell? How do you feel when you're there?

Each of us experiences the environment in different ways, and we each have different interpretations to share. This chapter discusses the findings of my study, beginning with brief profiles on each of the active environmentalists to acquaint you with the reasons they were chosen for this study and introduce the factors each individual identified as primary influences on his or her environmental ethic (individual sections that delve into each participant's story in slightly greater depth are found in Appendix C). It continues with a discussion and initial analysis of the themes that emerged from the group as a whole and concludes with a summary and look at what the survey responses reveal. While reading each participant's introductory profile, please keep in mind that although many people may have shared similar experiences, opinions, and observations with me, I chose to highlight the themes that each person emphasized during his or her interview – thereby giving the reader a glimpse of each participant's main points.

Active Environmentalists

Joe

Joe works at the university where he directs a campus-wide program on sustainability. In this position, he is involved in a number of efforts to assess current practices across campus and aid in establishing goals, as well as guidelines to meet those goals, in pursuit of a "greener" campus. He frequently coordinates forums and seminars to educate interested faculty and students, raise difficult questions, and encourage continued dialogue about environmental health. He is also involved in developing courses that focus on sustainable practices. He has been the driving force behind university-wide changes toward a more environmentally-responsible campus, including convincing the university to purchase only 100% recycled paper from Michigan pulp.

He does not live close to his place of work which is something he would like to change. In the meantime, he drives a car with good gas mileage and recently purchased a used bike so he can travel around campus without having to use his car. He has tried carpooling a few times but finds it difficult to locate people with similar schedules and suggests that perhaps he will need to adjust *his* schedule in order to give carpooling a better chance: "I have to figure out ways. I have to change some of my behavior so I can fit better with the other [environmental] behavior and see how that plays out."

He and his wife organized a recycling program in their community twelve years ago – recycling plastic, glass, tin, paper, magazines, and cardboard – and they work with other local volunteers to sort the material from schools and residents. Joe is a member of the Earth Island Institute and Greenpeace, and he takes numerous actions to minimize his effect on the environment, including conserving energy, purchasing earth-friendly products, composting, and reducing wasteful consumptive practices. For years, he has taken an active role in social justice issues, as well as environmental concerns, through various public awareness campaigns and protests.

He believes that his interest in the environment was initially sparked by a geography professor in college whose integrity and passion for what he believed in impressed Joe as a young student: "The one event that clearly pushed me in this direction – I don't think I was inclined in this direction before then – was an undergraduate course I took from a guy who was really an environmentalist."

Joe identifies a number of other factors that have influenced his environmentalism, including spending a lot of time outdoors and going camping when he was in college, volunteer work and public policy jobs that focused on social justice issues but touched on some environmental concerns like energy production, his wife who is very ecologically-aware, and reading inspiring works of other environmentalists. He mentions that his activism for social justice issues came before his environmentalism, but they are connected in many ways. He also talks quite a bit about questioning the way things are typically done, learning more about himself, and striving for genuine integrity.

* * *

Michael

Michael works as policy advisor for a non-profit consortium of over fifty environmental organizations in the state. He has worked in the environmental arena for nearly twenty years, including upper-level governmental and non-profit positions, and has been instrumental in many of Michigan's environmental policy initiatives. At present, he focuses on children's environmental health, wetlands protection, and evaluation of current environmental protection practices in the Great Lakes states. He continually responds to calls from concerned citizens who seek his advice on how to halt development proposals and other threats to the natural environment across the state.

Michael and the other staff members in his office have chosen to purchase blocks of green power, at a higher cost than traditional fuel, from the local utility plant – ensuring that their energy comes from renewable sources like water, wind, and biomass. Michael purchases green power for his personal energy consumption as well. He recycles paper at his office and

paper and other recyclables at home. He notes that this is easy since his apartment provides separate bins in the basement for recyclable products. He tries to purchase products that are environmentally-friendly, conserves water and energy, reduces waste by reusing paper and other items instead of purchasing them more frequently, and buys organically-grown food. He has participated in protests regarding issues that are important to him, frequently contacts his representatives about social and environmental concerns, and he is a member of the Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy, and a couple state environmental organizations as well.

He comments that a person's choice of car is one of the most significant impacts he or she can have on the environment, and he has made an effort to purchase fuel-efficient cars since his first car after college. He plans to purchase a hybrid car within the next couple years, and because of the investment, wants to make sure it will be the greenest car he can buy. He notes that he should do better about walking to work instead of driving and explains that he often has meetings that take him away from the office. As a result, he tries to make use of conference-calling as often as possible so he can limit the need to drive.

Michael speaks fondly of trips to the Upper Peninsula with his family to visit his grandparents. Even as a young child, Michael enjoyed the wilderness on these trips up north and was excited to be in the "wild west!" He also shares the impact of a powerful connection. On the first camping trip of his life, Michael, recently out of college, went with some friends to one of Michigan's National Lakeshores where he had "almost a religious conversion."

> It was the first time I had ever woken up outdoors, basically…I got up on a July morning – a cold July morning, but it was sunny – before anyone else in the campground was up, and I went to the lake, and I was very much in awe of it, and it was such a wonderful feeling that came over me.

Michael explains that his interest in the environment started long before his epiphany along the lakeshore. He had started taking some pro-environmental actions already and had done some volunteer work with organizations, but the camping experience suggested a clear direction for where he should focus his time, talents, and efforts.

Other influences include meeting people who were actively involved in environmental protection, family discussions about politics at the dinner table, and his father's dedication to public service.

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Emma

Emma works as staff director for the state chapter of a national non-profit grassroots environmental organization. She focuses on forest issues at present, and she represents her agency at the state and national levels. She was also part of a bipartisan ticket that emphasized environmental concerns in a recent local election.

At home, she engages in multiple pro-environmental actions. She conserves energy by keeping the lights turned off, choosing energy-efficient appliances, and keeping the house cool with the strategic use of windows during the summer months. She reduces waste by bringing her family's recyclables to the collection site, reusing products, and composting organic waste. Her other actions include purchasing environmentally-friendly products and recycled goods, conserving water, buying locally-grown organic food, converting her yard to native plants, and growing some of her own vegetables. She and her family are members of the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Audubon Society, and the League of Conservation Voters. She is also a member of a local food cooperative and supports several other local environmental agencies.

Emma and her family live fairly near the bus line, and she tries to take public transportation as often as possible. She admits she should try to do better about this and explains that since her youngest son has just graduated from high school, it will be easier for her to use public transportation more frequently as she will no longer be transporting him.

Emma describes her journey as one of "reinforcement over time through great experiences of wonders in the wild world." She had a lot of exposure to nature while growing up, as she and her family did a lot of hiking, canoeing, and camping, and she and her siblings would play in a nearby maple forest. Although she didn't necessarily appreciate it at the time, she believes that these experiences "built it in."

Emma also singles out her family's activism as a significant influence. Her parents were actively involved in local government and the community. By setting the example they did and by engaging their children in provocative discussions at the dinner table, her parents instilled in Emma the belief that there are ways a person can take action. "You see people who do have a direct effect, and they can do this. It's possible to make a change." She also internalized the belief that "it's worth doing that. Yes, you can, and it's worth doing it because this is an important thing to do for your own sense of self worth." Numerous subsequent experiences in nature also made an impact on her.

* * *

Tara

Upset with the way local officials were handling environmental issues in her community, Tara ran for local office and won. As an advocate for the environment, she was in the minority for four years – after which she decided to look for people who shared her concern and put together a bi-partisan ticket from which five of the six individuals won in the recent election. Now with a clear majority, she has enjoyed being able to advance pro-environmental changes more effectively, one of which is achieving joint jurisdiction of all wetland protection in the area. She is concerned about the rate and manner in which development occurs in her region and would also like to work on maintaining a wildlife corridor throughout the area. She recycles what she can at work, and there are bins around the office building so others can recycle as well. Prior to her current job, Tara designed native landscapes for others and still enjoys doing that when she has time.

At home, Tara chooses not to use any herbicides or lawn fertilizers and has converted much of her lawn to native plants which also helps feed the wildlife. She mulches instead of watering her yard frequently, but when it becomes necessary, she has purchased special hoses that soak the ground slowly, conserving water. She and her husband also conducted a major overhaul of some of their property – including purchasing more land – so that she could retain some wetland areas and provide natural corridors and habitats for birds and other wildlife.

She bikes or walks when she can, chooses cars with good gas mileage and hopes that policy makers and researchers in the automotive industry will put more effort into alternative fuel sources. She tries to purchase glass instead of plastic, and her family recycles the items that can be. She tries to conserve water and energy and purchases earth-friendly products. She is a member of the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and The Nature Conservancy.

Tara mentions that there was a stream near her home when she was growing up, and she would look for crayfish and turn over the rocks looking for things. She spent a lot of time in the woods and the trees. She and her brother had a great time, and "I think it's because it was there that we became very aware of the different birds and whatnot." She and her brother would bring home little animals which she now realizes is probably not the best thing to do, but they were always around some sort of wildlife as children. Although her parents were not very environmentally active, she was a Girl Scout and would go camping a lot which she really enjoyed. "I guess maybe it made a bigger impact on me than some people. I think some people internalize things and remember things more than others, but that's how it affected me, and I would hope it would impact other people, too."

Tara mentions seeing Lake Erie on fire on television when she was a young girl. That incident left an impression on her and is part of the reason she thinks people should see some of the devastation we cause in order to think about our actions and think about changing them. Although seeing that footage on television affected her, she does not necessarily think it influenced her environmental ethic.

She talks about a social issues course she took as a freshman in high school and recalls that when the class was over, she was a believer in zero population growth: "If we're going to have a sustainable planet, you to have to limit your population growth." She remembers that it was such a buzz word for a while and wonders, "Why did so many choose not to go along with that?" She explains that she is a Christian, and "I don't believe in damaging the earth that we were given."

She also really enjoys her time outside in nature. When her children were younger, she and her husband went to St. Lucia for a month and worked in a hospital there. Tara paid

attention to how the people related to the environment and treated it while she was there. She suggests that "having different experiences like that help shape people."

* * *

John

John is a project director for an expanding community garden program in the city. He helps locate and establish new gardens, educate interested residents, and provide support, such as seeds and tools, for area gardeners. He is also a master's student in an environmental program at the university.

Having enjoyed watching birds since childhood, John recently traveled to a nearby state to learn more about Sandhill Crane conservation efforts and subsequently initiated a crane count in Michigan, which he has coordinated all four years of its existence to date.

Prior to applying for his current position, he and his wife, Chloe, moved into the city where the poor condition of their neighborhood park prompted them to speak with their neighbors, clean up the park, and establish a community garden in part of it. Each of the garden's six lots is currently being used, and the interaction they initiated among the residents encouraged them to pursue the idea of a more formal neighborhood association.

John has made significant changes in his consumption patterns. Instead of receiving a daily newspaper, he reads it at the library. John and Chloe grow much of their own food, try to purchase food in bulk and/or locally-grown organic food, and compost much of their waste. They recycle what they can, burn the cardboard that is not accepted at the local recycling plant, and reuse paper as scrap paper. John notes that instead of two bags of garbage each week, they now have only one. They also try to conserve energy.

Although initially influenced by the lull of society's desire for a two-car household, when his truck finally broke down, John and Chloe decided not to fix it or purchase a new one. Instead, they now rely on their other car and adjust their schedules accordingly. John notes that he is not sure how much of a difference this makes since they do use the car a lot, but it challenges them to think more carefully before running errands and seems to reduce the number

of trips they make. John and Chloe attend local gatherings where area residents meet to discuss issues of sustainability and the concept of voluntary simplicity. While he often participates in these kinds of meetings, he has grown disenchanted with the idea of formal membership in environmental organizations.

John identifies the day that he quit his job at a water filter testing company as a crucial turning point for him. During the last year that he worked there, John grew increasingly concerned with the way the company conducted business, and he also resented the hour-long commute. He describes the internal struggle he experienced: "*And a realization that your actions didn't reflect your beliefs?*"

> Yeah, because during the hour ride to work, I had to change myself. I had to almost psych myself up. And then when I'd come home, it was an hour of psyching myself down because you had to change your whole…thought. And I would sit there and say, 'This is just business…I'm here to make money. This is just business. When I go home, I'm different…I know at home, that's not what I believe in.

One day as he was sitting in a traffic jam, complaining about traffic, it hit him: "I'm part of the problem." Although he did not yet have a new position secured, this epiphany prompted him to quit his job that very day. He simply could not abide the discrepancy between his beliefs and actions any longer. He had experienced periodic inklings that there was a better way for him to lead his life, but they all seemed to come together at that moment for him.

Other significant influences include parents who encouraged their children to think for themselves and do what is right, searching for critters and fishing with his dad as a child, spending a lot of time outdoors throughout his life, and Chloe's influence and the sense of teamwork he feels with her.

* * *

Chloe

Chloe works at the local public library, where she frequently finds ways to display some of her favorite environmental books in prominent places. She enjoys interacting with people and considers careers in library science, education, and counseling as exciting possibilities. While

her husband, John, is studying for his master's degree, Chloe has decided to work and support his efforts while she explores some of her own interests and determines which route to pursue before returning to school herself.

Chloe engages in most of the same pro-environmental behaviors that John does, and in fact, was instrumental in encouraging him to make many of the changes he has made. For instance, when his truck broke down, it was Chloe who convinced John that they could manage without two vehicles.

In addition to the pro-environmental actions John already mentioned, Chloe indicates that they focus on reducing waste, limit the amount of packaging they purchase, prefer to buy in bulk and grow their own fresh produce, and they conserve energy by turning off lights and rarely using the air conditioner. While she does attend many of the meetings on community sustainability with John, she is not a member of any environmental organization, explaining, "I don't feel I have to join something to be environmental."

She also elaborates that upon moving to their new home, they were upset with the condition of the park. They heard frequent complaints about it, but nobody was taking any action. She and John took it upon themselves to encourage interest among their neighbors, restore the park, and start a community garden. Chloe tries to use as much gray water as possible to keep the garden nourished, and she and John engage curious children and other passers-by in conversation, pointing out new and different plants in the garden plots.

Chloe grew up in the country on sixty acres of an old farm where she had "the run of the fields and forests." She did not have a lot of material possessions and spent much of her time outside picking blackberries, tromping through the woods, and enjoying walks with her father, to whom she credits much of her love of nature. Walking through the woods on her way to a friend's house and exploring the fields nearby made a lasting impression: "I think that that really had a big impact on me – to know what skunk cabbage is and marsh marigolds and sweet woodruff and all the plants that are out there, and I think that really gave me a love of nature and respect for the earth, and that really guided my choices since then."

The environment was not a major topic of conversation in her family that she can remember, but since her parents were children of the '60s, there was a "general sense that they cared about the earth and human rights and things that really mattered." Chloe recalls that it was something sensed rather than learned through parental lectures: "It's almost like it's air. You breathe it. You don't realize what it's made of. It's just there. And that's what I remember most." During college, Chloe began reading more about the natural environment, growing increasingly interested in the human impact on it. John's support and the changes he has made in his own life provide an important sense of partnership for her. She also credits increasing self-respect, confidence, and general maturity as important factors in her environmentalism.

* * *

Alex

Alex is an eco-builder. He was an independent contractor for twenty-five years and recently went into partnership with a former employee. His work entails a wide variety of projects, including small tract housing, infill and cluster housing, rehabilitation projects on existing homes that need retooling, and custom homes. Cognizant of the conflict between environmentalism and building new homes, Alex works to minimize the negative impact. He tries to focus his projects in areas already zoned for residential and mid – high-density living. He then incorporates earth-friendly practices into the construction of homes that might otherwise have been built without this consideration.

Alex concentrates on reducing waste throughout the construction process – from the careful ordering of supplies to recycling the raw materials, using techniques, and installing appliances that conserve energy. The homes are rated as five-star energy homes through the Department of Energy, and through cooperation with the American Lung Association (ALA), they are also considered ALA Healthy Homes, which means that there is continuous fresh air ventilation and at least forty percent hard-surface flooring.

The larger custom homes present the biggest challenge for Alex because they consume a lot of space, infrastructure, and energy, and they are typically located in suburbs, contributing to

urban sprawl. Although it is a lucrative part of the business, Alex is steadily moving away from this kind of construction to focus more of his efforts on cluster housing and rehab projects in town.

Alex is active in the Home Builders' Association. As a member of the education committee, he invites speakers to encourage ecological building practices, and he promotes the establishment of a "Green Certification" program among local builders. He is actively involved with local sustainability and voluntary simplicity groups, and he is a member of the League of Conservation Voters and the Earth Island Institute.

At his own home, he has converted his lawn to wildflowers, composts appropriate waste, brings recyclables to the local transfer station, and watches his consumption practices by reducing waste, conserving water and energy, and purchasing earth-friendly products. Careful construction and attention to opening and closing windows or shades at the appropriate times allow Alex to regulate his home's temperature naturally. Recently, city officials accepted his proposal to develop a co-housing project which utilizes minimum space and infrastructure while maximizing green areas and opportunities to walk, bike, and grow one's own food.

Beginning as a counselor-in-training and finishing as the assistant director, Alex worked at a summer camp from age sixteen to twenty-two. He explains that the owner hoped to teach students twelve to eighteen "about their capabilities and self-sufficiency through a program of shared work, outdoor living, and learning wilderness skills." The summers Alex spent at this camp helped instill a deep respect for the natural world. He also talks about doing a lot of his own camping around the same time – both with friends and by himself – and witnessing severe destruction on a canoe trip down the Mississippi – images that remain with him today.

Other influences include the care his mother gave to reducing waste and being thrifty, an upbringing that fostered in him the value of serving others, his own inner debate when society's principles seemed to clash with his own, the wave of environmentalism in the late '60s and early '70s, meeting people who share his faith and environmental concerns, and finally internalizing

the discrepancy between his career practices and beliefs while building a large custom home in the suburbs many years ago.

* * *

Andrea

Andrea is co-executive director of a regionally-based state environmental organization. She is involved in the strategic planning as the agency reorganizes and clarifies its mission and role in the community, and she frequently represents the organization on a regional level. She is also the chair of a citizen's advisory committee on recycling. She has had several jobs in the environmental arena, including a leadership role in a state-wide recycling group. Andrea strives to create the kind of community in which she wants to live – one that is environmentally and socially healthy.

To that end, she is involved in planning and promoting a co-housing project in the area and plans to move there with her family once it is completed. She does not use any herbicides or pesticides, and other personal actions include recycling, purchasing organic and health foods, composting, and gardening. She also mentions that she tries to ride her bike when possible and that she and her husband try to reduce their purchases. She concedes that it can be difficult to be that diligent and admits that they do have air conditioning.

Andrea notes that her "experiences have sort of guided me down this environmental path to some extent," and as she responds to other questions, she continues to recall experiences that had an impact on her. While growing up, she and her family went camping together, and she remembers the sense of freedom she felt during those trips when the daily rules of life at home were relaxed. She recalls, in particular, a trip with her father and some friends where the hillside they were camping on was scattered with litter, and "we all went out there with garbage bags and picked up the hill, so that for some reason stuck with me." As she grew older, they continued to go on outdoor trips like rafting and canoeing, although not as frequently. Having taken many classes with an environmental focus in college, she credits that with "turning…all this random experience when I was little into something more meaningful for my career."

Many other experiences added to her interest in the environment. While still in college, she worked as a back country ranger for a base camp at Mount Rainier through the Student Conservation Association. She did a lot of hiking and would frequently pick up beer cans and other litter. After graduating, a brief stint in Colorado impressed her as she interacted with people who were environmentally aware and took the time to recycle and ride their bikes to work. After moving back to Michigan, working at an outdoor outfitter exposed her to more people who liked to spend time outside. She then worked in a beauty salon for a short while before realizing that she had strayed from her path.

Other influences include an aunt who was environmentally conscious, a huge outdoor summer gathering that she attended, and meeting a young man who was very environmentally aware and active. His dedication helped her realize that she could do something about her concern for the environment.

* * *

Julia

Julia works as the recycling coordinator for a nearby municipality. She primarily focuses on public relations and education. She frequently speaks to various groups in the community, such as the Lions Club, the Rotary, school classrooms, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and 4-H groups. She discusses recycling with them, but rather than concentrating solely on that message, she tries to inspire an appreciation for the environment as a whole, encouraging them to go out and be in nature. Hopefully, recycling will come as a "by-product."

When possible, she tries to lead nature activities and communicate to others that "this planet is a living thing, and we depend on it," adding "even though our connection to it has been totally severed from it for all practical purposes." She writes and designs a newsletter, focusing on particular issues that are of interest to her at that time (i.e. yard waste, pesticides and herbicides, etc.), and she frequently writes newspaper articles as well. She has tried to make recycling convenient for the other employees in her office building.

In her personal life, Julia and her husband recycle, try not to mow the lawn frequently, conserve energy by turning lights off and adjusting the air conditioning and heat to moderate temperatures, compost, and reuse items whenever possible. They also limit their use of pesticides, if they use any at all, conserve water with a low-flow showerhead, and avoid over-packaged and over-processed foods. Julia is a member of several organizations, including the Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, Natural Resources Defense Council, Greenpeace, and others.

Julia remembers playing in a creek in her yard as a child, searching out waterskeeters and fireflies. She and her family went on frequent camping excursions, and they would go on a big camping trip every summer which took them all over the country. Julia explains that her parents were "not really outdoorsy" but wanted to show their children the country. Growing up, the only book reports she can remember were her two favorites – one on Alaska and one on New Zealand.

She had always wanted to go to New Zealand, and in her mid-twenties, Julia planned a six-week trip there. She hiked and camped while she was there and describes many places of magnificent beauty. Four weeks into her trip, she had not seen nearly all the places she had hoped to visit. On a wilderness hike by herself at the top of a bluff on the northern tip of the south island, Julia stood and looked down at the water. "It was crystal clear. You could see like twenty feet in the water. It was just the greatest thing in the whole world. That's when I just sat down, and I wrote this postcard." Her face lights up and takes on a different expression as she explains that it's hard to describe and give somebody that feeling.

The postcard to which she refers is a message telling her boss back in the States that she was quitting her job, and she stayed in New Zealand for another five months:

> Best thing I ever wrote in my life. Yeah, it was awesome! And you know, it was part self-discovery, part environmental discovery, part, you know, high on freedom and just being able to do whatever I want whenever I wanted and meeting new people from all over the world. And learning. You know, if you go hiking, you learn about all the different things at the interpretive centers… It was great! Best experience of my life!

Julia considers the fact that she spends a lot of time alone in nature and was outside a lot as a child (instead of watching TV) as significant influences. She also discusses doing quite a bit of reading on her own and a powerful trip to Zimbabwe by herself as events that have contributed to her environmentalism.

* * *

Chris

Chris is currently a master's student at the university where he is focusing on environmental studies and urban and community development. Previously, he was the executive director for an area initiative that models weatherized, energy-efficient homes and practices for community residents. He held that position for many years and now, as a student again, he is involved in numerous organizations and programs throughout the community – many of which he has initiated. He is interested in helping cities be more pedestrian and biker friendly and creating living areas that encourage a sense of community. Many of his organizations focus on sustainable choices, education, and community-building. He is frequently involved in bringing people together to discuss different issues in the community, and among other things, writes a newsletter focused on environmental awareness and opportunities to be more involved in environmental protection.

