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Prompting and Protecting Radical Environmental Justice Activism

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Prompting and Protecting Radical Environmental Justice Activism

By

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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Dr. Laura Harrison (Advisor)

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Dr. Paul Prew (Committee Member)

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I want to thank all defenders of the earth and its inhabitants. Capitalism would have destroyed everything by now if it weren't for the speed bumps you've built. Thank you for your enormous sacrifices. I hope that one day you will rest without worry.

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Abstract

As environmental crises are systemic, intersectional, and extreme, this thesis frames corresponding action as a necessary and appropriate response. Using semi-structured interviews with people who identified as having engaged in radical environmental justice (EJ) activism, this study explores the following two research questions: the types of environmental actions and attitudes these activists report engaging in, and the types of factors and experiences they report as inhibiting and encouraging those actions and attitudes. This information might help unearth actions and policies that can help prompt, sustain, and protect engagement in radical EJ activism, which is here defined as activism that addresses environmental issues "at the root"[1] and is systemic, intersectional, and extreme. While some research investigates factors associated with environmental activism, there is almost no research on the factors associated with radical EJ activism specifically. Participants in this study cited several internal factors, such as environmental knowledge (particularly about environmental issues and activism strategies), emotions (particularly anticipatory and moral), and several personality and practice-based traits that influence their engagement in radical EJ activism. More commonly and consistently, participants cited situational factors, in particular, direct experiences with nature, its destruction, and its protection, social support and a lack thereof, burnout (including temporal, energy/emotional, financial, and professional costs of activism), and institutional backlash and cooptation as influencing their activism. Participants also shared tips for prompting and sustaining radical EJ activism, including tips on how to palatably present radical ideas, mitigate organizational conflict, and make space for a diversity of tactics within the movement.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Environmental activists worldwide face a stark reality; protecting the planet can come at a heavy cost. Le Billon and Lujla found between 2002 and 2018, upwards of 1734 "environmental and land defenders" were murdered globally, and that "income level, foreign direct investment, dependency on mineral extraction, regime type, frequency of protest movements, and size of Indigenous populations" were the national "determinants of killings." [2] Indigenous people were most vulnerable, composing almost 1/3 of eco-defenders murdered.[3] Environmental activists interviewed for this study reported experiencing varying levels of backlash for their activism and described barriers that made it impossible or extremely difficult to do activism. Despite these barriers to activism, environmental crises continue, which means activism to stop these crises must also continue. This thesis rests on the assumption that because environmental crises are systemic, intersectional, and extreme, corresponding action is a necessary and appropriate response.

This thesis aims to uncover factors that might be useful in prompting, sustaining, and protecting an environmental justice activist theory and praxis that is: 1. systemic, 2. intersectional, and 3. open to extremism. This kind of activism is what I call radical Environmental Justice (EJ) activism. Cultivating radical EJ activism requires understanding each tenet of this framework, factors that commonly prompt people to reach this understanding and motivate them to take action around it, barriers that make it difficult to engage in this type of activism, and factors that help people overcome these barriers and sustain their activism. For this reason, this study reviews the literature on these factors and barriers and analyzes themes that emerged across eleven interviews on this topic with people who identified as socialists, communists, or anarchists who have engaged in environmental justice activism. The primary

research questions are as follows: What types of environmental actions and attitudes do environmental activists report engaging in, and what barriers, experiences, and emotions do they consider influential to those actions and attitudes? I argue that for some radical EJ activists, several internal and situational factors are influential in prompting, protecting, and inhibiting their activism and its radical orientation. These internal factors environmental knowledge (particularly about environmental issues and activism strategies), emotions (particularly anticipatory and moral), and several personality and practice-based traits (such as openness, creativity, and empathy). These situational factors included direct experiences with nature, its destruction, and its protection, social support and a lack thereof, burnout (including time, energy/emotional, financial, and employment costs of activism), and institutional backlash and cooptation.

While there is significant research on the factors associated with developing environmental attitudes (EA) and concern (EC) and engaging in pro-environmental behaviors (PEB) broadly, there is very little research on the factors associated specifically with environmental activism, and almost no research on the factors associated with engaging in *radical* EJ activism specifically. Given the need for this kind of activism, this gap in research would be shocking if not for its direct challenge to capitalist forces that determine what kind of research can be funded and published. To fill this gap in research, this study assesses the type of environmental actions and theoretical frameworks participants engage in and what sort of lived experiences and attitudes they report contribute to this action and theory. This provides information about the factors that might increase people's likelihood of engaging in various types of environmental activism, particularly radical EJ activism. This knowledge may equip educators

and policymakers to create systems to facilitate these beneficial lived experiences and attitudes to encourage radical EJ activism.

Chapter two, the literature review, discusses three schools of environmental theory and activism and reviews the drivers and inhibitors of environmental behavior and activism frequently studied in the existing literature. Schools of environmental theory and activism include intersectional vs. single-issue change-making, individual vs. systemic change-making, and extreme vs. palatable change-making. The difference between intersectional and single-issue environmentalism is that single-issue environmentalism focuses solely on environmental concerns, while intersectional environmentalism recognizes that these issues are interconnected with other social justice concerns. Individual versus systemic change centers on whether people prioritize personal and lifestyle changes (individual) or advocate for broader structural transformations (systemic). Extreme versus palatable environmentalism depends on whether activists propose solutions that differ significantly from the current norm and embrace unconventional methods to achieve that change (extreme) or prioritize incremental changes accepted by mainstream society (palatable). Literature on drivers of environmental behavior and attitudes focuses on established psychological models of pro-environmental behavior and factors that may inhibit or encourage systemic, intersectional, and open-to-extreme environmental activism. These factors are divided based on whether they're primarily internal or external/situational to the person experiencing them, although there is always an interaction between the internal and external.

Chapter three discusses the methods and methodology I used to carry out this study, focusing specifically on how I logistically gathered and analyzed data, the theory behind these methods, and any limitations that result from these methods and methodologies. In addition, I

engaged in a reflexivity process, reflecting on the relationship between the researcher (me) and the research. Chapter four discusses the results and analysis of the interviews, which focused primarily on four themes: prompting and sustaining activism and theory, barriers to activism and theory, theoretical perceptions, and finally, strategies, sidenotes, and recommendations by the activists. Throughout this thesis, I show that participants have a wide variety of experiences with environmental and social justice activism and express a wide variety of perspectives on activist issues. This study found that internal factors such as environmental knowledge, emotions, personality traits, and practices, as well as situational factors like direct experiences with nature, environmental destruction and protection, social support and lack thereof, burnout, time, energy, employment, and institutional backlash influenced participants' engagement in radical EJ activism.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Extreme floods and storms have displaced an average of 19,000 children globally each day from 2016 to 2021.[4] Environmental scholars argue effective environmental action is crucial, given the increasingly uninhabitable planet.[5] However, there is debate over what kind of environmental action is most effective. This debate tends to revolve around whether effective environmental action and theory is intersectional vs. single-issue,[6] whether it aims for individual vs. systemic change,[7] and whether it seeks extreme vs. palatable change.[8] For this reason, this literature review covers literature debating each of these theories of change and studying factors associated with the likelihood of engaging in each of these types of environmental action. The division between intersectional and single-issue environmentalism hinges on whether the focus is specifically on environmental issues (single issue) or on recognizing environmental issues as inextricable from other social justice issues (intersectional). The division between individual and systemic change revolves around whether people focus on personal and/or lifestyle changes to address environmental challenges (individual) or advocate for broader, structural transformations (systemic). Finally, the division between extreme and palatable environmentalism depends on whether activists propose solutions that significantly diverge from the current norm and employ unconventional methods of change (extreme), or if they prioritize incremental adjustments that align with mainstream acceptance (palatable). The final section of this literature review covers literature studying both internal and situational factors associated with environmental action and focuses (when this literature is available) on factors associated with environmental activism specifically.

Schools of Environmental Theory and Activism

Intersectional and Single-Issue Change-Making

Scholars like Leslie King and Deborah McCarthy frame environmental and social problems as inseparable.[9] This is called intersectional environmentalism. Extensive literature has documented unequal distribution of environmental privileges and hazards along national,[10] species,[11] gendered,[12] ability-based,[13] racial and ethnic,[14] colonial,[15] caste,[16] and class [17] lines, and proponents of intersectional environmental justice argue challenging this inequality is crucial to addressing what Archbishop Desmond Tutu calls "climate apartheid."[18] Terms like Climate Apartheid and Environmental Racism describe the unequal impacts of climate change and environmental pollution based on some of the above systems of oppression.[19] More recently, these terms have been broadened to include the exclusion of marginalized groups in the development of environmental policies.[20] Environmental Justice movements are widely considered to be intersectional, as Dorceta Taylor asserts, they employ an "injustice frame," focusing on environmental disparities frontline communities face and working toward "improved quality of life, autonomy and self-determination, human rights, and fairness."[21]

Rather than leaning purely on Crenshaw's legal framework of intersectionality, which explains how identities connect and combine to form unique positions and experiences of oppression within individuals and emphasizes the need to address these overlapping inequalities in legal systems,[22] intersectional activists and theorists sometimes use a frame rooted in Angela Davis's intersectionality of struggles. In her book *Freedom is a Constant Struggle,* Davis argues that while intersectionality initially focused on "bodies and experiences," it's useful also to bring "social justice struggles together, across national borders" because of the structural similarities

and connections between the forces oppressing various struggles.[23] Dorceta Taylor describes an effective environmental justice (EJ) movement as centering unity across "various struggles" through coalition building.[24] Nadine Naber refers to this as a "Joint Struggle,"[25] and David Featherstone refers to this as solidarity, which he defines as "a relation forged through political struggle which seeks to challenge forms of oppression," particularly across different struggles.[26] By practicing solidarity between movements for liberation, such as environmental and indigenous movements,[27] Environmental Justice and abolitionist movements,[28] and Black and Palestinian liberation movements,[29] intersectional Environmental Justice advocates have argued we can strategically amplify each other's movements and create political power greater than the sum of their parts.[30]

In addition to intersectional environmentalism, single-issue environmentalism is also prominent, with some single-issue frameworks being somewhat extreme. Non-intersectional frameworks like deep ecology, biocentrism, eco-centrism,[31] eco-fascism, Malthusianism, and population control address environmental problems through a single-issue lens. These frameworks often promote the idea that since people and animals will continue to suffer until environmental issues are resolved, fixing environmental issues must take priority over fixing social issues.[32] Eco-centrism is one prominent single-issue framework, which Robyn Eckersley identifies as an approach prioritizing "our proper place in the rest of nature" above "appropriate social and political arrangements for human communities."[33] Malthusianism, connected with an idea that Paul Robbins refers to as the "eco scarcity model," is a particularly extreme eco-centrist worldview that argues that because there are limited resources, and humans are consuming those resources, the human population needs to be controlled.[34] Extreme single-issue environmentalists often take a Malthusian or eugenics-oriented focus on population growth

(particularly in countries with lower incomes, with higher concentrations of people of color, and dealing with impacts of colonization) [35] as a cause of environmental crises. [36] Non-intersectional extreme environmentalists often argue either in favor of authoritarian solutions or that authoritarian solutions will naturally arise if growth isn't limited. Giorel Curran refers to this rhetoric as a type of "authoritarian environmentalism."[37] Authors such as Garrett Hardin (in *The Tragedy of the Commons*),[38] William Ophuls' (through his analysis of "a Hobbesian sovereign"),[39] Paul Ehrlich (in *The Population Bomb*),[40] Commoner (in *The Closing Circle*),[41] and Robert Heilbroner (in *An Inquiry Into the Human Prospect*)[42] employ this type of environmentalism.

Deep ecology's support for population control is often in tension with its declared principles of diversity, egalitarianism, and classlessness.[43] *The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movement* distinguishes "shallow ecology" from "deep ecology," with the former addressing "pollution and resource depletion," in "the developed countries," and the latter addressing "principles of diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness."[44] In this instance, deep ecology is framed as paradoxically prioritizing diversity while maintaining population control perspectives. Arne Naess outlined eight key points of deep ecology. These principles include valuing diversity, valuing all life regardless of utility, reducing "human interference with" nature, resisting constant pressure to raise the standard of living, promoting a smaller human population (which Naess claims is compatible with "flourishing of human life and cultures"), and implementing policy change in alignment with these principals. [45] Today, scholars argue that current environmental challenges are not triggered primarily by population growth, but rather by an increase in production for profit (primarily by higher-income, whiter, imperialist countries).[46]

In addition to critiquing the more extreme schools of single-issue environmentalist thought, scholars such as Ramachandra Guha and Archbishop Desmond Tutu critique single-issue environmental and conservation efforts broadly, arguing that they widen environmental disparities even when it's not their explicit aim. Mario Diani states that, as was the case in 1900s Britain, single-issue environmentalism can sometimes result from the lack of communication between environmental and other social justice movements, rather than from an articulated logic of environmental priority.[47] In other words, a harmful single-issue environmentalism can sometimes result from implicit bias and social positionality, rather than from explicitly or intentionally oppressive attitudes. Guha and Tutu provide examples of this: adaptation apartheid and conservation imperialism. Tutu argues that non-intersectional environmental solutions—particularly those aimed at adaptation rather than mitigation—can alleviate the impacts of environmental crises on privileged communities while ignoring marginalized ones. Tutu refers to this phenomenon as "adaptation apartheid."[48] Guha notes that inequalities can also be perpetuated through conservation or environmental efforts that directly harm marginalized communities, such as through displacing tribal people from their homes in the name of conservation. Guha refers to deep ecology, which he connects with this phenomenon, as "conservation imperialism."[49] In these cases, while the rhetoric isn't as extreme or explicit as eugenics, the impact is similar.

As I've outlined in this section, there's significant tension within environmental movements between single-issue and intersectional theory and action. Louise Chawla identifies concern for the environment and concern for social justice as *distinct paths to environmentalism*,[50] and tension between these paths has characterized a significant volume of environmental theory in the past century. Where single-issue environmentalism stresses the

urgency of environmental crises and advocates focusing on environmental issues at the expense of other social issues, intersectional environmentalism argues that environmental and social justice issues are bound up with each other, and no one issue can be wholly addressed without addressing the others. This research aims to cultivate intersectional environmental activism by investigating the factors participants report as influencing their path toward understanding environmental issues as intersectional.

Individual and Systemic Change-Making

The issue of individual vs systemic change-making is another area of tension within environmental movements. Where individual change-making stresses the importance of making personal lifestyle changes to protect the environment, systemic approaches change larger political structures to protect the environment. Academics such as Luiz Barbosa argue the systemic nature of environmental destruction requires corresponding systemic change.[51] This systemic change is radical in that it goes beyond individual changes and addresses environmental issues "at the root."[52] Other academics argue that the choices we make (such as eating vegetarian) within these systems significantly influence the environment in ways we individually have control over. These scholars advocate for individuals to take personal actions to adjust their environmental footprint, a position that seems to have public support.[53] Within Dorceta Taylor's framework outlining four types of social movements, systemic activism could be categorized as either reformative or transformative (with reformative movements seeking partial systemic change and transformative movements seeking total systemic change), whereas individual change-making could be categorized as alterative or redemptive (with alterative movements seeking partial individual change and redemptive movements seeking total individual change).[54] Many researchers advocate for both individual and systemic changes. For instance, one study on

personal water footprints in Taiwan indicated that while households should take personal water conservation steps, cities also need to take larger steps (such as reusing and recycling industrial wastewater), as per capita water footprint in any given area is significantly impacted by the type of industry in the area.[55]

Academics frequently argue our energy is better spent on political actions to hold corporations accountable than on individual consumer choices to encourage corporate responsibility. There are several layers to this argument. Shigeto Tsuru critiques the idea of "voting with your dollar" for healthier corporate environmental practices by pointing out that some people have more dollars than others, and those who are most affected by and concerned with environmental issues are likely not to have enough money to make much difference, while those who benefit from environmental destruction are given exponentially more financial votes.[56] Joshua Axelrod illustrates a related point, which is the idea that large corporations have the greatest environmental impact compared to individual consumers or small businesses.[57] Another layer to this argument is the idea that individual consumption choices are influenced by social factors and systems of power,[58] causing many sustainable consumption behaviors to be inaccessible to those without access to certain resources.

The question of green consumerism and green capitalism showcases tensions and connections between individual and systemic, intersectional and single-issue, and extreme and moderate environmental frames. Green consumer frames, which Elkington and Hailes' Green Consumer Guide employ, encourage individual sustainable consumption.[59] Early critics of green consumerism include Carrier, Irvine, and Hawken. Carrier and Irvine argue that there is no ethical consumption under capitalism and that the system itself needs to be destroyed, rather than simply navigated differently,[60] and Hawken frames "green marketing" as paradoxical.[61] In

contrast, Elizabeth B. Goldsmith's Social Influence and Sustainable Consumption, advocates for green marketing and sustainable consumption, acting as a how-to guide for using social influence theory to increase consumption of sustainable products.[62] Similarly, John Grant's books, Green Marketing Manifesto and Greener Marketing, claim to provide readers with sustainable marketing strategies that meet social and environmental objectives, rather than greenwash.[63]

Critics label green marketing "greenwashing," arguing it places an environmentalist label on activities that exploit people and the environment. The terms "greenwashing" and "green sheen"[64] typically describe corporations misrepresenting their environmental performance to consumers. Vance Packard argued in 1960 that because companies introduce sustainable products without removing unsustainable ones, the company's motivation isn't to improve their environmental impact but rather to provide an apparent upgrade that will motivate consumers to spend money on a "better" version of the products they already own and improve the brand's image.[65] Greenwashing also has broader applications.[66] For instance, Sharon Beder critiques environmental organizations that provide legitimacy to corporate greenwashing campaigns. Beder attributes this decision to an organization's desire to appeal to donors who could financially support the organization and to corporations that could provide career opportunities to its staff, which led to a shift, in the case of Greenpeace, from radically opposing government and business practices to working with businesses and governments for incremental environmental solutions.[67]

Systemic change-making isn't always or necessarily intersectional or extreme/radical. Market-regulation-based environmental frames are a systemic equivalent of the green consumer frame, which is neither intersectional nor radical. Do Amaral et al. frame sustainable consumption as a systemically oriented legal framework demanding corporate responsibility to

consumers and the environment and asserting the government's responsibility to regulate

corporations in line with public interest. They argue that sustainable consumption is the

responsibility of corporations and governments, rather than consumers.[68] Market-based,

capitalist, and neoliberal environmental frameworks utilize systemic solutions, but critics such as

Bookchin and Lloréns assert that they very rarely address ecological crises completely or for

everyone, as the areas in which they're implemented and the processes used to create them tend

to perpetuate existing power structures.[69] Scholars such as Naomi Klein argue that the reason

why these environmental frameworks are insufficient is because they fail to dismantle

capitalism, which is the root cause of environmental destruction. Klein frames capitalism's

model of infinite growth as paradoxical and argues that capitalism, which by design places the

profit motive over all other motives, is inherently environmentally destructive. For these reasons,

Klein argues capitalism must be not just regulated, but transcended.[70]

In addition to market regulation-based environmental solutions, sustainable development

is another systemic solution frequently proposed to reconcile the relationship between capitalism

and the environment. Several scholars critique this proposal. Similarly to Klein, Arturo Escobar

argues sustainable development is not a sufficient change because capitalism as a system is in

inherent opposition to environmental justice."[71] Other scholars, such as Michael Redclift and

Andrew Stables, support this idea, with Redclift framing sustainable development as "an

oxymoron,"[72] and Stables referring to it as "an inherently paradoxical policy slogan."[73] Samir

Amin highlights the social and environmental costs of development, arguing economic analysis

is inadequate at evaluating the benefits of any given intervention to a community. Amin uses the

example of tourism, which can stimulate local economies but also cause significant

environmental pollution.[74]

Sustainable development initiatives are often framed as a top-down and global-to-local systemic "solution" which scholars argue devalues local knowledge and causes local environmental destruction. Guha provides an example of this, framing eco-tourism as a problematic development initiative typically imposed by wealthy outside forces, marketed as a pro-environmental activity, and resulting in local environmental destruction.[75] Escobar further challenges the assumptions present in a sustainable development frame that ecological problems are disconnected from local/cultural factors, that environmental problems are best defined globally, and that everyone is equally responsible for environmental crises.[76] This devaluation of local knowledge involved in development discourse, Elora Halim Chowdhury argues, disempowers people living in the aftermath of colonization, "who come to see themselves and their cultural heritage in a negative light,"[77] and Vandana Shiva similarly stresses the importance of honoring local environmental knowledge.[78] Shiva argues the pervasive appeals to science made in the name of "progress" and "development" rely on this devaluation of the local, and tend to justify and contribute to patriarchal oppression, destruction of nature, and exploitation of the "Third World."[79]

Some scholars consider science and technology to provide systemic solutions to environmental crises compatible with capitalism;[80] however, many scholars who advocate for intersectional systemic environmentalism resist this solution. Neha Vora, for example, argues that because "modern science has…been the primary source of environmental destruction" and imperialism, it cannot be the primary solution.[81] Francisco Toro likewise critiques the supposed solution of technology as tied up in "bureaucratized power and a vertical and linear way of managing problems,"[82] and Huey Newton warns that any technology within a capitalist system will be controlled by and used toward the interests of the rich, rather than the working majority.[83]

Participants in this study, who tended to align with systemic, intersectional, and open-to-extreme activism, rejected techno-capitalist environmental solutions, viewing them as distractions that give people a false sense of sustainability while fueling the capitalist environmental destruction machine, as I will discuss in the analysis section.

In addition to these critiques of the political orientation of science favoring the powerful, scholars such as Samir Amin critique the apolitical illusion of science."[84] Many scholars identify a split between "political ecology" and "conventional" or "apolitical" ecology,[85] where political ecology identifies political systems as instrumental environmental influences and apolitical ecology and traditional environmentalism tend to frame "the science of ecology" as separate from political systems.[86] Escobar argues for a political ecology that frames nature, economy, and ecology as political and socially constructed.[87] This frame differs dramatically from a traditional/pure ecological framework. Mario Diani frames the split between the "conventional ecology sector" and the "political ecology sector" as being entangled in issues of moderate vs extreme environmentalism, which the next section will discuss. [88]

As was covered in this section, environmentalist perspectives range widely from promoting tips for environmentally conscious consumption to advocating for an overhaul of the capitalist system. Intersectional/single-issue, individual/systemic, and extreme/palatable frameworks are all at play within specific debates such as those surrounding green capitalism, market regulation, sustainable development, and technological/scientific solutions. This section covered individual change-making as oriented largely around personal and lifestyle changes and systemic change-making as oriented toward changing broader social and political systems and institutions. The examples used in this section represented several issues that fall at various points between being purely individual and purely systemic. This thesis aims to examine the

factors that might encourage activists to work toward larger-scale systemic changemaking, without discouraging individual changemaking. It also attempts to examine the factors which might contribute to a more radical/extreme approach to extreme environmental and social problems, without discouraging more palatable approaches in the process. This next section will outline these extreme and palatable approaches to environmental change.

