

Motherhood and Environmental Activism

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of a
Master of Arts in Ecology and Spirituality

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Abstract

This research focuses on why and how mothers become environmental activists, including discussion on motivations for performing environmental activism, and the types of activism mothers choose to participate in. The study is important to recognise what stereotypes and assumptions are often made about mothers who perform environmental activism, and to move forward into more non-dualistic thinking. The research approach adopted in this dissertation includes a review of academic literature, a study of primary sources related to the subject, interviews with mother activists, and self-reflection. The findings from this research provide evidence that mothers' motivations and choices in performing environmental activism are often quite complex. Assumptions that mothers perform activism due to care for their children and future generations should be questioned, because often women are activists before they become mothers. The main conclusions are that differing generations of mothers, differing environmental concerns, and being in different social situations can all influence why mothers perform environmental activism, and that there are varying reasons for choosing different types of activism. The choices made often are due to circumstances surrounding familial responsibility, concern with how the mother is viewed by other people, or external societal pressures placed upon the mother.

1. Introduction.

When I turned 30 I was living in Thailand. I decided to return to the UK and put down roots, so that I could have a family. My desire for having a child had grown. Eventually I settled in Glastonbury, Somerset, where I met people who were knowledgeable and caring about the environment. My activism so far had been mostly around women and children, volunteering at NGOs while travelling.

I learned about hydraulic fracturing (fracking), happening in the UK. Once I understood that fracking could be dangerous I felt, out of concern for my future child: 'if fracking came to Somerset I might have to move'. Being new to Glastonbury, I naively said to a member of Frack Free Somerset that they must get a lot of support from the people of Glastonbury. She replied: 'no, they are all navel gazing', meaning they are concentrating on spirituality rather than environmental campaigning or activism. I began to question whether those 'spiritual people' cared about environmental degradation in a different way to activists. What is the best way that I, as a potential mother, could affect change for my child's future?

This began my enquiry into environmental activism, and led to the questions I will explore within this thesis. Firstly, as I had come to environmental activism through concern of my future child, I question whether other women came to environmental activism through similar concerns. What are the reasons a mother becomes an environmental activist? The first two chapters will enquire into this first research objective: to identify why mothers become environmental activists.

Motherhood and Feminism focuses on why mothers perform various feminist activisms. I argue that early activisms performed by mothers were feminist rather than environmentalist. Greta Gaard says that 'feminist research puts the lines of the oppressed (whether by gender, race, species, or other hierarchical systems enforcing inequality) at the centre' (Gaard, 2017, pp 116). This can be extended through concepts such as peace activism. Linda Forcey (2014, pp 355) sees the connection between women and peace as ancient, but this denies women's differences with

other women, and exaggerates differences with men. Ecofeminists of the early 1990s believe that women and nature are both 'threatened by the same enemy' (Roszak (1979) in Pompeo-Fargnoli, 2018, pp 1): patriarchy. Later the term 'patriarchy' was largely rejected for the idea of anthropocentrism, acknowledging women as part of the problem: 'human centredness as a whole was killing the planet' (Gaard, 2017, pp 118). I conclude that there is value in a feminist movement for justice as a whole, but associating women with peace, and men with destruction, should be rejected in favour of non-dualistic ways of thinking.

Motherhood and Environment concentrates on why some mothers have concern for the environment, and why some perform environmental activism. I argue that it is not necessarily the case, as it was for me, that concern for ones' child preceded environmental concern. Sara O'Shaughnessy and Emily Kennedy (2010, pp 558) suggest that women today, especially mothers, are more likely to display concern for the environment. However, this assumes that women are in socially defined roles as mothers, and that their concerns are primarily for their children, secondarily for wider society or environment: the 'eco-maternalist narrative' (Sze, 2017, pp 162). Another issue that concerns mothers is overpopulation. Cameron Butler sees focus on overpopulation as failing 'to criticize global capitalism for its role in human exploitation and ecological degradation' (Butler, 2014, pp 279). I conclude that issues affecting mothers are often framed through the eco-maternalist narrative, which is essentialist in that it assumes mothers care more for the environment. Overpopulation issues also focus on mothers and ignore other factors, particularly over-consumption. Environmental destruction can affect mothers through emotions such as love for ones' children, guilt for lack of action, and grief for environmental destruction, leading to a greater 'caring for the natural world' (Pompeo-Fargnoli, 2018, pp 2). Again, I cannot conclude that mothers emotionally show a greater environmental concern than men or other women.