Chris's own home was built (as somewhat of an experiment) with recycled and other salvaged materials, and much attention was given to energy-efficiency and insulation throughout the house. His yard is primarily native grasses and plants. He explains that some people may call them weeds, but he refers to his yard as the "plains." He and his family purchase organic food products and grow some of their own food at home. They recycle and compost. Chris rides his bike as often as he can and tries to conserve energy and water. He often purchases environmentally-friendly products and those that are durable and higher quality than ones that need to be replaced quickly. He is a member of some area environmental organizations and is actively involved in the many forums he has initiated.

Chris talks about spending hours and hours outside as a youngster – fishing with his father and walking in the parks and arboretums with his family. He enthusiastically recalls

seeing a huge frog on a rock by a pond in the park, running around a relative's large farmyard with friends, and playing in the old barn. He often traveled, and still does, to upstate New York where members of his family have some cottages. Spending a lot of time outside was one of his biggest influences. "I've been blessed with lots of experiences in nature, with the fishing, with parents that have provided me with those experiences. Yeah, I guess it's part of the context by which I grew up in." Although he did not realize it as a child, these experiences had a significant impact on him.

Views of the World

The following pages present the findings from the group of active environmentalists as a whole, beginning with the themes that emerged regarding their views of the environment, their relationship to it, and the primary influences they identify for having helped develop their environmental ethic. I use specific quotes as examples for each topic. This is followed by a brief discussion of other themes that emerged from the interviews, what these findings suggest, and findings from the survey.

Environment

A connected world

When discussing the natural environment, active environmentalists tend to describe it as an interconnected web of life that encompasses the entire planet. We are all part of the environment, and things are not isolated objects but are connected to each other in a living world.

Michael explains, "I think of it as a web – everything being interconnected, and…to me the environment is really a bad pseudonym for all living things and the landscapes and even the rock on which they're founded. It's everything, including people." Chloe describes the environment as "all one living thing. It's not just a bird or a tree or grass or a bug or a flower or a river or rain or clouds, it's all of it. It's all interconnected."

An endangered planet

Active environmentalists express concern over the condition of the environment, and their view of the environment as interconnected has implications for its condition. Because all things are related and dependent on each other, problems are not isolated. For example, one problem (over-population) can affect many different things (water supply, wildlife habitat, air quality, global climate), and these things, in turn, affect others (habitat loss affects biodiversity, pollution affects humans, flora, and fauna).

Andrea expresses grave concern: "Very, very serious problems that if we don't attempt to address them in one way or another are just going to become worse and worse…." Joe explains, "Clearly there are [problems with the condition of the environment]. Global warming is probably – well, they're all connected…they all affect each other." Tara refers to the world as a "sensitive place," and she believes that "once it is gone, it is gone forever. As recent studies have shown, the wetland mitigations are not working like the natural system. I believe that the natural systems are the best filters we can ever get and one which cannot be duplicated."

While people hold different opinions about the severity and urgency of the damage – from unprecedented danger to acknowledgment that things are getting worse – there is little debate on whether humans have changed the environment in negative ways.

Stemming from concern over the state of the environment is concern over the ability of the earth to withstand continued human impact and uncertainty over the results of human interference. When mentioning zero-population-growth, Tara argues, "The earth is only so big and can support only so many people." Chloe expresses a similar sentiment: "We pesticide the ground, we pave it over with cement, and I'm not saying we should all go back to eating nuts and twigs and berries and living in the woods, but I think there is a limit to what this earth can sustain."

Although many think that nature will continue to exist if devastation continues, it will be forever changed, and "there isn't anybody smart enough to be able to say what that will look like" (Joe). Such concerns suggest the need for caution when dealing with the environment – an

idea that specifically came up in a discussion on genetically modified organisms. Joe argues, "I'm very skeptical…On the face of that, it sounds great…but what else does this gene and this combination do that we don't know? Are we opening a Pandora's box?" The uncertainties of manipulating the environment and the need to treat it with respect lead ring through in Joe's questions. Since we cannot possibly know the long-range consequences of our actions, it is best to be careful.

A sacred creation with a higher purpose

Beyond its being an inter-related web, the participants often expressed the view that the environment is sacred and transcends the functions and values human beings give it. It is a creation of life and has a higher purpose and meaning to its existence. Michael explains why he thinks the environment has intrinsic worth: "I don't think it's window dressing for human beings. I think it has an underlying beauty and purpose and value, and I strongly believe that." He expresses a sense that "there's an underlying purpose to life and that there was love behind its creation…" Chloe believes, "There's a sacredness to it that a lot of people don't have."

People do not always connect the idea of intrinsic worth with religion or the notion of sacredness, per se. Although not specifically referring to nature as a sacred creation, Andrea refers to its magic when asked if the environment has intrinsic worth: "Yes, very much so. It's existed long before we were here and has evolved to a point that we could develop here. That says a lot about the magic and power of life on this earth."

An awe-inspiring world

Experiences in the natural environment mean a great deal to the active environmentalists in this study. Nobody had difficulty identifying and remembering significant experiences in the environment. Experiences range from watching the veil of green burst out in the spring and the wildlife scurry to action as the days grow colder to sitting on the prairie and "taking it all in." The experiences may be different, but the feelings are very similar – a sense of joy, awe, and wonder.

When describing the experiences and how they feel in nature, faces light up, eyes sparkle, and hands become animated as they recall those powerful memories. Yet, there seems to be something about nature and being in it that defies articulation. Instead of specific descriptions about the experience of being in nature, they use words like *awe*, *magic*, *wow*, *amazement*, *beauty*, and *real* to describe their reaction to nature. Perhaps by *not* being able to capture the marvel they feel for nature in detailed language, the active environmentalists reveal the force with which they are struck by nature's presence and their respect for something that is so special and complex.

Emma recalls driving through Michigan with her husband to visit his family many years ago. Having not grown up in Michigan, she was unfamiliar with the beauty of the area, and as they approached the Mackinac Bridge, she explains that they were "going through trees and trees and trees and wonderful forests…and seeing this spectacular water – gorgeous colors – was sort of like a 'Wow! This is pretty amazing!'…I've been to many places now in Michigan where you just sort of have this sense of 'Wow! What a wonderful place!'"

Chloe describes a recent trip to a wetlands area: "And it was just amazing! I'd never seen a bald eagle up close…It was amazing! It was really beautiful to go!"

Chris expresses awe in a different way, as it is a very sensory experience for him. When asked how he would describe the environment to someone who had never experienced it, Chris thinks for a while. "How do you describe…the *thickness* of an experience?" He emphasizes that it's "multi-dimensional," and suggests that the person who had not yet experienced nature would almost need to do just that: "Smell the grass!" He frequently refers to the natural beauty and laments, "Too bad you can't get the smells on tape, the textures of the bark on the wood chips."

"Wow! What a system!" Joe shakes his head as he relays the thoughts he often has when he's out in nature admiring all the connections. Referring again to the interconnections of nature, Joe's comment touches on another prevalent belief – that of the environment as a whole system. While people spoke about admiring small natural objects or living things like a twig or a bug or a blade of grass, it was not with the impression that these things operate in isolation; rather they are unique pieces of a whole – a system, a "web of life."

Closely related to a sense of sacredness and awe in the face of nature's beauty is a sense of appreciation fostered by experiences in the environment. The active environmentalists frequently used words such as *respect*, *appreciation*, and *reverence*.

A rejuvenating force

Nature is more than an impressive display of beauty. It is also a source of strength and renewal for the mind, body, and spirit, helping people reconnect with themselves, their emotions, and spiritual guidance. The restorative qualities of nature were echoed by most of the study participants as they frequently referred to nature as *refreshing*, *recharging*, *healing*, and *peaceful*. It restores the soul, grounds the psyche, and strengthens resolve.

Tara often unwinds in nature: "Being in nature is very relaxing. It is my downtime. I just love observing and being a participant. Too many folks spend all day in homes, stores, and never spend any of their day in nature. What a shame. Guess I just need it for sanity reasons."

Chloe explains that she can just be herself in nature, with no pretenses. Nature does not judge. This is a liberating experience: "It's peaceful. You don't have to assume. You don't have to keep up with the Jones.' You don't have to do anything. You just have to *be*, and I think that's the easiest thing in the world to do. And in nature, it's comfortable. It's like you're in your own skin."

Julia refers to it as "simple," "uncomplicated," and "relaxing." She says that she also thinks of it as "inspiring," and adds, "It sort of feeds you in some ways."

Being in nature helps Michael put things in a new perspective and work through difficult times: "I often go alone when in a time of personal strife or crisis. The answers are always clearer when I'm in a natural setting. Fewer distractions, less interference from 'rational' processes."

Emma talks about how unreal it seems when you are in a place of such beauty and the peace it brings: "I think the sense of wonder is one of the things that I find so amazing. You sit there and think 'This doesn't look real.' This is the kind of thing that so few people actually

experience. We're used to seeing things through documentaries and photographs, and there you are surrounded by it, and there's often a great sense of peace and quiet…"

Andrea talks about many of the feelings she has when she's in nature:

> Peaceful. You don't have to be in a rush. You don't have the stress of deadlines and that kind of stuff. Rejuvinated. There's just something – rejuvinated. I always have this sense of wonder. You know, once you get away from people-made structures…and if you take the time to look at it and enjoy it, it's just amazingly put together. I don't know how it's developed that way. It's definitely a sense of wonder. And fulfillment, I guess, like this is how we're supposed to be…

"It's hard to define, " Chris states succinctly and then earnestly contemplates what it does feel like to be in nature:

> I feel more of a whole person. It's like why does it feel good to take a shower or to eat food or to breathe fresh air. It's multiple things. It's hard to put your finger on it. I think putting your finger on it squashes it a bit. Being there in that rich experience. Multiple senses. And it's a peacefulness, I think. It's being part of eternity. And in some ways, it might be just sort of a slowing down. I think that's part of it – is just slowing down. Shedding the baggage that you have. Going into the woods. Going into the water. For me going just this half-mile trek back to this pond is like – it's kind of like taking a nap. You sort of feel refreshed when you're done.

Alex points out that nature makes it easy to find his inner voice, helping to ground him spiritually and revealing a strong connection between his faith and love of nature. Being in nature eliminates distractions and brings him closer to God: "Camping, with its simple focus and isolation in nature, with its direct communion with God, allows me to quickly and clearly access my inner voice – to know myself and how better to live in harmony with God's plan for love between all creatures."

Relationship

A connection

The active environmentalists feel a strong connection to the environment – typically on an emotional and/or spiritual level. Their experiences in nature appear to spark that sense of connection and renew it over time. Although the sense of connection seems to be the strongest when they are actually in nature and directly experiencing it, they carry that connection with them once they leave, and it means a great deal to them; each of them expresses a sense of connection – many of them use that exact word: "I connect with nature and can sit there and watch the activities of a bird, or for that matter, a bug..." (Joe).

Julia first sensed this connection on her trip to New Zealand: "I started feeling that connection – that bigger connection – between yourself and the bigger world. And I was growing up, too. I mean, I was in my mid-twenties, and so all of a sudden the world wasn't revolving around me. It was like me – this little thing – in this huge, big, beautiful world."

The fact that many active environmentalists view nature as sacred often extends to feeling a religious or spiritual connection to nature, as well: "Why do I need to go sit in a church when this (looks around at the trees and river and waves her arm to indicate nature in general) is the best cathedral in the world? I feel very spiritual about that – that the earth is my church" (Chloe).

"To be immersed in a setting where God's works are more apparent than the hand of man is to completely understand God's perfection and love" (Alex).

Andrea explains that even though she's not a very religious person, she's trying "to seek out more and more what that is for me:"

> So I think if there was anything that I would say was religious for me, I would say it was nature…It's being in awe of nature. It's going out there and letting yourself go, whatever that means. Feeling the freedom of what it's like to be in nature. I find that when I'm not in touch with nature in a day-to-day way, that I get caught up in all the [stuff] that is not important to me.

She also talks about the joy of being out in nature and what it is like to go climbing: "Really fulfilling and uplifting and spiritual because you're working hard and climbing and physically challenging yourself. Rest at the top and be amazed at what's around you."

The experiences they have can be quite profound and emotional. Beyond *thinking* that a pond is neat and a sunset pretty, they *feel* it and appreciate it in a deep way, seeing and sensing so much more than just the surface qualities around them. And again, the feeling can be difficult to put into words: "It was just beautiful! I had never seen eagles before. It was amazing! I go out there, and it makes me cry. Oh, it's so beautiful!" (Chloe).

While many of them like to recreate in nature (hiking, canoeing), they often also enjoy just sitting and watching the world around them and the activities of the busy critters nearby. John describes one such experience that reveals a deep connection as well. Sitting near a road and watching birds fly in to find dinner from a recent wildlife casualty, John explains, "I remember sitting there…with just my hand out and making just that little chip noise, and I'd get the chickadees to land on my hand… I guess when you touch something like that, it touches something real deep in you. It's not something that most people do because it does, like I said, take patience."

A part of it all

If everything is interconnected, then each of us is part of a larger community. Active environmentalists see humans as a part of the web of life. Joe explains, "I guess I would say that I feel connected to something that is part me and yet is bigger than me…but it's feeling a relationship – a strong relationship and connectedness to the whole."

"We're a part of nature, and it's a part of us" (Michael). Chris agrees: "We are part of the environment, and the environment is part of us." Emma thinks that even though we try to distance ourselves from it, we have evolved from it, and "I see us as part of nature and not separate from it." Chris again: "I think we are a part of nature. It's hard to separate ourselves from nature. It's in our blood." Here, Chris hints at the idea that humans are innately connected to nature – an idea that Joe expresses as "hard-wired." Chris later suggests that, "It's hard to

disconnect people from nature because we are organic beings." Yet, as discussed later in the chapter, it is a disconnection from nature that so many of the AEs suggest as the reason so few people take pro-environmental actions. Perhaps this indicates a difference between a "hard-wired" connection that everybody has and a more conscious connection that must be sensed or felt.

A responsibility

When discussing their personal relationship to the environment, the active environmentalists in this study express a sense of responsibility to minimize their impact and protect it. The reasons they give for this feeling vary, but they agree that there is a responsibility to do so. Although they do not like the negative connotations associated with "obligation" and "duty," for lack of better words, that is frequently how people discussed their relationship with the natural environment. Alex also used the word "protector," but explained that it's not the best way to think of the relationship because the environment is so massive compared to any one individual.

Chloe feels a sense of responsibility because humans are the cause of the destruction: "We're the ones who made the mess. We're the ones that have to change. The earth doesn't have to change to meet our needs. We need to change to meet the earth's." She also discusses another reason for her sense of responsibility by explaining that although we're a part of the earth, it is not ours to do as we please. We are caretakers:

> There's a moral obligation…I could trash it…but there's the talk of doing everything with seven generations in mind. I try. Will I have kids? Probably not, but it's not my earth to destroy. I'm not the only person here. I'm not the only species here. I don't have the right to do this. I try to interact as carefully as I can.

Rather than interpreting the Bible as granting humans dominion over nature, she interprets it differently: "I was under the impression that we were stewards of it, and that was the intention of the Bible quote that is there."

When asked how she would respond to the argument that the earth was given to us and we have a right to do with it as we please, Tara offers, "I would answer that we don't really know how long this earth will last. We are also considered stewards of the earth, and it is important to protect the earth from which we depend upon."

Alex echoes this stewardship ethic: "The woods are my church, as well as the Lansing streets. To love God and want to share His love with all creation is to work for the health of the world He lovingly gave us."

Michael explains that spiritual beliefs are "the chief reason I get up and go to the office every day. I have a responsibility to creation. After all, I'm part of it; but even more importantly, when I'm in nature and feel its affirmation, I also feel a solemn duty to assure that others can know the joy and renewal it has given me."

Joe suggests that humans are in a unique position because we are able to make intentional decisions: "Perhaps other species do not have a consciousness, and so when you have a consciousness, one has the ability to make decisions and not just react to something. And so I try to make decisions that are fundamentally better for life."

Tara agrees that human beings hold a unique position and suggests it is important to protect the environment for future generations as well. "No other species can protect the environment. We must do as much as we can to ensure that there are still wild spaces in the future for other generations to enjoy and learn from."

Although Emma does not think of it in terms of individual duty, she does think that there is an obligation for our species "because we can. Because we think. We intentionally take actions. We have an obligation to creation as a whole."

Typically, active environmentalists extend the obligation to take care of the earth to all people, but a distinction is made between those who are free to make their own choices and those who are not able to do so. Chloe explains: "John and I have this little phrase – 'Oh, those people should just pull themselves up by their bootstraps.' Well, if they don't have boots, they can't do that. A lot of people don't really have the opportunity to do that. Is it an obligation? Yes, I think it's an obligation for all the people who are aware to do that."

Influences

As evidenced in the individual profiles at the beginning of the chapter, numerous factors influenced the active environmentalists in this study. A review of those factors reveals many similarities across the individuals.

Usually, but not always, parents are mentioned as important factors because they exhibited an appreciation for nature and shared that with their children, engaged in pro-environmental behaviors, created a supportive atmosphere for their children to think for themselves and pursue their own interests, and/or set an example of civic responsibility and the capacity to effect change. While these impacts are usually not recognized as such at the time, looking back, the individuals appreciate this foundation as a significant influence.

Positive experiences in nature – both alone and with others – help active environmentalists develop a sense of connection to the environment, and continued exposure fosters investment and strengthens the connection over time. Increasing knowledge through coursework, literature, on-the-job experience, and/or deliberation on the issues enhances their understanding of the environment and often helps connect them with others who share some of the same concerns. The encouragement of significant others or close friends can help them sort through some of the issues and offers them an extra boost of strength and support.

Contributing factors often involve interaction with a motivating individual who is environmentally-minded. This may spark an interest in spending time in nature and learning more about the issues, but it is their *personal* sense of connection to the environment that invests the further. Frequently mentioned was the profound impact of witnessing large or small-scale destruction of natural areas. Often, this kind of experience takes place after developing a connection to nature. Some also mention flashes of cognitive dissonance in which they recognized the discrepancy between their actions (prior to making the environment a priority) and their evolving beliefs, making them feel uncomfortable. Typically, it would take a few of these "flashes" before the discomfort really "set in," which then prompted a change in subsequent behavior.

Factors that are perhaps more difficult to define but just as significant were woven into much of what was said. Religious and/or moral convictions frequently influence the way the active environmentalist interprets his or her relationship to the environment and what that implies for behavior. Major emphasis is placed on taking the actions they do because it is the right thing to do. A sense of self-awareness and confidence appears to be an important factor in helping the AE determine if making the environment a priority is truly a path that is right for him or her.

While this is certainly not an exhaustive list, it is intended to present a summary of the factors most commonly mentioned by the active environmentalists as primary influences. Experiences from most, if not all, of the above-mentioned categories tend to build on one another in a cumulative manner and increase the individual's investment in, and dedication to, the environment over time.

There is not a simple formula for achieving active environmentalism. Each person takes his or her own path. A person's journey is unique in the specific combination of experiences and the manner in which those experiences affect that individual. Nonetheless, as noted above, some striking commonalities do exist among the participants.

The number and variations of factors at work indicate that it takes more than one factor to achieve dedication of this kind. While each is important, no one experience or event is the entire picture, and they do not act in isolation. Rather, it is an accumulation of experiences that work together to effect change. Personal experience, common sense, and past research, in the form of studies (Chawla, 1998) and theorized models (Hungerford & Volk, 1990) support this finding.

To reach the point where you're ready and willing to "walk the walk" takes time. As discussed earlier in this study, it is hard enough to adopt or change one behavior let alone the way you lead your life. Reaching this point can be a long process – one that involves people growing interested, beginning to act, maintaining that behavior, and deciding to make it a way of life. Indeed, some of the active environmentalists, themselves, characterize the process as a "journey."

Planting the Seed

As might be expected, environmental interest or concern precedes action (on one's own), and these initial actions precede greater involvement and dedication. Since each person expressed an interest in the environment prior to taking self-initiated actions, it may help to distinguish those influences that are especially effective at fostering concern from those that were not mentioned until farther down the active environmentalist's path.

Evidenced in the findings above, the individuals in this study view the environment in much the same way as the larger population, indicated by the questionnaires and interviews Kempton et al. (1995) conducted and the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) surveys of Dunlap and Van Liere (1978) and Scott and Willits (1994). However, the purpose of those studies was different. The researchers focused on investigating or gauging the environmental views and values held by a wide population of American citizens. Here, we are interested not only in what specific individuals think about the environment but what has led them to adopt their ethic as well.

The active environmentalists express many of the same views as other citizens, but the passionate responses, the ones that elicited emotions and excitement, came when these individuals discussed actual experiences in nature. It is experience in nature that "wows" them, experience in nature that renews their spirit, experience in nature that brings them closer to God, experience in nature that recharges them, experience in nature that teaches them first-hand something new about a twig or a tree or a bird, and experience in nature that touches something deep within them. It is experience in nature that develops a sense of connection, and it is a sense of connection that sparks or strengthens the interest in the environment and keeps it fed. How can you feel connected to something with which you have little knowledge or personal experience?

Although other factors also played a role in sparking the active environmentalists' interest in the environment as a cause, it was spending time in nature that really seems to have fostered a relationship or connection:

> As far as having a value, it's because I've walked out there, and when I walked to my friend's house, I didn't walk down the road, I took the shortcut through the woods. Because the summer I turned seven…we camped for a whole summer…I thought it was awesome because I got to go to the lake, and I got to go in the woods, and I got to go see my friends, and it was a wonderful experience to be able to experience nature, and you can't value something unless you learn about it and know it (Chloe).

This connection proves powerful, as it seems to invest the individual in the welfare of the environment. Developing a sense of personal investment is something Hungerford and Volk (1990) argue is an essential step in bringing about pro-environmental behaviors, and the environmentalists themselves emphasize the importance of the connection they feel. Joe suggests, "The more we wall ourselves off from nature, the less connected, and therefore the less affection we hold for it. Wendell Berry argues that we take better care of that which we hold affection for."

John echoes this sentiment: "If you lose that connection, you lose respect or appreciation." He also explains that one of the reasons he started taking environmental actions was because he kept seeing destruction of the crane's environment (and this is key) – an animal he had developed a special connection with and appreciated for years.

Tara recalls sitting in a lot of trees as a child and describes progressive destruction on her visits back home: "And going back down there to visit my family – every time I would go, I'd notice the landscape change dramatically, and I'd be really upset to see hillsides of trees just devastated and turned into apartment buildings."

Chloe shares a similar story, explaining that "It's amazing what just in the past twenty years – and walking in the woods where I lived is now a subdivision. Do those people know about that whole history? No, they don't know anything. Do they care? Maybe. Maybe not." With a lump in her throat, she also offers, "It's that sadness of standing there and seeing the world die around me – actively. That's hard for me to look at." Chloe, too, cites "destruction of natural places" as one of the reasons she first took pro-environmental actions. Both Tara's and

Chloe's statements reveal strong connections to specific environments where they had a history and felt a real sense of loss when they saw it destroyed.