Extreme and Palatable Change-Making

Scholars and activists have diverse perspectives on the utility of extreme/radical and moderate/palatable environmental frameworks and strategies. In this study, extreme/radical frameworks and strategies are defined as lenses of environmental understanding and techniques for environmental change that significantly diverge from the currently accepted norms. In contrast, moderate/palatable environmental frameworks and strategies will be defined as those that appear pragmatic,[89] appeal to a broader range of people, and directly oppose fewer powerful structures.[90] Jackie Smith argues that more moderate, palatable, incremental, and compromise-focused environmental steps tend to be favored by governments and politicians who are often concerned with change visible during their short terms in office, rather than longer-term environmental change.[91] As the scale of environmental crises intensifies, however, scholars and activists such as Best and Nocella, Ted Trainer, and members of the original climate justice movement argue these extreme crises must be addressed through equally extreme aims and action.[92] Extreme/radical activists sometimes frame environmental issues as a result of capitalism/neoliberalism and colonialism and suggest that systems built to profit from environmental destruction will never be adequately changed through palatable action from the inside, such as market solutions, partnerships between climate institutions and corporations,[93] and lobbying of colonial governments.[94]

The extreme/palatable split is similar to the conflict vs consensus division. McCarthy and Wolfson differentiate between conflict and consensus movements, defining conflict movements as confronting organized opposition and lacking widespread support. They define consensus movements, in contrast, as enjoying overwhelming support, with minimal organized opposition.[95] Conflict movements would typically be considered extreme, whereas consensus movements would be considered palatable/moderate. Marc Michaelson frames Kenya's Green Belt Movements as a consensus movement to argue in favor of consensus strategies, particularly within repressive environments.[96] McCarthy and Wolfson similarly find that consensus movements effectively create social change,[97] while others[98] argue that conflict movements are more effective instigators of social change. Dennis Downey identifies "a pattern of strategic eclecticism" linking consensus and conflict strategies to complement each other as effective,[99] and William Gamson argues that entirely consensus or conflict movements are not all that common, as movements typically use a combination of consensus and conflict frames and strategies.[100] The idea of dual power, which the analysis section of this study will discuss, is relevant to this strategic combination of moderate and radical strategies.

There is some debate over whether working within or outside of systems of power is the most effective way to dismantle or reform these systems. CrimethInc argues that institutions of hierarchy reproduce hierarchy regardless of "who holds the reins."[101] In Audre Lorde's words, "the masters' tools will never dismantle the masters' house."[102] Anarchists such as Black Flag Sydney tend to oppose working within government systems on similar grounds. Black Flag Sydney argues that more "combative" direct street action is more effective and that legal action diverts energy away from these actions. They criticize environmental organizations that pursue legal routes of change "even when they know they will lose" due to the structure of the state.[103]

Murray Bookchin is an anarchist-adjacent academic who makes a similar critique, arguing against an "environmentalism that is based more on tinkering with existing institutions, social relations, technologies, and values than on changing them."[104] Some scholars such as Petra Kelly have more faith in the state, arguing for "anti-party parties" that can work within the recognized political system to model alternative ways to structure political action while working for material policy change.[105]

Critique of capitalism is one of the most prominent radical environmental perspectives. Kohei Saito argues that Marx viewed ecological destruction as capitalism's "fundamental contradiction,"[106] and Joel Kovel argues that capitalism's requirement of constant growth (fueled by the consumption of natural resources) contradicts the possibility of sustainable capitalism.[107] Rosa Luxemburg similarly theorizes that as capitalism exhausts resources locally, it needs new areas to extract resources from and naturally takes up imperialism.[108] It follows that once all the resources have been exhausted in areas subjected to this environmental imperialism, there would be nothing to feed the capitalist machine. Samir Amin argues social and environmental injustice is "rooted in the very structure of the capitalist economic and social system" and points out how industrial plants are often established in "third world" countries where environmental regulations are lower and labor is less expensive.[109] Through this process, capitalism, imperialism, and environmental destruction intersect.

Amin's linking of capitalism, imperialism, and environmental destruction is echoed by several academics, including Vandana Shiva and Winona LaDuke. Shiva similarly frames colonization and imperialism as central causes of environmental destruction. She speaks of the conflict between a system of "earth democracy and biodemocracy" and the dominant system of "ecoimperialism, bioimperialism, and ecoapartheid" and argues for uplifting local knowledge of

agriculture and land management, rather than relying on capitalist systems imposed by imperialism which have very little concern for the health of the local environment.[110] Winona LaDuke is another scholar-activist who radically links decolonization, economic justice, antimilitarism, and environmentalism. LaDuke refers to "political decolonization" as centering "the dismantling of settler-imposed political and economic institutions," as involving "tangible support for indigenous struggles to protect land, territories, and ecosystems" and as necessitating the reversal of "military, political, economic, cultural, and religious imperialism."[111]

Scholars arguing for anticapitalism and decolonization are one example of an intersectional extreme/radical environmental group working for systemic changes. In addition to this type of framework, some extreme/radical environmental justice advocates work for individual change.[112] One example of an extreme/radical movement advocating for individual change is vegetarianism as a practice of individual anarchism, which Carl Tobias Frayne reviews a history of.[113] This type of anarchism frames practices of veganism and vegetarianism as opposing the capitalist system which runs on animal and earth exploitation. Joseph Parampathu argues "capitalism has doomed us to a path of death and destruction, and the only way forward is total and immediate animal liberation and earth liberation."[114] Anarchism's frequent links with environmental issues seem to be a natural result of its core values, which are in opposition to authority and hierarchy, including hierarchies that place certain humans, governments, and corporations above nature, animals, and other humans.[115] This deconstruction of hierarchy lends itself to environmental thinking. Esther Dolgoff frames acceptance of our "animal origins" as central to anarchism.[116] Similarly, Flower Bomb emphasizes that as humans are animals, human and animal liberation are inseparable, and links anti-speciesism with anarchism and anti-capitalism, arguing for "an anti-social" (not palatable) lifestyle that combats hierarchy in all

forms.[117] While the ideology behind this action is systemic, extreme, and intersectional, the action itself is individual.

This section has covered several sects of the environmental movement, if it's even possible to refer to it as one movement. This review of perspectives makes it easier to understand how and why distinctions in environmental thought can hinder or promote environmental organizing. Learning about these different perspectives might also prompt opinions on the types of environmental thought you find ideal. To encourage preferable types of environmental thought and action, it's helpful to first understand the factors associated with pro-environmental thought and activism broadly, which the next section will cover.

Drivers and Inhibitors of Pro-Environmental Behavior and Activism

The second component of the lit review will focus primarily on factors associated with pro-environmental activism. Since research on environmental activism is limited, I supplement this research with research on PEB broadly. I will first review the literature addressing individual factors influencing the likelihood of engaging in pro-environmental behavior (PEB), such as environmental knowledge, values, motivation and intention, emotions, and various personality traits, practices, and experiences. Then, I will discuss literature addressing external factors, including social norms and support, perceived consequences such as institutional support or backlash, physical violence such as murder and rape carried out by governments, corporations, and the people they hire, legal and media suppression of activism, time, energy, and money limitations, and opportunities for activism.

Internal Factors

Environmental Knowledge

Many academics have studied the factors contributing to environmental knowledge (EK) and awareness (EA), as well as whether EK and EA translate to PEB. Scholars identify several types of environmental knowledge. Alexander Grob defines environmental awareness as encompassing "factual knowledge about the environment and recognition of environmental problems."[118] Kaiser and Fuhrer distinguish between declarative, procedural, effectiveness, and social knowledge around the environment, and find that each type of environmental knowledge must combine to create the conditions necessary for PEB.[119] Both Grob and Fliegenschnee and Schelakovsky found that environmental "domain-specific factual knowledge" or in-depth technical environmental knowledge was not correlated with PEB.[120] In contrast, Levine and Strube did find a significant and independent association between basic (scientific) knowledge about environmental issues and PEB.[121] Notably, Hines et al.'s meta-analysis found an association between knowledge of environmental issues and action strategies and PEB.[122] The present study supports this finding, as participants consistently cited knowledge of environmental and social issues and action strategies as crucial to their activism. Participants didn't frame in-depth technical or scientific knowledge as particularly influential to their social, political, and environmental framework, but did report that knowledge of issues and strategies to address them was influential, which the results section will discuss further.

Other sources look at environmental knowledge more broadly. For instance, Abdul Latif et al. and Bamberg and Moser found a relationship between EK and PEB but did not distinguish the type of EK.[123] In contrast, Kempton et al. found that environmental knowledge isn't required

for PEBs, as lack of environmental knowledge was equally prevalent among pro- and anti-environmentalists.[124] Similarly, Ajzen and Fishbein, as well as Liu et al., found that EK did not significantly or directly impact PEB. However, Ajzen and Fishbein argued that this knowledge can be viewed as desirable for its own sake, and Liu et al. found that EK does positively impact environmental attitude, which significantly positively impacts environmental intentions and behaviors.[125] Some studies investigating the impact of *perceived* environmental knowledge on PEB yield conflicting results. Das and Ramalingam found a positive relationship between perceived EK and "ecologically conscious consumer behavior." [126] In contrast, McCright and Dunlap found that for conservative white men, perceiving themselves to have a high level of EK was associated with a higher likelihood of denying climate change.[127] Despite the conflicting results on the effectiveness of EK in prompting PEB, there is no research to suggest a negative association between *legitimate* EK and PEB, which indicates that efforts to increase EK as a means of increasing PEB are not misguided.

Emotions

Several academics have studied the connection between knowledge and emotion in sparking PEB, with the consensus being that high levels of reason-based and emotional responses are correlated with higher PEB. Both Grob and Kollmuss and Agyeman found that higher strength of affective (emotional) reactions significantly correlated with PEB.[128] In addition, Wendy Horwitz found that emotions and reason together played significant roles in helping environmental activists develop their environmental ethical framework.[129] Concerning this reason-emotion connection, scholars such as Fliegenschnee and Schelakovsky focus on how lack or abundance of knowledge about environmental issues can set the stage for lack or abundance of emotional attachment to environmental issues, which then impacts the likelihood

of PEB.[130] Researchers have also investigated emotions more deeply by breaking down the roles

of more specific emotions, including guilt, shame, pride, hope, denial, worry, fear, denial, sense

of responsibility, and anger, in prompting PEBs.

Anticipatory Emotions: Fear, Worry, Hope, and Denial About Environmental Crises

Fear, worry, hope, and denial are all anticipatory emotions that often surround

environmental crises. This section focuses on the fear of environmental crises, however, activists

in this study also reported a fear of negative consequences for their activism, which I will discuss

later. Kleres and Wettergren, who interviewed 41 young environmental activists, found that every

interviewed activist expressed fear of the climate crisis. Activists in their study reported fear to

be personally mobilizing, rather than paralyzing, but tended to frame fear tactics as ineffective

mobilizing tools.[131] Similarly, Maria Ojala found that each environmental volunteer she

interviewed reported worry, with the majority reporting that worry was the first emotion related

to the environment that they felt, and many volunteers framing worry as motivating their

action.[132] Likewise, Norgaard and Reed found members of the Karuk Tribe in California who felt

distressing emotions around environmental crises tended to view these emotions "as a signal

function confirming structures of power in relation to identity, social interactions, and ongoing

colonialism."[133] This is significant to my research because the majority of activists in the present

study viewed distressing emotions around the environment (such as anger, guilt, and feelings of

betrayal by existing systems of power) as a kind of fire alarm that prompts them to take action.

This indicates that emotions that cause discomfort are likely necessary to prompt radical EJ

activism.

Hope has been found to be effective in helping people move past fear and worry. One study found that hope was positively associated with recycling behavior for people highly worried about environmental issues, but negatively associated with recycling for people with little worry about environmental issues.[134] Hope and denial are also sometimes analyzed together. For instance, Maria Ojala found that while "'constructive' hope" was positively related to PEB, "hope based on denial" was associated with a lower likelihood of PEB.[135] Kleres and Wettergren frame denial as a method to diffuse the potentially mobilizing potential of fear, and hope (particularly around the potential for one's own actions to create change) as mitigating "the potentially paralyzing effects of fear."[136] Lisa Kretz similarly argues hope is crucial to prompting environmental action,[137] and Carl Cassegård suggests that even in some postapocalyptic environmentalist frameworks that appear to be built on hopelessness, hope is often present.[138]

Moral Emotions: Anger, Guilt, Shame, Sense of Responsibility, Moral Obligation vs Delegation

Scholars frequently analyze the role of moral emotions in influencing PEB, with guilt and shame taking center stage. Many studies find that guilt and shame prompt PEB. For example, Moore and Yang conducted two studies on eco-guilt and found that "it was the strongest and most consistent predictor of environmental behavioral intention in both studies."[139] Adams et al. conducted two similar studies on guilt two years later, which both indicated that guilt mediated the relationship between past environmental performance and future PEB, with guilt being associated with increased PEB.[140] Reinforcing these findings, young environmental volunteers in Maria Ojala's study reported more specific feelings of guilt over participation in "an overall unjust Western lifestyle."[141] In addition, Rees et al. found references to human-caused environmental destruction were effective in sparking a guilty conscience (feelings of shame and guilt), which was then associated with increased PEB.[142] This indicates that not only can shame

and guilt prompt PEB, but exposing people to specific types of information may be an effective method to prompt this productive shame and guilt. There is, however, one study by Bissing-Olson et al. indicating that guilt was not associated with higher PEB,[143] This might indicate that feelings of guilt may have different impacts on different people.

Anger is another moral emotion frequently cited in activists' accounts of their feelings around climate change. Anger around the environment is frequently found to predict environmental activism. For instance, Gregersen et al. found the strength of anger "was the strongest predictor" of climate activism in their survey of 2,046 people.[144] Likewise, Freiling and Matthes found "climate change-related anger positively predicted political environmental activism over time."[145] A couple of other academics have also investigated the relationship between anger, the environment, and the nation. For example, Kleres et al. framed anger as politicizing, and noted that climate activists from the global south practiced "angry ascription of responsibility/guilt and power to the north" which created hope and managed the acute fear they felt about their material realities. Meanwhile, Northern activists framed anger as an emotion to be subdued.[146] A similar study by Kari Marie Norgaard examined deterrents to environmental action among Norwegians and found participants shifted blame to America when discussing their country's environmental injustices, but in this case, ascription of guilt to America acted as a kind of scapegoat which allowed them to remain inactive.[147] This contrasts with Southern activists' ascription of guilt to the north in Kleres et al.'s study, where the ascription of blame sparked an activating anger. Carl Cassegård is another scholar who highlights anger as an initial emotion prompting environmental engagement, with a subsequent discovery of "gratitude and love" behind the anger. Cassegård also highlighted ethical reasoning and moral obligation (feeling the need to "do the right thing" regardless of whether it will lead to the desired outcome) as

underlying motivators to action, particularly for those who aren't particularly hopeful that their action will create the desired outcome.[148]

Personality and Practices: Openness, Creativity, Empathy, Locus of Control

Self-efficacy, perceived behavioral control, and locus of control are frequently researched as prominent determinants of pro-environmental behavior. Locus of control refers to a person's sense of whether events in their life result from internal or external factors.[149] Perceived behavioral control refers to a person's feelings of how much control they have over their behaviors, or how do-able a given behavior feels.[150] Perceived self-efficacy is a kind of combination of the former two concepts which refers to a person's feeling about whether they can perform a behavior and successfully achieve the ideal outcome.[151] While Alexander Grob did not find any correlation between PBC and PEB,[152] researchers including Antonetti and Maklan, Hines et al., and Carducci et al. have found these factors to be associated with a higher likelihood of engagement in PEB.[153] Kollmuss and Agyeman also suggest these factors influence PEB, but acknowledge that due to unequal power distribution, low self-efficacy often reflects a political reality.[154] Norgaard and Reed reflect on this idea, highlighting feelings of "shame related to one's inability" to protect the environment and hopelessness and "powerlessness in the face of institutional forces" like capitalism and colonialism.[155]

Additional prominent personality traits and practices that scholars highlight as determinants of PEB include self-direction, creativity, independence, curiosity, openness to new ideas, experiences, and change, honesty-humility, and creative thinking.[156] Researchers have also found activation in parts of the brain associated with empathy (which means a person's care for other people's experiences)[157] when participants viewed ecosystem degradation,[158] and Moore

and Yang similarly found empathy to predict PEBI.[159] In addition, there is encouraging research suggesting that rather than being an inherent trait, empathy can be *practiced* to promote PEB.[160] If traits like openness, creativity, curiosity, honesty-humility, empathy, and locus of control can be practiced and cultivated, and if they have a role in shaping environmental activism, creating circumstances conducive to these traits might allow us to create circumstances conducive to environmental activism. For this reason, this study examines the relationship several environmental activists have to these traits and practices.

Values, Attitudes, Motivation, and Intention

Several scholars believe environmental values, attitudes, motivation, and intention play a big role in whether we engage in environmental activism. Sloot et al. and Prendergast et al. found biospheric (caring for nature)[161] values were associated with environmental activism and community efforts.[162] Sloot et al.'s study linked social change actions and activist identity to altruistic (caring for others)[163] values and linked "pro-environmental lobbying" to egoistic (caring for oneself)[164] values.[165] In contrast, Steg et al. found egoistic values were negatively associated with environmental activist intention.[166] Most existing research suggests that feeling motivated to engage in PEB and reporting intention to engage in PEB are both positively associated with, but do not guarantee PEB.[167] Pro-environmental attitudes can be viewed as similar to biospheric values and are also consistently associated with PEB.[168] Steg et al. emphasize that understanding environmental values can help us cultivate PEB because this understanding gives us the tools to prompt the values necessary to prompt the PEB.[169] In addition, Stern et al. suggest the values a movement holds can influence the mobilization strategies that are most effective for them.[170]

Situational Factors

Direct Experiences With Nature and Environmental Destruction

There are many situational factors that scholars widely consider to influence the likelihood of engaging in PEB, including direct experiences with nature and environmental destruction. Both Louise Chawla and Wendy Horwitz found direct experience in nature was a leading contributor to participants' environmental commitment, and that experiences with pro-environmental organizations were frequently reported as sparking environmental commitment during adulthood. [171] Scholars such as Stephen Kraus, Liu et al., Evans et al., and Kathy James have revealed similar findings.[172] In addition to positive experiences in nature, experiences with environmental destruction also contributed to environmental commitment in Chawla and Horwitz's studies.[173] Jessica Smartt Guillion's *Fracking the Neighborhood* provides another example of environmental destruction as a call to action, with Smartt Guillion examining the experiences of "reluctant activists" who are drawn to action out of necessity—because of environmental issues happening right in their backyard and impacting their immediate quality of life.[174] This is in line with the experiences of many land defenders globally, who are forced either into action or out of their land, and with the experiences of participants in the present study, several of whom reported direct experiences with environmental destruction prompted their environmental activism.

Opportunities

Opportunities are another major factor scholars widely consider to influence the likelihood of engaging in PEB. The Motivation Opportunity Ability Model describes opportunity as "overall and situational conditions," and ability as including habit and knowledge of the pro-

environmental task, which when combined with motivation and opportunity, leads to PEBs.[175] Fietkau and Kessel's 1981 Model of Ecological Behavior argues that possibilities and opportunities to act pro-environmentally influence the likelihood of engaging in PEBs.[176] Stern et al. provide a similar finding, suggesting given an individual supports a movement ideologically, "the particular type of support that results is dependent on the individual's capabilities and constraints."[177]

One opportunity some scholars highlight is the opportunity to participate in action within an organizational environment that meets your cultural needs—something frequently denied to environmental activists of color in the U.S. In one study investigating barriers to participation in environmental education for people of color, cultural norm disparities were the most frequently cited obstacle, followed by a lack of access to nature and to information about job opportunities and environmental issues. Participants also emphasized organizational shortcomings in addressing community needs and in prioritizing diversity, racism, and the prevailing idea of environmentalists being white, male, and rural as significantly hindering racial diversity in environmental education.[178] The present study also examines opportunity as a primary factor in radical EJ activism, with participants reporting a wide variety of opportunity-related factors influencing their ability to engage in activism. The results section analyzes this more thoroughly.

Costs and Perceived Consequences: Time, Money, Energy, and Burnout

There is significant literature addressing characteristics of environmental activist experiences that influence people's ability to continue engaging in environmental activism.[179] There is also literature centering how the perceived cost of comparably safe forms of PEB correlates with the chance of engagement. For instance, Kollmuss and Agyeman's 2002 Model

of Pro-Environmental Behavior, based on Fliegenschnee and Schelakovsky's 1998 model, suggests awareness of consequences that might arise from a PEB influences the likelihood of engaging in that PEB.[180] Fietkau and Kessel's 1981 Model of Ecological Behavior similarly suggests higher perceived consequences of behavior lower likelihood of engaging in PEBs.[181] Consequences can include factors like time, financial, and monetary restrictions, burnout, institutional support or backlash, physical violence, and legal and media suppression, which I will now discuss in detail.

Limited time and energy is often cited as a significant barrier to environmental activism and PEBs broadly. Carducci et al., for example, identify time in the day as a barrier to PEB.[182] It's also worth acknowledging that systems of power influence the amount of time available to people; for instance, Lawton et al. found female respondents were especially likely to report a lack of time due to the expectation to perform unpaid domestic labor.[183] Linder et al. found that the time minoritized students have to take to advocate for themselves and their communities reduced their capacity to take advantage of educational and career opportunities, and sometimes resulted in decreased academic performance.[184] The amount of time it takes to achieve concrete progress has also been cited as a barrier, with Conner et al. finding "the slow progress of change" to be a primary cause of burnout among activists in their study.[185]

A related cost of environmental action is money. Das and Ramalingam found that the relationship between perceived EK and "ecologically conscious consumer behavior" is moderated by price fairness, indicating that perceived costs of PEB influence the likelihood of engaging in PEB.[186] Carducci et al. similarly found that cost was the biggest barrier to choosing less environmentally destructive products for participants in their survey.[187] Most of the literature surrounding financial barriers to PEB relates to green consumerism, despite the obvious

intersection of time and money scarcity that comes from having a lower economic class and therefore needing to spend time working to pay for living expenses and having little time to dedicate to activism and other PEBs. Despite some existing literature on burnout and other social justice activism,[188] there also seems to be a lack of literature on time and energy constraints and burnout within radical environmental movements, indicating a potential need for research on this topic.

