

Embodied Ways of Knowing: Women's Eco-Activism

by

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BA, Simon Fraser University, 1993
MA, University of Victoria, 2004

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

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Traditional knowledges and ways of living in harmony with the Earth and among species have been disregarded, discarded, and destroyed as industrialisation, capitalism, and globalisation have pervaded, all maintained in part by the Cartesian split which dissociates body from mind, heaven from Earth, nature from culture. These hegemonic layers of control have served to bind the fate of the Earth's eco-systems, including human life, to the global capital economy which thrives on growth and development at any and all costs.

This feminist, arts-informed inquiry brought an embodied lens to the stories of eco-activism and inquired as to the role of embodied ways of knowing and their role in eco-activism and the toll of activism upon women eco-activist bodies. This research inquiry interviewed thirteen women eco-activists, conducted four art-making focus groups, and used embodied reflexivity as part of the analysis process in order to find new understandings and knowledge to add to the limited literature on embodiment, embodied ways of knowing, and women's eco-activism. Furthermore, this research sought to identify and articulate the ways in which activism practice can be more sustainable for

activists and intended to add to the growing awareness body/mind connection and unity consciousness for activists, educators, and others working towards social change.

The key findings of this research indicate that embodied knowledges counter fragmented ways of living, foster sustainable practices, and offer guidance and direction to live more harmoniously with, and on, the Earth and to practice activism. It also expands our understanding of women's embodied ways of knowing and illuminates our understandings of how bodies can guide and show alternate ways of living, and practising activism, that are sustainable. This inquiry further added to the growing awareness of body/mind connection and unity consciousness with a focus on activists, educators, and others interested in finding ways to live with, rather than on, the Earth.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who work on behalf of the Earth and all her species. May you fall deeply into the wisdom of your body and have it hold and guide your activist practice.

CHAPTER ONE

The Entry Point

This worked called me – I felt it in my bones, it stirred me deeply – my body guided me to and through the work. It began long before I started my doctoral work...in February of 2006 I was invited with two colleagues to Fort Simpson, Northwest Territories to teach a trauma resolution workshop. Having never been to the North I was struck by many things – most notably the apparent intactness of the culture and connection to the land of the Indigenous people despite the colonisation and extermination policies and practices utilised in residential schools. I was also struck by the undeniable power of the land – how my body dropped, as if the land helped hold not only my own suffering but the suffering of the people I was with. *By my body dropped*, I don't mean that I collapsed, rather I felt a slowing and expanding of my inner self, the way my body regulated, the way I stood in myself and the ways in which I was in connection with those around me. I felt changed by the land, supported by it, in ways that I had never experienced.

My curiosity was peaked. What was the link between a deep connection to the land and resiliency? How did that connection impact embodiment? What were the links between the sacred, land, and embodiment? I was looking for answers but at the time I found it hard to form the questions...I could feel them in my body yet they were not ready to be articulated. I followed this felt sense, it was an inkling of a knowing...I could feel a pull and I began putting pieces together. During this time I was in contact with Dr. Darlene Clover who encouraged me to do my doctorate with her in leadership studies. To consider moving departments from counselling psychology was a challenge for me because of my own fractured worldview and the

proliferation of dualities in educational and professional disciplines. I struggled to trust this move into an expanded interdisciplinary view, and feared that this expansion would alienate me from colleagues in my professional life. My initial work was to drop deep into my own knowing and to be willing to stand in what I believe – I couldn't afford to care that within my field or the fractured world this choice was not understood if I were to lead or move forward from a place of embodied integrity. For me, I found that place by dropping into my own knowing, not only of my own knowing, but by trusting the relationship of Darlene Clover who had been open hearted and encouraging from the beginning. Having taken the leap, grateful for the opportunity and support, I have been graced with having the space to explore, link, and expand my understanding and to articulate the ways in which embodied ways of knowing counteract the fragmented self and world. In doing so I believe that it made one small stand toward my own integrated approach to living and in building a bridge between individual and collective healing oft delineated in academia.

Some Background and Self Location

As a white, middleclass, straight woman I have been afforded much privilege throughout my life. In my twenties and early thirties I worked in multiple non-profit agencies: I was keenly aware of the "costs" associated with doing front line crisis and counselling work and taking action towards changing the status quo. I myself had seen, felt, and witnessed despair, rage, isolation, heartache, and triumph. I knew and saw great women burn themselves out over and over again. I witnessed this unchecked drive, or as I would now name it, disembodied activism, create issues in their bodies and interpersonal lives.

In 2002 I began training as a somatic therapist and began my own long journey of becoming embodied and living with a non-dualistic consciousness. This work continues to date. As a body oriented psychotherapist, educator, and social activist I continued to have first-hand experiences and to witness many challenges which activists experience through their activism, at this point with a new lens – embodiment. I came to believe that much activist, leadership, and educational work often lacks the personal embodiment, awareness, or action imperative for ethical and sustainable practices towards the self, as exemplified in experiences of burnout, compassion fatigue, isolation, and despair. In looking to the literature I could find nothing that addressed these concerns. I delved into more mainstream authors such as Starhawk, Joanna Macy, and Paul Hawken and continued to make connections from my own experience and my experience as a psychotherapist; I also started delving into writings of Jungian scholars through the Spring Journal of Archetype and Culture edited by Nancy Cater. I was inspired. I came to be curious about how embodiment was linked to ways of knowing through connection to the body, Earth¹, and spirit, and how these ways of knowing offer support and guidance for care and action. This led me to this research – to explore how the body guides women’s eco-activism and how the body is affected by eco-activism. More specifically, I looked at how 13 women eco-activists used their bodies to access embodied ways of knowing or embodied epistemological sites to support and guide them in their activism and self-sustainability.

During this time I have had the good fortune of being invited to different communities to work. I continue to feel welcomed and supported by different lands and have received great teachings from the participants about how their connection to the land and Earth supports them. Most notably I have been to the mountains in Kaslo, BC which held our work so deeply and firmly that I felt called to do part of the research in the Nelson area. I felt called and followed

1. I capitalise Earth to show respect

that inkling by interviewing four women who lived there individually and then by returning months later to meet with them and carry out an arts-informed focus group. I make my home on Coast Salish territory in Victoria, BC. Throughout this time, the land and ocean has remained a faithful supporter of me. I carried out the remainder of my research in Victoria or in the surrounding area, interviewing nine more women and holding three additional arts-informed focus groups.

By inquiring with women eco-activists about how the body informs, affects, and is affected through their activism, this study is able to offer some insight towards social and ecological transformation and increased sustainability for eco-activists and all of life, as “social justice cannot be achieved apart from the well-being of the Earth; our fates are intertwined” (Mack-Canty, 2004, p. 169). Further, this study gives voice to embodied ways of knowing that have the potential to counteract the fractured ways in which we understand and carry out living.

In reflecting on the past six years I see that I entered into the programme knowing that it would companion me as I came to understand what it is to lead from the inside out. The gifts that have fostered that along the way have been plentiful, most notably the awareness of just how deeply dualistic frameworks are embedded in my psyche and how utterly colonised I am. The paradox is that this awareness is comfortable, as in familiar, and it is incredibly uncomfortable. Merely my choice to do a PhD with the hopes of decolonising myself is absurd as I sit with it now. It is not unlike engaging in war to establish peace. Yet, shift has happened, and continues, as I am here and writing with the knowing that the journey is not over for in every moment it begins.

Statement of the Problem

Many scholars argue that we live in a fragmented world (Bai & Scutt, 2009; McGilchrist, 2009; Tacey, 2010; Ray, 2008). Long before you and I were born, the ways in which we live with, and on, the world were fractured. We are born into this way of being and it has become woven into the contextual landscape of our lives, both within and outside of us: Who we are, how we live, and the choices we make are not inseparable from the sociocultural and political arenas in which we exist. I believe it is the fracturing of life that is the problem in the industrialised world of the twenty-first century; a global market that supports capitalism, abuses of power, and exploitation. In Canada and in the United States capitalism is at the very core of our fragmented ways of life creating ongoing local and global issues visible in areas of health and healthcare, poverty, war and human rights, the criminal justice system, education and credentialing, and environmental concerns: Merchant (2005) claims “The global ecological crisis is exacerbated by the globalization of capitalism” (p. 30). The current and worsening ecological crisis is merely one of many symptoms that illuminate the destructive nature of this fractured life and our collective crisis of consciousness: “The so-called environmental crisis is actually misnamed....It is not a crisis that begins with the environment, but one that begins with human consciousness” (Tacey, 2010, p. 335).

There are overwhelmingly vivid expressions of ecological destruction and suffering resulting both directly and indirectly from the fractured ways inherent in first world living. While there is widespread disagreement amongst scholars and scientists within the environmental field, many believe that telltale signs are abundant and forewarn of what is to come if new, radical ways of being and knowing are not adopted (Hawken, 2007; Macy, 2007; Orr, 2009a; and Suzuki, 2007). O’Keeffe (2010) suggests that as the state of the Earth continues

to deteriorate, humans, individually and collectively, are being called upon to re-vision or re-imagine our relationship and how we live in and on the Earth. Different ways of knowing and being that have been silenced and excluded by “the power regimes that currently organize our world” (personal communication, Leslie Brown March 11, 2013) are needed to make the radical shifts necessary to alter the trajectory of environmental destruction and the impending fall-out. More and more, people are responding to, and engaging in, activism towards sustainability and changing individual behaviours (Clover, 2002). World-wide, women are engaging in environmental justice (Barry, 2008), but despite this, environmental issues continue to increase (Clover, 2002) and there exists expanding uncertainty as we traverse this unknown territory. The current dominant global ideological agenda cannot be underestimated: Issues of environmental degradation are political and are enabled by governmental support and corporate issues (Clover, 2002). In the current epoch of “neo-liberal governments and global economic forces, environmental and social justice movements are increasingly challenged to tackle the structures underpinning social inequality and environmental degradation” (Gardner, 2005, p. 4). Yet, individualistic solutions and behaviour changes such as “reduce, reuse, and recycle” are touted as the solution – despite their insufficiencies (Clover, 2002). In actuality, there “is little insight into long-term solutions” (Bondar, 1999, p. 11). O’Keeffe (2010) problematises problem solving processes whereby “Solutions are tailored to fit within the dominant economic system: the current paradigm, not a re-imagined one, that shapes virtually all decisions” (p. 62).

The intersectionality of the subjugation and domination of women, nature, and the body continue to be unabated despite (eco)feminist and other social movements of the past four decades. These connections have been used by the Western patriarchal paradigm to justify the

objectification and devaluation of women and nature and to invalidate environmental and women's concerns (Gardner, 2005).

In looking to the literature there are ample articles on embodiment, activism, and spirituality, however, there are no studies that directly look at how activists use their bodies to inform their activism. This study asked women eco-activists about their bodies in the context of their activism – how do their bodies inform them and how are they affected – in the hopes of finding some ways of embodied being and knowing that might offer glimpses of a path to support us through this mess we find ourselves in and challenged to take responsibility for. This study looks at embodied knowledges as a counter to fractured ways of knowing – and holds the question of what promise might this offer. This study is by no means the answer to the world's problems – in fact, in my estimation the search for a solution only contributes to the problem, as problems are often broken into pieces and fragmented from the whole which is in essence the predicament we find ourselves in today. *This predicament begs the questions: how did we end up here? what is maintaining the predicament? and how do we get out of this mess?*

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore how embodied ways of knowing support women eco-activists in their activism. I was also interested in how women's eco-activist bodies were affected by activism and the implications of this. Using a feminist approach that included arts-informed creative process focus group sessions and individual interviews, I worked with women to inquire into the role of the body, the concept of embodiment, issues surrounding sustainability of self, embodiment and embodied ways of knowing, and the impact of activism for thirteen women eco-activists. The research question that guided this study was: *What role*

does the body have in women's eco-activism and what are the effects of eco-activism on the body?

Literature Review

The literature review begins in chapter two, providing the context and analytical framework for this inquiry. In order to respond adequately, one has to consider the contexts: the historical, the socio-cultural, the political, and the psychological. Chapter two does this. I outline the historical context that laid the foundation for these current-day contexts to flourish. Namely, the rise and dominance of rational reasoning based in dominant left brain thinking that came about in the era of Enlightenment. The imbalance in the way in which we utilise our brain, as McGilchrist (2009) calls it, paved the way for disembodied and fractured ways of thinking, skewed perceptions of the world, and ultimately, of living. From this dualistic starting point, understandings of the world such as mind/body; man/woman; human/nature were established and allowed for control over that which was subordinate – body, woman, and nature.

Next, I look at the political context and ask who does this serve and how does this context remain powerful? I speak to the rise of capitalism and expansion into corporate capitalism and globalisation as the political context that further forges and maintains duality thinking, fractured living, and harken to neoliberal ideology as the totalising framework of the West.

The sociocultural context is explored next with the questions of how and why has this container been created and what purpose does it serve. Considerations such as epistemologies of ignorance (Pascale, 2010) based in dualistic frameworks that sever our awareness of the interconnectivity of life and the supremacy of the rational mind are examined as part of the context that maintains fractured living.

Lastly, I outline the psychological context in which we live. What is it about humans, how we think, what we believe, and the ways in which we live, that continue to be hazardous to our health and the health of the planet and all life forms? This section explores the fractured ways of living which are predominant in the West in terms of technology, consumerism, and disconnection to ourselves, others, and the Earth, as the context that keeps us in want of more, unable to find peace or fill the insatiable need bequeathed to the masses via disconnection, disembodiment, and fractured living and fulfilled day-to-day by the machines of globalisation. This sets the context to look at the overview of the problem – the problem not being the ecological crisis, as this is but a symptom of the meta problem of how we live in relationship, what drives us, what are the rationale and the ramifications of this way of life, and how do we make sense of this ecological problem which is symptomatic of the fractured ways in which we exist. Chapter three offers theoretical areas to provide the framework for this study of embodiment and embodied ways of knowing. Within chapter three I cover embodiment, feminism and embodiment, dimensions of embodiment, the undivided body, embodied learning, embodiment in education, and embodied ways of knowing. These embodied ways of knowing, a more nuanced understanding and praxis of the body as a starting point and conduit for subjugated knowledges, are explored, including the body as a site of knowledge, Earth as a site of knowledge, and spiritual epistemological sites. Chapter three delves into the ways in which embodied knowings can avail underutilised avenues of exploration, awareness, and guidance to create new possibilities in ways of living with, and on, the Earth. It highlights the marginalised location of embodied knowledge not only in everyday living in the West but in education, including academia. As subjugated sites of knowledge, the body, Earth, and spirit are rendered

silent in the ongoing manufacturing of life where the rational, logical left hemisphere of the brain runs rough-shod over the wide lens, visionary functioning of the right hemisphere.

Chapter four is dedicated to activism. In this chapter I explore what activism is, what activism looks like, activism and the body, activism and embodiment, eco-activism and spirituality, and studies linking activism and the body. In essence, this chapter explores an expanded view of activism and speaks to the significant role the body plays in activist practice. Finally, I offer a short conclusion that links the three chapters that make up the literature review.

Methodology

I used a feminist arts-informed inquiry as the methodological framework for this study. Feminist research brings women's experiences and voices into the forefront (Andrews, 2002), builds oppositional knowledge (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999; Hesse-Biber & Brooks, 2007), and advocates for social change (Apodaca, 2009; Hesse-Biber & Brooks, 2007; Pillow, 2003). Arts-informed research has important social action elements and seeks to showcase marginalised voices and build oppositional knowledge. Art and feminist approaches can be critical to the process of creating oppositional knowledges and "surfacing ways of knowing and constructing meaning for social change" (McKenzie, 2005, p. 23).

I collected data using two sources. The first was individual interviews. The second was focus groups where we made prayer flags. To carry out analysis, I engaged with the material on a number of levels. Integral to this work was the use of embodied reflexivity, practices of embodiment, art, and meditation as methods to analyse the data.

Significance of the Study

This research generated extensive exploration of the body as a tool of cultural and social discourses (e.g., Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1980), the body as a site of knowledge (e.g., Chapman, 1998; Ray, 2008; Wilson, 2004), women's ways of knowing (e.g. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) and the body as the sacred gate to spiritual life (Ray, 2008). This study offers some insights into ways that the body and embodiment can avail epistemological sites or embodied ways of knowing and offer potential direction back to a place of guidance and balance for activists and people in general. Further, this inquiry contributes to the research on activism, embodied ways of knowing, and embodiment which has been absent in the field.

The purpose of this study was to elicit some understanding of how women's bodies affect and are affected through their eco-activism. A further purpose was to illuminate if and how activists are currently using the wisdom of their bodies and the Earth to make their activism practice more sustainable. This is significant in that gaining insight and understanding into personal experiences of activists is critical in several ways: exploring the often private stories of how women respond to the "risks and challenges" of engaged eco-activism and maintain commitment through time (Gaarder, 2008, p. 2); as well as by gaining an understanding of the ways in which embodied ways of knowing guide and protect women in their activist practices. Furthermore, Hall (2009) indicates that from his perspective "the very core of social and cultural transformation" (p. 67) happens via the creation of new knowledges in social movements and "ripples" outwards "to those of us who are not part of the movements, to those in the academy looking for more reliant ways of explaining things and eventually to the changing of institutional behaviours" (p. 67).

This study is political in nature, particularly in the context of academia, as it invites the reader to engage with the material through their sensing, live bodies not merely their minds. This is political in that to engage in embodied knowing is a political act of resistance to the dominant discourses of pedagogy and learning (Gustafson, 1998). It is significant in that it invites the reader to move into a more embodied state and engage with, and value other ways of knowing which is counter to the norm of academic work and daily life. Further, this study is political in nature as it reclaims marginalised knowledges “away from the binary conceptualizations fostered under existing research paradigms” (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 11).

How to Engage with this Work

In January 2011 one of my committee members asked me how they were to evaluate my work. My reply was along the lines of, "let it resonate in your body," to which she followed up with “you’ll have to teach me.” This has been with me ever since...not haunting me per say but it has been a consistent companion. This invitation to “teach me” illuminates our ultimate challenge – doing and living in embodied ways.

I have come to know that one cannot force embodiment, we are far too complex psycho-physiologically to demand that of ourselves or of others. The path to embodied experience or living is through engaging people where they are, meeting them there, and extending an invitation to hear, feel, and respond to the call of their body, and their psyche, and to listen and experience the moment in a different way. This will be very different for each of us. For some, I invite you to let go of your "critical analysis" for the time being, to let the words conjure up images and allow yourself time to feel how they sit in your body, and how you sit in your body. For others, I invite you to pause as you read, close your eyes, and notice what happens within

you. Allow your body the freedom to respond and be heard by you. Others might choose to read this in pieces, letting go of time and allowing your body to guide you in how you process the experience; by experience the invitation extends to reflecting on what is stirred or conjured up beyond what is written. If at this moment you are stymied, take Blair's (2009) words to action, "in order to be able to doing something, one must be able to imagine it, and in order to understand something, one must be able to imagine it" (pp. 95-96). Allow yourself a moment to imagine your body responding to what you experience as you read. Above all, my invitation to you, the reader, is to be with yourself and engage with this work in a different, more embodied way.

CHAPTER TWO

The Contexts

The Ecological Context

Inquiring into the links between eco-activism, embodiment, and embodied ways of knowing is a process that extends far beyond the scope of this study. The ongoing ecological crisis cannot be solved nor understood by one perspective alone – each of us is oriented in a particular way through our worldview, our belief systems, our lived experience, our professional training and expertise, and the ways in which we gather and create knowledge. This research is oriented in this same way. Like activists, researchers have to narrow their interests and find a particular niche to focus on. I have chosen to look at embodied ways of knowing. In particular, I have located the inquiry of embodied ways of knowing in the context of women and eco-activism. The underlying dualisms pervasive in Western culture are foundational to this work as I believe that they are key barriers to embodiment and contribute to the on-going desecration of the Earth. In using the term "Western" I am referring to a global system of knowledge that seems to be dominating the world, rather than a local system of knowledge (Hawthorne, 2002). From this standpoint I have asked women eco-activists the question: How does your body inform your activism and how is it affected by it?

This chapter begins with the brief statement of the contextual situation followed by a historical contextual framework which outlines the emergence of Western knowledge practices of duality. I then offer political, sociocultural, and psychological contexts to explicate the contextual frameworks that have created, supported, and continue to maintain disembodied or fractured ways of living. I trust this needs to be explicated so as to offer a comprehensive

perspective and implications of Western living. These contexts illuminate the colonisation and practices of colonisation that render us disconnected from the very act of living in an embodied way, which I believe to be innate in all of us.

The Present Day Context

We are living in a crisis of consciousness (Tacey, 2010) – the significant issues of our time merely reflect different aspects of one crisis, a crisis Ray (2008) refers to as a “crisis of disembodiment” (p. 22). We exist in a fractured world, disembodied from ourselves and ways of knowing that are experienced in the lived world. When we take into account the implications of capitalism and the shift into left brain dominance we understand how this creates a fertile ground for disconnected or fractured life: The all-encompassing reach of capitalism combined with the over-reliance on left brain thinking creates disembodiment. When we are disembodied we don’t have access or full access to embodied ways of knowing. This is a crisis of consciousness.

Over two decades ago Joanna Macy asked, “In the face of what is happening, how do we avoid feeling overwhelmed and just giving up, turning to the many diversions and demands of our consumer societies?” (1991, p. 4). This question continues to be relevant, perhaps even more so today than in 1991. The predominant current paradigm sees

the natural world as merely a backdrop for humankind’s activities, and sees nature as a mere storehouse of ‘resources’ to be transformed into economic goods to exclusively benefit humans. Almost by definition, the paradigm does not entertain a vision of the future. (Zorrilla, 2002, p. 56)

Frighteningly, we objectify that which is around us, our physical environment, viewing it as separate from ourselves and using it as if it were a commodity (Zapf, 2005). These discourses of

separation, objectification, industrialisation, individualism, and consumerism, in combination with the decline of spiritual consciousness and practice, a disconnected existence, and left brain dominance and over-reliance, create fragmented communities and impair the ability to know, live, and make changes that take into account sustainable practices of living from a systems framework. We stand on the precarious cliff of our future. Indeed, as Gardner suggests

If one lives in a culture steeped in segmentation it is challenging to live and act holistically. Dominant Western paradigms constantly give us messages to live and act in fragmented ways. Patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, anthropocentrism, and other systems of domination disconnect us from others and ourselves. Mind, body, and spirit are continually viewed in separation; logical reason tends to preside over intuition and emotion; the separation of public and private spheres continues to be normative; humans are viewed as superior to the natural world; as a group, men continue to be privy to more social power than women; minoritized cultural groups are dealt less societal influence than Caucasian groups; and individuals are viewed as more separate than connected to one another (2005 p. 5-6).

These discourses maintain a web that imprisons us in the very way of being that threatens our existence by disconnecting us from ourselves, community, and the larger eco-system which we are a part of, and rely upon. This disconnection from nature leaves us in an alienated state (Tacey, 2010), removed from the awareness that “Nature does not need us to rule over it” (Radford Ruether, 1996, p. 330).

The Historical Context

In taking into account the fractured landscape that holds our lives we want to travel back to the Age of Enlightenment—the Age of Reason—beginning in the early to mid-sixteen hundreds. The Age of Enlightenment introduced and championed science and intellectualism as supreme ways of knowing with the intention of reforming a society steeped in religion and spirituality. The proponents of the Enlightenment wished to evolve knowledge from the emotional and intimate ways of knowing into knowledge through science, reason, and rationality. McGilchrist (2009), a psychiatrist who studies the ways in which the hemispheres of the brain function, claims that 15th and 16th century Europeans enjoyed a balanced functioning of their right and left hemispheres. He explains that reason which sees in context is not problematic, rather, the Enlightenment era introduced reason that was founded on rationality and this “imposes an ‘either/or’ on life which is far from reasonable” (p. 331), and is a function of the left hemisphere. Problems arise when the left hemisphere leads rather than is informed by the right hemisphere (McGilchrist, 2009) – this reliance and dominance of the left brain translates into ways of being that create fragmentation and disembodiment.

The philosophical writings of René Descartes (1596-1650) introduced the roots of dualistic living that escorted the Enlightenment era into full force. Descartes called for a separation between the body and mind; Michelson (1998) claims this disconnection began on the day that Descartes “severed his body from his head” (p. 217). This division co-opted rationality, reason, and objectivity as the superlative mode, attributing them to the mind. In privileging reason formed by rational thought, the body lost its legitimacy as an epistemological site (Clark, 2001): “Descartes, in short, succeeded in linking the mind/body opposition to the foundations of

knowledge itself, a link which places the mind in a position of hierarchical superiority over and above nature, including the nature of the body” (Grosz, 1994, p. 6).

This divisive and limiting worldview relegated subjectivity, emotionality, and the body to the subjugated realm of other— “the body is an absent presence, the Orientalised Other of the mind, representing the antithesis of reason and objectivity” (Chapman, 1998, p. 98). This view supported the aims of colonisation: domination, competition, control, and ownership—which eventually evolved into the aims of capitalism, then corporate capitalism, and finally into globalisation. This orientation, based on hierarchical conceptual frameworks, prejudices the superior toward abuses of power, exploitation, domination, subjugation, and sets the stage for interaction (Maioli, 2009). Cartesian philosophy also established the nature-versus-culture duality central to Western thought and philosophy today (Mack-Canty, 2004), effectively denying the epistemological stances availed from and through the body, thus rendering the body and embodied ways of knowing silent.

The Enlightenment era shepherded in the Industrial Revolution. Starting in 1750 and continuing for the next sixty to eighty years, radical changes were seen in the areas of farming and agriculture, transportation of people and goods, manufacturing, mining, and technology (Duiker & Spielvogel, 2010). These changes profoundly impacted the sociocultural, political, and economic arenas of life and greatly changed everyday living. Populations grew, commerce expanded, and there was a transition from an agrarian way of life to a mechanised, machine based workforce who flocked to the cities to find factory jobs and entered into waged labour. The world was forever changed. Economics had taken a front seat in everyday living and the fragmented life was institutionalised (Duiker & Spielvogel, 2010).

Over the 19th and 20th centuries capitalism took hold across Europe and the Western world. Private ownership, wage labour, competitive markets, the creation of goods or services for power, profit and wealth accumulation, and the on-going need for growth and development became hallmark features of capitalism, and now globalisation, and fostered further changes to the ways of everyday life. Globalisation, which emerged through the advancement of colonialism and capitalist practices introduced in the sixteenth century (Merchant, 2005) is simply the most current phase of Western colonialist empire-building through which militarisation and economic hegemony assert domination and jurisdiction (Radford Ruether, 2005).

Current adaptations of capitalism, corporate capitalism, or globalisation can be seen with “commodities that claim to be advancing some kind of social justice agenda, like organic foods and other such 'responsible' consumer products” (Hickel & Khan, 2012, p. 15), somehow relaying

both the mark of institutional power and signifies a public disavowal of this very power in the service of creative self-expression. This form of consumption is a way to signal one’s rejection of the mainstream. Today, dissent is a highly valued commodity that is openly bought and sold in the marketplace....It trades a deeply felt political urge (revolution) for a passive instantiation of identity and difference (consumerism). (p. 215 parenthesis in original)

Wage slavery, exploitation, commodification of natural resources, war, corporatisation, social and class divisions, and politics, all have come to revolve around economics and capitalism in one way or another, creating a system that Hickel & Khan (2012) name as destructo-industrial production that is unsustainable. Patterson (2007) asserts “destructo-industrial technologies are

those technologies that focus on enhancing labor production with little if any regard for consequential harm to environmental sources and sinks” (p. 147). Despite the mounting evidence of these unsustainable practices and destruction to Earth and species, Hickel & Khan (2012) claim that the underlying push comes from neoliberal ideology that

has become a totalizing way of life, a worldview that furnishes the terms for everyday praxis and representation, creates its own forms of political participation and activism, and promotes a virtually unassailable notion of morality. It is not just a manipulative ploy to appropriate surplus value, but a regime in the truest sense of the term—a cultural logic that insinuates itself into every aspect of lived experience. (p. 205)

Corporate capitalism is at the forefront of neoliberal ideology and continues to colonise the bodies we live in and the very ways in which we exist. In essence, capitalism has become seen like, and worshipped like, the sun in ancient times – a prime controller of all life on Earth.

The Political Context

Hickel and Khan (2012) claim that the counterculture movement that began in the 1960s and protested the mass conformist capitalism has merely created another way for capitalism to morph. A case in point was when companies responded to this counterculture movement by creating non-conforming consumables that this demographic identified with: “To be counter-cultural, one would simply have to consume the commodities symbolically associated with counter-culture” (p. 212). The most current example of this are corporations and states that are in pursuit of being a leader in the eco-technology field while operating on the assumption that environmental issues can be handled without a fundamental change in values or economic system (Patterson, 2010).

Capitalism, and the means by which capitalism produces, advances a fundamental understanding of the etiology of the current global environmental crisis: “more than any other single factor these material conditions of production have determined the patterns of justice or injustice within societies and have similarly been the principal regulators of environmental quality” (Miller, 1994, p. 79). Furthermore,

Most observers would agree that capitalism *as we know it* is thoroughly inept when it comes to addressing climate change and that redemption can only be found, if at all, in its capacity for transformative change towards sustainability. (Storm, 2009, p. 1017 italics in original)

Despite this, these ideological frameworks continue to grow as more and more people want the spoils of capitalism that promise redemption to those who have the most.

The underlying ideological framework of globalisation is built upon religious fundamental rhetoric and “neoclassical economic liberalism” that justify enormous discrepancies between rich and poor (Radford Ruether, 2005, p. 33). From this, globalisation, the “expansion of corporate capitalism across national boundaries” (Merchant, 2005, p. 31), has an established death grip on the world’s trajectory. After World War II the most current system of financial colonisation was implemented with the establishment of The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (and in 1995 the World Trade Organisation). These international organisations assert their global control at the expense of developing nations for the benefit of the economic North whereby through the “global system of transnational corporations...third world governments have largely lost their national sovereignty, their right or ability to pass laws to protect their own national industries or shape their own development and foreign policies” including protection of people, natural resources, and land (Radford Ruether, 2005, p. 7). Patterson (2010) aptly states: “the

environment cannot sustain capitalism and capitalism certainly cannot sustain the environment” (p. 74). We need to ask, who does this serve and what are the costs individually, collectively, and to the planet?

The Sociocultural Context

Western ways of living and knowing are entrenched in dualistic frameworks that often sever the interconnectivity of all things and create division and hierarchy within contextual and functional life. These dualistic frameworks, established and maintained by colonised discourses, have heralded rationality as the primary mode of existence (e.g., Mack-Canty, 2004; Michelson, 1996). Frameworks and discourses in Western thought are maintained and heralded as "truths" by what could be metaphorically understood as the machines of social and societal construction, namely those in power: “hegemonic culture provides structural validation for epistemologies of ignorance that reproduce existing social hierarchies” (Pascale, 2010, p. 157). These epistemologies of ignorance have become foundational in the ways in which many societies and cultures are built, understood (and misunderstood), and operate. In fact, Davies & McGoey (2012) assert that during the financial crisis of 2007/08 the “productive mobilization of ignorance” (p. 66) (rather than the mobilisation of knowledge) was often “the most indispensable resource throughout the crisis” (p. 65) in order to protect individuals with power and regulators or regulatory bodies. In perpetuating epistemologies of ignorance the power elites maintain their position(s) and continue to enact abuses of power and oppressive acts of domination. Domination administers objectification, which in turn nurtures hierarchical classification exemplified in dualistic discourses (Howell, 2000).

In viewing the sociocultural context, we must identify that we are not without the influences of state regulated departments such as healthcare, policing, and education which influence the sociocultural field. Rose (1993) suggests that the state extends its power of influence not through overt methods of domination, rather via choices individuals make that are linked to bodies regulated by the state.

One of the most prevalent victories of epistemologies of ignorance is the construction and maintenance of dualistic discourses of disembodiment – the separation of mind and body. The body becomes the other to the rational mind, and intellectualism reigns supreme. This rupture leaves the door open to practices of colonisation and subjugation of peoples who fall outside of the patriarchal White male dis-embodied norm, and to assaults on the interconnectivity of all life. In its wake, mass disconnection from the body as a site of knowledge is set aside throughout our global world, particularly in, and led by, the West.

The Psychological Context

The fragmented self is at home in a disembodied state and content to rely on knowledges garnered through logic and reason. Regrettably, disembodiment and fragmentation of the self are rampant and narcissism in our North American world today is astounding – another symptom of this fractured world. Disembodiment, initially a result of fracturing, then becomes an ally to the fractured way of life. When we divide ourselves and our lives into parts we lose the connection to the whole – we disconnect from who we truly are and we lose sight of our interconnectivity to all things. Korn (1999) reports there is a “growing social dissociation in people” and connects “dissociation from the body...to dissociation from the earth...[which] reinforces the transmission of trauma between generations” (p. 150). Our ability to resonate with

nature or live in connection with it is greatly diminished by trauma which impedes embodied functioning which grants us access or awareness to feel our rhythm and the rhythm of the Earth (Korn, 1999).

Many humans, particularly those in dense urban settings, have moved far away from our connection to the rest of the living world. Researchers indicate that social isolation is a leading issue for people in the thriving urban metropolis of Greater Vancouver (The Vancouver Foundation, 2012). Human disconnection is a growing concern.

This fact is far more frightening than anything else we hold to be frightening (terrorist attacks, illegal aliens, “other” religions). The distancing and nihilistic separation from what is fundamental for our very existence is not just striking (in the sense logic) but suicidal (in the sense of survival). (McLean, 2006, p. 108 parenthesis in original)

The fractured life opens us to be controlled – controlled by the powers that continue to exploit us, and others, for financial gain and political power. In every way we live in a fractured world. In general we don’t know where our food comes from or how it was grown, killed, or transported; we have fifty-five friends on Facebook but social isolation is a growing concern; we recycle what is convenient, or profitable, and return the rest to the Earth as if it were separate from us – or we ship it to China, India, or other countries to disassemble (e.g. computers) and harm humans other than ourselves; and we shop as a national pastime. Our appetite for more and cheaper is voracious – this is capitalism’s charm, it lulls us into a trance, the trance of the fractured self that believes we can buy happiness, control health and aging, and defy the laws of nature. The very nature of capitalism fractures us. We wonder, can I afford this rather than considering the implications of this purchase, such as, do I need (rather than want) this, and what are the real costs associated with my behaviour?

Consumerism, the engine of capitalism, satiates our inner emptiness and fears revolving around self-worth, all the while functioning as an impediment to sustainability and justice. In fact,

Capitalism is an attack on people's ability to function ecologically, as organisms, by disciplining the body to behave as if it were mechanical, thereby striving to homogenize human corporeality – a project that is ultimately impossible without destroying the species. (Engel-Di Mauro, 2006, p. 71)

Capitalism is like a mutating virus — it morphs and mimics, hiding itself in plain sight until the host is weakened and cannot fight back — in this case, the consumer becomes reliant on their consumer lifestyle and feels morally right, or right enough, to continue it. The endless pull of consumerism's promise to fill the emptiness of the fractured life is pervasive: "It is not easy to ward off the seductive temptations calling to everyone daily in a culture of excess" (hooks, 2000, p. 69). Consumerism is fostered by the "development through expansion" mindset and has become the opiate of the masses and the nemesis of sustainable living both on a human and environmental level for much of the Western world and those nations that aspire to Western lifestyles. Ostensibly, "the Western mindset of individualism and materialism has ruined the environment and destroyed community" (Zapf, 2005, p. 634), with corporations appropriating nature for profit while the costs of environmental degradation are shared among the world's citizens (Patterson, 2010).

Our disembodied selves, disconnected from Nature, are severed from the very source that affords us life. As we witness the ecological crisis it is evident that these industrialised, "modernised" societies influence some humans to abandon their

connection with the guiding principle of nature, and the consciousness most of us are now encouraged to attain leaves us fundamentally alienated from the natural world as well as from our own inner natures. (Evans, 2006, p. 131)

Furthermore, by filtering the world through our thoughts and concepts we domesticate it, thereby enabling “us to own and possess it, to make it subservient to our agendas and wants” (Ray, 2008, p. 25). The severing of our interconnectivity, reflected by the on-going desecration of the Earth and its peoples, illuminates the despotic machine of domination – science and market economics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Radford Ruether, 2005). Moreover, the discourse of industrialism justifies the exploitation of nature through the use of technology on behalf of progress. While technology has availed us of significant time-saving measures, it has created on-going dependency and socially-conditioned and condoned addictions to the ever-advancing technological commodification of everyday living, and created further disconnection between self, body, and Earth. While our technological advances over the past several centuries have afforded us many gains and betterment of life, they have also cost us: “Technological man [sic] has lost his connection with the ground beneath his feet” (James, 2002, p. 3).

Cycles of Nature are still with us and within us, although we might not be aware of their presence because we can so easily override just about anything “natural” with technology and by keeping “busy”. And much technology and much “useless busyness” causes alienation from Nature and this rupture in turn leads to our wanton abuse of Earth. It is all too easy to destroy something to which we are not attached, or to abuse another being to whom we are not bonded. (Bekoff, 2003, p. 58)

The capacity which we now have to destroy, to objectify, to claim our humanity as superior to other life forms, to colonise, and to despoil all that is "other" are symptomatic of a “terrible

disease, the illness of having lost touch with our bodies” (Ray, 2008, p. 24). Hall (2009) asserts the necessity for re-establishing a sense of the natural world through “theoretical, practical, experiential and participatory” opportunities as “our collective ability to survive as a collectivity of all living beings depends on each of our species surviving in ecologically interconnected webs of life” (p. 54).

In recent decades, inquiry into embodiment and the body have resurged for feminists, poststructural scholars, and educators (e.g., Barnacle, 2009; Crowdes, 2000; Wilcox, 2009). At the same time, the body and embodiment have emerged as key areas of foci in the interdisciplinary fields of psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, and psychiatry (Fuchs & Schlimme, 2009), and in other disciplines such as education, adult education, sociology, and anthropology (e.g., Michelson, 1998; Wilcox, 2009). Feminists in particular have engaged in the reclamation of the body and the body as a site of knowledge (Barnacle, 2009; Michelson, 1998) and in identifying ways of knowing alternate to dominant epistemological sites within the Cartesian paradigm (see Belenky et al., 1986).

Yet dualistic tendencies of body/mind split continue to prevail despite the inroads made by proponents of unity consciousness. The complex, multidimensional experience of the body, or embodiment, calls for a complex, multidimensional lens (Johnson, 2008): A comprehensive, interdisciplinary viewpoint to speak sufficiently to the various aspects of the body and brings together the fragmented self.