Although many of the active environmentalists indicate that interest in the environment began when they were children and spent a lot of time outside, that was not always the case. However, spending time in nature *does* appear to foster an initial connection, no matter what the age. It may help to think of this developing relationship as laying the groundwork or planting the seed for commitment in the future.

Indeed, Chloe credits her experience growing up in the country and not being distracted by tons of material possessions as the primary source of her environmental values. Walks with her dad, swimming in the lake, running to her friend's house through the woods, and spending hours picking blackberries in a nearby field are memories that made a real impact on her. She fondly recalls:

> The blackberry picking experience. That whole area is blackberries. You're just surrounded. You can't see the road. You can't hear the cars. Did I understand it then? No. I was seven. I didn't care. I was gorging myself on blackberries. But now, looking back, I can pull the lessons from things like that and understand how valuable that experience was. There's nothing like homemade blackberry jam!

Similarly, Chris talks about fishing with his dad and having a great imagination as he wondered what was beneath the surface. He suggests that those experiences as a child helped him "develop an appreciation for aquatic life," partly because he learned where the good places were to fish and where the polluted areas were, as well. He also mentions going to the park with his family and enjoying their walks together. He explains, "When I was here, I was more interested in the frogs and the fish and fighting with my brother and sister." And yet, other aspects of those excursions stuck, too: "Some of that is sort of just etched in your soul."

Feeding the Fire

While the AEs emphasize the significance of spending time in nature and developing a connection with it, they also identify many other factors that influenced them. Once the interest

or concern is sparked, it appears that other factors work together to strengthen interest and investment in the environment. Although not the case for each of the individuals, this stage typically takes place during and/or just following the college years when young adults are on their own for the first time and trying to find their own direction.

Depending on when the initial connection and interest developed, some years may elapse before other influences play a role. This time period often finds the active environmentalists camping and spending a lot of time outdoors, actively seeking more knowledge on the issues – whether through classes, jobs, or on their own – volunteering at environmental agencies, and beginning to talk with others and/or think about their values and the environmental issues in more depth. Many of these opportunities appear to be self-initiated. While the environment is not yet a primary focus of their life, they grow more involved during this time – although the degree of active involvement certainly varies.

This is the same time period when many of these individuals begin taking the first pro-environmental actions on their own. The actions vary. Many start with entry behaviors like recycling and turning off lights. Other actions include taking more of an activist role with the public, buying fuel-efficient cars, writing letters to policymakers, being more conscientious about purchasing earth-friendly products, and employing environmentally-responsible principles when building homes.

Not surprisingly, participants identify several factors which acted as triggers that led them to take action, including reading about an issue (i.e. "green building," oil and pollution), seeing wilderness and habitat destruction, significant others, and the general social climate at the time. These responses suggest that knowledge, a sense of connection to (and investment in) the environment, contextual variables, and environmental values played a noticeable role in motivating the environmentalists to take initial actions. Indeed, many of these variables are the same that Hungerford and Volk (1990) emphasize in their behavior flow-chart for environmental behavior, as they argue that environmental sensitivity, knowledge, and investment are important variables.

Perhaps because they focus on environmental education – presumably for a student age group who would not be as directly exposed to contextual variables as adults – they do not include contextual variables in their model. The extent to which social atmosphere (particularly mentioned by those who were of age during the energy crisis and national environmental movements) and other contextual factors play a role varies as well, but they were never mentioned as sole influences. The active environmentalists typically included it as part of a general ethic that was already developing in them. Again, not all of the participants mentioned each of the factors listed above, but they were the most common. Michael explains how some of these factors influenced him:

> Gas prices shot through the roof in a matter of weeks…So energy and fuel efficiency became national causes…I didn't purchase a car with my own money until after college graduation…and by that time, I had spent spring, summer, and fall days along Lake Michigan and my environmentalism had begun to bud. I think it was a combination of both of these things that spurred me to think about fuel efficiency…I was certainly not alone…the connection between the environment and energy was in the popular consciousness.

Even with connection, investment, and knowledge, the active environmentalists also *wanted* to take action. This is the point during the interviews where the language of many of the participants became fuzzy as they worked to articulate the intangible motivators. At first glance, the reasons they give for taking initial actions vary, but ultimately they seem to rest on an inability to stand by and not take action and/or belief that their actions will make a difference. Joe explains, "I had read enough of the greed of oil companies and the pollution that was growing to finally take a stand…I'm sure I thought my actions would make a difference." John recalls, "I realized that there was no protection, that I had to do something on my own."

Responses of this kind suggest that a sense of personal efficacy was also important – a finding consistent with Hungerford and Volk's (1990) research that views an internal locus of control and knowledge of action skills as primary factors that empower individuals. The responses also imply that environmental values – the moral/spiritual beliefs that affect the

way a person views the environment – may be starting to take root or strengthen, pushing the environmentalist to take that first step.

It was interesting to note that the study participants did not dwell on the initial actions they took and what led them to take those specific actions, leaving the impression that it was not perceived by the active environmentalists as being that unique or difficult a decision. This may be a result of perspective that makes events look different in hindsight, the possibility that, indeed, it was for them a logical step and not that big of a deal, or the manner in which the questions were asked by the interviewer that did not probe that specific issue in great detail.

Growing Intensity

By this point, the active environmentalists have invested some time, thought, energy, and emotions into environmental issues. Once the AEs have adopted some behaviors, this eventually gives way to more immersion in nature, exposure to the topic, and actively seeking out knowledge and people that foster continued involvement and deeper investment.

Although it appears that this period of time is a fairly critical one, it is also a rather elusive one because the active environmentalists did not articulate these kinds of influences in the same manner as more tangible or noticeable experiences. While tangible experiences were specifically identified, the experiences at this stage were more implied. People would make statements such as "Their friendship and beliefs definitely kept these ideas alive in me" (Alex), or people would refer to a significant other's influence. Phrases like "bouncing around ideas" or feeling "relieved" to have met people with similar viewpoints indicate an effort to investigate environmental values and pursuits with more intensity. Joe reports that he "started doing environmental reading more thoroughly and consistently." Some of the individuals begin adopting more pro-environmental actions during this time as well.

Inner Light

The triggers may be different. The initial actions they take may be different. The amount of time it takes to move through the process may be different, but it seems that the

underlying path is curiously similar. Through direct experience in nature – either self or other-initiated – the active environmentalists develop a personal connection with nature, and they give this connection a great deal of significance. Their interest piqued, through both external and internal triggers, they begin to spend more time outdoors strengthening their connection, gain more knowledge, grow invested, and develop a sense of personal efficacy with respect to certain pro-environmental actions. More involved now, they begin to give greater thought to the environment, expand their knowledge, and may invest more time and effort in action. With the stage set, the individuals in this study came to a critical point: *will they walk the walk?*

One could argue that by engaging in some pro-environmental behaviors, they are already walking the walk, and in some respects, this is true. They are frequently – even with a handful of actions – already doing more than most people. However, these individuals were chosen for the extent of their dedication, and to stop with just finding out what led them to start adopting behaviors would not explore the real question – what seems to be the difference for them? Why go the *extra* mile (or two)? Clearly, these folks did not think a few behaviors were enough. And so it appears that they come to a point – in various stages of life – where they realize that this is right for them OR that the other path – the one that most of society travels – is *not* right for them.

To refer to this decision as a critical point implies a specific moment when a conscious decision was made and recognized at the time. For some, like Michael, who had "almost a religious conversion" as he stood and looked out at the lake on a cold July morning and realized, "What would be a better work than to devote your life to this?" a single moment did trigger a dramatic shift in thinking.

John also reports some fanfare as the "AHA" moment took effect on him. Sitting in traffic on his way to work that fateful day, John looked around at all the other commuters and began to gripe about it again when a quote he had heard suddenly hit him: "'Get out of the jam. You *are* the traffic jam if you're sitting in it.' And I thought, 'Why am I doing this?' I was part of the problem." And as we now know, that is the day he quit his job.

Such experiences are, indeed, critical moments for these people, and while it may not result in an immediate change in total behavior and actions, it does indicate a decisive internal

shift toward real dedication to the environment, and subsequent life changes followed closely.

For others, this realization is more of a gradual, subtle process that is difficult to pin down in space and time. It may come in little flashes of recognition from time to time and slowly sink in from there. It may be a matter of growing more deeply connected to the environment over time and feeling it at a gut level. Whatever the case, it appears that some sort of realization does take place, like Emma indicates: "…over time, it became apparent that this was really a good fit for me."

For all, the path to discovering that the environment is more than a hobby and something worthy of greater dedication is scattered with "quakes," as Joe calls them, or triggers in various forms and intensity that build on one another. Once they have developed a connection and are living on their own, they may come to this realization fairly quickly, or it may take a while. It may happen in a moment of revelation when all the past experiences and ideas suddenly fit together and click, or it may sneak up on a person over time as they deepen their understanding and appreciation of the environment. For the active environmentalists in this study, it is internalization of the beliefs that emerged and developed as they grew connected to the environment. It appears that this internalization means developing a clear understanding of what they believe and why. For the active environmentalists, this appears to rest in moral guidance and self-awareness.

The Voice of Morality

"It's the right thing to do."

This sentiment was echoed by many of the participants at various times throughout the interviews. Whether reading a book, spending time in nature, or discussing issues with a significant other or close friend, most of the influential factors discussed above were specific and tangible events. Yet, it is obvious in statements like the one here that something else is also at work. Comments involving morality weave throughout the interviews, indicating that it is a powerful force. Statements such as "I try to make decisions that are fundamentally better for life" (Joe), and "If I'm going to be here, I should do something good. I should make a positive

difference on this planet" (Chloe), suggest that a sense of morality guides their behavior.

Spiritual or religious beliefs may inform their sense of moral responsibility as well. Alex describes his relationship with the environment as a "duty to identify the places where people can live with nature and make that option attractive to people." He explains that he thinks of himself as "respecting it, revering it, appreciating it for the reflection of the divinity in it." The AEs repeatedly talk of "moral obligation," "solemn duty," "responsibility," and "stewardship" when discussing their relationship to the earth or motivating factors for their efforts.

When asked if it is important to see an impact as a result of their actions, responses are somewhat mixed. However, it appears that they make a distinction between what they do as professionals and what they do in their personal lives. Most active environmentalists report that it is important to see an impact from their efforts in the workplace. Emma explains that after fighting to preserve some land for forest and wilderness designation, her organization won the battle. Later, her son went camping in that same area – unaware that his mother's efforts helped make his adventures possible – and returned from his trip inspired by the places he had just visited: "It comes back to you. It's very important to have that." John explains, "Ok, this thing is done. So, yeah, I have to see that. I couldn't work in the accounting department of some law firm because that stuff is so abstract." Alex expresses annoyance that his impact is only one house at a time and wishes he could speed up the process and make more of an impact.

Others offer a somewhat different approach by suggesting that their efforts may have "slowed the momentum of the global juggernaut a tad while we look for our senses" (Joe) or are "difficult to trace" in their current line of work but previous efforts may have reduced the amount of destruction (Michael).

The impact of personal actions receives a different response. Michael, matter-of-factly, explains:

> Well, it's kind of like voting. I feel good about it. Yeah, I spoke my mind. I've acted on this power I have to send one ripple across this giant ocean, but at least I feel that I've done that! And I get e-mails asking me to write a letter…I do it instantly – even on non-environmental issues – things like that where you think, 'Well, I

> don't know if it's going to make a difference, but I feel good for doing it. I think it's the right thing to do.'

He also explains that "silence and apathy are the enemy. They always have been. I believed that before I got involved with the environment. To *not* act is to give permission to the things you hate. You have to speak." Michael clearly reveals a strong moral pull to take action whether or not he thinks it will make an actual difference. It's still something he needs to do.

Julia, too, reveals a strong sense of moral responsibility as she discusses how extensive environmental damage is, and how it is too significant for any one individual to have much of an impact. However, she still does engage in pro-environmental behaviors: "Each of us can make our own little impact, but we're only one little part of the whole. My action to decide not to use a disposable fork at lunch is going to make no difference in the grand scheme of things at all." *Why do you make that decision?* "To not use the fork? Because I feel like I have to follow my own, you know, my own set of ethics." When asked what she does to combat a sense of being overwhelmed, Julia responds, "Just that I'm going to do whatever I can do to make a difference, and my personal goal is to make sure other people – as part of my job – I want to help other people to see how important it is." Julia reveals how powerful a sense of ethics can be in the face of such massive obstacles.

While the moral aspects are not purely altruistic, as performing the behaviors clearly creates positive feelings in the doer, the influence is, nevertheless, a strong one. Morality – whether inspired by religious, spiritual, or more general principles – guides the AEs' interpretation of their relationship to nature, as well as their lifestyle choices regarding the environment. Furthermore, it also motivates them to act even when an actual impact is doubtful. This finding is consistent with Eden (1993) who argued that environmentalists who took an active role in organizations continued their efforts in the absence of tangible results out of a sense of moral efficacy.

Personal growth, awareness, and confidence

"It's really getting up and looking in the mirror and saying, 'Am I living the life that I want to live? And if I'm not, what can I do about it?'" (Chloe).

Although expressed in many different ways, most of those interviewed share Chloe's sentiment. Nearly all of them spoke about developing self knowledge, finding integrity as a person, being genuine, engaging in self-reflection, re-examining their life, or gaining self confidence. Those who did not specifically mention these things tended to express it in other ways – exhibiting self confidence and speaking knowledgeably and confidently about their beliefs and experiences. These responses indicate that something else is happening at the same time the active environmentalists are learning to care for the planet.

Rather than being independent from the environmental journey, it appears that the journey of self discovery is connected to it. After all, if an individual is truly to internalize his or her beliefs and decide to make something a priority, it makes sense that the person needs to learn about him or herself. Who am I? What is my passion? What makes me tick? What is important to me, and why?

The road to self discovery is not an easy one. In fact, most of the active environmentalists suggest it is a constant process because an individual is always changing and developing – "finding" oneself does not imply a specific destination. Instead, it means going beneath surface attributes to ask tough questions and being confident enough to act on one's convictions. First, a person must figure out what his or her convictions are.

Similar in fashion to the groundwork of environmental concern making way for environmental dedication, many of the participants report circumstances that acted as groundwork for self knowledge and confidence. This often came as an example that parents set in the household, an ethic they instilled, and/or an atmosphere of support that they created. Michael explains how his father's example made a lasting impression: "What I *was* aware of was that my father enjoyed working…and he thought public service was really the best way to spend your life. Making money wasn't important, but finding a cause and contributing to the

betterment of society was the highest thing you could do."

Others share stories that are different but have similar results. Alex talks about a childhood in which an ethic of service to others was instilled in him – an ethic that was later challenged and pushed him to struggle with his childhood values in order to determine which ones he wanted to maintain. Chloe talks about a youth in which material possessions were not readily available and so family togetherness and outdoor adventures were valued over things. John describes a home environment with parents who were supportive and encouraged their children to think for themselves and do what was right. Emma talks about parents who were both politically and socially active and engaged their children in discussions about different ways to take action and effect change, instilling in her the "belief that it's useful and belief that it's a good thing to do and you need to do it."

These factors appear to have provided much of the base on which future beliefs, and how best to act on them, grew. It is important to note, however, that even those who did not specifically mention parental influences in this manner still communicated the importance of finding their own voice and doing what is right for them.

The active environmentalists exhibit an ability to think outside the box or question the way things are done. Often, this is associated with disenchantment with our society or the economic-political "system" that may blind us from the natural wonders around us. Joe suggests, "I think the cultural driving separates some of us, and for some fluky reason, I've looked at that differently. I've been able to step outside of that box and say, 'I thought college was the time to think outside the box.' Actually, *all* of life should be thinking outside the box."

John, tired of hearing people complain about the status quo without doing anything to change it because that's "just the way things are," made a choice to step outside of the box himself: "And sure, it's almost an easier choice to go with the flow…but like that Gandhi quote, 'Be the change that you wish to see in the world.'" Likewise, those interviewed frequently suggest how difficult it is for people to move past an "overwhelming society" that drains them of their energy and tells them there is an established way of doing things. These kinds of statements

also indicate that they see themselves as already having stepped outside of the box.

Although self knowledge takes time and can be an uncomfortable process, it is a crucial part to answering what it is you want to do and why. When dealing with human maturity, confidence, and awareness, the process involved is not a well-defined one. It seems that part of it involves "just growing up" and realizing that you "have worth on this planet," and part of it is hard work:

> A lot of this is work. People may be used to the easy path. Heaven forbid they have to put in some effort or actually self reflect, realize you're a screw-up and need to make some changes. John and I realized that and said, 'What do we need to do?' Self reflection and a true path is work, and society is geared toward a quick answer…We have to understand ourselves to understand the world around us (Chloe).

Even though it's hard work, Chloe urges, "If they aren't your values, change them. Change your surroundings to reflect what's important to you! So many people check out those self-help books – 'I need to be a better person' – well, do it."

Indeed, changing her surroundings is just what Andrea is planning to do. She and her husband and daughter will be moving to a new co-housing development because their current situation is "not how I want to live, and it's not the statement I want to make."

A sense that this is the right choice for the AEs because it's what they believe in pervades many of their explanations. Tara believes it is crucial to get involved with things that are important to her, and she expresses a strong sense of self-efficacy in facing that challenge:

> I have always believed in getting active in what you as a person believe is important. I don't subscribe to the theory of complaining. I believe in getting involved to get things done. Cannot rely on others to do what you know needs being done.

"I do it because I believe in it" (Andrea). And Emma: "Well, I think you have to believe in things. If you don't believe in anything, my goodness, what good are you?… I tend to be somewhat of an intellectual person on this stuff, but it's also a gut level feeling. You've got to feel good about what you do." These individuals frequently express "feeling good" about what

they do, indicating that it meshes with who they are.

It is important to note that the process of growth and self discovery is not necessarily something that takes place before a person decides to be an environmentalist. Instead, it is part of naturally maturing, testing, and recognizing one's capabilities as well as deliberately thinking through one's values and beliefs. Perhaps, the road to greater self-knowledge interacts simultaneously with growing environmental dedication as they feed off each other. Through this rather ill-defined process, it becomes clear that the environment really *is* a priority for him or her, that it sits right with the individual because it really *does* coincide with what they believe and who they are. Frequently referring to this process as their "path," they are being true to themselves by honoring their convictions.

Perseverance

Seen in this light, the question of perseverance becomes almost moot. The active environmentalists give a variety of reasons for persevering with their actions and work, including other activists, volunteers in their field who do a great deal of work without any pay, recognition that all major change takes time, and minor tangible victories. However, the other reasons they give – at various points throughout the interviews – indicate that it is much more than those tangible factors. It is because it reflects who they are, what they believe in, and what they think is important that they persevere. In most cases, they cannot imagine doing anything else:

> "I was thinking it's like a moth drawn to a light or candle or something. There's an irresistible attraction that is very difficult to walk away from" (Emma).

> "The stuff I'm doing now is the most important work I've ever done, but I'm making the least amount I've ever made. I don't measure it in money" (John).

> "If I go to my death at eighty, and I have slowed down for cynical or skeptical reasons, then I'll be very disappointed in that. I would like to think that though I might get tired of something now and then, that that's who I am, and when I retire, I'll be more active than I am now…I'll be doing more and more of it than less of it. And having fun, too, because I don't see it as work…You know, in a sense, it's not work. It's what you want to do" (Joe).

> "The job of protecting the environment is so important, and I've wasted too much time on nonessential things. I hope that I can elevate this work to the center of the remainder of my days" (Michael).

> "Once you hear it, once you see it, you can't go back. I can't understand why somebody would have their eyes opened to all of this – to see the different problems in the world and want to make a change and then just purposefully ignore it. I can't comprehend that. To me, it's unfathomable. You have to try. That's why we're here. You just have to try. I can't explain it any other way" (Chloe).

These people have clearly internalized the beliefs that led them down this path, and it would be like trying to shake off their shadow to try to walk away from the pull to do this work. How can you walk away from who you are and what you believe? It is more than a whim, more than a hobby. This is what they need to do. It is an essential job and a joyful one. Statements like these seem to touch the core of their perseverance.

The realization that this is the right path for someone does not necessarily mean that person will pursue a career in the environmental field. As the participants in this study show and common sense would indicate, an individual can lead a life consistent with his or her environmental ethic without also holding a job in that field. It is a choice on how to lead one's life. My focus is primarily on the individual actions one takes. If it is our actions that have led to the "ecological crisis," as past research suggests, it is our actions that need to change (Maloney & Ward, 1973).

However, lest it appear that it is a "done deal" as soon as that realization takes place, it is also important to note that there may still be moments of uncertainty. Both John and Michael report that they periodically questioned whether they were headed in the right direction after making changes following their respective moments of revelation. For both, it ended up being the path they chose to continue. John recalls:

> Then not too long ago just realizing that I can never go back to that – whatever *that* was. Just this road. I don't know where it's going.

> I don't really care as long as I'm sticking by what I believe in and just roll on and see what doors open. I used to be blinded by that path….It's like that white noise. You've just got to cut through that forest and just do whatever you want.

Others, too, recognize the importance of, and engage in, periodic self-reflection to make sure they are leading the life they want to lead. Joe suggests, "I think it's also important to go back and recheck who you think you are. Why are you like that? Is that someone that you want to be?…If there's something that you want to change, how would you change that?" *It sounds like you do kind of check in with yourself?* "Oh yeah. I think I've done that at least since high school."

Completing the Circle

In many respects, these individuals keep themselves energized by seeking out reinforcement – not in the sense of validation, per se, but opportunities to strengthen their connection to nature and share some of that joy with others. These active environmentalists frequently spend time in nature on brief visits to nearby parks, day trips to wetland or wilderness areas, weekend jaunts to beautiful lakeshores, or longer camping or recreating adventures throughout the state and nation. Emma explains that if she has a business meeting up north, she throws her tent in the car so she can camp out if possible.

They enjoy both time alone and time with others in the natural environment. Typically, time alone is sought out for more meditative purposes. They enjoy time with others as a chance to bond and enjoy nature together, to "share with them the wonder that I feel" (Michael). Again, this indicates the important role nature plays in their lives as people do not typically talk about purposely seeking out a spot to be alone or wanting to share with others the joy they feel in an area unless it holds special meaning for them.

As mentioned earlier, these experiences in nature serve as a break from the frenzy of everyday life and a time to breathe deeply and feel the pulse of nature again, renewing the soul. Although the active environmentalists are already invested, the experiences also reenergize them for continued service, and so they return to the source that first touched them and started

them down this path. Although they sense their connection to nature all the time to varying degrees, being back in it may make the connection "real" again. They frequently continue to do quite a bit of reading related to the environment, including research on environmental trends as well as more philosophical, biographical, and popular literature. Many also report growing increasingly involved as other opportunities present themselves, and in essence, they have now become the inspiration for others (people seek them out for guidance, they are invited to speak at environmental seminars and organizations, etc.).

Many of the active environmentalists discuss the benefit of working through these issues with a significant other, close friends, and/or an environmental group. John explains that "the fact that my wife and I are like-minded on this helps." Alex talks about spending a great deal of time with people discussing these issues which enhanced his perspective and understanding. Joe describes his wife as more environmental than he was when they met, and since then, they have enjoyed many wilderness experiences together and have started a recycling program in their community.