Social and Institutional Support, Backlash, and Norms

Social support, backlash, and norms are prominent situational factors that scholars such as Carducci et al. and Kaiser and Fuhrer consider to influence PEB, since a sympathetic social environment might incentivize PEB while a social environment opposed to PEB will discourage it.[189] Family can be a significant part of this social environment. Both Louise Chawla and Wendy Horwitz found having family members who valued environmental and social justice issues was a leading contributor to participants' environmental commitment,[190] and Evans et al. found children whose mothers were more educated and held more pro-environmental attitudes grew up to engage in more PEBs on average.[191] Social norms can also decrease the likelihood of engaging with environmental issues. For instance, one participant in Kari Marie Norgaard study also reported that while they would like to act more pro-environmentally, it would cause tension in their family life. Norgaard describes another example of this, explaining how the norm within the field of education to be optimistic interferes with educators' ability to represent environmental issues realistically to their students.[192] In addition, Linder et al. found that isolation from their communities and a lack of social support for their activism can cause student activists to experience mental health issues, including suicidal ideation, which may discourage students from engaging in this activism,[193] and Conner et al. found social backlash to be a significant cause of

burnout.[194] Raminder Kaur argues this hostile social environment is also sometimes more intentionally engineered by the forces that benefit from environmental destruction, suggesting that the state of India creates "a culture of vilification" of anti-nuclear and environmental activists as a means of suppression.[195]

Institutional backlash and lack of institutional support is another significant inhibitor of PEB. Carducci et a found that "lack of support from institutions was the most cited" barrier to PEB in their survey.[196] In addition, Weselink et al. found "perceived organizational support for the environment" and "leadership behavior" were associated with both PEB and PEBI of individual employees in the workplace, indicating that institutions have significant influence over the environmental behaviors of their employees.[197] There is also a particularly strong case for educational institutions to support student and staff activists. Nikolas Matteis provides an example of a lack of institutional support within education, arguing that legal sanctions for school absence and interactions with truancy officers or police who confront students about their "truancy" can "coerce children" out of participating in environmental protest during school hours.[198] Linder et al. illustrate the heavy toll activism takes on students' academic, social, and professional well-being and advocate for universities to protect and compensate student activists whose efforts improve these institutions.[199] Gardner et al. argue that because research and education don't automatically or immediately create impact, it's essential for environmental academics to engage in action and advocacy based on their research. They further argue that to make this possible, it's the responsibility of universities to defend academics' right to protest and alleviate fear of employment repercussions for advocacy.[200]

Physical Violence: Murder, Rape, and Surveillance by States, Corporations, and the Anti-Environmental Movement

Backlash for activism can involve physical violence, including murder, rape, and surveillance. Raminder Kaur's participant observation revealed that states and industries employ several strategies to sabotage the livelihood and social power of subaltern (extremely oppressed) people and environmental and anti-nuclear activists. One strategy Kaur highlights is "overt and punitive violence" including threats, imprisonment, and murder.[201] Kaur, in addition to Helvarg, Le Billon and Lujala, Menton and Le Billon, and Rowell, states these murders are sometimes carried out by government officials and police, but often by "middlemen" hired by corporations, governments, and ranchers.[202] Scholars also highlight surveillance as a form of suppression, with Yanwei Li identifying suppression of activism using state "security" forces as a response by the Chinese state to environmental conflict.[203] In addition to this state violence, Helvarig and Rowell also cover organized movements like the Sahara Club, which focused on eliminating "ecoterrorism" through collecting and distributing environmental activists' personal information alongside instructions for leaving threats, carrying out assaults, and mailing dangerous objects to the activists.[204]

Several scholars argue that environmental suppression impacts frontline and indigenous communities first and worst. One suppression strategy Kaur identifies is "a silent and encroaching death" somewhat inherent to the process of placing pollutive and exploitative industry in marginalized communities, which subjects residents of the area and industry workers "to a life of environmental uncertainty, exploitation, and health hazards."[205] In *Environmental Defenders: Deadly Struggles for Life and Territory,* Menton and Le Billon highlight first-line defenders, who are often indigenous people facing theft and degradation of their land at the

hands of corporations and governments while also facing violent suppression, including murder and rape, for any activism they participate in.[206] Le Billon and Lujla found violence against land defenders is most common in Asia and Latin America. They found between 2002 and 2018, upwards of 1734 "environmental and land defenders" were murdered, and that "income level, foreign direct investment, dependency on mineral extraction, regime type, frequency of protest movements, and size of Indigenous populations" were the national "determinants of killings." Indigenous people were most vulnerable, composing almost 1/3 of eco-defenders murdered.[207] This literature points to many environmental activists being situated between a rock and a hard place; they can accept the unlivable conditions corporations and government have placed them in, or they can resist these conditions and accept violent suppression.

Legal and Media Suppression and Eco-terrorist labeling

Scholars broadly define eco-terrorism as use of force to draw attention to environmental issues or sabotage environmentally destructive projects.[208] Ecoterrorist scholars make a clear distinction between ecoterrorism and environmental terrorism. Environmental terrorism is the use of violence against an environment or ecosystem to "terrorize or frighten people"[209] or to "deprive others of its use."[210] These acts are generally performed on a larger scale by militaries and governments, whereas eco-terrorist acts are typically done by individuals and small groups.[211] Douglas Long notes in *Ecoterrorism* that prominent ecoterrorist organizations such as the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, the Earth Liberation Front, and EarthFirst! maintain "strict guidelines against harming humans or animals," and destroy almost exclusively "machines and tools" that corporations and governments use to "destroy life."[212] Alpas, Berkowicz, and Ermakova similarly state in *Environmental Security and Ecoterrorism* that "eco-terrorists focus their energy on harming property and not people."[213]

Several activists and academics have argued the "ecoterrorist" label, which media, state legislatures, and enforcement agencies frequently employ against environmentalists, unjustly suppresses environmental justice activism, because it provides a justification for imprisoning activists and acts as a defamatory label that poisons public perception of activists.[214] In a similar vein, Le Billion and Lujala identify defamation as a suppressant of environmental activism.[215] Yanwei Li provides an example of this, suggesting the Chinese government sometimes ascribes defamatory labels to acts of protest as a strategy to suppress environmental activism.[216] The US government in particular has passed significant legislation criminalizing environmental and animal rights activism including the 2006 Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, which makes harming the profits of any industry based on animal products an act of "terrorism."[217] Despite the discouraging reality of governmental suppression, scholars have explored how activists work around these barriers, with Adam Simpson finding that suppression of environmental activism sometimes leads to an "activist diaspora" who advocates for change with less threat of governmental suppression.[218] These studies on backlash and support for activism are crucial to the present study, as environmental activists in this study frequently reported institutional and social support and backlash significantly impact their activism.

Conclusion

This literature review explored key debates and schools of thought within the environmental movement. These environmental frames and change-making strategies included intersectional and single issue, individual and systemic, and extreme and moderate change-making. Intersectional lenses emphasize the interconnectedness of environmental and social problems, whereas single-issue strategies emphasize the importance of focusing specifically on environmental issues. Individual change-making focuses on small-scale choices people can make

to improve their environmental impact, whereas systemic approaches frame institutions and systems as the root causes of environmental crises and argue that they must be targeted to fix environmental issues. Finally, extreme approaches argue that the scale of our interventions must address the scale of the crisis, and push for changes that are often unpopular, while moderate or palatable approaches used in consensus movements use widely supported strategies and solutions to enact change.

In addition to covering various streams of environmental thought and action, this section reviewed literature on the factors associated with pro-environmental behaviors (PEBs) broadly and environmental activism specifically. These factors included internal factors, such as environmental knowledge, values, motivation and intention, emotions, and various personality traits, practices, and experiences. External factors, including social norms and support, perceived consequences such as institutional support or backlash, physical violence such as murder and rape carried out by governments, corporations, and the people they hire, legal and media suppression of activism, time, energy, and money limitations, and opportunities for activism were also reviewed, as they significantly impact PEBs. This literature lays the groundwork for understanding the diverse approaches environmental activists take.

While existing research has addressed some aspects of environmental engagement, there is a need for literature on the factors influencing the likelihood of engaging in various types and frames of environmental activism. Additionally, there is a need for research examining how barriers to activism and needs for sustaining activism might vary across diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences. This kind of research is necessary to promote environmental activism, and particularly radical EJ activism, that is, environmental justice activism that addresses environmental issues "at the root"[219] and is systemic, intersectional, and extreme.[220]

This includes understanding the factors that influence the type of environmental ideologies and activist strategies people adopt, including more radical approaches that are often excluded in environmental psychology literature that tends to simplify environmental frames.

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

This section focuses on methods, methodology, limitations, and reflexivity used in this study. This study aims to gain insight into the following two research questions: the types of environmental actions and attitudes environmental activists report engaging in, and the types of factors and experiences they consider influential to those actions and attitudes. This information might help unearth some common experiences and approaches associated with engagement in radical EJ activism and provide frameworks for future research. Gaining insight into this topic is important because it might allow educators and activists to more effectively cultivate the experiences and approaches that promote radical EJ activism. Due to the varied backgrounds of participants in environmental movements and the small sample size of this study, I approached this research without a rigid hypothesis on what participants would report and remained aware that the responses of participants in this study cannot represent the perspective of the whole environmental movement.

Methods

To find detailed, in-depth information about experiences that have informed people's environmental actions and attitudes, I carried out eleven semi-structured interviews with people who identified themselves as socialists, communists, or anarchists who have engaged in environmental activism. Semi-structured interviews are characterized by utilization of an interview guide comprised of predetermined questions to be asked in the interview. Coverage of each question is necessary in semi structured interviews, but the flow is relatively free, allowing for the interviewer to adapt to the interviewee and uncover new themes.[221] Interviews are beneficial because they allow in-depth information and a "high recovery rate from the collected

respondents."[222] They also have an advantage over other research methods, such as archival research and literary analysis, in that the data available is determined by the participants, rather than made available by the systems of power that determine what is worth archiving or publishing. Interviews are often helpful when researching lived experiences and trying to uncover subjugated knowledge, and they pair well with a feminist lens that accounts for the impacts of power on research.[223]

I used purposive sampling to select participants and contacted potential participants and organizations with activist connections through email and direct message. I also made social media posts on my personal Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and LinkedIn pages, and on several environmental-oriented Reddit and Discord servers. Purposive sampling is a common method in qualitative research in which researchers choose the subjects most able to provide in-depth information of value for the study's focus.[224] The time-consuming nature of interviews makes purposive sampling especially useful, as it prevents researchers from spending excessive time interviewing participants who aren't particularly useful to the study. I had initially carried out sixteen semi-structured interviews with people who identified themselves as having engaged in environmental activism; however, I realized after conducting the interviews that there was variation in results between participants who identified as progressives, liberals, or democrats, and participants who identified as being socialist, communist, or anarchist. Due to the scope of this project, I limited my dataset and only included data from the eleven participants who identified as socialist, communist, or anarchist, which allowed me to better focus on radical EJ activism.

I grouped the interview questions into the following four objectives:

1. Understanding their work: What kind of environmental work have they done?

2. Formative environmental experiences: What turning points, emotions, and experiences impacted their approach toward environmental issues?

3. Barriers to environmental action: What issues have hindered their environmental activism?

4. Their environmental approach: What characteristics does their activism have (Intersectional vs single-issue, extreme vs moderate, and individual vs systemic)?

These questions are central to the focus of this study because they allow participants to address the factors that have influenced their environmental action. To find themes and commonalities between the interviews, I used a "middle-order approach" combining deductive and inductive coding. [225] I developed codes ahead of time based on intersectional environmental theory while remaining open to discovering new codes and themes throughout the data analysis process. After transcribing interviews, I asked all participants for their preferred pseudonym. Prakrit, Silas, JD, Cliff, and Beyoncé were the only participants who provided one, while the rest suggested that I choose one for them. For this reason, I asked ChatGPT to randomly assign names to the remaining participants. It happened to choose nature-related names, which was unexpected. I then performed thematic analysis to find themes between codes and across interviews. I noticed how frequently each code and theme emerged to determine which are most relevant, and then summarized my findings. In refining quotes, I sometimes removed common filler words and phrases such as "like," "um," "so," "I think," and "you know?" and occasionally made similar minor adjustments for clarity (such as removing any repetition of words that didn't seem intentional) when making these adjustments didn't significantly change the meaning of the

quotes. I also adjusted some of the quotes to remove information that might be used to find participants' identities, while retaining the original meaning of each quote.

There were some instances in which participants shared information with me "off the record." This information typically related to their engagement in or association with somewhat more radical action, or involved intra-movement discourses that they felt were not beneficial to share outside of the movement. In these cases, I omitted that information from my analysis completely. While this caused slightly less radical and exciting results, honoring participants wishes about the conditions under which they feel comfortable disclosing sensitive information is necessary for ensuring this research doesn't harm the communities it studies. To support this goal of non-harm, I provided a copy of the results to participants to ensure they were content with the way they were represented.

Methodology

I center an intersectional antihierarchical lens, which encompasses anticolonial/anti-imperial, antiracist, anti-capitalist, disability justice, transfeminist,[226] and animal rights politics throughout this thesis. I choose this lens because hierarchical systems of nationalism,[227] speciesism,[228] cisheteropatriarchy,[229] ableism,[230] racism,[231] colonialism and imperialism,[232] casteism,[233] and classism [234] are intertwined root causes of our current environmental crisis, and the same groups marginalized by these systems are being doubly marginalized by environmental crises. In this section I will briefly explain the applications of this framework to environmental justice, however this topic is explained more fully in the literature review chapter under "intersectional vs single issue changemaking."

There is a robust pool of literature linking capitalism, racism, colonization and imperialism. Rosa Luxemburg refers to imperialism as "capitalism in the final stage of its historical career" and theorizes that as capitalism exhausts resources locally, it needs new areas to extract resources from and naturally takes up imperialism.[235] Four years later, Vladimir Lenin published "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism."[236] In the same vein, Samir Amin refers to anti-capitalist struggle as being necessarily "a struggle against imperialism."[237] Martin Luther King Junior similarly described "the evils of capitalism" as "as real as the evils of militarism and the evils of racism."[238] Flores and Greenwood state that "any effort to undue structural racism must seek a racial capitalism lens. A true anti-racist is distinctly anti-capitalist."[239] Even in literature that focuses on one of these systems of power, the other systems are consistently analyzed.

These frameworks of an interconnectedness between capitalism, colonization and imperialism, racism, and cisheteropatriarchy are particularly useful in explaining both root causes and impacts of environmental destruction.[240] Archbishop Desmond Tutu uses the phrases "adaptation apartheid" and "climate apartheid"[241] to describe the life and death impacts of unequal distribution of environmental hazards on marginalized communities. In relation to race specifically, activists and researchers use terms like environmental racism.[242] Some scholars, such as Ramachandra Guha, note that inequalities can also be perpetuated through conservation or environmental efforts that directly harm marginalized communities, such as tribal people being displaced from their homes in the name of conservation. Guha refers to deep ecology, which he connects with this concept, as "conservation imperialism,"[243] and Douglas Long notes similarly that deep ecology is frequently critiqued "for valuing animals above humans."[244] In the context of energy justice, Sovacool et al. posit that "feminist, Indigenous, anti-racist and

postcolonial approaches offer an important remedy to theories of justice with underlying colonial, liberalist, majoritarian, utilitarian, or masculinist assumptions."[245] These lenses are useful in my analysis in that they allow me to understand the causes and impacts of environmental crises, which provides valuable insight into activist responses to these crises.

Limitations

Interviews do have drawbacks, as they can be time-consuming and carry a high labor cost, researchers can have difficulty collecting a large sample, and the interviewer's skill and experience can highly impact the validity of the results, especially if there are multiple interviewers.[246] In contrast to archival research or literary analysis, through which the sources themselves are not impacted by the process of study,[247] interview data might be skewed depending on the way it is conducted. Social desirability bias may skew participants' answers.[248]

Because I am completing this thesis as part of a Gender & Women's Studies program, it's worth addressing ecofeminism, which I perceive to be an incomplete lens to analyze environmental violence. Despite the absence of anticolonial, anti-capitalist, antiracist, and trans liberation analysis throughout much of ecofeminist theory, Masatsugu Maruyama shows in *Deconstructive Ecofeminism*[249] and Lois Ann Lorentzen argues in *Indigenous Feet* [250] that effective ecofeminist approaches must account for context and culture beyond solitary gender analysis. Ynestra King argues that the nature/culture and woman/man dualisms are socially constructed and should be socially reconstructed,[251] and Susan Griffin argues that the social construction of "women" and of "nature" must be understood together.[252] Brinda Rao critiques ideas of a woman-nature connection that paints women (and particularly indigenous women) as both victims and activists, promoting "an essentialist construction of women and" indigenous

people.[253] Due to my educational background in gender studies, this thesis uses feminist sources more heavily than others. However, I attempt to avoid the limitations of ecofeminism through employing an anti-essentialist and anticolonial environmentalism.

This study's anti-essentialist and anticolonial approach aligns with the experiences of participants in this study, who did not report identification with essentialist or traditional womanhood as influencing their activism. When participants did refer to gender and sexual identity, it was more commonly related to their LGBTQ+ identities than to ideas of womanhood. Overall, issues of colonization, militarism, and control of land seemed far more relevant for most participants in comparison to gender and sexuality. For instance, ten of the eleven participants brought up the genocide of Palestinians as a primary concern of theirs. This genocide certainly impacts women, but occurs primarily on racial, ethnic, and economic grounds and is executed using military forces that dispossess people of the lands they have cared for and relied on for generations. This tactic of forced alienation from land is a common characteristic of colonial genocide (for instance, in the U.S. governments genocide of Indigenous Americans). This shift in focus might indicate that many radical environmentalists have departed from ecofeminism and adopted a more relevant and applicable decolonial environmentalism.

Reflexivity

Feminist standpoint theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins,[254] Donna Haraway,[255] and Sandra Harding[256] emphasize the importance of positionality and experience in knowledge production and critique positivist research. Transnational and postcolonial feminist theorists such as Chandra Mohanty[257] and Gayatri Spivak[258] have critiqued how the white feminist gaze can perpetuate colonial dynamics and fail to accurately depict experiences of subaltern women. As

the impacts of environmental crises disproportionately impact marginalized groups who are rarely centered in environmental decision-making, it's essential to ensure that marginalized groups are not spoken over or misrepresented in this research. It's also important that I continue to conduct research and engage in environmental justice activism in solidarity with frontline communities. This means I need to confront how my standpoint influences the biases I approach this research with and ensure that I am not positioning myself as a definitive authority, but rather as a person making observations from a specific identity within a specific cultural context.

I'm pulling heavily in this research from my experiences with environmental justice activism, which is situated within a white, relatively feminine, and mostly able-bodied standpoint. White femininity provides a fragile image that has protected me from policing and allowed me to be inflammatory in my actions and statements in a way that people of color can rarely safely do. While this can be leveraged for activist purposes (as has been done by the raging grannies, for instance), it also carries a potential for harm within activist organizations (as was also the case for the raging grannies[259]) and when constructing knowledge. This positionality has shaped my experience with activism, and it's not possible for me to separate myself from that bias. This might impact interviews, as it would be perfectly reasonable for activists of color to be distrustful of me, given the role white people have played within environmental movements throughout history. My environmental work, however, might provide me some insider status, making interview participants somewhat more trustful. I hope that through strong objectivity and reflexivity[260] practices, I can stay mindful of my bias to avoid misrepresenting or causing harm to the communities I'm studying. These practices include continuous self-reflection throughout the interview and analysis process, transparency about my background, and seeking input from mentors and peers.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

This chapter provides the results from my interviews with eleven participants who identified as communists, socialists, and/or anarchists who have participated in environmental justice activism. I will discuss recurring themes related to participants' political-environmental theory and praxis that emerged across interviews. Specifically, these themes relate to factors that prompted and sustained their political-environmental theory and activism, barriers to their theory and activism, and strategies and recommendations activists had for others who are interested in creating positive social and environmental change. At the end of this section, I have included additional observations and insights that didn't fit within the above theme categories. Along with each theme, I will provide direct quotes from the interviews as well as findings related to the theme from existing research.

Of eleven participants, five identified as socialist, four as both communist and socialist, one as only communist, and one as anarchist. Four participants identified as women, three as men, three as nonbinary/genderqueer, and one as both a man and nonbinary/genderqueer. Six participants identified as white, three as a race that wasn't listed, one as Asian, and one as Black. None of the participants identified as Middle Eastern or North African, Native American or Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Two participants identified as Hispanic or Latino (one of whom identified as white, and another identified as a race that wasn't listed) while nine identified as not Hispanic or Latino. The average age was 32.3 years, with the youngest participants being 20 and the oldest being 72. Four participants identified as Upper-Middle Class, three as low-income, two as Middle-Class, one as lower-middle class, and one as high income. Seven of the eleven participants were LGBTQ+. To break this up further, seven participants identified as cisgender, three as transgender, and one as an identity not listed. Four participants

identified as straight, three as bi/pan/multi-sexual, two as gay/lesbian, and two as a sexuality that wasn't listed. None of the participants identified as asexual. Most participants were not religiously affiliated. Three participants were atheist/agnostic, two were spiritual but not affiliated with a religion, and one reported no religious affiliation. There were, however, some religious participants. Two were Muslim, one was Buddhist, one was Jain, and one was Jewish. No participants were Hindu, although one mentioned growing up Hindu. Likewise, no participants were Christian, although several mentioned being raised Christian. Nine participants identified as not disabled, and two as disabled, however, three participants who identified as not disabled mentioned that their health conditions have made activism difficult. This indicates that while medical conditions impact their ability to engage in some of the actions they'd like to participate in, they might feel "not disabled enough" to identify as such on a survey.

Prompting and Sustaining Activism and Theory

Experiences with Nature, Its Destruction, and Its Protection

Nearly every participant listed experiences in nature as a primary contributor to their care for environmental issues. They also frequently included feelings of oneness with nature in these stories. When asked what sparked her interest in the environment, Fern, a 43-year old cishet low-income white woman who identified as a socialist, responded:

> The main thing that got me interested was growing up outside and being part of nature. And then wanting to protect it... and show that we were part of this, not separate from it. That was the main thing that turned me into an activist. Like, "Wow, this is beautiful, and I want it to stay safe."

Forest, a 21-year old cishet white socialist similarly stated that spending time in nature with other people was formative to his care for the environment.

I would spend a lot of time outside just with friends and family growing up. And I think that definitely got me interested in caring about the environment from early on.

Cliff, a 20-year-old multisexual white trans man who identified as a socialist and a communist, provided a similar answer, suggesting that spending time in nature helped him appreciate the environment. He noted that he didn't have as much time in nature as he would like, and listed structural barriers to spending time in nature, such as lack of natural spaces in cities with car-centric urban design and having caretakers who discourage spending time outside. Cliff expressed that learning about environmental destruction after he'd already developed an appreciation for nature evoked an emotional reaction, where he felt sad about the idea that people in the future wouldn't be able to experience this connection with nature. Once he was emotionally involved in the issue, becoming aware that there were activist efforts to protect the environment inspired him to take action as well. Cliff reported:

> I started to value environmentalism when I started valuing nature… Going out in nature and learning about things like deforestation and natural habitats being destroyed and thinking "Other people in the future might not be able to do this same thing that I really value" is really emotionally affecting and saddening, especially since going out in nature wasn't something that I did super often, but I really loved it… There are a lot of kids where the adults in their lives don't want them going outside, or they live in towns where there's not much natural space. It's just four-lane divided highways and fast-food places on either side… And then I saw people were trying to fix that… Getting that experience was really important to leading me into activism."

Sky, a 25-year-old non-binary/genderqueer Black trans anarchist, similarly felt that witnessing the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprisings prompted a period of confronting their previous beliefs about systems of power such as policing. Sky noted:

> The 2020 uprisings were very critical because I think it forced me to also reconcile with what I had long held inside internally and perhaps what I didn't say, but also really forced me to do a lot of hard unlearning.

The participants indicated that spending time interacting with nature created a connection with nature. This connection with nature (or in Sky's case, with other people) meant that when they later encountered its destruction (as will be discussed later), they were upset. Participants also noted that their anti-capitalist and anti-hierarchical radicalization came about through seeing that when the environment was destroyed, corporations and governments were typically behind the destruction. Seeing activists combat this destruction showed the participants that they, too, could take action, and inspired them to learn more about the issues and get involved in activism themselves.

Activists also reported that they became involved in activism when they found *environmental issues in their backyard.* Beyoncé, a 72-year-old cishet woman, expressed that she began her anti-CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation) activism when a neighbor alerted her that plans were in place for a CAFO to be built. She was initially relatively unconcerned, assuming that it was somewhat distant, but once she realized the CAFO would be built a mile from her house, she "went into high gear."

> He [Beyoncé's neighbor] called one afternoon and said, "How do you feel about a CAFO coming in south of you?" And I'm thinking down by [name of city], and he said, "No, it's a mile from you." And I'm thinking, "Oh, my." I wrote a flyer, and I was out canvassing the neighborhood by 5:30, trying to get people to know about this. This was on a Monday. We had 25 people at our house on Friday, and we started an organization… I've always thought, "Oh, the environment, that's really terrible." But the environment is not "out there." I'm part of the environment. When I breathe, I'm part of the environment.

In a similar vein, JD, a white nonbinary socialist, stressed the temporal and geographic immediacy of environmental crises. They argued that to justify inaction:

> We sustain the illusion that "it's coming," and it's not. It's here. We're in it. We are it. Now, I don't go into the classroom and go "our time is limited, so rise up!" That would be insane, because again, what I'm advocating is learning how to live with this knowledge. And it's a terrible knowledge.