The second two chapters investigate what specific actions mothers perform; whether different activisms are more or less effective than others; and why mothers choose specific activisms. This is the second research objective: to identify how mothers

perform environmental activism.

Motherhood and Activism discusses the forms of activism mothers perform and how they choose these actions. I argue that mothers can perform different activisms at different times of life, and that activisms usually associated with motherhood are often generalisations. The assumption that more women are engaged in micro-level activisms,¹ because their local lives are more concerned with 'human health and habitat' (Mellor, 1997, pp 127), can be questioned, as men also engage in these activisms. Also, many women perform macro-level activisms, such as direct actions (Capdevila, 2010, pp 534). Anneleen Kennis and Erik Mathijs regard that micro-level activisms fail to 'connect a person with real causes of climate change' (Kennis and Mathijs, 2014, pp 151). However, private activisms can be performed alongside more public actions. I conclude that there are various ways in which mothers perform activisms, and assuming they perform some before others is not always accurate. Their reasons for choosing activisms are often quite complex.

Motherhood and Sacred Activism explores how mothers incorporate spirituality into their various activisms, and why they decide to do so. I argue that current narratives of spiritual-based activisms associated with motherhood are assumptions, which in various ways can be detrimental to both women's liberation and environmental degradation. However, these sentiments can also motivate women to perform activisms. Sacred activism comprises both 'a metaphysics of interconnectedness and employs relational modes of thinking' (Keating, 2005, pp 242). There are many ways in which this is connected with motherhood, including concepts of Mother Earth or Mother Nature. Catherine Roach (1996, pp 55) questions the metaphor: associating earth with mothers could lead to further environmental degradation, because the patriarchal version of mother gives all and wants nothing in return. There are problems with the concept of nature connection as a whole. Robert Fletcher thinks that the term 'erects a physical separation between humans and the "nature" to

¹ Micro-level activism means small tasks or actions one takes during day-to-day life, making small changes within society. Macro-level activism is the larger campaigning actions or direct actions, aiming to make big changes within society (Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred, 2010, pp 143). Dissertation. Motherhood and Environmental Activism. Amy Martin. Student 1604164.

which they are then invited to reconnect by crossing back over this spatial divide' (Fletcher, 2017, pp 227), reinforcing the barrier between humans and nature. Concepts that women are more connected with nature, or are more likely to 'save the world' should be questioned. I conclude that while issues exist with associating motherhood with sacred activism, overall mothers can gain immensely through these narratives. Ultimately, 'Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation' (Keating, 2005, pp 242), and mothers have found beneficial ways of performing these activations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Motherhood and Feminism

Gaard notices 'From the start, feminism has been a movement for justice... feminist research puts the lines of the oppressed (whether by gender, race, species, or other hierarchical systems enforcing inequality) at the centre' (Gaard, 2017, pp 116). First-wave, or liberal, feminism of the 1960s to 1970s takes the position that 'women's differences from men are minimal and should be minimized in the fight for equality' (Forcey, 2014, pp 356). They reject traditional notions that women are inferior, more closely related to nature than men, and their roles are solely as mothers and nurturers (Plumwood, 1993, pp 21-22).

This relates to socialist or humanist-Marxist feminism, which sees woman as producer or worker (Plumwood, 1993, pp 27). This is not necessarily radical, as 'women of colour and working-class women have always been in the 'kitchen' and 'the workforce' (O'Reilly, 2014, pp 193) at the same time. First-wave feminism attempts to fit women into a masculine model, presented as the gender-neutral ideal human: man (Plumwood, 1993, pp 27).

From the mid-1980s, second-wave feminism conceived this as detrimental to motherhood, because in reproduction women are essentially different from men (Forcey, 2014, pp 356). However, this reversal usually emphasises women as superior to men, giving rise to such statements as 'The Future is Female' (Plumwood, 1993, pp 31). Some ecofeminists could be considered second-wave feminists, believing that women and nature are both 'threatened by the same enemy' (Roszak (1979) in Pompeo-Fargnoli, 2018, pp 1). First-wave feminists criticise this as essentialist, assuming that 'those of a particular race, gender or other category share the same traits' (Pratt, Howarth, and Brady, 2000, pp 537).