The frequency with which the influence of interaction with others is mentioned suggests the importance of having a support network. Also, those who are married appear to appreciate the benefits of discussing the issues and leading a positive lifestyle together: "It's nice not feeling alone" (Chloe), but they suggest that although it would be more difficult to adopt such a lifestyle alone, they would still try to do it. In fact, a few of the married participants did not have like-minded spouses, indicating that it is not a crucial factor for everyone.

The activities mentioned above reveal how central the environment is to the lives of the AEs. Once they have made the environment a priority, not only does internal drive keep them involved, but they are also frequently reinforced by actually "living the lifestyle."

A Sense of Hope

The individuals interviewed appear to be torn on how optimistic they are about how people will treat the environment in the future – skepticism seemingly based on a lack of action from the general public. Although they express measured optimism, they emphasize that they are hopeful:

> Yeah, I am. I don't have any rational basis for that, but optimism, to me, isn't rational – or hope. I guess optimism…could be based on a rational analysis of the facts, but I would think of it more as a matter of hope. Hope comes from mysterious places. And sometimes, it's kind of a grim optimism – basically a thought that 'Well, we're going to make it because we have to…We're going to wake up because it's our survival.' At other times, I just feel that there's an innate instinct in a human to do the right thing that he or she should…So yeah, I'm hopeful (Michael).

Michael expresses an uncertainty that others feel as well, some suggesting that it may take a severe environmental crisis before people are motivated enough to take action. Nonetheless, a general hopefulness characterized these discussions – if even because of its importance in making the fight for change seem less futile: "I can't allow myself to go to the place where we can't…There's got to be hope…There's got to be hope for the human condition generally. And without hope, you don't act…." Joe continues to explain that when he starts feeling doubtful, he purposely tries to steer away from those thoughts. Chloe echoes, "You have to have hope because what's the point if you don't?" Most of the participants do report having witnessed different changes in the general public's behavior over time, such as increased recycling, which fuels some of their hope for the future.

Change of Perspective

When specifically asked what the active environmentalists see as the primary differences between themselves and the average American citizen, they find it difficult to do so. Understandably, they tend to shy away from making judgments, speculating, or "speaking for another person." In fact, many of them contend that there is not much of a difference and that the general public does care about the environment. Previous research (Kempton et al., 1995) and the findings of this study indicate that, indeed, there does not seem to be that great a difference in the way active environmentalists and the general public view the environment, although the strength of their beliefs and their behaviors are certainly different.

While they hedged when directly asked the question about differences between themselves and the general population, the AEs do recognize that they take more actions than the average person does, and as the interviews unfolded, they frequently hit upon aspects that might set them apart from others while responding to entirely different questions. Their suggestions include that the AEs are more focused on the environment, have greater knowledge about the issues and what actions they can take, have had more contact with nature, have had a unique combination of experiences, and have been able to step outside the proverbial "box," see through the damaging assumptions, and go in a direction more in tune with their personal values. These are significant observations, many of which, by their very nature, imply that the AEs do, on some level, see themselves as thinking and acting differently than most people.

These factors are mentioned repeatedly and certainly reflect the areas the AEs emphasize in their own relationship with nature and the importance they give to certain aspects in helping to secure their dedication. For instance, they stress the need to feel connected to nature in order to care about, understand, and protect it. With respect to the larger population, Emma argues, "Right now, there's a warm and fuzzy good feeling about wild places…but it's a foreign thing. It's like looking at something you're never going to experience…They conceptually have a good feeling about it, but they're not invested in it, and that's a problem."

Similarly, another suggestion that kept recurring is the notion that people, in general, are distanced from nature – both physically and emotionally – so have developed no conscious attachment to it. Tara speaks to this point: "I think, deep down, there's an innate sense with nature. It's just that people have gotten so far away from listening to it, they don't know… they don't respond to it."

While the active environmentalists tend to downplay differences (perhaps because they wish to focus on the similarities and not the differences in order to advance the notion that others are surely capable of making the environment a priority in their lives, as well), certainly their actions, if not their views, separate them from the general public, and it would appear that family members view them as being different, as well. Most active environmentalists report

that among the members of their family, they are the black sheep – the "odd one out," in Alex's case and "way out there" in Emma's. John explains that his family thinks he is going through a phase: "Yeah, he'll kind of step out and do his grad school thing. 'Write your little thesis. Write your paper about this or that and then jump back on the bandwagon.'…They probably think I'm misguided."

Occasionally, parents and/or siblings also engage in a few pro-environmental behaviors but have not made the environment a priority in their lives. In a few cases, parents and/or siblings were (or are) very dedicated to some other issue. Some active environmentalists are teased good-naturedly and respected by their family members for their involvement. Others have relatives who seem to accept it grudgingly while shaking their heads in disbelief.

For some active environmentalists, the handwriting is almost on the wall – parents are very active in social or political arenas, engage their children in intellectual and ethical discussions, work on giving them a strong sense of self respect and efficacy, spend a lot of time in nature with their children…. Clearly if it was that simple, the need for research in these areas wouldn't exist. Not each family member comes out of eighteen years in the home looking like the others. In fact, John's brother is in the business of expanding office supply markets overseas.

For other active environmentalists, it seems like one of the least likely paths to take – fairly inactive parents who are mildly interested in the environment. Perhaps the ground a person has to cover in one scenario is greater than in another, but people from both kinds of backgrounds can end up making significant decisions to benefit the environment.

The Active Environmentalist's Journey

In this section, I summarize what has been gleaned so far by the active environmentalists' journeys. The findings suggest that active environmentalists tend to emphasize biocentric values in interpreting the environment and their relationship to it, viewing the earth and its inhabitants as connected and part of a living web of life to be valued in its own right. Most believe that the condition of the environment is in jeopardy, and that humans are the main cause

of environmental degradation. Regardless of whether or not they subscribe to formal religious traditions, they think of the environment as something that transcends human understanding and is part of a grander purpose, often seen as a sacred creation.

Experiences in nature often render them practically speechless as they stand in amazement at the majesty around them. Spending time in nature has also allowed them to experience the restorative qualities of nature as they feel grounded, alive, and more at peace all at once. Because the environment is so special, interconnected, and complex, it is best to take great caution when making decisions that will affect the environment.

The active environmentalists view humans as a part of nature, and they sense a deep connection to nature through personal experiences in the natural environment. This connection helps them develop a close relationship with nature, in which the active environmentalist, guided by moral and/or religious principles, feels an obligation and responsibility to do what he or she can to care for the planet. Active environmentalists do express values which border on anthropocentric, such as aesthetic value and considerations for future generations, but these values rest in a sort of gray area and were not emphasized by the active environmentalists, in general. The active environmentalists also touch on some views from deep ecology like the idea that humans are hard-wired to nature and have an innate need to connect with it. Again, although mentioned, they were not stressed.

Overall, the active environmentalists expressed solid biocentric values as might be expected, and most of their worldviews were consistent with those of the American public interviewed and surveyed by Kempton et al. (1995). However, most Americans do not engage in environmental behaviors and lifestyles to the extent these individuals do. The role of actual experiences in nature or the relationship one feels to it was not investigated in the Kempton et al. (1995) study. Yet the connection to nature was an influence which the active environmentalists emphasized during the interviews in this study. It is a relationship – one that stirs emotions and can bring them to tears.

This sense of connection appears to lay the groundwork for investment and further involvement. Emma, having spent much of her youth outdoors near their home and on family adventures, explains that although she resisted it growing up, "It just sort of seeped in and built…my sense of values, it seems, has been shaped by a lifetime where I've had exposure to this." She adds that she's now "realized that I'm lucky to have had those range of experiences as a kid…This is the kind of experience you should have. This is what everybody should have."

As diverse as the paths may be, the process is fairly similar. Once interest is piqued and a sense of connection established, various factors work to invest the active environmentalist further, including knowledge and a sense of personal efficacy – factors which Hungerford and Volk (1990) include in their model of environmental behavior. The AEs grow increasingly invested over time and actively seek out more information and outdoor experiences. These experiences appear to build on one another, acting as triggers that push the individual a little further down the path each time.

The active environmentalists talk repeatedly of figuring out what is important to them, doing what they know is right for them, doing what they believe in, and doing it because it is the right thing to do. These statements indicate an important role for both morality and self-awareness. While the more tangible influences help "get them there," the intangible ones appear to be what keeps them dedicated. This does not mean that intangible factors do not also play a role in earlier stages of active environmentalists' investment; rather it means that once they are dedicated, external influences act as little more than reinforcement. For many of the individuals in this study, it appears that that which signifies elevating the environment from a noticeable aspect of their life to a central focus is the *realization that it's the right decision for them.*

The process surrounding this recognition remains unclear, and realization, or recognition, may not be the best choice of words, but at some point, it becomes a conscious "fit." It may happen in a flash of inspiration, sneak up more gradually, or confirm a feeling that the individual has had for some time, and it does not necessarily result in immediate changes in behaviors or lifestyle. For most, it does appear to signify a shift in the way the active environmentalist views

the role of the environment in his or her life, if only to validate present actions and plant the seed for future ones.

Recognition that this is the right thing for an individual implies self-knowledge and realization that he or she really does believe that it's a worthy endeavor. The importance of learning about themselves and their passions, and deciding to follow that "path," pervades much of the active environmentalists' speech and/or demeanor. This sense of self-awareness and confidence appears to develop both as a natural part of maturing and as a result of giving real thought to their passions, values, beliefs, and themselves – who they are and what direction they want to take. Being true to themselves seems to have significant implications for their perseverance as well. This study suggests that internal motivation is a crucial factor in maintaining pro-environmental behaviors, a finding consistent with Dwyer et al. (1993) and Eden (1993).

The active environmentalists interviewed for this study exhibited joy for the work they do, belief in the moral responsibility to continue their efforts, and confidence that they were capable of contributing something of worth to the cause. Their sense of responsibility and self worth appears to involve them in other causes that are important to them, as well. While generally speaking, environmental concerns are their primary focus, they may be found at a protest rally, working on children's advocacy efforts, helping out at schools, tutoring beginning readers, active in local government, and generally supporting social justice issues. It would appear that beyond environmental dedication is a desire to do what they can to make a positive difference in other areas, as well.

Survey Results

As described in Chapter Three, after the interviews, each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire on environmental attitudes and behaviors (Appendix B). The same questionnaire had been administered to a sample of Environmental Studies students and a sample of non-Environmental Studies students attending Michigan State University the previous year by a different researcher.

The following section introduces and discusses some of the information collected through the questionnaire. I have included some tables to help with reporting certain sections of the survey, and I address results that touch on the major themes of this study. Due to the very small sample size of my study (N = 10), no statistical analysis beyond response frequencies was conducted on the data, and caution must be taken in drawing conclusions from the responses. However, it is useful to consider the degree to which the survey data compliments or contrasts with the interview data and the extent to which it supports the existing environmental attitudes literature.

Ideology

Political ideology has been reported as a significant socio-demographic variable influencing environmental attitudes (Shean & Shei 1995; Scott & Willits 1994). More liberal political views are significantly linked to support for environmental causes and higher scores on the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) scale. Survey respondents were asked to identify their ideological orientation from the following categories: liberal, slightly liberal, middle of the road, slightly conservative, or conservative. Eight of the ten active environmentalists consider themselves to have a liberal political ideology, one slightly liberal, and one conservative. This is consistent with the literature. As a group, the active environmentalists were more liberal in their political ideology than either of the groups (RD students at 71% and MSU students at 48%) surveyed in spring 2001.

Attitude

The environmental worldviews of the active environmentalists were assessed using 10 of the 15 items in the revised "New Environmental Paradigm" scale (Dunlap et al., 2000). The scale attempts to measure people's general attitudes toward environmental issues. Respondents were asked whether they strongly agree, mildly agree, neither agree nor disagree, mildly disagree or strongly disagree with each item shown in Table 1. Answering positively to the items marked with a "+" and answering negatively to the items marked with a "-" is considered by the designers of the scale (Dunlap et al. 2000) to reflect a more pro-environmental orientation or worldview.

The active environmentalists demonstrated strong support for each of the value statements from the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP). They feel strongly that we are approaching earth's carrying capacity, that nature has intrinsic value, that the resilience of nature is limited in the face of anthropogenic forces, and the "ecological crisis" is very real. Humans were not meant to rule over the rest of nature and we will never understand enough of the complexities of nature to figure out how to control it.

When the responses of the ten active environmentalists are compared with those of environmental studies students and other MSU students from the earlier study, all three groups show support for the NEP. However, the support is strongest among the active environmentalists.

Table 1. Environmental Orientation of Active Environmentalists, Environmental Studies (RD) Students and Other MSU Students.

Item	Response	Active Environ-mentalists	RD Students	MSU Students
We are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support.	% strongly agree	60.0	33.3	24.0
	% mildly agree	20.0	35.3	40.5
	% neither agree/ disagree	10.0	15.7	17.5
	% mildly disagree	0	11.8	14.0
+	% strongly disagree	10.0	3.9	4.0
	(N)	(10)	(51)	(200)
When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences.	% strongly agree	20.0	40.4	30.5
	% mildly agree	60.0	46.2	44.0
	% neither agree/ disagree	20.0	9.6	11.0
	% mildly disagree	0	3.8	12.5
+	% strongly disagree	0	0.0	2.0
	(N)	(10)	(52)	(200)
The earth has plenty of natural resources if we can just learn how to develop them.	% strongly agree	10.0	15.7	18.0
	% mildly agree	10.0	31.4	40.5
	% neither agree/ disagree	0	15.7	10.5
	% mildly disagree	60.0	31.4	23.5
--	% strongly disagree	20.0	5.9	7.5
	(N)	(10)	(51)	(200)

Table 1 (cont'd)

Plants and animals have as much right as humans do to exist.	% strongly agree	50.0	59.6	51.0
	% mildly agree	40.0	34.6	24.5
	% neither agree/ disagree	0	5.8	11.0
	% mildly disagree	10.0	0.0	11.5
+	% strongly disagree	0	0.0	2.0
	(N)		(52)	(200)
The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations.	% strongly agree	0	0.0	4.0
	% mildly agree	0	13.7	12.0
	% neither agree/ disagree	20.0	5.9	12.0
	% mildly disagree	40.0	31.4	41.5
--	% strongly disagree	40.0	49.0	30.5
	(N)	(10)	(51)	(199)
Despite our special abilities, humans are still subject to the laws of nature.	% strongly agree	70.0	78.8	58.8
	% mildly agree	30.0	17.3	30.7
	% neither agree/ disagree	0	1.9	8.0
	% mildly disagree	0	0.0	2.5
+	% strongly disagree	0	1.9	0.0
	(N)	(10)	(52)	(199)
The so-called 'ecological crisis' facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated.	% strongly agree	0	3.8	4.0
	% mildly agree	0	36.9	19.5
	% neither agree/ disagree	10.0	7.7	17.0
	% mildly disagree	20.0	21.2	34.5
--	% strongly disagree	70.0	40.4	25.0
	(N)	(10)	(52)	(200)
Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature.	% strongly agree	0	2.0	8.0
	% mildly agree	0	9.8	11.0
	% neither agree/ disagree	10.0	13.7	16.5
	% mildly disagree	10.0	25.5	27.5
--	% strongly disagree	80.0	49.0	37.0
	(N)	(10)	(51)	(200)

Table 1 (cont'd)

Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it.	% strongly agree	0	3.8	4.0
	% mildly agree	0	9.6	15.0
	% neither agree/ disagree	0	11.5	15.5
	% mildly disagree	30.0	36.5	36.5
--	% strongly disagree	70.0	38.5	29.0
	(N)	(10)	(52)	(200)
If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.	% strongly agree	60.0	25.5	30.0
	% mildly agree	40.0	43.1	37.0
	% neither agree/ disagree	0	17.6	17.0
	% mildly disagree	0	11.8	12.5
+	% strongly disagree	0	2.0	3.5
	(N)	(10)	(51)	(200)

Individual item scale: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Mildly Agree, 3 = Neither agree/disagree, 4 = Mildly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree.

As shown in Table 2, the active environmentalists support a strong role for government in helping to solve environmental problems even if this infringes, to some extent, on private property rights. This is consistent with the liberal ideological orientation of most of the participants. They feel that they, personally, have been affected by problems of environmental quality and doubt that industry has done its best to develop anti-pollution technology. Responses to the statement "we will have to reduce our standard of living to solve environmental problems" shows half of participants agreeing and the other half disagreeing. Information provided during the interviews suggests that it may be a matter of how one defines "standard of living." If one thinks in terms of consumption patterns and other wasteful practices, then our standard of living may need to be "reduced." If one thinks in terms of changing one's conception of standard of living and elevating it to live in closer harmony with nature, the standard of living could actually be raised. Of course, one cannot tell by reading the survey how the respondents interpreted the question.

Table 2. Responses to Statements on the Role of the Individual and Government

Statement	1 Strongly Agree	2 Mildly Agree	3 Neither Agree/ Disagree	4 Mildly Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
I am not willing to pay additional taxes to fund the government's environmental protection activities.	0	0	10	20	70
We will have to reduce our standard of living in order to solve environmental problems such as global climate change.	40	10	0	20	30
Property owners have an inherent right to use their land as they see fit.	0	0	0	50	50
Industry is trying its best to develop effective anti-pollution technology.	0	0	0	70	30
Government should more heavily regulate the environmental performance of industry.	40	40	10	10	0
Because global climate change is a world issue and not an individual one, it is the government's responsibility to do something about it, not mine.	10	0	0	20	50
The environmental movement is really more interested in disrupting society than they are in fighting pollution.	0	0	0	0	100
Environmental quality problems are not personally affecting my life.	0	0	0	40	60
We must prevent any type of animal from becoming extinct, even if it means sacrificing some things for ourselves.	20	50	10	20	0

Table 2 (cont'd)

Statement	1 Strongly Agree	2 Mildly Agree	3 Neither Agree/ Disagree	4 Mildly Disagee	5 Strongly Disagree
I support the use of economic incentives (e.g. emissions trading; tradable discharge rights; transferable fishing quotas) to conserve environmental resources and control pollution.	40	10	0	30	10
Government restrictions on the use of private property are necessary in order to insure that the land will not be permanently harmed.	50	30	10	10	0

In particular, responses to questions involving the management of wildlife in Michigan show some variation and/or uncertainty among respondents (Table 3). Responses tend to indicate that some human intervention (management) and use (hunting) is acceptable if done with caution. These responses coincide with interview responses about the balance of nature. It also indicates that these active environmentalists are not as radical in their views as people might assume of an "environmentalist."

Table 3. Responses to statements pertaining to wildlife management in Michigan (N=10).

Statement	% Strongly Agree	% Mildly Agree	% Unsure	% Mildly Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
Whether or not I see wildlife, just knowing that wildlife exist in Michigan is important.	100	0	0	0	0
It is more important to manage wildlife for current human needs than to preserve wildlife for future generations.	0	0	0	30	70

Table 3 (cont'd)

Humans should stop managing wildlife populations and leave wildlife alone.	0	10	20	70	0
It is acceptable to kill individual wild animals in order to control damage caused by wildlife.	0	60	30	10	0
Recreational hunting is acceptable if the meat is used for food and not wasted.	20	80	0	0	0
Deer should be fed in order to survive an unusually harsh winter.	10	0	10	40	40
Hunting and fishing by Native Americans should be given favor over recreational hunting and fishing by others.	0	40	50	10	0
I oppose all forms of recreational hunting.	0	0	0	70	20

Responsibility

In the next section of the survey (Table 4), the AEs very clearly ascribe responsibility to the individual and convey personal efficacy. They all strongly agreed that "Each person has the ability to affect the environment through everyday choices." They strongly agreed that they would be willing to make personal sacrifices for the environment even if immediate results did not appear significant. They each strongly rejected the notion that there was no point to their taking pro-environmental actions. All but one strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that because global climate change is a world problem, it is the government's responsibility and not their own (Table 2). However, the one participant who strongly agreed indicated in writing that the problem is too big for an individual to take responsibility on that issue. This is curious and may be an outlier because each of the other items measuring responsibility had strong endorsement from everybody even though most environmental problems were considered massive by the active environmentalists during the interviews, and this still does not stop them from feeling a sense of responsibility.

While the strong sense of responsibility is certainly not unexpected, it is interesting to note that participants expressed skepticism during the interviews as to whether their individual actions really did make a difference. On the survey, they indicate strong agreement that they do. This could be a result of the survey instrument, in which a certain response is the only way for participants to express personal efficacy. It could also indicate a belief that actions, in cumulative form, do have an impact, or a "think global, act local" attitude. Not surprisingly, all respondents strongly agree that they "feel a moral and/or civic responsibility to engage in pro-environmental behaviors," a finding consistent with the interviews.

As one would expect, the responsibility index score for the active environmentalists is extremely high as well. With 20 as the maximum possible score, they averaged 19.4. In comparison, the environmental studies students had an average score of 18.6 and the other students a score of 17.38. Environmental group members in the larger MSU survey scored 18.53 and non-members scored 17.39. These scores indicate a very high sense of personal responsibility toward the environment in each of the groups surveyed.

Table 4. Responses to statements pertaining to responsibility and perceived efficacy

Statement	1 Strongly Agree	2 Mildly Agree	3 Neither Agree/ Disagree	4 Mildly Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
Each person has the ability to affect the environment through everyday choices.	100	0	0	0	0
I would be willing to make personal sacrifices for the sake of improving environmental quality even though the immediate results may not seem significant.	100	0	0	0	0
The federal government will have to introduce harsh measures to protect environmental quality since few people will regulate themselves.	0	50	10	30	10

Table 4 (cont'd)

There is little point in my engaging in pro-environmental behavior.	0	0	0	0	100
I feel a moral and/or civic responsibility to engage in pro-environmental behavior.	100	0	0	0	0

Comparisons and observations

When it is suggested that "The federal government will have to introduce harsh measures to protect environmental quality since few people will regulate themselves," responses are split (the only statement from Table 4 to receive mixed responses). This split coincides with the uncertainty expressed during the interviews regarding whether or not the AEs thought that other people will take pro-environmental actions.

When asked to compare their level of concern to others, six considered themselves "much more concerned" and four considered themselves "more concerned." However, when asked about differences they perceived between themselves and others during the interviews, many hesitated or did not think they were that different. In fact, quite a few expressed a belief that the public does care about the environment.

A number of possible explanations for this variance exist. These include a desire to minimize possible differences or be seen as "bragging" about their own choices during the interview that is removed when they just have to check a box on a piece of paper; a difference in the measured variable, suggesting that a response on how someone rates their concern should not be compared to responses about perceived differences; and the question itself: if participants interpret concern as translating to action, then this may have been a way of acknowledging more investment in the cause than others exhibit.

Although the intent was simply to see how active environmentalists viewed themselves in comparison with the general population, it might have been difficult to interpret and may have benefited from clarification or re-wording. On the other hand, a pattern may be emerging that

suggests that most of the active environmentalists do think that the general public cares about the environment in a rather abstract fashion but that they are not yet concerned enough to learn more or do much about it.