CHAPTER THREE

Embodiment and Embodied Ways of Knowing

This chapter provides a context or orientation by outlining the theoretical lenses and literature on embodiment and embodied ways of knowing. Chapter four will explore activism. This chapter begins with a contextual framework on embodiment, then moves to feminism and embodiment, and then I outline various dimensions of embodiment followed by a section on what I call the undivided body. Next I explore embodied learning and embodiment in education. Finally, I explore embodied ways of knowing, hence embodied epistemological sites including the body, Earth and spirit.

The Emergence of Western Knowledge Practices of Duality

For many scholars, disconnection between body and mind epitomises Western discourses and colonising practices of duality and they cite different entry points for the emergence of disembodied living (e.g., Capra, 1982; Grosz, 1994; Mack-Canty, 2004; Michelson, 1998; Ray, 2008). Sessions (1994) claims that ecocentric cultures and religions were greatly diminished with the emergence of agriculture. Ray (2008), a Buddhist academic, concurs and posits that the roots of our disembodiment are linked with the emergence of agricultural life, where our way of life shifted from hunting and gathering to an agrarian lifestyle where survival relied upon, and continues to rely upon, ongoing control of the natural world. In contrast, hunter-gatherers were intimately connected to the animate worlds of water, weather systems, seasonal cycles, and the landscape. Further, they moved within the world by following their senses, feelings and

intuition, and used myth and ritual to find connection and communion with the living, breathing Earth (Ray, 2008).

Other scholars (e.g. Capra, 1982; Grosz, 1998; Mack-Canty, 2004; Michelson, 1998) locate the roots of dualistic living within the philosophy of René Descartes. Before Descartes, knowing was a deeply intimate, connected experience, greatly informed by one's somatic and emotional experience, and connected to nature (Clark, 2001). If we take both views – Sessions (1994) and Ray (2008) and scholars who decree the shift due to Cartesianism – as legitimate, one might imagine a radical shift from the hunter-gatherer lifestyle to agrarian which drastically shifted how humans lived in and through their bodies. We might also imagine, with the introduction of a Cartesian worldview, that a further radical shift occurred where disembodiment took on a whole new meaning and experience. Descartes gifted Enlightenment-era peoples as knowing subjects, detached from their physicality and emotions, thus able to wield reason without the complications of the subjective body.

The Cartesian subject was, above all else, a thinker (Michelson, 1998). Grosz (1994) suggested that the Cartesian thinker, separate from the body, availed the body as a receptacle for cultural and societal discourses, as “the body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution” (p. 23). A worldview based on binary conceptual frameworks predisposes the posited superior toward abuses of power to establish a firm hold in order to dominate, subjugate, and dictate the rules of engagement, in other words, possession or mastery as is implicit in colonialism (Maioli, 2009).

Moreover, Cartesian sensibilities paved the way for colonising practices to distort and disfigure bodies, particularly women's bodies (Grosz, 1994). Western medicine long ago claimed its territory over the body, thereby exerting control over the right to practice medicine

(healing), and employing dualistic hierarchies to compartmentalise the individual into body parts, thus dehumanising individuals. Michelson (1998) argues that the practice of Westernised medicine was one of the institutions that vanquished the body as an epistemological site.

The victory of male institutionalized medicine over female traditions of community-based healing is one prime example of the denigration of the [female] body as a site of knowledge. (Michelson, 1998, p. 219; parenthesis in original)

Modern Western medical science continues the practice of colonisation, through its disease-related endeavours and aesthetic, cosmetic alterations, serving to appropriate the body and render the person, metaphorically, and in some cases literally, dismembered: “plastic surgery functions as a modality of social control” (Suissa, 2008, p. 619). The discursive practices of the natural sciences, Western medical practices, and biology continue to colonise the body (Suissa, 2008). Colonial discourses use protection as the common moral justification to assert control (Maioli, 2009), thus providing the significant leeway necessary to subjugate and marginalise women and peoples of colour, supporting the denigration and containment of the female body that has contributed to the alienation and objectification of women (Grosz, 1994).

Further, widespread acceptance of practices that alter our reality or disconnect us from ourselves and therefore reality (e.g., cosmetic alterations, plastic surgery, medicated existences, recreational substance use) serve to exemplify the disconnection and dysfunction prevalent in our culture where seeking fulfillment through altering or othering our experience is common practice. Ray (2008) contends that “There is no more telling examples of our modern disembodiment than the way in which we use, misuse, and exploit our bodies simply as part of our modern lifestyle” (p. 29). Over the past ten millennia the ways in which human beings inhabit their bodies and live in and with the natural world have and continue to fundamentally

depart from a natural, embodied existence, which is the ancient human way, where our primary knowing comes “in and through the body” (Ray, 2008, p. 25).

Embodiment

In recent decades, inquiry into embodiment and the body have resurged for feminists, poststructural scholars, and educators (e.g., Barnacle, 2009; Crowdes, 2000; Wilcox, 2009) and is a widely debated topic in the social science literature (e.g., Johnson, 2008; Wilson, 2004). Scholars view embodiment through different lenses and speak to the varying aspects of embodiment, creating much room for interpretation and debate; they often use the terms *embodiment* and *body* interchangeably. Over the past decade, embodiment has enjoyed a renaissance, to become a key area of focus in the interdisciplinary fields of psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, and psychiatry (Fuchs & Schlimme, 2009), and other disciplines such as psychotherapy, education, adult education, sociology, and anthropology (e.g., Michelson, 1998; Wilcox, 2009). This research generated extensive exploration of the body as a tool of cultural and social discourses (e.g., Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1980), of the body as a site of knowledge (e.g., Chapman, 1998; Ray, 2008; Wilson, 2004), of women’s ways of knowing (e.g. Belenky et al., 1986), and of the body as the sacred gate to spiritual life (Ray, 2008). Regrettably, the renewal of interest across multiple disciplines has not contributed to the resolution of the mind/body discord, nor has it radically transformed the primary reliance on rationality, intellectualism, cognitive processing, and logic. Despite bold, recent attempts to investigate embodiment through various lenses or dimensions (e.g., Barnacle, 2009; Johnson, 2008; Wilson, 2004), the literature and research on embodiment still lacks a cohesive, multifaceted approach (Johnson, 2008). Because of the dominant lens of duality, we continue to

exist within a sociocultural context which has a complex and conflictual relationship with the body, and we continue to be most comfortable in our heads (Clark, 2001).

Despite the resurgence of interest, academic literature on embodiment is limited in its understanding of full embodiment, or perhaps it is so because academics are unable to translate their full experience of embodiment through the written word. I suspect that numerous complications contribute to this: Academic literature written by academics who by the very nature of their roles utilise thinking to a large extent so that it is challenging to write in an academic style and at the same time write in a way that does not insist the reader favour their mind over their felt sense, feelings, senses, and intuition. Furthermore, most people are disembodied to a large degree: van Lobel Sels (2005) illustrates this, “Outwardly, an athlete or dancer may epitomise embodied living; inwardly, however, he or she may be as unrelated – or as destructively related – to psychologically informed embodiment as” anyone else (p. 227).

Feminisms and Embodiment: The Body Re-membered

Feminists have long toiled to contest the contemptuous and pejorative standing for the body in Western thought (Barnacle, 2009; Michelson, 1998). Feminist theorists refer to this as *abstract masculinity*, with the key characteristic to this approach to knowledge being that the knower takes an objective stance, detached from human experiences of emotion and connection (Michelson, 1998). This disconnection between the knower and life is rooted in dualistic, objective conjectures of positivism and reductionism. Feminism, particularly among third-wave feminists (e.g., Mack-Canty, 2004; Maioli, 2009), contested the discourses of dualism that dichotomise and create hierarchies rather than recognise the multiplicities of existence, and re-established embodiment as a focus of inquiry (Mack-Canty, 2004).

Much of feminist work focused on reclamation of the aspects of the body (e.g., reproductive rights, sexual harassment, sexuality, pornography, and objectifying body images) and restoration of the body as an epistemological site, while maintaining the sociocultural and historical impact on the body (Michelson, 1998). However, fears about the essentialist, naturalist, and reductionist lenses of biology created caution and division within the feminist agenda of body reclamation (Barnacle, 2009; Chapman, 1998; Njambi, 2004; Wilson, 2004), which Wilson (2004) characterised as “deeply problematic” (p. 69). Another central tenet of feminist work contested the hegemonic discourses of binary hierarchy from several perspectives. Feminists asserted that the body is a traditional female sphere and reclaimed it as an epistemological site; furthermore, they deconstructed “the very dualisms that code the body as female as opposed to male, as nature as opposed to culture, and mark it as the despised antipode of mind” (Michelson, 1998, p. 22).

Eco-feminists in particular have made links between the subjugation of women, nature, and the body as inferior in the dualistic hierarchy to men, culture, and the mind. Some feminist ideas of embodiment facilitate a restructuring of the “relationship between nature and culture in the representations of bodies” (Njambi, 2004, p. 293). These posited-as-inferior dualistic components refocus attention away from the diverse makeup of bodies: “bodies construct and in turn are constructed by an interior, a psychological and a signifying view-point, a consciousness or perspective” (Grosz, 1994, p. 8).

The majority of feminist theory identifies the body as a fundamental way in which individuals come to know and understand their environment (Miller-Lane, 2006): “One has to understand how one’s lived body has shaped what one understands about the world in order to understand fully the world in which one lives” (p. 17). Chapman (1998) claimed that one of

feminism's foremost effects "has been the establishment of the viability of the situated subject, and the insistence that actually all knowledge is located and thus specific, that it is grounded" (p. 98). This establishment of the body as a site of knowledge avails personal and universal understandings of reality (van Loben Sels, 2005). Reclaiming the body alters where we stand, what we know, and how we know, thereby offering new resistances to the hegemonic discourses that serve to subjugate, colonise, and control: "When we remain connected to our body knowledge, it will make it more difficult for the powers that be to control our minds" (Crawford, 1998, p. 57). Yet, despite the resurgence of interest in the body, Cartesian dualistic conceptions continue to permeate the dominant Western global discourses that underscore the primacy of the mind (rationality, logic) rather than the wisdom of the body as the pathway to change (Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002).

Dimensions of Embodiment

Johnson (2008) argued that the embodied mind is complex and multidimensional; that to view the body as anything else situates one in a reductionist mindset of dualism. Kosut & Moore (2010) articulate that looking at embodiment through the Cartesian split is an over-simplistic explanation and suggest that understanding the body and embodiment calls for a more nuanced articulation. Johnson (2008) described a continuum of embodiment, with one extreme as an over-focus on the flesh, or the physical body as the home of the self, which is problematic, as it ignores the impact of the social and cultural discourses. At the other extreme, he problematised the postmodernists, who overly focus on the enculturation of the body, positing the body as nothing more than a palimpsest on which to etch the cultural rules of the body. This continuum exemplifies the ensconced dualism proliferated in Western theorisations.

Like Johnson (2008) and Kosut & Moore (2010), I believe that inquiries into the body and embodiment necessitate multimodal lenses and theoretical frameworks. In order to provide some clarity to this investigation of embodiment and embodied ways of knowing, I have incorporated Johnson's (2008) five dimensions of the body, which nonetheless evidence considerable overlap and interconnection and have added a sixth dimension, the *psychospiritual body*, as this sixth dimension is unaccounted for in Johnson's model and in the embodiment literature in general. The absence of the psychospiritual body is a consequence of manufactured dualities generated and sustained in hierarchical systems of oppression and the relegation of science over spirituality: It is through the connection of body and mind that the psychospiritual dimension is accessed. This divide continues the denigration of the body as a complex whole, via "patriarchal culture that emphasizes spirit and rational thinking over body and connected feeling" (Greene, 2005, p. 190).

Before delving into the dimensions, I believe it is important to offer an over-arching explanation of embodiment – "embodying is where knowing and being meet" (Todres, 2007, p. 20). Embodiment is a state of being where we are attuned to the present moment where "The body is an intentional body, primordially relational, and co-arising with its situation that is not just fleshy perceptual but also full of implicit meanings and relational understandings" (Todres, 2007, p. 21). The body is our guide, the teacher (Ray, 2008) and to be embodied is to be fully human (Ray, 2008; Todd, 2001).

The body as biological organism. The biological body is the body of flesh, blood, organs, tissues, and bones; it is the matter of the self. The human body is the physical manifestation of self that serves as container for the life force:

Inherent to the body is a kind of primordial force, in which experience and consciousness

are earthed and contained by our desirous mortal, flesh-and-blood awareness...we can relate to the body as a sign, a symbol, or a site—a home. (van Loben Sels, 2005, p. 228)

As previously iterated, many feminists have, and continue to have, concerns about bringing the biological body into focus. Ironically, science, particularly recent advances in neuroscience, challenge mind/body dualism; neurophysiology and environmental impacts over a lifespan advance a nonessentialist, nonreductionist lens. To this end, Barnacle (2009) claimed, “recent feminist scholarship is demonstrating that attending to physiology can open up new ways of understanding the various ways in which embodiment conditions everyday being-in-the-world” (p. 23).

The neurobiological body receives and integrates information through multisensory input via the sensory-motor, vestibular, visual, auditory, and proprioceptive systems and the viscera (Fuchs & Schlimme, 2009). Afferent nerves of the enteric nervous system, including the gut, provide the brain with 80% of the information from the external environment; in turn, the brain responds by transmitting information to the body on how to respond and regulate. Consciousness arises from the ongoing interaction and communication amongst the brain, the being, and the environment (Fuchs, 2002).

It is our biological body that houses our affect, emotional responses, and feelings, and guides our survival (Johnson, 2008). Our physiological states create varied internal sensations that serve as precursors to behaviour, affect/emotion, and thoughts:

Embodied processing involves awareness of what the somatic unconscious is saying with its tensions, blocks, and interruptions in the flow of energy. Although it begins with a physical sensation, it often transforms that sensation into a feeling or image so that the

border between imaginal and embodied modes of experience is blurred, at which point their reciprocal relationship becomes apparent. (Greene, 2005, p. 202)

Greene's words reflect the overlap of the fabricated dimensions of embodiment and the interconnection of the epistemological sites of knowledge in and through the body.

The biological body is an essential aspect of embodiment. Metaphorically, it is the foundation and framework of the house, the skeleton upon which all other lenses scaffold. Johnson (1999) beautifully illustrated this scaffolding: "Reason does not drop down from above like a transcendent dove; rather, it emerges from the "corporeal" logic and inference structure of our bodily, sensorimotor experience" (p. 86). The biological body is a foundational lens in grounding the felt experience of living into a conscious awareness of the very flesh that houses our experience.

The phenomenological body. Philosopher and phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (2002) maintained that we experience the world through our body, which is our anchor to the world. Further, he saw the body as a "dynamic locus of human thought, action, and language," in contrast to his colleagues and Anglo-American philosophers, who believed that logic was separate from the body and unrelated to the environment, who "regarded 'mind' as computational programs run on bodily wetware, and who thought of reason as universal, pure, and abstract" (Johnson, 2008, p. 159). The phenomenological body is the site of conscious awareness and meaning making that provides a landscape and understanding for human interaction and existence.

The phenomenological body is the lived body. It is the body of the here and now, the present moment experience.

The lived body is sentience itself, it is my personal spatiality, the body to which I am born, fall ill, desire, nurture children, age, and die. It is my flesh and blood existence, it is mine as much as it is the common form taken by all humans. This lived body is the fulcrum or lexicon of all human experience. (Morely, 2008, p. 152)

The phenomenological body is the bedrock of our corporeal existence from which we experience life and make meaning – it is the experiential body.

In “reading the body as one would read a text, we used our lived experience as another valid and valued source of information and knowledge about body” (Gustafson, 1998, p. 52). This is the aspect of embodiment that houses kinesthetic and proprioceptive experiences, and emotional and somatic experiences (felt sense that is known through sensations). Emotion communicates information through the body (Sharma, Reimer-Kirkham & Cochrane, 2009) and somatic knowing is the unified (nondualistic), tangible experience of being alive (Matthews, 1998). The phenomenological body connects us to our conscious aliveness and experiences, “only as we come close to our senses, and begin to trust, once again, the nuanced intelligence of our sensing bodies” (Abram, 1996, p. 268). Our sensing bodies connect us to our body wisdom: “By deliberately bringing attention to the meaningfulness of our bodily felt experience in the way we allow ourselves to align with the wisdom of the body” (Fisher, 2006, p. 166). Lived experiences are embodied experiences (Grosz, 1994; Wilcox, 2009) that connect us to the conscious awareness of our existence.

The ecological body. The ecological body speaks to the knowing that the body is part of the environment; the body cannot survive without it (Johnson, 2008). Our relationship with the environment generates implicit knowledges with which we make meaning; this wisdom is housed in the body (Crawford, 1998). It is through our relationships with our environment that

the neural networks of the body develop (Johnson, 1999), and it is through our bodily experiences in and of the world that we develop consciousness (Grosz, 1994). Our complex embodied interactions and relationships to the environment influence whether we thrive or perish, and the ways in which we inhabit and make meaning in the world (Johnson, 1999).

Eco-feminism, eco-psychology, deep ecology, Tibetan Buddhism, and pagan and indigenous cultures are examples of belief systems that are strongly connected to the ecological body through understandings of interconnectivity to the web of life. Griffin (1978) illuminated unity consciousness and the interconnectivity of body to Earth: “We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies” (p. 226). Abram (1996) further illustrated our interconnectivity to the web of life and the reciprocity of those relationships:

The breathing sensing body draws its sustenance and its very substance from the soils, plants, and elements that surround it; it continually contributes itself in turn, to the air, to the composting earth, to the nourishment of insects and oak trees and squirrels, ceaselessly spreading out of itself as well as breathing the world into itself, so that it is very difficult to discern, at any moment, precisely where this living body begins and where it ends. (pp. 46-47)

Speaking again to the symbiotic nature of our relationship to the environment, “the landscape is an ambiguous realm that responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in return” (p. 33). Speaking to embodiment as a deep connection of self to the world in which we exist,

to return to the psyche in its depth as found in the depths of the world around us, and particularly in the natural world, requires a return to the body-self, the sense of embodiment which is interwoven with the landscape. (Mazis, 2006, p. 7)

The ecological body intertwines not only the physical self, the body, with the Earth and all that is alive, it also links the identity of the self to the identity of the Earth. It is through our connection to the environment that we come to know who we are.

The relational body. Johnson (2008) called this aspect the *social body*, but I have named it *the relational body* as it is the intersubjective, relational processes that shape this aspect of embodiment. This dimension of the body revolves around the relational interconnection of individuals to the environment and the social and developmental processes that take place through social interaction (see Gerhardt, 2004; Schore, 2007, Schore & Schore, 2007).

The key idea here is that the body does not come fully formed prior to entering into relations with social others; rather, the character of those relations is crucial in shaping bodily modes of comportment. The *brain* and the entire bodily organism are being trained up through deep interpersonal transactions. (Johnson, 2008, p. 165)

Humans, like other mammals, are social creatures who live and interact through the body; we also rely on relationships with others to provide “meaning, company, affirmation, protection, and connection” (van der Kolk, 2006, p. 2). These relationships extensively influence the wiring of our brains and physiological bodies (see Fishbane, 2007; Schore, 2007; Schore & Schore, 2007).

Attachment literature addresses extensively the quality of relationship(s) and human development across the lifespan. Significant and “early attachment has lifelong implications” (Rees, 2005, p. 1058). Due to the plasticity of the brain, particularly through the first few years of life, there is a focus on early attachment relationship(s): “individual development arises out of the relationship between the brain/mind/body of both infant and caregiver held within a culture and environment that supports or threatens it” (Schore & Schore, 2007, p. 10).

The relational body extends beyond human relationships; it is the interaction between self and other that provides the fodder for the connectivity that is required to live in an interdependent eco-system and community. The quality of these relationships relies upon the complex interaction between the dimensional aspects of embodiment particularly the underlying physiological substrates of the biological body that sets the stage for the way people perceive, interact, make meaning, enter into, and maintain connection.

The cultural body. In recent preceding decades, feminists (e.g., Grosz, 1994; Miller-Lane, 2006) and some postmodern philosophers (e.g., Butler, 1993), specifically Foucault (1980), challenged corporeality, the social enculturation of the body. Enculturation is both the implicit and explicit process through which one learns the rules of the culture. Bordo (1997) exemplified this, “We learn the rules directly through bodily discourse: through images that tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements, and behavior are required” (p. 94). Foucault posited that social discursive practices serve to assimilate individuals through the body, thus exerting control and dominance through adherence to cultural norms: “The body is not only a *text* of culture” (Bordo, 1997, p. 90), it is “a *practical*, direct locus of social control” (p. 91) where the known and knower are distinct.

Foucault (1980) viewed the body as a tool of enculturation in which power and knowledge mark the interior and exterior, a “field on which the play of powers, knowledges, and resistances is worked out...it is acted upon, inscribed, peered into; information is extracted from it, and disciplinary regimes are imposed on it” (Grosz, 1994, p. 146). To this end, “the body...is a medium of culture” (Bordo, 1997, p. 90) and “Body’s ‘speak,’ not only as the grounds of subjectivity, but as texts that carry psychic and cultural meanings” (Michelson, 1998, p. 223).

Not only corporeality shapes who we are, how we know ourselves, and how we interact in the world; so do discourses specifically about the body (Schlattner, 1998).

Michelson (1998) wrote about the tensions involved in postmodern inquiry into the body. The validity of the body as an epistemological site has advanced, while other postmodernists have “reinscribed abstract masculinist claims to un-located and disembodied knowledges by merging the discourse of destabilized identities with the hard drive, as it were, of globalizing instructional technologies” (p. 229). These tensions speak to the complex, embedded nature of Cartesian philosophy that advanced the reductionist division of the whole into parts and maintained overreliance on top-down informational systems (Michelson, 1998; Waskul & Vannini, 2006).

The psychospiritual body. The psychospiritual body is the whole of the self, the soul, and the mind – the unified experience of the interconnected, relational self. This interconnection or intersubjective awareness denotes the experience of Self as a consciousness in which one resonates with all beings whilst maintaining a sense of distinct individuality (Bai & Scutt, 2009). It is the knowing or awareness of other beings inextricably bound in identity and welfare with one’s own: There is an awareness of consanguinity (Bai & Scutt, 2009).

The psychospiritual body houses both conscious and unconscious elements; unconscious elements are found both in the implicit memory system of the body and within the psyche. Greene (2005) tells us our soul concerns – emotional histories, relational capacities, values and beliefs, and the deepest sense of self – are inextricably linked to the body. The body holds the story of one’s life: “Nothing in a body’s life goes unregistered, so wholeness enters through the body’s door. The threshold of consciousness is a bodily threshold” (van Loben Sels, 2005, p. 230). It is through the body that unconscious material enters our awareness and becomes

conscious; “the unconscious remains unconscious and we never come to the end of it, even with dreams, if only because it presents itself to us in a body” (p. 219). Further supporting this claim, Greene (2005) indicated that “Jung [1936] describe[d] the unconscious complex as having a somatic aspect that locates itself in our flesh and bones” (p. 193), and “the human psyche lives in indissoluble union with the body” (Jung, 1936, p. 232, as cited in Greene). The body is the home of the Self; we experience ourselves through our bodily existence with both our conscious and unconscious parts of our psyche: “The somatic unconscious [is] the unconscious as it is experienced and expressed in the body” (Wyman-McGinty, 2005, p. 268). The unconscious realms of our existence are availed to us through our bodily knowing and the unconscious can be linked to spiritual realms and knowing.

Spiritual realms and knowing accessed through the body are revealed in the territory of the soul, the collective unconscious, the archetypal and imaginal realms, and through Earth wisdom. Ray (2008) claims that our body is *the* entry point to embodiment and links it to the spiritual by referring to the body as a “sacred gate.”

Our physical body is the portal...the one and only gateway that exists—to the totality of our embodied existence....the physical body is the all-important access point to our embodiments in its various dimensions and layers, the incomparable, sacred gate. (Ray, 2008, p. 131)

This sacred gate allows us to access beyond the material world, however, the body not only acts as the window into, but then offers itself as a guide, to decode, understand, and experience life – spiritual or otherwise. In this way, Morely (2008) views the human body as “the very source of divinity” not the “dualist temple of the soul” (pp. 155-156) while McKenna (1992) believes that “The body is placenta to the soul” (n.p.). The living, breathing, interacting body, essentially our

experience of living, opens us up to realms and knowledges far beyond the material world: “the action of the body in and toward the world is the basis for the possibility of spiritual knowledge” (Holloway, 2003, p. 1965). Slater (2006) argues that the connection of the body/mind, the psychospiritual body, allows spirit to be accessed thus availing our capacity to access and to experience the archetypal realms (psyche, Earth, and cosmos) through the body and through bodily interaction in the lived world. Archetypes are seen to be

the hidden foundations of the conscious mind, or, to use another comparison, the roots which the psyche has sunk not only in the earth in the narrow sense but the world in general...They are this, essentially, the chthonic portion of the psyche, if we may use such an expression—that portion through which the psyche is attached to nature, or in which its link with the earth and the world appears most tangible. (Mazis, 2006, p. 19)

These roots anchor us to the world while allowing us to traverse the unconscious and spiritual realms. The psychospiritual body offers us the exquisite experience of embodied spirituality.

Embodiment and the Undivided Body

The English language lacks a word that encapsulates the body as a unified whole; we are hindered not only by this absence but “how do we write about body and mind without implying that they are two different things which must be joined by a hyphen or slash mark?” (Stinson, 1995, p. 45). Herein lies an inherent dilemma in writing about a part while trying to address the whole; yet, in order to reference the whole, one has to step back and separate from the whole, into the part, ironically recreating duality. It is the way from the part to the whole, instead of splitting off into the different realms (ecological, relational, phenomenological, etc.); it is the staying present with the awareness of the realm while holding awareness of the interconnection

of the other realms, having the parts in consciousness that allows one to experience the undivided body.

The undivided body is embodied; it is the unification of the self where there is a willingness to experience the fullness of what life offers:

To be fully embodied means to be at one with who we are, in every respect, including our physical being, our emotions, and the totality of our karmic situation. It is to be entirely present to who we are and to the journey of our own becoming. It is to inhabit, completely, our relative reality, with no speck of ourselves left over, no external observer waiting for something else or something better. (Ray, 2008, xv)

It is the experience of being in the present moment with all that is, to be present and awake to what is within and around you, and *not* to be in want of a different life, a different experience, a different self. To be fully embodied requires a level of acceptance of *it is what it is* and how can I respond in this moment – *not* how can I wish it away, *not* how can I not feel it, but how can I be present to this ever-changing moment. “Only when we are fully embodied are we mindful and fully human” (Todd, 2001, p. 28); embodiment connects us to the wisdom of the body and intuition (Alexandre, 2010). This is counter to Western intellectual understandings of embodiment or the body, particularly because Western psychology and spirituality is enculturated by social and religious discourses that separate the body from spiritual and psychological knowledges.

The counter to Western logic precisely exemplifies the entrenchment of dualistic separation of self from other and so on. The body is a “neglected but essential part of psyche” (Greene, 2005, p. 189). Moreover, Western dualistic logical understandings are counter to the ecological and spiritual understandings of interconnectivity and the web of life. This

consciousness is accessed through being mindfully aware, present, and attuned to oneself; it is “understood as the primordial layer of our psyche, and it is always there to be accessed,” it holds “the underlying integrative consciousness, whereby one feels the continuity of self and other” (Bai & Scutt, 2009, p. 101).

The undivided body as a conceptual framework suggests access to epistemological sites of knowledge not currently explored in the embodiment literature. The undivided body is a more nuanced and complete understanding of embodiment where there is a utilisation of the body as a site of and conduit for knowledge, which offers potential to bring us into contact with the deeper material of the Self – psyche, body, and spirit. Although the literature on embodiment and embodied learning speaks to the body as a site of knowledge (e.g., Grosz, 1994; Miller-Lane, 2006), it does not address access to the deeper material of the psychospiritual body save for Jungian scholars. By including this dimension, one has access to the deeper psychic and collective unconscious material. The union of multi-dimensions of the body leads to innate epistemological locations within and beyond the body, while addressing the critical analysis in feminist theories of embodiment.

Embodied Learning

Embodied knowledges, embodied pedagogies, and embodied ways of knowing are all terms that can be used interchangeably “to signal an epistemological and pedagogical shift that draws attention to bodies as agents of knowledge production” (Wilcox, 2009, p. 105).

Embodiment is inherently about learning; the body is the universal instrument necessary to experience the world (Barnacle, 2009). Moreover, the body acts as an integral element of the learning process throughout the lifespan (Crawford, 1998). Despite this, embodied knowledges

are at the fringe of our pedagogical practices: Latta & Buck (2008) explain that the “power of our bodies to form and inform self and other(s) continues to be marginalized, perhaps feared” (p. 324). Although discounted, silenced, or discredited, learning cannot be disconnected from the body:

There is no way to separate bodily and mental functions; learning is an active, world-creating process inscribed on the body and at the same time subject to particular material and discursive conditions that constrain the body within culture and in history.

(Michelson, 1998, p. 225)

It is through the embodied ways of knowing that personal insights about the self and the world come into being (Gustafson, 1998), and avail, from this location, a place of embodied knowing, a fuller understanding. From this location, marginalised knowledges may emerge into the world.

Our bodies are primed to provide us with a myriad of sensory, emotional, psychic, and spiritual information to facilitate our learning. When we connect with the body and process the information that is available to us, we engage in the primacy of life, nurturing and satisfying our felt sense and our sensory body. When we attune to ourselves in the present moment, we connect to our aliveness. In contrast,

living by secondary experience alone sets up a tremendous drain on the world, because we are never satisfied. Only when we set aside the mind’s dichotomies and settle into the body, putting ourselves squarely in the world, can we ask ourselves, “What is my own first-hand, primary experience of being alive?” (van Loben Sels, 2005, p. 233)

The Body in Education

The body devalued “languishes in our educational geography” (Chapman, 1998, p. 98) and “has become a site of disempowerment and enervation” (Springgay & Freedman, 2007, p. xix). Disconnection permeates pedagogical discourse and practice (Latta & Buck, 2008). The binary divisions of mind and body continue to fortify the rational propensities of pedagogical discourse and practices that are characteristic of contemporary universities (Barnacle, 2009). The rational mind, separate from the body, has been used as evidence to invalidate and eradicate bodily based epistemologies in academia and the everyday world. However, “the claim to have achieved disembodied knowledge is less a matter of transcending the body than of rendering the body invisible” (Michelson, 1998, p. 220). Educational institutions serve to uphold and contribute to the enculturation process, reinforce societal discourses of dualism, and continue to hamper experiences of embodiment and practices of embodied learning, despite the resurgence of embodiment across disciplines. Keating (2008) posits that when we orient our teaching in a dualistic framework, “we assume there is only one right way to think, act, theorize, or self-define” (p. 65).

It is imperative for educators to remain cognisant of the ways in which they further replicate the dismissal of the body:

By conveniently decoupling students’ minds and bodies in a Cartesian manner even in a lively discussion—it is the thoughts that count; the bodies that think and utter these thoughts are irrelevant—we reproduce the very system of power that we claim to critique. (Wilcox, 2009, p. 107)

Moreover, many feminist educators fail to make links between what they are doing in their pedagogical forums to embodiment; for without these connections, the full potentiality of

embodied learning cannot be realised (Wilcox, 2009). Most educators “consider somatically engaging our students outside of our responsibility...we lose many opportunities for not engaging their multiple intelligences and for not actively cultivating trust through embodied interaction” (Gardner, 1983/2004, as cited by Wilcox, 2009, p. 107).

To engage in embodied learning is a political act of resistance to the dominant discourses of pedagogy and learning (Gustafson, 1998). It is necessary to explicitly identify and pursue embodied knowledges, which clearly place the body at the heart of knowledge production, to avoid becoming ensnared in the hierarchy of mind/body (Wilcox, 2009). Feminist(s) resolve to include and validate embodied knowledge is not in the attempt to reverse the hierarchical structure whereby emotion would be superior to thought and so on (Michelson, 1998) but rather to include embodied knowing as an equal and viable way of knowing.

The power of embodied learning allows the learner to bring his or her whole self forward, to engage with all of the tools of knowledge production; embodied learning has incredible potential to be transformative, both within the classroom and in our world. Schlattner (1998) called for educators to “rejoin the knower with [his or] her soma and research its contribution” (p. 326). From my perspective, the struggle goes beyond these crucial points; because most people, although aware of embodiment and the duality of mind/body, do not, in fact, reside in their bodies. This statement again sits in the dilemma of whole and part. Of course, people are alive and in their bodies, but we experience disconnection from the full awareness of that epistemological site. This disconnection is evident throughout our culture: rampant consumerism; ambivalence towards preservation of natural and cultural ways of living; various lifestyle and health pandemics; and addictions, offer but a few examples.

Embodied Ways of Knowing: Epistemological Sites

Epistemology is the study of knowledge, where and how truth and knowledge are created (Hodge & Derezotes, 2008) or produced, and by whom – this is contested throughout our cultural, educational, and institutional contexts. Feminist epistemologists generally concur that there is no general or universal account of the nature and limits of knowledge production.

For feminists, the purpose of epistemology is not only to satisfy intellectual curiosity, but also to contribute to the emancipatory goal: the expansion of democracy in the production of knowledge. This goal requires that our epistemologies make it possible to see how knowledge is authorized and who is empowered by it. (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, pp. 13, 14)

In bringing forth this aim and including a wider understanding of who is empowered or not exploited (i.e., understanding from a non-dualist perspective), we can engage with what Reid, Teamey, & Dillion (2002) refer to as an “indigenous worldview” where the production of knowledge is created through the “holistic, subjective, experiential, embedded, and integrated in the social, cultural, and moral dimension” as opposed to modern knowledge production which is “reductionist, objective, positivist, disembedded, compartmentalized - convergent - homogeneous” (p. 116). In drawing from Hawaiian epistemology one can see the interrelatedness of dimensions – there is a blending of epistemological boundaries where intelligence and mind are linked and mind literally translates as viscera and figuratively translates as emotions/feelings (Meyer, 2001). This blended understanding is what I would call embodied, or arising from the undivided body which runs counter to Western construction of knowledges.

Subjugated knowledges of the body, Earth, and spirit have incredible potential to counteract the manufactured dualities central to Western systems of domination and guide us in our daily living, professional lives, and eco-activism. A more nuanced understanding and praxis of the body as an epistemological site, a starting point and conduit for subjugated knowledges, is innate to our human beingness. By using the lived body as a text to read our internal experiences, we can decipher what is encoded in our sensations, our images, and our emotions. As we increase our body literacy we create an embodied epistemology from which to start. Until we transform our epistemology to include embodied knowledges we cannot transform the ways in which we live, educate, and construct our world (Dillard et al., 2000).

Without actively establishing practices that connect and support us to enhance our body literacy and live an embodied life, we rely on our logical, left hemisphere of the brain to guide us through life, find solutions, and take actions. This disembodied way of life renders ethical decision making and action impossible (Todd, 2001): “A brain disconnected from the stomach, intestines, throat, heart, and other parts of our body isn’t only seriously impaired, it can be as deadly as the proverbial loose cannon” (p. 28). We are in a “crisis of disembodiment” (Ray, 2008, p. 22) where the domination of the intellect, the mind, has played a significant part in enabling Western nations to be captured and enthralled by the corporate promises of growth and development, capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, colonialism, anthropocentrism, and other systems of domination. These systems of oppression serve to disconnect us from others and ourselves and “this is intimately tied up with the fact that, as modern people, we live in a culture that survives through exploitation. Wittingly or not, we are all exploiters” (Ray, 2008, p. 23). This disembodied existence fragments our innate rhythm and interconnection to all that is alive from the inside out and the outside in; it renders us vulnerable to the perils that proliferate

societies driven by capitalism. Mazis (2006) argues that it is our consumer laden, materialistic, postmodern world that confuses us, that obscures our psyche and keeps us disconnected from the embodied self that is deeply connected to the Earth.

Yet, why we need to make this turn and how to turn towards this sense of embodiment that allows the level of psyche and openness to the natural and material world around us as meaningful to come into the depths of our soul is also obfuscated in our postmodern world of materialistic consumption and disposable objects. (Mazis, 2006, p. 7)

In this Western world it is a radical act to live an embodied life – to cast off “ideologies that normalize domination, violence, and exploitation of the earth” to reconnect to our ancestral selves, our innate way of being where our “consciousness that naturally connects to and integrates with the earth” is roused (Bai & Scutt, 2009, p. 103). “It is as if an ancient, undivided world lies curled inside us with an ancestral memory of wilderness” (van Loben Sels, 2005, p. 228). Korn (1999) refers to this as our “indigenous” or “original mind,” an inborn capacity or way of being that “emerges from the rhythms of the body and spirit and is one with the earth and natural forces” yet is “a skill lost to the “urban mind” (p. 146). In bringing this ancestral way of being to life the undivided body is animated and embodied epistemological sites are availed.

These embodied epistemological sites, namely the body, Earth/nature, and spiritual are interconnected – to imagine them as separate would be to overlay a dualistic framework. However, for the sake of ease I have allotted each of them a section to contextualise and illustrate how they might be experienced.

The Body as Site of Knowledge

The undivided body is “our primary text and starting point for knowledge” (Rountree, 2006, p. 98). Throughout history peoples have survived because of their bodily knowledge – and the epistemological sites that the body has availed them. We have relied on the wisdom of our ancestors and of interconnectivity, and on traditional knowledges including principles of sustainable ecosystems – the wisdom of what separates human beings is irrelevant in comparison to what unites us. The undivided body unites us – it is the embodied self that connects us to others, that allows us to experience empathy (Blair, 2009), that informs ethical decision-making (Todd, 2001).

Notwithstanding, the body as an epistemological site has been, and continues to be, a marginalised conceptual, practiced, and theorised path of knowledge in academic and mainstream Western dominant thought despite knowledge being a lived experience (Meyer, 2001). The body is, and has been, denigrated and relegated to that of an unfortunate functional necessity; “a tool, an instrument, or a medium like paint on paper” (Stinson, 1995, p. 46). Wilcox (2009) asserts that in order to avoid being ensnared by the dualistic framework of mind/body “we need to explicitly name and pursue embodied pedagogies whereby the body is at the front and center of knowledge production” (p. 107). These dualistic conceptions steeped in a mind/body split pervade dominant Western global discourses and underlie the primacy of the mind (intellect, logic, cognition, beliefs, and meaning) as pathways to change rather than through the wisdom of the body (Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002). This dichotomy further espouses the disconnection of mind and body to the separation of the spirit and sponsors the dominant worldview that humans are superior to the natural world (Gardner, 2005; Macy, 2007).