Early feminists sometimes performed peace activism, rejecting absorbing women into a masculine culture of misogyny and death. They consider that 'for women, the

real task of liberation is not equal participation or absorption in such a male dominant culture, but rather subversion, resistance and replacement' (Plumwood, 1993, pp 30). Forcey sees the connection between women and peace as ancient: peace symbolised by the giver of life. However, this denies women's differences with other women, and exaggerates differences with men (Forcey, 2014, pp 355). Sara Ruddick recollects that mothers usually support war if it means employment for their children, and references to mothers losing their children to war often ignore the fathers (Ruddick, (1990) in Richards, 2009, pp 300).

From the early 1990s, third-wave ecofeminism rejects parts of both first- and second-wave feminisms. Val Plumwood notices that in both cases, dualistic assumptions are made. First-wave feminisms reject assumptions that women=nature and man=reason, but do not question that nature is inferior and reason is superior. Second-wave feminisms reject assumptions that reason is superior and nature inferior, but do not necessarily question that woman=nature and man=reason (Plumwood, 1993, pp 33-34). Mary Mellor agrees that 'a radical approach to ecology would incorporate a fundamental reorganization of human-human relationships as an essential aspect of reformulating human-nature relations' (Mellor, 1997, pp 130).

In the 1990s the term 'patriarchy' was largely rejected for the idea of anthropocentrism, acknowledging women as part of the problem: 'human centredness as a whole was killing the planet' (Gaard, 2017, pp 118). Ruddick proposed retreating from the institution of motherhood towards examining the experience of mothering. Anyone can be a mother 'to the degree that they are committed to meeting demands that define maternal work' (Ruddick, 1990, pp 17). Now, in the UK at least, more mothers are insisting on motherhood combined with paid employment, that fathers are involved in childcare, that they can engage in activism and have a life outside mothering (O'Reilly, 2014, pp 189), realising that 'what a child needs is a free and happy mother' (O'Reilly, 2014) pp 192).

Since the 2000s feminist theorists have discussed 'intersectionality', a term meaning

'intersecting axes of inequality' (Sauer, 2018, pp 87). This concept relates to the interconnectedness of different oppressions due to gender, race, class, sexuality, age, and religion. It combines political movements, such as women's, queer, anti-racist, and worker's movements (Sauer, 2018, pp 87). This is another narrative that suggests the ongoing aim of feminism to reject all forms of repression.

2.2. Motherhood and Environment

Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term 'ecofeminism', calling for an ecological revolution grounded in establishing new relationships between man and woman, humanity and nature (Ling, 2014, pp 104). First-wave feminists contest linking women and nature as regressive and insulting: 'images of women as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals' (Plumwood, 1993, pp 20) do nothing for women's liberation. However, many women around the world found this connection of woman with nature helpful. Ecofeminism became a list of worldwide activisms, most of which saw women protecting their local environments (Moore, 2011, pp 7).

Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva believe 'The concept of... *mata* [mother] has automatically got connected with the whole movement' (Mies and Shiva, 1993, pp 5). Mothers are more likely to display concern for the environment (O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy, 2010, pp 558), because they may be more affected by environmental issues such as soil fertility reduction, chemicals, pollution (Ling, 2014, pp 105) and the various effects of climate change (Rylander, Odland, and Sandanger, 2013, pp 1). Susan Logsdon-Conradsen and Sarah Allred agree: 'There is nothing quite like the mothering instinct kicked into overdrive and funnelled into the effort to protect and preserve the land, air, and water for our children' (Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred, 2010, pp 142).

However, Butler suggests that 'When the fundamental explanation for why people should care for the environment is 'for the sake of the kids', the strategy can fall flat with people who don't identify with the heteronormative narrative' (Butler, 2014, pp 279). Reasoning that women are more physically affected by environmental

degradation assumes that women are in socially defined roles as mothers: concerned primarily for their children, secondarily for the wider society or environment. The 'eco-maternalist narrative' (Sze, 2017, pp 162), which 'makes explicit links between women's mothering and caring disposition and their unique propensity to care for nature' (MacGregor (2006), in Ey, 2020, pp 6), obscures 'the many ways in which women's resistance to natural resource extraction is multiple, contingent, more-than-gendered, and more-than-human' (MacGregor (2006), in Ey, 2020, pp 1).