Ocean (a 24-year-old white Hispanic/Latino communist/socialist) similarly expressed that

witnessing environmental destruction by nearby corporations contributed to their radical

intersectional environmental orientation. As a firsthand observer of local human-made

environmental crises, Ocean noticed they were causing suffering along intersectional (class,

racial, and gendered) lines. In addition to witnessing its destruction, spending time in nature

cultivated their connection to nature. Ocean explained:

> Growing up, we spent a lot of time in the woods, and we'd spend the whole summer at
> the beach… The ocean is just very crucial to me. I've always felt most at home and most
> free in nature. What it brings and provides and how we're a part of it has always felt very
> clear. And then seeing that compared to the very clear degradation and exploitation of it
> and how that affects everyday people and people who are victims of the oil and gas
> industry. ..
>
> I grew up in the Gulf South, where it's impossible to ignore the impact of the oil and gas
> and chemical industries. The coast is a beautiful, amazing part of the country that has
> been absolutely taken over by the fossil fuel industry. And it's suffering deeply from
> climate change. It's a really poignant example of how class, race, gender, and
> environmental issues all come together in one place. And then growing up and
> experiencing hurricane Katrina firsthand and experiencing hurricanes every year was a
> big part of it.

Brooke similarly emphasized the importance of recognizing environmental issues locally while

making connections between these local issues and broader global environmental issues. Brooke

invokes feelings of collectivity and connection, and suggests a moral obligation to care for other

people within this collective.

> There are so many things that are really important and have to do with literally where I
> live, the neighborhood that I'm in, and what's happening here. And it's important to see
> how all those movements that seem very local are connected to something bigger, like
> stopping the Dakota pipeline. Worrying about water safety in Flint, Michigan. All those
> things are connected to this larger idea of like we are a collective, and we need to care for
> one another.

For participants in this study, direct experiences in nature cultivated feelings of connection and

oneness with nature, and direct experiences with environmental destruction both prompted action

to protect the environment and created more radical anti-capitalist, anti-racist, feminist environmental frameworks. Existing literature has consistently validated this finding that direct experiences with nature and with environmental destruction may encourage action to protect nature and combat environmental destruction.[261] Participants reported that their radical frameworks arose when they noticed that corporations and industries tended to be causing the local environmental crises that impacted them and the people close to them. In addition, for Cliff, seeing that others were combatting environmental destruction inspired his activism. For Beyoncé, a neighbor's direct invitation to take action around a local instance of environmental destruction inspired her activism (I analyze this social aspect in-depth under "Social Support"). This implies environmental activism might effectively be cultivated by providing people with experiences in nature, bringing them to locations where nature is being destroyed (this destruction will likely be a direct result of capitalism, colonization, and/or imperialism, due to the nature of environmental problems), making the connection between environmental issues and the aforementioned systems of power explicit, and providing examples of concrete activist actions they can take to address these issues.

Moral Emotions: Anger, Guilt, Shame, Responsibility, Moral Obligation vs Delegation, and Complacency

Participants in this study frequently reported feeling emotions related to morality, including anger, guilt, shame, responsibility, and moral obligation. Prakrit, a 22-year old cishet Asian man, shared a story in which he *directly ascribed guilt to himself after causing harm* to an animal. This guilt was the primary motivator for his future actions. Prakrit grew up in a city with many street dogs, and when he ran over a puppy with his bike as a child, he started feeding the

puppy to make amends. Soon, other dogs in the area started coming to him for food as well. Prakrit recounted:

> One day in maybe fourth grade, I ran over a puppy with my bike, and he cried. I felt really bad that day. I felt guilty, and then I started feeding that puppy. When I started feeding him, the other dogs near my house also came in, and from that day, I fed them. I felt so bad. I was like, "Oh, why did I do that?" I did it because I thought puppies and dogs were just toys. I was not treating them as living creatures. I was being stupid, but I really did that, so I tried doing something good because I did something wrong. And the more I saw the dogs, the more I saw how skinny they were. So I had to help.

This realization – that his past disregard for street dogs had caused harm – prompted feelings of guilt. This motivated Prakrit to continue taking care of many more dogs, as he felt responsible for their well-being. Prakrit's story aligns with several studies outlined in the literature review section on moral emotions which reported that shame and guilt can effectively motivate PEB. [262] [OBJ] In Prakrit's case, the sense of responsibility for the initial harm ("I really did that") may have led to a larger feeling of responsibility for the dogs in his city ("I saw how skinny they were, so I had to help") despite not having caused the larger issue of a lack of infrastructure to support the many unhoused dogs in his city.

While Prakrit's story aligns with much of the literature on guilt and PEB, it seems to contradict one study by Bissing-Olson et al. who found that guilt was not associated with higher PEB.[263] Bissing-Olson et al.'s results may be due to a concept called "delegation." Kollmuss and Agyeman frame "delegation" (such as through ascribing responsibility to others) as "a means to remove feelings of guilt" that tends to decrease likelihood of engaging in PEBs – especially those involving personal sacrifice.[264] Through delegation of responsibility, people can override feelings of guilt and justify inaction. Supporting this theory, Antonetti and Maklan found higher pride and guilt was associated with higher feelings of personal responsibility for environmental outcomes, which led to more PEB,[265] and the Model of Responsible Environmental Behavior

(REB) similarly suggests a sense of responsibility is a prevalent factor involved in PEB engagement.[266]

Several activists in this study *delegated guilt to systems of power and exempted themselves from guilt.* These activists recommended that people try not to feel guilty about not doing enough, precisely because these issues are so much larger than us and it's legitimately not possible for us to fix these issues alone. Brooke critiqued how focusing excessively on making perfect *individual consumption choices* can yield a level of shame and guilt disproportionate to the real impact these choices have, and that it would be better to focus your energy on changing systems. As Brooke said:

> It can't be just "did I make the right choice today," and then experiencing shame around that… I feel like there's a lot of misdirected shame and guilt around consumption. If that energy was directed at addressing these bigger issues, maybe more would get done.

On the other hand, Cliff suggested that excessive attachment to *huge systemic change* can make it easy to feel discouraged about not doing enough. He argues that change is created through the actions of many people over time and recommends trying not to hold yourself to an unrealistic standard of creating a huge revolution on your own. According to Cliff:

> I see people talking about things like revolution, and it's like "if it isn't this great big visible change, it's not worth doing," but that's not true. Progress is made up of a whole bunch of tiny steps. You shouldn't feel discouraged because you're not doing enough. There's realistically probably more that you can do, but you shouldn't feel guilty about not doing enough because doing anything helps.

Cliff and Brooke's arguments seemed to frame guilt and shame as ideally avoided because they're exhausting. While these arguments could be used to justify inaction (e.g. "corporations are the real cause of climate change, so it's fine for me to stop recycling," or "the movement is bigger than me, so it's fine for me to skip this protest"), participants seemed to use these

arguments as strategies to avoid the burnout that might come with taking on too much personal responsibility for issues you legitimately have little control over.

Along these lines, some activists reported that feelings of obligation and the action they prompted were uncomfortable. For instance, a 20-year old cis lesbian named Iris found this discomfort was severe enough that it led to her disengagement from activism. She described social dynamics within environmental organizations that made her feel pressured to perform a certain type of environmental activism. While she didn't refer to her feelings about this as "shame" or "guilt" specifically, she did reference feeling like she "had to" engage in a certain type of activism to fit in. This social pressure (and the potential shame that might arise if she failed to be the perfect activist) was ultimately too much and contributed to her decision to stop engaging in environmental activism. Some activists similarly found that feelings of obligation were uncomfortable but were able to work through this discomfort. Sky, for instance, reported feeling obligated to make sure their mother was educated about social justice issues. This motivated difficult conversations with their mother, and while these conversations were uncomfortable, the discomfort wasn't strong enough for Sky to disengage. According to Sky:

> This was really, really uncomfortable for me and really, really hard for me because *I had to* keep having these conversations with my mom about the things that I'm learning and really fight her on certain things so that she could understand and maybe even bring attention to things that she's considered normal for so long.

Other activists similarly *ascribed guilt to systems of power without discouraging personal guilt/responsibility*. This seemed to sustain their activism. For Silas (a 26-year-old Jewish Hispanic/Latino Communist/Socialist) this didn't lead to a disengagement in PEB, but instead, it led to an adjustment in expectations for the outcome of their actions. Silas reflects on this idea in more detail later. Beyoncé similarly expresses "They will keep building [CAFOs]…

so we just have to shame them." Both participants acknowledge that the issue is going to continue. Neither discourage feelings of guilt and shame, but they don't express any enormous personal guilt or shame for the issues, since they didn't cause the issues. This indicates that it's possible to ascribe responsibility to corporations, take the steps within our control to make as much progress as we can, and release as much attachment as we can to the outcome of our actions to preserve our mental health and avoid burnout.

Forest invoked a different kind of guilt, in which he directly and angrily *ascribed guilt/responsibility to systems of power and oppression.* In addition, he expressed a *personal feeling of obligation to combat this oppression.* While Forest hadn't caused the harm himself, he felt that knowing about the harm obligated him to address it.

> If you're paying attention, you have to start caring about these issues because with the genocide in Palestine, if we let 26,000 people[1] just die without batting an eye, then we're fucked. We're totally fucked as humans. This drive to do something different has become just more and more of a drive for me over time. And yeah, I think a lot of it is just becoming older and more radicalized to how the world really works, and it's not any kind of world that I wanna live in. So I wanna do what I can to change it.

For Forest, this sense of responsibility to do something to address injustice is a significant motivating factor, even if paying taxes to the US government is the only harm he's caused Palestinians directly. The activating personal responsibility/obligation/guilt here is not tied to any feelings of direct personal responsibility to make amends for the harm you've caused. Rather, Forest reports a strong indirect feeling that when you are watching a government murder thousands of people, you'd be a monster not to do anything. It's worth exploring whether the "complacency is complicity" lens Forest is hinting at, which frames inaction as bad action, might be effective at increasing feelings of responsibility for those who haven't caused tangible harm.

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[1] The incomplete count of Palestinians murdered since October 7th has now reached over 32,000.

Other activists have hinted at this moral responsibility as well. For instance, Ocean explained "We *have* to protect one another," and Brooke similarly stated "We *need* to care for one another," but other participants tended not to directly report such strong feelings of personal obligation for an issue they didn't create.

Every participant in this study ascribed guilt to systems of power such as corporations and governments for environmental destruction at some point in their interview, and this ascription of guilt to systems of power was not particularly de-activating for any of the participants. If anything, it seemed to trigger an activating anger which fueled participants' activism. Participants varied in terms of whether they brought up feelings of personal obligation or moral responsibility, although those who did framed it as motivating. This brings to mind Kleres and Wettergren's study which found that activists from the Global North "largely rejected" guilt, blame, and shame in their environmental frameworks, while activists from the Global South embraced guilt as a motivator. In Kleres and Wettergren's study, ascribing guilt to others was an activating factor when used to generate anger.[267]

Kleres and Wettergren also found that while Northern activists were largely "ambivalent" about anger as a motivator, anger was a prevalent motivator for activists from the Global South.[268] In the present thesis study, the activists' relationships to anger didn't have strong demographic correlates, but this might be due to the small sample size. Silas, Cliff, and Beyoncé embraced anger as the first emotion present in their relationship to environmental issues and activism. The other activists, however, tended to avoid discussing anger. This might have to do with the public perception of anger as scary, radical, violent, and ideally suppressed. Since activists in this study identified as radical, it's possible that some of the activists were more willing to transcend social stigma and express anger as a necessary and valuable emotion. In

explaining the way they perceive their anger, Silas, for instance, described a righteous anger a la

feminist theorist and activist Audre Lorde:

> I definitely feel anger. Hopefully in an Audre Lorde way, like this is the situation, it's
> frustrating, and I use that anger as fuel to fight it.

Cliff reported similar anger over responses (and lack thereof) to environmental issues:

> There is some anger with the disregard for climate change, especially in America where
> it's treated as a political issue.

Beyoncé referenced anger as the first emotion she felt related to the environment but later

expressed some critique of anger. Sky mentioned feeling emotions of sadness, hopelessness, and

anger around watching people in power ignore environmental issues, but explained that having

an "environmental justice perspective" helps them cope with these feelings. Sky explained:

> There were lots of big emotions, like, I'm seeing all of these bad things happening but it
> seems like the people that are supposed to be dealing with it aren't, so that makes me sad
> or angry or feel a little hopeless at times, but also not. And I think that's also why having
> an environmental justice perspective is really helpful because then you have this historic
> reference to pull from of people of color who have also been in the same situations, time
> and time again who continue to fight and find some sort of a fire within themselves to
> continue going and then you have that support system.

Sky also mentioned that witnessing their brother's anger around being racially profiled was a

turning point for them in gaining an understanding of racial and social justice issues in the U.S.,

recounting:

> And then seeing my brother who would wear black hoodies, to then see other youth
> getting shot that looked like him and also seeing his frustration and his anger at that time,
> it was very much a bigger awakening in terms of social justice in a very short amount of
> time.

Anger and guilt were both mentioned much less frequently than I had anticipated, but did

play a central role in motivating some participants. It's possible that participants felt

uncomfortable discussing those feelings due to their social stigma. Feelings of moral obligation

or responsibility were frequently expressed, which I see as somewhat underrepresented in the literature on PEB. In addition, Forest's feelings of indirect guilt/responsibility (complacency is complicity) were particularly strong and compelling. This might indicate a need for more research on the role of feelings of duty, obligation, and responsibility in prompting environmental activism. In addition to demonstrating ascription of guilt to corporations and governments, participants also expressed distrust in the idea that corporations and governments would do anything to protect the environment, causing them to adopt personal responsibility for fixing these issues. Cassegård highlights ethical reasoning and moral obligation (feeling the need to "do the right thing" regardless of whether it will lead to the desired outcome) as underlying motivators to action, particularly for those who aren't particularly hopeful that their action will create the desired outcome.[269] The next section will explore this activating distrust and hopelessness.

Anticipatory Emotions: Hope, Trust, Fear, and Expectations

Understanding the role of hope and trust for participants in this study requires viewing hope and trust as multifaceted political attitudes relating to specific political structures (e.g. "most of us have high trust for some things and low trust for others, and these levels of trust are deeply political"), rather than as a black and white personality trait (e.g. "there are hopeful/trustful people and hopeless/distrustful people"). Most participants reported high distrust in the idea that existing political-economic structures (like corporations and government) would combat environmental crises on their own, instead framing corporations and governments as being in (sometimes violent) opposition to environmental justice. Forest, a 21-year-old cishet white male socialist identified "trust in the political system" and in electoral politics as an "important divide" within environmental movements.

Based on the participants in this study, distrust didn't necessarily lead to a hopeless

disengagement. Instead, it led to vigilance. Sky reported:

> *We're obviously living with this government that says they care about us. But through their actions, they don't.* Reflecting on why we don't see a lot of like, revolutionary people of color in leadership anymore, it's because they might have been killed, or *murdered* rather, or exiled — things like that. I'm feeling all those feelings about that, but then also feeling hope through being able to show this to students in an education setting.

Sky considered the government to be the enemy and generated hope through engaging their

community in the idea that we cannot trust the government to protect, or even refrain from

murdering oppressed communities. They seemed to find hope in the idea that cultivating a

distrustful awareness will spark a community urge to take issues into their own hands. Ocean

also expressed distrust in the government and corporations, and (in separate quotes which I

analyze later) framed activist experiences and college education as contributing to this

understanding. Ocean stated:

> When I was younger, I had more trust in the US government. I thought corporations were bad but the government's on our side. My distrust in the government built throughout my life.

Beyoncé similarly denounced any hope that the government or corporations would stop

destroying the environment on their own, explaining:

> I do feel hopeless that these are huge corporations and there's nothing we can do to fight… *We have no fingers crossed.* They will keep building. Because they see us as if it's all this open land, so we just have to shame them… *I won't see this fight done in my lifetime, but I can move it along a little bit* the way those folks moved it along a little bit…

Beyoncé framed this lack of trust in corporations and her government to fix environmental issues

as an alert that her activism is needed. Several activists, including Beyoncé, emphasized that

while they can't save the environment, they do hope to create some improvement. Silas similarly

stated:

> My friend's boss told them, and she's been in the movement for a really long time. She sees herself as *a speed bump* on the corporation's way to do whatever they want to do that is going to hurt people. Activists are *like thorns in the side of Godzilla. I'm happy to be a thorn, but it is tiring…* Especially when I was younger, and I think a lot of people get into any kind of activism and are like, 'Yeah, I'm going to change the world and we're going to fix this. It's going to be awesome,' then, getting to a point of being like, 'Okay, so there's not going to be like a big dramatic win necessarily. But if we can make that CEO's hair a little bit grayer by the end of this, then I'll take it, you know.'

While Silas originally felt hopeful that they could change the world, discovering how difficult it

is to create change given the severe power imbalance between activists and decision-makers

caused them to adjust their expectations so they could continue engaging in activism. Cliff

reinforced this idea that while immediate change created by one person wasn't realistic, he could

find hope in the idea that he was one of many people working for progress.

> *The reason that I continue to try and help is hope that like… more and more people will start to join in* and even if you don't see this dramatic change right away, that's not usually how progress happens. So I think staying hopeful really helps.

Here, Cliff has hope that the cumulative efforts of many people can create change and frames

this type of hope as a primary motivator for their activism.

Some activists emphasized the value of hope as a tool to motivate action, even when it

isn't an intuitive response to the material state of the world. Ocean stressed the importance of

finding a balance between understanding the urgency of environmental crises and avoiding the

kind of "climate doomerism" that prevents people from even trying to act. Ocean explained:

> I don't think broadly, a kind of immediacy has hit with most people of like, we really need to do this. But I find that a lot of times I talk to people, they're worried about climate change and all these things going on, but *they're kind of just like "We're fucked,"*

and like, no, dude. Like that can't be it because then we will be fucked… I hope things can be better."

Here, Ocean isn't claiming to believe we aren't fucked. Rather, they must believe there's hope to create the possibility of hope. The future is both hopeful and dire, but action is the only thing that will make it more hopeful. Silas similarly framed hope as a necessary practice, regardless of how realistic a safe future is.

> This prison abolitionist Mariame Kaba, she says *hope is a discipline,* and I try to live by that. That even when I'm feeling discouraged or hearing about another big loss or something, I still have to hope. Even if it takes effort, we have to hope anyway. I really just pray that…we can't be collectively that dumb that we're going to let these literally made up entities (corporations and governments) kill all of us.

Kaba's hope goes beyond the passive notion of "thoughts and prayers" or simply trusting that everything will work out in the end. Hayes and Kaba talk about an activating "fire of hope," and make the compelling argument that even when hope is difficult to attain, "we know that hope is essential to social change because in order to make change, someone must first imagine that it can be so."[270]

Another activist, JD, reported conflicting perspectives on hope, mentioning a kind of idealized perspective on hope, moving to frame hope as enabling passivity, but (similarly to Ocean and Silas), asserting that they don't advocate for an acceptance of the idea that the fight is over. Still, the feelings of hopelessness linger.

> It's ironic, because my mother used to say where there's life, there's hope. And I think for her generation, you know, that actually meant that that better times could come, and I'm finding the issue of hope…I don't want to call it disingenuous, but I think those that talk about hope are being disingenuous because just sitting around hoping for one thing and *inspiring hope in people to me is, is just…it's justifying passivity*…but I don't go into a classroom and go our time is limited, you know...that would be insane… You can get to the point of thinking "why bother living, other than the fact that I'm alive and I value life." It's complicated.

Most of the activists in this study had little trust that environmental justice would be reached in their lifetimes. They pushed back especially against the idea that governments or technocapitalists would fix environmental crises. This contrasts with the environmental volunteers in Maria Ojala's study, for whom trust in technology and politicians was a prevalent coping strategy to diffuse fear and activate hope.[271] This finding is in line, however, with Grob's finding that "belief in science and technology" as solutions to environmental issues was slightly negatively correlated with PEB.[272] Activists framed their lack of trust in the political system and in capitalism as a factor motivating their activism. They also framed hope in several different ways: as generated through action, as easier to attain when paired with an awareness that large-scale change happens through the efforts of many activists over time, as a necessary practice to motivate action, and as a reprehensible method to justify passivity. Participants did report some kind of hope, but it wasn't the kind of hope typically used to paint a sunny picture of activism. It was conflicted. It was accompanied by despair and rage, and it was in relation to the idea that their actions might bring about change, *not* that everything would turn out fine in the end, or that the people in power or systems of power would have any role in creating this change. If we are to encourage radical environmental justice activism, this is the type of hope we must cultivate.

Activists were somewhat split on their feelings around fear, both as influencing them personally, and as a mobilization tactic. Fern expressed some critique of fear rhetoric, suggesting:

> I think the powers that be make things sound big and scary so we don't take action, and so we don't feel like we could ever make a difference. I think that sense of despair is the biggest thing that keeps people from engaging.

Here, Fern frames fear as inhibiting action, and discourages rhetoric that frames environmental crises as overly scary. In a similar vein, Kleres and Wettergren found "the danger-alerting

capacity of fear is embraced internally but rejected as an effective emotion in mobilization" for

activists in their study.[273] In contrast to Fern's perspective, many activists in this study reported

stigma around fear tactics, indicating that perhaps fear is an effective, but suppressed motivator

of environmental activism. Sky, for example, expressed they'd experienced pressure to avoid

using "scary" words and ideas when teaching about environmental justice because these ideas

might contribute to climate anxiety. They suggested their empowerment-focused programming

might have given students the skills needed to manage climate anxiety, and they also pointed out

the contrast between being concerned for the climate anxiety of people in the global north while

people in the global south watch their homes burn.

> When one of our presenters putting together a presentation, someone was like, "don't include the two scary slides because you don't wanna make it sound too scary for the teachers." And I was thinking, yes, we don't want to trigger anybody. I do understand that. But I also feel like, especially here, "climate anxiety" has become a really big thing. A lot of people have asked us "do students feel climate anxiety?" And I've never seen a student in distress, or at least one has ever let me know of anything… I feel like a lot of climate anxiety can be avoided through the empowerment piece. And this concern is all happening while in the Global South, it's like, ok, but their actual house is burning. And our house is burning too, but it's a slow burn.

While the activists above critique rhetoric of climate anxiety, other activists expressed

personal feelings of fear. Beyoncé expressed fear about health risks of CAFOs near her house as

a motivating factor for her activism. This is in line with Séguin et al.'s finding that high

perception of environmental health risks is the factor "most closely linked to environmental

activism."[274] Forest also framed fear as motivating, explaining that:

> The environment was always important to me, and I knew climate change was a big, scary, looming issue. College is a big eye-opening, radicalizing experience for some people because they learn just how shitty everything is.

Iris similarly described climate change as "looming," however, Forest, and Beyoncé were the

only activists who used any form of the words "fear" or "scared" to describe their feelings about

the environment. When I searched through transcripts for the various forms of these words, I found they were used primarily when referring to fear of the police, fear of being labeled as too radical, and fear of their university "cracking down on" them for their activism. The "Institutional Backlash and Cooptation," "Extreme and Palatable Activism," and "Lack of Social Support" sections of the analysis discuss this fear further.