Within this dualistic hierarchy there is a subtle, complementary hierarchy within the right and left hemispheres of the brain. The left hemisphere reigns dominant and supports logic, rational, cognitive functioning while the right hemisphere supports creative, affective, and embodied pathways to knowledges. McGilchrist (2009) asserts that for balanced living the left hemisphere should be emissary to the right hemisphere, the master. The right hemisphere can be accessed through the body and within it holds the seat of the unconscious and the home of creativity, intuition, empathy, emotional processing, and imagination. We use our right brain to attune – to feel the web of life and enter into experiences of unity. It is through the processes of the right brain that deep connection to the self, others, and the Earth are experienced.

Over-reliance on the functioning of the left brain levees considerable challenges for living an embodied life. An embodied existence goes beyond awareness and connection to our five senses; it speaks to the engaged attunement of the inner landscape of the body and psyche through the processes of the right brain as it relates and attends to the self, other, and the Earth. This type of embodiment invites us to go beyond our sensory awareness and calls us into the natural, varied processes of the right brain which include: tracking and listening to the sensations of the body; allowing the sensory motor aspects of the body – gestures and movements to tell a story or part of a story and guide us; affective expression and regulation; working with images be they in the form of auditory, visual, tactile, metaphors, myths or dreams; and working with the archetypal or symbolic realms of the collective unconscious. Our capacity to access and experience the archetypal realms (psychic, Earth, and cosmos) is through the body and through bodily interaction in the lived world (Slater, 2006). As we enter and inhabit the body through the right brain we lay claim to our ancestral knowing, the intrinsic connection of Earth and body, body and mind, spirit and matter, self and other. We trust ourselves to breathe the world and

have the Earth breathe us, we attune to the cosmic eco-system and “touch nature from the inside” (Mazis, 2006, p. 8). When living an embodied life, experiences of unity, connection with the animate world, and a deepening sense of self can occur.

Attention to the processes of the right brain, including intuition and emotions, has been intermittent, compromised, maligned, and misconstrued. These are epistemological sites that differ from the rational, logical epistemologies of left brain intellectualism. In these ways of knowing, the body is considered to be a “sage not just a machine to get us through this world” (Drumheller, 2007, p. 27), and the deep psyche is accepted as the fertile ground in which the innate wisdom of the body and beyond, are contained (Aizenstat, 2006). Abram (1996) illuminates the essence of this and exemplifies how our interconnectivity to the web of life is created through reciprocal relationships; he asserts that discernment between the living, breathing body and the living, breathing Earth are challenging. It is through the body and the right brain that we can speak to all of nature and it can speak to and through us: “at the most primordial level of sensuous, bodily experience, we find ourselves in an expressive, gesturing landscape, in a world that *speaks*” (Abram, 1996, p. 81, italics in original). Embodied experiences in nature can ignite or deepen the yearning within to have the Earth speak through and to us.

To turn our back on the information and access to realms of information that the body provides us in the moment, and over time, is to turn our back on a part of ourselves rendering us incomplete. Stinson (1995) writes that her knowing is not hers until she knows it in her bones. Focus on the body as a pathway to Earth and spiritual knowledges further remains on the margins as does an in depth, nuanced articulation and praxis of body literacy based on the processes of the right brain to create an embodied epistemology through the undivided self.

Earth as Site of Knowledge

The predominant worldview functioning in the world today utilises the Earth, the source of life, as a resource for human existence to be exploited (Ray, 2008; Zapf, 2005; Zorrilla, 2002). Despite the abundance of ecological warnings there has been minor political impact (Rowe, 2003). The natural world is simply seen as a stage for humanity to live, a theatre for its drama, and nature is regarded as a storehouse for raw materials to be transformed into commodities exclusively for the benefit of (some) humans and to contribute to the economic machine (Zorrilla, 2002). Disturbingly, this worldview establishes duality and separateness of humans from the rest of the world: The Earth is objectified and seen “as a commodity to be developed or traded or wasted or exploited, as an economic unit, as property” (Zapf, 2005, p. 636). The divisions between body/mind, Earth/body, spirit/psyche, self/other, reveal the inherent dualism, hierarchy, and disconnection that enables the objectification, subjugation, plundering, and commodification of the Earth: “The bulldozing of nature and the abuse of our own bodies reveal the split in the psyche that cuts us off from the physical world (Macy, 2007, p. 38). Within this anthropocentric view, the Earth has no wisdom, no knowledge, is inanimate and

we’ve forgotten who we really are. We think we can extract, exploit, manipulate, and control the natural world without any consequence to ourselves. We’ve forgotten that, when we stretch the strands of the web of life to the breaking point, we are threatening the very life force that we depend on, its air, water, earth. (Rosenhek, 2006, p. 91)

In contrast, there are individuals and cultures who subscribe to an alternate understanding of the world and the interconnectivity of all living things: “Many Indigenous cultures encouraged learning through culturally enmeshing with the landscape and building spiritual relationships” (Worster, 2006, p. 108). These Earth-based epistemologies are most commonly ascribed to

indigenous cultures from around the world. In addition, Buddhist, Celtic, Pagan and feminist Earth-based spiritualities are examples of other cultures that recognise the Earth as animate and sensitive, and live in deep connection with all that is alive and, through that interconnectivity, regard the Earth as a site of knowledge.

In ancient times, people always learned from and worshipped nature, our Earth: the sunlight, the water, the fire, and the wind. Spirituality and healing have always been a combined tradition. Even today in Hindu, Native American, and Appalachian cultures, nature worship is uniformly present. (Pesek et al., 2006, p. 117)

While there are specific cultures that continue to embrace a worldview of stewards of the land, regard the Earth as alive, and believe that each of us has the potential to reclaim our connection to our ancestral ways of knowing and being, this perspective is marginalised by Western ways of living. We all possess the potential to “view the land as a precious resource that nurtures life, promotes good health, and educates those willing to learn from careful observance” (Pesek et al., 2006, p. 115). Our connection through the body to the Earth “reminds us that we are from the Earth, of the Earth and not separate from it” (Rosenhek, 2006, p. 91).

A vivid illustration of the body Earth connection is captured in the words of Glenn Mazis (2006):

The embodied self is a reciprocal relationship of being of the same stuff as what it apprehends, so that as often quoted by Merleau-Ponty, Cezanne asserts that he can only paint Mt. St. Victoire because the mountain paints itself through him – the mountain is the motive force of his hand as much as the artist, and the artist is given a sense of himself through the vision of the mountain. (pp. 3, 4 citing Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 17)

Cezanne's experience of the mountain painting through him speaks to the latent potential within each of us to have the Earth speak to and through us. Jungian scholar, David Tacey (2010) writes: "the landscaped worked on me, drawing me out of the hard-boiled rational ego into a mystical participation with land, earth, and sky" (p. 343).

In her book, *The Earth Knows My Name*, Patricia Klindienst (2006) writes, "The land is said to 'speak,' and the gardener learns, from wisdom passed down orally through generations, how to listen for its voice and respond with reverence" (p. xxiii). In one of her interviews she speaks to a farmer who learned from an elder, Philip Deer of Oklahoma:

He taught me that if we learn to listen to our mother, we can also listen to the elements – like the winds – and the winds can talk to us and teach us things. The water can do the same thing. The stars. The moon. We just have to be able to learn. (p. 14)

Elders from the Okanagan in British Columbia speak to this knowing of the Earth as a site of knowledge as well:

all my elders say that it is land that holds all knowledge of life and earth and is a constant teacher. It is said in Okanagan that the land constantly speaks...It is constantly communicating...Not to learn its language is to die. (Armstrong, 1998, p. 177)

Worster (2006) says, in moving to Hawai'i it was "necessary and even desirable to listen to the local land and people, and follow the path laid out" (p. 108). She like many others have learned that "Those who observe and listen to the land and people of Hawai'i, and learn from them, experience the Hawaiian value of Aloha. If you ever meet someone who moved to Hawai'i, they will agree that the land "tests you" (p. 104). Indigenous cultures and many immigrant families maintain connection to their culture through gardening (Klindienst, 2006), and a growing number of Westerners are fluent or becoming fluent in the language of the Earth, a sacred dialogue.

Throughout her book, *The Earth Path*, Starhawk (2004) shares experiences of the Earth talking to her; this passage is particularly relevant and occurred during a group ritual.

In my mind, I hear the earth sigh with pleasure, drinking in our energy. “Do this,” she says. “Feed me. Tell people to feed me, to consciously feed energy into my energy body. For I am getting weakened, and I need it.” (p. 215)

The wisdom told to her by the Earth articulates what each of us can feel, or hear, when or if we turn inward, connect and ask the questions. Kivi (2005) writes that in the face of industrial logging, “the forest asks something new of me: it asks me to be a warrior” (p. 103). Macy (2007) aptly suggests that part of the problem is that many people turn away, shut down and do not want to hear; that feeling the pain of the Earth and our emotional response feels like it is too much for some. The power of the Earth, as exemplified above, illuminates the breadth of experience cross-culturally and from different aspects of the Earth.

Scholars Pesek et al. (2006) write “we can learn by careful observation of (i.e., listening to) the plants themselves....Through mindful study, nature also teaches us how to keep fit” (p. 117, parenthesis in original). Abram (1996) in his book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, speaks of the intimate nature of our relationship to the landscape: “The landscape is an ambiguous realm that responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in return” (p. 33). He also speaks to the reciprocity and guiding wisdom of nature:

as we touch the bark of a tree, we feel the tree *touching us*; as we lend our ears to the local sounds and ally our nose to the seasonal scents, the terrain gradually tunes us in turn. The senses, that is, are the primary way that the earth has of informing our thoughts and of guiding our actions. (p. 268, italics in original)

The communication of the Earth happens in and through all life forms – trees, water, animals, wind. Mary Oliver (2009), renowned poet, beautifully captures the interconnectivity of Earth, bird, human, spirit and heart in her poem, Red Bird Explains Himself

“Yes, I was the brilliance floating over the snow
and I was the song in the summer leaves, but this was
only the first trick

I had hold of among my other mythologies,
for I also knew obedience: bring sticks to the nest,
food to the young, kisses to my bride.

But don't stop there, stay with me: listen.

If I was the song that entered your heart
then I was the music of your heart, that you wanted and needed,
and thus wilderness bloomed that, with all its
followers: gardeners, lovers, people who weep
for the death of rivers.

And this was my true task, to be the
music of the body. Do you understand? for truly the body needs
a song, a spirit, a soul. And no less, to make this work,
the soul has need of a body,
and I am both of the earth and I am of the inexplicable
beauty of heaven
where I fly so easily, so welcome, yes,
and this is why I have been sent, to teach this to your heart.” (p. 78)

Jungian analyst, Robyn Van Loben Sels (2005) links the spiritual with the Earth. She affirms
“When we hear the voice of nature, we may enter the metaphysical world. We must listen to the
animal, must become the animal we are” (p. 229).

Each of these passages has offered windows into the vast and varied experience of how
humans are connected to, understand, and commune with, the Earth. The knowledges offered by
the Earth and nature are poignant examples of wisdom lost in the industrialised modern world of
corporate capitalism and left brain ideology.

Spiritual Epistemological Site

As we entered into the twenty-first century we inherited the “spiritual devastation” of the previous era, the aftermath of a world “shaken and dispirited by multiple traumas” (Deyoung, 2007, p. 2). Further challenges arise from the very deities contemporary society panders to – money, growth and development, and commodification – which seduces many to prostitute their souls for the salvation of materialism. This predominant worldview of domination perpetuates hierarchical relationships, exploits the Earth and peoples, commodifies acts of living, and wields fear as its mighty sword. Moreover, the scattering of people and the fracturing of the human as whole and interconnected to the world generates a call, “a spiritual longing for community and relatedness and for a cosmic vision” (Moore, 1992, p. 208).

Spirituality is located in one’s personal beliefs and experiences of a higher power or higher purpose (Tisdell, 2000). It is our fundamental understanding and perception of the world and how it relates to us and how we relate to it (Meyer, 2001). Within this perception or worldview the nonvisible and nonmaterial are included and it encompasses humanity’s collective psyche (Antonelli, 1982). Further, at its foundation, spirituality holds the deeply profound experience of compassion, of feeling the oneness, interconnection, and interrelatedness with all life: “Spirituality is a deep feeling of compassion and unity and relatedness and connection with all of existence” (Kumar, 2000, p. 46). This awareness of the interdependency of the web of life in conjunction with an open heart toward others, and an ethic of care that is inclusive and extends beyond humans, adult educator Leona English (2001) considers to comprise a “fully integrated spiritual person” (p. 30).

Unfortunately, it is all too common that the citizen of the 21st century is disembodied – unaware of the Cartesian split that leaves us disconnected. When the self disconnects, it splits

into mind – body, and the spirit leaves (Kalshed, 2004). This disembodiment, characteristic of Western ways of living (Capra, 1982; Ray, 2008), is rampant and paves the way for actions steeped in fear, oppression, and violence. In part, disembodiment is the loss of trust in the body. When we lose trust in the body we lose trust in one’s self and are susceptible to external authorities usurping our power – whether it be in the arena of politics, religion, education, or healthcare, to name a few. This renders us dangerous, to ourselves, others and the planet:

People who can’t trust their own body knowledge feel out of touch, have less tolerance for ambiguity, seek clearcut simple rules to determine their actions, tend to consider complex situations in simplistic terms, and are thus more likely to be swayed by “experts” and by naïve either/or arguments. (Todd, 2001, p. 24)

In this vulnerable state of disembodiment we are open to fundamentalisms of all types. We are displaced from our bodily sense of safety and we yearn for a resting place, a safe haven where we can experience life rather than experience trying to control life: “In this age of Diaspora, the body has become the Home many yearn for” (Chapman, 1998, p. 98). The lack of connection to oneself or one’s body impedes us from experiencing an embodied spirituality.

Dillard, Abdur-Rashid & Tyson (2000) re-vision epistemological construction by way of attending to the spiritual from the ground up. Vella (2000) calls for education “grounded in humanity” and asserts that until we relate to “one another as spiritual, human beings, we will continue to feed a domination system that will be our death” (p. 14). “Grounded in humanity,” or from the ground up, through the body, we are in an intimate state of sensory union with all living things which allows us access to spiritual dimensions or experience.

The body presents a very different way of knowing the world and of being in it. To be embodied, to be in the body, is to be in connection with everything. When we begin to

inhabit the body as our primary way of sensing, feeling, and knowing the world, when our thought operates as no more than a handmaiden of that somatic way of being, then we find that we as human beings are in a state of intimate relationship and connection with all that is. To be in the body is to know our sense perceptions as opening out into a sacred world. (Ray, 2008, p. 24)

Embracing the body as an entry point into modern day spirituality was key for both Jung and Nietzsche (Mazis, 2006) as “the body and bodily action are fundamental components of the production of sacred space” (Holloway, 2002, p. 1964). Sacred space is created through our consciousness – our awareness of ourselves and how we interface with the environment.

Sacred space is within us, not in body or brain, but in the volume of our consciousness.

Wherever we go, we bring the sacred within us to the sacred around us. We consecrate locations and studies by the presence of this awareness, not just the other way around....Awareness is the ultimate sacred wonder, though we tend to endow objects outside ourselves as sacred while ignoring the same source within us. (Schneider cited in van Loben Sels, 2005, p. 225)

Accessing this source with or through the body avails us to our soul that extends and reaches beyond the body: “The notion that soul is found inside the body is a sign of ignorance” (Tacey, 2010, p. 340). The evolution to a modern holistic worldview that embraces interconnectivity and inclusiveness, can be a spiritual transformation (Coates, 2004), and can be foundational for a new paradigm of sustainable life on Earth. The body is foundational in the creation of, and access to, spiritual epistemologies – the undivided body offers the foundation for spiritual knowledge (Holloway, 2002).

CHAPTER FOUR

Activism

Because my study is concerned with eco-activism, it is important to explore what is meant by activism, and the debates and theories that surround this concept today. This chapter examines ideas of what activism is, what it looks like, its connections to the body and embodiment, eco-activism and spirituality, as well as studies linking activism and the body. At the end of the chapter I offer a short conclusion that links this chapter with the two previous chapters.

Activism

Activism is challenging. It demands of us, it calls us to feel and act upon that feeling. It invites us to make ourselves vulnerable, to reflect on who we are and how we live, to put ourselves on the line, and to take action for a better world. It asks us to stand outside of the mainstream or status quo and hold steady: “To work for change, we need to know where we stand” (hooks, 2000, p. 9). It calls for us to be introspective and to see ourselves in all our embeddedness; it needs for us to vision ourselves free. Activism needs us to know who we are.

Activism often conjures images of front line protests, letter writing, awareness campaigns, civil disobedience, and rallies. Organisations such as Greenpeace, Sierra Club, and Amnesty International are well known for their efforts and diligence over time. Recently there has been a huge world-wide activist movement, Occupy Wall Street, that has engaged people across cultures and social spectrums – unions, seniors, students, celebrities, and everyday folks have joined forces to protest economic injustices inherent in Western and global economies.

Furthermore, this past November a powerful protest movement originating amongst Canadian Aboriginal people and gathering non-Aboriginal supporters, Idle No More, emerged to protest abuses to treaty rights and Bill C-45. This movement, like Occupy Wall Street, garnered great support and utilised social media to publicise and protest injustice. Despite their widespread support, the public is encouraged to dismiss the message; this tactic is orchestrated through media coverage which focuses on the minority outliers that congregate at protests for purposes other than, or in addition to, social action. Increasingly, mainstream media, governmental agencies, and corporate voices are linking activism to anarchy, criminalised activity, and are painting activists as destroyers rather than builders, in an attempt to discredit activist movements. Jacqueline Kennelly (2009) urgently tells us that “the possibility for creating a public sphere of contestation within Canada is being continually and increasingly placated, repressed, and commodified through institutional, cultural, and social factors” (p. 128).

What is Activism?

Activism is a state of being, a state of doing, a frame of mind, and an orientation to a way of life. Activism produces change – engendering “evolution and re-creation within the system” (Svirsky, 2010, p. 168). It is the conscious utilisation and mobilisation of our life energy towards change for a more just world: It “is about affecting or transforming the world in a way which is better, even if what we think is better, can never fully be agreed or decided upon” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 102). Activism is about consciousness and increasing consciousness to disrupt the embeddedness of practices and structure of injustice in our fractured world. Svirsky (2010) suggests activism to be

involving local instigations of new series of elements intersecting the actual, generating new collective enunciation, experimentation and investigations, which erode good and common sense and cause structures to swing away from their sedimented identities....activism imposes new regimes of succession of ideas and affective variations in the power of action. (p. 163)

From these descriptors activism can encompass a wide diversity of actions to increase or change our consciousness.

This research considers activism to be conscious action that intends to, or creates, change in ways that alleviate some form of injustice or suffering. Implicit in this, is an authentic alignment or belief in what one is doing for “sincerity of purpose is essential to effecting change” (Dean, 2007, p. 363). Moreover, activism offers potential transformation for both the activist as well as the society, group, or individual for which the activism is taking place.

What Does Activism Look Like?

Activism comes in many forms. The common understanding of activism as a “collective action intended to produce political, economic, or social change” (Hodgson & Brooks, 2007, p. 15) is contested by some. Who gets to decide what is activism is a challenging notion. Lines are often blurred between action and inaction and non-traditional forms of activism are often overlooked. Activists are as diverse as the issues that draw people to action in order to create change, and activism or what constitutes activism is equally diverse.

The conceptual margins of activism need to be expanded to include non-traditional ways of creating, producing, and taking action towards change, thereby re-conceptualising the notion of activist and activism. By expanding the notion of activism or activist a more comprehensive

understanding will prevail. Scholars (e.g., Martin, Hanson, & Fontaine, 2007; Maxey, 1999) across disciplines are articulating this expanded perspective. Martin, Hanson, and Fontaine (2007) suggest that creating social networks is activist work underscoring that everyday lived experiences or activities that shift power relations in prevailing social networks is activism regardless if it burgeons into more recognised political forums. King (2006) asserts that “Social creativity, or the active production of society, is a key objective of social movements and social activists” (p. 873). In this way, activism includes actions that are precursors to political action that transforms a community, develops a formal organisation, or extends in scale to reach social networks beyond the initial embeddedness of the instigating activist (Martin et al., 2007). Hodgson & Brooks (2007) suggest that activists are motivated to “seek, build, and sustain connections beyond one’s self” (p. 15). Ian Maxey (1999) greatly expands the notion of activist by suggesting that everyone contributes to the creation of our social world – and in that way, everyone is an activist. Others are expanding the parameters by examining the potential of practitioner as activist within disciplines such as teaching (Verma, 2010), social work (Lee, 2001; Coates & Grey, 2011), adult education (Neilson, 2009), and feminist therapy (Marecek & Kravetz, 1998; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1998).

Some activists use writing as a platform for their activism, using words to illuminate and comment on injustices and social distortions (e.g., Hawken, 2007; Lorde, 1983), to invite readers to envision a new possibility (e.g., Starhawk, 1994), or for readers to find new ways to approach and make change (e.g., Macy, 1991). Driedger (2006) articulates that “writing your way into peoples’ consciousness” is a form of activism (p. 188). Lorde (1983) writes:

I see protest as a genuine means of encouraging someone to feel the inconsistencies, the horror of the lives we are living. Social protest is saying that we do not have to live this

way. If we feel deeply, and we encourage ourselves and others to feel deeply, we will find the germ of our answers to bring about change. Because once we recognise what it is we are feeling, once we recognise we can feel deeply, love deeply, can feel joy, then we will demand that all parts of our lives produce that kind of joy. And when they do not, we will ask, “Why don't they?” And it is the asking that will lead us inevitably toward change. (p. 112)

These powerful words clearly articulate the potential of the written word as activism, the potential of empowering people to deepen their awareness, to question their circumstances or the circumstances around them, and to take action. In stretching the common prescribed idea of what activism is and who is an activist and what kind of activism is acceptable in itself has profound implications for disrupting the social and political context. In this way the notion of activist is ever-expanding.

For many, *activist* has a compromised meaning – the very word brings up connotations both negative and positive – this is similar to words such as sisterhood, feminist, and lefty, whereby some associations with the label have strong and sometimes pejorative connotations and/or affiliations therefore identifying with them can be uncomfortable and undesirable. Given the ambiguity and the multiplicity of meanings, Maxey (1999) writes that identifying as an activist is in itself a form of activism.

I believe that it is necessary to expand our notion of activism – to build momentum for change by reclaiming the label and inviting those sitting on the fence to ally with action – to consider how they themselves might be a contributor to this massive movement towards a just world. Paul Hawken (2007) reveals that there is a largely underground, world-wide mass movement towards social and environmental justice. Expanding the notion of what is activism,

and including non-traditional forms such as the arts, teaching, sustainable horticulture and agriculture, building community, psychotherapy, health and dental care, and everyday choices of what you do and where you spend your money creates a broader scope in which people can feel more empowered to create change and become actively and consciously involved in creating a better world for all. However, I believe that activism needs to be intentional and reflect accompanying actions.

Action, intention, and reflexivity equal activism. I agree with Maxey (1999) that we cannot devoid ourselves from the political – that our actions and inactions reflect our politics and create the world in which we live. Nonetheless, activism requires consciousness. It requires that there is an intention behind the action. Sometimes what looks like activism is actually a by-product of another primary motivation (i.e., people may buy a hybrid car for multiple reasons – tax incentives, fuel consumption savings, or environmental concerns).

Asserting that activism requires a consciousness and reflection of oneself and one's actions differentiates everyday activism from everyday actions. It is necessary for one to be able to know and articulate why they are doing, choosing, or relating in a particular way in order for it to be considered activism, and to be reflective as they engage. Maxey (1999) suggests that reflexivity, “a continual process of reflection” is what critically engages us consciously in this process and is a radical act (p. 201). It offers the potential for individuals to connect to their experience and potentially untangle themselves from the web of discourses and social structures that limit creative vision and the change process. Reflexivity enables one to break the trance of the status quo that merely reproduces society (King, 2006).

Environmental educator Alison Neilson (2009) describes her attempts at disrupting oppressive powers over the past decade as being complicated by her own complicity in these

oppressions. Reflecting on her work, the intersectionality of oppressions and environmental injustices, she considers, “perhaps I am the colonizer” (p. 138). She shares that her intention to teach, as “the disruptive activist,” is hindered by her embodied experience of resisting angering her students and the archetypal/symbolic representation of she herself carries as woman teacher/mother.

Activism and the Body

Activism uses the body. Gardner (2005) asserts that activists are called to use their voices and speak of the realities and possibilities, to envision a different way, in the support and facilitation of change. English (2008) suggests that “Voice refers to the right to express one-self in multiple ways” and is “about choice, literally and figuratively” (p. 122). By voice, I interpret it as a tool of expression. Our voice identifies us, moves us forward, and invites others to share our vision of a just world. We can look to our recent past, the civil rights and suffragette movements, to exemplify how the body has been integral in activism.

The unity-diversity tension was crackling with intensity, and it was only when men and women put their bodies on the line and when they embodied their disagreement in the name of fulfilling the promise of democracy, that the political framework became more equitable and just. (Miller-Lane, 2006, p. 18)

Women prominent in the suffragette movement of the early 1900s in the United Kingdom used their bodies in their political actions. Their bodies underwent hunger strikes, endured acts of violence, were imprisoned, and were used in these ways to protest to gain Women’s rights. Mary Leigh (1885-1978), infamous for throwing bricks, axes, and breaking windows as acts of protest, put her body on the line time and again. Her commitment to her politics, her willingness

to sustain distress, and “The capacity of Leigh’s body to communicate dissent, as well as courage and endurance, powerfully interpellated other suffragettes to identify with her commitment to the cause, despite an insistence on Leigh’s uniqueness” (Parkins, 2000, p. 68). Half a century later, on December 1, 1955, African-American civil rights activist, Rosa Parks (1913-2005) used her body to resist as an act of defiance. In refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white bus passenger, her civil disobedience sparked the Montgomery Bus boycott in Alabama. This led to a Supreme Court decision that declared the Alabama and Montgomery laws requiring segregated buses to be unconstitutional. Like Mary Leigh, Rosa Parks used her body as a critical tool for political contestation (Parkins, 2000).

As exemplified above, protest often places the body on the line (Alaimo, 2010) and is enacted through the body: “The body is a key vehicle of protest” (Sutton, 2007, p. 143). The physical body has long been used as a tool of activism making the voice of the activist visible. The impact and utility of the activist body goes beyond the physical dimension. Many activists feel the work is never-ending. The seeming ambivalence to the plights of social and ecological justice often leave activists “feeling frustrated that they are moving against a strong tide, and that their positions are not widely supported by the mainstream culture” (Thomashow, 1996, p. 6). Experiences of helplessness and of being overwhelmed often emerge when people consider the scope of changes needed to secure a sustainable ecological future.

The concerned citizen cannot escape the loss and suffering that accompany ecological deterioration. However people choose to understand the magnitude of this problem, through emotional pain, or sheer deductive analysis, the psychological turmoil of global environmental change is inevitable. (Thomashow, 1996, p. 148)

In the face of fear and uncertainty, it is easy for us to constrict and let our “heart and mind go numb” (Macy, 2007, p. 92) and brace “psychically and physically, against the signals of distress that continually barrage us in the news, on our streets, in our environment” (Macy, 2007, p. 76). This bracing can create experiences of helplessness, immobilisation, intense emotional “dysregulation,” disconnection and dissociation, and psychological numbing - all of which have significant implications for the body, relational capacities, and contribute to the maintenance of a fractured existence. Other emotional responses, such as anger, which often fuel and sustain activism (Thomashow, 1996) are common and heavily tax the body. Scholars cite the pervasiveness of burnout for professionals working in the environmental not-for-profit sector (Cox, 2009; Lysack, 2012; Rossiter, 2010; Whelan, 2000). Svirsky (2010) writes that the activist life is dramatic in that it is

marked by a sense of urgency, anxiety and alertness to a life under attack. It involves both a type of discomfort with the world, and a life-force seeking out the new; activism is therefore in and of itself turbulent and restless. (p. 177)

He goes on to suggest that activism is dangerous, a “pure form of terror” (p. 177) that “threatens our neat and secure life” (p. 177). The ultimate challenge within activist practice is to maintain a balanced and healthy lifestyle. Trappist monk, activist, and writer Thomas Merton (1965) wrote

there is a pervasive form of contemporary violence [and that is] activism....The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful. (n.p.)

These powerful words resonate as true today. No doubt activism has a toll upon the body.

Furthermore, Whelan (2000) contends that burnout is prevalent, in part due to the reluctance of

environmental activists to take necessary time for rejuvenation, planning, or evaluation. Lacking in the research are accounts of how activists use their bodies to guide their activism and access embodied ways of knowing.

Activism and Embodiment

Scholars (Evans, 2006; Mazis, 2006) suggest that embodied ways of living have the potential to increase our consciousness, take action, and change the ways in which we live on and with the Earth. James (2002) proposes that embodied activism might render more sustainable activism:

if unsustainable practices are bodily as well as mental, might the comportment which could bring about sustainability be, to a certain extent, a bodily comportment, not just an exclusively mental understanding of the world, but a way of acting as an embodied being? (p. 5)

Wilcox (2009) advances that embodied knowledges are essential to activist work. They foster a “citizenry for action and change” (p. 104) to “empower and mobilize communities for social change” (p. 109). She further suggests that embodied epistemologies provide an alternative to the ways in which activists currently engage. Evans (2006) speaks to this from a slightly different lens: “Unless people feel themselves to be sufficiently connected to the planet on a deep, psychological level, the chances of this action taking place, or taking effect on the scale that is needed, are remote” (p. 130). Orr (2009b), echoing Evans, asserts that science alone cannot save us without the powerful sacred alliance and allegiance to the Earth. Non-dualistic consciousness and living opens us to feel beyond the enculturation and fractured constructs that inhibit our embodied knowing and integrity. Returning to the undivided self has profound

implications for activism in the ways of “healing the self, mending our broken relationships, restoring a healthy relationship to our world, seen and unseen, and healing the planet” (Ray, 2008, p. 43). In this way, the embodied self is a tool of activism — the body bringing us into connection with, and awareness of, the ruptures between self and nature, and self and other.

Eco-activism and Spirituality

Eco-activists, those who work on behalf of the planet and all of its creatures, continue to be thwarted by governments tied to corporate regimes and the global economic machine (e.g., the Kyoto and Copenhagen summits); despite this, eco-activists continue to plot, plan, and take action in a variety of ways and with a multitude of foci. It is imperative to bring spirituality into the conversation of embodied ways of knowing and social and ecological activism because of the potentially fertile and transformative knowledges availed through spiritual sites that guide and inform our actions. Further, Lysack (2012) indicates that for veterans of the peace and social justice movements, the maintenance of spiritual resilience is pivotal to activists. Working towards ecological sustainability for Earth and all non-human beings can be seen as part of one’s eco-political spiritual path. Rosenhek (2006) illustrates this point, “For many, matters of the spiritual and soul are separate from action. But certainly this separation is illusory, much like the separation we feel between ourselves and the Earth, or ourselves and each other” (p. 92). Keating (2008), writing about Gloria Anzaldua’s spiritual activism, speaks to it as combining the inward reflection of spirituality and the outward action of activism; she refers to it as a “spirituality for social change” (p. 54) that engages “private concerns with social issues” (p. 55). Spiritual activism emerges from the individual and moves into an outward expression where

personal and collective issues are revealed and challenged with the intention of change (Keating, 2008). Further, Keating asserts that spiritual activism is not

solipsistic; nor does it result in egocentrism, self-glorification, or other types of possessive individualism. Rather, spiritual activism combines self-reflection and self-growth with outward-directed, compassionate acts designed to bring about material change. (p. 58)

The embodied act of connecting with, feeling, and taking action for issues of social and eco-justice can be a spiritual practice: “Spirituality and social action must become united in a common vision—the vision for justice, peace, ecological sustainability, and compassion” (Sivaraksa, 2002, p. 43). Engaging spiritually and expressing that faith (through action) helps deepen one’s location in reality (Dantley, 2005): It “liberates one to create what is essential to enhance and often transform the real world” (p. 8). Furthermore, eco-social worker, academic, and Anglican priest Mishka Lysack (2012) contends that spiritual traditions have practices “for respecting the earth as sacred, critiquing greed and financial gain at the expense of social or ecological communities and proposing alternative visions of society”; he posits these “seeds” have yet to be harvested (p. 261).

As we move into deeper communion with all that is alive, there is a natural or innate energy that moves us into action: “in allowing the body to speak, we can also discover this crucial *life-forwarding* directionality” (Fisher, 2006, p. 165, italics in original). Drawing upon this energy, and cultivating practices that establish it, is integral to the radical paradigm shift required to fundamentally alter the fractured and disembodied ways of being and the trajectory of the ecological crisis. By embracing the potentiality of the undivided body as a pathway to and through our embodied self we open ourselves to a reunion with the ancestral self, the innate part

of each of us, no matter how disconnected we might be, that is intimately tied to the Earth and intrinsically connected to all that is alive. This alignment with our interconnectivity to the web of life invites us into an eco-spiritual path: “The return to the unity of the body and psyche is the return to the union of psyche and nature as earth. The body opens us to a spirituality that remains faithful to the earth” (Mazis, 2006, p. 18). It is the undivided body that breathes with the Earth; that understands how to live in harmony, with reverence and in community; and appreciates that the Earth’s healing and our own healing are intimately bound, and ultimately, the same thing.” No ecological renewal of the world will ever succeed until and unless we consider the Earth as our own Body and the body as our own Self,” (Panikkar, 1992, p. 244 cited in Bai & Scutt, 2009, p. 93) “for human and environmental health are indissolubly bound” (Pesek et al., 2006, p. 115).

Studies Linking Activism and the Body

There is a dearth of studies on the connection between activism and the body or embodiment in terms of how the body informs activists or activism, how the body is impacted, and activists’ use of alternative ways of knowing. The closest study was by Hamilton (2007) who brings together violence and the body in relation to women’s activism. In focusing on women’s narratives who have been part of political violence either through direct participation, or in support of, Hamilton inquires as to the relationship to political violence. It is significant that she does not view women’s bodies as vulnerable and finds that her participants “locate the origin of violence within their bodies” (p. 913). Alaimo (2010) also researched the use of the body, particularly the naked body and activism. Her study introduces the term trans-corporeality which highlights the overlap and the vulnerability human, animal, and environment/landscape. From a

different angle, Yuill (2007) looks at how the body-as-weapon has been used in hunger strikes and “acts as a resource for minority political groups; (ii) destabilises notions of the body in modernity and related to that point (iii) engages in a 'hidden' impulse of modernity, that of self-sacrifice” (p. 1). Other research studies like Butterwick & Selman (2006) illuminate how popular theatre utilises the body to tell and listen to stories and “imagine alternative ways of being” (p. 56) for social justice work. Etmanski (2007) also used popular theatre that utilises the body in her research that looks at intersectionality and transformative learning in the context of graduate students, popular theatre, and multicultural discourse. In spite of this work, there are no studies that directly look at how activists use their body to inform their activism. On May 4 and 5, 2012 I carried out extensive searches via the internet and the university library. In each search I put limiters of peer reviewed and publications since 1992. I have created a chart for ease to explicate my findings, or lack of findings.

Table 1

Databases	Keywords	Results		Relevant Article
Academic Search Complete Academic Search Premier Environmental Studies Index ERIC Health Source: Nursing Academic Women's Studies International Urban Studies Abstracts Social Science Abstracts Social Work Abstracts Psyc INFO Psyc ARTICLES Peace Research Abstracts	Activism in Subject and Body in open field	126	1	Alaimo, S. (2010). The naked world: The trans-corporeal ethics of the protesting body. <i>Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory</i> . 20(1), 15- 36.
Academic Search Complete Academic Search Premier Environmental Studies	Activist in Subject and Body in open field	96	1	Hamilton, C. (2007). Political violence and body language in the

Index ERIC Health Source: Nursing Academic Women's Studies International Urban Studies Abstracts Social Science Abstracts Social Work Abstracts Psyc INFO Psyc ARTICLES Peace Research Abstracts				life stories of women ETA activists. <i>Journal of Women in Culture and Society.</i> 32(4), 911-932.
Academic Search Complete Academic Search Premier Environmental Studies Index ERIC Health Source: Nursing Academic Women's Studies International Urban Studies Abstracts Social Science Abstracts Social Work Abstracts Psyc INFO Psyc ARTICLES Peace Research Abstracts	Protest in Subject and Body in Subject or Embodiment in Subject and Self in Subject	125	0	
ERIC	Activism in subject and Body knowledge in subject or Embodiment in subject	0	0	
ERIC	Activism in subject and Body in subject or Embodiment in subject	5	0	
ERIC	Activism in subject and Body in subject or Embodiment in subject	9	0	
ERIC	Activist in subject	1	0	
ERIC	Activism in subject and	0	0	

	Ways of knowing in subject			
ERIC	Activism in subject and Knowing in subject	0	0	
ERIC	Activism in subject and Self in subject	34	0	
ERIC Social Services Abstracts Sociological Abstracts International Bibliography of Social Sciences	Body in subject and Embodiment in subject and Activism in subject or Activist in subject	4	1	Yuill, C. (2007). The body as weapon - Bobby Sands and the Republican Hunger Strikes. <i>Sociological Research Online</i> , 12 (2), in print.
Sociology Academic Search Complete Ebsco	Activist in subject and Body in subject	66	1	Hamilton, C. (2007). Political violence and body language in the life stories of women ETA activists. <i>Journal of Women in Culture and Society</i> . 32(4), 911-932.
Sociology Academic Search Complete Ebsco	Activism in subject and Knowing in open field	7	0	
Sociology Academic Search Complete Ebsco	Activist in subject and Knowing in open field	5	0	
Sociology Academic Search Complete Ebsco	Activism in subject or Embodiment in open field	3	0	
Sociology Academic Search Complete Ebsco	Activist in subject and Embodiment in open field	6	0	
Environmental Index	Activist in subject or Activism in subject and Body in subject	273	0	
Environmental Index	Sustainability in subject and Activist in subject	1	0	

Environmental Index	Sustainability in subject and Health in subject	6	0	
Environmental Index	Burnout in subject and Activist in subject	0	0	
Environmental Index	Ways of Knowing in subject	0	0	
Psych INFO	Activist in subject and Body in subject	3	0	
Psych INFO	Activist in subject and Ways of Knowing in subject	0	0	
Psych INFO	Ways of Knowing in subject	3	0	
Psych INFO	Embodiment in subject and Knowledge in open field	33	0	
Psych INFO	Consciousness in subject and Activism in open field	15	0	

Conclusion

To be embodied, in the fullest sense of the word, scholars suggest is to be fully human (Todd, 2001; Ray, 2008). The perils of Western living and culture, specifically disembodied living, create ongoing hazards and levee mass proliferation of domination and subjugation of the environment and a gross disconnect from the environment as teacher and site of knowledge accessed in and through the body. Even when taking into account the undivided body, the dualistic colonisation of Western thought makes this a struggle as does the globalised dominant ideology that permeates everyday living.