Again, the active environmentalists are split on how they envision the condition of the environment in Michigan twenty years from now. This variation is somewhat consistent with responses pertaining to optimism during the interviews. Although, in general, they were marginally optimistic – with some expressing significant doubt that enough change would happen before an environmental catastrophe of some description – they also expressed a great deal of hope. Hope appears to be one of the essential ingredients in this struggle because without it, AEs suggest, what's the point? Perhaps it is this sense of hope that encourages people to think positively about the relatively near future.

Behaviors

The active environmentalists score high on the survey's behavior scale. Out of a maximum possible score of 18.0, as a group they averaged 13.4. The university students in environmental studies who completed the survey as part of the MSU study scored an average of 10.98 on the same behavior scale. Those who were not environmental studies majors scored 9.68. Those students who were also members of an environmental group had an average of 10.78 and non-members an average of 9.75 in the earlier study.

In a separate set of questions, respondents were asked if they drive a car to work instead of taking public transportation. Eight of the ten active environmentalists report that they do take their car, and seven of them indicate in the following question that they would prefer not to take their car if public transportation were more efficient. For people who are as actively environmental as these, this finding suggests how difficult it is to switch to alternative means of transportation if it is not a relatively convenient option. It also speaks to the problem of cities that are designed without public transportation or other alternative methods of transportation in mind, exacerbating reliance on the automobile.

Knowledge

Eight of the ten active environmentalists report having had course work of some kind in environmental studies, of which half believe it increased their understanding of the environment. As expected, they score extremely high on the knowledge scale consisting of fourteen multiple-choice questions. As a group they averaged 12.9 out a maximum possible score of 14. Over half of the respondents answered all of the questions correctly. In comparison, the mean score of MSU student survey respondents was 8.16.

Discussion

The questionnaire data reveal a picture of the active environmentalists as people who are very knowledgeable about ecological principles and environmental issues, engage in many pro-environmental behaviors, feel a strong sense of responsibility to take action, and hold values reflecting the New Environmental Paradigm. While research by Maloney and Ward (1973) and others have reported no significant linkage between knowledge about the environment and environmental behaviors, the results of this study suggest that such a relationship may exist, at least for active environmentalists – although it is clearly not the only factor.

The survey results paint a picture that coincides with many of the views expressed during the interviews. In terms of a data collection instrument in this study, it serves to round out a profile by providing measures of knowledge, helping to clarify some points that were unclear during the interview (how they view their level of concern with respect to others), highlighting other areas that are unclear (views of the future condition of the environment), and providing an expanded perspective by placing them in relation to other respondents.

Interpretation of questions can be problematic, as indicated earlier and as one participant suggested in the margins next to some of the questions. Statements that are unclear or have value-laden words like “harsh measures” can be interpreted different ways by different respondents, resulting in inconsistent responses when, in fact, there might be agreement. The survey responses also indicate areas that would be interesting to discuss with the participants in greater detail as the survey provides no information on the whys and the hows.

Perhaps initiating the survey part of the study first and then conducting the interviews would be beneficial. This still allows the researcher to develop an interview protocol and focus on the study's themes while also providing the opportunity to address questions that may arise as a result of the survey or clarify inconsistencies in responses between the two methodological instruments.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: The Joy of Living

Why do you do the things you do? A simple question to a complex answer, or could it be the other way around? For years, concern over the health of the environment has led researchers, advocates, educators, and other professionals to try to determine how to encourage others to act in environmentally-responsible ways. With so many factors working against an individual taking such action, it has been a struggle. Perhaps part of the battle has been won in greater general awareness and increased concern among a large portion of the American public. Now if only they would act. Those who *do* act remind us that there are many factors working to promote individual pro-environmental actions if we are willing and able to open our eyes and see them.

Past research has made significant strides in advancing our understanding of the complex relationship between attitudes and behaviors. Although this study did not isolate specific behaviors to examine the factors that led to each behavior's adoption, it is apparent that beliefs about actions and their outcomes are at work. Instead of focusing on specific actions, this study attempted to explore the active environmentalist's world – how he or she views the environment, interprets his or her relationship to it, and identifies those people, experiences, and events that have influenced them to make the environment a priority. Interviews with them suggest that despite some differences, there are also striking similarities on the road to living an environmental ethic.

According to the interviews and survey responses, the active environmentalists tend to view the environment in a way similar to the general population – albeit with slightly stronger biocentric values and pro-environmental concern. This suggests that they are neither terribly extreme in their views, nor is the "leap" to adopting pro-environmental behaviors for the general public as great as one might think. Indeed, emphasizing the differences between the AEs and the American public may hinder the adoption of such behaviors – a hunch that AEs may operate under when de-emphasizing the differences between themselves and others.

A look at the development of an environmental ethic in each of the AEs reveals that multiple factors work together to foster beliefs, values, actions, and dedication. Unique individuals with unique experiences, no two encountered the same influences in the same way, yet they arrived at a very similar spot. While the specific experiences varied, most of the AEs did share a number of characteristics.

An AE's upbringing appears to be an important first step as it often fosters an initial appreciation for nature, basic conservation principles, ethics of service and civic responsibility, and/or belief in one's own abilities. Ongoing personal experience in nature allows the AE to develop a sense of connection – seemingly crucial for building a relationship, strengthening values, and feeling a sense of investment. While the initial interest in the environment and spending time outdoors may be influenced by someone else, it is the AE's own connection that seems to keep them invested.

Once the groundwork has been laid, various other factors serve to strengthen their investment, including significant others, increased knowledge, and a growing sense of personal efficacy. These findings suggest that the primary variables identified by Hungerford & Volk (1990) – entry level, ownership, and empowerment – are some of the most influential factors at work in the AEs as well.

The findings in this study also suggest a crucial role for morality – a factor not addressed by Hungerford & Volk (1990) but certainly discussed in other literature. In the Dwyer et al. (1993) study, intrinsic behavior controls, in the form of verbal or written promises to perform a behavior, were the "only factor thought to influence long-term effectiveness" (p. 316), and Eden (1993) suggests that a sense of moral obligation is what keeps active members of organizations behaving "responsibly despite the perceived futility of impact" (p. 1748). The AEs in my study express a strong belief that their pro-environmental behavior is important because it is "the right thing to do."

However, previous research only tells part of the story for the active environmentalists. Although initial pro-environmental actions may have been adopted fairly easily, for the AEs in

this study, choosing to adopt a truly environmentally-responsible lifestyle was a longer, more intense process – a process that required soul-searching, and therefore, coincided with a growing sense of self. AEs express a strong belief that their actions are important because it is the right path for them. They emphasize the importance of learning who you are and feeling good about yourself, your capabilities, and what you do. Many indicate that they cannot imagine living any other way or doing anything else.

It is rocky territory, and beyond the scope of this project, to try to conclude precisely how self awareness and self confidence interacts with the AE's environmental ethic and the actions one takes. It is an ill-defined process. Moreover, it is likely that they affect each other (where one's developing environmental ethic influences how the person sees him or herself and vice versa). Whatever the inner workings of this relationship, AEs stress the importance of learning who they are and being true to that. They talk about being able to "cut through the white noise," "think outside of the box," and choose a way of life that is consistent with their values. Indeed, realizing that living an environmental ethic is being true to themselves is what moves the active environmentalists to real commitment.

This study also suggests that a cycle of reinforcement exists. As the AE becomes increasingly involved in leading an environmentally-responsible lifestyle, it becomes increasingly easy to stay involved. After all, they are surrounded by environmental consciousness, in a sense. While it appears that both internal and external reinforcement are important to the AEs, it is also clear that the real driving force behind maintaining their ethic is inner conviction, readily apparent in the passion the AEs exude when discussing the environment.

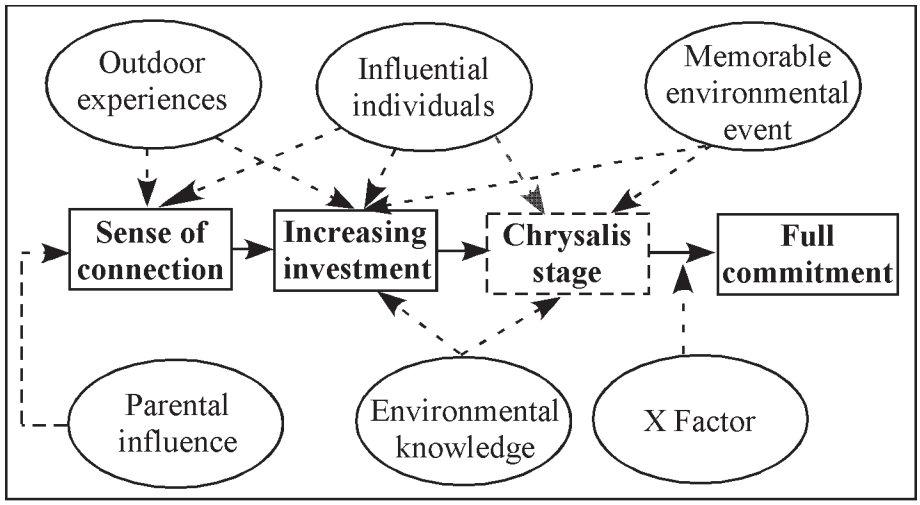
The study reveals that the AEs share other characteristics as well. Each AE feels a personal connection with nature through direct experiences in the natural environment – experiences that frequently have a profound and emotional impact on the individual. The AE is often overwhelmed by a sense of awe, wonder, joy, and/or sense of the Divine and one's place in the web of life. This is a powerful, often religious, experience for the AE.

The AEs exhibited considerable knowledge about the environment – both during the interviews and in the surveys. They found it easy to discuss the interconnections of living things, the balance of nature, and the consequences of personal and societal actions.

The AEs feel a sense of responsibility to be thoughtful and contributing members of society which may mean not always accepting everything they are told. These findings indicate that the AEs in this study are more than environmentalists. They appear to be actively involved in family life, if applicable, and they also tend to be concerned and active members of their community, as well. Although they have different personalities and ways of preferring to engage in civic life, they frequently organize and/or participate in community, educational, and/or social justice efforts and often participate in other causes that are important to them.

With these findings in mind, it is possible to envision a model that introduces the common factors that propelled the active environmentalists to full commitment in this study.

Figure 1. Active Environmentalist Diagram



My research indicates that the AEs start to travel a path similar to that presented in Hungerford and Volk's research (1990), with factors that operate like their entry level, ownership, and empowerment variables working together. The model I propose introduces some revisions to their model, incorporates influential factors, and expands on it to address the trajectory towards full commitment, as opposed to the adoption of specific behaviors.

As the AE Diagam indicates, an initial *sense of connection* develops first. This connection is typically influenced by personal experiences in nature and family upbringing--often in childhood and not consciously recognized as having a significant impact at the time. This stage eventually leads to a period of *increasing investment*, usually encouraged by specific people, classes, books, and other educational opportunities and continued exposure to natural environments.

The *chrysalis stage* I include to represent that stage in which the AE actively seeks out experiences and further information and brings all of his or her experiences and other significant factors to bear in a kind of fermentation period. As mentioned earlier, this remains a somewhat ill-defined stage, but is characterized by more exposure to influential factors and often involves conscious self reflection, increased self awareness and confidence, and figuring out what sparks his or her passions. The person is naturally maturing and "coming into one's own." These "X factors" lead to the realization that the individual can make his or her own decisions and choose the kind of life he or she wants to lead (regardless of societal pressures and sometimes coinciding with a revelatory moment or event) – all of which moves the individual to *full commitment*, where the AE actively and purposely chooses to lead a pro-environmental lifestyle. This becomes a way of life for the AE, reinforcing itself over time.

Implications for Practice

The study points out the significance of one's upbringing and the importance of instilling positive and productive values in one's children. In general, the support the AEs received at home – whether it included an environmental focus or not – provided a solid foundation of ethics, and in many cases, belief in their capabilities as well.

The study also indicates the importance of building on positive values and a sense of self confidence. Hungerford and Volk (1990) report that students who engage in empowerment training (increasing their perceived skill in using pro-environmental actions) "develop a great deal of self-confidence as a result of this training" (12). Moreover, they argue that it also improves one's "self-concept" and belief they are more involved in society. Teachers

may consider assignments and other projects that challenge students to reflect and provide opportunities to build confidence and practice behaviors, like having a recycling station in the classroom.

Moreover, actually encouraging students, as well as other individuals, to think "outside of the box" may help them develop a stronger sense of self and where they stand on various issues. Many of the AEs expressed an ability and willingness to question the way things were typically done and learn to make their own decisions even if they seemed to defy societal conventions, revealing the ability to think independently. It may be difficult to elicit that kind of behavior since we are generally taught to conform and not question why or how things are done, but this may be an important aspect in encouraging people to realize that different choices can be made. Just because most people go down one path does not mean they have to follow.

Application of the theory of cognitive dissonance might also offer some benefits. The AEs have a strong sense that they are "living their values," and both John and Alex spoke about specific moments in which the discrepancy between beliefs and actions hit them in a profound way. Eagly and Kulesa (1997) suggest that people do not normally recognize or think about the discrepancies between their harmful practices and their pro-environmental attitudes. Since research suggests that most people do hold pro-environmental attitudes, perhaps education programs, advocacy organizations, and concerned individuals could point out the discrepancies in ways suited to whatever audience they are attempting to influence.

One promising avenue is that of interdisciplinary programs that focus on the environment or include it as a course topic, such as the growing science-technology-society (STS) framework. This kind of approach recognizes the absence of boundaries between traditionally isolated disciplines and encourages students to notice the connections among various fields of study and practice. Educators have a tremendous opportunity to develop curricula that is challenging and rooted in real-world concerns. The environment, by its very "nature" is well suited for STS programs (Bragaw, 1992). In fact, Tara identified a high school interdisciplinary course that focused on social issues (including population and environmental concerns) as a pivotal experience for her.

Besides presenting important scientific principles, thoughtful teachers and well-designed courses should expose students to different sides of the issue so they will have a chance to grapple with alternative perspectives and arguments. Wiggins and McTyghe (1998) argue that being able to appreciate other perspectives strengthens a student's understanding of an issue because they are able to make comparisons and distinctions among the varying standpoints involved. It seems this would also inform and help clarify one's own argument.

Because of the importance of direct contact with nature, teachers should not only encourage exposure to truly natural environments, but when possible, coordinate wilderness excursions themselves. Attention should be given to make outdoor experiences frequent and extended, as this seems to have the greatest impact (Glover & Deckert, 1998), and it might help to vary the experiences in nature from informative walks through the woods or along a stream to more active adventures like hiking or biking.

As Hungerford & Volk (1990) argue, educators must also work to empower their students. Knowledge, concern, and investment are necessary building blocks, but they do not accomplish any goals completely. What are people to do with their concern? Students need to have the knowledge and skills necessary to take action, so allowing them the chance to practice certain behaviors raises the students' confidence in their ability to perform the behavior and improves the likelihood that they will continue the behavior after the course ends (Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Perry, McMichael, & Brannon, 1992).

Ideally, wilderness trips would involve some form of environmental or wildlife service project, an opportunity that promotes heightened skills, ownership, and efficacy. If trips to wilderness areas are not possible, environmental education courses can still offer a good foundation, and local trips to parks, wetlands, community gardens, or recycling centers could be employed.

Programs should encourage deep thinking, including asking the students, themselves, what it would take to make them more environmentally proactive – a question that provokes both self reflection and exploration of environmental concerns. Programs could also involve an aspect in which the students pass on their own knowledge to new and/or younger students. The students

then become the teachers and take further ownership and responsibility. Clearly, well-designed programs have the potential to help promote a sense of connection, knowledge, empowerment, and efficacy in students, no matter what their ages.

Perhaps encouraging self confidence and self knowledge in their students is one of the greatest impacts teachers can make. Clearly, fostering self discovery is not an easy task. Asking students to keep a journal and provide self-evaluations after assignments may encourage reflection. Allowing students to make some of their own decisions, like choosing an issue to research and present, and giving them responsibilities, like designing and scheduling their own service learning project engages them in their own learning and may boost confidence levels and self knowledge.

Self knowledge is recognized as an important aspect of many interdisciplinary programs, as well as contributing to a sense of social responsibility (Waks, 1992; Wiggins & McTyghe, 1998), and it is not something that is typically engendered in our educational systems or society. Confidence in themselves, it seems, should help students in all aspects of their lives and may even increase the chance that they will be actively involved in civic life.

These are not new arguments. Rather, the findings confirm what many in the educational field have been arguing for years. It is true that some schools have made excellent progress, encourage innovative teaching practices, and do not shy away from environmental programs and less conventional interdisciplinary courses. However, many have not. Instead of just teaching the facts, environmental educators should fight resistance to their efforts and implement programs that address different value systems, encourage deliberation, provide tools for critical thinking, self awareness and responsibility, and touch both the hearts and minds of students.

For the AE, the environment is more than just a nice place to go. It is something that is not only seen, but felt. It is an awesome gift, close to their hearts, and clearly connected to values. As Williams (2000) suggests, rather than appease those who prefer to leave feelings and values out of environmental education, teachers must work to bring them back and make them a focus.

Just like forming a relationship with nature and developing a sense of responsibility to it, self awareness is not just important for young people attending school. We can all benefit from self reflection, and most of us probably do not engage in it enough. It's much easier to just skim the surface, but the idea here is to think critically – about yourself (Who am I? What kind of person do I want to be?), about the world (What kind of world do I want to live in?), and about your role in life and the future (What kind of world do I want to leave for my children/future generations? What kind of personal legacy do I wish to leave?). It seems decisions and actions would take on greater meaning if there is thought and purpose behind them.

At the end of the day, a person has to look at him or herself in the mirror. If people can be encouraged to do some deep thinking about things we don't often attend to, they may realize that many of their actions do not coincide with their beliefs, and our friend, the cognitive dissonance theory is back in play again – pestering us to reexamine our actions and bring them in line with our beliefs.

Implications for Research

The environment is more than a "cause" to the AEs. They give a lot of significance to their experiences in nature and the connection they feel. In most cases, it is not simply an enjoyable experience, but it is often a deeply profound and emotional one. Suggestions for future research include closer examination of this connection. What is it about those experiences? When do they begin to feel this connection? Can it develop during random recreational activities? Does it take solitude? Or is it a result of years of being outdoors in general? Is long, extended time in nature important? Does a particular kind of experience seem to affect them in a similar manner? These subtle shades may be difficult to track but may offer insight into the kinds of experiences that prompted a sense of connection. For example, the AEs often refer to "camping a lot as a child" and suggest that that was one of their initial influences. These early experiences could be explored further, as well.

Another line of inquiry includes exploring the views, experiences, and sense of relationship that people who do *not* engage in pro-environmental behaviors hold. The Kempton

et al. (1995) study suggests that they would hold pro-environmental views. What do they give as the reasons for not engaging in pro-environmental behaviors? Do they, in fact, share pro-environmental views and express environmental concern? How do they interpret their relationship to the environment, and what has influenced that understanding? A lot of people spend a lot of time outdoors. Do all these people feel a sense of connection as well? And if so, how do they describe it? Are they aware that their actions are environmentally unfriendly? How do their stories, views, knowledge levels, and self awareness compare with the AEs in this study? Certainly a range of different populations could be studied in greater detail from those who are "anti-green" to those who fit a deep ecology paradigm. Larger sample sizes would widen the perspective as well.

Research in psychology indicates that the development of greater self-awareness and moral conviction typically begins in adolescence, extends into the college years (or early 20s), and strengthens from there (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, and Bem, 1993). As expected, this pattern was typical of the AEs in my study as well. Further research might involve the extent to which age plays a factor in one's openness to environmental messages, rethinking his or her responsibility to nature, and adopting and maintaining new behaviors. Also of interest would be examining which kinds of experiences and learning opportunities would be most effective for different age groups (and perhaps for each gender, as well).

Another line of inquiry should examine the chrysalis stage (fermenting) and elusive X-Factor (realization) introduced in this study. While it may not be necessary or possible to clearly define these aspects, more studies might provide greater insight into their nature. Are these common characteristics, able to be replicated in other studies? What else can we learn about the important stages of maturing, gaining confidence, and internalizing beliefs and how they interact with environmental responsibility? It would prove helpful to examine the role of self knowledge and confidence. Although a rather gray area, since self-identity is always developing and is naturally affected by what a person is doing with his or her life at any point in time, it was such a prevalent theme in the interviews with the AEs that it seems worth probing in greater detail.

Real-world Implications

In the world that we live in, how effective are our individual actions, and is it even productive to bother studying ten dedicated individuals to try to glean suggestions for fostering similar behaviors in other people on a planet that may very well be gridlocked with people in the foreseeable future?

Over the course of many years, we human beings have caused most of the environmental degradation in evidence today, through our actions, non-actions, and inventions. Clearly, we have the capacity to effect significant change if given the knowledge and means to do so.

One can also argue that in addition to personal pro-environmental actions, the AEs in my study support numerous environmental organizations with their time and money – groups which have power in membership numbers, activists, scientists, and lawyers all working to defend the flora and fauna who cannot speak for themselves.

The AEs also typically vote for local and national policymakers who share a more pro-environmental view and are often in the position of allocating resources to various projects, setting a kind of "tone," and passing (or denying) ordinances, permits, laws, and treaties that can have significant environmental impacts. As these examples indicate, while behaviors are certainly important, the AEs' ethic can affect the environment on many different levels.

The active environmentalists in this study would point out that it is important to have hope for individuals, the human race, the resiliency of nature, and the future, in general. They would also note that it is unrealistic to think that everyone would, or could, change. While philosophers and psychoanalysts might argue that each person is capable of some kind of change in beliefs and behaviors over a lifetime (and they may have a point), not everyone would be willing and receptive to programs involving environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviors.

Of course, many aspects of environmental concern can be introduced non-obvious ways, but suffice it to say, having realistic goals about truly motivating people to shift their lifestyle patterns is important, as well. After all, as discussed earlier in this thesis, attitudes can be very

entrenched – some more than others, and some people hold on to their habits stronger than others, as well.

Limitations of the Study

This study explored the views and experiences of ten active environmentalists in the Greater Lansing area of Michigan. Participants in the study were a relatively homogenous group in terms of race, socio-economic status, political ideology, and age. Five women and five men took part in the study. Participants were white, mid – upper-middle class, politically liberal (nine of them), and ranged in age from approximately early 30s to mid 50s. Household income level as children did vary across participants. This homogeneity may limit the kinds of responses received. The study does not claim generalizability of its findings. A sample size of ten means that the findings can only be assumed to be primary themes for the group in this study. As a pilot study, we look to this specific group to indicate directions for future research and practice.

Focusing on the environment as a concept is also problematic. As discussed, the environment is a massive system – intricate, complex, and all-encompassing. To try to break it down and discuss it in a precise manner naturally takes away from its magic as a whole and to try to describe the ways AEs conceptualize it in specific terms takes away from the overall effect the environment has on these people. The environment is more than what can be shakily articulated on some pieces of paper, and it means more to these people than I could convey.

A Word about Voluntary Simplicity

Upon delving into the interview process, it became apparent that a subgroup existed within the group of ten as some of the participants were quite immersed in, and others flirted with, the notion of *voluntary simplicity*. This concept, it became apparent, is not so much about taking specific actions, although that is certainly part of it. It means looking at things differently, and it is a way of life. Alex explains that "It's not just to turn the lights off; it's to live in a way where you don't leave the lights on so much."