Participants' conflicting feelings about whether and how change is made might support Huebner and Lipsey's model of a "situation-specific, multidimensional locus of control."[275] This model suggests that people attribute outcomes internally, to "powerful others," and/or to chance. This recognition of different types of external loci of control (attributing outcomes to powerful others versus to chance) is useful in analyzing the perspectives of activists in this thesis study. Activists in the present study seemed to have a largely external locus of control but didn't attribute environmental outcomes to random chance. Instead, like activists in Huebner and Lipsey's study, they attributed outcomes largely to systems of power while trying to hold onto hope that their personal actions might contribute to a larger social movement. Huebner and Lipsey's model also suggests these attributions fluctuate based on the situations people are in. They found that for activists, their locus of control shifted further toward the "powerful others" dimension "after a disappointing political defeat." This seems to align with participants in the present study, who reported feelings of disempowerment after systems of power defeated their efforts. While this disempowerment could be demobilizing, it also seemed to evoke an activating feeling of anger or radicalization for activists in this thesis study as they begin to realize that systems of power and oppression have undue influence over environmental outcomes.

As I discussed in detail in the previous sections on moral and anticipatory emotions, activists in this study engaged in action without necessarily anticipating that their actions would

be successful or effective. For most activists, their reasons for engaging in activism seemed to be

rooted in the idea that it was the right thing to do. Some activists expressed hopefulness or belief

in their own ability to make things incrementally better, but they all seemed to determine that the

state of the world is largely determined by systems of power bigger than themselves. In contrast,

the Model of Responsible Environmental Behavior and Carducci et al.'s survey of Italian

University Students both stress the importance of an internal locus of control (i.e. belief in your

own ability to make change) in promoting PEB engagement.[276] It's important to note that

participants did tend to advocate for engaging in actions that they viewed as being more effective

at creating the desired change in comparison to other actions. This indicates that effectiveness of

actions might influence which actions they choose to take, but not so much whether they choose

to act.

Personality and Practices: Openness, Creativity, Empathy, Independence, Motivation, Intention, and Locus of Control

Literature frequently frames traits such as self-direction, creativity, curiosity, openness,

and independence as contributing to pro-environmental behaviors and activism.[277] Ocean

mentioned that their rebellious/contrarian nature helped them reach certain anti-capitalist

perspectives.

> Where I went to school, a lot of people were like, "I wanna work in oil and gas." And I
> think I'm just kind of inherently a bit of a contrarian, so I was like, fuck y'all. I think that
> pronounced it a little bit more.

Similarly, Zibenberg et al. found independence and self-direction to be associated with PEBI and

activism.[278] Despite this, activists (including Ocean) repeatedly pushed back against the idea of

independence, arguing consistently for living in community with others and creating structures

of support for everyone to benefit. This will be discussed in more detail under "Social Support."

Ocean suggests "I don't really think there's truly any such thing as an individual," and explains 'building community is the most important avenue toward making the changes that need to be made." Sky, in contrast, expressed some critique of the idea of community, suggesting it's become so frequently used in social justice-related spaces that it seems to have lost its meaning.

> I think community is an overused word. I was listening to this podcast, and Silvia Federici was saying, "I don't think we even know what community is anymore because community used to be tied to land and work and living in togetherness," And I think the groups that I've relied on that come through the most, we have this commitment to each other. We are not living quite literally together, but we are organizing in a long term way where we will eventually come to that point, and through this process have built trust. But it's just become like an icebreaker, like "how are you showing up for your community?" I'm like, ok. But what do you mean? Like, which one?

Despite their critique of the word "community," they still emphasize the importance of having one. This idea of community is somewhat inherent to socialist, communist, and social anarchist ideologies, which participants identified with. However, participants also indicated that holding these identities in North America requires willingness to go against the grain. This might suggest care for others alongside willingness to challenge social norms might be needed to engage in this kind of activism. This will be further discussed under "Lack of Social Support" and "Extreme and Palatable Activism,"

While none of the participants explicitly made any statements about their openness to new ideas or to change, their statements suggest that they all exhibited openness to new ideas and to change throughout their lifetime. For instance, the participants tended to explain that they didn't grow up within communist, socialist, or anarchist households, but rather developed these understandings through exposure to new ideas. Similarly, none of the participants framed attending protests or engaging in activism as being engrained in their early childhood experience.

Rather, when the opportunities to participate in protests and activism arose later in life, the

participants explored those opportunities. In line with these observations, Zhou et al. found

people with high openness to change had higher intentions to purchase organic food, and Grob

found that openness to new ideas correlated significantly with PEB.[279] When asked about

practices they recommend for sustaining activism, Sky supported the benefits of a different type

of openness: openness to rekindling connections and supporting others' efforts for change. In

response to my question, Sky said:

> Being open. When people float back and say "I know it's been a while. How are you? I
> have this great idea of how I can contribute to this organization," I'm like "Great! Yes,
> you can do that!" Keeping the door open to co-creation is important.

Sky emphasizes the importance of openness to connection and co-creation with people they've

previously engaged in activism with, even when it isn't convenient. This aligns with a

recommendation Forest and Beyoncé make in the next section to center community-building and

connection with other activists as a means to sustain the movement and make activism enjoyable.

In addition to engaging in openness, participants frequently reported engaging in creative

thinking as part of their environmental activism and as a strategy to sustain their activism. This is

in line with the literature which suggests creativity is associated with PEB. For instance, Grob

found the strongest correlation with PEB was creative thinking (tied with recognition of

environmental problems),[280] and Zibenberg et al. similarly found creativity and curiosity to be

linked to PEBI and activism.[281] In the present study, Sky framed curiosity about the environment

as important to generating pro-environmental action. In addition, a study by Daskolia et al.

featuring interviews with teachers engaged in environmental education found that the teachers

viewed "creative thinking as an inherent component of environmental problem-solving."[282] In

this study, Ocean suggested engaging in creative thinking about alternative solutions and

creating community were some of their favorite parts about activism, explaining "what I love so much about organizing itself was creating community, talking to people, communicating ideas of 'what are alternative ways that we can think about the situation?'" In addition, creating media to shift public consciousness toward a pro-environmental perspective is central to Ocean's current theory and practice of change. Fern similarly framed creativity as a tool to mitigate burnout and sustain activism. "I think that's one of the best antidotes to despair: creating things, instead of always fighting against things." On the whole, participants in this study frequently discussed creating, but typically in the context of creating just and equitable futures (for instance, JD's desire to "create a space for the least amount of suffering").

Participants also frequently expressed motivation and intention to protect the environment as prompting their activism, particularly toward the beginning of their activist journey. Research on PEBs generally asserts that both motivation and intention are positively associated with, but do not guarantee PEBs. Scholars have studied whether Pro-Environmental Behavioral Intention (PEBI) translates to PEB, and the factors involved in that translation. The Model of Responsible Environmental Behavior (REB) establishes that verbal commitments or intentions made to PEBs increases likelihood of PEB engagement. The Motivation Opportunity Ability Model describes motivation as encompassing beliefs, evaluations of outcomes, attitudes toward PEBs, and social norms. This motivation leads to PEBI, and opportunity and ability determine whether that PEBI is translated into action.[283] Participants such as Iris tended to frame motivation as a limited resource which tended to be a strong motivator at the beginning of their action, but dwindled with time. Iris recalled:

> Especially in the beginning, I felt very passionate about everything that I was trying to work on and I felt very motivated at that point to learn as much as I could and to do the best that I could. And there were a lot of things that changed over the way I approached

climate activism specifically or just environmental activism in general. But at that point, I was just super motivated, and I thought activism is going to be everything that I do. And then as time went on, especially when I decided to stop doing it as much, there was just a lot of overwhelm and burnout. Plus, there was personal stuff going on that made it hard to balance that as well.

This brings to mind Silas's quote mentioned in the section on hope, where they similarly expressed feeling strong enthusiasm, motivation, and intention to engage in activism in the beginning of their activist experience, but encountered failure, which caused them to adjust their expectations.

I was surprised to notice that participants didn't spend much time discussing empathy specifically. Participants frequently used the word "care," but "empathy" and "sympathy" were not commonly referred to. Participants expressed deep personal care for environmental and social justice issues, and expressed frustration about people who don't share that care. For instance, when asked about barriers to activism, Fern explained "there's a lack of empathy – some people just don't care." JD, however, explained a shift they've made in their teaching strategy away from the focus on compassion and toward a focus on nonviolence:

> What I landed on is called Ahimsa. It's a Jain philosophy and the principle of Nonviolence. I used to teach about understanding and extending compassion. I realized that's not enough because compassion is selective and sometimes exclusionary. Many people consider themselves compassionate but draw the line when it comes to other animals and so-called nonhumans. So, I thought, "Okay, Nonviolence, that's pretty direct and easy to recognize what constitutes violence. How can we continue teaching and living in a way that is about Nonviolence?"

It's possible that for JD, compassion as a kind of emotion people feel is less tangible and easy to determine than nonviolence. It's still worth considering how the shift toward a nonviolence frame might not always address the way violence is socially constructed. Most participants reported that they had always cared about other people and the environment, and struggled to find any experience that brought them from apathy to empathy. For instance, Cliff reported:

> I'm not sure if I can pinpoint anything that flipped that switch for me, to be like, "oh, now I have empathy for people that are outside of my circle." It just kind of comes from getting older and developing like, my sense of like, what my values are.

Prakrit, whose story was discussed in detail under the section on guilt, was the only activist who reported developing a sense of empathy after a single specific experience. In his case, he developed empathy for animals when he hurt a puppy and felt guilt about the consequence of his original apathy. This indicates that people for whom empathy and care for others don't come easily might be able to reach these understandings through various practices. Literature that indicates empathy can be practiced to promote PEB supports this.[284] Unfortunately, because the majority of participants reported that they had always felt a deep care and empathy for others and for the environment, I wasn't able to collect enough information to reach any conclusions about what kinds of experiences might prompt this transformation. This would be a great opportunity for further research on this topic.

Social Support

While many participants were unable to remember the origins of their activism, nearly every activism origin story involved a friend or family member who was interested in these issues and invited them to participate. When asked what inspired them to take their first environmental actions, Iris immediately responded:

> I had a friend who was already doing some climate activism. And I personally also have a lot of like passion about that… so I decided to try and get involved.

Cliff responded similarly, explaining that their experiences in nature evoked an appreciation for the environment, but their parents' general disinterest in the outdoors reduced their intentions to engage in activism. Despite initially having low intention to engage in activism initially, they began engaging in environmental protests after a friend invited them to one. Cliff recalled:

> I always loved going out and seeing Michigan. It's gorgeous and, I have an appreciation for it but… neither of my parents are very outdoorsy people. So I had kind of a base appreciation for it, but I never really thought it was… something that I would get invested in … it was actually one with you [the researcher], I think, where we went to the capital. I think that was my first protest.

Supporting this, Schussman and Soule found "being asked to protest is the strongest predictor of participating in protest."[285] For some activists, the social aspect prompting their activism was as simple as an alert. For Beyoncé, whose story was discussed in a previous section, they began their anti-CAFO[2] organizing when a friend called and suggested it. Silas similarly explained that when one of their college roommates became involved in work advocating for divestment from fossil fuels, they decided to help.

> For divestment specifically, one of my roommates freshman year got really into it. So I would see her do things and I'd be like, "oh, hey, I'll help with whatever they were doing" because I was like, "yeah, you're right, and we're friends."

> Many of the activists, including Silas, mentioned that they were encouraged by friends and family to spend time interacting with nature, which helped cultivate their concern for nature (as discussed in a previous section). Silas explained that they grew up helping their dad take care of plants, which was influential for them. Silas remembered:

> I always cared about the natural world. My dad loves plants and he's very good with plants. So I would help him a lot and just kind of grew up doing that… that made a really big impact on me.

Ocean similarly expressed that their father's connection to nature influenced their environmental orientation, saying "for my dad, being outside was always really important to him." In a similar vein, Prakrit, a 22-year old cishet Asian man replied that watching his parents care for animals

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[2] CAFO stands for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation.

primed him to care for animals, however, this modeling wasn't a significant turning point for

him. Prakrit explained:

> My parents care about animals. My dad would bring up any injured birds, especially
> pigeons, and other birds that got hurt near our house… we have a space where my dad
> keeps injured birds… so I would see that and I would pick up injured birds. But I was not
> old enough to really understand yet. So I would just watch and see, but the interest was
> not strong.

Some activists also expressed that friends and family members influenced their political

orientation. For example, Forest explained that their parents' values and care for social justice

issues influenced his political orientation.

> My parents both came from small Mennonite communities... a faith informed belief in
> social justice was always present for me growing up. And my parents always cared a lot
> about war and talked with me about Iraq and Afghanistan. They were politically aware.
> They were super democrat, neo-liberal, but now they have become much more
> radicalized.

Parents were frequently framed as influential to participants' care for environmental and social

justice. This might indicate a need for future research on parenting strategies to encourage this

kind of environmental and social care and concern (beyond cultivating the experiences this study

finds influential).

Activists in this study also consistently reported that finding social support through their

activism was crucial to sustaining their activism. Ocean for instance, explained they loved

creating community and found that prioritizing joy and connection can help mitigate the impacts

of the burnout which often accompanies activism. Ocean noted:

> What I love so much about the organizing aspect was creating community, talking to
> people, communicating ideas of what are the alternative ways that we can think about the
> situation… Bringing joy into it has been something that I've seen people prioritizing,
> because they experience such intense burnout and mental health issues and all these

things because like, it's such a daunting task and you just see so much suffering and everything like that.

Beyoncé similarly emphasized the importance of having fun, and how that can sometimes be difficult to cultivate, but is necessary for creating a sense of community and trust among the people you're working with. Beyonce remembered:

> At first people rolled their eyes. But I tried to make it really fun and people got to where they loved it, so you have to have fun. We get together, we're a great strike force. The five of us have just continued to meet in a friend's kitchen. And we don't really talk about CAFOs, we just have a lot of fun laughing, talking about the neighborhood, which I think is just important. We're all old. It's like we don't really have the energy to make it an ongoing "building your base," et cetera. But what I think is important is building relationships like just sitting around someone's kitchen having coffee and having a good time. Because you just learn who they are. You learn to trust them. You learn what their skill set is, so when it's time to go into action you're a real tight group, you trust each other.

In addition to framing community as necessary to avoid burnout, Forest expressed that the desire to be part of a community of people with similar values is a significant driver of his activism. He explained that while he is sometimes inclined to skip social connection and focus on the issue at hand, he feels that social connection is necessary to create a healthy movement.

> I wanted to stay involved over time because these were things I really believed in... But a big part of it is just being a part of a community of people who share the same values and concern about the state of our world… When you're not living in the walkable city that is a university, it's hard to stay connected with people and be a part of communities… I think people need to connect better, focus more on building community, and support each other materially, psychologically and spiritually. Over my tenure in environmental activism, I've wanted to jump straight to working on the issue. But I think that what's more important is building healthier ways of relating to each other.

In other words, multiple participants reported that finding community through activism has helped them remain engaged in activism and suggested that other activists put effort into cultivating this kind of community. Supporting this finding, Conner et al. found that "A sense of

belonging to an activist community" was "a significant protective factor for mental health, physical health, and flourishing" for activists in their study.[286]

Knowledge and (College) Education

Participants across this study reported that gaining environmental and social justice-related knowledge through a variety of educational experiences was instrumental in prompting their action. Participants stressed the importance of various types of learning and knowledge. Some participants emphasized knowledge gained through reading books or experiencing college education with professors and other students who are passionate about the subject matter. Others emphasized knowledge gained through social and real-world experiences. Participants also stressed the importance of knowledge of activist strategies and techniques.

Participants consistently framed coursework, and especially college courses, as formative to their environmental frameworks. Brooke explained that college education was a major lightbulb moment for her.

> When you come to college, you're like, "oh, the way that history has always been presented to me isn't actually factual." Like, here's Howard Zinn, the *People's History of America*, and you're like, "okay, it changes everything."

Ocean similarly framed history as crucial to developing their political consciousness. They recounted feeling frustration in primary and secondary school, where they were informed about social and political issues, but the importance was dismissed. Going to college, where they found instructors and students who were passionate and knowledgeable about these issues, they were able to make more connections and form a coherent and radical frame of understanding. Ocean reported:

> History has always been crucial for me. I remember reading history textbooks in 7th and 8th grade and talking about colonialism and being like, "This is where racism comes from," and everyone being very casual about it, and I was like, "What the fuck?" I felt all these connections being made, but I still had this "history bends towards justice" idea... But I got more and more frustrated as I learned more... I got sort of radicalized but I had no language to express it. In college, my courses taught me so much about colonialism, slavery, and capitalism. Going to college, there was a whole universe of people who had dedicated their lives to these things I've been feeling, and I could learn from them, so a lot of things were clicking.

JD explained their strategy of bringing their activist knowledge into the classroom. They also emphasized knowledge for the sake of itself, even if it doesn't necessarily lead to much beyond a few students changing their minds and practices.

> I now see that the time I spent in jail, out in the logging roads, and in the forests doing various demonstrations is now spent in the classroom as a form of activism, in a kind of bell hooks way, where teaching is activism. I feel like a secret agent in the classroom, where my aim is just to see some light bulbs go on. I can't do anything for anyone or have anybody do anything but come to terms with the reality of what's happening on this planet... And after some time of reflecting on the ineffectiveness of what I'm doing, in a larger scale, just recognizing that after working with people for a term, if there are 25 people in the class, well, maybe 15 of them will become vegan, and there will be a few fewer animals being exploited.

> While they did frame attending college as formative to their environmental and political framework, Silas had some critique of traditional frames of education, emphasizing the importance of a "physical knowing" over a "brain knowing."

> I feel like education is part of it. But lots of people know things and then they don't do anything with that... There's a brain knowing and then there's a more physical knowing. I think if you don't physically know, if you just brain know, that's not going to change your behaviors or your actions, and it's not going to make you more invested. Just because you can recite the facts or whatever, isn't necessarily always going to change your attitudes and your behavior.

Supporting Silas' critique, there are very mixed results regarding the value of "brain knowing." For instance, specific technical/scientific environmental knowledge hasn't been definitively shown to creating pro-environmental frameworks strong enough to prompt environmental

action.[287] When it comes to the physical knowing, direct experiences with nature and with social

systems that support environmentalism were two of the most prominent factors prompting

environmental activism for participants in this study, and they were often reported to involve this

kind of body knowledge Silas described, and the social learning Sky recounts here:

> I didn't really think so deeply until in that moment about what that meant for myself
> personally. Until I was in that space and I was with the students, and we were just talking.
> And I was learning about myself through their experiences.

Sky also recalled that meeting and speaking with people their age during college was formative

to their social and environmental justice framework, because it allowed them to learn about other

people's experiences.

> When I started meeting more people that were my age towards the end of college and
> around that age, and started to talk through it, and quite honestly got burned a little bit in
> terms of what I thought, because growing up, for instance, my family was not taught to
> be fearful of the police… and didn't really understand the deeper scars and how all that
> connected to slavery. But at the same time we have our own very different connections to
> slavery. So, yeah, it's definitely very complex, but college was a big thing.

> While Iris had some knowledge of the issue, she cited a lack of knowledge about activist

strategies and a lack of access to a network of activist mentors as barriers to activism. She

explained that she had time, motivation, and intention, but didn't know how to implement her

ideas.

> The biggest barrier was the steep learning curve of figuring out what resources I needed
> and how to access them. I didn't know the pathways for anything. Unless you had
> networking connections, which are hard to get as a high schooler, it's hard to get the
> information and support you needed from people who are already in the field. There was
> just this big information barrier where I had the passion, and I had at least some time, but
> I just didn't know how to put it into use… I just didn't have any kind of training in
> anything. I needed a crash course on environmental activism. Like, everything you need
> to know to plan a protest.

Supporting Iris's experience, Hines et al.'s meta-analysis found an association between

knowledge of environmental issues and action strategies and PEB.[288] Sky also emphasized the

importance of education as an activism strategy, as a lot of their activist work revolves around

providing environmental education so that young people have the tools they need to take action.

Sky explained "What's really important is empowerment...the action of making sure that people

have the tools and the knowledge to feel like they can do something." In the next section,

participants explain what might happen when people have knowledge about environmental

issues and action strategies, but institutions attempt to take opportunities for change away from

these activists.

Barriers to Activism and Theory

Institutional Backlash and Co-optation

Participants reported environmental activism to be extremely difficult, with many barriers

in the way. When I asked if she's encountered any challenges in her activism, Beyoncé laughed

and replied, "oh, it's nothing but challenges." Several participants cited institutional backlash or

fear of it (particularly backlash from their universities) as hindering their activism. For instance,

Silas participated in divestment activism within a university setting, and explained:

> There was a fear about repercussions. There were times when I wanted to get more into
> divestment, but I saw the University was cracking down on other people, and I don't need
> that in my life… They tried to suspend people and kick them out of housing. It was really
> bad… I have enough problems without making these powerful people my enemies.

For Silas, seeing the way the university reacted to divestment activism discouraged them from

participating as much as they'd like to, as they were afraid of what might happen to them.

It's notable that while several activists briefly mentioned being arrested or getting into legal trouble, and another participant briefly discussed illegal actions "off the record," they didn't seem particularly eager to expand on these experiences. There is a culture within some more radical environmental circles where people are incredibly careful about when and where to share certain pieces of information regarding arrestable actions for their own safety. We often don't share our real names or anything illegal we've ever done, because there's always a possibility that the person you're speaking to is a cop. This fear of sharing information is a result of the many instances of police surveillance of environmental movements and state violence against environmentalists, which I have discussed in the literature review. For this reason, I chose not to push anyone to open up about experiences of arrest or illegal activity unless they seemed open to it, as that might involve sharing incriminating information or experiencing re-traumatization through feeling pressure to recount traumatic experiences.

JD, however, did feel comfortable sharing some information about being imprisoned for environmental justice activism.

> We were served a summons to appear in court and we were going to be charged. And of course…had we paid a fine, it would have disappeared... We all made the decision that we would not pay the fine and would thereby accept jail time to make a public statement.

In this case, the government charged a group of activists for engagement in nonviolent civil disobedience, and the activists had the choice between paying a fee and serving jail time. The time they spent in jail was a sacrifice they made to draw public attention to the issue. This sacrifice of time is inaccessible for people who have certain jobs (more on this under the "employment" barrier). The sacrifice of potential damage to one's legal record is something Prakrit mentioned he is unable to take on as an international student without risking deportation. In addition, the "option" to pay money for bail is clearly not accessible to those without money.

Several participants brought up the connections between police violence against people of color and police suppression of environmental movements, with Brooke mentioning Cop City construction in Atlanta, where the state patrol murdered environmental protector Manuel Estaban Paez Terán (also known as Tortuguita) in January 2023. Sky also addressed how the areas around pipeline construction grounds tend to be dangerous, as these man camps are "where many of the missing and murdered indigenous woman" are trafficked and/or killed. It's possible that this perception of various crucial environmental battle sites as dangerous, particularly for people of color, might inhibit participation in protests at these sites.

Some participants reported that less extreme institutional backlash can also serve as a barrier. Such backlash can take the form of condescension, lying, and manipulation. Ocean, who worked on a divestment campaign, reported that institutional condescension and gaslighting significantly damaged their relationship with their university.

> People ask "did you enjoy college?"…honestly, the whole time, *I felt like I was at war with my university* … they make an exorbitant amount of money on lands they're actively extracting oil and natural gas from… Oil and [the university] are married in a very clear way financially, so a lot of [interactions with university administration] involved being dismissed as unreasonable, being dismissed as if we don't understand like how the real world works, and really being punished for wanting to make change… It was beyond frustrating.

Ocean understood that the university was making their investment decisions based on profit, rather than on a sense of responsibility to students, and the university's false excuses and attempts to discredit activists left a sour taste in their mouth. Beyoncé similarly expressed that her anti-CAFO organizing had encountered strong institutional opposition, but also noted that even in one of the instances where they were successful, the government refused to acknowledge that their decision was a result of activist efforts, instead opting for similarly condescending rhetoric.