We cannot know everything; we cannot wholly define and articulate the essential qualities of embodiment. There is, in part, an unknowable, indefinable, quality to embodiment; whether we know it as the divine or chaos, there is mystery to the experience of being fully human, “The living body contains the secret of life, it is an intelligence” (Jung, 1988, p. 360).

This unknowable aspect chafes at the dominant Western paradigm of left brain knowing and controlling.

Scholars have indicated compelling evidence for the profound implications for pedagogy that embodiment can offer (e.g., Clark, 2001; Wilcox, 2009), and for living and creating a world in which we want to live. Further, there is ample indication that epistemological sites of knowledge accessed in and through the body, Earth, and spirit are potentially transformative in the ways that we experience and respond to the world around, and within, us.

As a psychotherapist, educator, and activist, I was compelled to find out more – to glean a better understanding of how embodiment and epistemological sites of the body, Earth, and spirit can support activists to make more meaningful change in the world without sacrificing their well-being. By interrogating the dichotomist worldview where mind and body are separate, which creates dissonance for activists whose main tool for activism is themselves, this research hopes to support a unified experience of care for self and the Earth.

CHAPTER FIVE

Methodology and Methods

Research methodologies are multiple and varied in the social sciences. Choosing the appropriate methodologies — congruent with one’s epistemology, ontology, and research goals — encourages reflection on the part of the researcher. Congruence amongst these elements in the conduct and reporting of the research demonstrates rigour (Carter & Little, 2007) and facilitates embodied research which was one of the intentions of this inquiry. This chapter offers a window into some of the key points of convergence and emergence for me and the methodologies and methods I used to uncover how women eco-activists’ bodies were informing and being affected by their eco-activism. I begin by providing some context for my research inquiry. I then locate myself ontologically and epistemologically. I follow this with an exploration of the feminist methodological framework of this research and then I move to arts-informed inquiry, a method I used. I then speak to the research design including the limitations of the design, participant recruitment, and data collection methods. As a feminist, I include a discussion on the researcher in relation to power, reflexivity, and validity. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how I analysed and represented the findings.

Framing the Context for My Research

It is important to me that my scholarly work is self-aware and psychologically informed, given I am a feminist counsellor, what I do in the world, and how I believe change happens. Yet I made a choice to shift my work from counselling psychology to leadership, as I felt constrained by the focus on individual, pathological frameworks and status quo politics entrenched in

psychology and counselling psychology. However, much work in activism, leadership, and education lacks the psychological awareness imperative for ethical and sustainable practices that some scholars suggest we need (e.g., Keating, 2008; Rabinovitch, 2004). Furthermore, my understanding and experience of embodiment from a theoretical, multi-modal framework, as well as from my location as a body-centred psychotherapist and educator, afford me a unique pantry of knowledge from which to explore this fruitful topic.

In keeping with these goals, I was clear from the outset that it was integral for me to find ways to carry out and engage in research with a high degree of congruence with both who I am and the research. In addition to engaging with the material from an embodied feminist lens and relating with the women as a feminist, relational being, it was important for me to find ways to do the work in ways that were congruent with the inquiry – allowing my body to guide me, writing from an embodied place, and engaging in the research in a sustainable way. Further discussion of this is found in chapter nine.

Ontological Location

Ontologically, I locate myself through feminist, constructivist, poststructuralist lenses, wherein truth(s) and reality(ies) are fluid and constructed through subjective experiences or understandings of experience, shaped by the context, social environment, individual perceptions and lived experiences, and, with regard to research, through the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee (Ponterotto, 2005). The dynamics of power inherent in all relationships is a mediator for truth(s) and reality(ies). Furthermore, I see the intersectionality of locations (e.g., socioeconomics, culture, politics, sexuality) and their corresponding discourses as foundational to the production of truth(s) and reality(ies). These locations of intersectionality

play into the dimensions of embodiment (as outlined in chapter two). I also subscribe to an emancipatory or social action lens for research, which posits that research is ultimately about change, personal and collective, as they cannot be separated.

Epistemological Location

The epistemological sites that we authenticate guide our choices, actions, paths, and dreams. Knowledge, as articulated by adult educators and feminists, is multifaceted and mediated through different ways of knowing (Belenky et al., 1986; Chapman, 1998; English, 2008; Wilcox, 2009; and Wilson, 2004). Adult educator Jane Vella (2000) asserts that “epistemology is the study and knowing and the art of learning” (p. 14); she further asserts that a spiritual epistemology is “grounded in humanity” (p. 14).

Knowledge is constructed, transmitted, uncovered, discovered, birthed, and co-created through relationships, with oneself, others (human and non-), the environment, Earth, spirit, and/or the cosmos. I believe knowledge is everywhere, availed to and through us in more ways and through more sites than we understand. I also believe, like adult educator Leona English (2005), that much of this knowledge is spiritual, mediated through our bodies and psyches. This study was particularly interested in how women eco-activists’ bodies directly link to multiple ways of knowing, and how that capacity and potentiality to access knowledge has an impact on their work. In this way I am interested, as explored previously in this thesis, in embodied knowledges.

The Question of Gender

While going beyond the scope of this inquiry it needs to be noted that inquiring with women rather than with men about their embodied experiences would likely reveal a different articulation of experience given the ways in which gender is socially constructed and enculturated on and in the body. The male gaze that feminism works to deconstruct (Pillow, 2002) radically impacts the ways in which we not only land and inhabit our bodies but how we understand our experience of that and how we construct or interpret our embodied knowings. That is not to say that men and women have different capacities for embodied knowing, rather “there is no escaping gender and gendered positions” (Pillow, 2002, p. 549) that likely would alter the ways in which men and women experienced, interpreted, and articulated their experiences.

Methodological Frameworks

Given my ontological and epistemological stance, I have woven together two methodologies to support the undertaking of this research and have utilised them in the following ways. The first is feminist research, the second is arts-informed research as it was used in data collection and representation. In addition, methods (reflexivity, both discursive and embodied) under the umbrella of feminist research were heavily utilised in the analysis. Of importance to this research was that both feminist and arts-informed research contest hegemonic discourses that intersect and impact social structures, and thus individuals, and explicitly explore power dynamics (e.g., Cole & Knowles, 2008). This is inherent in the exploration of ways in which the body informs eco-activism and is affected by eco-activism. Of further relevance is that the methodologies are subjective, and value the experience of the researched as well as the

researcher, as creators or co-creators of multiple truth(s) or reality(ies) through their functioning (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999; Neuman, 1997) In addition, feminist and arts-informed inquiries are emancipatory in nature and work towards social change (Clover, 2007). This is important to me as congruence in one's way of being with one's beliefs and values is integral for embodiment and comfort.

Feminist Research

Feminist research contests mainstream or traditional research steeped in patriarchal, masculinist, positivist frameworks that alienate and subjugate women (Andrews, 2002; DeVault, 1996; Hesse-Biber & Brooks, 2007). Its aim is to build oppositional knowledge, and use research to uncover and challenge injustice, systems of privilege, and power. In particular, feminist research listens to women's experiences "in stereo" – to listen with restraint to the meanings of the experience of the respondents" (Levesque-Lopman, 2000, p. 103). It is also about "recording one's words, asking appropriate questions, laughing at the right moment, or displaying empathy" (Levesque-Lopman, 2000, p. 103). Empathy soothes, creates safety (Fishbane, 2007), and builds relationships.

Feminist research seeks to shift focus to uncover women's locations and viewpoints (Andrews, 2002; DeVault, 1996; Hesse-Biber & Brooks, 2007), essentially "giving voice to the silent" (Oakley, 2000, p. 47). It also seeks to minimise harm throughout the research process (Andrews, 2002; DeVault, 1996). It is conducted in a manner that leads to social action/change to benefit women and other marginalised groups (Andrews, 2002; Apodaca, 2009; DeVault, 1996; Hesse-Biber & Brooks, 2007), and more specifically, incorporates and emphasises the value of the researcher's subjective experience into the research (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999;

Neuman, 1997). McCormack (1989) supports the stance of the researcher's subjective value in her claim that unencumbered knowledge is neither wanted nor realistic. Moreover, feminist research is flexible in terms of combining research techniques and methods and in traversing academic fields thus creating interdisciplinary knowledge (Neuman, 1997). Apodaca (2009) asserts that the "defining rationale for feminist research" is in the act of improving the "well-being of women somewhere" (p. 421), and this was the aim of my own study. I, like other feminists, believe that emancipatory social change that benefits women benefits everyone, particularly, when we look through the lens of interconnectivity and unity consciousness.

Feminism is an ideological stance or worldview with much diversity, complexity, and variance across its membership, making an all-encompassing, precise definition problematic. "There is no one set of feminist principles or understandings beyond the very, very general ones to which feminists in every race, class, and culture will assent" (Harding, 1987, p. 7). However, Harding (1987) asserts that research informed by feminist theories is feminist research.

Given such diversity, feminist research faces the same challenges as feminism, for lack of a definitive feminist methodology (Akman, Tonner, Stuckless, Ali, Emmott & Downie, 2001; Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992). Feminism(s) reject(s) "the notion of a transcendent authority that decides what constitutes 'feminist,' consistent with the anti-hierarchical nature of many feminist organizations and much feminist spirit" (Reinharz, 1992, pp. 6-7). Yet, feminist theory offers a theoretical framework or stance that can inform feminist methodology (Crotty, 2003).

Feminist-informed research encompasses principles of:

- creating space for women's voices (Andrews, 2002);
- producing knowledge for and on behalf of the betterment of all women (Bierema, 2002; Pillow, 2003);
- consciousness raising (Eichler, 1997);

- contesting positivist research methodologies' objectivist stance (Andrews, 2002; Eichler, 1997);
- building oppositional knowledge to challenge systems of privilege (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999; Hesse-Biber & Brooks, 2007);
- contesting the inherent power structures of the relationship (Neuman, 1997; Pillow, 2003);
- “disrupt[ing] the asymmetrical power relations characteristic of White male-dominated organizations” (Bierema, 2002, p. 246); and
- promoting equality (Apodaca, 2009; Thompson, 1992) by advocating for social change and emancipation (Apodaca, 2009; Hesse-Biber & Brooks, 2007; Pillow, 2003).

Through the application of some or all of these principles to “the act of research, the questions asked, and the data to be collected” the research becomes feminist research (Apocada, 2009, p. 419). Furthermore, feminist research engages within a feminist community that acknowledges and responds to the work, creating and evolving practice and praxis overtime (Eichler, 1997). Apodaca (2009) asserts that the “act of collecting and publishing data is a political act. It is so because only certain segments of the population are considered worthy of being counted or measured” (p. 422). In this way, feminist researchers “have an opportunity to affect cultural forms via the construction and dissemination of theoretical perspectives” (Gergen, 1990, p. 481).

In bringing the focus to my study, I incorporated a number of methods including individual interviews, focus groups, and reflexivity. Feminists rely on in-depth interviews for various reasons: “the advantages of ‘connected’ as distinct from ‘separated’ knowing, dissolution of the artificial boundaries between knower and known, the opportunity to ground knowledge in concrete social contexts and experiences” (Oakley, 2000, p. 47) and to “access people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19). I chose to use in-depth interviews with semi-structured, open-ended questions. Gaarder (2008) suggests that semi-

structured interviews have been relied upon in social movement research to illustrate participants understanding of their role, involvement and construction of identity.

A second way in which I collected data was through the use of focus groups: They offer potential for increased authenticity and connection (Wilkinson, 1998, 1999); consciousness-raising (Montell, 1999); and the co-creation of knowledge. As a feminist method, focus groups have the potential to shift the power dynamics between the researcher and researched to a more egalitarian and less exploitative dynamic (Montell, 1999; Wilkinson, 1998, 1999). This was evidenced as the women in the first focus group encouraged me to create my own prayer flag and share the story of it.

Arts-Informed Inquiry

Arts-informed inquiry uses creative processes – but not necessarily art - in a precise manner as the principal means to uncover and explore the experience of the participants and the researcher (McNiff, 2008). Creative practices have the potential to open individuals to a new perspective (Eisner, 2008), a “pedagogy of possibility” as it is called by Kinsella (2007, p. 43) that can disrupt dominant research practices and privileged knowledge(s) embedded in our social, political and institutional structures. Moreover, arts-informed research is understood to be one key way to directly challenge the entrenched hallmarks of Cartesian philosophy, rationality, and positivism, as the only valid means of inquiry (Cole & Knowles, 2008). This is because creative practices in research delve below the surface of the rational mind and connect with the emotional, creative human, often flying below the radar of the ever-vigilant mind that protects and upholds the hegemonic discourses embedded in our world and enculturates our bodies. Creative processes rely on our creative, intuitive, and artistic right brain and leaves the

rational, logic debate to others: They use a bottoms-up approach, entering through the body and allowing new knowings and meanings to emerge. Creative processes “have the ability to enter one’s psyche at a deep level, despite resistance,” (Branagan, 2005, p. 40) making them invaluable in that they can be invitational; they silently enter into our psyches, bypassing the logical gatekeeper, and find their way to our hearts. Through our hearts, we feel empathy, “a political practice which envisages, in relationship with others, the possibilities of a new and better world” (Shaw & Martin, 2005, p. 87). The arts and creative processes invite mystery and often evoke powerful responses: “art informs through its evocative power—to surprise, delight, mystify, disturb, shock” (Piantanida, McMahon & Garman, 2003, p. 186).

Using creative practice in research unveils new epistemological sites to expand ourselves and those who interact with our work, “to gain a holistic understanding of the world... acknowledging that all forms of knowing have potential for validity” (Etmanski, 2007, p. 76). In linking holistic awareness and acknowledging multiple valid ways of knowing, we can broaden our understanding of the ways in which the embodied knowledges and eco-activism intersect.

Engaging in arts-informed research has the potential to:

- be inclusive (Branagan, 2005) and expand audiences, thus increasing the accessibility of the research (Cole & Knowles, 2008);
- contest subjugation and give voice to silenced peoples (Clover, 2007; West & Stalker, 2007);
- explore issues pertinent to social justice (Clover, 2007) and avail emancipatory directions and actions;
- disrupt dominant discourses that silence and marginalise (Clover, 2007); and
- expose hidden social, corporate, and political agendas (Branagan, 2005).

Creative research practice or arts-informed research can be critical to the process of creating oppositional knowledges and “surfacing ways of knowing and constructing meaning for social

change” (McKenzie, 2005, p. 23). Creative practices are tools of expression that everyone can access which can “cut through the layers of habit and resistance, and speak universally” (Branagan, 2005, p. 37). Given that creative processes of the right hemisphere can bypass the logical, left hemisphere and, as Branagan (2005) claims, enter deeply into one’s psyche, I believe that art or creative works can enter into the psyches of audiences to disrupt the hegemonic discourses that maintain the status quo. Minge (2006) captures this: “Art expels the inside out and takes the outside in” (p. 118). This intimacy with the self, and the researched, also invites embodied experience, a powerful way to explore unimagined possibilities (Minge, 2006). Feminist arts-informed research combines feminism’s principles and practices with creative processes that focus on bringing subjugated voices and marginalised areas of social and ecological justice into focus for change.

The arts-informed method or creative process I used was the making of "prayer flags" in the focus groups (I speak to prayer flags below). I chose this textile medium because of my interest in how fabric can be representative, the emergence of spirituality as a strong thread in the women’s experiences, and my relationship to Tibetan Buddhism, something I shortly explore more richly in this chapter. Further, I invited the use of images and metaphor in the interviews to offer the researched different avenues to discover, uncover, articulate, and express their understanding and knowledges of the intersection of body and eco-activism offering an alternate form of inquiry to advance understandings of complex human experience (Cole & Knowles, 2008) and to explore discursive practices.

Research Design

The guiding question for this study was, how does your body guide your eco-activism and how does activism affect it? To this end, individual interviews, focus groups, and the creation of prayer flags were used to elicit data. Reflexivity including embodied reflexivity was used in the data analysis.

Participant Recruitment

I interviewed thirteen women over thirty years of age who have been involved in eco-activism for at least three years. In the advertising information calling for participants for the research inquiry, eco-activism was not defined because I was looking for women who self-identified as eco-activists.

I sent an email or spoke directly to people who I knew who were connected to the eco-activist communities in Victoria and Nelson. I also made connections with environmental organisations and asked them to support this research by forwarding or posting the poster (see appendix) which called for participants; in addition *EcoNews*, a free local newsletter that reaches around 8,000 people included an advertisement in one of their newsletters calling for participants. In some cases people made suggestions of women I "should" talk to or women who might have links to women eco-activists. I followed those suggestions by telephone or by sending emails and the poster directly to those women. I used snowball sampling and those who were interested contacted me – all of the women who contacted me and were able to potentially attend a focus group (in terms of location) were interviewed. I was not specifically looking at recruiting across racial or cultural or sexual or ability. I was planning on recruiting urban and non-urban women, however, in the interview process I realised that this duality was not discreet

as women often lived in rural and urban settings at different points in their life. My sampling techniques resulted in certain limitations, as the sampling was limited to those to whom I had access or to those whom I wanted specifically to contribute to the study, therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to all women eco-activists.

Data Collection

Data was collected through two means. The first was in-depth individual interviews, a key method of feminist research as noted above. I chose in-depth interviews as the primary way to collect data. The interviews were semi-structured in that I had questions that I wanted to cover. Despite my agenda, they were informal and conversational and I, as the researcher, was verbally self-disclosing at times when it felt relevant, when it furthered or deepened the conversation, or when women inquired about what I thought, or my experience. Needless to say, my body language, facial gestures, and the responses in my embodied system (my autonomic nervous system) such as sadness, frustration, excitement, or empathy were self-disclosing throughout the interviews: “Much interpersonal communication happens nonverbally, nonconsciously, right brain to right brain” (Fishbane, 2007, p. 399). I believe that some of the information I was asking was material that is not talked about, perhaps not thought about, in day to day encounters. To ask “how does the Earth speak to you or through you?” or “can you talk about some of the barriers to embodiment?” can be intimate sharing that happens through relationship, through connection (Reinharz, 1992). Like other feminist researchers, I believe that women share more of who they are and their experiences depending on the level of presence and attunement of the researcher. This evokes trust and establishes connection or an inter-subjective or co-constructed field. In-depth interviews also afford an opportunity for validation and healing

via sharing of one's process and knowledge: The very act of sharing and witnessing opens possibilities of unearthing new insights and knowings for both the researcher and the researched. In addition to collecting data, the interviews had the potential to be conscious-raising for both myself as the researcher and the researched.

The individual interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes and were conducted in a relaxed, informal manner. I interviewed four of the women in Nelson, BC where I interviewed one of the women at her home; the other three women were interviewed on the back steps of the hostel where I was staying (it was lovely September weather that week). Two women were from Duncan, BC; I interviewed them at their homes. The remaining seven women lived in the greater Victoria, BC area. I interviewed one of these women at the University of Victoria, three at their homes, and three met me at my home for their interviews.

The following questions offered starting points and directions for the interview:

- Tell me about your activist work. Give me an example of it?
- What impact does it have on your body?
- How is your body impacted through your activism?
- How is your body nourished or replenished through your activism?
- Is there a toll upon your body?
- In what ways does your body inform your activism?
- What is the connection between embodiment – being in your body – and taking action?
- How do you experience the body as a guide or information source?
- Do you experience Earth/body communication? What can you tell me about it?
- Are there links between body, Earth, spirit(uality) and activism? What can you tell me about them?
- What is the ideal or natural way in which we could inhabit our bodies?
- Are there barriers to being embodied? What are they? What/how do these barriers impact daily living and activism?
- What are the potential links between embodiment and sustainability?
- What do you imagine would happen if the world's people were embodied?
- How would the world be different if we lived in our bodies or valued embodied knowledges?

The audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed by professional transcribers in the Victoria area who signed confidentiality forms so as to keep the identities and information private.

The focus groups – art-making. Data was also collected through a focus group where women created textiles in the form of prayer flags to represent their experience of activism and their body. The focus groups were held to offer an opportunity to engage the researched with the material in a more tactile, embodied way whilst building connection and community with the women. I knew firsthand, and through the literature, the necessity of connection for sustainable activist practice. I was also aware that individualising participants through the individual interviews would serve the study well in order to glean the depth of information that I was looking for but that it would also run counter to my wish to offer an opportunity for connection. This was also informed by my own experience as an activist, which cannot be separated from my work as an academic activist. It was important to me to incorporate methods that were congruent to my values as well as to the aims of the research. Creative practice through fabric, in this case the prayer flag, was an ideal way to engage with embodied ways of knowing and to express through non-linear, abstract processes to elicit information and collect data. Once made individually, women were asked to share the story of their prayer flags. The process of creating prayer flags is congruent with the inquiry as it is a more body-centred process which engages the creative right hemisphere of the brain which allows for epistemological sites of the body to emerge. I audio-taped when the women shared the story of their prayer flag and had these transcribed.

The impetus for the use of the prayer flags was three fold: it was important for me to collect data through a manner that engaged the embodied right brain self; I wanted something visual to disseminate the findings with the intention of creating change; and thirdly, I wanted an opportunity for the women to present themselves without the researcher as editor. I asked women to create a prayer flag she felt represented eco-activism and her body.

Four flag making gatherings were held. I returned to Nelson seven months after the interviews and the four women from Nelson and I met in a room at the community centre. In the planning phase of this inquiry my vision was to have two focus groups, one in Victoria and one in Nelson. I held two flag making gatherings in Victoria to accommodate busy schedules. One of them was held at the University of Victoria where four women participated; a second was held at my home where two women participated. At this point I had a telephone call from two women in the Cowichan Valley area who were interested in participating in the study. I trusted that they were an important part and scheduled a time to meet with them. This fourth gathering happened immediately following their individual interviews in Duncan. The atmospheres in the focus groups were markedly different. The size of the groups did not seem to impact the sense of connection or community, rather, previous connections or history together seemed to be more of a contributor. In two of the focus groups people knew each other, in some cases very well. This increased the conversation, laughter, and sharing of personal information. However, in the focus groups which had four people there were comments indicating appreciation of connection with like-minded folk. One woman was not able to attend the art-making gathering. Images of the prayer flags are found in chapters six and seven.

Why prayer flags. Initially I had planned on women creating quilt squares at the focus groups. I am a quilter of sorts myself and love fabric – the vibrancy of texture and colour, what it represents, and how it evokes emotion. I also love quilts and have been involved and exposed to the power of quilting for research and quilting for social change throughout my doctoral programme. I was very clear that I would use quilting as a method in my research, even before my topic emerged. However, in my first interview, Claudette spoke about her activism as part of her spiritual practice and it resonated with me. I became curious about what else was to come in

the next interviews. After the next three interviews, all in Nelson, I had a clear idea that this was emerging as significant. Months later as I was gathering and preparing materials for the quilting focus groups it "came to me" that a communal prayer flag would be the most appropriate textile to use to encapsulate this more "spiritual" dimension.

Although I realise that prayer flags belong to a specific culture and emerge from and for a specific tradition and I respect and honour this, prayer flags are most importantly about blessings. In Tibetan Buddhist tradition, prayer flags hold a representation of the blessing which the wind blows, carrying it into the world as a vehicle of blessing of compassion, peace, and wisdom through the surrounding area (O'Connor, 2009). Prayer flags are believed to benefit all beings. To me they are an offering of hope to all beings, including the Earth, that we can live with, that my prayers, my sacred energy, is connected to these hopes that I put forth onto the flags. This is in part what activism is – a gathering and expression of energy towards social change, a betterment of the world, the Earth, our planet.

The tradition of prayer flags is specific to Tibetan Buddhism. Typically the flags are made of vibrant colour cloth and strung in the mountainsides in Tibet. Increasingly they have become popular in the West as exemplified by the proliferation of flags seen on houses and in backyards. I have a small but heartfelt connection to Tibetan Buddhism through my meditation practice. My practice is informed by the work of Dr. Reggie Ray who is a prominent Buddhist scholar and the Spiritual Director of Dharma Ocean. Dr. Ray teaches within the lineage of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987) a preeminent teacher of Tibetan Buddhism who was forefront in bringing Tibetan Buddhism to the West. Ray's work is somatically based resting on the premise that the body is the gateway to spirituality. This works allies with and informs my somatic psychotherapy training, practice, and teaching.

Based on my understanding of the purpose of the prayer flags and their intention for the good of all beings - the explicit choice albeit under the duress of the Chinese invasion of Tibet for practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism to bring it to the West - and the way in which the idea emerged – though embodied reflexivity – I trusted that the creation of prayer flags in the inquiry would be viewed by the Tibetan people and others as a respectful, creative way to bring more blessings into this world rather than as an act of cultural appropriation.

At the first focus group which was held in Nelson I spoke about the shift in creating a quilt square to creating prayer flags and how it came about. The women were interested and supportive of the shift. Because the Nelson women were interviewed first and there was a span of time between those interviews and the ones in the Victoria area, the remainder of the women in the study entered into the interview process with the information that we would be making prayer flags at the focus group.

The Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the *instrument* of the research (Bierema, 2002, p. 258). The ways in which the researcher interacts, moves forward, uses power, and experiences the world significantly impact the research process and product, as do sociocultural and political location. It has been said that there is a symbiotic relationship between the research and the researcher (Cutcliffe, 2003).

Feminist researchers strive for awareness of self as they conduct the research (Reinharz, 1992). They seek to expand the manner in which questions are introduced, and transform the ways in which the research process is carried out, ultimately with the hope of

increasing research utility (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999). The researcher and the researched have an intersubjective relationship

that establishes mutuality and nourishes recall of the seen-but-not-noticed, revealing to the knower what [he or] she knows, possibly for the first time in [his or] her own words and from [his or] her own perspective. (Levesque-Lopman, 2000, p. 103)

These powerful words illuminate the transformative potentiality of being-in-relation or being connected for both the researched and the researcher.

In using myself as the instrument of research I engaged in embodied reflexivity to analyse the data. As I had a “strong reliance on intuition, imagination, personal experience, and emotion” (Neuman, 1997, p. 82) the research was feminist in nature.

Power. Feminist researchers recognise their power as researchers and as representatives of the findings. Wolf (1996) argues that

Power is discernible in three interrelated dimensions: (1) power differences stemming from different positionalities of the researcher and the researched (race, class, nationality, life chances, urban-rural backgrounds); (2) power exerted during the research process, such as defining the research relationship, unequal exchange, and exploitation; and (3) power exerted during the postfieldwork period—writing and representing. (p. 2, parenthesis in original)

Andrews (2002) adds or takes this further by arguing

Feminist researchers hide behind the shield of transparent power—behaving in ways that are common to other people in positions of power—if and when they insist on their privilege to reframe the stories they hear, knowing full well that the interpretations they offer will go unchallenged by those whose lives they describe. (2002, p. 62)

The researcher must wield the role's inherent power in ways that insulate the researched from harm: Reflexivity is useful in decreasing the power differential between the researcher and the researched in the representation of the knowledge(s). A subjective approach may diminish, but not eliminate, risk. Harding (1987) asserts that the researcher must be

placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research. That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours for the researcher her/ himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint. (p. 9)

In placing oneself under the same scrutiny, the researcher undergoes a process of self-reflection, or reflexivity—a hallmark of feminist research.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity is a disciplined self-reflection of one's experience of who oneself is, how and where one locates oneself, how one influences one's work, and how one's work influences oneself (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999). It is a critical instrument to examine the production of knowledge and power intersects with that production (D'Cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez, 2007) and "to deconstruct the author's authority in the research and/or writing process" (Pillow, 2003, p. 179). Simons & McCormack (2007) suggest that reflexivity engages one in the conscious reflection of how their values are impacting – either inhibiting or deepening insight – to one's insights and understanding of material.

In recognising that value-free knowledge is not possible, nor desirable, (McCormack, 1989) reflexivity provides an avenue for feminist researchers to unearth, identify, and be clear about their beliefs and values and how they impact the analysis process. Researchers must appreciate that we cannot separate "*what* we know from *how* we know it" (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999, p. 3). Broido & Manning, (2002) clearly articulate the need for feminist researchers to

“reflect upon and be explicit about their subjective role during the research” as “the people who construct and articulate the research findings inevitably shape knowledge” (p. 442). Harding (1987) warns that feminist researchers can influence analysis in the same manner as sexist and androcentric researchers. This influence extends beyond analysis – to the creation and implementation of the research, the question(s), the setting, the findings, the interpretation(s) (Pillow, 2003), and through representation and dissemination. Wickes (1991) asserts “the process of asking meaningful questions allows for a passionate knowing of oneself to emerge” (p. 40). Moreover, one can identify and recognise the social world in which they are embedded (Frank, 1997) thereby unearthing and articulating what is familiar or known and what is unknown or hidden. This knowing, through a reflexive practice, can be “used as assets and tools for interpretation” (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 442).

Embodied reflexivity. Embodied reflexivity is a process that relies on body-based experience, which in relation to the self “unfolds through a corporeal medium” by way of practices that increase awareness of sensations” (Pagis, 2009, p. 266). Rather than a discursive practice of reflexivity where language is the central medium, bodily experience is the fundamental avenue – “self-knowledge is anchored in bodily sensation” (Pagis, 2009, p. 265). In allowing bodily experience to be primary, one must cast off Western discourses and practices of duality which herald thinking above all other ways of knowing, particularly conceptual knowledge which is “formalized and disembodied nature” (Pagis, 2010, p. 471). In settling into a mindful awareness of bodily experience there is an immediacy in the reflexivity and “embodied consciousness tells the self what is happening using the present tense” (Pagis, 2009, p. 278). In this way, embodied reflexivity is very much a phenomenological inquiry.

Using an embodied reflexivity is integral to the process of feminist inquiry and particularly in research like mine about embodiment, consciousness, and the body as a site of knowledge: “Reflexively locating and interrogating the impact of the body on the knowledge and meanings produced is important” (Sharma et al., 2009, p. 1643). The bodies of researchers need to be recognised in research, as their absence “obscures the complexities of knowledge production and yields deceptively tidy accounts of research” (Ellingson, 2006, p. 299). Disembodied research validates the Cartesian split of body and mind and privileges a “masculine mode of being” (p. 300). In engaging both embodied and discursive practices of reflexivity the knowledge produced is liberated, allowing the union of body and mind to create knowledge from the lived experience of the body complemented by the discursive practices of the mind.

Validity. Challenges abound to the notions of validity in qualitative research bringing into question traditional practice which has focused on positivist understandings which highlight objectivity, accuracy, generalisability, rigor, and reliability. Validity in feminist qualitative research must not be misconstrued and viewed through a positivist or masculinist lens, rather one aims to establish a thorough, consistent method of inquiry where there is a high degree of congruence between the philosophical underpinnings of the methodology and the research design (Koch, 1996). In addition, Lincoln & Guba (2000) also indicate that a deliberate fairness to avoid marginalisation in reporting a balanced representation of the data needs to be apparent in the text. Anderson (2001) writes that the practice of embodied writing (or listening, or reading) asks one to slow down and focus on the resonance in the body thereby bringing “a ring of authenticity” (p. 92). This ring of authenticity, I propose, further establishes rigor. As I offer a detailed account of the research process the congruence between the methodological

underpinnings and the ways in which this research inquiry was carried out; the attention to fairness; and the ring of authenticity should become evident.

Data Analysis

Engaging with and interpreting the data was an on-going and lengthy process. During the interview process which happened in two clusters, September 2010 and April – May 2011, I made notes of what themes were surfacing, information that was unexpected or missing (Reinharz, 1992), and my own wonderings. As the interviews were transcribed I read through them and began cutting out information that was superfluous. Through this process, topics or ideas began to emerge. I created a list of headings that felt relevant and began cutting and pasting the interviews into a cohesive document with the different headings creating the structure of the document. Throughout this process of working with the data I engaged in multiple non-rational processes (e.g., meditation, gardening, art, movement, and "being with" nature) to allow the material to speak to me, and then re-engaged with the texts allowing connections, insights, and more questions, to surface. Etmanski (2007) used a meditation retreat as part of her analysis method. I also engaged in embodied reflexivity. I allowed for time and space for the material to process underneath the surface of my thinking mind. I was conscious to make time to be with nature, in the garden with my hands in the dirt. This was necessary in order for me to write authentically and in an embodied way. The more I was "with" the texts the more I felt, or understood, the implication of the women's words

the knower approaches a text with some foreknowledge of it, which in turn is questioned and challenged and amplified by the text, thereby transforming the knower who returns to

the text with a different understanding of it...and is about the co-creation of reality (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 221).

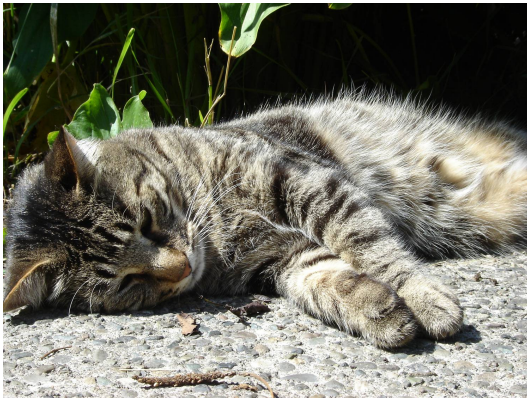
Once all thirteen interviews were organised into headings in a cohesive document I allowed time for the material to sit within me. During the entire process I was also engaged in my work life as a psychotherapist and educator – this provided me with a necessary grounding to help balance the reflection and writing process. I would block series of days off from work to engage with the material and retreat into reflection. I would walk, meditate, stretch, garden, be with nature, make abstract notes, take the occasional nap – from which I would awake or emerge with phrases or ideas towards a possible theme. I would then return to my work, my allotted time ended until the next block. While from the outside progress seemed slow I could feel the inner workings of my psyche engaging with the material. I lingered, loitered, and dreamt the material as Romanyshyn (2007) suggests. At times my body felt as if it were growing information – linking, digesting, and reformulating - while at other times it felt as if I were descending or spiraling deeper into their truths.

As the next block of time approached to engage with the material I had a felt sense of a readiness, a process nearing completion. I sat to write, with pen and paper, and jotted notes. I had scraps of paper with ideas – some scrawled in early morning, some had cat prints, tea stains, an important phone number scrawled across the top of one page – in essence the living proof that this research had become part of my life. At this point I had a cohesive document organised by headings. I could feel some sort of creation within it despite its unwieldy length. It was as if I was a carver and in this piece of wood I could see the shape that was ready to emerge. I moved between headings, the excerpts from the interviews, my notes, and taking time to engage with myself – all the while moving from left to right brain, allowing space and being present to the

process. I lumped and clustered headings together, played with different ways in which I could present the themes. I was uncomfortable, unable to settle or find a flow; I felt like a cat who couldn't find the "right" place to sleep. On day two of this block of time I awoke and was clear on the themes (see chapter six and seven for themes). Some of the themes were ones that had previously emerged and others had hatched so to speak...cracking through from the underworld of my consciousness to be articulated. I had four themes from which to craft this inquiry; headings were collapsed or combined into themes or subthemes and cohesion began in a new way. As I spent the next four days, I continued working in ways which fostered embodiment (as described earlier) and engaged with the material. It was as if there was a flow or fluidity to the material as I wove, linked and connected individual women's experiences to the themes or subthemes that emerged:

to think of the text as a body, as the fruit of gender and social relations, and to understand the process of interpretation as the product of a concrete relationship between bodies, shed new light on what is being said (Pereira, 1997, p. 236).

I had this unusual sense that I had spent the summer with these women. As I worked with the texts, their words, I recalled moments in our interviews, their faces, and I could feel our connection; this felt incredibly supportive. I also felt a great deal of support through my



connection to the natural world outside my windows; I watched hummingbirds, crows, squirrels, trees, flowers, fruit trees, the sun, and the wind do their thing. I was also supported by Henri (picture beside), my feline muse, who would spend time overseeing this project – he'd lay wherever I was

working every so often reminding me that I was an important part of his ecosystem – that yes I did need to take breaks – if only to attend to him. My meditation practice also offered grounding and support throughout this process. I write this not to offer pedestrian details of my life and process but to articulate some of my experiences of interconnectivity and receiving support and guidance from that beyond my rationale mind.

It became clear that I was working in a parallel process of dipping in, engaging intensely with the work, then retreating, allowing time, and then re-engaging both within the research and in a bigger way in my life. It was as if I were living the research both inside and outside of the inquiry. Embodied knowledge mixed with conceptual knowledge and both were informed by practices of reflexivity which moved between embodied and discursive.

September came and I had the first draft of the analysis. I sat with it and re-engaged in early November for a series of short writing spurts and then another intensive five days where it felt as though I swam through the underbelly of the research and got a much clearer understanding of the findings. Metaphorically I carved more precise features on my sculpture giving her an expression and sophisticated features.

Representation

The women's words were presented in many cases, in long excerpts in order for you the reader to hear their words rather than my version of what they said. I chose to "clean up" the text removing filler words such as "um," "you know," and "like," so as to make the reading of the text most accessible and allow for the reader to import these words into their own experience. Resting on the belief that we are all connected, I trust that resonance and connection will happen – that if you, the reader, are able to drop into your body and allow the words to

penetrate, your body will respond. As in embodied writing, this inquiry seeks resonance – the experience of reading a story or text, where the words strike a chord within (the body) and in turn, deepen one’s understanding (Anderson, 2001).

Some of the women chose to use their real names, others chose to be anonymous and either chose a pseudonym or I chose one for them. It was important for me to offer a choice for the women to use their real name as their knowledge, understandings, and the meaning they have made is their intellectual property and I believed it was up to them whether they wanted to be identified. I also wanted to have the women represented in the study by something that reflected them that I would not be interpreting; the prayer flag performed this role. Their creation and the inclusion of their flags warranted an opportunity for the women to present themselves without the researcher as editor.