A major environmental issue concerning mothers is overpopulation. George Monbiot rationalises that overpopulation is a huge issue, but sees the rise in global consumption as more important: 'economic growth this century could be 32 times as big an environmental issue as population growth' (Monbiot, 2008, pp 20). Women are caught up in this ethical dilemma precisely because they are birthing children. Issues focus on the global South, positioning women both as victims and as threats to Northern lifestyles, due to their potential to give birth. Again, this fails to acknowledge that people other than mothers need aid by focussing on heteronormativity and females (Butler, 2014, pp 279-280). Subsequent policies have sometimes led to human rights abuses, such as those arisen from Agenda 21.² Butler condemns Agenda 21 as racist and sexist; reinforcing current hierarchical structures; and failing 'to criticize global capitalism for its role in human exploitation and ecological degradation' (Butler, 2014, pp 279).

Alyson Pompeo-Fargnoli sees our separation from nature as the major cause of psychological disorders and human suffering. Many of our problems, emotional and physical, arise because we do not live in harmony with the world. Sanity, a healthy psyche, is 'dependent upon our reconnecting with and caring for the natural world we are part of' (Pompeo-Fargnoli, 2018, pp 2). This echoes Jem Bendell's *Deep Adaptation Agenda*: 'climate change is... an indicator of how our human psyche and culture became divorced from our natural habitat' (Bendell, 2018, pp 19). This has

² Agenda 21 is a climate change document drawn up at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 (United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, 1992).
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led to 'inevitable collapse, probable catastrophe and possible extinction' (Bendell, 2018, pp 19).

Bendell notices 'a growing community of people who conclude we face inevitable human extinction and treat that view as a prerequisite for meaningful discussions about the implications for our lives right now' (Bendell, 2018, pp 19). This leads to a curious dual state, in which our deepest grief can be expressed. Phyllis Windle suggests that when expression of environmental grief is supported through rituals of mourning and celebration, it can help people 'reaffirm faith in ecology and evolution' (Windle, 1995, pp 143). While nature connection narratives may be inaccurate, and even harmful (Fletcher, 2017, pp 226), they can also positively influence people's motivations towards performing activism.

2.3. Motherhood and Activism

Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred discuss different ways in which mothers perform activism at the micro-level, which includes mothers expressing themselves on internet platforms, discussions with friends at social gatherings, and making environmentally-friendly purchasing decisions. Macro-level activism includes participating in grassroots activist groups, campaigning and direct action (Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred, 2010, pp 143).

These terms may reflect definitions of light-, mid-, and dark-green ecology, which are different ways in which people react to environmental degradation. Patrick Curry defines light-green ecology as where 'consideration for the nonhuman is only indirect, insofar as the well-being of humans is affected' (Curry, 2011, pp 61). Mid-green, in which 'there is consideration for nonhuman individuals' (Curry, 2011, pp 61), often manifests as animal-rights activism. Dark-green can be defined as 'ecocentric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable' (Taylor, 2010, pp 13).

It could be that more women are engaged in light-green activism because their local lives are more concerned with 'human health and habitat' (Mellor, 1997, pp

127). This is not necessary negative, as Graham Harvey recalls that 'The personal is political', so 'using ecologically "friendly" washing up liquid... recycled paper and local products begins to affect wider economic and political realities' (Harvey, 1997, pp 127). However, micro-level activism may put more pressure on overburdened mothers (Plumwood, 1993, pp 23).

O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy expand micro-level activism to *relational activism*: 'attending protests and public action campaigns relies on an overlooked and underrecognized set of activist behaviours that are not "direct action"; we call these relational activism' (O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy, 2010, pp 555). They believe 'when women form networks of individuals who can be called upon to engage in conventional activism, the very act of forming and maintaining a network constitutes relational activism' (O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy, 2010, pp 563-564). The 'acts behind activism' (O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy, 2010, pp 555) are often performed by women, whose political activism can be 'curbed or limited' (Capdevila, 2010, pp 533) due to marriage and childcare duties. Direct activism is 'dismissed as something for those without such responsibilities' (Capdevila, 2010, pp 533).

This contrasts with lists of ecofeminist activism (Moore, 2011, pp 7), and historical figures frequently show women as political leaders and instrumental in grassroots movements. For example: 'As far back as Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, we have accounts of women intervening in politics... On a more grassroots level, women were involved... in the anti-slavery movement... and the civil rights movement... in the Greenham Common protests' (Capdevila, 2010, pp 530). Mellor acknowledges that 'women provide much of the grassroots support for environmental campaigning, but fall away when organisations become more formal and bureaucratized' (Mellor, 1997, pp 127).