> They said the reason they pulled the permits was because it was too late in the year to pour concrete, which is not true. Then they said, "since we pulled them, all those people don't have to meet anymore." They're so condescending.

This disrespectful behavior from government officials contributed to her feelings of animosity toward her local government similarly to how disrespect from university officials contributed to Ocean's animosity toward their university. Iris similarly experienced that the administration at her high school was dismissive of their activism. "The administration was very 'whatever' about it," she explained. "They were very 'let's not get into this.'"

Ocean also described sneaky and creative ways that systems of power would manipulate issues to make it difficult for activists to make any ground. For instance, Ocean explained that their university organized their investments in such a way that some of the oil money was used to fund scholarships, which set administrators up to frame environmentalists as anti-scholarship, even though any system which requires oil rigs to fund college tuition is obviously absurd.

> As we put more pressure on them, they made a policy where a lot of this oil money was funding scholarships and they'd say "oh, so you don't want people to have scholarships?"… *There was so much manipulation.*

In addition to these actions, Ocean explained that since the university intentionally made information about their investments inaccessible, they had to expend large amounts of energy to figure out "what's even going on." Ocean also suggests that some university offices and programs pushed for students to focus on relatively ineffective changes, like community gardens and soapmaking activities. These highly visible, but very small-scale changes made the university look good while they were actively repressing changes that would make a much larger impact while being less visible.

> *They tried really hard to dilute the activism.* [The university] has a newer sustainability major that I was a part of, and in the institution itself, there is the Office of Sustainability.

> They tried really hard to dilute the work that we're doing and to, push us toward "let's build a community garden and make our own soap and put composting on campus!" and then, they made those things even, really difficult. You're just having all these people who really care and really want to do stuff getting thrown into work that is important but isn't really addressing the root of the issue and most of the time is just burning people out more and preventing them from participating more. This university would teach me these things [about environmental and social justice] and I'd try to put them into action and the administration would be like, "no."… I got incredibly radicalized from my organizing experiences.

Ocean's experience of becoming radicalized through coming up against institutional opposition

to relatively palatable requests aligns with Keith Makoto Woodhouse's suggestion that extreme

or confrontational environmental activism strategies are a result of the perceived ineffectiveness

of traditional change-making efforts, rather than of the activists' inherent extreme tendencies.[289]

This story also aligns closely with Silas's experience becoming radicalized through their

university's response to their divestment activism.

> The first time I sat in with Divest, I didn't stick around for the whole thing, but people got in big trouble over it. And that really ticked me off. Before that happened, I was just thinking "I want us to do the right thing as the university and make an impact that we can be proud of." But after that, I was like, "wow. Literally fuck this." Like this whole system of power is so entrenched, and they don't care if they incinerate all of their students. They don't give a fuck. Before, I thought it must just be a coincidence that they're doing this bad thing, and they probably just don't even know that it's bad yet, so we'll tell them. But then afterwards, I was like, "fuck those guys."

JD similarly highlights institutional cooptation of environmental rhetoric, critiquing the

disingenuous "lip service" activism that governments and universities sometimes participate in.

They provide an example similar to Ocean's, where the university provides an easy and palatable

environmental change they can champion, which they use to discredit more radical solutions.

When more radical solutions are proposed, the University once again uses their idea of "the

students" (whom they haven't even consulted) being disinterested to deflect responsibility away

from themselves.

I got put into a discussion table with campus food services, and their solution at this teach-in on climate change at the university was, "Let's use these reusable cups." And I said, "Wait a minute. What about Cambridge University or Oxford, those institutions in the UK that have voted to have completely plant-based campuses? What about that?" They say "Students aren't interested," and I think that's bullshit.

In my institution, I'm mostly alone in speaking of real climate breakdown… and making a real change instead of just paying lip service, like the governments are doing. The talk is "Let's mine the oceans for lithium!" And I'm thinking…we've just had it.

Ocean expressed similar frustration with the disconnect between environmental messaging and policies in his city with a progressive reputation. While the city promotes itself as being environmentally friendly, Ocean feels environmental initiatives they participate in are aimed at making the city look better while often perpetuating additional issues such as gentrification. Ocean reports that the city's promotion of its environmental initiatives could be seen as a form of greenwashing, where surface-level actions are used to create a positive image without addressing underlying issues. This can lead to the marginalization of voices advocating for environmental justice and the prioritization of symbolic gestures over meaningful change. Ocean explained:

[Ocean's city] is like, "we're [so progressive!] It's so green and pretty here!" But every single policy they do promotes gentrification, pushes out people of color, and puts people of color in the way of environmental hazards. Anytime people try and speak out about these things, the city doesn't care. But then they're like, "we're planting more trees, man!" Like, who is this helping? Is it actually helping anybody? It just feels like a facade. It's incredibly frustrating…

Participants in this study experienced and witnessed institutional backlash for environmental activism. In addition, they experienced cooptation of environmentalism by institutions that wanted to appear pro-environmental but were in explicit opposition to larger pro-environmental policies behind closed doors. This cooptation and backlash made it difficult for them to accomplish their goals and sometimes discouraged them from engaging in activism. However, these challenges also seemed to have a radicalizing effect. Initially, activists believed that these institutions could be persuaded to prioritize human and environmental wellbeing if

made aware of the harm they cause. Yet, during negotiations, institutions such as universities, governments, and corporations conveyed that they must prioritize profit over ethics to survive under capitalism. This created a barrier where institutions viewed every demand motivated by ethics (rather than profit) as a direct threat to their profit-driven model. Surrendering to these demands would set a dangerous precedent that undermines their profit-motivated approach and, potentially, the capitalist system that necessitates it. Bearing witness to these judgements seemed to radicalize activists against both capitalism and these institutions.

Social Backlash and Lack of Support

In addition to reporting institutional cooptation of their movements, several participants identified a lukewarm lack of social support for their activism, which they found frustrating and isolating. Iris described her experience with environmental activism in a conservative high school.

> There was this group of people who were like, "good for you doing this. But, like, I won't," and like, "oh, it's a bit too much…" any kind of left-leaning ideas were a little bit wild.

While people were typically outwardly polite to Iris, she got the impression that leftist activism was perceived as being socially unacceptable. Ocean expressed a nearly identical, but slightly less negative response by peers to their activism in college and outlined the feelings that evoked in them.

> There is just like a little bit of like you care about this and that's great, but I'm not a part of it, you know… Which is fine. But when it's like such a total issue and like an existential issue and it's like, framed so much of like how I see the world, it can feel, like, frustrating or lonely sometimes.

Here, Ocean expressed that while some of their peers encouraged their activism, their response

didn't align with the issue's gravity and personal significance, leading to feelings of frustration

and loneliness. Beyoncé expressed a similar sentiment, stating that many people in their

community appreciated their activism, but wouldn't support it materially due to fear of backlash.

Rather than expressing distress over this response, Beyoncé stated they were happy to see that

people were ideologically on their side.

> In rural America, in a very small community, people don't want to stand up because they have neighbors, they don't be ridiculed. But people would come up to me in a grocery store and they would say, 'I really like what you're doing. Please keep doing the work. I just can't say anything because my husband's a farmer, or my husband owns a local business. We can't afford to lose business,' et cetera.. But it was gratifying that so many people were anti-CAFO[3] in the community

Beyoncé did, however, later express some exhaustion around how difficult it is to motivate

people to participate in activism, recounting how people tend to get angry when they first hear

about the issue, which motivates them to attend meetings, but "once the crisis is over, it's very

hard to motivate people."

Some activists, including Beyoncé, also identified more intense social backlash,

recounting that her friend received death threats for his activism, which was alarming, but that

she hadn't been harassed in that way.

> My friend, who started 20 years ago doing this, got death threats… He said we're unlikely to get those because you can trace that stuff so much more easily now. We've never gotten anything like that. They don't like me, let me tell you. There are a lot of people in the county that do not like me at all because I'm outspoken. I don't care about that one bit. You don't like me, that's fine, right?

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[3] CAFO stands for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation.

Notably, while Beyoncé was aware that many people don't like her, she didn't seem particularly affected by it. Beyoncé went on to say that she doesn't care about whether various people in the community like her because she wouldn't want to be friends with the kind of person who would oppose her activism. She also explained that she has a strong social circle with people who share her ethical beliefs, which makes it easier to ignore her critics. Iris similarly explained that while there were people at her school who staunchly opposed her activism, she was able to ignore them easily because she was detached from a lot of the social dynamics at her school.

> Some people there were very against everything that I cared about… I didn't really face a lot of backlash personally. That's also because I just wasn't really locked in on the social scene. So, if people were talking, I was not listening.

In addition to describing social backlash within their broader community, some participants explained how activism can create strain in their own interpersonal relationships. For instance, Fern described activism as putting strain on family relationships, both because some family members felt her activism was too extreme or led her down a life path they didn't want for her, but also because activism takes time that she'd otherwise like to spend with family.

> There's always family saying things like, "oh god, you're getting yourself arrested? Are you in with a bad crowd? Do you know what you're doing?" There's always some of that, especially when you're younger. There's this "go get a real job." There's that sort of a backlash all else. If you're seriously involved in environmental action, it takes a toll on relationships. It's hard to maintain relationships when you're always working or when you're in jail or when you're hyper focused on some issue. The other things need to take a step back.

Ocean similarly expressed difficulty balancing "taking care of relationships" with activism. While Sky mentioned having some difficult conversations with their mother, it's notable that no other participants reported facing significant backlash from their family or friends on account of their activism. In fact, participants frequently mentioned being motivated by their parents. This could indicate that experiences of significant backlash from friends and family are enough to

discourage people from participating in a study like this, or it could just indicate that no one in this small sample of people happened to be in a hostile family and peer environment.

While many activists reported social connection through organizing alleviated burnout, as the "Social Support" theme illuminated, Iris reported intra-movement conflict and organizational politics were a barrier to her engagement in environmental activism. She found that social dynamics within the organization and shifts in organizational structure were "hard to keep up with," and distracted from the work at hand. In addition, she critiqued the fast-paced nature and pressure to be a perfect activist within an organization she was in. Iris explained:

> I wish there was a culture of bringing people up and laying the educational foundation. It was a "move it or lose it" feeling where there were a lot of changes, especially within the youth organizations. If you couldn't keep up with all of that… it became very hard to feel like you were making any impact. I think that left a lot of gaps in knowledge and ability.

> I wanted to belong to those organizations, and people wanted others to feel they belonged, but if you didn't approach things in this one specific way, you didn't really belong… If you weren't posting everything on your Instagram story…then you didn't care enough… There were a lot of social things that divided people, instead of focusing on the action everybody was here to take.

Beyoncé also recounted conflict within her activist organizations and explained going through a conflict mediation process. Similarly to Iris, she recalled that smaller peripheral issues tended to distract from the organization's central goal and explained that returning back to the shared mission was helpful in mediating this conflict.

> We ended up hiring someone to do mediation. That was very helpful. She talked to each of us individually about problems we saw and what goals we had. Then she set an agenda for us…The big recommendation I can remember is to put things out on the table. That allowed people to say, "okay, I'm saying this because we all agreed when we met with the mediator that we would be open with each other." Being able to say "in the spirit of our mediation, I think we're going into the weeds and we need to get back on track" allowed us to keep focused on our goal and step back to acknowledge when we were getting frustrated and distracted from it.

In addition to the tip of staying focused on the shared goal, Beyoncé emphasized being open with

one another and "putting things out on the table." This advice echoes Sky's solutions to

organizational conflict. Sky similarly noted the importance of conflict resolution skills and of

tolerating the discomfort of airing grievances within movements.

> Conflict resolution has been a significant learning curve. It's helpful to have a mindset of "these are our people, there's no leaving these people" unless it's super egregious. Most conflict is so petty that if we just communicate about it early, it'll be fine. But if we let it fester, it becomes much bigger… And granted, resolution is not always quick. The longest process I've been in has been two years. And that's because it's a lot of practice. There's a lot of healing, breathing, and understanding "this person is not thinking this way anymore because we've done this process, and I should assume best intent." Especially if things have been festering for a long time, it doesn't happen overnight.
>
> And even if it isn't conflict that has to do with you, it touches the organization. For example, something was said about one of our staff members. One staff member was like, "I don't know if I should talk to this person about it." I'm like, "We cannot tiptoe around members of our team. So, as my mom would say, we need to squash it and wash it, or essentially feel comfortable having uncomfortable conversations." A lot of strong movements have died because of bad communication or lack of resolution.

Sky explained that conflict resolution is a difficult and lengthy but necessary process, and

emphasizes the importance of assuming best intent, of addressing issues as they arise rather than

pushing them under the rug, and of viewing our co-organizers as part of our long-term team,

rather than as disposable. While conflicts both within and outside of their organizing circles

proved difficult for activists, they demonstrated a wide variety of strategies to overcome these

conflicts.

Burnout: Time, Energy, Money, and Employment

Every activist in this study reported feelings of burnout, exhaustion, or frustration with

their work. Hayes and Kaba frame burnout as "a profound exhaustion paired with an injury to

our dignity or sense of belonging or a violation of our boundaries," which frequently occurs

through the process of activism.[290] Silas reported feeling exhausted because their efforts to create

change are consistently thwarted by powerful people and institutions, causing them to feel like

they are unable to create the change they need.

> I'm just running into a wall every time because we know we need to phase out fossil fuels, but we can't because these powerful entities have decided that's not going to happen. And I can't do anything about that, which is just exhausting to think about.

Many activists supported their statement, with Iris noting feelings of discouragement over not

being able to accomplish everything she'd hoped, especially given the constraints on her time

and energy. She expressed that distancing herself from activism helped alleviate immediate

feelings of burnout but didn't seem to make returning to activism easier for her. Forest also

expressed feeling significant burnout and explained that gaining a feeling of oneness with the

issues you're working on and the people you're working on them with has been helpful in

alleviating that burnout.

> Burnout is so real. They always say that you need to understand your self-interest and you need to be one with why you are working for these things, because otherwise it's completely unsustainable and I was like, "oh, yeah. That's cool" for a while and I never really understood it, until this semester, and I'm getting tired, to be honest.

Cliff expressed that both mental health struggles like depression and the need to have a job have

been primary barriers to his activism.

> One of the main barriers has just been mental health affecting my ability to do a lot of things, including activism. With depression, it kind of affects your ability to care about anything, and especially things that aren't right there with you… I've also been too busy with things like work to be able to go to protests and stuff like that.

Fern suggested that she would engage in environmental activities with her community more if

capitalism didn't force her to have a job to pay for her and her husband's basic needs.

I would like to invite people to come and walk the trails and see things and I'm not ready because I don't have the time to devote to that because I have to work. I have to work not only to pay the bills but to have health insurance for my husband and I. If I didn't have to do that, I would have a lot more time to create this faster.

Sky suggested that this constant cycle of business and of struggling under capitalism is so advantageous to the class of people who benefit from barriers to activism that it might as well be intentional.

I think they purposely make us busy and stuck in wage labor because they know if we have more time and if our material needs are actually met, we would be thinking "Why are things like this?"

Some participants also explained that they have felt unhappy or burned out in their jobs at environmental nonprofits. For example, Silas recalled:

There was a time when I wanted to make that my career and that didn't work out. I wish I had more time for environmental action, but I couldn't make it my job. And I need to have a job. All the jobs I was seeing were very administrative and donor focused, which I can't enjoy… It seemed like, not in the movement but in environmental nonprofit scene, it's computer work.

Silas later explained that they wanted to apply for "hands-on jobs" within the environmental movement but found that those positions don't tend to pay a living wage. Sky also expressed that they're struggling with a lack of flexibility in their current job within the nonprofit field because their organization stresses the importance of being active in the community while requiring that they be in the office from 9-5. This makes it difficult to engage in the activism and organizing that they'd like to be more active in. Sky reported:

I am struggling with this current job. I'm able to do more research and they're okay with that. But I think the other jobs that I did were also open to me doing events and organizing and stuff like that, and this job is a little bit more of a "9 to 5 you must be in the office"... So, I think, this is just like a newer barrier… A good solution I've been playing around with has been sharing roles across organizations. For example, for our education programming, we share an educator… It allows for more job security and flexibility.

Activists in this study explained that the amount of time it takes to engage in effective activism and the time and energy demanded by the jobs they need to survive under capitalism leave little to no time and energy to spend meeting their other basic human needs. This led to burnout, which caused some activists to abandon activism. This decision is made because while they can abandon activism without putting themselves in significant danger, quitting their jobs would lead to homelessness and inability to pay for basic needs such as healthcare. In addition, the emotionally, intellectually, and sometimes physically draining nature of environmental activism and nonprofit work, combined with difficulty achieving "wins" when combatting systems of power was emotionally draining for activists in this study. They found that nonprofit jobs tended to be relatively restrictive and tied to funding, which made it difficult for them to engage in the activist projects that energize them.

Lack of Physical Access to Activist Spaces: Pandemic, Disability, and Transportation

Another less frequently discussed theme was lack of physical access to activist spaces. In this study, the main barriers to this were transportation, the pandemic, and disability. It's quite possible that if this study hadn't been conducted through the internet, I might have had access to participants who might have framed the internet as an activist space they don't have access to. Both Iris and Cliff expressed that a lack of transportation made it difficult to engage in environmental activism. Iris explained:

> The other barrier was transportation. As a high schooler, it's much harder than as an adult. I can go to anything now. But when I was doing this, I didn't really have a car yet. When I started out, that made it really hard to say that you're gonna go to a protest an hour away. That is a huge thing living in a rural area. Now I live in Boston, and if I want to get to a protest in the city, I just take the train, walk, or bike. But in rural areas, it's much harder to get anywhere without a car.

Iris highlighted that this barrier is particularly difficult to overcome for people who don't have a

license or car (often young people, low-income people, and disabled people) and people living in

rural areas. Cliff echoed this statement, suggesting that because protests are typically held in

bigger cities and not small towns, it's difficult to find protests within a reasonable driving

distance.

> The town that I live in has been a barrier. It's a small town, there's not very much surrounding it. The bigger towns are at least 40 minutes away. The protests are all held in bigger cities, which are at least an hour away sometimes.

> Three activists in this study framed the COVID pandemic as a point at which their

activism stopped or slowed down. Beyoncé explained her experience of meeting less with her

activist group since the pandemic began and reported that her mold illness made it difficult for

her to meet in the houses of her neighbors for activist projects.

> With the pandemic, we haven't met much. We need to get back in the habit. Some of it is when I got mold illness, I couldn't be in a lot of places without having mold reactions. All the houses in the country are old farmhouses and they all have mold. People are very kind, and sometimes we just sit outside, but we're all old.

When asked about barriers to their activism, Silas also reported "Covid was a big one; that made

it hard." Ocean explained that before the pandemic, they were doing "on-the-ground organizing,

but when Covid happened, they "took a big step back" for their "own well-being." Their activism

since the pandemic has related mostly to communication and art, which they enjoy and feel

aligns with their strengths. In contrast, Forest explained that when Covid began and everything

moved online, it was easier for him to participate in activism because the organizing meetings

were done through Zoom, so getting to meetings physically wasn't an issue.

> I came to college during when COVID was raging. And I was basically just in a dorm room. It was super easy to hop onto a bunch of Zoom meetings. That was a big social

outlet for me that first year, joining and becoming a part of these environmental activist communities.

Participants reported being unable to meet in person because they remain immunocompromised despite mainstream attention to Covid dwindling. They also had difficulty finding transportation to in-person events, causing them not to attend many meetings and events that they otherwise would have. In addition, one participant expressed that they began attending activist meetings and events partially because it felt easy for them to join through Zoom. This indicates that continuing to hold activist meetings online, or at least to provide an online option, would make it significantly easier for a wide variety of people to engage in activism.

Theoretical Perceptions

Extreme and Palatable Activism

Participants described varying stances on each theoretical framework I introduced in the literature review. I focus in this section on the participants' perspective on each framework, and I note specifically any instances in which participants described turning points that helped them reach their understanding of that framework. I discuss any instances in which one of the frameworks has influenced their likelihood of engaging in activism and the type of activism they chose to engage in. I also note any instances where these splits have caused conflict or infighting within any organizations the activists have participated in, and I begin first with the issue of extreme versus palatable activism.

Validating my identification of divisions between extreme and palatable tactics within the environmental justice movement, Ocean stated that the division between extreme and palatable action was present in the organizations they worked with. Ocean recounted:

> That was a big split in the organization I started in college with my friend because I was more like, "I think we should do divestment," which at the time felt really extreme. And she was like, "I think we should focus on cleaning up this creek" and everything like that.

Ocean described their stance on extreme and palatable action, stating that they lean toward extreme/radical thought and are sympathetic to extreme/radical action. Their support for this was linked to the idea that extreme responses are justified in the face of extreme circumstances.

Ocean explained:

> I listened to a podcast recently that talked about Buddhism and Marxism and violent and nonviolent revolution and how for the civil rights movement for instance, you need your Martin Luther King and you need your Malcolm X. You need the NAACP and you need the Black Panthers and I think that now we need people creating communities, and going out and creating beauty, and we also need people going out and destroying the things that are inhibiting that and killing us. My stance on violence is that it's hard to say "We should be killing people" or anything like that. But *those in power will gladly and enthusiastically use violence to hold onto that power.* So I think there is a line where you need to say "I'm not being listened to and I need to protect myself and my community, And so if they're not going to get rid of this pipeline, then I'm going to get rid of this pipeline."

While Ocean feels uncomfortable with the idea of hurting people and sees a place for more moderate forms of action, they feel an obligation toward forms of extreme direct actions such as physically sabotaging pipelines. This sympathy comes from the idea that when environmental destruction directly and physically harms people and communities, real nonviolence requires removing these violent forces by any means necessary. Beyoncé expressed some ambivalence when asked about her position on extreme action. She later explained that she thinks the best approach is for everyone to engage in the pro-environmental activism they feel most comfortable with. Beyoncé also referenced the Martin vs Malcolm dichotomy, and while Ocean arrived at a conclusion that leaned toward extreme action and Beyoncé leaned toward moderate action, they both concluded by suggesting that both extreme and palatable action have their places within movements for social justice. Beyonce reported:

I don't believe in destroying anything you hate. It never does anything but produce more hate. I'm reading the autobiographies of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, which is really fascinating because Martin Luther King was all about nonviolence… Malcolm X was much more about the military and creating a separate Black community based on dignity, not trying to be integrated into a white community. And he felt like militarism was the way to achieve that. Here are these two national figures taking totally different standpoints. And before each of them was assassinated, they were becoming a little bit like the other.

Fern also expressed the importance of both moderate and radical strategies, suggesting that extreme/radical activism is needed to provide an anchor point to "make the moderates seem normal." This is sometimes described as the left-flanking effect. Fern explained:

I definitely follow the "eat the rich, kill corporations" end of the spectrum. However, I'm not actively portraying that in my life right now, mostly because of where I live. But that's where my head is most of the time, and I think we always need the radicals so that the moderates seem normal.

Forest similarly expressed that he lies on the radical end of the spectrum but sees space for many different strategies, stressing the importance of coexistence between moderate and radical wings of the movement. He uses the example of how the radical right tends to successfully "push the bounds of what is acceptable" which benefits both the radical and moderate right, as it brings radical right-wing ideas into the mainstream and makes the moderate right-wing ideas seem more centrist. Where moderate conservatives have largely refrained from criticizing extreme conservatives because they recognize how they benefit them, moderate progressives tend to criticize the extreme left for "alienating" centrists and conservatives. Forest suggests progressives would benefit from encouraging, rather than alienating, radical leftists.