Voluntary Simplicity involves the idea that one can be "downwardly mobile," living in a way that casts off the regular "trappings of society" and embracing a lifestyle that reduces wasteful consumption in all areas of life. It does not entail hunting and gathering in the woods, but it does involve mindful focus on things other than material wealth and possessions and leading a conscious lifestyle of minimal impact.

Voluntary Simplicity, like the self-reliant school discussed in Chapter Two, might sometimes be questioned because adherents, disenchanted with society, may disengage from political and civic life and not actively seek change in the wider world. While I did catch inklings of that attitude in a few of the interviews, most of the people involved with voluntary simplicity were active in civic life, and some also worked to promote change on an even larger scale. These observations could provide more avenues for further research: how engaged in civic life are people who adopt such a lifestyle, and what are their reasons for, or against, active involvement?

Concluding Remarks

A blueprint for active environmentalism does not exist. Five children growing up in a family that tries to instill a love of nature and desire to protect it may all go their separate ways, not one of them pursuing environmental actions. The same could be said for other experiences as well. Although there is no sure bet, this study has identified steps that might be taken to create a learning environment with a good chance of producing not only active environmentalists, but responsible citizens.

A strong desire to be environmentally-responsible seems to rest on how an individual gives meaning to an accumulation of experiences over time. Often built from a significant foundation, for most of the AEs, it is an emotional connection that helps spark that passion, a moral sense of responsibility that helps invest them, and self awareness and confidence that allows them to pursue their own path.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

This protocol shows the main topics that were covered in each interview. For each topic, a number of possible questions are identified. Questions were not always asked in the same order in each case, and most of the primary questions also involved follow-up questions and/or questions that called for elaboration of a point raised by the interviewee.

Actions

- What actions do you currently take for environmental reasons? Why have you chosen to take these actions? Are there actions that you are not currently taking that you would like to be taking. If so, what are they, and why aren't you engaging in them now?

Experiences

- Can you identify and describe specific experiences you've had in the natural environment that stand out for you? What made these experiences special? How do you feel when you're in these places?

Impressions/ Values

- There are probably countless definitions of the environment. If you had to describe the environment to someone who had never experienced it before, how would you do so? What comes to mind when someone says "the environment?" What is included in your definition?

- Do you think the environment is in danger? If so, to what extent? What are your primary concerns, and why? Do you think the tide can be turned, and if so, how? Can nature "bounce back" after injury?

- Considering that most people aren't as dedicated to the environment as you are, what do you think makes you different from others?

- Many people throw around words like *beliefs, values*, and *principles* when discussing the environment. Do you think you view the environment differently than others? If so, how?

- Are you optimistic in terms of the future for the environment and how people will treat it?

- Does the environment have intrinsic worth?

Influences

- Can you identify and talk about experiences, points in your life, beliefs, etc. which have influenced your view of the environment and the decisions you make regarding it? When did you start taking pro-environmental actions, and why (Age? What was going on in

your life? In your community? In society?) What did/do close relatives and friends think about your environmental ethic? What effects did this have on you?

Relationship

- How do you understand your relationship to the environment?

- Do you believe humans have an obligation to protect the environment? If so, to what extent, and why?

Perseverance

- In light of continued environmental degradation and little external reinforcement, why do you persevere? Do you see an impact, or consequences of what you do (what, when and where)? Is seeing an impact important to you?

Other

- Why the environment? What makes the environment a cause for you? Are you this active with other causes?

- Are there any actions that you would not take in support of the environment? If so, what are they, and why? Where do you draw the line?

APPENDIX B

Ecological Survey Cover Sheet And Survey

ECOLOGICAL SURVEY

Reminder: **As stated in the consent form, completion of the survey is voluntary, and responses will be kept confidential.** Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Please take approximately 15-20 minutes to fill out the survey and use the envelope to mail it back within the next seven (7) days.

Thank you again for your participation in this study.

1. The following statements talk about the relationship between humans and the environment. For each statement, please indicate whether you **Strongly Agree, Mildly Agree, Neither Agree/ Disagree, Mildly Disagree,** or **Strongly Disagree**. (Circle **<u>one</u>** response for each statement)

	Statement	1 Strongly Agree	2 Mildly Agree	3 Neither Agree/ Disagree	4 Mildly Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
a.	We are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
b.	When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
c.	The earth has plenty of natural resources if we can just learn how to develop them.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
d.	Plants and animals have as much right as humans do to exist.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
e.	The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
f.	Despite our special abilities, humans are still subject to the laws of nature.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
g.	The so-called 'ecological crisis' facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
h.	Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
i.	Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
j.	If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
k.	Constructed environments (e.g. artificial wetlands, plantation forests) are an acceptable substitute for naturally occurring features lost to development.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD

2. For each of the following statements, please indicate whether you **Strongly Agree, Mildly Agree, Neither Agree/Disagree, Mildly Disagree,** or **Strongly Disagree**. (Circle **<u>one</u>** response for each statement)

	Statement	1 Strongly Agree	2 Mildly Agree	3 Neither Agree/ Disagree	4 Mildly Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
a.	I am not willing to pay additional taxes to fund the government's environmental protection activities.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
b.	We will have to reduce our standard of living in order to solve environmental problems such as global climate change.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
c.	Property owners have an inherent right to use their land as they see fit.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
d.	Industry is trying its best to develop effective anti-pollution technology.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
e.	Government should more heavily regulate the environmental performance of industry.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
f.	Because global climate change is a world issue and not an individual one, it is the government's responsibility to do something about it, not mine.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
g.	The environmental movement is really more interested in disrupting society than they are in fighting pollution.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
h.	Environmental quality problems are not personally affecting my life.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
i.	We must prevent any type of animal from becoming extinct, even if it means sacrificing some things for ourselves.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD

j.	I support the use of economic incentives (e.g. emissions trading; tradable discharge rights; transferable fishing quotas) to conserve environmental resources and control pollution.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
k.	Government restrictions on the use of private property are necessary in order to insure that the land will not be permanently harmed.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD

3. Each of the following statements pertains to the management of wildlife species in Michigan. For each, please indicate whether you **Strongly Agree, Mildly Agree, Neither Agree/Disagree, Mildly Disagree,** or **Strongly Disagree**. (Circle **<u>one</u>** response for each statement)

Statement	1 Strongly Agree	2 Mildly Agree	3 Neither Agree/ Disagree	4 Mildly Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
Whether or not I see wildlife, just knowing that wildlife exist in Michigan is important.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
It is more important to manage wildlife for current human needs than to preserve wildlife for future generations.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
Humans should stop managing wildlife populations and leave wildlife alone.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
It is acceptable to kill individual wild animals in order to control damage caused by wildlife.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
Recreational hunting is acceptable if the meat is used for food and not wasted.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
Deer should be fed in order to survive an unusually harsh winter.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD

Hunting and fishing by Native Americans should be given favor over recreational hunting and fishing by others.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
I oppose all forms of recreational hunting.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD

4. For each of the following statements, please indicate whether you **Strongly Agree, Mildly Agree, Neither Agree/Disagree, Mildly Disagree,** or **Strongly Disagree**. (Circle **one** response for each).

Statement	**1 Strongly Agree**	**2 Mildly Agree**	**3 Neither Agree/ Disagree**	**4 Mildly Disagree**	**5 Strongly Disagree**
Each person has the ability to affect the environment through everyday choices.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
I would be willing to make personal sacrifices for the sake of improving environmental quality even though the immediate results may not seem significant.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
The federal government will have to introduce harsh measures to protect environmental quality since few people will regulate themselves.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
There is little point in my engaging in pro-environmental behavior.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
I feel a moral and/or civic responsibility to engage in pro-environmental behavior.	SA	MA	N	MD	SD

5. Are you currently a member of an environmental organization(s)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (Please skip to question 7)

6. If **YES**, please identify the organization(s): _____

_____

7. I keep track of my legislator's environmental voting record.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. I have made changes to my consuming patterns for environmental reasons.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (**Please skip to question 10**)

9. If **YES**, please describe the changes: _____

_____

10. In comparison to most Americans, I am _____ about environmental issues.

- ☐ Much more concerned
- ☐ More concerned
- ☐ Concerned to the same level
- ☐ Less concerned
- ☐ Much less concerned

11. In 20 years time, Michigan's environmental quality will be _____.

- ☐ Much better than it is today
- ☐ Better than it is today
- ☐ The same as it is today
- ☐ Worse that it is today
- ☐ Much worse than it is today

12. I have paid more money for certain products because they were "environmentally-friendly".

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

13. I usually drive my car to work/university, rather than take public transportation.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (**Please skip to question 15**)
- ☐ I do not have a car (**Please skip to question 15**)

14. Even if public transportation were more efficient than it is, I would still prefer to drive my car to work/university.

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree

15. The following are some activities that have been suggested as ways people can help solve environmental problems. For each, please indicate with a 4 whether you **Always**, **Sometimes**, or **Never** engage in these activities.

	Activity	Always	Sometimes	Never
a.	Use low or non-phosphate detergents.			
b.	Save beverage bottles for recycling.			
c.	Purchase high efficiency lightbulbs.			
d.	Put on a sweater rather than turn up the thermostat to save energy.			
e	Use alkaline, rechargeable batteries.			
f.	To conserve electricity, you turn off the TV when not in the room.			
g.	Use a low flow showerhead.			
h.	Take your own bags when you go shopping.			
i.	Reuse scrap paper that's printed on one side.			
j.	Purchase toilet paper that is made of unbleached, recycled paper.			

16. Are there any other pro-environmental behaviors in which you engage?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes Please identify: _____

_____

17. At least one of my parents engages in pro-environmental behavior.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No (**Please skip to question 19**)

18. If **YES**, please identify the type(s) of pro-environmental behavior:

_____

19. Which of the following categories most closely matches your ideological orientation?

- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Slightly liberal
- ☐ Middle of the road
- ☐ Slightly conservative
- ☐ Conservative

In this section of the survey, we would like to ask some knowledge questions related to the environment. For each question, only <u>one</u> box.

20. If a government took action to address an ecological concern even though irrefutable scientific proof confirming the problem had yet to be obtained, they would be exercising the:

- ☐ Principle of sustained yield management.
- ☐ Precautionary principle.
- ☐ Principle of finite carrying capacity
- ☐ Principle of sustainable development

21. Which one of the following conservationists did not focus primarily on forest/land issues:

- ☐ Aldo Leopold
- ☐ Rachel Carson
- ☐ John Muir
- ☐ Gifford Pinchot

22. Which of the following effects is not particularly associated with unsustainable mining practices:

- ☐ Destruction of the ozone layer
- ☐ Surface and subsurface disruption
- ☐ Toxic and non-toxic air emissions
- ☐ Discharge of liquid effluents.

23. A symbiotic relationship in which one organism derives benefit from the interaction but the other organism is not affected is known as:

- ☐ competition
- ☐ commensalism
- ☐ mutualism
- ☐ parasitism

24. What is a Superfund site?

- ☐ A site designated by the EPA as being a high priority for building condominiums.
- ☐ A site designated by the EPA as being low priority for pollution cleanup.
- ☐ A site designated by the EPA as being worth a lot of money.
- ☐ A site designated by the EPA as being the highest priority for pollution cleanup.

25. Any species of plant or animal that has been introduced into an area or ecosystem and is not native to that area is known as:

- ☐ A domestic species
- ☐ An exotic species
- ☐ An indigenous species
- ☐ A parasite

26. Global warming is also known as:

- ☐ Ozone depletion
- ☐ The greenhouse effect
- ☐ Acid rain
- ☐ Deforestation

27. The destruction of the stratospheric ozone layer of the earth's atmosphere is due primarily to the release of _____ into the environment.

- ☐ Carbon dioxide
- ☐ Nitrous oxides
- ☐ Chlorofluorocarbons
- ☐ Sulfur dioxide

28. The 'Tragedy of the Commons' is a model commonly used to explain what type of ocean problem?

- ☐ Ice shelf disintegration
- ☐ Oil Spills
- ☐ Nuclear waste dumping
- ☐ Fisheries depletion

29. A treaty obligating industrialized states to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions was named after what city hosting the conference?

- ☐ Nagano
- ☐ Kyoto
- ☐ Rio
- ☐ Oslo

30. A wetland is:

- ☐ Land covered by a permanent lake.
- ☐ Land covered only by freshwater ponds.
- ☐ Land covered temporarily or permanently by freshwater or saltwater.
- ☐ Land covered only temporarily by freshwater or saltwater.

31. Which of the following is not a function of wetlands:

- ☐ Maintaining water levels during times of drought.
- ☐ Diminishing the impact of floods.
- ☐ Purifying water by breaking down harmful chemicals found in surface runoff.
- ☐ Adding sediment to water before it reaches a lake or stream.

32. Phosphates in agricultural runoff have a harmful effect on aquatic life because they ____.
- ☐ Lead to eutrophication.
- ☐ Are carcinogenic agents.
- ☐ Result in reproductive abnormalities.
- ☐ Are a source of heavy metals.

33. An "ecological footprint" is a measure of:
- ☐ The relationship between the lifestyle of humans living in an area and the ability of the local ecosystems to support that life.
- ☐ The density of animal tracks in an area and thus its biodiversity.
- ☐ The area of land excavated during mining and agricultural activities.
- ☐ The rate of change of biodiversity in an area.

In order for us to more fully understand people's responses to the survey, we need to know a few things about your background.

34. When you were growing up (i.e. your pre-college years), in what type of area did you spend all or most of your time? (**check only one**)
- ☐ Rural, farm
- ☐ Rural, non-farm
- ☐ Small town (25,000 people or fewer)
- ☐ Urban area (from 25,000 to 100,000 people)
- ☐ Metropolitan area (more than 100,000 people)

35. After you graduate, in what type of area would you <u>like</u> to live? (**check only one**)
- ☐ Rural, farm
- ☐ Rural, non-farm
- ☐ Small town (25,000 people or fewer)
- ☐ Urban area (from 25,000 to 100,000 people)
- ☐ Metropolitan area (more than 100,000 people)

36. In university I have taken **<u>at least one</u>** class with an environmental focus.
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

37. I am not interested in studying the environment.
- ☐ True
- ☐ False

38. As a result of my university courses, my understanding of environmental issues has ____.
- ☐ Remained the same
- ☐ Increased somewhat
- ☐ Increased significantly

39. Are you male or female?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

40. I am currently a ____.

- ☐ Freshman
- ☐ Sophomore
- ☐ Junior ----------Go to Question **41**.
- ☐ Senior
- ☐ Masters student
- ☐ Ph.D. student -------Go to Question **42**.

Other (please specify) _____ (**Please skip Q. 41 & Q.42**)

41. My undergraduate major is _____ (**Skip Q.42**)

42. My graduate program is in the following MSU department: _____

Thank you for your participation in this study.

If you would like to make any additional comments, please use the space below.

APPENDIX C

Individual Interview Sections

Joe

With a ready smile, Joe welcomes me into his office and reveals a gentle strength as he shares his vision of a connected, awe-inspiring world. Everything is connected. Everything is related. We are all part of the whole. Nature is diverse, complex, and interrelated, and because of our attempts to dissect everything, we often miss a deeper understanding of the whole and its connections:

> I see that everything is related. I call this the 'Age of Relationships.' And part of the problem is that we tend to focus… On almost everything that we do, we look for the problem and fix the problem. We really don't ever look at it broad enough to see how it fits in. Because we fix something, we screw something else up because we don't understand relationships as well as we might because we study things in fragments like disciplines.

While discussing some of the problems with the condition of the environment, he offers, "Global warming is probably…Well, they're all connected, so in a sense, biodiversity is a real issue…but they affect each other." The idea of connectedness also influences what comes to his mind when somebody mentions "the environment." As he explains, "If I'm thinking in the way that I fully think of it, I'm thinking of nature, humans, and the whole totality, including the built environment." For Joe, this connectedness extends to himself and to everyone else. We are all connected.

When talking about spending time in nature, Joe expresses fascination: "It's pretty cosmic – or just watching the sky, especially on a cloudy, stormy day." As if almost incredulous, Joe lowers his voice and stresses, "Sometimes, it's just amazing!"

When asked to talk more about the connection he feels and try to describe what it's like for him to be in the natural environment, Joe grows more animated while attempting to discuss something that is difficult to articulate and reveals deep respect and amazement:

> I think I feel more whole in those environments. As whole as I can feel...*What kinds of things do you like to do when you're out in these places?* Ahhh, walking and hiking, I guess, or just sitting – sometimes just sitting, you know, taking it all in – sitting in the field and thinking of all the varieties of life that are dependent on each other and then thinking about the air around you. Where was that air 24 hours ago?…You know, all that kind of stuff. It's much bigger than your brain can comprehend.

The geography professor who sparked Joe's initial interest in the environment lived what he preached (i.e. he and his wife chose not to have children because they believed over-population was a problem). This conviction and sincerity made a significant impression on Joe, and he believes in the importance of being genuine about whatever you're doing: "I keep falling back at this place in my life to this 'nature of genuineness' – finding out more about yourself and then correcting your own self and then trying to add some identity and integrity, thereby building genuineness."

The road to self-discovery is not an easy process, and it is different for each person. Joe explains that it is an ongoing journey, and although he frequently "checks in" with himself to make sure he is on the path that he should be, he has also learned a great deal about who he is and has grown more confident about standing up for things that are important to him. "You know, when I used to meet with administrators, I'd cower in the corner, or I'd try to control what I said and how I felt so much, but now I just feel like you just go in and be who you are… And I'm just more comfortable with it myself, far more comfortable with the interaction." This comfort seems to have emerged from a growing self-awareness and confidence. He expresses humility by admitting that there are things he works to improve and things he doesn't like about himself, but he also exhibits a belief in his vision and his capabilities to lead a life he can be proud of and try to effect change in areas he feels he can make a difference.

His conviction motivates him to persevere in times of frustration, resistance, and seemingly minimal impact. Having mentioned a brief story during our interview, Joe sent it to me by e-mail later that same day – a story he wanted to share with me because it speaks to his idea of perseverance and sense of hope.

The Weight of Nothing

"Tell me the weight of a snowflake," a coal-mouse asked a wild dove.
"Nothing more than nothing" was the answer.
"In that case, I must tell you a marvelous story," the coal-mouse said.
"I sat on the branch of a fir, close to its trunk, when it began to snow, not heavily,
not in a raging blizzard, no, just like in a dream, without any violence.
Since I didn't have anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes
settling on the twigs and needles of my branch.
Their number was exactly 3,741,952.
When the next snowflake dropped onto the branch –
nothing more than nothing, as you say – the branch broke off."
Having said that, the coal-mouse flew away.
The dove, since Noah's time an authority on the matter,
thought about the story for a while and finally said to herself:
"Perhaps there is only one person's voice lacking for peace to come about in the world."

- Mary Lou Kownacki (1980)
Pax Christi

Michael

With an easy-going confidence, Michael sits at a table in a meeting room at his office and shares his passion and awe for the environment. Signaling a fundamental turning point in his search for direction, his revelation at Pictured Rocks Lakeshore during the first camping trip of his life appears to have strengthened an appreciation for nature that began when he was young and took summer vacations with his family to visit his grandparents in the northern part of the state. Smiling at the memory, he recalls with boyish enthusiasm: "One of my earliest memories is sitting in a motel…and hearing coyotes howling and thinking, 'Wow! Wow! This is like the Wild West or something!' So, it was impressed on me early that there was this great history to nature that I had a reverence for I guess."

He recalls these childhood adventures vividly: "It was just amazing! We would spend a lot of time taking in the sights of the Upper Peninsula, so that kind of made me feel like I lived in a special place. I was part of a state that has great beauty." These experiences had a profound impact on Michael and appear to have awakened in him a respect and excitement for nature and place. In fact, he refers to them as "the ones that shaped me."

Michael's awe and reverence for nature extends beyond its surface beauty. He frequently refers to a higher purpose and meaning in the creation of nature: "We have an obligation to the whole system and to all the creatures…and I'm very convinced that they all have value and they're all here for a purpose. I don't know what that value or purpose is, but it's not up to me to nullify it by getting rid of it." Michael expresses humility and responsibility in light of the wonders of nature, its intrinsic value, and its transcendence beyond human understanding. He feels very strongly about this and describes a deep, almost transforming relationship with the natural environment. When asked what he feels when he's out in nature, he explains:

> Well, let me put it this way. There are two kinds of insignificance that you can feel. You can feel insignificant…in a big city, generally, surrounded by the works of humankind, feeling like no one cares if you live or die, you're just invisible. And that's a feeling that makes you small and feel unworthy. The kind of insignificance that I feel in nature is totally different. Instead of isolated, I feel connected. I don't feel like what happens to me is that important, but I do feel somehow that there's a meaning and a purpose to life that's hard sometimes to get in touch with when you're in an urban setting…or just in your day-to-day routine.

He pauses for a moment.

> I don't know, semi-religious feelings come to the surface – intuition – that there's an underlying purpose to life and that there was love behind its creation and that things will be okay. And that's very healing. It gives you strength to go back and live and fight. So I get a lot more out of it than I give to it, let's put it that way.

Nature has a powerful effect on Michael. He values nature in its own right, and being in nature, where one can feel connected and part of a higher purpose seems to be a source of strength for him. Nature, removed from the buzz and whirl of the daily routine, centers him. Acknowledging that he gets more out of nature than he gives, Michael refers to the restorative qualities of nature and the intangible effects in his own life.

When describing his experiences in nature, Michael talks in terms of feelings and healing. This is where he goes when he needs to be recharged, when he needs to let go of stress or other worries from everyday life and gain a different perspective.

What do you like to do when you're in these places? "A little bit of camping. I probably camp twice a year. A lot of day hikes." He pauses, and then:

> As little as possible. I mean, really what's important to me is to sit still for a change and then kind of blend into the landscape, and then that's when the healing begins, I think, the good stuff that you get out of nature. You start seeing things and feeling things and appreciating stuff that you can't when you're in a day-to-day routine.

He doesn't need to be recreating when he's outside. Just being there is what matters. That is what allows Michael to get in touch with his feelings and work through difficulties. It is, at once, both calming and re-energizing.

Even amidst witty remarks and a sense of humor that borders at times on cynicism, Michael reveals a sincere joy and optimism for his work. Like a youngster on Christmas morning who has just received a brand new bike, Michael wants to share his joy, but it is more than an occasional urge to excite others. It is a responsibility Michael feels very deeply, referring to it as a "solemn duty." Respecting the environment's intrinsic worth and grateful for the bond he shares with nature and the strength he receives, Michael does not look at his work as burdensome. Instead, it is a small way for him to honor the web of life and give something back to that which gives so much to him with the hope of giving others the chance to share a similar bond.

Torn over the negative connotations associated with "obligation," Michael explains that he does feel an obligation to the environment because it's always there for him when he needs "to escape and renew," but he then works to clarify his thoughts:

> You owe it in kind of a joyful way to give back. You know, it's not an obligation, it's a joy because you feel good that you're doing something that will – that's hopefully good for nature but also good for other people later. Sort of the thought that runs through your mind when you're doing a lot of this work is 'Well, if I succeed in stopping only some of the bad things, there will be

> places other people who aren't even born yet can go to and get renewal.' These are people who won't die – or at least their health will be better – because you stopped pollution of some kind. So it's sort of a giving back to nature and giving back to people you don't know in a very general sense.