Kennis and Mathijs regard that micro-level activism fail to 'connect a person with real causes of climate change, the political and economic system' (Kenis and Mathijs, 2014, pp 151). The best way to affect change is to challenge the status quo, through direct action (Kenis and Mathijs, 2014, pp 152). Some mothers see their

duty as both a mother and an activist is to be fully involved in direct action. Rose Capdevila interviewed a mother at the Newbury Bypass protests: 'involvement in the road protest was her responsibility "as a mother."... she argued that a "good mother" is one who teaches her children to be aware of and involved in "the struggle"' (Capdevila, 2010, pp 534). However, Ruddick questions assumptions about 'good' mothers: 'An idealized figure of the Good Mother casts a long shadow on many actual mothers' lives' (Ruddick, 1990, pp 31).

The Earth First! Movement encourages activists to put their bodies and lives at risk to defend the biosphere (Mellor, 1997, pp 132). Where do mothers' bodies fit into this collective organisation? Capdevila thinks that 'the involvement of mothers normalizes political involvement through their very subscription to ordinariness' (Capdevila, 2010, pp 534). However, I consider that performing direct action challenges this. Rich describes the stereotypes of mothers as pure and peaceful versus mothers as impure and dangerous (Rich, 1997, pp 34): both assumptions about mothers can be seen in direct action narratives.

2.4. Motherhood and Sacred Activism.

Peter La Coura *et al.* discovered six different understandings of the word spirituality among people in Denmark: '(1) positive dimensions in human life and well-being; (2) New Age ideology; (3) an integrated part of established religious life; (4) a vague striving, opposed to religion; (5) selfishness; and (6) ordinary inspiration in human activities' (La Coura *et al.*, 2012, pp 63). These practical understandings can be incorporated into AnaLouise Keating's definition of spiritual activism:³

a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics, a way of life and a call to action. At the epistemological level, spiritual activism posits a metaphysics of interconnectedness and employs relational modes of thinking. At the ethical level, spiritual activism includes specific actions designed to

³ I will use the terms *spiritual activism* and *sacred activism* interchangeably. Dissertation. Motherhood and Environmental Activism. Amy Martin. Student 1604164.

challenge individual and systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of social injustice. Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation (Keating, 2005, pp 242).

Themes often surrounding spiritual activism include non-violence and being of service. Ruddick (1990, pp 157) implies that non-violent engagement is a prominent aspect of mothering practice (rather than being intrinsic to mothers). While many mothers struggle with non-violence (Ruddick, 1990, pp 31), Ruddick has often been struck by 'resilient, non-violent mothers under considerable provocation in difficult circumstances' (Ruddick, 1990, pp 163).

Gandhi's word *ahimsa* means 'not injuring any living being, whether by body or mind' (Godrej, 2012, pp 441). Through environmental activism 'every breath we take and every decision we make is a pledge of service and allegiance to Gaia' (Harding, 2009, 274).⁴ However, the common metaphor of Mother Earth could be 'potentially liberating or simply a rationale for the continual subordination of women' (Warren, 1996, pp xv). Associating earth with mother could lead to further environmental degradation, because the patriarchal mother gives all and wants nothing in return (Warren, 1996, pp 55).

Another aspect of spiritual activism includes religious practices: prayer, pilgrimage and ritual (La Coura *et al.*, 2012, pp 74). Harvey mentions that 'some Pagans go beyond meditation to symbolic action. If they cannot actually stand between a rainforest and a lumberjack... they might plant a seed of the next apple they eat in the hope that not only will it grow, but that a rainforest seed will grow too. The action combines imagination, intention and a first step in the direction of a reforested planet' (Harvey, 1997, pp 127).

⁴ James Lovelocks' (1960s) Gaia Theory tells the story of the world as a singular organism: Gaia, or Mother Earth (Harding, 2009, 274).
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Examples of mothers performing spiritual-based activism include the women's peace camp at Greenham Common, connected to the Goddess Movement (Feraro, 2016, pp 226), and the Fridays for Future climate strikes and Extinction Rebellion demonstrations. Both include a range of rituals underpinning actions (Kidwell, 2019, pp 1). Ideas for ritual often come from ancient traditions or Indigenous cultures. Ralph Metzner implies a major change in environmental treatment will not arise 'unless supplemented by a recovery of ancient traditions of initiation and ritual celebration and a strong dose of ecological literacy' (Metzner, 1995, pp 63).