We need a diversity of tactics. It's beneficial if there is a super radical strain. It makes the other side seem moderate and reasonable. I think the right is really good at that by pushing the bounds of what is acceptable. I think it would behoove the left to do some of that as well.

Forest later highlighted an issue that arises when there isn't any space for radical leftist ideas in electoral politics. Forest suggests that when the only powerful left-ish party is committed to morally decrepit policies it paints as centrist and reasonable, it's difficult for organizations to justify endorsing them and for people to justify voting for them. Forest applied this idea specifically to democratic support of the genocide of Palestinians, suggesting that their own support for genocide and the alienation it causes to their base is a bigger threat to the democratic party than "alienating conservatives" with radical ideas ever could be. Forest framed this as a point of division within environmental organizations and explained his organizations' difficulty figuring out how to respond to the democratic party's moral failures, saying:

> Right now there's this issue of what the fuck do we do about this next election? Like, do we endorse Joe Biden? Do we endorse a third-party candidate? Do we not endorse anybody? Do we not endorse Biden but still carry water for him because we think Trump is so much worse?

As Forest's comments suggest, existing within a political structure that has very little radical leftist representation makes it difficult to engage electorally for some participants.

Along these lines, several activists also expressed that they felt pressure to appear more moderate. While Fern ideologically falls within an extreme/radical category, she doesn't tend to express those values publicly because she lives in a location where expressing those ideas could make it difficult to be respected in their workplace and community. Here, the institution of work/employment gets in the way of radical activism once again. Fern explained:

> I'm definitely on the farther side of the spectrum. I think it's necessary to get the more moderate proposals through... I live in [a small town]. So there's not a lot of opportunity to express that except in my own household, where it's definitely shared. And I have a job. I live in the community, and I need to be respected here… I feel the need to appear more moderate than I am.

Iris expressed a similar sentiment about fearing being perceived as "too radical" despite having

radical political views.

> I think that a lot of people think more similarly than they let on, but they have a fear of
> being labeled as too left-wing or too radical. And I think that a lot of people really believe
> in a lot of radical ideas, but they're afraid of talking about them.

Here, Iris and Fern frame fear of social consequences for their radical beliefs as a barrier to

radical leftist political expressions and actions.

While palatable activism seems to paint environmental issues as apolitical for the purpose

of appealing to a wider variety of people, all participants in this study framed environmental

issues as political. Many activists reported that when people opposed environmental solutions on

political grounds, this compelled them to adopt political frameworks to support their

environmental solutions. This implies that a political ecology framework may sometimes

develop through exposure to the material political forces preventing environmental justice, rather

than through the theoretical "science isn't enough" framework frequently presented in

environmental literature which frames political ecology as a response to apolitical ecology.[291]

One example of this is Ocean, who reported that growing up within a conservative family and

Catholic school created a dissonance between their environmental values and their community's

political values. On top of that, watching the impact corporations were having on the

environment meant "it always sort of felt political." Another example was Cliff, who began his

interview by framing capitalism as a root cause of environmental destruction and then stated "in

America where it's treated as a political issue, I do have some anger with the disregard for

climate change." Cliff takes issue here with the political decision to ignore climate change while

acknowledging that environment and politics are intertwined.

Despite expressing that a political framing of the environment was crucial to their

environmentalism, several participants advocated for an apolitical, moderate framing of their

more radical environmental ideas when speaking with people who aren't already familiar with

these ideas. For example, Iris suggested that while environmental issues are inherently political,

avoiding political labels can encourage people with different political views to support

environmental solutions. She illustrated this point through arguing it's relatively easy to get

people on board with most communist ideas, but "if you frame it within a political label, then it's

like 'let me stop you there because I'm not a communist.'" Ocean similarly described the process

of helping people who are disengaged but ideologically sympathetic. They emphasized the

importance of using language that resonates with others, highlighting any commonalities in their

values and goals. Despite differing perspectives, Ocean believes that centering shared desires for

positive change can bridge ideological gaps and foster understanding. Ocean explained:

> I find that people relate to it in their own way…you just need to use the right word,
> like… OK, you care about all these things and I care about all these things, but those
> things are like kind of the same. So sometimes I just had to remind myself that like I'm
> approaching it from this angle, they're approaching it from that angle, but we all want the
> same things.

Ocean also seemed to agree with Iris's statements about the dangers of using slogans or labels

that might turn away people who aren't already on board. Instead, he emphasizes the importance

of presenting alternative ideas for a just world.

> When you're saying we need to go out and say, "Abolish the military, abolish
> capitalism," while I believe in both those things, in terms of messaging, I don't think
> that's very effective. Because it's like, "and then what?" You can't just go up to a kid and
> be like, "Abolish your mom and abolish your dad because they're making you go to bed
> at six pm." Because it's like, "and then what?" People need alternatives. And what I've
> been the most interested in recently is what would that actually look like? And trying to
> not even just imagine alternatives, but to see where they already are and build them.

These participants suggested it's most effective to present radical solutions in ways that are concrete, easy to understand and agree with, and rooted in shared values.

Tension between a desire to frame issues as you legitimately see them and a desire to be seen as respectable and objective for the purpose of appealing to those who aren't already familiar with your ideas is central to the extreme/palatable split, which the extreme/palatable sections of the lit review discuss further. An issue in this framing is the idea of centrism as equal to objectivity. Jeff Cohen, founder of FAIR (a nonprofit focused on highlighting bias in mainstream news) critiques the mainstream conception "that while there is propaganda of the left and propaganda of the right, there is no such thing as propaganda of the center."[292] In addition, feminist theorists frequently critique how the perspective viewed as "objective" is typically the perspective of whoever has the social power to claim objectivity. This makes the effort to market pro-environmental or leftist perspectives as reasonable/respectable/objective/centrist-in-a-just-society politically and ethically complicated. To complicate this further, some people take moderate stances and work within existing systems of power not because they're deceiving people in power or infiltrating these systems, but because they hope to uphold these systems, make a living, and/or find political or professional success within these systems.

This section suggests that conflict between extreme and palatable frameworks and tactics exists within environmental justice movements, organizations, and individual activists. Activists frequently expressed feelings of internal conflict and ambivalence about radical tactics but tended to believe sabotage of destructive property (such as pipelines) is morally defendable, while violence against people is not. Several participants explained that moderate/palatable/centrist positions are perceived in their communities as more reasonable and respectable than extreme/radical perspectives. While they personally have extreme/radical

frameworks, these participants reported that they don't frequently express these frameworks or engage in corresponding action, typically due to fear of how it might impact them socially within their communities. They also explained that they sometimes strategically hold back from using extreme/radical language when communicating with people who opposed extreme/radical solutions. This prevents the moderates and conservatives they're speaking with from shutting down and enables them to communicate their full message in more easily understandable terms, which is sometimes effective in convincing people to agree with these radical/extreme perspectives. Participants frequently expressed that the coexistence of moderate/palatable and extreme/radical tactics and arguments is necessary to construct a strong movement. One reason for this is the left-flanking effect, where radical leftist ideas make moderate leftist ideas seem more approachable while normalizing the previously "out there" radical ideas. Activists expressed that continuing moderate/palatable advocacy simultaneously can help advance small, realistic "wins" in the meantime. Activists in general expressed positive feelings about extreme/radical environmentalism, but suggested that it's difficult to be publicly extreme/radical, and emphasized the importance of a diversity of tactics.

Intersectional and Single-Issue Environmentalism

Participants proposed several different perspectives on issues of intersectional and single-issue environmentalism. Ocean explained that they'd encountered conflict within organizations they've been involved with about whether it's best to address environmental issues through a single-issue or intersectional lens, indicating that this is a prevalent divide outside of the literature. One participant explained that the ability to work simultaneously on various movements he cared deeply about was motivating and sustaining to his activism, whereas other participants reported that they felt overwhelmed and unable to address all social justice issues at

once, preferring to focus on the specific single issue they care most about. Other activists suggested that because the same systems of power cause each of these issues, and due to the inherently connected nature of environmental and social justice issues, these struggles are inseparable, and it's impossible to engage in an activism that doesn't have intersectional implications. All participants expressed care for a wide range of social justice issues, but they approached them in very different ways.

Forest framed intersectionality as feeding his activism and explained that he reached an intersectional understanding through caring about many different issues and seeing the connections between them, rather than through caring about one issue and being forced to address other issues due to their inherently intersectional nature. Forest explained:

> Having all of these things that I cared about and thought were important to pursue, and then hearing the idea of bringing all of these together in intersectional movements was most inspiring and activating for me, rather than like, "Oh, I cared about the environment so much and then I realized we need to care about people too in order for the environment to be protected."

Brooke similarly cited experiences witnessing the intersectional nature of environmental and social issues as a significant and encouraging "lightbulb moment" for her. Brooke recalled:

> My lightbulb moment was probably seeing that if I went to a protest, and it was about reproductive rights, or if it was an anti-war protest or whatever, it was all the same people. Those people also cared about the environment. Those people also had all those other issues that they were thinking about.

Silas shared several contrasting experiences of witnessing non-intersectional (or, intersectionally oppressive) environmentalism rooted in colonialism. One of these experiences involved a fundraiser with their childhood synagogue to plant trees in Israel. As a child, Silas accepted this uncritically, but after learning more, Silas developed a critical approach to environmental

actions, considering the role of systems of power such as capitalism and colonialism. Silas

reported:

> I definitely follow the more radical side. I'm Jewish, and it just reminds me of when I was a kid, at synagogue, they would be raising money to plant trees in Israel. And I thought "oh, that's so great. Trees are wonderful. I'm five years old and this is so nice!" And then later, feeling like when I learned where the trees are going — in settlements and shit—I was like, "oh, that's not environmentalism, that's colonialism." I think if the right can co-opt something like planting trees, then what do we have?

In addition to this experience, Silas recounted experiences with conservation-oriented

environmental organizations which didn't fully consider the colonial context of their

conservation actions. Childhood experiences with these organizations left a bad taste in their

mouth and prompted them to seek a more intersectional environmentalism. For these

participants, seeing real examples in which environmental and other social justice issues

intersected prompted them to explore intersectional environmentalism further. This intersectional

awareness seemed to encourage curiosity about these issues and contribute to their mobilization.

Nearly every participant framed colonization and imperialism as root causes of

environmental crises, and many participants referenced colonization and imperialism as turning

points in sparking activism. Fern framed an issue that intersected with the environment as

prompting her interest in the environment, recalling the beginning of her activist journey when

she became concerned about the first Gulf War. Fern recounted:

> The one turning point I can think of was when I was 13 or 14 and the first Gulf War started. There were these reports on how horrible war was for the environment, like oil spills, and oil fields on fire and wild things like that and depleted uranium munitions, and contamination of water supplies. I followed that conflict closely because my uncle was in the navy at the time, so I was worried about him. So I kind of became a news junkie and read a lot of stuff about what war does to the ecosystems.

When asked how he became interested in environmental issues, Cliff reported he gained this interest through working for a conservation organization as a young teenager "doing hands-on stuff for the environment—a lot of removing invasive species and stuff like that," and became further interested in the environment through seeing "the government and corporations doing their very best to disregard the environment as long as they can make a quick buck." When asked how he discovered the connection between governments, corporations, and the environment, Cliff replied:

> I don't know if there was a specific time period. It was just learning over time about the environment, learning the kind of things people were doing and who they were going up against. Seeing like, "Oh, the government's approving like a pipeline," or "This corporation is putting out hundreds of thousands of tons of CO_2 in the air" and stuff like that. Looking at when people are trying to help the environment who they're up against.

In other words, he became an environmentalist through direct experience with nature and became radicalized by seeing that governments and corporations tended to be behind environmental destruction and blocking environmental progress. Cliff further explained that rhetoric of individual responsibility fell apart during Covid, when people were staying home and reducing their consumption, but environmental issues weren't being resolved. This understanding of the capitalism-environment contradiction contributed to his radicalization as well. Cliff explained:

> I'd hear from all these corporations, "watch your personal carbon footprint" and "if everybody does these things it make a huge impact," and then everybody was staying home because of Covid. People weren't driving much, and things didn't really change, you know, because corporations were still outputting way too much, so even if we do all these things, it wouldn't matter much because we're up against corporate waste and stuff like that. There was some stuff about "nature is healing," but that was all just animals out in cities because there weren't as many people outside. It wasn't like our carbon emissions have dramatically lowered - there was still increasingly bad weather and forest fires and stuff like that. So I figured there's no way that just like common people taking personal accountability will change much if corporations aren't changing.

In addition to framing colonization and imperialism as central to environmental work, participants mentioned gender as an intersectional element influencing their activism. Sky highlighted a study done in 1990 by Hungerford and Volk which framed androgyny as being associated with PEB. Sky read the following section of Hungerford and Volk's study:

> "Androgyny [in a psychological sense] is a variable that is often associated with individuals who are active in helping resolve environmental issues. Androgyny refers to those human beings who tend to reflect nontraditional sex-role characteristics. For example, an androgynous male may be a very sympathetic individual and able to cry in a sad situation (a traditional female characteristic). An androgynous female, for example, may exhibit certain male characteristics such as assertive behavior."[293]

This finding is notable given the demographics of this study, with seven of the eleven participants identifying as either not cisgender, not heterosexual, or nonbinary. Notably, Silas explained that being queer and organizing mostly in groups of other queer people has made it difficult to get cishets to feel comfortable joining their groups because they didn't want to be associated with queerness. Silas explained:

> Because I'm queer and I've been in groups where there's a lot of queer people, we found it sometimes difficult to bring new people in who maybe weren't queer because they were very uncomfortable with the rest of us being gay. I think that can be a hindrance, but that just goes back to how it's all connected. If there's a group that's almost entirely white, for example, there's probably some racism happening there.

Where the research Sky cited suggests that diverging from cishet gender norms is associated with higher PEB, Silas suggested that opposition to the queerness of environmental activists kept some people from engaging in activism.

In contrast to the activists who framed intersectionality as motivating or energizing, Iris and Beyonce explained that limited time and energy were a barrier to intersectional thought and action. Iris reported:

> There was the burnout, and having a life outside of activism complicates things. There's this big culture in the organizations I was in, of being aware of every single problem that was going on in the world and the need to be knowledgeable and outspoken about everything. That put a lot of pressure to spend all my time learning about all of these things that are really emotionally draining to be trying to keep on your mind at all times... it was overwhelming because you couldn't be specialized in any one area of activism.

When asked about addressing the interconnectedness of all social justice issues in their action, Beyoncé replied:

> I don't think that's possible because it's too big. It takes all of our little county's energy to look at the issues around factory farming. If we tried to take on larger issues, I really think that people would become overwhelmed… There needs to be education about the interconnectedness. But if you try to fight that on all fronts, there's so much grunt work.

Despite these statements, Iris and Beyoncé both brought up intersectional issues related to environmentalism. For instance, when asked what the biggest environmental issue was right now, Iris said:

> In terms of environmental issues, the clock is really ticking on climate change if it's even still ticking at all... But there are more immediate things, like Israel's current bombing of Gaza.

Similarly, when asked about the issues she feels most called to, Beyoncé stated "all the above is pretty much my answer because they're all interconnected." In this way, every activist in this study was engaged in some kind of intersectional thought, despite reporting barriers to reaching an intersectional understanding.

Supporting this finding, several activists expressed that they don't think it's possible to focus on environmental issues without also touching other social justice issues. Fern linked intersectionality with solidarity, and suggested that while she can understand the desire to focus your attention on one issue, she sees so many connections between similarly disparate issues that she views them as inseparable. Fern explained:

> A lot of my work these days is as a labor activist. Sometimes people tell me "you should stick to wages and benefits, don't talk about whatever else," and actually today our union put out a statement calling for a ceasefire in Gaza because that's really important. We're showing solidarity with health care workers across the world. I understand to a certain degree why folks would want to just focus on environmentalism, but I don't think it's possible. We're too interconnected. All those issues are all these issues. There's all these threads connecting everything, and we have to we have to see them in order to fix things.

Several other activists expressed that intersectionality is inherent to environmental organizing due to the nature of environmental issues. For instance, Silas explained how environmentalism is inherently intersects with colonization and the Land Back movement.[4] Silas suggested:

> It's all intermingled and it's all tied together. Any environmentalism we're doing is on stolen land. So even if you think you're not engaged with an intersectional struggle, you are.

Similarly, Ocean explained how even specific single-issue organizing efforts tend to represent and address a wider range of environmental and social justice issues due to the way the world is arranged. While they were engaged in and prefer intersectional activism, they also appreciate people who focus on one issue. Ocean explained:

> I think single issue things can become really fantastic when it's like a material thing that sort of represents all those other things that you need to address as well. I think if people are like, "look, I know there's so much going on, but I'm like, dedicating my life to shutting down this coal plant," I'd be, like, "cool. The coal plant needs to go, so that's great."

This research indicates activists sometimes encounter conflict between intersectional and single-issue wings of the environmental movement. Some activists felt that due to the inherently intersectional nature of all environmental issues, it's almost impossible not to incorporate intersectionality into their environmentalism. On the flip side, others felt that their limited time

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[4] "Land Back" is a movement advocating for decolonization which frequently intersects with the environmental justice movement, as the right to care for the land in accordance with traditional stewardship practices and protect land from capitalist and colonial interests are central to the movement's goals.

and energy made it difficult to feel educated enough to speak on the wide variety of issues that intersect with environmentalism. A couple of activists also suggested that intersectionality acted as a gateway to their environmentalism. Intersectionality was an effective gateway in that it prompted interest in the common structures of power creating such a wide variety of issues. Intersectionality also felt freeing for some activists, as it allowed them to work on the many issues they cared about simultaneously, rather than feeling nailed down to one issue. In addition to discussing their feelings about intersectionality of struggles as a framework and tactic, participants also discussed many issues they view as intersecting with environmentalism at its core (such as colonization, imperialism, militarism, and racism), and sometimes discussed how their intersecting identities (such as queerness, age, disability, race, and class) impacted their activism.

Individual and Systemic Activism

Individual environmental solutions often take the form of personal lifestyle[294] and consumption adjustments[295] and are sometimes framed as a means to an end for systemic change,[296] for instance through the demand-side arguments that individual consumption choices influence corporate environmental decisions. This rhetoric sometimes results in informal adjustments in lifestyle, but can also include organized boycotts of unsustainable products, in which individuals collectively adjust their personal lifestyle choices to push for systemic changes.[297] Additional research indicates that because modeling personal pro-environmental actions shapes attitudes and actions of those around us, these behaviors are more than individual.[298] One study showed that individual actions such as recycling increases likelihood of participation in environmental movement organizations, indicating that personal actions can translate to systemic and political actions.[299] In other cases, individual environmental lifestyle

changes are framed as necessary for creating resilient communities,[300] for becoming self-sufficient,[301] or simply for creating a harmonious personal connection to nature.[302] Other scholars argue that individual pro-environmental behaviors (such as biking rather than driving) are only possible when sustainable systems (like safe bike lanes) are established.[303]

Several activists, including Cliff, expressed preference for engaging in systemic action because they view it as more effective. Cliff went on to explain that he does see the value in personal choices and wouldn't want to discourage them.

> I think personal choices are important. But my main point is that big systemic changes will lead to changes in personal behavior. So, I wouldn't discourage anyone from going vegan or anything like that. But systemic changes are going to change it even for people who don't want to go through the effort of changing what they're doing.

Prakrit similarly stressed the importance of picking appropriate systemic targets for environmental demands, while also encouraging personal environmentally friendly behavior. For instance, he critiqued a group of environmental activists at his high school who targeted street vendors who had very little money or power. He suggested that instead of shaming and harming these individuals, they could have adjusted their own environmental practices (such as through taking the easily accessible metro in his city rather than driving their own personal cars, and through having conversations with their parents, who happened to be industrialists with significant social and political power). He recommended that activists target larger corporations, such as fast fashion companies, rather than small businesses and low-income people.

> They would do these protests and stuff, and they wouldn't do anything to people who have power or anything. And they would just go to the roadside vendors who make sugarcane juice or something using a kerosene-powered makeshift engine to squeeze the sugar cane into juice, and it's bad for the environment, but it's just a small engine, and this street vendor doesn't have anything. That's all his operating capital. And without providing any better solution., they would just harass that guy, break his engine like they're doing something great... So instead of going after a huge fast fashion factory that's

polluting the environment, they're going to a low-income person who's trying to make a living. And at the same time, their parents are industrialists letting untreated water into the lakes and polluting. They just wanted to take pictures to use in university.

Silas similarly stressed the importance of choosing systemic targets for activist demands while letting people with little power off the hook for their individual behavior. They suggested that while wealthy people who are creating exorbitant pollution should adjust their behavior and face consequences if they don't, it's not particularly effective to pressure people with less power to focus their limited energy on decreasing their already small environmental impact. They also suggested that because systems make it easier for people to make better individual choices, changing systems also changes individual behaviors, but the inverse isn't always true.

> I would rather focus on systems and try to inconvenience individuals as little as possible. People that are making an outsize impact should face an outsize responsibility; people whose jets are emitting tons of carbon should change their behavior before regular people have to. Also, when you change systems, you set up individuals to make better choices and to have a lower climate impact. If we changed our transportation system, for example, then people who need to go places, which is mostly everyone, would have less climate impact from going places. That can't happen just because some more people ride bikes.

Brooke made a similar suggestion that changing systems makes the biggest impact, and critiqued individual solutions to environmental crises on the grounds that they're often focused on capitalist consumption, but also noted that she tries not to discourage people from trying to improve their environmental impact if that's the kind of change they feel most comfortable with.

> It all comes down to these ideas of regulation and corporations… but I do think it's one of those things where an individual can say "this is what I have the time, energy, and means to do," That's what I'm going to contribute to. Let's say you're talking about high school or college students; their entry point into thinking about the environment might be individual localized things that they can do.
>
> If our answers are always market-driven and capitalist, we can't fix it. I don't need an electric car; I need a bus. I don't need reusable water containers; I need safe drinking water from my faucet… But I would never want to discourage someone from their boycott or discourage someone from saying "I see this one thing that I can do and this is

how I'm going to contribute." You can do that thing and still make these larger connections.

In line with Brooke's suggestion, Iris highlighted barriers to systemic environmental action which have caused her to engage in individual environmental action. The first barrier to participation in systems-based activism was the time it takes to learn about policy-based issues and to organize ways to advocate for them. Iris explained:

> I decided to leave most of the environmental activism, mostly because of other factors in my life, like school, and the amount of time I had to dedicate to things... There's also just a bunch of availability needs with policy activism. There are lots of meetings and planning that goes into it that I just personally could not handle…I had a really hard time figuring out what I needed to know and what I didn't.

The second barrier for Iris was the social aspect of systems-based action. Collective action typically requires spending significant time interacting with people socially, which can be difficult for introverts.

> I realized that the policy side did not work well with my own personality and my strengths… A lot of that policy stuff is a lot of networking. I am just not as socially inclined in that way. I like to focus on what I can do on an individual level, even though I realize that to have a greater impact, policy is really important.

JD similarly highlighted the powerlessness that can arise when people focus on systemic solutions.

> I feel really skeptical about government intervention and solution. I realize on one hand that addressing climate breakdown is much larger than individuals and it's systemic, so systems have to change. But systems are so abstract, and that's where people begin to feel powerless. People feel empowered when they are out on the street. But then you go home, and there you are again, and it still goes on.

Activists like Fern and Ocean critiqued the idea of a divide between individual and systemic action. When asked about her preference, Fern suggested "I don't think we have to choose one or the other." Similarly, Ocean replied:

> The division between those two things is a result of propaganda…regardless of how much impact the individual thing has, it's a way to show that you care about this and have

> it impact other people's lives around you. Some individual changes are difficult … But ideally, there would be a community network of people supporting one another in that change.
>
> At the same time, there are systems that are massive and encompassing like capitalism, and I think capitalism needs to go away for real fundamental climate work to be done. But even creating those communal networks involves an *individual* trying to alter the broader system of capitalism. If I had to choose one or the other, it would be systemic. But we're part of a system, and I don't really think there's truly any such thing as an individual.