Emma

"When I go home at night, I want to be able to tell my children what I did that day and feel good about it."

I am ushered into Emma's office and sit with her there – surrounded by desks and shelves that are crammed with various pamphlets, periodicals, and books about the environment or issue-specific concerns. A distinct passion for the environment emerges from her quiet, gentle demeanor as she discusses her experiences in nature and what inspires her work.

Emma clearly enjoys her time in nature – taking advantage of every opportunity she can to spend time in some out-of-the-way places. From packing up her two sons for impromptu camping trips when her husband was called away on business trips in years past to bringing along her tent and sleeping bag on her own current business meetings, Emma delights in these experiences. On a recent trip up north, she recalls, "And I ended up on Saturday morning before I headed off to this meeting, I woke up at 6am or 5:30, I guess, and the sun – you could see the light on the tent. It was just a spectacular sight. I jumped up, and it was just *gorgeous,*" she lowers her voice at the word. "And there was a group of geese floating on the lake, and they were just absolutely silent." Now she does whisper, repeating her words, "*Absolutely silent.*"

Emma expresses her respect for the environment in other ways as well. Because of the nature of her work, she is steeped in environmental material and makes it a point to read as much as she can about the issues and science behind them. She takes her work very seriously, studying the issues and reflecting on them in order to make the best-informed decisions. Compared with the way many others may view the environment, Emma suggests:

> When you're doing it day in and day out, you tend to spend a lot more time contemplating the issues. Even when you're not doing work, you're sitting there thinking about the issues…..I think I tend to be a little bit more realistic about environmental threats and problems….And that simplification of the issues, I'm uncomfortable with because I believe that these issues tend to hold up very well with intense scrutiny….I'm much more comfortable with as complete an understanding of the issue as possible.

She appears frustrated with the disconnection she senses between most people and the natural environment. "We don't exist without the environment." We need to "recognize that we are totally dependent, and ironically, people have used it (information re: the environment) the

other way. They've used it to pretend we're isolated. Give me a break…it's (the environment) the base on which everything else is built!"

Emma attributes much of her environmental commitment to a strong sense of political efficacy greatly influenced by parents who were actively involved in their community. With a grandmother on her local planning commission, a father who was the township supervisor, and a mother who was continually volunteering her time with various organizations, including helping to found their county's Planned Parenthood, Emma witnessed, by example, people's ability to make a difference:

> I come from a family that has always been sort of participants in government, and I think their putting together sort of an appreciation of nature and a belief that there are ways one can take action that will be worth doing has been very important for me. There's an awful lot of people who are very cynical about our ability to effect change use that as an excuse or are so cynical that they take no action.…I don't think naively, but actually, in a very passionate way believe that we have to believe we can have an effect.

She adds that "involvement in the processes that make decisions that assure one way or another how we're going to interact with the environment is a critical thing to do." Emma believes that growing up in such an active family helped her internalize these concepts and consequently, being involved in her community is something she "grew up expecting."

Although Emma is very involved in environmental advocacy work, she readily admits that she burns out from time to time. At first, she thought she might not be able to return to the never-ending demands of her job, but before long, she realized she could not stay away: "I've, at times, burned out from environmental work. Actually, probably three separate times burned out, and then taken time off and decided I don't know what else I would do with myself. If I wasn't doing this, I would not be enjoying myself anywhere near as much. And so I have come back to it because of that." She elaborates later on: "Well, one of the troubles with this kind of work is that it doesn't ever get put away for the night….You've got way too much going on, and you can't do it. You can't address all those issues. You can't fix everything."

At one point, she took three months off and spent much of her time out in the woods so she could unwind and really enjoy some wilderness places. She has learned that from time to time she may need to take some breaks, but she always finds her way back to environmental work: "I knew that I didn't want to not do this work. I wanted to do the work, and what I needed was time off to get proportion back." She knows she's doing what she needs to do: "I enjoy this work enough that I can't imagine doing anything else….I've got so much more to do! And the challenges are there, and even when we don't win, they're good challenges, and I enjoy it. And I got very lucky in that arena to be able to do that."

Throughout the interview, Emma frequently returns to the idea of doing work that she

truly supports, stressing the importance of being proud to tell her children about the work she does. She indicates that this desire is self-serving in many respects – making the point that she may share the same motivation as others while having different priorities:

> I'm not sure that I'm that different. I'm somebody who also seeks out my own self-interest in many respects. You know, those that pretend that they're altruistic in these things I think are deluding themselves. I get a real thrill out of this kind of work. I feel good about it. It's important to me to come home at the end of the day and feel like I've done things that I could tell my kids about.

She explains, "It's less important to me to worry about having expensive items that I own than it is to enjoy being outdoors and to have a sense of leaving something that's going to be a better legacy. And so, in reality, it's just a matter of the things that I've chosen to use as personal benchmarks for success are different."

The belief in what she's doing shines through in her excitement over one of her proudest moments. With a smile in her voice, she describes the fruits of her labor:

> One of the first things that I worked on for the first several years after I started on staff here was designation of wilderness areas in National Forests in Michigan. And while we have a relatively small system of wilderness in Michigan – only ninety thousand acres out of three million acres of national forest land – we won that fight. And it is – well, like my son going camping at Nordhouse Dunes, and it was *so cool!* I've got to tell you it was *so cool* to have him come home and talk about this wonderful place he didn't even know I had a role in saving. That was pretty good. That was a very important thing because this is the kind of stuff that does, you know, it makes a difference…

It is this example that best reveals her strong spirit, conviction, and joy about her work.

In her own job, she has witnessed numerous victories and disappointments. Furthermore, when Emma started working at her organization, she was a staff of one. Now her office will employ eight staff members and four contract workers. State-wide membership in her organization has grown from 2000 in 1985 to 19,000, which she believes indicates "growing interest in the environment and growing awareness." Asked specifically if she is optimistic about the future, she replies, "Ah, I have to be. I sort of don't have a choice because I think you have to be optimistic because otherwise then why would you spend the time?" She then grows rather quiet, reflecting:

> I think we lose bits and pieces every day that are gone, and that worries me a lot. Every species that disappears from the face of the earth is something that diminishes our world dramatically, but

making the best of what we have and making sure that we keep as much of that as possible to me is actually very optimistic. We have to believe that we can do good things, and we have to believe that it's worth it. And I tend to hold that out there, that yes, it's worth it.

And why is it worth it? "Well, I guess because this is a pretty amazing planet, and keeping it…I would hate to have the legacy as the only inhabited planet we know in the universe be that the most developed species destroyed it….I think humans can do better…. While I don't give obligation or duty a whole lot of weight to individuals, I do give it a lot of weight to us as a species."

Tara

On an afternoon in early August, Tara welcomes me into her office, and her strong sense of self-efficacy becomes evident from the start, as she is now in her fifth year as an elected official. She decided to run for office in the first place because she was unhappy with the decisions being made in her township and because nobody in local office seemed to be an advocate for the environment.

She wishes more people would take the step she did if they wish to see changes in their communities: "So more people need to start doing that and putting their foot forward, saying, 'You know, I need to get involved.' And that's why I got involved was because nobody else was. I thought, 'Somebody has to be able to be strong and stand up to some of these things going on.'"

Not only did Tara decide to run for office to have a voice for environmental concerns, but she was, indeed, the *sole* voice for the environment in many situations – in the unique position of sitting on a Board with members who shared her general political ideology but all of whom broke strongly from her regarding environmental issues. This took its toll on Tara, as she very often found herself standing alone, ostracized by her own party members, and the target of ridicule.

Tara persevered because she felt responsible for standing up for the minority viewpoint, but this was a difficult time: "They did everything. I think they were trying to get me to resign, and I kept thinking, 'If I resign, nobody else will be there trying to fight for the environment.' So I stuck it out." She mentions this experience again: "All four years were like that. It was constant… and I was the only one speaking. The others would just sit there. I knew that they had talked ahead of time, and they knew how they were going to vote, and it was just me complaining all the time. You know, 'Why aren't you considering this? How could you do this?'"

After beating her head against the wall for four years, Tara recently decided to run for office again, but this time, she put together a green ticket – a bi-partisan coalition of

environmental supporters, all but one of whom made it to the newly-elected Board. Now the Township Supervisor, perhaps it goes without saying that Tara is thrilled to have a majority on her Board, where she is an active decision-maker.

Tara's decision to run for office to try to effect change, as well as her perseverance in the face of lengthy adversity, reveals a solid sense of self-efficacy, strength of conviction, and personal responsibility to environmental issues, as well as her constituents: "If the only agenda on the republican caucus is development at any cost then I do not share that vision or belief. I believe strongly that residents should have a right to decide how the community they live in is going to look and feel. I am restoring their voice in government." This dedication has also led to her recent appointment as the Acting Chair of Republicans for Environmental Protection in Michigan.

Tara's love and appreciation for the natural environment started at a young age. She describes herself as a very curious child and always enjoyed being outdoors, identifying with nature at a young age: "I've always loved canoeing, and um, I've always had a natural bent toward the earth… I've always been somebody digging in the dirt and paying attention – in great detail – to what plants look like. I would be happy as a kid to just look at it. I'd have to study it, so I've always been kind of an environmental person."

It seems "tree-hugging" starts early for some people. When asked if she spent a lot of time outdoors while growing up, she giggles, "Mmm, in trees, mainly. Sitting in trees and that sort of thing." She later recalls some fond memories with her brother:

> When I was a kid, we had a stream near our home, and I used to go back and look for crayfish and turn over the rocks and look for things and chase things down the little creek… and I spent a good time in the woods. It later became a subdivision… I mean, silly kid things, but because we weren't surrounded by total subdivision, we had the opportunity to play in some woods. Um, I don't know if the farmer knew we were playing back there in his woods, but we had a great time!

Her interdisciplinary class in high school may have started Tara on the road to advocacy, as it introduced both theory and subsequent action. When asked what her first conscious environmental action was, she explains, "I was in high school, and I remember I wrote a letter about the earth. I don't remember what I said, but it was about protecting the environment." *Do you remember what triggered that?* "It was my high school class, I'm sure, and I probably saw something happen, and I wrote a letter to the editor." When asked when she thinks the "switch" happened for her and she decided to dedicate actions for environmental protection, Tara is unsure at first, thinks about it, and then replies, "Probably from the moment I wrote my first letter… Yeah, because I think for somebody who's seventeen, eighteen years old to decide to write a letter about an issue that they kind of knew things about, but not a whole lot about, and make a public stance says something."

When she speaks about nature and her experiences in it, it is with great respect and joy. She makes it a point to spend time outdoors and has passed on much of her ornithological and horticultural knowledge to both of her children. Tara treasures her time in nature, which is clear when she describes those moments:

> I think it's exciting. It's peaceful. I love the peacefulness of being outside. I think a lot of times, we don't spend enough time outside, and so people almost feel like it's a foreign environment to them to be out… I even used to sit outside in the backyard with my son when he was little and just sit out and watch the stars come out at night. And we'd spend all evening just watching the stars. And things that should be so natural to people – you know, they're inside watching TV all the time… I mean, there's a lot of reasons for being outside. I just prefer to be outside. If I have a choice between being inside and outside, I'll be outside.

To that point, Tara explains to me that each year, rather than asking for presents on Mother's Day, she requests that her family take her on a picnic in the park so they can enjoy the spring flowers.

Although some might argue that environmental protection should not be politicized, the fact remains that it definitely is. Tara stands against the majority viewpoint of her own party with many of her ideas, but she also reminds me that Teddy Roosevelt was a republican and one of the first great champions for conservation in the US. Most of her viewpoints and actions diverge significantly from mainstream conservative politics in today's world, however, especially when she talks about nature, human responsibility to it and to future generations, and the need to drastically curb our footprint, as well as our massive extraction of natural resources:

Nature is very resilient… Human beings try very hard, but ultimately nature wins. And I hope nature wins again. And you know, I have faith that it will, but I think it needs to be – I think people need to be conscious of the decisions we make. "I want to make sure that the future has the abundance of wildlife and nature that I am seeing. In fact, it would be great if they have even more… Because I travel, I see how Europe has handled their growth issues, and we are just so far behind the times from Europe where things are stressed."

Perhaps one of the most telling examples from my interview with Tara is the importance she places on providing her children with experiences in nature so they can share some of the knowledge and joy she feels in these places and learn to care for it as she does. After describing many family adventures – rafting, kayaking, bird-watching, and simply gazing at the stars, her simple statement reveals a great deal: "I wanted to make sure that they saw the beauty of the environment."

John

"You kind of sit there, and before you know it, you just kind of let it take you over, and after a while, it's like the birds forget you're there, and you start seeing them behave as though you're not there."

John relaxes with me in one of the parks affiliated with the community gardening program he helps coordinate and, with quiet conviction, discusses his realization of the importance of stripping away the excesses and assumptions of society to lead a more authentic life. He explains that after finally making the decision to quit his job, numerous other changes followed, including moving their television away from its prominent position in the living room, relying on one vehicle instead of two, and reducing the packaging on food products by growing their own food or purchasing locally-grown produce. John repeatedly indicates that these decisions, as well as a considerable shift in salary, significantly "changes your perspective."

Perhaps the biggest changes in John's life have been changes in himself – the way he thinks about, and prioritizes, things. His internal realizations appear to have influenced lifestyle changes which, in turn, spurred further internal changes. Among other things, John reads far more than he once did, and the television is more of a "distraction" now. He consciously thinks about the food he purchases and where it was grown. These changes indicate significant shifts in worldviews. Many of John's and Chloe's decisions have allowed them to distance themselves from the "clutter" and "negative stuff" that bombarded their daily lives and open themselves up to new experiences and the life around them.

Frustrated with hearing people complain about present circumstances without being willing to change their own behavior, John "realized it all comes down to the choices you make," a belief he echoes throughout the interview. Rather than complain about a situation or allow somebody else to make decisions for him, John indicates the importance he places on taking responsibility for his own actions and being the person he wants to be: "All you can do is change yourself." He returns to the idea of personal accountability frequently.

When asked if the tide can be turned on environmental degradation, he responds that it will probably come down to a "personal moment" for everyone, and each person has different levels of tolerance. He explains that he tries to "stop worrying about what other people will do because I can't do anything about it. I can worry about how I live my life."

John notes that making certain choices – or even realizing that one *can* choose a different way – is not always easy in our society: "My big beef with the system is when they take choice away from you. We're living in a democracy. I think it's going away because people don't have a choice. People have the sense that this is the way things are, so 'This is what I'll do. I'm just walking down this path.' There's got to be freedom so you can step outside of that if you want to."

By the decision he has made to lead a different life, John shows that one *can* step outside the predominant current and take a different path: "Maybe you get to a comfort level where I thought, 'Well, maybe this is the path that I'm supposed to be on,' and I started realizing, 'You know, maybe this isn't all it's cracked up to be.'"

The realization that the trend of mainstream culture is not the only way to go played a powerful role in shifting John's perspective. Coupled with this recognition was John's strengthening sense of his own values and growing intolerance with the tension he felt between many of society's beliefs and his own. In fact, John suggests that his low tolerance may be one of the reasons he has made changes when so many others have not:

> The majority of the people seem to be content with going along with the job and things, and 'Yeah, these things are wrong, but I want to have a nice car, or I've got kids, or I don't want to think about turning another way.' They say, 'Oh yeah, I see that stuff, but…' Maybe my low tolerance just got to the point where I couldn't justify that I could know that these things are wrong and just continue to go through and do them.

This internal dissonance finally erupted as he sat in traffic just before deciding to quit his job. John recalls that a moment of clarity leading up to his conscious decision to make changes came while watching *Victor Victoria* in which James Garner's character explains to Julie Andrews' character that he is not a gangster; he is merely a businessman who does business with gangsters, to which Andrews' character replies, "'Then you're in the gangster business.' And the light goes on his head about what he's doing, and then that night I was thinking it kind of applies to what I've intuitively always known. Now that it's been said, I can't just turn my head. I'd be a hypocrite." Directly confronted with cognitive dissonance, John reveals how important it is to him to be genuine and live a life according to his values.

Nature is a constant source of interest for John: "You always learn something new." John smiles as he recalls climbing a tree in the woods near his house as a young boy and sitting there for hours watching what was going on around him from different perspectives. That same schoolboy curiosity and enjoyment are evident today as John talks about watching a territorial fight between woodchucks while working on a crane count recently. He explains, "You just have to learn the patience to sit there…and you can realize after a while you're part of this whole thing."

Similarly, while John likes to go kayaking, canoeing, and fishing, he spends more time just being outside and noticing the critters and trails around him. He points to a person shooting hoops on the blacktop court nearby, "I may walk from here to where that guy is playing basketball, and it would take an hour to get there, and what you do is just go in small steps and barely move and you'll stop and you get a new perspective. You might see the other side of a tree, and so you'll notice something there." While he speaks matter-of-factly, John exhibits a great deal of respect for nature and a desire to learn more. He contemplates his responses –

especially the more philosophical topics – and suggests that he will probably continue to think about his views on certain issues long after the interview ends.

John, once comfortable with the "suburban lifestyle" he and Chloe had been leading, has had to adapt to a more urban environment. While exploring locations for a recent crane count, John realized there was "nowhere you could go to block out the white noise" and the presence of human activity, including the rural area where he used to live in the company of numerous Sandhill cranes – now home to new residential development. Nonetheless, since moving to the city, John takes note of the nature that exists there: "The natural environment is there. It's modified a bit, and it's covered up…and there's all this junk that's just clutter. You just kind of block that out."

From a connection that he feels with nature, support from Chloe, and a strengthening sense of his own accountability, John challenges himself to make responsible and productive choices. He recalls that while in the car with Chloe recently, he noticed construction of yet another chain restaurant and commented on it. "'You mean, you're going to watch that thing when you've got a beautiful red sunset behind it?'" Chloe asked. John reflects for a moment before continuing:

> And that's always the struggle. There's all this stuff that goes on, and you can…moan about it and talk about it. It's still there, but you've got to try to focus on the good stuff that's there…and do what you can to protect it, and make sure you always have the freedom. You know, I don't want part of this white noise…It's a tough road to go to have the freedom to grow your own food or this and that, but that's something you have to fight for, and people don't. Somebody else will make the decision for them.

Chloe

> *"I think the earth is its own great lesson if you open your eyes to this. Once you open your eyes to this, you can never close them. You can ignore it, but I think you'll make yourself crazy. I don't think you can ever turn it off again. You look for it everywhere – not just nature, but following the path."*

As clouds gather in the hazy afternoon July sky, Chloe and I share a bench next to the river that winds through campus. I am quickly impressed by the raw emotion and candid passion she exudes throughout the interview, and her spirit is disarming. With enthusiasm and sincerity, Chloe discusses her deep respect for nature, explaining that her experiences as a child growing up with few material possessions and hours of romping through the woods provided a strong foundation for her appreciation for nature today. After vividly recalling lazy afternoons picking blackberries as a young girl, Chloe reflects:

> So, experiences, I think my whole life has been experiences, but maybe until you asked that question, I didn't realize that they all tied together as much as they do. And they're all important. And I had the luxury of growing up in the country. I got to see it. If I grew up in Farmington Hills, I wouldn't have had all these experiences and be who I am today. I think the shift to the point where I am now would have been much greater. I think I had a big backbone to start with.

Chloe's comfort with nature is apparent in the ease with which she discusses the environment and the conflict she senses between society's norms and the natural world. Chloe gestures to the trees around us, "This is where we're supposed to be. All of the other stuff seems so foreign…I think that our society has shut out nature, so it's important for me to go get some kind of restorative dose as much as I possibly can."

Chloe's emotional connection with nature surfaces repeatedly throughout the interview, as does her frustration with the massive societal wave pushing people in the opposite direction. Close to tears, Chloe describes her first trip to see eagles up close, explaining that it's partly "just awe and amazement and part of it's sorrow that there's a freeway running through their home…. I look around at our natural areas, and I think how beautiful they are, but I know how much of a hand – the fact that I'm there is disturbing their world. I really look at it as this does not belong to us. We're here, and we're a part of it, but it doesn't belong to us, and I think a lot of society says, 'Yeah, it does.'"

Deep concern and frustration tinges many of Chloe's statements:

> People don't seem to be doing anything about it! When I talked about the environment being everything, that includes us, as people, and I think we are doing much more damage than not only we should, but I think our main thing on this earth should not be earning money to buy a new TV. And when I was looking at the paper…they're talking about the tax rebates that people are going to get, and they were like, 'Oh, we're going to get six hundred dollars. We're going to buy a new TV, a big screen.' And I just…

Pained and incredulous, Chloe lets her sentence hang for a moment before continuing. "I can't fathom that! I just can't. Why is everyone working to destroy our home?" She pauses, tears in her eyes, then pleads again, "*Why* is everyone working to destroy our home?" Another pause:

> And you can talk all you want about not understanding it or not knowing, and I agree with that to some extent, but we are all part of the earth, and I think in every single person, in every single living thing there is something within us to connect and that we

> deny it constantly to live in our society. And we're the only ones who can change it because we're the ones who are damaging it. We're it.

During the interview, Chloe demonstrates impatience with people who blindly follow society's influence and acknowledgment that choosing a different way can be difficult. She has learned through her own personal growth that she must decide what is right for her and do it. This is about self-reflection, taking action, and being responsible in both big and little ways. "And it's more that just 'Save the whales!' and stuff like that. Save the *grasshopper* in your backyard by not chem-lawning! Think of small things that you can do."

Chloe repeatedly discusses the choices people can make in their own lives, indicating that her choice has been to change the priorities in her life from those in line with society's dictates to those that are more in line with her own beliefs. Indeed, for Chloe, this has meant a change in the way she thinks about things as well as the way she leads her life. "It's more than just making sure you have energy-efficient light bulbs. It's definitely a change in perspective." At another point, she pauses while discussing how overwhelming our society can be and adds, "It's hard to change the focus of your life, and I think that it really has to be a change in the focus of your life. We all make the decision on how we live every day, and it's easy to say that, and it's hard to do it."

Chloe explains that while people may not always be comfortable with the general trend of society, "they think, 'I must follow this path. This is what everybody's doing.' And I think it takes bravery…to say 'No, I don't have to do that.'" It becomes quickly evident that Chloe perceives a real difference in the way she channels her efforts compared with the general population as she repeatedly emphasizes the significance of stepping out from the wave of society. She explains that for her and John it's "almost like we've had two lives – pre-now when we were back in the normal society and now where we're kind of separate from it." She also talks about the realization that she always seemed to think a little differently than most people, but that it is so easy to subscribe to societal norms:

> …there's an alternative path here that I feel I've always been on, but there's never been a name to it before. When I got to about twenty-oneish, you get out of school and get caught up in that and think 'Oh, this is what I'm supposed to do – Go, go, go,' and it never felt right. And now I know that, hey, as you get older and wiser, you realize you don't have to do everything that everyone tells you to do, and that includes society. You can follow a path that's more comfortable to you. And for me, it means slowing down and making choices that are appropriate to me, my family, the environment, the world that we live in…

Chloe passionately talks about the importance of stripping away excess and cultural expectations to unleash what is true about an individual and the life he or she leads. Chloe attributes her own empowerment to knowing herself and being comfortable with who she is.