CHAPTER SIX

Analysis

In sifting through, sitting with, and being immersed in the data, common pieces and themes emerged that reflect experiences of the women eco-activists interviewed for my study. The four themes are: Connection as Integral Force; Listening from the Inside; Activism, Action to Orientation: A Way of Being; and The Ebb and Flow. I discuss these themes in chapters six and seven; chapter six explores the first two themes and chapter seven the second two themes. Table 2 delineates the themes, subthemes, and categories visually to give the reader a map.

Table 2
Themes, Subthemes, and Categories

Themes	Subthemes	Categories
Connection as integral force	Connection to the Earth: A visceral bond/relationship	<i>Being in relationship with the Earth</i> <i>Somatic connection</i> <i>Earth a haven</i> <i>Interconnectivity</i> <i>Recognition of self as Earth</i>
	Communities of connection: A necessity	<i>Support</i> <i>Strain Conflicts</i> <i>Discouragement</i> <i>Toxic environments</i>
Listening from the inside	The Earth speaks	<i>Heart and gut</i>
	My body speaks	<i>Dreaming</i> <i>My voice</i> <i>Unity consciousness</i> <i>Effect on the body:</i> <i>Health benefits</i> <i>Emotional costs</i> <i>Physical costs</i>
Activism, Action to Orientation: A Way of Being	Answering the call Eco-activism is an orientation Personal journey of consciousness Activism as spiritual practice	<i>Activist: The label</i> <i>Transformation in activist practice</i> <i>Putting my body on the line</i> <i>Spiritual guidance</i>
The Ebb and Flow	Sustainability	<i>Spiritual nourishment</i> <i>Practices that sustain</i> <i>Personal connection</i> <i>Finding your rhythm</i>
	Embodiment and barriers to it	<i>Visions of a different world</i>

Connection as Integral Force

The concept of connection is foundational to the women's experiences of eco-activism and stories of what this looked and felt like were plentiful in all of the interviews. As scholars such as Merriam, Courtenay and Baumgartner (2003) and the women in this study argued, the experience of connection, human and otherwise, is a survival need. Like other mammals, humans are social, relational creatures, reliant upon relationships to provide safety, connection, and interaction (van der Kolk, 2006). Connection is often understood as a visceral experience: It is the awareness of relationship, the force of feeling that people experience when they are in contact with themselves, with other forms of sentient or spiritual beings (humans, animals, plants, spirit), or with the Earth and elements of the universal ecosystem (stars, streams, mountains, elements of weather, sky). Through relationship, or connection, the heart opens. Metaphorically, the heart is the organ of connection: "our heart is what keeps us alive and what connects us to other people" (Trish). It is the metaphorical originator of all things to do with love – "love creates the unknown but utterly substantial reality of the future" (Sardello, 2008, p. 3).

All of the women interviewed for this study spoke about relationships which existed on various levels, often expanding beyond the anticipated societal expectation of human to human contact. One of the most compelling areas of connection was the myriad of ways in which these women experience a connection with the land. I was deeply moved when K. Linda spoke about how her connection to Bird Creek which powers her home and where she gets her water. "I am 70% water. I am 70% creek. That creek and I. I am Bird Creek." Robin's words stayed with me long after they were spoken, "when I see a place damaged, my body aches," as did Jacquie's who said "I am going to put my body on the line" in protection of the Earth.

There was also much talk of human connection and community which many of the women, as well as scholars, have identified as one of the ways to manage and mitigate the challenging aspects and emotions inherent in activist work (see Gaarder, 2008). The stories highlighting human relationships and community or the longing for it reminded me of the great need and longing we humans have for safe, empathic caring and connection. One of the women spoke of her activism shifting as she aged; she realised that:

I'm going to support a whole lot of the next generation who are coming up...[saying to herself] okay you can't do that anymore, you can't put yourself out there and you do have to use love and your own deep heart as a tool for holding and lifting other people.

(Robin)

Throughout the interviews I was also reminded of the challenging dynamics inherent in interpersonal relationships and particularly within community. The stories of conflicts within activist communities were familiar to my own experiences and unfortunately mirror the divisions within community and society in everyday life. This familiarity allowed for greater understanding and ultimately deeper connections between myself as researcher and the women's stories. These elements of Earth connection and human connection function as subthemes in the theme Connection to the Earth.

Connection to the Earth: A visceral bond/relationship

All of the women spoke of their deep devotion and connection to and for the Earth and all species. Robin spoke of her connection with the Earth from early childhood "from a really, really early age I had this incredibly deep connectivity with nature." The depth of feeling and commitment to the Earth was evident as each of the women shared her experience. This went

beyond their words and was articulated through the emotion and felt sense they conveyed to me as the listener. Embedded in their stories of care of and for the Earth were stories of relationship. Their care extended beyond an ethic of care to a personal, visceral experience of connection highlighting the relational, ecological, and psychospiritual dimensions of embodiment. Doran in talking about her connection to the Earth shared, “it is in my blood, in my body.” It was not so much that these women cared about or for the Earth but it was that they were *in relationship* with the Earth — a mutual, reciprocal, relational experience. In listening and sitting with their stories of connection, descriptors such as love, affection, support, and safety surfaced.

Stories about women’s relationships with the Earth, land, and species were laden with powerful expressions of attachment, gratitude, appreciation, and meaning. Both Claudette and K. Linda spoke of *falling in love* with reference to the land or landscape. It was as if their experiences of being *in relation* offered great stability and a trusted connection they could access to find security and nurturing: “There is no place in which I feel so right and so good as in a natural setting” (K. Linda). In this way, their relationship or connection with the Earth brought to mind elements of strong attachment relationships whereby one feels safe, seen, and supported. As with any relationship there is a coming into phase. Some of the women spoke of their process of coming into relationship with the Earth. Doran described her process as a “movement of the heart towards all of the lovely things that are going on...oh definitely a reverence.” K. Linda spoke of coming into relationship with the land where she currently lives: “it was very much like the process of falling in love...I fell in love with this land.” Claudette, in speaking about her eco-activism, shared “I go to these places and then I fall in love with the landscape.” These excerpts speak to the process in which they were drawn into relationship with the Earth. In the art-making workshop Kate shared that her prayer flag represented the ways in which the

Earth draws her into relationship. She spoke of the ways in which the pattern materials were symbolic of how she experienced the natural world. She described her prayer flag: “It was the colours and patterns that drew me. This is forestry and garden looking...and it’s almost like rays



of the sun but it’s not the sun, the sun is this little thing here. It’s just the things I was drawn to. I was trying to get sea, land, and the elements in...and the space between the stars.” The bond of attachment towards or with the Earth, displayed in Kate’s prayer

flag, was articulated by all of the women. Their stories underscored the pull of nature that draws people into relationship with the Earth and highlighted the depth of connection of those relationships.

The depth of connection in context of relationship with the Earth was revealed in the ways in which women spoke about their relationships. In particular, many of the women experienced and shared the ways in which the Earth supported or "held" them. Jacquie, in her prayer flag, (next page) expressed the importance of the Earth and her relationship with it: “I was really clear that I wanted to have the brown because it’s about relationship to the Earth and it’s about grounding. It’s the Earth. For me all activism is about connecting to my body, connecting to the Earth, connecting to all that is, it just felt that would be an important colour....This is the grounding and then on top of it the fire, the passion, the energy, the movement. It feels like you need to have both – the solidity and the movement and the passion....I put black here because I



was thinking of some of the despair of course but if felt really important to put the yellow on to show moving towards the light and calling on the divine. Even though the whole thing isn't totally symmetrical it's meant to embody the duality of all of

existence. And the centre is where we always have to come from, that's where it all begins. It's Earth and spirit." Jacquie clearly articulates the primacy of connection for her expressed through her activism. "All the elements are part of this." K. Linda picked up this thread of deep connection and speaks to the relational quality of support she feels through her connection to the Purcell Mountains. She shared a moment when she was

dancing on the beach facing away from the people and facing the Purcell Mountains and I thought, those mountains are my lover. I take those mountains as my lover and I felt, not so much like a purely sexual kind of feeling, but a really sensual big love...I just feel that they are my lover and when I go into the Purcells I feel this incredible sense of holding.

This sense of holding highlights the relational qualities inherent in the Earth/human connection; qualities that are most often ascribed to human relationships. The experience of support or holding was echoed with Jacquie's telling of her experience of her activist work, in this case teaching body informed trauma work and being supported by the land:

I have such a strong sense...of how those mountains and that land held us...there was no doubt...to know that and to feel...these powerful mountains that know beyond all

knowing and that reflect the mystery of all life and this is how this work is being held... so there was a way in which that work felt quite easy - within the knowing of that holding.

Suzy, in speaking about her connection to the trees, also spoke to a sense of holding:

sometimes when I go for a walk in the old growth forest up by the Kokanee Park and the big trees - I just put my hand on them. I just love the feel. I really know they're watching out for me. I can't tell you how I know that but I do... I have a sense of well-being.

These excerpts offer another perspective on the visceral bond of relationship, illuminating the relational connectivity and experience of support and holding in an explicit way.

Somatic connection. Similar to the above but articulating it in a different way, participants talked of their relational experience of connection with the Earth through a somatic experience of connection, meaning their felt sense. The felt sense links us to the sensate experience of the present moment through bodily experience linking us to the phenomenological, biological, and relational dimensions of embodiment. Ray (2008) asserts that “Sensation brings us into intimate contact with the world around us; intuition opens us to our context in an instantaneous, non-thinking way; feeling reveals our deep connection with others—human, animal, and vegetal” (pp. 38-39). For both Fran and K. Linda, their experience of connection was felt as resonance within: “I have an almost body connection with streams” (Fran); “My body knew that the land feels” (K. Linda). From a slightly different perspective, Doran spoke to her experience of being in relation with the Earth and how the Earth touches and heals her: “Touch is incredibly important...the air is terribly important, and the green...it’s healing to the eyes and the Earth.” Like Doran, Kate talked about how having physical contact with the Earth, specifically, her “hands in the dirt,” was healing. As she spoke of her healing, I said, “So the

Earth kind of helped you decolonise yourself,” to which she replied, “Yes, yes.” These somatic experiences articulated through the felt sense in the body, illuminated the relational experiences of their connection to the Earth. Their somatic knowing of the Earth was deeply intimate.

Earth as haven. Of interest here are the strong messages of reliance, comfort, trust, and safety that the women spoke of with regards to their relationship with the Earth. It was as if through their connection to the Earth they felt protected. Most of the women spoke of their comfort and ease with nature – their stories highlighted a sense of rightness, safety, and consolation through their experiences. Fran’s words illuminate this: “I am just at ease when I am in the forest, when I am out of the city and when I am in open spaces - everything says okay.” This feeling of ease speaks to the safety and comfort offered in her relationship with the Earth. Jacquie also highlights the safety and comfort she experiences, particularly when she is in contact with mountains. She shares that her “whole body seems to land more...I feel more contact from the Earth,” and she “lands in a deeper way in her body.” By “land” Jacquie speaks of settling into herself, dropping into a more embodied experience of being present.

From a slightly different perspective of haven, some of the women spoke of being in nature akin to being at home. Trish feels most at peace when she is connected to the Earth; in nature is “where I am at home.” K. Linda expanded upon this, highlighting that in nature she feels right “It’s my right, it’s my body’s correct, right home.” Zoe picks up the thread of nature feeling right:

in a natural setting...there is almost a logic to it...things happen for a reason, and they aren’t manipulated the way we do in human culture and society, they just are...it’s all understandable...So when I am in that kind of setting it’s like you don’t have to try to figure things out, you can just let go...there is an order.

Kelly told me that in order for her to be comfortable in her body she needs to be in nature. The link between being in relation, safe, and embodied is not new. Studies of somatic psychology, neuroscience, and interpersonal biology stress the ways in which relationship, safety, and embodiment are inexorably linked (see Fishbane, 2007; Gerhardt, 2004; Schore, 2007; Schore & Schore, 2007). What is of course different is that for many of the women in this study their relationship with the Earth provided the necessary comfort and safety to allow them to drop into fuller, more embodied experiences of themselves and highlighted how the Earth acts as a haven for them.

Interconnectivity. The notion of being interconnected or part of a web of life had a strong presence in this study. All of the women spoke in one way or another of the interconnection between them and the Earth/land/species. Interconnectivity advances the understanding that we are all connected to an ecological framework whereby the health of one species or ecosystem is invariably linked to the health of another species or ecosystem.

K. Linda spoke of her struggle and the process of having to cut trees to create some light where she lives:

every year I take out a few of trees and I agonise for months and months because these trees are my friends and I've known them for 16 years and it's like 'oh which one, which one will I take down'....when you live with nature it's not this sort of arm's length thing where nature is that pretty thing out there. I actually use all the elements. I use the soil, I use the trees to heat my home, I use the water. They are not abstract separate things. I am a part of this and they are a part of me and the fundamental is respect and gratitude.

Her words illuminate the depth of awareness and connection with which she walks on the Earth. Kelly, in the art-making workshop, created a prayer flag that represents this. In her mind, we need to recognise our connection and band together to make change. Here is what she said about her prayer flag: “This is my piece and as you can see in the corners there is each of the elements:



the wind or the air, fire, water, and Earth. And the purple around the spirit which goes into me in the middle, the heart and there's different layers and they are connected to the spirit and connected by this root and into these rocks which are the

foundation and the rocks are the connection to non-living things and also rooted connected to all kinds of species as everything is interconnected. Together we're kind of pushing upwards and we are pushing up together collectively against air pollution to try and rid ourselves of this evilness.” At different art-making workshops Suzy and Trish created prayer flags which expressed their notions of interconnectivity. Here is what Suzy said about hers (on next page): “Well mine's all about the connectedness of things....This idea that there is probably a web connecting us all through organisms that we can and cannot see, whether it's by worms or mushrooms or the atmosphere or whatever, it really sustains me...it blisses me...I get my little head up...the worm is poking his head up and it's me....the other part I see now...I'm really into darkness and I love the dark and I love the stars and the idea that somewhere there is somebody looking at the Earth wishing on us, that we are the star others wish on.” In Suzy's flag there is a



sense of the vastness and scope of our interconnectivity that expands into a cosmic eco-system. She highlights the connections that cannot be seen by the naked eye but can be felt by the naked (or embodied) body. Trish's prayer flag expresses her experience of

interconnectivity and aliveness. Her flag emphasised the overlapping complexity of our existence and underscores that life is sustained not only by the body but through engagement. "I chose the brown tones, the Earth tones because of my connectedness to the Earth. The green colours as well and the leaf pattern are again being connected to nature. For me the centre piece is representing my core. It reminded me of blood flowing through my body and how we need that, it keeps us alive. This is also my connection to my social activism, it's part of my passion and that's part of what keeps me alive too....I purposely chose circles as the pattern as circles within some of the patterns, there's that sense of wholeness; I'm just really drawn to circles...I chose this piece [the blue and the flower pattern] representing water as



another piece of the Earth. And I chose the light green with the white tree, I chose it specifically because it was a white tree amidst the brown trees – it shows a bit of unique quality...I wanted all of the circles connected because everything in our bodies, in our lives, and what we do are all connected.” Lana Marie also expressed her experience of interconnectivity in her prayer flag and highlights different spheres of consciousness namely the transpersonal and the underworld. She also speaks of the power of the feminine which guided her into her body and through that, towards a new orientation to her life. She speaks of the creative experience as a right brain process that lacks a linear story. Rather, she makes meaning of her work: “There are three realms. The middle realm is my body which I see as connected to all – there’s the underworld or the unconscious, then there’s the middle realm or the Earth body realm and then upper or the spirit or transpersonal. And there’s a way that my body and the way that eco-activism is in my body in that each realm has ways that it’s connected with the other ones so you can see with the imagery and shapes overlaps so there are these ways that everything is interrelated. The upside down triangles are a representation of the feminine and a process that had to do with my sexual organs which really brought me into awareness of the importance of being embodied and aware and how through that I came to a form of eco-activism....I’ve learned about a certain kind of awareness and when that is held there’s a natural caring for the Earth that isn’t about morals or rules or right or wrong, it’s simply about the truth of being. That is what



I'm representing here." These representations, to me, reflect the symbiotic relationship of self and Earth the women spoke of above and also speaks to their innate knowing of the Earth as giver and sustainer of life. Gunn Allen (1994) beautifully articulates this:

We humans and our relatives the other creatures are integral expressions of [Earth]....

We are not her [Earth], but we take our being from her, and in her being we have being, as in her life we have life. As she is, so are we. (p. 329)

Recognition of self as Earth. Extending beyond understandings of interconnectivity, some of the women expressed their experience of self as Earth. Lana Marie shared "I feel myself as the Earth...I feel so much that I am the Earth." She talked about coming to know at a deep experiential level that humans and Earth are of the same substance:

the property that I was living on at the time...had been slated...to be developed. I just really wanted to be able just to go out and be with this land because it felt really sacred and important to me...I would go out and sit in the woods, I would write poems and make drawings....It was profound to me the way that through this process of first of all coming back into my body, realising the importance of working from that place, and then connecting with the land in this kind of way; it is where I really experienced this kind of knowing of how much as a human being, as a human body, we are the Earth, we are the same substance, it's the same vibrations that go through the Earth, we feel in our bodies. The same things that we do to our bodies we're doing to the Earth. And that just stays with me.

Lana Marie's passage illuminates her powerful process of coming into profound knowing.

K. Linda spoke of her daily meditation practice in which she blesses the Earth. Each morning she sits in her watershed next to Bird Creek.

That's my practice; it's a very sacred place for me. All of the water that comes into this house that I consume is from Bird Creek. All of the water that nourishes our garden from which I eat part of the year is from Bird Creek. All of the power generated on this land is from Bird Creek....And I am 70% water. I am 70% creek. That creek and I. I am Bird Creek....And so every morning I bow to water, I bow to air, Earth, and the spark of life that joins us all and every morning I make a very sincere attempt to not have that just be a ritual but to feel gratitude in that moment and be grateful for each day...when I bow to the creek I bow to myself. Because I am Bird Creek.

Her words illuminate the deep resonance and unity she shares with the Earth and ultimately her experience of being one with the Earth. Claudia spoke to this as well. One of her goals was to become very directly aware of, not just the Earth's seasons and the Earth's change but how I am that. How I am the Earth and therefore those seasons and changes that I see around me are happening to me too. I just have been 'humanized' to not observe them or know them.

Her words illustrate the depth of recognition in Claudia's worldview that values interconnectivity. In a similar way Kelly understands that we are of the same stuff as the Earth. In talking about cob house building she said:

we come from the Earth...if we are part of the Earth and if we are building with the Earth and if this house is built with our hands and with the Earth and there is no toxic materials in it, and everything is natural, and this house is breathing like we do, because the walls breathe and everything is natural, then we are in fact part, we are part of this house, this house is...IS us, and we are it...that this house, we have a connection to this home to this land, to this Earth, because we all come from the same place.

These excerpts offer a window into the inner life and experience of these women's awareness of self as Earth that rests in unity consciousness whereby we are not separate or other to the Earth.

Communities of Connection: A Necessity

Over half of the women spoke about how community plays into their experience of eco-activism. Many of their stories illuminate challenges. Some reveal the depth of connection; all reveal the necessity of support. Categories of support, strain and conflicts, discouragement, and toxic environments characterise this theme. The relational dimension of embodiment was underscored throughout this subtheme.

Support. Many of the women spoke of their want for community and the necessity in terms of sustainability for having people support them in their activism. Claudette said that since the young age of seventeen she has longed for a mentor in her activism. English (2000) maintains that the mentorship relationship “transcends the competition and negativity that often sully the learning environment, by fostering and affirming informal learning relationships that promote growth and change” (p. 31). Whelan (2000) found in his research that activists rely on mentors and mentorship to gain skills and support, in that way they play a significant role. In a similar way, through connection to women active in the environmental movement Kelly shared that her awareness of eco-activism was ignited. K. Linda shared about the necessity of support to sustain her activism. She identified that the people she lives with on a land co-op offer a great deal of backing:

I feel them behind me and not necessarily, they're not involved in any of the political things I am, but I feel their support of me as a person and I feel their support of the values in whatever campaign I'm involved in. So I feel like I have a family or a community that really holds me as a human being while I'm doing activism.

Fran spoke of the relief and necessity of having relationships where she was supported and people who understood her and her experience. She recalled what it was like “to be in a room with 30 other people who get it” and how relieving, comforting, and nourishing that was. Like K. Linda she identified it as having a familial feeling and of being deeply known and understood: “to be in a clan of people where you don’t have to explain your tears or why your heart is breaking.” Robin shared about belonging to a supportive community of activist practitioners who have taken the road less travelled. She describes how the community responds when a member is struggling:

our implicit agreement is we will put a circle of care around them and help them get through it...we have unconditional love and we will hang in there while you are going through whatever transition you have to go through....[if someone puts] out a call...we activate. So we come together in the circle of kind of support, care, love and practical stuff.

For Robin, this community offers support, connection, and a place to land. Suzy shared that over the years with the increase in numbers of people acting on behalf of the Earth and the increase in activist communities she has felt less isolated and more a part of the change.

In listening to the women’s stories of support or their longing for it I was struck by the ways in which community was spoken of as if it offered supportive knowing of oneself where safety and trust is established and there is an unspoken way in which support is asked for and offered.

Strain and Conflicts. A couple of the women talked about the support as well as the strain their activism creates in their personal relationships. Suzy and Claudette both shared that at times it has taken a toll on their intimate relationship. Claudette shared that her husband has

concern about the toll her activism has taken on her. She shared, “There has been lots of resistance from my partner.” His "resistance" is rooted in care and trepidation, and is illuminated in the question he asks of her, “are you going to do this again”? referring to the challenges, exhaustion, and turmoil that come with her activist work. Suzy, whose husband is also ecologically aware and active, spoke about the ways in which she feels very fortunate to have had the opportunity to engage in activism with her husband’s support, despite her activism taking a toll on their relationship at times:

I don't think everybody has the luxury of being an activist. They're too busy feeding their kids and I married a man who doesn't, didn't say 'come on you got to get to work'. He believes that my working in my environmental community was as important as bringing in money.

A few more women talked about the financial aspect to their activism which links to the cultural dimension of embodiment. Researcher K. Rossiter (2009) cites financial hardship as one of the challenges of people working in the environmental nonprofit sector and Robin affirmed this when she spoke of her early days as an activist, “I was poor and struggling.” Kelly echoed a related but different struggle; she argued that with all of the pressures of daily life she did not have time to volunteer or engage in eco-activism as much as she would have liked or felt called to do. Fran spoke to financial marginalisation from a different angle. She was working in a governmental position where her outspokenness (her activism) had negative ramifications to her career: “I was devalued financially as well as professionally”; and Zoe shared that sometimes financial considerations impact her ability to take action.

The strains, financial and relational, which were identified speak in part to the overwhelming pressure and challenges activists face, and illuminate the necessity for community

where the activist can be supported, valued, and held in a way that avails them the energy and backing to continue their activist work. Yet K. Linda spoke differently. She noted how she disengages from those financial struggles, arguing, “I don't have many expectations around money and wealth so that puts me out of that whole rat race.”

Many of the women spoke of conflicts within relationships and or communities. My overall sense of their collective experience was that these breaches of relationship were hurtful and disappointing on many levels. Feelings of disconnection, betrayal, and sadness were commonly expressed. Doran shared that she is drawn to working in a group, to being in a community. She has been involved with many activists groups with the better known ones being Extenuating Circumstances and the Raging Grannies. As with many communities there was conflict: “I was at odds with the grannies quite often.” She talked of the hurt and painfulness of the infighting:

there were a number of us who became like scapegoats in the group, and this is the bitchy awful side of things....It's hurtful....as a feminist I thought we shouldn't be doing this, that is what got me I thought more than anything.

The stories Doran told of the early days of these groups were full of humour, passion, and truly ingenious activism (for more information read *Off Our Rockers and Into Trouble: The Raging Grannies*, 2004). The disappointment she and others experienced within the breakdown within such communities can easily be imagined. Fran also talked of pain and betrayal by her colleagues when she was ousted from her government position when she took

too strong a stance in support of local communities and environmental groups....it was really painful as that was my career and my life, and I was doing what the regional director asked me to do, but I became his scapegoat, he didn't support me.

She talked about being labeled a “rabble-rouser” and how people she considered friends turned away from her. Again this was hurtful.

The conflict was not always interpersonal. A few of the women talked about their own inner challenges – many talked about times where they were challenged to take care of themselves versus the need for action. The never-ending need or call for change often trumped women’s self-care. K. Linda, another long time eco-activist, talked about the challenges in working in the environmental movement where feminist principles or ideology are often lacking. This has led to internal conflict for her: “It's not always easy being a feminist activist in the environmental movement...there is a certain set of values there that don't always mesh with mine.”

No matter how or why the conflicts arose, my overarching sense from their stories was how challenging it was for these women to live with the loss of hope, trust, or faith in themselves and others.

Discouragement. Some of the women spoke about being discouraged or challenged by human behaviour in other ways. In her work Fran was incredibly disappointed when she saw “that a lot of community people would trash the Earth if it meant \$50.00 less on their taxes. I was so heartbroken, because I really thought that people were made of better stuff.” When Zoe spoke about her different activist experiences she said “people can be incredibly disappointing... people are all deregulated and discombobulated.” Kelly spoke about people doing what they do and not realising the negative impact many actions are having on the planet. She told me, “I’m not hopeful...I don’t think we have a whole lot of time” and she doesn’t have a lot of faith in people to change. In a similar vein Trish spoke about her frustration and how she is “blown away” by the lack of awareness and responsibility people take for the planet. She cannot

understand why people do not “do their part.” In terms of recycling, something easy and straightforward in her eyes, here is what she says:

it’s frustrating because to me it’s so easy to sort, put things where they need to go, rinse things out if there is a bit of food left on it so we don’t get fruit flies and that sort of thing, and just do your part. Take responsibility for your own actions, if everyone did that it would be so easy. But there are so many people who think that’s not my job I’ll let somebody else do that.

She asks, “how can you be so oblivious to what is around you and not be interested in helping?” The discouragement and aggravation she feels about people not recycling increases and impairs her ability to partake in some social events: “when we go places now, and they don’t recycle, it’s really hard to participate in what’s happening because I don’t want to create the waste.” Her irritation was evident when she talked about how she has been at gatherings and taken the recyclable materials home that the hosts were not going to recycle.

This discouragement in human behaviour can be challenging and erode feelings of hopefulness when working towards change. Eco-activism often feels like an uphill climb and to experience people as not caring undermines and isolates activists.

Toxic environments. Some of the women talked about the toxic environment within some environmental activist communities. Robin has a long history of working in the environmental movement and found working with some environmental groups very challenging. She talked about the “huge egos” involved and how people were harsh and uncaring with one another. She spoke of how some people would “stab you in the back if you didn’t agree with their strategy...I nearly got murdered for saying all those things...it was a very unpopular...I

was very unpopular.” She described it as “horrific”; at times it was, and some of her colleagues were “vicious.”

I’ve never seen such vicious behaviour....I was ashamed of a lot of my colleagues’ attitudes and performances and shoddy treatment of people, I really was, I mean some people were great, you can’t paint everybody with the same brush, but there was a lot of nastiness and disregard for....humanity.

The burden both psychologically and physiologically on one in a toxic environment is well documented (see Scaer, 2005). Robin and Fran both spoke of times where the stress was so intense that they were so distraught they thought they were going to vomit.

Some of the women spoke about feeling safe and united in a community and then having it split. Claudette shared that during one of the environmental campaigns she was involved with “there had been many magical moments with people that I was working with and then...there was a tremendous amount of skepticism” around some government consultation. She did what she thought was best and engaged in the process: “It created a lot of stress. There were a lot of negative phone calls that came in - threatening phone calls. It just becomes a real nightmare.” Claudette shared that when that happens “it becomes threatening and then it's down to the old basics - fight, flight or freeze/fix.” K. Linda tells that “the environmental community is very divided and there is a lot of in-fighting.” On this note a few women spoke of threats or feeling threatened. K. Linda shared that given the conflicts and challenges that arise within eco-activist communities she has found a guiding principle to keep her aligned with her integrity. She revealed that “A long, long time ago I made a commitment to myself that I will not fight with my allies.” To that end K. Linda shared that she does not always find a “fit” in terms of support by the people working on a particular issue so she seeks it elsewhere. In many of the stories,

women talked of painful situations and experiences. Claudette talked about how challenging it was to recognise that her community working to save their watershed had become exhausted – this left her feeling isolated.

The needs and challenges inherent in human relationships are revealed through the women's stories of connection and disconnection. Listening to these stories reminded me of my own interpersonal and community experiences highlighting the range and diversity that life brings with it. Their stories were reminders of the considerable challenges in finding ways to work together despite common goals and alliances.

Listening From the Inside

The women spoke at length about the ways in which they listened from the inside out – whether it was to their bodies, to the Earth, or to spirit. Listening from the inside refers to the ways in which these women deciphered information from their bodies or through their bodies and from the Earth or species of the Earth and falls within the psychospiritual, ecological, and relational realms of embodiment. This theme is divided into two subsections, the Earth speaks and my body speaks.

The Earth Speaks

Most of the women spoke to the ways in which the Earth or animals communicated with them. Trish was very clear when she said “Mother Nature gives very clear messages actually.” Suzy shared a powerful story about a time when she was struggling with the state of her watershed. She told of a pivotal moment when she reached out to the trees seeking guidance:

I looked at the trees standing there and I said 'you tell me what to do right now and I'll do

it. You tell me what to do. If you tell me to take out a knife and stab these women I will do it! I don't care you know, they have lost their nurturing ability, they do not see where they are. You tell me what to do' and the trees said to me, 'Suzy, we'll be back. We'll be back. You take care of yourself. We can grow back, you change people not us. You don't need to chain yourself to us. You need to get down there and make a difference with people so that they don't want to do this anymore'.

She spoke of this experience as an epiphany where she stopped worrying about “doing the right or wrong thing” and could trust in the guidance of the Earth. Zoe also spoke of this trust. She acknowledged that through deep listening there is “a sense of connection with the Earth and us.” She spoke of the clarity that emerged through the connection between the body and Earth which linked her “to truth and speaking the truth and listening to the core...it’s all connected in that way.” The notion of deep listening or embodied listening was picked up by Lana Marie when she shared her understanding that the plants and trees “are the mediators between the Earth and us humans, we see ourselves as separate...a lot of the way that the Earth communicates to me is through feeling and sensation.” An example of this was how plants guide or communicate with her through moods if she asks:

It's a very direct expression of cycles. But then there's also a very personal part of it where you know I can look up and see moss sort of grasses through that...on the rock right now and I might ask question of that moss and grass....I would get spontaneous creative ideas or thoughts that might come from asking that question in a way but I'm directed to the grass and moss in a way that feels maybe more reliable than asking a person.

Kate also spoke of her embodied experience of communication with species. She shared that she feels a relationship with both fish and birds and knows that animals are aware that she is communing with them. She says, “I talk to them...I know animals are aware that I am communicating...they know.” This knowing, felt through the body, happens when, according to Claudette, people are more open or sensitive and when these channels are not inhibited by the external environment. In talking about the Earth and animals communicating she spoke to her understanding of that:

I think that it happens all the time because I think that some people are more willing to listen than others. Some people are more sensitive or more open. I think that it's easier to be receptive when one is not living in a city because there is less stuff coming in.

Robin spoke to a similar understanding. She shared that she can feel the trees but can't hear them. She spoke of indigenous cultures who do hear them and believes that living in an industrialised world has forced us to shut down other ways of knowing. Claudia also shared a similar perspective, “we have grown so far [distant] from ‘land knowledge’.”

Energy. Energy and the Earth were spoken of by some of the women. Their experiences of the energetics of the Earth or landscape were described as powerful, overwhelming, life-giving, healing, cleansing, and inspiring. Jacquie talked about the energetic feel of the mountains and how she lands more firmly in her body. She shared that it's like “the spirit of the mountain is whispering.” Robin talked about an energetic experience she has in nature: “it's an energetic thing that I get...an energetic lifting...a different energetic cleansing, clearing, strengthening, purifying, detoxifying.” Similarly, Doran shared how the Earth supports her energetically: “if I've been around people too much and I garden, I feel the voices going out and

the Earth” and energy coming in. Jacquie described an experience where the energy from or of the Earth was overpowering:

we were hiking past this magnificent crashing booming piece of water, it was so profound and so loud—the energy of it...my whole body was electrified...it was so powerful that I almost could not tolerate the power...of the Earth in that place. It was like, oh my god, this is almost intolerable, the awe was almost too great...I have to step away from this now, like I have been in the energy of it enough and I had to step away and absorb it.

In the art-making group K. Linda (flag below) and Claudette (flag in another section) spoke about the Earth’s powerful energy. Claudette spoke of energy being the starting place that emerges and incites the energy within her. K. Linda, like Claudette, described the power of energy and the force that sustains her. “What underpins mine is the Earth, the source of my energy is the Earth, it holds me up it holds me down in the best sense of the word down. All of

the energy that
out from that in
different forms
shapes...this is
of ideas, burst
burst of what I
body....that’s
from me



flows
all of its
and colours and
about that burst
of energy, and
feel in my
what comes
naturally so, and

I’m just incapable of forcing myself to do things that I don’t like to do...well nearly incapable.

So for me it is the energy that’s rooted in the Earth that has these little explosions, like spring. I am very much a four seasons person in that I have very strong seasons and seasons in my

activism as well. The burst of spring and then things sort of die back and winter comes and I don't know what I'm doing then I burst into something new."

My Body Speaks

All of the women talked about how their body gives them information or guidance. There was great breadth and depth to the variety in which the women articulated and experienced their bodies speaking to them. Typical of a disembodied culture, many of the women expressed that over time they came into a deeper relationship to their body and embodied knowings. Kelly shared that she was not brought up noticing what her body was saying and just in the past few years has become more attuned to signs and listening to how her body is feeling. Kate told me that over her years of activism she has "learned more and listened more to my body." Suzy's body is a clear communicator: "my body tells me I'm doing the right thing because it's not kicking up a fuss." Lana Marie has come into her body through health issues and embodiment practices to have a strong body awareness and body wisdom: "I'm very kinesthetic...my body is constantly screaming at me about things." She also spoke about one of the ways her body guides her is through the use of images, through drawing, and shared that it "helps me to process what my body is actually saying."

Heart and gut. Many of the women referred to their guts and hearts as important information centres. Claudia told me that her gut is active and the most connected part of her body to her activist practice while Claudette spoke of her heart being a key organ: "it is that I'm told to do by...these strong feeling inside...to me it's a directive of the heart." During the interview I asked Kelly how her body told her something. Here is her description:

I feel it's around my heart, it's kind of like when you get an excitement kind of thing, it's

like the feeling when your heart drops out, when you get excited, it's kind of like some kind of movement and pulses, it feels like this urge.

Fran spoke of her body sending strong messages sometimes in the form of words, sometimes in the form of images. She shared a powerful story about her body knowledge at one of her jobs where developers were going to take down a grove of Garry Oaks. When she was told, she had this flash of the word moss go across my mind and I said, well that's a rocky area and we should check it for mosses...and it turns out there was a rare red listed moss on that hill and that little chunk of rock got protected and the mayor was making fun of me after that telling the developers that I was protecting moss. But I did, we did, that was like a belly intuition and then there was this word or thought about moss...really strong word.

She explains:

my intuition and my body was guiding me in areas where I was over my head, and it has never been wrong - when I listen, and I have to say when I don't listen sometimes it hasn't been good...but when I listened it was always right.

Like Fran, Trish has a strong intuition. She also shared that she lives “very much inside my body.” Zoe talked about being called to action, about the clarity that came with it, “it's a gut and heart thing, the clarity is the gut thing.” Suzy said she definitely gets response from her body; “my body tells me” through her gut. And Zoe's body speaks to her a lot, “not in complicated ways...my way of assessing the world is through my body, mostly gut - is this the right place for me to be and how do I feel in this situation? It's all physical to me.”

My voice. Many of the women spoke of their voice being a specific part of their activism. Some of the women spoke about the necessity of their voice, communication, and being messengers. Suzy talked about the importance of her voice, “the fact that I have a voice

and I'm willing to ask other people to have a voice" is significant. Kate used the metaphor of her body being like a musical instrument, "because I like to sing...to bring expression and voice," and K. Linda said this about the cello, the metaphor she named for her body as a tool or instrument of activism: "The cello is apparently the instrument that is closest to the human voice. And it's very beautiful and kind of melancholic. You can wail about on a cello."

Dreaming. A few of the women shared about information coming to them in the form of dreams. Trish shared that sometimes her body talks to her through dreams with thematic or symbolic information that she reflects on and uses to guide her actions. Claudette also spoke about paying attention to what dreams emerge for her and listening to their guidance. Suzy shared that her body gives her information through dreams, "it's a message and I listen to them. I pay attention to them." Robin also spoke of her dream world as a powerful transmitter of information. She has a recurring dream that has guided her through her activist life:

I call it my tree of life dream...this unbelievably detailed dream about how this tree comes out of the Earth and each limb of the tree represents saving reptiles, saving vertebrates...and that each branch has a note, a song, a message, a gift and [the first time she had the dream]...each one whirled out with all of this information as each branch of the tree rolled up and it was an unbelievable dream...and then at the top of the tree was a baby, a human baby, and I remember the message from that was don't despair because the next generation is going to get reborn and have amplified hearts and connectivity to the Earth and they will save the Earth....It's just never left me and so I use that tree of life as kind of a guiding motif for myself.

She also shared a second powerful recurrent dream, "I used to have this other dream that I used to get all the time about going to rivers and just sitting and putting my hands on stones, warm

stones, and receiving information from the stones,”

Unity consciousness. The interconnectivity of body, Earth, and spirit were touched on by many of the women and Zoe’s words summarise it well, “When you are aligned with your body, and therefore aligned with the Earth, you are aligned with spirit, it is all the same.” Lana Marie and K. Linda both spoke of the link between their bodies and spirituality as well as their bodies and the Earth: “I do have a strong belief that spirituality is really something that comes out of our bodies....there is that unity between Earth and the body” (Lana Marie); “I feel my body is a conduit for spirituality” (K. Linda). Doran told me “they are all connected” and shared that the information coming from her body “comes from nowhere... there is a feeling of excitement.... It’s like there is some nudge from somewhere.” She figures it is both spiritual and from her body. The connections or linkages women spoke of speak to the unity consciousness in direct opposition to the strong dualistic discourses rampant in Western culture. Claudette, Kate, Robin, and Jacquie all linked or commented on the unity of the body, Earth, and spirit as well in the interviews.

Effect upon the body.