Both Ocean and Fern explain that there is a place for both individual and systemic action, that both individual and systemic action can create opportunities for the other, and that in many circumstances, specific actions can be both individual and systemic.

Throughout their discussions of these divisions within the environmental movement, participants consistently critiqued black-and-white thinking about effective activist approaches and promoted the idea of dual power and playing to your strengths as a crucial strategy for sustaining social movement activism. Theo LeQuesne applies the concept of dual power to the climate justice movement, describing a dual power strategy as featuring "simultaneous engagement with existing regimes of governance, while establishing alternative institutions that prefigure the political reality that will ultimately replace those dominant institutions."[304] This concept is relevant to the strategic combination of moderate and radical strategies participants applied in this study. Along these lines, Beyoncé suggests that infighting within movements about the correct way to approach these issues is a barrier to progress and recommends that everyone do what they find most effective and let other activists take their own approaches, even when we have conflicting feelings about those approaches.

> The other thing I think is really destructive, as a tangent to your question, is how much infighting there is in environmental movements, Black Lives Matter movements, etc. There's the idea that my way is the right way to do this. I think we all have to choose what fits best for us. Not to judge the other person and just stay on our own path. I don't

know how I can judge them because I'm not in their shoes. But I have got reactions to it. I love artwork and then people putting paint on the artwork or whatever they're doing, it's hard for me to find okay. But well, is artwork worth destroying the world for? No, of course not. But anyway, I think that's a very knotty question. But I think you take your path and you stay on it with dedication. There's room for us all.

Forest similarly emphasized the importance of making space for a diversity of tactics and expressed appreciation for when organizations have allowed him to participate in the ways he feels comfortable and excited about.

> I've appreciated when groups have made space for me to be involved in whatever way I wanna be... I used to be super quiet and introverted. I appreciated when it could be "you can do the work that doesn't require being so outgoing." I wanna try to, as much as possible, make space for people in whatever way that they want to be involved. If they come in interested in making art or doing research or organizing protests or attending protests, whatever it may be, doing electoral work, doing direct action, etc., etc. We should be open to everything --this diversity of tactics and diversity of people—we'll be better off for it. Because we truly need everybody.

Participants had several perspectives on extreme vs palatable activism, intersectional and single-issue activism, and individual and systemic activism. On the whole, participants were most sympathetic to extreme, intersectional, and systemic activism. Still, they frequently acknowledged that issues like social acceptability, time constraints, and employment made it difficult for them to take these radical actions. Participants blurred the lines between these dichotomies and recommended a diversity of tactics to achieve environmental justice.

Conclusion

This thesis provides insight on effective strategies to prompt, sustain, and protect radical environmental justice activism. I gained these insights through interviewing radical environmental justice activists on the experiences that have encouraged and discouraged their current environmental activist perspectives and strategies. These interviews revealed several experiences that consistently prompted environmental care and action among participants, and

that contributed to the radicalized orientation of participants' activism. They also revealed several more nuanced factors participants consistently reported as influencing their activism, but had more complicated and conflicting perspectives on. In addition, this study investigated several barriers participants reported as making their activism difficult, along with their strategies for overcoming these barriers and for sustaining their activism. The results of this study indicated that while there is no single universal recipe to create a radical environmental justice activist, there are many factors that radical EJ activists frequently attribute to the formation of their political and environmental stances and actions.

These interviews revealed several experiences that consistently prompted environmental care and action among participants. Direct experiences with nature, its destruction, and its protection were one set of factors, with participants reporting that direct experiences with nature led them to feel a sense of connection to nature. Bearing witness to environmental degradation, particularly when it is geographically near their homes, tended to spark motivation to act around it. In addition, watching environmental destruction helped some participants discover the systems of power behind this destruction, which contributed to their radicalization. Learning about environmental and social issues and action strategies was another frequently cited contributor to radical EJ activism. This learning frequently occurred through either hands-on experience or through college-level education. It seemed to be particularly activating when it enabled participants to attribute environmental crises to systems of power like capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Participants also cited a need for environmental education on effective action strategies in addition to techniques and concrete steps to carry out these tactics, explaining that lack of access to these tools inhibited their activism. In addition, seeing examples of other activists' efforts around environmental issues seemed to help participants visualize ways

they could get involved. Social support of activism, social invitations to participate in activism, and social connections formed and sustained through activism were also significant contributors to radical environmental activism. Several participants reported that they engaged in their first experiences of environmental activism when friends invited them to join their activist efforts. These invitations opened the door for future action. Future research could benefit this field through investigating specific systems and programs that could be implemented for the purpose of encouraging these experiences, and studying whether these programs are effective in radicalizing and activating people interacting with them.

This thesis also discusses moral emotions as a set of more nuanced factors influencing participants' activism. Activists had complicated and conflicting perspectives on moral emotions relating to anger, guilt, shame, responsibility, complacency, and moral obligation versus delegation. Some moral emotions, such as anger, were typically viewed as prompting and sustaining activists' actions. Other moral emotions, such as shame, were sometimes viewed as uncomfortable and difficult to work through. In one case, this contributed to disengagement in activism entirely. Participants had much more mixed feelings on the roles of responsibility, moral obligation versus delegation, and the "complacency is complicity" frame in prompting their action. Most participants seemed to express some feelings of responsibility and moral obligation as motivating, while believing systems of power were ultimately responsible for the current crises. One participant more strongly framed inaction as bad action, linked complacency with complicity, and expressed incredibly motivating feelings of responsibility to address environmental and social injustices.

Participants were also somewhat ambivalent about the role of hope and trust, with some participants maintaining that they have very little to no hope for a just future, and others framing

hope as a necessary practice to fuel activism. Despite this variation, these activists overwhelmingly had little to no trust in the current political system, in the idea that powerful systems would fix environmental and social problems, or in the idea that they as individuals would fix these problems alone. They did, however, tend to have some hope that the collective actions of many people together might move the future toward environmental justice. Participants also indicated that psychological constructs such as hope and trust are situation- and issue-specific, rather than exclusively person-specific. Notably, participants spent very little time discussing feelings of fear or anxiety about environmental destruction, and some participants explained their critiques of climate anxiety as a construct which sometimes censors the activists and educators who want to provide accurate and realistic information about the state of the world. Since the roles of these emotions varied strongly from person to person, useful future research could investigate the similarities and differences between people who report factors like anger, hope/trust, guilt/shame, and responsibility to activate or discourage their activism. This research might provide a better map of the contexts in which encouraging these factors might be effective. Investigating responses to the "complacency is complicity" lens and feelings of moral obligation might be particularly fruitful, given the strong responses to these frames.

In addition, this study investigated several barriers participants reported as making their activism difficult, along with their strategies for overcoming these barriers and for sustaining their activism. Encountering activist failure, frequently due to institutional backlash and cooptation, seemed to cause participants to adjust their expectations, often away from the idea that they alone would change the world and toward the idea that they could be part of a larger world-changing movement. These instances of institutional backlash and cooptation also served to radicalize several participants, who had initially assumed that institutions were on their side,

and quickly realized through encouraging these institutions to support social and environmental justice initiatives that the institutions had very few interests beyond their own profit. Unfortunately, these failures were sometimes so disappointing that they discouraged activists from engaging in the future. In addition, this institutional backlash and cooptation prevented the environmental change participants were working toward, ultimately slowing the movement. Institutional backlash against other activists (particularly by their universities) was particularly demobilizing for some activists who feared that they would be the next victims, and therefore began to disengage. Participants framed cooptation of performative environmental values by systems of power (such as through implementing small, surface level environmental adjustments while actively suppressing and slandering radical environmental activists pushing for larger systemic change) as a particularly insidious form of institutional suppression of their activism, as it allowed institutions to preserve their public image while enacting environmental injustice. Given how participants reported that institutional backlash for their activism radicalized them, it's worth investigating whether making this backlash public (so as to expose more people to this radicalizing situation) or keeping it private (in-line with participants' strategy of finding common ground, and for the purpose of maintaining relationships with people in power to increase the chance that they rule in activists' favor) is more effective in creating concrete environmental change.

Participants also frequently listed limited time, energy and money as barriers to their participation in activism. They often linked this scarcity to their employment, and explained that they needed a job to survive, but had enormous difficulty balancing employment with activism while meeting their basic needs. Several activists stressed the high cost of rent and healthcare as a significant contributor to this financial stress. Some activists suggested that keeping the

working class too busy to engage in activism is an intentional component of capitalism which is essential to its continuation. This reinforces the connection between capitalism and the environment and highlights the importance of labor and tenant organizing in equipping communities with the capacity for activism. A lack of physical access to activist spaces was another barrier for some participants. Reasons for this lack of physical access ranged from lack of public transportation, the Covid-19 pandemic, and finding that some activist spaces are not accessible for their disabilities. On the flip side, one participant reported that meeting through Zoom during the pandemic enabled him to begin participating in activism, since he didn't need to leave his room. Willingness to ask proactively about disability accommodations and make adjustments when necessary, provision of virtual meeting options, and expanded public transportation might help mitigate these barriers. On the flip side, one participant reported that meeting through zoom during the pandemic enabled him to begin participating in activism, since he didn't need to leave his room. Willingness to ask proactively about disability accommodations and make adjustments when necessary, provision of zoom options, and expanded public transportation might help mitigate these barriers.

Participants also discussed their opinions and experiences related to the intersectional, systemic, and open-to-extreme orientation of radical environmental justice activism. Participants at large supported intersectional change-making, with a couple of participants reporting that the realization that environmental issues are intersectional prompted their engagement in environmental activism. A couple of other participants reported that they think it's easier for them to engage in single-issue changemaking, and that intersectional changemaking is overwhelming to them. Those participants did still frequently bring up other social justice issues and seemed to have a broadly intersectional frame, indicating that participants tended to be

intersectional. In addition, some participants argued that activism can never be truly single-issue, as every single environmental issue interacts with other social justice issues, making it inherently intersectional. Participants also had ambivalent feelings about the sustainability of individual versus systemic environmental activism, with some participants suggesting individual action is overly stressful for its low impact, and others suggesting that systemic activism is less approachable to the average person in comparison to individual action. Activists blurred the lines between individual and systemic activism as well, emphasizing how systems create circumstances that encourage and/or discourage pro-environmental individual behaviors, and that modeling pro-environmental individual behaviors and engaging in them on a mass scale (such as in a boycott) can influence systems. Activists also blurred the lines between extreme and palatable activism, with most activists reporting extreme ideologies but engaging in moderate actions. They also tended to express that they find it effective to communicate their extreme ideologies using moderate language rooted in shared values.

In addition to reviewing some of the factors which directly influenced their environmental framework and actions, participants had several recommendations for strategies to encourage others to engage in environmental justice activism. Among the most prevalent of these strategies was to use a diversity of tactics which can be employed based on the situation and the activists' skillset. Another prominent and repeated piece of advice is to build strong social communities with fellow activists, through which you can find social connection and support. Participants in this study generously shared their invaluable and varying experiences with radical EJ activism, and I feel immensely grateful for their contributions to this study and to the movement. I hope this information is useful to current and future activists and researchers trying to prompt, sustain, and protect radical environmental justice activism.

Appendices

Appendix A: Aggregated Participant Demographic Data

Political Beliefs/Ideology	Count	Percentage
Socialist	5	45%
Communist, Socialist	4	36%
Anarchist	1	9%
Communist	1	9%

Economic Class	Count	Percentage
Upper-Middle Class	4	36%
Low Income	3	27%
Middle Class	2	18%
Lower-Middle Class	1	9%
High Income	1	9%

Ethnicity	Count	Percentage
Not Hispanic or Latino	8	73%
Hispanic or Latino	2	18%
Not Listed	1	9%

Race	Count	Percentage
White	6	55%
Not Listed	3	27%
Asian	1	9%
Black	1	9%

Gender	Count	Percentage
Woman	4	36%
Man	3	27%
Nonbinary/Genderqueer	3	27%
Man/Nonbinary/Genderqueer	1	9%

(Trans/Cis) Gender	Count	Percentage
Cisgender	7	64%
Transgender	3	27%
Not Listed	1	9%

Disability Status	Count	Percentage
Not Disabled	9	82%
Disabled	2	18%

Age	Years
Average	32.3
Standard Deviation	17
Minimum	20
Maximum	72

Religion	Count	Percentage
Atheist or Agnostic	3	27%
Spiritual, Not Affiliated With a Religion	2	18%
Islam	2	18%
Buddhism	1	9%
Jainism	1	9%
Judaism	1	9%
No Religious Affiliation	1	9%

Sexuality	Count	Percentage
Straight	4	36%
Bi/Pan/ Multi-Sexual	3	27%
Gay/Lesbian	2	18%
Not Listed	2	18%

Appendix B: Individual Participant Demographics Responses

Name	Gender	Cis / Trans Identity	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Sexuality	Disability	Class	Political ideology	Religion
JD	Non-binary / Gender-queer	Not Listed	Not Listed	White	Not Listed	Gay / Lesbian	No	Upper-Middle Class	Socialist	Jainism
Forest	Man	Cis	21	White	Not Hispanic or Latino	Straight	No	Upper-Middle Class	Socialist	No Religious Affiliation
Cliff	Man	Trans	20	White	Not Hispanic or Latino	Bi / Pan / Omni / Multi-Sexual	No	Low Income	Communist, Socialist	Atheist or Agnostic
Beyoncé	Woman	Cis	72	Not Listed	Not Hispanic or Latino	Straight	No	High Income	Socialist	Buddhism
Fern	Woman	Cis	47	White	Not Hispanic or Latino	Straight	No	Low Income	Socialist	Atheist or Agnostic
Iris	Woman	Cis	20	White	Not Hispanic or Latino	Gay / Lesbian	No	Lower-Middle Class	Communist, Socialist	Islam
Ocean	Man, Non-binary / Gender-queer	Cis	24	White	Hispanic or Latino	Bi / Pan / Omni / Multi-Sexual	Yes	Middle Class	Communist, Socialist	Spiritual
Prakrit	Man	Cis	22	Asian	Not Hispanic or Latino	Straight	No	Upper-Middle Class	Socialist	Atheist or Agnostic
Brooke	Woman	Cis	46	Not Listed	Not Hispanic or Latino	Not listed	Yes	Middle Class	Communist	Islam
Silas	Non-binary / Gender-queer	Trans	26	Not Listed	Hispanic or Latino	Bi / Pan / Omni / Multi-Sexual	No	Upper-Middle Class	Communist, Socialist	Judaism
Sky	Non-binary / Gender-queer	Trans	25	Black or African American	Not Hispanic or Latino	Not Listed	No	Low Income	Anarchist	Spiritual

Appendix C: Consent Form and Demographics Survey

Consent Form

Introduction

We invite you to participate in a research study about perspectives and experiences of environmental activists. Researchers seek 5-10 participants with experience with environmental action. Ava Corey-Gruenes, a graduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato in the department of History and Gender Studies is conducting this research under the supervision of Laura Harrison, professor at Minnesota State University, Mankato in the department of History and Gender Studies.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to provide insights on perspectives of environmental activists on intersectional, systems-based, and radical environmental action and on the experiences that have led them to these perspectives. These insights are intended to provide theoretical frameworks for future research on experiential factors related to environmental action. To participate in this research study, you must be:

- 18+ years of age, and

- Someone who has engaged in environmental activist activities. This could (but does not have to) include activities such as:

    o Volunteering at events related to environmental or social issues (like community clean-ups, community gardens, and soup kitchens),

- o Circulating petitions around environmental justice issues,

- o Participating in protests against environmental inequalities, and

- o Research or environmental education (like publishing papers about the environment or running public awareness campaigns).

The Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board has approved this study. (IRBNet Id Number: 2132855).

Procedures

If you agree to join this study, the student researcher will ask you to complete an interview in addition to a few brief demographics-based survey questions.

In total, you can expect interviews to last about 60 minutes. In a guided interview format, the researcher will ask questions and ask follow-up questions. The researcher will ask about your key ideas related to the environment and the experiences that have helped you reach these understandings. The researcher will record the meeting on Zoom and will have a rough transcript of the meeting. They will check the rough transcript with the meeting recording to make sure it is correct. The researchers will store recordings on a password protected MediaSpace account. The researchers will erase all recordings within one year after finishing all interviews. Audio and video recording of the interview is required for participation in this study. You are welcome to turn off your zoom camera during the virtual interview at any time.

You can expect the demographics-based survey questions to take roughly five minutes to complete. Results will be stored in a password protected qualtrics account, and all identifiable data will be removed within three months after finishing all interviews.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. If you begin to participate but then decide that you would like to stop, you can discontinue your participation at any point without penalty or loss of benefits. To do so, please tell the student researcher or research advisors at any time via email or while completing the meeting. If requested, all data already collected on the participant will be deleted within three business days.

Risks

The risks you will encounter as a participant in this research are not more than experienced in your everyday life. To decrease this risk, you may choose how much to share. The researchers will follow up via email once after the data is collected and once before publication of the final paper to provide an opportunity for the participants to retract any statements they have made. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher will refer to participants with a pseudonym chosen by the participant. Excluding the signing of this document, the informed consent, and the identification key, your name will not appear in the research. To protect these documents, the student researcher will keep informed consent forms and the identification key in a password protected OneDrive folder. There is always a security risk in storing confidential materials digitally. However, utilizing college accounts that are password protected decreases this risk. If

you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Information and Technology Services Help Desk (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager. After removal of identifiers from the dataset, researchers may use the dataset for future research studies or distributed to other investigators for future research studies without additional informed consent from the subject or the legally authorized representative.

Benefits

There are no direct tangible benefits to the participant.

Because you have been invited to participate in this research study, you have a right to a copy of this informed consent page. To receive a copy by email, please contact Ava Corey-Gruenes at ava.corey-gruenes@mnsu.edu

If you have any questions about this research study, contact Ava Corey-Gruenes at ava.corey-gruenes@mnsu.edu. If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at 507-389-1242.

Before proceeding with the survey, please confirm that you have read the information above.

☐   I have read the informed consent page for this research study.

Please also confirm that you are 18 years of age or older.

☐   I am 18 years of age or older.

☐   I am under 18 years of age.

Audio and video recording of the zoom interview is required for participation in this study. You are welcome to turn off your zoom camera during the virtual interview at any time. Please confirm whether we have consent to take audio and video recording of the zoom meeting.

☐   Yes, I consent to audio and visual recording of the zoom meeting.

☐   No, I do not consent.

Participation in this research study is voluntary, as described above. You have the right to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. To terminate participation, you may ask to stop. Leaving the interview, leaving the consent form unsubmitted, and terminating communication will all be understood as a request to terminate participation. Any significant new findings developed during the course of the research that may influence a participants' willingness to continue will be provided to you. Now that you have read all of the above information and confirmed that you are 18 years old or older, please choose one of the following:

☐   I agree to participate in this study.

☐   I do not wish to participate in this study.

Note: If a participant selects an answer that deems them ineligible, they are given the following response: Based on your response, you are not eligible for this study. If you believe you entered inaccurate information, please revise it. If you understand you are ineligible, please exit the survey.

Demographics Survey

How do you identify your gender?

☐   Man

☐   Woman

☐   Non-binary/Genderqueer

☐   Not Listed: _____

Do you identify as cisgender or transgender?

☐   Cisgender

☐   Transgender

What is your age? _____

How would you describe your race?

☐   Asian

☐   Black or African American

☐   Middle Eastern or North African

☐   Native American or Alaska Native

☐   Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

☐   White

☐   Not Listed: _____

How would you describe your ethnicity?

☐   Hispanic or Latino

☐   Not Hispanic or Latino

How would you describe your sexuality?

☐   Straight

☐   Gay/Lesbian

☐   Bisexual/Pansexual/Omnisexual/Multisexual

☐   Asexual

☐   Not Listed: _____

Do you have any disabilities?

☐   Yes

☐   No

What is your religion, if any?

☐   Christianity

☐   Islam

☐   Judaism

☐   Hinduism

☐   Buddhism

☐   Sikhism

☐   Other major world religion (Jainism, Taoism, Shintoism, Confucianism, etc.)

☐   Indigenous or Folk Religions (specify if applicable)

☐   Athiest or Agnostic

☐   Spiritual, not affiliated with a religion

☐   No religious affiliation

☐   Other: _____

How would you describe your economic class?

☐   Low income

☐   Lower-Middle Class

☐   Middle Class

☐   Upper-Middle Class

☐   High Income

What best describes your political beliefs or ideology?

☐   Communist

☐   Socialist

☐   Liberal

☐   Libertarian

☐   Centrist

☐   Conservative

☐   Far-Right

☐   Other: _____

Contact Information

If you are interested in participating in an interview as described in the beginning of this survey, please provide your contact information.

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

First and Last Name: _____

End of Survey

To schedule your interview, please visit this bookings page. Thank you for completing this survey!

Appendix D: Interview Questionnaire Guide

Introduction:

I am working to help get people excited and engaged in different kinds of environmental justice activism. I'm hoping to get a feel for the different perspectives that environmental activists have and the experiences that helped them reach those perspectives. I'm looking forward to speaking with you!

1. How are you doing?

2. Can we record this conversation?

Objective 1: Understanding Their Work:

1. Have you been thinking about any fun plans or projects lately?

2. Can you tell me a little bit about what kind of environmental work you've done?

    Examples might include…

    a. Volunteering at events related to environmental justice issues,
    b. Circulating petitions around environmental justice issues,
    c. Participating in environmental justice protests, and
    d. Research or environmental justice education.

Objective 2: Understanding Their Formative Environmental Experiences:

1. What got you interested in environmental issues?

2. Were there any turning points or lightbulb moments you had that inspired you to do environmental action?

3. Have you had any realizations that have caused you to adjust the type of environmental action you do?

4. People often talk about emotions that have inspired or deterred them from doing activism. There are different narratives about how people feel angry or worried about environmental problems and hopeful that they can make a change, or that people feel scared of going to protests, or would feel guilty if they didn't engage. What has the role of emotions been in your path to environmental action?

Objective 3: Understanding Barriers to Their Environmental Action

1. What kind of challenges have you faced in your environmental action?

2. Have there been any barriers hindering your environmental activism?

3. What are some things you would like to accomplish, but have not yet accomplished because of barriers? (not enough money, no support in community, etc.)

    a. What are those barriers?

    b. How might those barriers be overcome?

Objective 4: Understanding Their Environmental Approach

1. What do you see as the most important environmental issues?

2. What are the key ideas people should know about environmental issues?

Individual vs Systemic

3. There's a split within environmental movements between making individual choices to protect the environment, like going vegan or recycling, and doing advocacy around changing systems. Where do you think you fall within that split?

Extreme vs Moderate

4. Activists have different stances on how to achieve their goals. Some participate in actions like physically sabotaging construction of an oil pipeline, calling for an end to capitalism and the military. Others advocate for things like volunteering at community gardens, or sharing fundraisers for tree planting programs. Where do you think you fall on that spectrum of action?

Single issue vs intersectional activism

5. Another split within the environmental movement seems to be the idea that since we'll all die if the planet is destroyed, environmentalism needs to be the top priority, versus environmentalism that's also involved in other social justice issues – things like decolonization, opposing militarism, and focusing on issues like environmental racism. What are your thoughts on that?

6. Do you see any other major splits or divisions in the environmental movement?

Closing:

7. In what ways do you hope the environmental movement changes in the future?

8. Is there anything that you'd like to add that I haven't asked you about?

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