"We could be making 50K and living it up, and we get looks from people. 'What's wrong with you? Why aren't you doing that?' Well, it's not necessary. It's about choosing what really is important to you and valuing that and honoring that. I think it's about trying to be as authentic as you can in the life that you choose to lead." She continues, "I guess that's the whole goal. You just have to move forward your entire life, and you have to keep trying to move toward what's good and real and true to each individual person, and everybody is a little different."

For Chloe, it is far more than just thinking about a different way of life, it is *living* the life you believe you should. While she freely expounds on numerous issues throughout the interview, she remains poignant throughout:

> Everyone has pain. Everyone has things in their life that are hard to deal with and spouses and children and interactions with parents and things like that that you have to decide how you will react to, but the person you have to deal with the most is the person that you look at in the mirror every day. It's cliché, but you have to sit there and do it. It's so hard. I have to look at myself every day, and I'm lazy just like everybody else, and I don't want to sometimes, but you know what? I have to, and I know that that's the path. I've chosen this path.

Alex

> *"To me, that's all part of being a good environmentalist because to serve God is to serve the planet, to work for its welfare."*

On a hot July afternoon, Alex and I begin our interview in a café before heading outside to the patio. With a calm, centered warmth, Alex shares his joy over his strengthening connection to God and the natural world. He explains that as a child, he was encouraged to serve others and "be thy brother's keeper," but as he grew older, it seemed society's focus shifted to advance a more self-centered mentality. It was the disparity between the general trend of society and what seemed right to him that sparked a lengthy internal debate.

The process of maturity and learning to be comfortable with his own beliefs helped Alex hold on to his values. He also credits educational events and deep friendships for helping him recognize that he was not alone in his beliefs. When discussing the way he dealt with humanism (society's backlash to the "serving others" ethic), Alex explains, "I was always uncomfortable with it, but I just accepted it as there were so many people who were saying it, and it just seemed like it was the main current and new thought, and when I finally encountered people who could be passionate about what I grew up thinking, and really basically always thought, it was such a relief!"

When speaking with Alex, it becomes quickly apparent that he looks at the whole picture before taking action. Perhaps it is partly his builder's mentality that allows him to assess the best way to reduce waste and/or conserve energy at each stage of a process. His participation with

voluntary simplicity also appears to contribute to looking at pro-environmental actions as a way of life rather than isolated behaviors.

It is this kind of approach that really means something to Alex, who expresses an intangible, but powerful, sense that the early choices he made on how to live his life were right for him. Although the rest of his family "didn't get it," Alex loved camping and carpentry work and making a living from a small-scale, home office – lifestyle decisions that were inexplicable to his father: "'You graduated from U of M! You could do anything! Why do you do this?' And I don't think I could even articulate it. To me, it just seemed like the right way to live."

Alex's environmentalism is strongly tied to his spirituality. He attended church for the first time when he was in college, and since then, his faith has become so much a part of him that it continually shines through in his statements during the interview. He frequently pauses before and during his responses, looking away, as if he is giving a lot of thought to what he is saying, deliberately articulating certain words and phrases – perhaps emphasizing their importance. Alex often refers to the fellowship group at his church, and at one point, he notes that during a recent fellowship gathering, a speaker from Chicago suggested that "the role of every human is to *serve through consciousness*."

He continues on to share that, although he dreaded the thought of entering the Hard Rock Café while chaperoning a recent 8th grade class trip to Washington, DC, he was surprisingly impressed to learn that their corporate motto was *Love all. Serve all*: "It's been so refreshing to encounter people who have the courage to say that our place on the planet is to serve others through love. That's what we're here for. That's the most we can do is to serve others. Serve all – which includes ourselves, includes our family and strangers – but serve all."

In an e-mail message after our interview, Alex expands on the idea of "serving through consciousness" by explaining that it is a sense of "'oneness with the universe' – living through the conviction that all life is inseparable."

> Consciousness also refers to the personal habits of persistent fearlessness and strength – a calmness and certainty that arrives from feeling connected to the universe…. Consciousness includes an understanding of the infinite possibilities that derive from affirming love. 'Serving through consciousness' means being able to relax into the infinite opportunities of any moment – a powerful and beautiful state.

Indeed, Alex seems both focused and calm. With clarity and enthusiasm, he explains that one can serve God, others, and all of creation, adding that "There are no conflicts when pursuing a goal of love and respect for God's gifts." It becomes apparent that Alex's convictions rest on more than basic guidelines. It is really a part of who he is and how he views his role on this earth: "I don't really 'get' the burn-out thing…. If you see your life as an opportunity to serve people and the environment, there's nothing to burn out from. There are no failures, just more opportunities."

It is being out in nature, in close contact with God's creation, that seems to feed Alex's soul. He makes it a point to spend time in nature, relishing the chance to go camping, but appreciating even the slightest glimpse of nature through his window and describing his time in nature with words like "intense" and "sublime." He explains that "two days is about right for total absorption into the natural setting – getting over expectations from our man-made work and feeling like comfort comes from external conditions. Usually just looking at a tree or clouds is enough to feel consumed by the joy of nature and the peace of God's love." As an example, Alex openly shares a recent camping excursion over Christmas Eve that was particularly profound.

> …went up to Sturgeon Bay to snowshoe up the shore and camp over in the snowy dunes. Feeding the fire and watching the stars twinkle at 35 below, I read most of Barry Lopez' recent book of short stories *Light Action in the Caribbean* – a book about love with God and learning how to live well in a place. The joy and peace that came to me felt like my heart was three times too big for my chest, and my perpetual grin made my cheeks sore – an experience full of revelations – intense and unforgettable.

While speaking with Alex, it becomes increasingly apparent that he has a lot of joy to share and that he continuously works to expand his appreciation for nature and his spiritual awareness. For Alex, there is so much love and joy to share with others, and this is how we can, and should, connect with the world around us.

Shortly after our interview, Alex sends me a daily message from Marianne Williamson, a prominent spiritual leader, explaining, "I really like it and it touches on some of the ideas we discussed." While reading it, I notice how well it seems to articulate many of Alex's own beliefs: "The love within us is meant to extend outward. The closer we grow to our inner light, the more we feel the natural urge to share that light with others. So it is that we all long for meaningful work, some creative endeavor that will be as our ministry, by which the energies within us might flow out to heal the world."

He also shares with me a mission statement that he developed for his company when he was an independent contractor – a statement which shares his clarity and conviction for meaningful contribution: *"Desiring to aid ourselves, our clients and future generations, The Mission of our Company is to serve God and all creation, family and friends – by filling each day with consciousness, skill, persistence, imagination and love."*

Andrea

"In nature, you always belong. In nature, you never not belong."

I drive down a residential street lined with trees and well-kept yards – sunlight filtering through shadows and leaves – and pull into a driveway where Andrea welcomes me into her

home. I sense her warmth and joy immediately. We sit at the kitchen table that looks out over the back yard, and while she periodically attends to her young daughter, I begin to learn her story.

Today, as co-director for a regional environmental advocacy organization and a young mother working diligently on plans for her family to move in to a new co-housing project, Andrea's feet are firmly planted in the environmental field. She attributes this to a combination of camping and other outdoor experiences with her family as a young girl, course work and other experiences while in college, some pivotal people whom she has admired, friends, enlightening jobs since graduating from college, and wilderness experiences that have served to reinforce her environmental conscience.

While Andrea certainly cares about global environmental concerns, she has started focusing most of her efforts into making changes where she can, where the impacts are tangible and direct – at the local level and within her own family. For instance, rather than continue to live in a neighborhood that does not reflect her values and ideals, Andrea is committed to trying to create a better community for herself and her family and is very active in planning the development of the new co-housing project. She is passionate about this project and explains, "Kind of my own environmental focus has changed from, you know, 'saving the earth' is a term that I feel very cynical about now because there's nothing you're going to do to save the earth. You're just going to be able to save your own part of it… It means creating the kind of community that you want to live in."

She returns to this topic frequently and explains that more of a direct impact is felt at the community level, and that is what she feels she can affect: "So I'm in the process of shifting my whole paradigm, I guess, so that the work I do now affects my community and therefore myself. It's things that I hold dear to me, you know – having a community I love to live in. And that's why the co-housing thing is something that really excites me because it's creating the kind of environment that I want to live in." She emphasizes this again when expressing how optimistic she is about the move because "we'll be living in the kind of life we want to live no matter what's happening around us."

Andrea is a fairly social person and is often energized by relationships and interactions with other people. In addition to the environmental harm caused by a reliance on automobiles, she also notes detrimental effects on neighborhoods and human connections. After spending some time in Spain recently, Andrea reflects on the transition to life back in the States:

> And when I came back here and had to get in my car to do a bunch of errands, I felt – what's the word? (Pause) I felt a lack of freedom, I guess, because now I was dependent on this vehicle that I fundamentally don't believe in… because you're encased in this vehicle – I felt separated from nature even though we have more green space around here. So, you know, we're going in our separate little bubbles, doing our separate little things.

Moments later, she returns to this theme: "You see all the houses where the garages are right up front so you can drive into the garage, and you don't see them for fifteen hours until they have to drive out of the garage and go somewhere. What a horrible existence! Maybe not for them, though, but not for me." She sums up her thoughts a little later when she reflects that many neighborhoods probably used to be more cohesive and people interacted with one another more frequently, but that does not seem to be the case anymore, and "I really do think that cars are kind of destructive to our way of life because it just takes us farther apart from each other. So really, it's all craving to be together with people in a productive way and not a destructive way." This reliance on cars is one of the things Andrea hopes to limit by moving to their new location.

It is clear Andrea has put a lot of thought into her decision to change her living situation and feels it will be healthier – both environmentally and socially. She thrives in collaborative efforts and is excited to live in a community with like-minded people – hopeful that others will be intrigued and inspired by the example set through this project.

Andrea's decision to break from the general societal path is a common theme in her life. She shares other instances where she felt like she didn't belong and needed to make changes to follow the right path for her. She states that "I really often feel kind of outside the common culture and not really a part of it." She goes on to explain that shortly after college, she worked in a beauty school with some people she knew from high school, and "they were more concerned with how they looked or where they went the night before, you know. I never quite fit in because I didn't wear the right clothes or drive the right car or whatever, so I never quite felt right." In fact, after about three months with that job, Andrea "realized I had strayed from my path."

It is important to Andrea to find her own place, and the place where Andrea *does* feel like she is completely free to be herself is the natural environment. *This* is where she had fewer rules and limitations while on camping trips as a child. *This* is where she is accepted no matter what. *This* is where she feels free, unfettered, inspired, and able. And it is a profound connection she makes with the environment in this manner – extending her sense of freedom to a belief that others also yearn for, and can find similar acceptance in, the natural environment.

Andrea notes a different rhythm to the natural world: "I think there's a pace that nature has that is much different than our own… everything just kind of disappears, and the pace changes. You don't walk fast. There's nothing you're running toward. Um, the birds are chirping. It's just, you know, a grounding kind of presence." She expresses great reverence for nature: "I'm pretty in awe of the environment in general – in the natural world – I mean, just the intricacies of it and the complexities of it… That's like *amazing* to me!"

When talking about experiences in nature, this is what she focuses on – her feelings of place, acceptance, unencumbered joy, all of which started during those childhood camping trips: "I more remember the freedom that we had when we were camping… We could stay up at night and talk about whatever we wanted to talk about. We could run. We could be dirty… so it was more a sense of freedom than it was anything that was imparted." She appreciates the fact that nature doesn't judge. You can be yourself: "So it's a sense of freedom in that. Out in nature,

you're kind of accepted as you are. It doesn't matter. You know, you don't have to dress and wear the 'right' thing or do the 'right' thing."

The sense of freedom she feels also seems to strengthen and fortify Andrea as well, possibly even restore her belief in herself when society seems to knock her down, and this is a powerful experience for her: "A lot of the experiences that I have had in the outdoors have been empowering for me and not – I never felt less than capable and less than whole in the outdoors. When it was me with nature or me with friends in nature, I never felt, you know, less than adequate to do something."

Julia

I sit with Julia in her office, and while we talk, her feisty, tell-it-like-it-is attitude soon reveals a strong emotional connection to the environment, and a passion for trying to make a positive impact.

Julia holds no punches, readily admitting that she is "mouthy" and likes to share her opinion – characteristics which often get her into trouble at work, where she holds a very public position and is supposed to "behave" herself by not creating too much unrest. Consequently, Julia must walk a fine line between expressing her point of view and going too far with making a point. She explains that while she likes to "make a lot of noise," she also has to "walk a tightrope."

This situation is a struggle for her on a regular basis: "One of the biggest frustrations I have in this position is that I cannot be an activist like I would like to be an activist. I have to be a good county employee. I'm the most visible county employee." She adds, "I have a really, really big mouth, and I like to tell people what I think, you know. In this position, I have to be careful."

One of the things Julia is most passionate, and perhaps "mouthy," about is the environment and her connection to it. She is not shy about standing up for what she believes. She will take action and voice her opinion even though it may be dangerous to do so. Julia recognizes the negative stigma associated with "environmentalism" in the US, and has seen the effects of that reputation first-hand, but for her, it is a risk worth taking if an issue is gravely important to her. In one particular instance, she took a strong stand but also notified the commission that she would be doing so and made it a point to be fair throughout the process: "I said, 'I cannot turn my back on this issue. I've got to be vocal about it, and if it costs me my job, that's the way it is.'"

Not everyone has the luxury of risking their job, of course, but it does indicate a strong moral compass on certain issues for Julia. She recognizes, though, that it's hard to stand up for beliefs sometimes, and offers it as a possible explanation for people's acquiescence:

> Being an environmental activist is a very – it can get you in trouble. I mean, caring enough about the environment to make noise can put you at risk. (Pause) And I think that's why a lot of people aren't environmental activists. They're not – they choose to take the safe approach, which is to complain about it quietly… I think it makes people really skittish of getting involved in things because, you know, you open your mouth, and there are repercussions… So I think it's very risky. I think there's getting to be fewer and fewer people who are willing to stand up in the face of such powerful forces – both socially and politically.

During our time together, it becomes increasingly clear that Julia tries to be respectful and follow the expectations placed on her by her position, but she enjoys pushing the envelope, and if it ever really came down to a choice, it seems apparent that Julia would follow her convictions.

This kind of fiery spirit pervades the interview, revealing a very independent streak in Julia. This is the Julia who chose to write a postcard home and quit her job in Chicago, turning a six-week excursion to New Zealand into a six-month life-altering trip. To be able to visit NZ as a young adult was a special opportunity, and "It was while I was in New Zealand and spent six months alone – not alone, but traveling alone – where I really started feeling that connection."

This is the Julia who, after returning from NZ and starting a new job at an athletic club in Chicago, realized that was no longer the life she wanted and decided to quit that job, move, and find something else. The "something else" she eventually found was working in the environmental arena, and so far, she seems to have found her niche there: "I would never want to do anything else. In fact, if I had a choice, I would not want to leave the environmental field." This is also the Julia who recently traveled to Zimbabwe and camped for four months by herself in the African wilds.

It is when Julia speaks about her experiences in nature that a slightly new phenomenon emerges. Her passion for the environment is still evident, but words often fail her, as they hardly ever do in her daily life. The environment is so important to her, the connection so powerful, that it is hard for her to describe. While she sat on the bluff in NZ writing her postcard, she explains, "It was sort of this expansive, um……I don't know. It's really hard to describe. Maybe that's what makes environmental education so hard is that it's hard to give somebody that feeling… People have to have those sorts of personal encounters with nature to have an empathy for it and sympathy for it."

She tries to describe her first night in Zimbabwe: "And the first night I was alone in a campsite in Zimbabwe, it was really um……it was one of those overwhelmingly powerful feelings." A few moments later, she speaks about the difficulty of describing the environment unless someone has had that experience and refers to it as a "very emotional thing." In fact, her time in nature holds a reverent, spiritual quality for her: "The awe of nature and how amazing it all is and everything. You know, I just don't need to be in a building to feel that. I've never felt in a church building the way I feel outside."

Julia's passion and bluntness is inspiring, and it is clear that she is capable of making "noise" and niggling people's consciousness to prompt them to action. She holds out hope for the future of humankind and values the tangible impacts she sees, especially as a result of her presentations to various audiences. She shares that "probably the most important thing for me is just when I see people's lights come on when I talk to them about the environment. They're like, 'Oh, I never thought about it that way.'" She remains realistic, however, about the effects of her work and supports it because she does not want to be a hypocrite or contribute to the problem. She says she tries to "practice what I preach and then some." Julia recognizes that the "major environmental issues right now are things that individuals have very little control over," but she also notes the importance of grassroots activism in pushing governmental policies.

Chris

> *"Everyone does it in their own particular way. Someone said something like 'The steps that you take are insignificant, but it is very important that you take them.' Because to some extent, everyone taking their small, insignificant steps is what makes the change happen."*

On a sunny Friday afternoon, Chris and I share a bench in Fenner Park. His sense of humor shines through immediately when I start by asking him if he could tell me what specific pro-environmental actions he currently takes. "No, I cannot," he smiles. Thus begins an interview full of wit, candor, reflection, *and* a list of pro-environmental actions!

Chris does not view the environment as separate from anything else. It is inherently a part of us, our community, and our world. It is crucial to our health and our very existence, and as such, deserves and demands our respect. The problem, Chris thinks, is that we tend to devalue ourselves and focus on material wealth and possessions – outward signs of societal success – divorcing ourselves from inner validation, self knowledge, and deeper connections to others and the natural world.

This is a topic of major interest to him, and he reflects throughout the interview on it: "I think we've lost a lot of our connection to the environment, and I think we've lost a respect. It allows us to not have a respect for the environment." He is concerned about our focus on always wanting more and never being content just to be present in the here and now: "So we tend to think that we've got to get somewhere else than we are. We have to achieve more, accumulate more." We end up "separating ourselves from ourselves" in many ways, and he laments the fact that many kids grow up without having an environmental experience or knowing where their milk originates (or seeing a cow being milked, for that matter). Part of this, he believes, is because "we don't value our natural and biological heritage."

It becomes apparent very quickly that, for Chris, the imperative is to know thyself. It is from self knowledge and self acceptance that other positive connections can develop, and this

extends to the environment. "It's like finding your place on the planet," he explains. He shares that it's something he consciously works on in himself, as well, and adds:

> I'm sort of struggling with this, but how do we get back in touch with ourselves? We've lost it. We've been sort of lulled to sleep that materialism is – or something outside ourselves will give us happiness versus it's inside us, and that, I guess, includes the environment… Maybe it's not outside of ourselves, so part of identifying – becoming more in tune with ourselves and our desires, our wholeness as individuals, we become naturally more in tune with the environment, naturally more respectful of each other and the life around us.

Part of being in tune with ourselves involves taking care of ourselves, and Chris sees a definite connection between leading a healthy lifestyle and working to protect the planet: "I mean, being an environmentalist, I think, is not different than being just healthy… Do we want to eat good food, breathe fresh air, drink clean water, exercise, live a life in balance?" He continues on to say that, "Maybe it's seeing the connection between those daily choices and your own quality of life. What's good for you is also good for the planet, what's good for the neighborhood, what's good for your fellow students. Again, I think it's the self and the whole. If you discover yourself, you connect with the whole."

The kind of self discovery Chris advocates is not for lazier types. It necessitates deep reflection on one's own life, an active curiosity, and civic vigilance. Chris stresses the importance of being mindful of the decisions we make in our daily lives, as well as the ones that are being made for us: "If we're not questioning, sort of, the foundations of our system, we are in danger of just being lulled to sleep… So I think a learning attitude is important… as a society I think we just need to be more mindful that there are multiple ways that we can address the challenges… Many of us don't know where our tax dollars go and where our money is invested, and yet, these are things that affect the environment."

Chris is extremely interested in helping incorporate more integrated and student-centered programs in K-12 classrooms. He views life as a learning process, and he values the opportunity to continue questioning and learning on a continual basis. It is a "soul-searching" activity for him, and one he takes very seriously. Each person has worth and discoveries to make, and "your path is important in life – your discoveries and your journey – is so incredibly important."

Chris values his time in the natural world. Having moved around quite a bit as a child, some of his fondest memories remain those of spending time with his family out in nature – "walking the trails, smelling the wood chips, and seeing the seasonal changes." He smiles as he reflects on spending time with family in Pennsylvania: "Well, if you can imagine a kid and his friends just having five acres, an old farm to play in, a barn with hay. I had a rope swing. There were three chicken coups… It was kind of nice countryside. There was good fishing around. It was sort of a rich playground for deviant youth."

When discussing his interaction with nature, specifically, Chris struggles a bit with describing his experiences and feelings and repeatedly relies on the importance of his senses and experiencing it firsthand. When asked what it feels like when he's in nature, Chris responds, "Well, let's go over here to the grass and smell it… Maybe we should take a quick walk through here and sort of experience – you know, get off the trail a little bit and just see the pond, see the place where I saw the huge bullfrog that is forever etched in my memory… and when you're fishing and you feel the water…" Those images and those sensory memories have clearly remained with Chris for many years, and he holds those experiences very dear.

Through his experiences in nature, education, career opportunities, and the process of figuring out the important connections in his own life, Chris has developed a deep appreciation for the natural environment – finding it irrevocably interwoven with our own wellbeing, and in the middle of our interview, I find a moving and succinct statement in which his message shines warm and bright: "If we value ourselves, we must value the environment."

APPENDIX D

Consent Form

Purpose of the Study

Little is known about the perceptions and values of active environmentalists regarding the environment and what has led them to adopt their ethic. This project is designed to explore the beliefs and influences that guide the behavior of active environmentalists.

As an active environmentalist, you have taken leadership roles in environmental activities and programs and engaged in numerous pro-environmental behaviors for some time. In essence, you have chosen to make lifestyle choices based on your understanding of the natural environment. You are being asked to take part in an interview to gain insight into the way you view the environment and your relationship to it. This will involve a one-on-one, semi-structured interview. A protocol has been developed to help guide the interview and ensure that we address certain topics, but significant flexibility exists to allow your responses to unfold naturally. I am interested in your thoughts and beliefs. The interview should take approximately 60 – 90 minutes.

At the end of the interview, you will be asked to take an ecological survey, complete it at a convenient time for you, and mail it back within seven (7) days. A postage paid envelope will be provided for this purpose. Completion of the survey should take approximately 15 – 20 minutes.

Confidentiality

If you consent to participate in this research project, your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Only the principal investigator – myself – and my faculty advisor will know your identity. Pseudonyms will be used in any reports to protect your confidentiality.

The interview will be taped for accuracy in transcribing the data. Audiotapes will be stored in a secure location on campus. Your identity will be kept confidential, and documentation, analysis, and research findings that result from this study will not permit association of your name with specific responses or conclusions. Data gathered for this study will be treated with strict confidence by the investigator and will only be reported in aggregate form.

Participant Consent

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate, refuse to answer questions, or stop the interview at any time. Similarly, you may refuse to complete the survey or choose not to answer certain questions.

If you freely agree to participate in this study, please sign the following statement.

I, _____ (print name), have read this consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

_____ _____

Signature Date

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, please contact:

Heather Suffron (Principal Investigator)
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If you have any questions about your rights as a human subject of research, please contact:

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