When thinking about the effect of eco-activism on the body, most of the women spoke of the toll upon their bodies. Zoe, in the interview as well as at the art-making workshop spoke to the challenges that eco-activism had presented. This was represented in her prayer flag (above) which highlights the ongoing



onslaught she has felt in her activist career. “The bottom is me and my core. These are the colours that I really love – blues and purples and it’s a lot of flow and curves and going outside of the box, three dimensional and it represents who I am. This is eco-activism which is an oppressive force so it’s dark and it’s got spikes on it and it’s pushing me down and making me hide [represented by the camouflage]. And this [above the brown] is the world outside representing nature and spirit which has a commonality with me which I’m trying to get back to and so there’s parts of me reaching up over the oppression to get to that. There are little bits of sparkle through everything which is meant to represent hope and optimism.”

Health benefits. Of interest, four of the women specifically spoke about improvement to their health through their activism. Kelly told me that as her awareness of ecology and eco-concerns grew “the more I got thinking about consumption and everything else and how much I eat and my own body in this whole bigger and larger picture.” With this increased awareness she made changes and became healthier. Doran and Kate also attribute an increase in their health in part to their activism; “I think my body is in much better shape because of the activism” (Kate). Lana Marie attributed the lack of a toll on her body to her high degree of body awareness. She also spoke about coming into her activism through some health issues – as if her body was calling her into awareness and through that, she became embodied which led to her deep connection with the Earth and then action.

Physical costs. Many of the women talked about more negative or challenging consequence to their bodies: feeling fatigue, exhaustion, despair, isolation, disconnection, and burnout at some point in their activist careers. The biological or phenomenological dimension of embodiment expresses the individual costs of their activism. Lysack (2012) indicates that experiences of burnout, discouragement, despair, and demoralisation are inherent in

environmental advocacy work given the challenges of responding to the overwhelming demands and the current context of “political indifference and institutional inertia” (p. 264). I think Zoe’s metaphor of a jackhammer as her body in activism supports Lysack’s statement and brings it into a felt sense for the reader. She described the sensation as “anxiety and tension and frenzy and...intensity”; having a “staccato-like” rhythm. This metaphor is an excellent descriptor of the dysregulating nature of stress within the body which is often referred to, or “medicalised,” as anxiety. Note as you read the following stories what you imagine it felt like in their bodies at the time. I trust this will heighten the reader’s understanding of how these women have experienced some of their activism. Claudia talked about how early on in her activism that she had “environmental anxiety”; having read everything, she felt “really scared and desperate...overwhelm, panic - about what had to shift and what all had to be done.” She takes action and finds ways to make a difference in her own life as an antidote to the anxiety. Suzy shared that she gets sick if she takes on too much, that her body lets her know “in general, if I’m over-doing it, if I’ve taken on too much, if I’m on the wrong track...it will slow me down to get me to slow down.” In a related way, K. Linda said “when my stomach goes then I’ve gone too far.” Claudette spoke about the complications and challenges of her activist practice which have led to both mental and emotional turmoil. She also shared that the impact to her body has been anxiety, lack of sleep, nervous stomach, and heart palpitations. Like Claudette, Jacquie shared that one of the impacts on her body is an over-active mind (a sign of dysregulation or anxiety):

I get upset thinking about things...this is the toll, it’s because I spend too much time in my mind thinking about it and trying to sort it out rather than necessarily moving it through my body, so that is the toll that really in fairness, I probably need more time to move something like that through my body, rather than thinking about it, naturally in an

academic institution where thinking and being in the mind and the brain, and neo-cortex is privileged, you know it is quite easy for me to instantly go there.

She also shared that other tolls to her body have been fatigue, feeling wired, overwhelm, heartache, and belly fat. Trish talked about having trouble sleeping (another sign of dysregulation or anxiety), because of her feelings of overwhelm and struggling with balance; when she's in turmoil she has trouble turning her mind off. Her next comment beautifully captures her internal struggle: "sometimes I feel like there is so much to be done I don't have time to take care of myself." On a similar note Claudia spoke to the overwhelming need she feels to take action. She shared that having undergone lots of different stressors,

I know that I have a very physical body reaction to those levels of stress, when there is something that has to be done...I know that there is a reaction there (in my body)...I've had to regulate the amount of activism I do; because I have a tendency to want to do more, and take on more, I can burn out. That I can definitely feel in my body – the worry, stress, or strain. I would like to be able to say activism 'fills me,' that I can feel in my body the activism 'moved me,' but in actuality, it just drains me. Except for the activism that I do within my own home...When I'm out in the garden or I'm tending my honey bees...when I'm tending the bees I feel very calm and good that is definitely a healer for my body.

These expressions of feeling an unsustainable drive to take action, that it is never enough, was also common with women activists in Gaarder's (2008) research study with women animal rights activists.

Burnout was a prevalent topic in the interviews. Some women spoke of it in passing like Claudia (above) and others spoke to the physical costs upon their body in terms of talking about

their experiences of burnout. Fran's story brought the point home when she talked about the detriment to her body when she was an environmental planner where there was chronic sabotaging and undermining of her projects and the environment. Being in an oppositional position on a daily manner took its toll. At one point her doctor encouraged her to leave after she had a bike accident.

She (her doctor) saw my body being challenged by my job and she felt it was my body sort of forcing me to take some time away from my job...I was injured quite badly....I went back (to work) and then I developed sleep paralysis...you wake up and think you are dead...you can open your eyes but you can't speak or move or anything.

Shortly thereafter Fran left her job, and immediately the paralysis stopped. Another time Fran was so depleted through her activism and life circumstances that her acupuncturist told her, "Fran, you have no life force, your chi is gone, I don't know how you are functioning." In a similar vein, Robin shared that she had to leave one campaign as she could feel that if she did not she was going to have a "complete collapse." Another time she did have an endocrine collapse and was diagnosed with thyroid disease. Zoe talked about the burnout stage, "I was holding a lot in or holding a lot...constant knots in my gut....you shut down." Of interest, Suzy told me that she feels like the experience of burnout can be used to learn about taking care of oneself: "I think you have to burnout...at least once. See what that feels like, and then step back and say 'ok I'm not going to go through that again.'"

Emotional costs. All of the women mentioned differing emotional impacts of their activism: these ranged from joy to grief, anger to despair, connection to isolation, and alienation, satisfaction, and a sense of well-being. The breadth and depth of emotional reverberations of activist practice is well documented: "there is an affective detritus, sifting through the cracks and

settling on the bottom of a task-driven professional life—feelings of anxiety, despair, and grief juxtaposed with reverence, compassion, and wonder” (Thomashow, 1996, p. 142). The deep connection to the Earth that sustains and supports the women also brings with it pain and emotional challenges for some. Fran shared “I feel the Earth pain deeply...some of us actually feel the Earth crying and trying to explain to somebody that doesn’t get it is awful and just makes me feel ridiculous rather than being helped.” Like Fran, Robin feels the pain of the Earth: “I’ve always had this just huge reaction physically to destruction of wilderness.” She shared about the earthquake in Japan in March of 2011: “I felt it...two days before [the Earthquake] I was inconsolable...I was absolutely so upset and so down” as if her body was grieving the destruction that was to come. Lana Marie shared her emotional experience of being connected to the Earth: “being embodied to me allows me to feel my true feelings...the Earth is in such despair, because I feel that so in that way being embodied means that I, that I feel that despair.” Jacquie shared that the more she wakes up “from the illusion of the separateness” the more she feels deep sorrow. Two of the women mentioned suicidal thoughts that had arisen either due to their activism or the state of the world: “I became very down at one point in time...suicidal at one point and I didn’t realise how my body was being depleted energy-wise” (Fran). Some of the women spoke of being isolated, feeling lonely, or alienated. When this happens Trish asks herself, “why do I keep doing this?...and then I come back to this drive that makes me do it.”

Dealing with their disappointment or managing when the change they were working towards does not happen was taken up by some of the women. Claudette relies on yoga and Buddhist practices to help her through; Robin and Fran both shared that they practice meditation and yoga. Suzy, K. Linda, and Claudette talked about decreasing or changing their expectations over the years: “I’ve scaled down my expectations. I’m doing what I can and that’s plenty”

(Suzy). K. Linda shared,

at some point I realised that as an activist if I attached to outcome I would burn out very quickly because the outcomes are not often in our favour. And so what I attach to is just speaking my truth, bearing witness, living in integrity with what I believe in the moment. So it's more of a question of what I'm for and I can't control the outcome. All I can control is how I participate in that process.

Claudette shared that over the past five years she has had a “steep learning curve” in staying with her sadness and not moving into anger to fuel her activism. She has been searching for new ways to engage in action without the fervor of anger:

which means having to come to terms with, and feel, and honour my own sadness and disappointment and realise that a lot of it is my ego disappointment that I have not been able to manifest what I wanted. But it's also learning how to live with heartbreak. So it boils down to breathing, feeling it, breathing it. And going, 'oh shit.'

The capacity of each woman to listen to their bodies from the inside varied as did the ways in which they articulated and understood their experiences. Without exception, the women were clear that their body communicated to them in a variety of ways and for different reasons. Their descriptions were congruent with Ray's (2008) statement:

Emotions are, at root, a somatic experience: they arise out of the darkness of the body, they are felt intensely in the body, and they call us – sometimes with great insistence and even grisly intensity – back into the body. To be fully embodied involves an unconditional presence to our emotional life, not separating and not distancing ourselves by retreating into our heads into judgments, recriminations, or self-loathing. (p. 31)

Clearly evident was the variety of experiences the women had in communication with the Earth.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Analysis

This chapter continues the analysis exploration through the thematic categories that emerged from the data. It opens with the third thematic category Activism – Action to Orientation – A Way of Being and then expands on the subthemes and categories within those subthemes. The fourth and final thematic category, The Ebb and Flow, wraps up this chapter. Chapter eight follows with a discussion of the key findings of the study.

Activism—Action to Orientation—A Way of Being

The stories the women shared of their past and current activism in this study were astounding in terms of the variety, the dedication, the strength, and the sheer determination illustrated in their stories. The majority of the stories were of triumph and tenacity; as well there were stories of disappointment and loss. There were also stories that inspire. The metaphors women used to describe how they viewed their bodies and activism were vivid and illuminating. Kelly's description was of her body in activism as a spear: "for staking claims...it was a spear through the air, into the water, into the soil...into the Earth...it is in all three at the same time, it is connecting all three of them." Doran spoke of her body used like a dance. She said "it's a little like love, love and creation and beauty, beauty is so important here...And the body expressing it." For Robin her body is like the sun, a tool of light, "something that was reflecting light on people, just reflecting their own light, bringing light, collecting light, scattering light."

Answering the Call

Many of the women spoke of being called or feeling driven to engage in activist work. For example, Suzy told me she has been called numerous times and Claudette spoke of her experience of the call as being “all lit up” over something. She shared that in her connection to the “spirit of place” a dialogue happens and “at a certain stage...it definitely feels like I am set up to do something.” In a similar way, K. Linda articulated that it is her deep connection to the Earth and her connection to her heart that calls her and that makes it easy to take action:

it's so easy to go stand on a road. It's like if somebody came to harm my partner, I would stand in their way, I would fight to keep them away. It's the same for me. There is really no difference actually. It feels just that it comes from the heart. So that's how I keep going. Connecting in with what I'm for and that fundamental love.

Trish shared that her connection to the Earth propels her into action and ultimately sustains her life:

I feel the destruction going on in the world, and people not respecting the environment, and the possibility that we could lose it, we could lose these places that are sacred to me...that makes me feel like I need to do something to ensure that doesn't happen...I feel I need that connection to the Earth to be alive.

Zoe illustrated and spoke to this in a slightly different way: “It’s sort of like there are things that are bigger than me but you know you have to do it...it might be difficult or challenging or have repercussions but you don’t think twice about it.” In the art-making workshop Claudette spoke about the energy that calls her to act represented in her prayer flag (on next page): “This has got to do with energy, from the yogic perspective it would be the basic vibratory energy from the universe which is for me from where it all starts, where I feel that I get inspired or I get moved

by a landscape or somebody and it's like that energy manifests in me. Then I try to figure out how I am supposed to use it, but this would be my depiction of something that is not describable. It's entirely symbolic and that's where it becomes an interesting exercise, and there is a hole in the middle so that it can come out from wherever it is coming from. It's just kind of fun, and the flames of course...it's passion is needed to make something manifest or move but it's how the passion is used

key. If I can
flowers for
magic and
universe, like
stars, then it
easier to not get
negative energy



for me, that is
stay focused on
instance or the
mystery of the
space and the
becomes a lot
caught up in the
process or

hassling others and.... the sticky stuff, and so this is my understanding of the big mystery behind what actually it is that motivates me to do things.” The relationship that each of the women has with the Earth is evidenced through their different, but similar, experiences in being called to activism. This call to action links into their connection with their inner knowing and spiritual guidance.

Fran expressed that she receives “wisdom from the Earth. Musicians and artists talk about being inspired from the divine, and they don't know where it comes from, I get that in terms of ideas and things that need to be done and need to happen.” She shared in that way she feels that she is a messenger. In a likeminded way K. Linda spoke of being an agent for the message of love:

I feel part of what I'm called to do is talk about the love piece. To remind people of what we're for, to remind people about connection and connection to our sadness. And to not distance from our own selves in our quest to save something [ourselves].

Echoing K. Linda's sentiments of expressing emotion, Lana Marie verbalised that "the action might simply be sitting down and crying for the Earth." Zoe added a new dimension. She spoke about how throughout her career she has been called to different or varied ways to create change:

initially, it was a connection with the Earth and also to improve the situation on Earth, and more of a connection with nature and my work evolved away from that...it became more about people and peoples' disengagement with themselves...how our belief system impacts our relationship with the Earth and what our priorities are and what we perceive as who we are, and how that impacts.

K. Linda also underscored that there are a "million things that could call" us and that in part, we need to trust that there are other people who are responding as well as ourselves.

The internal pull. Jacquie notes the call to action as a gut feeling, a sense of knowing when "something is right, when it lands really deeply...almost like I am being guided and pushed." This sense of knowing or embodied awareness is common in the women's stories.

Lana Marie shared about her call or drive to action:

my sense is that it comes from a very internal place...which involves being present in myself in such a way that I feel myself as the Earth and then from there whatever I do, I do just naturally...because I feel so much that I am the Earth.

K. Linda shared a similar orientation: "I feel very rooted and grounded...my activism doesn't even feel like something that's external...it feels like protection of self but self in the very big sense of this is my home." Trish also cited an internal pull as how she experiences the call to

action: “there is just something inside of me that keeps pulling me towards it...I just feel like I am connected to this work, like I have to do it.” Robin spoke to the strength of that call within and her increased sense of when it happens:

I have more of a sense of when I’m really called to step forward into something...it’s definitely in the body in terms of an aliveness, like 'ok pay attention now, this is important,' and again almost like a magnetism, like an incredible magnetic pull to something that feels like just something I must go and attend to, like a sore leg or something.

Eco-activism is an Orientation

What became clear throughout the study was the vast breadth of what the women considered eco-activism. The enormous range within the women’s eco-activism indicates the need for a new understanding of what constitutes activism which I will follow up on in the discussion chapter. To exemplify the wide range, here are some of the ways that these women engaged in their activist practice: writing books; hosting an eco-informing radio show; offering spiritual and activist guidance to younger eco-activists; creating and maintaining a large recycling program for a school which included education around recycling; consciousness-raising; cob building; teaching through embodied ways of knowing and Earth/body connections; offering psychotherapy from a unity, interconnected, somatic perspective; living consciously with the Earth; legal and community action on behalf of wildlife, ecosystems, and land; protests; making policy; working to build community; and being involved in the transition town movement.

Four of the women talked about writing as part of their activism. Claudette aptly put it,

“the pen is mightier than the sword.” She wrote a book weaving landscape ecology, mysticism and porcupines and described it as “magical.” For Claudette the writing process asked a lot of her: “it required a lot of listening and a lot of dedication.” K. Linda spoke about her process of writing as activism: “one of the most profound acts of activism that I have done is writing that book....the thing about my writing is it's very, it's about what I'm for. Whereas a lot of activism tends to be oppositional.” During this conversation she spoke of her writing as sustaining as well as reaching out. In contrast, when Zoe spoke about writing her PhD dissertation, it was a harrowing undertaking:

it was hard, not a happy process, but I had not a question that I needed to be doing it. It was a conservative faculty and I was pushing their boundaries and there was a lot of opposition, in terms of impact on my body, there was damage, but I had incredible clarity that I had to be doing it.

Mock (2000) speaks to the transformative power of writing and suggests that spiritual activist Rebecca Harding Davis' (1831 -1910)

writing serves as a dialogic force, one that ruptures and decenters the homogenizing discourses that began to surface in the suffrage movement, emphasising a tension that, in fact, occurs in all discursive arenas. Accordingly, to counter dominant discourse is to disrupt power relations, introduce possibilities, and, quite possibly, enact social transformation. (p. 45)

Other activist practices included psychotherapy and teaching. Two of the women work as psychotherapists and three currently work as educators. Lana Marie who works as a therapist, shared that she works

with people in a way that helps them access this [their internal place of connection to the Earth] and their presence in the moment with their bodies that it's not something that I have to try to tell anybody to do, it just naturally comes through and all of a sudden there's this awareness. I'm just really moved by it...it's more being really aware of simply what is true.

Jacquie, a therapist and educator, talked about our embodied connection to the land being “socially marginalised or subjugated in terms of knowledge.” Part of her activism in the academy is to create spaces for peoples’ consciousness to increase through the remembering of silenced knowledges, to connect with what they already know, and connect to their bodies and the Earth. She asserts that this is a “very profound part of the human experience.” The purpose of this is to deepen people’s relationships to their environment and “for them to begin to look at the many teachings which are evident in the natural environment of healing.” As a therapist she revealed it is

kind of the same...how do we bring in and how do we use these connections in ways that help to bring their nervous system into greater regulation...these are pieces of profound connections that we are really wanting to...to illuminate and to sit with...the process of sitting with that that restores some regulation to people’s nervous systems.

Claudia expressed “I’m an educator ultimately...educating others is the only way to change our current trajectory.” In a similar vein, Suzy uses her radio programme to inform and educate people about current environmental issues in the region and province. Over her lengthy activist career, “it has been my biggest outlet for informing people.”

Activist – the label. Of interest and surprise to me was that some of the women did not identify with the word activist, although during our conversations they all referred to their work as activism. One problem with the term, as Doran explained, is that the word activist turns

people off and labeling herself as an activist lets other people off the hook for taking action as they assume that someone else is doing it. Based on some of the women not identifying with the word activist, I asked the women what they thought an activist was. Here are some of the responses: “you just see through the BS” (Kate); “ I think activists are people that believe in taking action” (Doran); “it implies being willing to stand up to what’s wrong, bad decision making, and taking a stance for the side of good against the side of tyranny and money making at all costs and corporatisation of the world” (Fran). Kelly said

for me an activist is somebody who tries to sway public opinion or at least move somebody over...influence, move somebody over to their side....so I’m trying to learn this subtle kind of way, how to open peoples’ eyes without explicitly saying look at this crap.

Jacque expressed that activism is on a continuum that ranges from the thoughts that we have about ourselves and our place in the world and about our relationships to everything, that is

to writing books, to starting huge global protests....often the more quiet, less overt forms of activism aren’t considered activism but I think any efforts to move towards equalisation and efforts to repair the split (body/mind) that has been perpetuated over centuries, is a form of activism.

There was breadth and complexity to the views regarding activism and what it is. Within these comments we have a complexity of views about activism that centre upon holding a consciousness of betterment, of change, at their core. Further discussion of this will be in chapter eight.

Personal Journey of Consciousness. There was a general consensus that activism has the potential to bring one into personal reflection and growth: This is also reflected in the

literature (e.g., Gaarder, 2008). All of the women spoke in one way or another about the changes that had come about in their own lives. Some of the women talked about their activism as part of their personal journey bringing them to places of personal growth and reflection:

there is no way I'd be the person I am right now, if I had sat on the couch and denied taking responsibility for things that were disturbing me. I wouldn't be the same person, it's as simple as that. (Claudette)

Doran expressed her ongoing quest for personal growth through her prayer flag. She shared that it was an adaptation of an image she has been working with over her life which speaks to the ongoing struggle for balance: “I am moving towards equanimity and as I’ve thought about it over the years I don’t believe that in our lives here that things are going to get better and better – I used to maybe – but somehow there is some other dimension so it’s equally poised between the dark beautiful colours and the light and the sun which I love so it’s equal poise and equanimity and it’s meant to be dynamic.

That energy pushing one away to another.” Suzy spoke about the need to push herself towards those uncomfortable growth edges as “the more comfortable you are the more narrow minded you become.” When I asked Trish



about a tool or instrument that might represent her body in activism she had two answers.

Initially, she spoke of a shovel “because I think I just keep digging deeper....I feel like...I’m searching...and going deeper, I feel like I have to keep digging because if I live on the surface it

is really a shallow existence.” Interestingly, Suzy also identified with

a shovel....I like to dig....you know I’m always digging to get at something....I’m one of those stub-nosed spades. You know? That are easy to use! They can get right at it - getting people to communicate - that's been my, that's probably my strength - that and being able to bark down demons.

The elements of change, whether it be moving toward equanimity, moving out of comfort to discomfort to growth edges, or digging for a deeper existence, illustrate these women’s conscious awareness of personal change and transformation and their willingness to push themselves toward growth and personal transformation.

Other women talked about the developmental process as an activist and linked personal awareness to sustainability “if I'm really serious about this [activism], I have to make this sustainable whatever that means” (K. Linda). Claudette also shared that through her activist path she has learned this important piece “if I can give my body what it needs, it’s way easier for me to be open and receptive to what it is the Earth needs. If I'm continually shutting myself down I'm just walking around in shut down mode all the time.” Jacquie talked about the intersection between personal and activist work and the connection of spirit and the body: “in terms of my evolution... my work is to know what I stand for.” Later in our conversation Jacquie shared “I can’t imagine not having been used for speaking that which needs to be spoken.”

Anger – coming to a different place. Many of the women talked not only about the changes that they went through in their activist path but the transformation in the way that they did activism – an evolution of consciousness. Some of the women spoke about coming to work *for* something rather than *against*: “I’m working for things...most people are tired of working against things and they’ve got to be working for something” (Suzy). K. Linda told me she

couldn't live against: "I can't always be no, no, no anti this and anti that...anger, anger, anger, that's not the way I want to spend my life. I want to be in a place of positive, ok what am I for?" Claudette talked about coming from a place of joy rather than anger in her activism and how challenging it was – not only personally but in communities. Here is what she said:

anger is hot and righteous and passionate and directed. It's a warrior. A place of trying to change the world from a joyful dreaming perspective is much more subtle. It's easy to get confused because it's not as direct. It tends to be a lot more spiraling, a lot more waiting. It's quite different. And it also requires a lot of faith...knowing that things are coming together as they should, rather than me having to do it...Faith that I'm not the only one doing it or that this is the right thing to be doing at the moment rather than feeling that...picking up a sword and going to battle. It's quite different. Both are necessary, in different situations or at different stages.

Zoe felt that coming to a place of working towards change without feeling anger was part of the developmental process as an activist but added that she thinks "a lot of people never come to that." For her she wants to "find a way to kindness" but finding colleagues that meet her there is challenging. She talked about some beliefs that guide her "I have this belief we can't live sustainably on the Earth if we can't live sustainably with ourselves...and then I have this belief that we cannot create peace from anger." Lana Marie picks up this thread, an evolution of consciousness, when she shared:

I just go about it [her activism] in a quiet way...there's a very fundamental aspect to it where it's receptive and pushing and it's that kind of consciousness that needs to be facilitated and expanded. And it's like how do you do that without pushing because that's the opposite of the kind of consciousness that we need.

Claudette spoke to this evolution of consciousness as a “paradigm shift” and felt that not only was it healthier but it is more effective: “we're dreaming up what we want rather than fighting what we don't want.” It was interesting when Doran, with her decades of activism practice, suggested in our interview that one has to go through it, from the hard fight to a consciousness of love “because you learn the hard way.” One of the points K. Linda made highlighted a different perspective than that which is often cited in eco-activism:

Really what we're struggling to save is ourselves. The Earth will continue regardless to what we do to it. What will cease to exist is ourselves and unfortunately we're taking a lot of other species out with us, but to honour ourselves enough to put value, to work to save ourselves. You know it's really easy to think of saving the mountain, or saving an environment, or saving a creek. But really what we're trying to do it save ourselves and not just on a physical level. Or own respect, our own integrity, our own value.

Putting my body on the line. All of the women in the study have put their bodies on the line in one way or another in their activist practice. Practically speaking each one of us puts our bodies on the line with the myriad of daily choices we make – some of them are mundane while others are radical acts of protest, choice, or need. Some of the women spoke about their *coming to a place* where they were willing to put their bodies on the line (others were already doing this or had in their activist pasts). Jacquie offered another perspective of coming to a place of courage to use her anger to stand and trust her bodily information, her emotion, to propel her into new forms of activism:

I just felt this outrage...if that construction goes ahead I am going to be there, I am going to put my body on the line there. Now that is not something that I have done historically but I think maybe it has to do with getting older but I think that maybe...It's not that I'm

going to subordinate that bodily information like that outrage, I am actually going to say there is outrage here, I am not going to try to annihilate the outrage, that outrage is actually mobilising, it's mobilising me to talk to people...it's mobilising in a number of different ways.

Both Kate and Doran had been arrested through their eco-activism. I asked them about their experiences and how they decided they would put themselves on the line in this way. Doran told me that for her it was “ecstatic...no fear...it's joy.” She attributed her background in social justice with the Catholic Church as preparing her; “I really believe in direct action when it's appropriate and it's non-violent.” When I asked Kate how she came to the decision, she told me “I had read history, a fair bit of history and...I knew that sometimes some things are worth...I knew that laws could change by people being willing to do civil disobedience.” On a humorous note, she also told me “I don't have the stamina [to sustain long protests]...I generally try to get arrested in the afternoon, after lunch.” This section highlights the developmental process for activists and links the valuing of self and Earth. The stories underscore that one's trajectory is: a) not a linear process; and b) needs to be assessed in context of their life. I will discuss this further in the next chapter.

Activism as Spiritual Practice

In the first interview Claudette told me activism was part of her spiritual practice. This intrigued me and resonated with my own experience: Ultimately it opened up a new perspective or way of understanding that I had yet to read about in the literature. I expand upon this in the following discussion chapter. I wondered if others had the same sense of activism being part of their spiritual practice. The majority of the women did. Nine of the thirteen were very clear

about their activism being spiritual practice; two were clear that it was not and two women's answers were more complicated. K. Linda explains,

Oh absolutely. Because it's a follow through. When I sit down on the meditation cushion day after day, week after week, month after month, and the same worries plague me...And I let go, I let go and it comes back, it comes back, it comes back. It's a call from my conscience. Then it's like the logical next step is to engage. Is to say ok this requires more than just letting go on the meditation cushion, this requires engagement. And then once that's done then the space on the meditation cushion opens up a bit because I've responded to whatever call of the conscious, or the Spirit.

Robin talked about coming to know that her activism was a spiritual practice early on in her career when she worked on some

big campaigns it was so hard, and so demanding and so difficult...and you didn't get paid much at all...it was really marginalised...you could barely exist on it. I had to really dig down deep and say why the heck am I really doing this? I realised that it was a spiritual practice, it was the commitment, it was kind of like this is the work of this time.

Claudia brought in another lens; "If I'm considering what I do at my home as activism, that certainly is spiritual practice because I'm trying to pay attention...Being very open to what lessons I can learn, which is I think a spiritual awakening." Jacquie shared that activism and spiritual practice "can't be separate." Doran was emphatic when I asked her if she saw her activism as her spiritual practice: "yes, absolutely. It just has to be, that is all there is." Kate and Trish both shared that they considered their activism part of their spiritual practice.

Two of the women's answers were more complex: for Zoe it was complicated. Initially she said yes and then in talking about it, it became more complex – the interweaving of moral

obligation and call to one's path. Lana Marie initially shared that "No, I mean it is in a way but not in a way that makes it separate...it's not something that I consider to be like a practice that's separate from my everyday life." When I asked her if she considered her everyday life to be a spiritual practice, here is what she said

yeah...people talk about going to church on Sunday and in one way it's like okay it's this sort of thing that you do, one day we can go to a certain place to do it and it's a certain hobby that....place of reverence is going out for a walk in the woods and connecting with the Earth and the trees. So in that way it's a spiritual practice.

Two women did not consider their activism as spiritual practice. Fran has never seen her activism as spiritual as it has often been fueled with anger and "wrought with difficulty and so un-peaceful" however she sees it "as serving a common good and in service." Kelly was initially unsure if she considered her activism part of her spiritual practice, and in our conversation she concluded that no it was not, however, she feels that there is something magical and spiritual about the "the Earth and all the species...there is energy from those things."

Going further, many of the women spoke of the spirituality and intuition that connected and guided them in their lives and activist practice. Suzy shared about how she relies on the spiritual to support and guide her:

I talk with the devas [elemental spirits of the gardens] and I have a little method....It's things where I'm saying 'look this is so beyond me, this is in another realm what should I be doing here?'...I believe it's spiritual information. Maybe it's me getting in touch with my own intuition. I don't question what it is anymore....I listen to it...it's all energy, it gets me in touch with the spiritual where I'm not just going, 'oh it's just out there,' I actually get an answer.

She shared that intuition happens when spirit comes through you. In a related way, Trish spoke about wisdom or information coming through her from her ancestors and how that guided her in her life and in her actions, including in her activism. Jacquie shared that “it feels like the messages just come...they come from the bigger mystery...it’s just kind of a deepening of our relationship to the great mystery.” Fran spoke of asking for guidance and support at different times during her activism, “I would ask for support from the universe...the divine force.... somehow trying to bring some grace into the chaos.”

The ways in which these women shared their experiences, stories, and understandings of their eco-activism were congruent with activism in action. The theme of activism as an orientation, a way of life was exemplified by the care and willingness these women had in supporting this research and availing themselves to working on behalf of the Earth and Earth species.

The Ebb and Flow

The final theme, the ebb and flow, speaks to how the women found ways to sustain themselves in their activism as well as their thoughts and experiences of what impedes embodiment. The underlying premise of this particular piece of research is that embodiment is essential for sustainability on all levels. This was reflected implicitly or explicitly by all of the women and links to the relational, ecological, and psychospiritual dimensions of embodiment.

Sustainability

Given the commonplace of burnout in activist communities and activist lives (Cox, 2009; Lysack, 2012; Rossiter, 2010; Whelan, 2000) I asked the women what sustains them in their

activism. Most of the women spoke of their connection to the Earth as a sustaining and replenishing force. Suzy was clear when she told me that science, intuition, and indigenous knowledge “must go hand in hand” to create a sustainable world. Robin’s words represent this: “Earth is medicine.” In the art-making workshop Fran spoke about what sustains her activism. “This is the embodied part right here [purple] and also sort of Earth



and this is intellect and sky [green pattern]. My activism has always had a strong, embodied intuitive knowing – I get a lot of information from my gut. The purple is the feminist colour, the women’s colour, so this is all about my women’s way of knowing and my embodiment. In the interview I was really able to acknowledge my body as supporting me through my activism because I treat it very badly sometimes and did for years....somehow through those hard times it was there for me. This [purple] is that solid beautiful grounding for support and the connection I’ve had with other women and the friendships that have come out of the activism and how supportive that is for me. And this [the deer] speaks to the interconnection, the deer, with animals....This is pain [the red], emotional and physical pain that I’ve had through the struggle – lots of it is intellectual, mental, and some of it has been physical. This is anger and pain and despair.” In a different art-making workshop Claudia, highlighting her experience of activism and what supports her activist journey, expressed: “My prayer flag is about the void where this all started...the black...much more

nothingness there is than the light or the life in between things than we think...our energy is often in the light but I think we need to pay attention to the dark. So our beginnings, sort of exploring a bit of our creation history. This is a bit about that, the void. I'm



interested in the centre of it...the heart chakra which comes from beauty or stepping out in the light. So I was trying to express beauty because it inspires activism or helping the planet in whatever way. I keep on coming back to that I have to be doing it in joy it or noticing the beauty there is...so that's what these flowers are meant to represent, a kind of art cast, and then these bright stripes are meant to be these slivers of light within the darker colours. I read somewhere that the dark purple blues and blacks were sort of the realm of the God or the darkness." Claudia speaks to the vastness, the void, the divine, and the beauty that inspires action. Lana Marie talked about her body in activism being like a willow tree more than an instrument, but then she came up with the metaphor of a fishing line:

let's see, flexible, you know a fishing line...it's bendable, flexible, it can take a lot and it doesn't break...you catch a fish but if you have one fishing line you catch one fish and you eat it...there's a sustainability to it...and the connection is at the heart of it.

Claudette shared "there's a direct relationship for me of being sustained by the Earth and being able to politically carry on." Doran commented how "it is just healing to have your fingers in the Earth." For K. Linda, her nourishment for sustainability came through her relationship with the

land: “I just know what replenishes and what depletes. Humans deplete. Land replenishes. It's an easy equation.” The women spoke about sustainability both as individuals and in a more global, planetary sense. The commonality of connection to something resourcing, whether it be people, land, or community was highlighted.

Spiritual Nourishment. Three of the women spoke specifically about the connection between living sustainably and their connection to spirituality. Jacquie spoke of embodiment and connection as essentials for sustainability. She knows that when we are embodied “spirit moves through us.” She commented that sustainability comes through embodiment, decreasing our disconnection, and “furthering our connections, that’s sustainable...being connected to community, being connected to help people, being connected to the natural environment.”

Claudia shared that she believes that what is touted as sustainable, and what is really sustainable, are often different.

Anything can be sustainable. But the real sustainability would be modeled after Mother Earth. And her way is a lot different than how I've seen sustainability defined...I think the more people find a spiritual grounding connected to the give and take of Mother Earth, then that's what will ultimately save our planet. We'll have to get over ourselves already.

Kelly spoke about the mutuality of our body and the Earth, their sameness, and with this, knowing that sustainability is natural:

our body and the Earth are from the same, that we are the Earth and the Earth is us....
there is something spiritual about them that there is an energy and spirituality about them,
if we recognise that this exists and we are one...then automatically we practice

sustainability and automatically we take care of those things because we take care of them as we take care of ourselves.

Connection to self, Earth, and spirit was common in these three excerpts. They expressed not only how their spiritual connections nourished them, but were essential for sustainability.

Practices that sustain. The list was long and varied of practices and experiences the women engaged with to support and sustain them. All of the women spoke of being in or with nature as being a strong revitaliser. Robin spoke of taking time to go to wild places; K. Linda spoke of “the incredible abundance of the Earth” and “knowing that it just keeps growing...and growing and growing” as a support to her; and Fran shared that “the place, the streams, and the animal habitat” help sustain her. Claudette and Suzy both spoke of gardening, growing food, and hiking as important; and Claudette spoke about how “visitations from wildlife” were sustaining for her activism.

Some of the women spoke of different practices that sustained them: yoga (Claudette; Robin; Trish); meditation (Claudette; K. Linda; Robin); stretching (Trish); journaling (K. Linda); art (Lana Marie); and deep listening (Claudette; Lana Marie). K. Linda spoke of taking great care of herself, eating a healthy, organic, local, zero mile diet as much she can, and getting massages as part of her self-care and sustainability. The attention to their bodies spoke not only to the necessity of care, the toll activism takes, and the orientation to healthy living, it speaks to the consciousness that their bodies play an integral role in their health and activist practice – ultimately showcasing that the health of the planet is tied to the health of the individual and vice versa.

A few of the women spoke about coming to know what sustains them and making changes towards that goal. Zoe talked about the flow and replenishment of energy as sustaining:

“I take action a lot by being in my body...I think ideally if you are centred...you’re constantly fed energy as you are giving out energy.” Trish shared about being self-reflective and looking inward to find what she needs to sustain herself. Lana Marie talked about listening to her body to keep her from burning out and choosing to live a slower life; going “against the nature of our culture which is to be speedy and go faster and faster.” Interestingly, as Fran spoke about her preferred ways of being I asked if there was a tool or instrument that would act as a metaphor that represented her body in terms of activism. She named a cello. Her explanation gives us insight into her natural way of being:

maybe because it is kind of slower...and I don’t do anything really fast...and I can be quite sad...but also quite joyful...it’s a little bit in the background, sometimes a start, but mostly in the background and I am very comfortable with that...I’m okay being in the front as a leader, but I would rather be part of the orchestra.

K. Linda also spoke of her values and strong will sustaining her, however, she has had to learn to find a balance with that: “my will carries me through things that it shouldn’t even carry me through...I’ve learned...not to push always with will power, I think it caused a lot of damage just pushing myself.” The body played a prominent role in the women’s stories of sustainability. Each of them spoke to it in a different way. This speaks to their lived knowing, or embodied knowledges, of the power of the body – the body as the ultimate master of the self – how it can and will protest unsustainable behaviour.

Personal connection. Personal connections and friendships were integral for a few of the women to help sustain them in their activism. Kate spoke of being nourished through human connections, “I am nourished by other people’s energy...you feel the energy, you can do stuff that you wouldn’t normally think you could do.” Another woman expressed gratitude for the

deep connections that happened between women when working on a particular project: “what sustained me was the friendships from this group, these women I am closer to in a lot of ways, than women in my own community” (Fran). K. Linda spoke about her community connections and support and living on a land cooperative as sustaining for her activist practice. Again the essentialness of connection is highlighted from a different perspective and underscores the necessity of contact, support, and safety that happens in and through relationships.

Finding your rhythm. Coming to settle into a rhythm with their activism was highlighted by a few women. Suzy talked about the ebb and flow as the rhythm of her activism. She shared that a fellow activist died:

if there was a burnout she was it...and she couldn't stop herself. I took her death very seriously. I went 'you know, take time for yourself' so you step back a little bit. This world is not going to fall apart. You really see your own insignificance and your own mediocrity in this whole thing when people started dropping like flies around you. So the ebb and flow, if you don't ebb and flow I think you're in trouble. You've got to be able to have that sort of ability to step away.

Claudette shared that she has a cycle of engagement where she gets stirred up, engages, tires, and takes a sabbatical until something stirs her again. Claudia shared that she also has a rhythm to her activism. She reaches out then pulls back, depending on her energy level: “sometimes I feel like I don't have the energy to jump into it and be so involved - put all of that out, and so I come back into myself.” K. Linda spoke of her activism being like the four seasons. When I asked Jacquie about a metaphor of a tool or instrument that spoke to her about her body and activism she spoke of the accordion.

An accordion... expansion contraction...those little buttons...I am amazed that people can play the accordion because you have to do something really different with one hand than the other...there are a lot of things you have to do when you play the accordion, maybe pressing those black buttons are those moments when you actually connect, and think. No this has to be on the course outline...or...I just know without a doubt that I can't not speak about this...that would be kind of like pressing the black buttons and playing the melody with the other hand and it's kind of like what kind of happens regularly with our heart and our body...it kind of follows...It's a natural process...It's your rhythm.

Claudette also spoke about the necessity of rhythm when she described her metaphor of her body as a tool or instrument of activism.

The harp comes in right away....The lyre is a bird as well as a musical instrument. The harp and the lyre have always kind of been together for me. Harps are also something that the Bards in Ireland used....in symbolic imagery it would be like me learning how to pay attention to the rhythms. And be in harmony. Figure out how to make a nice tune, tell a good story.

Sustainability was something everyone spoke about, that each of the women were intimately aware of and connected to it in their own lives, on the planet, and in their activist practice.

Embodiment and Barriers to it

Women talked about the barriers to living an embodied life both in terms of them personally and in terms of the global culture we live in. Many of the women talked about the human-made distractions that are commonplace or sought after in our Western world and

ideological frameworks which impede embodiment through the cultural dimension. Jacquie says there are “millions, just millions” of barriers to embodiment, including:

you-tube, the multitude of distractions, the desire to accumulate, the deep engagement with consuming information, valuing certain ways over others, valuing intellect way more and subjugating the body and, disconnecting rituals. Those are all ways we subjugate the body.

Lana Marie and Trish, like Jacquie, cite the focus or valuing of the intellect as a barrier to embodiment. Lana Marie also told me that the “intense need for constant external stimulation, TV...all the things that are the norm,” are things that are disembodied. She talked about the societal expectation that we be separate, self-reliant individuals, and while there is a place for that, at the extreme which we are experiencing in our culture, we are seeing a disconnected or pseudo-embodiment due to the underlying experience of “separate.” Claudette told me that “threats are disembodied” as are human-made distractions that interrupt our capacity to pick up information. Fran spoke about the disembodied nature of the cultural norms that underlie our society - immediate gratification, convenience, and being fast-paced, which create impaired caring and impaired listening to our body wisdom. K. Linda was very succinct, her words summarise the experience of living in a disembodied society: “we have been alienated from our bodies by modern culture.”

Zoe talked about the demand we put upon our bodies and shared her experience of being cut off, disconnected; “it’s like living half a life or a quarter of a life.” She mused that when we come from a joyful place it “is a lot more difficult to cause harm,” and she spoke about coming back to compassion as “what you need to do to lead a healthy life is really small and subtle...but it totally changes how you see the world.” Kelly talked about the challenge of being embodied

in our industrialised, corporate world where she believes that our environment has changed to such a degree that it is too much for our bodies to be at peace. Doran figures that schools create barriers to embodiment and connected living. She said schools “are just dreadful...stops people from thinking critically for one thing, it’s just making people submissive and alienated...programmed.” Kate brought it closer to the personal, “it’s the things you grow up with, the diet you grow up with...how you see the world, how you see nature - is it separate, you are separate.” Robin called attention to the correlation between how we treat the Earth and how we treat our bodies:

the way that we think about ourselves and our bodies is just another part of that bigger worldview that dictates how we consider the Earth as natural resources, that we can exploit...the way we think and express our relationship to our bodies is mirrored right now how we think and express our relationship to the Earth.

In a similar vein, Kelly expressed how patriarchy has undermined our connection and respect for the Earth. Patriarchy “has taught us that these resources are there for man (sic) to use,...that we are above nature, we are above all other species, and that we are special.” Claudette told me that there is a parallel in the way that we use our bodies and treat the Earth: “It’s all got to do with control and domination.” She believes that if people listened to their hearts and bodies we wouldn’t be able to use and abuse the Earth as we do. She said,

for all of us to actually feel, to feel that pain, to be open hearted and sacrifice our endless desires, our addictions, and greed, for paying attention to what it feels like to hurt. And I think that’s the reason why people don’t want to listen to common sense, our body awareness. It’s way more fun, or acceptable, to go along with ideas and things that society says that we need, than it is to have to pay attention to the pain. And I think that’s

why it [mass change] isn't happening quite simply. It hurts. You can block it out with consumerism.

Suzy talked about our disregard and disconnection from the laws of nature: “we are, at our peril...disregarding the fact that we are just an ant on the planet munching on the sugar cube. And we...forget that we are also subject to all those laws...we are the endangered species.”

Visions of a different world. Many of the women talked about what the world might be like if we were more connected and embodied. Kelly paints a striking picture, capturing and revealing how she sees the world currently:

We wouldn't be destroying the planet, this wouldn't be happening, we wouldn't be dependent on fossil fuels, we wouldn't be greedy and money hungry, and we wouldn't devalue women, we wouldn't marginalise others, and we would live in harmony.

In contrast, Claudette's vision spoke of the beauty in the moment:

A glorious blue sky, gold tinged hillside, the sun shining...it's glorious here if we look...you can't get it much better in terms of creating the world I want to live in. And then in terms of inner spaces or personal spaces, relationship spaces, that's always a work in progress.

Lana Marie believes that if we, as a society, valued embodied knowledge it would create “utopia...we would be able to live sustainably...when we can be embodied it means that we can live in harmony with the Earth without having to destroy it and we can meet some insatiable need that never gets met.” I was interested in Claudia's metaphor of her body as a tool or instrument of activism – she gave a mother as the image. As she explained it sounded as if it were part of her vision for a “right world”:

I just think maybe human beings generally would be mothers. I mean if we're connected

truly to the Earth and the planet, that's our role. That's why we're here, is to reproduce and bring around another generation and to nurture them.

She also spoke of holding a vision of “working towards a community...the Transition Town model...where you're looking at things that are created locally by people that you know and that you are depending on them in some way and they're equally depending on you.” Akin to Claudia’s vision, Suzy also spoke of “collaboration....to see people come together. I really believe in diversity....the idea of getting people to take responsibility for their own actions and realise, they do make a difference.”

Claudia talked about a world where people would be more spiritually connected and that would happen through connection with the Earth, “the source.” Like Claudia, Trish believes that a more embodied world would create more connection to the spiritual. Jacquie expands upon the spiritual when she speaks of a world where we would

live in deeper awe and gratitude...we would be much more connected with the mystery of the universe, we would be much more connected to all that which can't be seen. We would make wise decisions, and that would honour our relationships to the next generations.

She spoke of the rampant severing that separates us and believes that a more embodied world would bring us into more awareness and practices of interconnection. Jacquie also told me that with this embodied connection “it’s inevitable and then we are no longer thwarted in taking actions in defense of the Earth and all human beings...So, my practice, my yearning is just to deepen that connection.” Lana Marie spoke about how disembodiment creates challenges in our interpersonal relationships, that in an embodied world we would have more regulation in our nervous systems so we would have greater capacity for connection. This would support Robin’s

vision where she imagines it would be a slower, happier way of life with more focus on healthy food, music, and love.

The understandings of what impedes embodiment are vast, ranging from the personal to the sociocultural and political realms. Of interest, there is more cohesion in the understanding or imagining of how the world would be if there were less barriers and more embodied living. Likewise, there was a wide variety of ways that these women eco-activists worked to live in sustainable ways and yet there was an underlying premise of care and respect for themselves and the Earth embedded in their words.

Conclusion

The overall themes of this research were Connection an Integral Force; Listening from the Inside; Activism from Orientation to Action; and The Ebb and Flow. These themes were all, in a way, pieces of the same puzzle. They spoke to the larger picture of perhaps universal struggles: to understand and live in ways that align with interconnectivity; with being in and maintaining connection – to the land and with ourselves; in working to stay aligned with our heart rather than our intellect; and in negotiating a world that is as diverse and varied as one could imagine - from vast wilderness to the concrete jungle. In the next chapter, I pick up on a number of these ideas and speak to the surprises, the links between the literature and the findings, and the implications of the research.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Discussion

Scholars suggest that fragmented ways of living have created, and continue to create, severe challenges to our global world in the areas of peace, healthcare, justice, equality, environmental issues, and poverty. Ray (2008) speaks of this as the “impending global catastrophe” arguing that our problem is that “we have completely lost our connection with our bodies and our physical existence” (pp. 22-23). This study delved into the relationship of the body and embodied knowledges with women eco-activists. In this chapter, I take up some of the key points raised by the women in the previous two chapters, who offered concrete and powerful illustrations of how the socio-economic, political, and cultural discourses of consumerism, globalisation, disembodiment, duality thinking, and technology impair or inhibit sustainable practices and living. The question that guided this study was, *what role does the body have in women’s eco-activism and what are the effects of eco-activism to the body?*

As noted in chapter seven, activists spoke of the pressure to work harder and extend themselves beyond a mental, emotional, and physically sustainable capacity. Others lamented the toll exacted upon themselves when that threshold was violated. Both scholars and the activists in this inquiry concur that the barriers to embodiment are directly or tangentially linked to the discourses of global capitalism. This is significant in that this pervasive ethos creates and maintains multiple hurdles for these activists, as well as others, who wish to live sustainably. For example, Fran spoke about the challenge to do preservation or implement ecologically sound choices as money plays a pivotal role in the decision making: “a lot of community people would trash the Earth if it meant \$50.00 less on their taxes.” This exemplifies the state of disconnection

and lack of conscious awareness of interconnectivity by many people in the West. Furthermore, for people who are less aware or disinclined to develop their embodied consciousness, such as the people Trish referred to as not bothering to recycle, the discourses of fragmentation foster and perpetuate disembodiment, creating fodder for an ever-expanding economic machine that uses people and the Earth for its own purposes. To go against the grain of the fragmented way of life, as many of the activists in this study attempt to do, takes considerable and on-going awareness, energy, and commitment. I elaborate on this below. The costs of not doing so are borne by all, across the globe, across species, despite our individual way of life, as these ramifications contaminate everything from land, air, and water, and ultimately the bodies we live in as warned by the Lancet commission (2009): “Climate change is the biggest global health threat of the 21st century. Effects of climate change on health will affect most populations in the next decades and put the lives and wellbeing of billions of people at increased risk” (p. 1693). The cost of fragmented living also creates environmental degradation and an increase to extinction of species: “Scientists concur that we are in the midst of the most rapid extinction of plants and animals the world has ever known” (Reis, 2010, p. 101).

This chapter serves as the culmination of the insights, links, questions, and implications that emerged during the inquiry. I have made reference to the literature, where appropriate, and sometimes indicated the areas where I believe future inquiries may be beneficial, although I elaborate on this more fully in the conclusions chapter of this thesis. The findings of the research offer insights for a broad range of people involved in bringing change and healing into the world: “In many respects, environmental practitioners are involved in a healing profession, yet they don’t necessarily think of their work in such terms....personal and community healing” (Thomashow, 1996, p. 143). In addition to activist practice, I suggest that these findings may

offer insight for leadership, environmental practitioners, education, adult education, social work, psychotherapy, and other professions or practices that centre on change, healing, and health. The research findings were vast and varied, interpreting and relating them to the literature proved to be illuminating. Many of the findings concurred with the literature, expanded it, and exposed areas that have been overlooked, silenced, or marginalised.

I have organised this discussion chapter by first speaking to the amorphous conceptual understandings of both embodiment and activism. Then I divide the remaining chapter into sections with subsections. The first section looks at embodied ways of knowing, which includes many subsections: the body as site of knowledge; the primacy of relationship with the Earth in eco-activism; Earth as site of knowledge; and implications. I then shift to the next section titled embodied knowledges and activism which includes subsections of activism and the body, Earth connection and activism, spirituality and unity consciousness, activism and spiritual practice. Activism, a way of life begins the next section with subsections of identity as activist, the challenge of anger, and activist communities.

Embodiment: An Amorphous Concept

The body or embodiment is well researched and written about in the literature and yet how we understand the body is tangential at best (see chapter two). Embodiment, as scholars noted, is a broad term and articulates a wide range of experience in the literature. The range of understanding and ways that the body is seen, recognised, and articulated offers an expansive scope from which to explore (see Barnacle, 2009; Crowdes, 2000; Johnson, 2008; Wilson, 2004; Wilcox, 2009). However, the issue of researching embodiment and embodied ways of knowing proved in some ways to be challenging given this vastness. Embodied knowing and embodied

learning is not a fixed point, it is fluid depending on context, internal state, and environmental considerations. There is no objective measurement for embodiment and people's reported and lived experiences vary, yet are equally valid. For instance, how do we assess whether one is embodied for the purpose of this and other research? The qualitative researcher must take the word or lived experience of the researched. There is not a measurement tool such as a ruler, scale, or numeric system to measure embodiment as there is to measure height, weight, or age. This created strife for me as the researcher as I struggled to convey what I meant about embodiment in the interview, art-making workshops, and in this thesis. Embodiment from the perspective of this research means to inhabit, to live in a fluid yet consistent state of inhabiting one's body and utilising the body as a site of knowledge. This research was oriented around embodiment being a way of life, or existence whereby one's awareness is consciously engaged in an intimate relationship with the inner self as it concurrently attends to other and the Earth.

In the adult education literature, embodiment is often used as an exercise to facilitate bodily knowledge but also, to create collations and networks of support (e.g., Butterwick & Selman, 2002, 2006; Etmanski, 2007). Equally in the feminist literature the body or embodiment has a wide range of ways it is articulated, employed, and understood. This wide lens in itself has been advantageous, however, to explore, understand, and articulate embodiment from such a vague and spacious framework in that it creates more opportunity for dialogue and exploration. However, it carries with it a cost of an agreed upon meaning of what is embodiment and embodied knowledge, how is it fostered, and what are the advantages and disadvantages or challenges to using it? The findings suggest that there were a breadth of understanding, articulation, and experience of embodiment concurring with, yet expanding, the literature.

Activism Requires a New Understanding or Definition

The enormous range within the women's eco-activism in the study, combined with calls from scholars (e.g., Maxey, 1999; King, 2006; Martin et al., 2007), indicates the need for a new and expanded understanding of what constitutes activism. Martin, Hanson, & Fontaine (2007) posit that "activism needs to be conceptualized and understood as an activity that emerges from the everyday lived context (place) in which people are embedded" (p. 80, parenthesis in original). In this way we understand activism as situated in the context of the cultural dimension of embodiment. As iterated in chapter seven, the wide range of activist practices were apparent in the individual interviews which revealed that women were engaged, or had been previously engaged, in activism practices such as protests, demonstrations, writing, teaching and education, psychotherapy, recycling, mentoring, conscious-raising, living consciously, legal and policy contributions, and community building.

Activism, as many adult educators have argued, must have an element of consciousness (e.g., Kilgore, 1999) to it, particularly within an expanded notion of what constitutes activism. In order to expand and consider a wider range of practices of activism there must be a direct awareness, understanding, or intention involved; there must be an awareness of the cultural conditioning, status quo, or need for change (e.g., King, 2006; Maxey, 1999; Rabinovitch, 2004, Sivaraksa, 2002). The findings of this study support this claim. Whether it was through the power of awareness, education, consciousness-raising, or direct action of protest and demonstration, these women illustrated what Tacey (2010) referred to as an eco-centric perspective which compels people to work for the safety and preservation of the Earth. Expanding our understanding of what constitutes activism may have the potential to increase the number of people who identify as activists as less volatile but equally powerful activist pursuits

such as public awareness, writing, and education fit for a wider range of people. This identification with activist as an identity may serve to increase awareness of opportunity and thereby increase participation.

Embodied Ways of Knowing

This study exhibits new and important contributions to the literature on embodied knowledges as well as the link between nuanced and varied descriptors of how bodies, Earth, species, and spirit communicated to the women, thereby expanding our understanding of what is possible and potential. The findings were clear and consistent - women's bodies offered information or acted as vehicles for information for embodied knowledges. This awareness is pervasively marginalised both in Western culture and the literature. The women's words put lived experience accounts to the poignant words of scholars like Fisher, 2006; Miller-Lane, 2006; Ray, 2008; Rountree, 2006; and Van Lobel Sels, 2005. The following subsections speak to the body as a site of knowledge, the primacy of relationship with the Earth, the Earth as a site of knowledge, and offer some implications.

The Body as Site of Knowledge

The findings indicate that the body is a site of knowledge, one that is readily accessed and relied upon by all of the women in the study. The literature recognises that the body is an epistemological site (Alexandre, 2010; Barnacle, 2009; Chapman, 1998; Crawford, 1998; Fisher, 2006; Miller-Lane, 2006; Ray, 2008; Rountree, 2006; Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002; Van Lobel Sels, 2005; Wilcox, 2009), however, the body remains a contested and marginalised location despite the revival of interest from feminists and interdisciplinary scholars over the past several

decades. Coinciding with the literature, the women demonstrated an expansive variation to the ways in which they expressed their experience of embodied ways of knowing. Of interest and significance is the variation within the findings in the ways in which embodied knowledge was received. Some "heard" the trees, Earth, landscape, species, ancestors, or spirit speak to them; others felt it; some relied on their intuition; while others gathered information through dreams. All of the women accessed embodied sites of knowledge through their body via sensations, emotions, and heart or gut to varying degrees. At one end of the spectrum Kelly spoke of the newness of listening and attuning to her bodily knowledge which helped her change the ways she feeds or nourishes herself, while at the other end of the spectrum, some of the women expressed their knowing as a pre-Cartesian experience (Clark, 2001) where knowing was deeply intimate, informed by one's bodily and affective experience, and connected to nature.

This embodied wisdom was strongly emphasised in the activists' stories. Some of the women were very fluent in what I would call body literacy – the interface of gleaning embodied knowledges - and articulating it. The activists' stories of how they inhabit their bodies, how their bodies guide and support them, and the ways in which their bodies facilitate connection were varied and highly nuanced. At the most sophisticated end of the spectrum, the women used their bodies as their "primary text and starting point for knowledge" (Rountree, 2006, p. 98). They relied on their "bodies as agents of knowledge production" (Wilcox, 2009, p. 105) and trusted that their primary knowing comes "in and through the body" (Ray, 2008, p. 25) in a consistent and fluid way while other women either articulated it in a less nuanced way, and/or experienced less bodily connection, awareness, and knowledge. The sophisticated awareness of many of the women suggested a high degree of connection between the psychological and the emotional which van Loben Sels (2005) indicates is a necessity for body awareness.

In our interview, Fran spoke about how she is able to rely on her intuition to guide her activist practice as exemplified by her body which offered her information about a particular kind of moss that proved to save a threatened Garry Oak grove. Trish spoke of her ancestors guiding her and four women spoke of their dreams guiding them: Robin articulates, “I’ve had a lot of information, Earth information, given to me through dreams.” In a related manner, K. Linda shared that she recognises her “body is a conduit for spirituality.” Most of the activists spoke about the ways that their intuition guided them. Many of the experiences were articulated as linked to their heart or gut, which echoed Lara’s (2005) call:

We need to listen to our hearts, intuitions, subconscious, bodies, bodymindspirits— whatever we want to call our faculties of knowledge that include but go beyond our rational minds. As spiritual activists we need to nurture our ability to hear each other, across differences (p. 30).

Incorporating the connection between the body and psychology (the gut for example)

offers the beginnings of an alternative account of the role of physiology within mind-body relations. Analyses of this kind have the potential to change the way that we think about embodiment. [And perhaps]...have a bearing on how we understand learning and knowing. (Barnacle, 2009, p. 26)

The physicality of experience highlighted in the findings, underscores the need for the physiological or biological dimensions of the body to be brought more fully into feminist conversations about embodied knowledges despite resistance and division within feminist communities who fear the reductionist lens of biology (Barnacle, 2009; Chapman, 1998; Njambi, 2004; Wilson, 2004). While there are numerous references to embodied knowledge within the literature, the nuanced articulation of embodied knowledges are atypical in scholarly works

particularly in adult education, environment literature, and activist practice. Adult Educators such as Butterwick & Selman (2006) speak generally through a wide lens to embodiment as dialogue and activism which broadly speaks to relationship. In using this wide lens we can include partnerships as evidenced in the findings of this research.

The Primacy of Relationship with the Earth in Eco-Activism

The women participants all told stories that underscored the pivotal nature of relationships, not only in their lives, but in their activist practices. This resonates with Belenky et al.'s (1986) ground-breaking research which identified women's ways of knowing as being through connection and collaboration. In the attachment, trauma, and psychological literature, scholars too have readily acknowledged the essentialness of human relationships (Gerhardt, 2004; Schore, 2007; Schore & Schore, 2007; van der Kolk, 2006). Further, the environmental literature speaks to the connection of place as being profound for knowledge creation, health, and sustainability (e.g., Pesek et al, 2006; Thomashow, 1996; Worster, 2006). However, the environmental activist literature does not underscore the primacy of relationship, particularly with the Earth, with regards to activism with the same depth, breadth, sophistication, and nuanced perspective as the women in this inquiry.

The findings of this study illuminated the importance of connection and relationship in all aspects of sustainable activist practice. The pivotal experience at the core of the findings revolved around relationship or connection, particularly to the Earth, that offers an expanded and nuanced description of women eco-activists' relationships that interface with their activism. The women's stories concurred with the literature that articulates connections between self and land as forms of deep, connective, and interactive relationships (e.g., Abram, 1996; Armstrong, 1998;

Klindienst, 2006; Mazis, 2006; Thomasow, 1996; Worster, 2006). However, the findings expand this notion as many of the women in this study spoke to their relationship with the land in a more affectionate, personal, and sentient manner; they build upon and nuance the depth and intimate nature of these connections. I was particularly moved by the stories of connection to the land. Embedded in their stories of relationship with the Earth were descriptions and qualities akin to deep friendships. Scholars (Chapman, 1998; van Loben Sels, 2005) have spoken to this as a place of home, however, the relational quality of home extended beyond for many of the women. As I heard their stories, read them, and sat with them, the women's words conjured the image of Earth as friend. Descriptors of intimacy were also used by other women: Jacquie and Suzy described being *held*, and five of the activists used *love* to describe their attachment to, or experience of, the Earth. Doran expressed how her heart was involved in coming into relationship while K. Linda was particularly articulate in speaking about her sensual connection with the Purcell Mountains. Many of the women also spoke of the deep pain and sadness they felt on behalf of the Earth and in some cases the women spoke of it as the Earth's pain. This underscores the deep relational communion like friendship. K. Linda spoke to this as well, she shared:

if the Earth is dying, just like a friend is dying what do you do? What you do when a friend is dying, you love. You just love that person, care for them, try to make them comfortable. Obviously I don't have much capacity to make the Earth comfortable. But I can love.

K. Linda explicitly reveals the intimate, personal nature of her relationship that is most often attributed to relationships with other humans or domestic animals. I have used her words to exemplify the level of intimacy with the Earth expressed by many of the activists.

The ways in which some of the women in this study related to the Earth are significant and have far-reaching implications in multiple areas of practice and living. By developing a closer, personal relationship with the land the natural outcome lends itself to deep caring and a willingness to protect, preserve, and promote care towards our object of love. Deep caring is intimate; intimacy creates empathy; empathy is felt in and through the body (Blair, 2009). To be intimately connected with the Earth means that the relationship is known through a felt sense (embodied) rather than merely an intellectual or conceptual experience. The intellect leads itself to dualistic thinking and rationalisations that inevitably have hierarchy built in and run counter to unity consciousness. Embodied awareness, as illustrated by the women, leads to sustainable options that resist fragmented decisions based solely on intellect.

To be clear, it is not that these women are not engaged with rationality, reason, or logic to make decisions, it is that they are also connected to the awareness that the Earth is living and breathing. They are aware that human decisions have consequences that impact the functioning of our global ecosystem, in addition to our global economic system. This study indicated that these women are not willing to marginalise the subjugated knowledges of the body/Earth and are willing to struggle with the knowledge that human greed and decisions create unjust situations for less privileged humans and other species. Within their struggles, what was evident was their desire to foster and promote a balanced approach to decision-making where rationality is informed by embodied knowledges, and sustainability is reached through a shift in the way the Western world currently exploits and devalues. McGilchrist (2009) underscores the need for the right brain, or the intuitive, embodied mind to lead the logical left, or as Einstein said, “The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.” What was also highlighted in the

findings was the awareness that many of the common practices in the ways that we live (e.g., distractions and over-reliance on technology; mass consumerism, corporatisation of our world, and the fast-pace) were suggested as barriers to embodied living and thus embodied decision making.

Earth as Site of Knowledge

In zeroing in on the Earth as a site of knowledge, some women articulated their connection to the Earth or animals in a highly nuanced, explicit way that is limited in the literature. Their stories indicated a highly developed consciousness that connected and integrated with Earth consciousness (Bai & Scutt, 2009). They found themselves in “an expressive, gesturing landscape, in a world that *speaks*” (Abram, 1996, p. 81, italics in original) where they touched “nature from the inside” (Mazis, 2006, p. 8). These findings depart from scholarly literature because of the wealth of information about the subtle or sophisticated ways in which women experience, and use, embodied knowledges to guide their activist practice, particularly in accessing Earth knowledges. The research findings magnified and developed the ways in which the Earth is understood as a site of knowledge. The literature references the Earth as a site of knowledge in specific and limited ways. In contrast, the women in the study spoke of their connection with and to the Earth as offering access and connection to knowledge that surpasses what is commonly understood or revealed in scholarly writings. In general, the literature references Earth knowledges as revolving around traditional or indigenous ways of understanding or relating to the Earth. Worster (2006) and Pesek et al. (2006) refer to indigenous or ancient cultures connecting with nature to inform and guide their spirituality. However, the women in this study did not divulge Aboriginal ancestry yet spoke of their own

ways that they accessed what is typically attributed to indigenous ways. This common finding may be related to the women's strong connections to the land, spirit, and their bodies and the interplay between the three with consciousness. Suzy spoke of profound communication with the trees when she surrendered herself and listened to what they offered. Other activists spoke to a more subtle communication with non-human species: specifically, Lana Marie spoke of seeking guidance from the landscape; Kate spoke of trusting the animals to hear her; Suzy, Fran, and Robin spoke of feeling the landscape; and Jacquie spoke of the mountains whispering in support of her. While this concurs with authors such as Starhawk (2004) and Kivi (2005), it is relatively absent or silenced in the scholarly literature. Merskin (2010) suggests, "To re-enter psychological intimacy with other species is to remember our own ancestry and past" (p. 299). This is what Korn (1999) and Tacey (2010) refer to as the indigenous mind and Ray (2008) suggests we meet when we descend into the depth of the body.

The wealth of information these women eco-activists revealed regarding the value of marginalised knowledges of and through the body indicates a need for further inquiry into this area. Tacey (2010) asserts that "The whole question of our subtle connection with nature is possibly the most under-researched topic in environmental studies. It requires an intuitive awareness to understand it, and that is possibly why it is under-researched" (p. 331). Studies examining the ways in which embodied knowledges are accessed and used, have the potential to create new ways of living with, and on, the Earth. The potential of embodied knowledges is yet to be articulated and addressed within Western frameworks, literature, or discourses to the extent of establishing traction in order to effect change. In addition, further research is called for in order to ascertain how to facilitate the best ways to help people become embodied and maintain their connection.

Implications of Embodied Knowledges

The primacy of relationship, whether it be with self, species, or landscape, is incredibly important not only as a finding in this particular research but in looking to place relationship within a larger perspective. If we take into account recent findings in neuroscience, we learn that we are actually wired to be in relationship and that safe relational experiences or connections shift our internal neurophysiological state to an open, receptive state; one where we have access to our higher brain functioning. McGilchrist (2009), speaking about brain functioning, and the evolution of the human mind tells us,

The evolution of the frontal lobes prepares us at the same time to be exploiters of the world and of one another, and to be citizens with one another and guardians of the world.

If it has made us the most powerful and destructive of animals, it has also turned us, famously, into the 'social animal', and into an animal with a spiritual dimension (p. 22).

With this in mind, we have a greater understanding of how embodied awareness, increased consciousness, and connection might positively impact the ways in which people respond to, and live in, the world. We know that safe, supportive, and authentic relationships create safety and allow one to access the most evolved part of ourselves which governs insight, compassion, empathy, and care. This state also links us to our spiritual consciousness. Relationships and connections foster a sense of responsibility for our actions, and towards that which we are in relationship with.

The implications of this are far-reaching and by no means simple. Deep emotional intimacy is challenging for many people. It demands of us to be solid in ourselves, have our feet on the ground, and trust that we are safe and can take care of ourselves. This foundation also runs counter to the cultural norm of fragmented existence and is deeply impacted by our

relational experiences across the lifespan and calls into question our interpersonal development and support from the ground up. Fragmented ways of being both individually and culturally create ever-expanding cycles of disconnection. This creates considerable challenges in our relational capacities both within and with the external world. Embodied living and knowing offers us access to realms of knowledge and internal experiences that are prohibited by fragmentation. One is opened to a sensual, feeling world that communicates and shares not only wisdom and joy but also pain. With these advances in the understanding of human functioning from a body and relational perspective the implications are obvious – how do we help people want to, become, and live an embodied life and stay open and attuned when the more challenging emotions emerge?

Embodied Knowledges and Activism

This section examines links between embodied knowledges and activist practice, as it emerged in the study. The findings not only concur with existing research, but articulate new and expanded understanding of how the body and embodied knowledges interface with activist practice.

Activism and the Body

The findings in this inquiry illuminate the pivotal role the body plays in activism as demonstrated in the literature (e.g., Alaimo, 2010; Gardner, 2005; Miller-Lane, 2006; Parkins, 2000; Sutton, 2007). While the literature for the most part suggests that the body is used in protest and pays the toll for the violence in activism, the findings revealed that the women's connection or relationship with and through their bodies greatly expands and diversifies the link

between activism and the body. While aspects of this are spoken to in the fringe areas or interdisciplinary literature (e.g., Jungian scholars - Starhawk, 2004; Macy, 1991; Ray, 2008; Kivi, 2005), mainstream scholarly environmental or activist literature lacks representation in this area. This narrow view of the body and activism demonstrates not only the marginalisation of the embodied knowledges but the limited scope of activism itself.

Many of the women spoke of powerful experiences of embodied knowledges which they used: to lead them towards sustainability; to direct and inform their activist practice including action, rejuvenation, and guidance; as well as to offer protection or insulation against enculturated practices of disconnection and the fragmented ways common in the West. Scholars (Ray, 2008; van Loben Sels, 2005; Chapman, 1998; Wilson, 2004; Dillard et al., 2000; Mazis, 2006) are forthright and concur that the body, and connection to the body, are paramount to alter the fragmented ways of Western living as described in chapter two. The body is described by van Loben Sels (2005) as “a landscape of truth-telling” (p. 228) and “provides us with an intimate and universal way to understand reality” (p. 227). Ray (2008) claims the body itself has not been fragmented and cannot be contaminated by the far-reaching grip of global capitalism:

there is a new wilderness, a new trackless waste, a new unknown and limitless territory – I do believe – that has not been, and cannot be, colonized and domesticated by human ambition and greed, that in its true extent cannot be mapped by human logic at all. This is the “forest” of the human body. The body is now, I believe, our forest, our jungle, the “outlandish” expanse to which we are invited to let go of everything we think, allow ourselves to be stripped down to our most irreducible person, to die in every experiential sense possible and see what, if anything, remains...Rather I am talking

about the body that we meet when we are willing to descend into it, to surrender into its darkness and its mysteries, and to explore it with our awareness. (p. 12)

Ray speaks to the depths of self that are protected by and housed within the body and only accessible through deep embodiment. He is talking about the body that cannot be disenfranchised into extinction.

In the individual interviews, many of the women spoke of how they used their bodies as instruments in their activism and spoke of using their bodies as articulated by scholars (e.g., Alaimo, 2010; Miller-Lane, 2006; Parkins, 2000; Sutton, 2007; Thomashow, 1996). Jacquie spoke of her willingness to put her body on the line in protection of the Earth. I also had conversations with both Doran and Kate about their willingness to stand and face criminal charges for causes they felt aligned with. These findings concurred with the literature about the willingness of women activists such as Mary Leigh and Rosa Parks to put their bodies on the line. Other women spoke of the power of their voices and how they used them in their activist practice. This also concurs with the literature where voice is recognised as an integral part of activism (English, 2008; Lorde, 1983).

The body also showed up in the clear and unanimous recognition of the pull between taking care of oneself and doing activism. Each woman spoke to it in one way or another. It was overwhelmingly clear that the bodies of these eco-activists were clearly in power or in charge, the master of the self. For a certain time bodies would put up with unsustainable behaviour, stress, overwork, exhaustion, and then they would take over. In a way the body is like a tolerant parent who is forgiving, flexible, and accommodating and then clearly sets the boundary, in the body's case through symptoms of illness or distress, "no, I won't put up with this behaviour" says the body, "I am in charge." Many of the women were seasoned or had long-standing

activist practices. They were the most vocal in their knowings about sustainable practice and heeding the needs of the body in order to bring balance and health to their life. Lana Marie articulated that her sophisticated bodily connection offered her access to epistemological sites as well as served as a protection against burnout. Further inquiries may take into consideration the role of gender in the dilemma of whether to take care of self, versus whether to sacrifice self for the good of all and may explore if these are threads of the discourses of women showing up in activist practice. Exploration of an expanded role of the body in activist practice is also warranted due to the widespread and nuanced articulations of how the embodied knowledges support activist practice, particularly given the pervasive toll upon activists that is highlighted in the literature (e.g., Cox, 2009; Lysack, 2012; Rossiter, 2010; Whelan, 2000). This research also expanded our understandings of the body by revealing how these women's bodies offered guidance –not only in the practices of sustainability but towards direct action and living an embodied life, and in accessing marginalised epistemological sites of the body, Earth, and spirit. This is significant in that it links embodiment to social justice, social justice to consciousness and through consciousness, spirituality: “It is in and through our bodies that we experience the world and develop consciousness” (Grosz 1994, pg. 106). Bai & Scutt (2009) contend that human consciousness naturally connects to, and integrates with, the Earth whereby “one feels the continuity of self and other” (p. 101). Further work in this area is called for in order to deepen our understanding of the complex interconnection between embodiment, Earth, relationship, and consciousness. The following section further explores these concepts.

Earth Connection and Activism

The deep, intimate connections to the land, species, and the Earth propelled, called, or invited women to take a stand and work towards more sustainable ways of living, with and on, the Earth. This concurs with the literature. Scholars (e.g., Bai & Scutt, 2009; Mazis, 2006; Ray, 2008) suggest that connection with the Earth/species incites action towards Earth-friendly practices, and activist literature links connection as a motivator for action (Gaarder, 2008; Macy, 1991; Thomashow, 1996). In addition, Clover & Hill (2003) indicate that the use of outdoor learning experience has the dual purpose “of provoking outrage and encouraging awe, wonder, and a renewed faith in human capacity to create change” (p. 91). This suggests that opportunities to connect with nature in ways that go beyond simply recreation fosters connection and care and in fact may be a starting point for increased activism on behalf of the Earth. For the women in this study, this is in fact the case. They speak of the land beyond simple recreation, to a deeper connection of being in relationship with the land. Further research may be indicated to ascertain the experiences, conditions, or developmental processes which foster deepening relationships with the Earth that evoke an ethic of care.

The women in this study clearly identified that connection to the Earth, and being connected to themselves and their bodily wisdom, contributed to sustainable activism. Further, there was general consensus that connection to the Earth and/or spirit served to nurture and replenish. Moreover, disconnection from themselves and their bodies created unsustainable practices which took their toll. The majority of the participants shared stories that highlighted balanced activist practice and conversely some stories reminded me of Merton’s (1965) warning about the frenzy or violence within activist practice that subverts efforts for peace both within self and in our external world. The connection between activism and burnout is well

documented in the literature (e.g., Cox, 2009; Lysack, 2012; Rossiter, 2010; Thomashow, 1996; Whelan, 2000). It was no surprise when women spoke of the challenges or toll that their activist practice had taken on their bodies. Of the thirteen women, twelve found ways to mitigate the exacting nature of activist practice. Zoe, an activist of twenty-five years, was an outlier. She shared her struggle in continuing to be engaged in activism stating, “if I had a way of approaching the work that had been more joyful then it wouldn’t have been so much feeling like I was trying to hold things together.” It is difficult to know whether Zoe’s struggles are the result of the specific activism in which she engages, how she engages, or due to a more personal constellation of factors. Moreover, it may have also been a discreet comment that doesn’t reflect her full experience.

The connection between health and wellness as linked to the integration of body, mind, and spirit is well established in Eastern, indigenous, and holistic models of healing. Pesek et al. (2006) indicate that the “health and wellness of an individual are reliant on the integrated effects of mind, body, and spirit” (p. 114). They also highlight that the environment, an often overlooked fourth element, is essential and is “a necessary component in holistic health and wellness” (p. 115). In addition, Worster (2006) indicates that “the development of a relationship with the land we live on becomes necessary for people to participate in their own wellness” (p. 106). The critical connection of mind, body, spirit, and Earth, linked to health and healing, was highlighted in this study in the vast ways in which women spoke of healing through connection in terms of feeling supported, inspired, guided, nurtured, replenished, and deeply held. Other practices of sustainability and wellness happened in conjunction which undoubtedly contributed to the maintenance of well-being. Importantly, four of the women in the study spoke to the increase in their health through their activist practice. This finding is tangentially congruent with

literature that speaks to activists experiencing greater well-being. Klar and Kasser's research (2009) indicated that political activists have a higher sense of well-being which correlated with the level to which people identified as an activist, expressed commitment to their activist practice, and reported involvement or intended involvement in activism. Their findings concurred with Downton & Wehr's (1997) findings and supported their "theoretical assumption that activism fosters the expression of intrinsic motivation" (p. 77). Yet while the literature suggests a correlation between activism and well-being in a psychological nature, this study expands our understanding of health to encompass the physical body as well. An additional finding of interest is that one of the four women who spoke to increased health entered into activism as a result of a health crisis which brought her to embodiment which then led her to act on behalf of the Earth. This leads me to wonder about the link between embodiment and eco-activism and whether the body brings one to eco-care and action or conversely the eco-relationship and activism brings one to the body. This is a promising curiosity that needs further exploration.

Of further interest and relevance, this study found that activism was not an activity, more so it was an orientation to a way of life and that relationship with the Earth was a critical component of that relational worldview. Within this orientation, there was great variety in the ways the women experienced and articulated their experiences, but most significantly women had found ways of living that mitigated the effects of activism. This begs the question as to why? I believe this study indicates that research on activist practice needs to take into consideration the worldview and lifestyle of the individual rather than viewing activism as merely an activity. The primacy of relationship extends far beyond relational connection to the Earth as emphasised in the findings and by some researchers. The importance of connection

between mind, body, spirit, and Earth highlighted by Pesek et al. (2006), and the women, indicates an understanding and orientation of interconnectivity. The discernment between being connected with the Earth versus an orientation of interconnectivity or unity consciousness which often includes relationship with the Earth, need to be explored in further research. I would suggest that the experience of interconnection, as described above, is spirituality. This is taken up in the following section.

Spirituality and Unity Consciousness

One of the strongest features of the findings was that spirituality was front and centre, though not necessarily explicit, in these activists' stories. All of the women spoke of interconnection or the web of life, and it was pronounced in many of the interviews. English & Gillen (2000) define spirituality as an "awareness of something greater than ourselves, a sense we are connected to all human beings and to all of creation" (p. 1). Ray (2008) suggests spirituality is a process that deepens, like consciousness: it "is the depth and subtlety of our person and of our experience that we gradually uncover" (p. 14). Former monk and post-Gandhian activist, Kumar (2000) speaks to the connection of interconnectivity and spirituality:

The tigers and the snakes and the worms and the butterflies are all our family members. If you knew that any activity you were doing would hurt your mother or your father or your sister or your brother, would you do it? No, because they are your family members. Spirituality brings you the unity of the Universe. (p. 46)

The women in this study revealed a strong understanding and relational worldview, one of interconnectivity and unity consciousness. Tacey (2010) suggests the shift from duality consciousness to unity consciousness is the shift from ego-centric to eco-centric and in that shift

an ethic of care for the Earth arises from our internal being. The findings also suggest that the women in this study have a critical spiritual discourse which

has the ability to call into question immoral positions and inhumane practices that marginalize and terrorize people in an attempt to defrock them of their inalienable humanity. It is the poignantly inclusive nature of the spiritual that allows questions of inequality, fairness, justice and ethics to arise from its core. (Dantley, 2005, p. 4)

This eco-centric or critical spiritual discourse was also indicated in women's stories of being called to activism and the ways in which they lived with, and on, the Earth.

Across the board the women spoke to unity consciousness in different ways. Of particular interest, three of the women acknowledged this via their oneness with the Earth: "I am the Earth" (Lana Marie), "I am Bird Creek" (K. Linda) and "I am the Earth" (Claudia). This is reminiscent of Reis (2010) when she writes

Deep in my own body I know and remember that our bodies—the earth's, the creature's, my own—are made up of precisely the same elements. I sense how profoundly interconnected and inevitable this relationship is. We are all evolving together, for better or worse. (p. 101)

Korn (1999) indicates this as an innate way of being "lost to the urban mind" (p. 146). The findings suggest that this innate way of being or as Korn refers to it as the "indigenous mind" (p. 146), is not lost. Tacey (2010) also speaks of the innateness of the indigenous mind. He cites Some (1993) who claimed

There is an indigenous person within each of us. The indigenous archetype within the modern soul is in serious need of acknowledgment. A different set of priorities dwells there, a set of priorities long forgotten in Western society. (p. 338)

The emergence of the “indigenous mind” in this research study, albeit in less than half of the women, suggests that there is potential to reclaim or reconnect with this innate part of self. This offers hope for future research as well as for activism and education praxis. I would argue that further inquiry is needed to ascertain the context which allows for this to re-emerge. However, while this is relevant, it begs the question: How do we foster unity consciousness when the underpinnings of Western ways and practices of living are founded on inequity and values stemming from worldviews such as Christian (e.g., Lacourt, 2010) that sponsor hierarchical beliefs embedded in their doctrines? How do we foster unity consciousness and devotion to Earth when to do so may be in conflict with an individual’s either explicit or implicit beliefs around devotion in general, or devotion to God? How do we foster unity consciousness when people often misinterpret and simplify the meanings and implications by understanding unity consciousness as putting animals and Earth’s needs above, or on a par with, human needs, many of whom are suffering, as a way to subvert the complexity of how do we live in harmony? This in itself is counter to cultural discourses that uphold the belief that humans are superior, therefore, have more right to live. “What we see in western culture is a strong dissociation due to its assumed superiority over, and separation from, nature and its own natural instinct” (Lacourt, 2010, p. 84). This line of (ir)rationality serves to maintain a stronghold on practices of disconnected rationality by using fear (e.g., of job loss) as economic justification to supersede issues of sustainability and protection of the global eco-system. The issue of economics often co-opts the discussion of sustainability, creating either/or options and subverts the conversation of change for the privileged Western world. In general it would appear that the majority of the privileged are not willing to radically shift ways of living off the Earth and continue to treat current levels of consumption as a right. These challenges indicate the complexities inherent in

eco-systems and underscore the challenge of living in ways that honour and work towards sustainability that the women of this study have undertaken. Embodied practice suggests the link between embodiment and unity consciousness which redirects the trajectory of how the West understands and approaches the crisis of fragmentation evidenced in the ecological quandary: “the greatest resource for change is not our *guilty conscious* but our potential for recovery of a shared unitary consciousness” (Tacey, 2010, p. 330, italics in original).

Returning to the relevance of the strong findings of interconnectivity and unity consciousness, it is also significant as this perspective is in short supply in the scholarly literature, apart from those who write from a spiritual lens (e.g., Abram, 1996; Bai & Scutt, 2009; English, 2000; Griffin, 1978; Keating, 2008; Ray, 2008; Rosenhek, 2006). Further, it is lacking in areas of adult education and environmental discourse. Research exploring the links between unity worldview, activist practice, and embodiment are warranted: Further inquiry into how they link, emerge, and if they correspond to greater sustainability, may offer insight to rectifying the fragmented ways in which Western culture operates. Furthermore, inquiry into the indigenous mind and the connection between embodiment and connection to the Earth is recommended. Finally, research into the connection between unity conscious and spirituality, as well as spirituality and embodiment, are warranted.

Activism and Spiritual Practice

One of the profound findings of this research was the strong connection between activism and spirituality. As a researcher I was surprised by the depth and scope of this finding. While I myself am oriented in this way, I was taken aback firstly with the consistent orientation of activists towards interconnectivity, and secondly, the strong correlation between spirituality and

activist practice. Researchers Dillard et al. (2000) would not have been surprised by the level of spirituality revealed in this inquiry as evidenced by the following quote:

research then is a revealer of things past hidden – the voices of women and the oppressed, the inherent biases, motives and ideologies of the researcher, the social and political context of research work which implicates the very notion of the research project – and the oft silenced spiritual voice. (p. 448)

This statement rings true for this research. The connection between activism and spirituality adds to the scholarly literature that explores this connection (e.g., Keating, 2008; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Wane, 2011). Like the activists in this study, the participants in Kovan & Dirkx's (2003) study "clearly perceive[d] their involvement in and commitment to environmental work as grounded fundamentally in a sense of the spiritual" (pp. 113-114). However, these findings contrasted with Whelan's (2000) study, which found "the interpersonal, creative and spiritual aspect of effective activism (heart) appeared to have been overlooked by the participants to some extent" (n/p parenthesis in original). Further, Whelan suggests that "The 'heart' dimension of activism appears to be given more credence in the women's and peace movements than in the environment movement" (n/p). This suggests that the significance of these findings may act as a springboard for further research.

The women's orientation to interconnection, and sense of being part of the web of life, exhibits an orientation that Keating (2008) articulates as a relational worldview where spirit is infused in all that exists, creating what she calls "radical interconnectivity" (p. 60). This is significant in that surely all environmental activists do not have a relational worldview: Further research is called for to explore this anomaly. It is also of significance, though to a lesser extent, that the self-reflective nature of the women's stories reflects a propensity for inner work, or

critical self-reflective observation and practice, which is a necessary component of spirituality (McDonald, 2002). King (2006) and Maxey (1999) suggest that reflexivity is part of activist practice and Sivaraksa (2002) warns us that without reflective, critical inquiry into the self, there is a greater possibility of greed, abuses of power, delusion, naïvety, and violence to emerge. Keating (2008) suggests that spiritual activism emerges from the individual and moves into an outward expression where personal and collective issues are revealed and challenged with the intention of change. This brings into question and perhaps suggests the necessity for critical self-reflection to be included in education including post-secondary academic programmes such as adult education, leadership, environmental studies, counselling psychology, human and social development, policy making, social work, and disciplines which lend themselves to training those who are already oriented to working to the betterment of our world. Furthermore, this suggests a need for awareness training in activist communities.

The particular discovery that nine of the thirteen women identified their activist practice as part of their spiritual practice adds to the literature and calls for a more in-depth inquiry. This spiritual activism combines the inward reflection of spirituality and the outward action of activism. Keating (2008) calls it “spirituality for social change” (p. 54) that engages “private concerns with social issues” (p. 55). She suggests that there is an academic spirit-phobia whereby scholars are reluctant to align themselves with matters of spirituality, in specific to activism, as “references to spirit, souls, the sacred, and other such spiritually inflected topics are often condemned as essentialist, escapist, naïve, or in other ways apolitical and backward thinking” (p. 55). This may explain the lack of research. Lara (2005) suggests that we “must speak and act in spite of the fear” (p. 30). She suggests:

As scholars committed to social justice, it is our responsibility to self-define and redefine, speak and act in spite of the fears caused by real threats. As Lorde reminds us, whether or not we speak and act, the fear may still remain. We cannot wait for the luxury of fearlessness or completely “safe” conditions. (pp. 29-30)

This call to action, to face and topple our fears, is necessary, for the backlash against researchers and scholars delving into matters of spirituality only serves to maintain the status quo and the fractured world in which we and our sentient brother and sister species are challenged to live.

Activism: A Way of Life

The research findings indicated that activism had become a way of life, meaning the activists had integrated and continued to integrate their ways of living to be congruent with their belief systems and values which informed their activist practice. In this way, it resonates with the often heard statement in feminist counselling and psychotherapy, that the personal is professional. Within the following three sections I look at identity as activist, the challenge of anger in activism, and activist communities.

Identity as Activist

The issue of identity raised itself in a complex and even perplexing way in this study. The research call (flyer) clearly indicated that I was looking for women eco-activists. In our initial contact that descriptive was also articulated orally, yet in the interviews, four of the thirteen women stated that they did not in fact identify as an activist; paradoxically, they referred to the work they did as activism. In reflection, I believe this speaks to the development of an activist identity and the complex ways in which we label or brand ourselves (which also calls for

further inquiry). But it also raises a number of questions around the negative connotations of the word activist. And if this is the case, why does it not stand true for the term activism? One answer may be that two of the women were new to activism, while another three were not currently engaged in specific activism. However, given what the participants have been saying about relationships and connections the answer may lie in the fact that all four were not connected to an activist community. That is, all four were individuals making changes in their own lives, but they lacked connectivity. Scholars Merriam et al. (2003) indicate there is a significant link between one's practice and their identity formation but perhaps more importantly, a correlation between identity and our relationships in and of community. This may also bring us back to English's (2000) notions of embodiment and dialogue, the communicative act as something that contributes to how we identify ourselves in relation to others.

The Challenge of Anger

Passion and anger are powerful and rousing emotions that often incite action towards change or protest of an unjust world. Harnessing the powerful nature of anger is both difficult and necessary for activist practice. Claudette beautifully articulated the energy that anger creates: "anger is hot and righteous and passionate and directed. It's a warrior." Most of the women in this study who had been involved in activism for well over a decade spoke to this and identified that over the years their activist practice transitioned from acting from anger to working from a place of love or compassion. They spoke to the realisation of the harm to self that came with action fueled by anger and the necessity to live and act from a place of working towards rather than against. Kovan and Dirkx (2003), suggest that the transformative process "represents the struggle for consciousness in a largely unconscious world" (p. 107). For

example, K. Linda's pledge to walk away from fights with her allies speaks to an evolution of her consciousness: "They can try to fight with me. I will turn my back and walk away....I'm not going to fight with you, I'm not going to waste my precious energy, battling energy with someone that's on my side." Keating (2008) asserts that "the us-against-them stance we have employed in oppositional forms of consciousness seeps into all areas of our lives, infecting the way we perceive ourselves and each other" (p. 65). The high costs of anger can be seen in the body and within interpersonal relationships. Anger in the body creates an over-active or chronic stress response which contributes health issues and an orientation towards anger within activist communities create behavioural issues are apt to create interpersonal stressors within the organisation.

Rosenhek (2006) suggests there is an inner revolution whereby one brings loving kindness into their daily life and it "must take place if any of our good efforts are to be binding" (p. 92). Zoe spoke directly to this when she said "we cannot create peace from anger." Claudette also spoke to this, highlighting the necessity of trusting one's feelings and having faith that things are "coming together" when working towards change from what she calls a "joyful dreaming perspective" rather than being motivated by anger. This perspective she speaks of reminds me of English's (2001) understanding of integrated spirituality:

A fully integrated spiritual person reaches beyond his or her self and acknowledges the interdependence of all of creation, appreciates the uniqueness of others, and ultimately assumes responsibility for caring and being concerned about other humans and the natural order. (p. 30)

Her words describe the women of this inquiry. I see this transformation as a psychospiritual evolution of consciousness. In my first interview, Claudette spoke to this developmental

process or stage for activist development. From that initial interview I asked questions about the developmental process as an activist as part of the inquiry to which there was a strong consensus. There was general agreement from the women: Doran suggested that activists had to experience the raw energy and the motivator of anger before coming to a consciousness of love. In a related way, Kovan and Dirkx (2003) found that

Environmental activism furnishes a context that evokes ardent passions, emotions, and commitment, hence providing a context for deepening our understanding of the emotional and spiritual dimensions of transformative learning, its relationship to a sense of calling, and the essential mystery at the core of this process. (p. 102)

They refer to this as “being called awake.” In a similar way, Sivaraksa (2002) suggests that “by awakening ourselves to suffering, we can work to change it” (p. 41). This suggests that there is a developmental process for activists that necessitates further inquiry.

Of interest, Claudette spoke of having to sit and tolerate the emotion that came when she withdrew her anger. She spoke of sadness and through acknowledging her own feelings towards what she witnessed, she was able to expand the way in which she viewed and engaged her role as activist. It was as if the anger provided a shield to the sadness and overwhelm that was coupled in her activist practice. By dropping into the body and sitting with the emotion, her need for anger to protect and defend lessened but the passion for change and justice remained faithful.

In a seemingly opposite trajectory, Jacquie offered another perspective of coming to a place of using her anger to expand her activist practice. She spoke of the outrage and the willingness to put her body on the line which was a recent change in her practice. Jacquie considered this shift as growth as she was no longer willing to subordinate her bodily information. It seems to me that both these women listened to their embodied wisdom to guide

them in the next phase of their practice and we cannot assume that the evolution of consciousness is a linear process or looks a certain way. Further, it seems we need to take into consideration the context of the activist's life as for some, feeling and expressing anger comes quite easily, and for others, it is a challenge. I believe that what has been revealed in these findings is that over time and with consciousness embodied awareness, the body leads women eco-activists to transform themselves and to move into greater consciousness in how they practice their activism and relate to anger, love, and compassion. Additionally, it seems necessary to mention that there are different types of anger, or more specifically, different ways one can be with it internally. In this way, we must expand our view of what an evolution of consciousness in activist practice might look like. Further inquiry into the ways in which embodiment, anger, consciousness, and activist practice intersect are called for.

Activist Communities

Connection with others and communities provided support, safety, comfort, and a sense of belonging for most of the women in this study. This is reflected in the literature that suggests community creates a container to cope with and diminish the challenging aspects and emotions inherent in activist practice (e.g., Gaarder, 2008). The findings also indicated that disconnection from others and within communities caused pain, disappointment, loss, and created longing for connection. Highlighted further were the destructive dynamics within activist communities which were characteristic in many of the women's experiences of activism.

It is critical that activist communities foster supportive networks and Capra (2007) suggests that healthy human communities need to reflect nature in that sustainable ecosystems are built upon interconnectivity and symbiosis: "To be sustainable, a human community must be

designed so that its way of life, technologies, and social institutions honour, support, and cooperate with nature's ability to sustain life" (p. 10). The findings reflected this. Women who spoke of being supported by communities in their activist practices attributed positive effects while women who shared experiences of a lack of support, sabotage, or toxic and/or division within activist communities spoke of the negative effects. This concurs with scholars such as English (2000), Thomashow (1996), and Whelan (2000), who all speak to the efficacy of relationship to mitigate negativity.

Scholars indicate the challenges inherent in working within activism and activist communities (Gaarder, 2008; Gardner, 2005; Macy, 1991, 2007; Thomashow, 1996; and Whelan 2000); one of the prevalent challenges being the psychological impact. Thomashow (1996) concludes that it is "evident that people need support for their feelings and concerns...and they are deeply appreciative of discussions about whether and how to present such challenges" (p. 142). Further he asserts that there is a lack of reflection or discussion of the psychospiritual implications of environmental activism in formal environmental practitioner training programmes or organisations. In order to consider the ramifications, activists need healthy connections that are built upon emotionally safe relationships where people feel heard, supported, and seen. In addition, healthy communities need to find ways to negotiate diversity, share power, and communicate with respect, kindness, and clarity. Whelan (2000) indicates that most environmental movements do not adequately invest in training and skill development for their activists, and that there is a lack of providing adequate communication and collaboration skills, including non-violent or compassionate communication. Furthermore, returning to Capra's (2007) assertion about sustainable human communities (cited above) it follows that

people need training and skills not only to envision but work towards building healthy organisations.

I turn now to the final chapter. In this I speak to my own process in the research and suggest some understandings and implications.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

The over-arching findings of this research indicate that embodied knowledges counter fragmented ways of living, foster sustainable practices, and offer guidance and direction to live more harmoniously with, and on, the Earth and to practice activism. This study reframes the concept of embodied knowledges within a female environmental activist context. Moreover, this study expands our understanding of women's embodied ways of knowing and illuminates our understandings of how bodies can guide and show alternate ways of living, and practising activism, that are sustainable and universally available, for all one needs is a body and consciousness. This inquiry further added to the growing awareness of body/mind connection and unity consciousness with a focus on activists, educators, and others interested in finding ways to live with, rather than on, the Earth.

In the following chapter I speak to my own process of the research – where I struggled, what I would do differently, and where I currently am with the material. I then speak to how this research might inform activists and the public at large.

My Experience as Researcher

In entering into the research I hoped for growth for the participants and for myself. I wanted to increase my awareness of how we access, rely upon, and engage with our embodied knowledges and understand more deeply how our bodies are inextricably at the centre of our world informing and being affected in the most mundane to the most extreme moments. In the second art-making focus group I made a prayer flag that spoke to my understanding of



embodiment or embodied knowings and the interconnectivity of all things. Here's what I shared about the meaning of my prayer flag. *As I was doing this one I was thinking about the dimensions of embodiment and how it looks*

different for each of us. Life can be seen in such black and white terms and yet in this black and white there is so much differentiation. The red is the love that finds its way through those spaces of rigidity that we see in the world and I think that in the red, there's a way in which it contrasts but softens. When I was thinking about the different layers of embodiment I was thinking about the different layers of the Earth. There's not one way that is more important than another—there's not one layer of the Earth that's more essential than another. And the circles were about different ways that we're connected and we cross over and these little pieces fall over to create their own circles of communities.

This research and the process which I as the researcher went through was rich and varied. I found myself challenged and growing in ways that were unanticipated. Most delightfully I was surprised at the profound insights, emotions, and learnings I experienced. Above all, this research offered me an expanded capacity in which to hold hope for all species and for a return to the ancient ways of living and knowing from an embodied place. In the summer of 2009 I created a piece of art that helped guide this process. The title is, *When silence springs from the fire it cannot be broken.* (see next page).

As I sat with the women their words echoed within me, stirring my emotions, as they did for Drumheller (2007), “I began to experience how the words of another woman resonated through me, as though it was my own story or the story of my sister, my mother, my best friend, and my enemy” (p. 28). Their words invited me into resonance with their experiences and images emerged in my mind linking me to them and in turn to the land. The stories clearly articulated the overlap within the dimensions of embodied experience, illuminating elements of the undivided body where “knowing and being meet” (Todres, 2007, p. 20).

Inviting Art into the Research

It was important for me to invite art into the inquiry for my own process but more specifically as part of the data collection. In using arts-based inquiry the researcher can take the role of *witness* or *artist* in the research study (Higgs, 2008): in either position, the researcher’s subjective experience is instrumental to the process as in feminist methodology. In the individual interviews I asked the women if there was a tool or instrument to describe their body in activism – as you’ve read, the metaphors were powerful and the images often more revealing than words. Because this research has some psychological orientation, and



art can be used to study psychological meaning (Higgs, 2008), it made sense to me to use metaphor and image to elicit rich description from the researched about their difficult-to-describe felt sense (Higgs, 2008). Connection with image and metaphor engages the embodied, creative (right) brain, linking the unconscious, “Images provide access to the psyche” (Dirkx, 1998, p. 141). In the art-making focus groups art was also used to symbolise their body’s relationship to eco-activism. The prayer flag became the container for this story to emerge, for parts that had been missed or unasked in the interview to come forth and to be known. Minge (2006) beautifully captures this, “Art expels the inside out and takes the outside in” (p. 118). It was also a way to access and use embodied knowledges to inform this study. This intimacy with the self, and the researched, also invites embodied experience, a powerful way to explore unimagined possibilities (Minge, 2006).

Beyond this, the use of art, particularly in creating a collective visual representation, the prayer flag, felt important as I would have something visual to represent this inquiry. I made a commitment to bringing this work beyond the academy. I felt entrusted with this knowledge and will do some community work and presentations to ensure the information was not merely an academic exercise for my benefit. I hope to use the prayer flag as a visual tool to invite people’s curiosity to come forth as they learn about the findings of this inquiry. In this way I was incorporating elements of what Potts and Brown (2005) call anti-oppressive research: “An anti-oppressive researcher means that there is a political purpose and action to your research work...an explicit, personal commitment” (p. 255).

Challenges as the Researcher

One of my greatest challenges was experiencing how embedded in dualistic thinking I am

– facing my own enculturation and colonisation. In many ways it is a habitual and learned way of being in and with the world. I would catch myself endlessly breaking things down into groupings, themes, or categories in order to explain, question, or grasp concepts. For example, I believe that the way in which we live reflects our values and then I think about values as psychological, political, and spiritual. I believe this is reflective of dualistic rather than unity consciousness which is precisely what I am calling into question as a useful and sustainable way to think and live. The prevalence of dualism was evidenced throughout this work in my thinking, the questions I asked, and the ways that I link and compartmentalised data. The challenge of being aware and having that translate to being different is a widely pervasive experience. Bai & Scutt (2009), citing Zimmerman (1998), speak of this in the literature: “Knowing that on a quantum scale we interpenetrate and merge with other life and objects does not give us necessary experiential insight to move us beyond a dualistic mode of perception towards a nondualistic experience” (p. 98). This was not unexpected for me. In the early stages of the research I wrote:

In rethinking my research question, I do not believe that I can separate the body from the embodied unconscious for the research, as I would surely be (consciously) collaborating with the hegemonic dualities rife in the embodiment literature. Certainly, I will fall prey to my own enculturation and (mis)understandings of how I am located in and of the body. As I move forward in delineating my research approach, I hope to construct a place in which I can avail myself fully of and into the epistemological sites of the body. It is the unification of the multidimensional body that encourages and supports me to move ahead with this work. It is my hope that this work will offer some insights into how the body can offer alternative, more sustainable ways of engaging in activism on behalf of the Earth and all of its species. It is also

my hope that this work will reveal ways in which we can engage in activism in harmony and alliance with the rhythms of the Earth.

In writing my candidacy exams the reality emerged of how challenging embodied writing would be for me. I offer two brief, italicised, reflective pieces to further contextualise:

For weeks, I have immersed myself in the literature to write these papers. I reread part of the first paper I wrote tonight and as I was reading it I kept thinking, “Oh, I wrote this...these words are so, so foreign.” And I realised these words are from my head—in my head—they are not in my body. In fact, I have had to ignore my body for the past month in order to complete this. And this makes me really sad. (January 2010)

“Disembodied writing is intertwined not just with academic writing conventions but with language itself” (Ellingson, 2006, p. 301). “In writing disembodied, systematic accounts...we gain mastery over material....When we do this, we often detach ourselves from the knowledge we produce, and we deny our body vulnerability” (p. 308).

And I think that is really the crux of what I am interested in not doing...For me, this exam process has really illuminated what I am seeking to explore. So this isn't meant as a declaration of “I've worked so hard, my body hurts, and I'm sad.” This is a declaration of uncertainty — of how to engage with this process in a truly congruent way, where I don't have to ignore myself in order to find out how the body impacts and is impacted by eco-activism. Illuminated here, in my opinion, is the cultural affliction and irony: that when we ignore our bodies (due to pain, which of course creates more pain, or due to emotional distress, or because it's not convenient or encouraged), we lose access to the multiple epistemological sites that are within or connected through the body, including elements of the embodied unconscious.

Knowing firsthand the struggle I was facing to engage in the writing of the material in an embodied way was not new. I was familiar with the dread of forcing myself into states and ways of being that had become more and more distant the more embodied I became. I had a lot riding on this - writing from an embodied state was not only necessary for congruence with the work but, even more so, part of my own personal transformation. From the beginning I trusted this research journey would be transformative for me – finding ways to be embodied and write for the academy has been an on-going challenge throughout my studies. Embodied writing is more than an appropriate research skill, it is “a path of transformation that nourishes the enlivened sense of presence in and of the world” (Anderson, 2001, p. 83). By bringing the experience of the body to writing and reading we relay or experience “human experience *from the inside out*” as the body is an inner realm of knowledge (Anderson, 2001. p. 83 italics in original).

I see research as a craft and believe researchers need to be embodied in order to produce authentic work, as does Anderson (2001). The theoretical basis of embodied writing validated the ways in which I myself process and write, allowing space for the process and expansion to emerge, being present, deeply connected, and aligning with the slower, natural rhythms of my body, being open to and attuned to the wisdom of my body, and listening for resonance and allowing the reverberation of the resonance to guide and shape my work. This way of working felt natural and for the most part organic. I was hindered or faced challenges in working in this way when I put myself on a timeline or felt pressured to produce and I became impatient with the process. Time and again I was reminded that forcing or trying to expedite my process was futile. Time also proved to be an illuminator of that which is yet to be known.

Hindsight reveals what we cannot see at the outset. This is conventional wisdom. With regards to the methodologies, methods, and questions that created the framework of the study

retrospect has offered some significant realisations for me. At the outset I was concerned about my own embedded duality and how that would interfere with the study. What I did not realise was that studying embodiment and embodied knowledges would be so challenging in terms of coming to a common understanding and articulation of what embodiment is and what embodied knowledges are. I was spared the gravity of this until the final discussion chapter where I had to grapple with how I made sense of the data, how it concurred with, expanded, or stood apart from the literature. My struggle became, how do I authentically represent this information when I believe that just because we can articulate it does not mean we experience it in an embodied way? This created internal strife for me as the researcher. My experience was that many of the women spoke of being embodied or articulated their understanding of interconnectivity, however, my experience of sitting with them was that there was a range in the level of embodiment which in some ways contradicted what they were telling me. My experience and skills as a somatic psychotherapist and educator avails me a strong capacity of attunement to assess embodiment. This created a challenge for me. On the one hand I believe in the validity of one's experience, and on the other hand, I am aware that the embodiment is a complex experience and one often is not aware of the level of disconnect until more connection or embodiment is gained (much similar to my experience of colonisation or duality thinking). This illuminates not only the challenge of researching embodiment but the ways in which I went about researching it. Embodiment is not static. I don't know that it truly can be measured and, therefore, it is hard to research. It has been necessary for me to remember that my job as researcher is to represent what the women shared with me and within that is their valid lived experience of being embodied. In retrospect I would ask the questions, *what is your relationship with your body, the Earth, and spirit in relation to your activist practice?*

I would also consider changes to the selection process particularly in the realm of self-identified as activists. The issue of four of the women not identifying as activists in the individual interviews aside, two of the women would not have met my criteria if I had put one forth. This in itself calls into question who gets to decide who is an activist, which is why I chose self-identification at the outset.

In the introduction I wrote that I entered into this programme with the desire for decolonising myself, or returning to a unity consciousness that I believe is innate to our existence. At the outset, I was unable to articulate this and the words came as I travelled through the underbelly of this research. My seeking extends far beyond the time and scope of this thesis. In May of 2007 I was at an eco-conference in Calgary. Joanna Macy was a keynote as was David Orr. I connected with like-minded people. One of the most pivotal moments was when I heard Karsten Heuer, another keynote at the conference speak. He is a storyteller and an activist. He shared the story of his 5 month journey with his wife, Leanne Allison, in 2003 when they migrated for 5 months across the Yukon and Alaska with the endangered Porcupine Caribou Herd. He spoke about his transformation – about how he could hear the Earth thrumming; about how he was linked with the caribou, with nature. The room was mesmerised – people had tears streaming down their faces. His storytelling called many awake – to the longing of living within an embodied communion with the Earth. His story awakened this longing within me. This is what I have articulated as becoming decolonised - the return to the indigenous mind.

At this final leg, I have some more clarity that I'm really talking about embodied consciousness. This has made all the difference in reorganising my thinking and in my being able to articulate this work in a new way. The awareness of embodied knowledges these women

shared are about consciousness and go far beyond embodied awareness as most often written about in academic literature.

As I sit today, January 28th, 2013, I let the emotion move within me. As I struggled through the last two sections of the thesis, I have come to know in an embodied way, or within the depths of me, that this journey has revealed the next. The words of Jungian writers have resonated, inspired, and spoken to me throughout this project. I have savored their words as if they were words of my kin. In my seeking, I have explored many alternative practices, spiritual and otherwise, with the hopes to access and live from, as Jung would call it, my indigenous mind. I feel as though I have found the next path to walk. When I reflect on my journey to date – my own frontline activist work, my dedication to studies of embodiment, trauma, and embodied ways of knowing and healing – I see that this project brings everything together for me, and hopefully for you as the reader. I live with the trust that as I learn and grow I will increase my capacity to be a force of change in our world, our precious, precious world. I have felt isolated during this process. I wrote that the women's voices sojourned with me this summer while I wrote the findings chapters, but that is only half of the story. The isolation was tempered by my felt sense of being supported by the Earth. This is reflected in prayer flags I made in the third and fourth art-making gatherings, almost a foreshadowing of what was to come. The third prayer flag I made speaks to my experience of being supported by the Earth as well as how activist practice is messy. Here's what I shared:

The border is representation of the Earth and how I feel held by the Earth – the beauty and the exquisiteness of nature. The blue is being held by the water....This piece is really about how I feel very much held and buoyed by the Earth and the water and what's



alive and how I feel really so blessed to be able to see this in the Earth despite the mucky parts in the edges. The sparkly red inner border is the glam(orous) part which wasn't quite as glammy as I wanted it – which is kind of apt for activism. It may look all glammy but it's actually kind of messy and the thing about this is that this piece of white has glue all under it and it's symbolic in that it's not perfect. In activism, and I guess in life, you make do with what it is and you find ways that it works.

The fourth prayer flag I made had a similar yet simpler theme of being supported. *About five or six years ago I drew a picture of hands holding the Earth and this image came to me again. The hands and the fabric is the bigger energy that holds the Earth...and it's also the energy creation of lava, of fire that holds the Earth and I chose the color because it is*



fiery and it is dark and it looks rich to me. Both of these are really which support me – this is me the purple one with the heart. It's just a simple thing that represents what holds me so that I can do whatever it is that I do.

The support and isolation I experienced in some ways reflected many of the women's stories of activist practice — I believe this offered a lived experience of this research which deepened and sophisticated my understanding of the data.

This inquiry is not complete, literally or figuratively. It continues to move within me – I suspect the seeds that have been planted and tended will continue to bloom for years to come – perhaps forever changing my inner landscape. Before closing I wish to speak to some of the implications I see from this research.

The research problematised the common experience of disembodied or fragmented living commonly experienced in the West. It showed that embodied practices including things like yoga, meditation, and being in nature and connected to people can help mitigate the challenges inherent in activist practice and counter identified barriers to embodiment as described in the previous chapters. But most importantly, it revealed three profound findings in terms of embodied consciousness or embodied knowledges. Firstly, all of the women had deeply intimate connections with the Earth and these relationships were felt and known through their bodies. Secondly, all of the women held a relational worldview of interconnectivity, and with their unity consciousness came an awareness that the body is a site of knowledge. Further to being a site of knowledge, the experience of unity consciousness brought at least five of the women into connection with which Jungian scholars refer to as the indigenous mind. Finally, it is profoundly significant that many of the women considered their activist practice to be part of their spiritual

practice. I will speak to these three significant discoveries, in the following section, from my own perspective.

The intimacy and relational qualities relayed in the women's stories of connection to the Earth were inviting. I felt as if I could relate to the depth of care and love of which they spoke – at times their stories sounded mythical, magical, and I wanted to say, “stop, let's go there now.” And in a way, their stories brought me there. I could imagine the trees speaking, the mountains whispering, feel the land holding me, and remember being at home on the Earth. The women's connections to the Earth go beyond an ethic of care to a relationship built on trust and in some unarticulated way, equality. It was as if these women practiced activism not because the Earth was in need of help, or was helpless, rather that their activism was an extension of their caring relationship. There was reciprocity. This reciprocity has stayed with me. I think about how fragmented living interrupts reciprocity and creates relationships of exchange. I wonder how we foster deep relational connectivity when many people struggle so much to be present and attuned to the present moment with themselves, never mind in relationships. I recall the trees telling Suzy, “we'll be okay” and I need to drop into my own trust that nature heals. It heals what we humans cannot. In terms of how this might translate into the world, I am just starting to see how this framework of reciprocity might reframe our experiences and expectations of activist practice, psychotherapy, and education. I wonder how our world and lived experiences might be different if reciprocity of care was cornerstone.

The deeply intimate connection to the Earth was closely linked to the relational worldview of interconnectivity that offers links to the spiritual realms of life which can be profoundly sustaining and life-giving. I was surprised that everyone had strong orientations to the web of life and wondered if it was because I was speaking to eco-activists. Linked to this

embodied worldview that decolonises was the emergence of the indigenous mind which holds incredible potential for all who are disconnected and living as colonisers on North American (and other) lands. This emergence holds the promise of coming to know our own indigenous ways of being without appropriating other cultures. Susie O’Keeffe (2010) speaks to this when she says: “There is a formidable, unconscious conceit in believing that we of one culture can adopt the sacred rituals and rites of another in order to fulfill our own needs” (p. 65). This revealing of the indigenous mind by the women was re-affirming for me and links by Jungian scholars proved to deepen my understanding and innate knowing. This work has implications for aspects of my own life which will inevitably translate for others in their own embodied ways. My sense of interconnectivity has been strengthened and I feel more comfortable talking about it in my psychotherapy practice and teaching. Below is the first of four prayer flags I made in the



art-making focus groups. Here is

how I described it to the group:

This is me and on many days I actually feel like I’m a tree, or maybe know that I’m a tree. This is the Earth here and there is a way in which humans have brought a battle on to the land and the land just loves us back

despite the warfare we enact. Probably the strongest way that I see myself doing activism these days is my work as a trauma therapist and it’s about helping people find their own embodied sense of being the tree and connecting to nature to help them heal. And so whatever it is that I’m

involved in I think about how it is me standing there with these great roots and that I'm actually really in the Earth and it actually supports me to do the work that I do and that I find that other trees in the world support me and bear a bit of fruit once in a while. This experience (the inquiry) validated and strengthened my own awareness and experience of interconnectivity – this has proven invaluable for me and I believe for others—particularly those who have been deeply harmed through human relationships. To plant the seeds that the Earth is part of us, we are part of the Earth, that the trees stand with us, the wind whispers, and that we might be deeply held, offers a safe haven to heal when the human world feels so unpredictable.

In a related finding, the inquiry also revealed that most of the women considered their activist practice to be part of their spiritual practice. This finding surprised me – not because I don't relate but because I think many people bring their fragmented lives into the ways in which they practice spirituality and taking action for social- and eco-justice requires a level of consistency that most people do not have or do not choose to invest. In reflecting on the findings, I see how spiritually oriented the women really were. The body proved to be the doorway into realms far beyond our rational, logical, reasoned mind and availed guidance, wisdom, and knowledges that supported not only personal transformation but activism for collective change. I know this to be true in my personal and professional life. I wonder how this information might take a stronger foothold, how it might be introduced into mainstream consciousness, and who might be the transmitters of this knowledge. How might they relay the unused and often unknown potentiality of embodied knowledges and spiritual connection with Earth and activist practice. I have to trust, to drop into my own faith, that the Earth is calling and people are listening. I am recalling a commencement speech Paul Hawken gave in 2009 at the University of Portland that someone emailed me.

There is invisible writing on the back of the diploma you will receive, and in case you didn't bring lemon juice to decode it, I can tell you what it says: You are Brilliant, and the Earth is Hiring. The earth couldn't afford to send recruiters or limos to your school. It sent you rain, sunsets, ripe cherries, night blooming jasmine, and that unbelievably cute person you are dating. Take the hint. And here's the deal: Forget that this task of planet-saving is not possible in the time required. Don't be put off by people who know what is not possible. Do what needs to be done, and check to see if it was impossible only after you are done.

Personally, I think the same message is written on the back of your grocery bill.

For the Reader

By now, reader, I anticipate that this has been an embodied read for you – that your body has been a faithful companion and spoken to you along the way. I hope that you have touched in and allowed this work to strike a chord within you...and that the stories of love, care, and tenacity offer the promise of whatever you might need to deepen your connection to yourself and to the Earth. Above all, reader, I hope that as you stand and stretch and take a moment to listen, you will know that “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.” (Roy, 2003).

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Appendix



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Certificate of Renewed Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Lisa Mortimore	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER: 10-265
UVic STATUS: Ph.D. Student	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 07-Jul-10
UVic DEPARTMENT: EPLS	RENEWED ON: 08-Jun-12
SUPERVISOR: Dr. Darlene Clover	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 06-Jul-13
PROJECT TITLE: Eco-Activism and the Body	
RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: None	
DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: None	
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL	
<p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.</p> <p>Modifications To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.</p> <p>Renewals Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.</p> <p>Project Closures When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.</p>	
Certification	
<p>This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.</p>	
 <hr/> <p>Dr. Rachael Scarth Associate Vice-President, Research</p>	

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Certificate Issued On: 08-Jun-12