A further aspect of spiritual activism is nature connection. Harvey describes animism as: 'the understanding that the world is a community of persons, most of whom are not human, but all of whom are related, and all of whom deserve respect' (Harvey, 2019, pp 80). Judith Chen-Hsuan Cheng and Martha Monroe understand how 'Children's connection to nature, their previous experience in nature, their perceived family value toward nature, and their perceived control positively influenced their interest in performing environmentally friendly behaviors' (Cheng and Monroe, 2012, pp 31).

Fletcher (2017, pp 226) rejects emphasis on Connection with Nature (CWN), because the phrase reinforces dualisms between humanity and nature, and displaces attention from larger political and economic issues, which should be the main focus of environmental concern. Elizabeth Dickinson agrees: 'the core issue lies in how psychological, interpersonal, and cultural fracturing promote disconnection in the first place, leading to the notion that nature is outside of humans who suffer from decreased contact with it' (Dickinson, 2013, pp 328).

Another aspect of spiritual activism is awareness of environmental issues in daily life. For example, intentional communities challenging the status quo and resisting social norms (Jarvis, 2017, pp 435). Another example is diet and attitude towards animals, such as 19th Century women challenging the use of 'plumage', or wearing feathers from exotic birds in hats; and 20th Century vegan feminists and ecofeminists trying to end animal suffering in scientific research, beauty product industry, and food

production. Recent studies have emerged such as animal studies and post-humanism, positioning 'humans as but one among many life forms on the planet, challenging the myth of human superiority' (Gaard, 2017, 116-119).

3. Methodology

Research conducted for this thesis was threefold. Firstly I explored primary sources including memoirs, blog posts, YouTube videos and activist organisation websites, and reviewed the academic literature.

Secondly I performed interviews, the participants of which are detailed below. I used a semi-structured interview method, meaning I had questions in mind to explore with the participants, but mostly let them tell their stories and let the conversation unfold naturally. Tom Wengraf's method of semi-structured interviews is: 'a deliberate half-scripted or quarter-scripted interview: its questions are only partially prepared in advance (semi-structured) and will therefore be largely improvised by you as interviewer. But only largely: the interview as a whole is a joint process, a co-production, by you and your interviewee' (Wengraf (2001) in Etherington, 2004, pp 77).

Kim Etherington discusses the benefits of this, suggesting that a 'not knowing' (Etherington, 2004, pp 21) attitude is ideal for researchers who seek new knowledge rather than knowledge that reinforces dominant worldviews. During this research I aim to listen deconstructively, without assuming I know anything about what the participant wishes to say. Mies and Shiva discuss methodological guidelines for feminist research, in which neutrality and indifference towards research objects 'has to be replaced by *conscious partiality*, which is achieved through partial identification with the research objects... [which] enables a correction of distortions of perception on both sides and widens the consciousness of both: the researcher and the 'researched' (Mies and Shiva, 1993, pp 38). To this end, I have chosen to call the women I interviewed 'participants' rather than 'interviewees' because I consider this reduces the gap between myself as researcher and the participants as researched.

Thirdly, I supplemented this research with my own reflections. Etherington (2004, pp 27-28) advocates for the use of mutual discovery in research. She includes her own story in her book, viewing this as an honest way of documenting her findings and as

a moral and ethical approach to her work. While I agree, and include some of my own reflections in my research, I am aware that this will be limited, because I completed the interviews and the majority of the research while I was not a mother. I say the majority, because during my dissertation research I became pregnant, and my views have reflected the process of growing a child inside me. My own reflections will therefore be based on my feelings of being an impending mother and on my own experiences of activism.

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study are eleven women who live in Somerset, in the South-West of the UK, including Glastonbury, villages around Glastonbury, Wells, Yeovil and Bridgwater. They are all mothers and some are grandmothers, except Lucy, who has cared for many children and used to be a teacher. I included Lucy to hear a voice from outside of motherhood, and to potentially show that one can be 'motherly' without having a child. They all, as far as I know, identify as heterosexual women. These participants all have aliases to protect their identity.

The participants are: Elena (adult children, grandmother), a spiritual activist who formed the group *Changing Times*, exploring Jem Bendells' *Deep Adaptation Agenda*. Lucy (no children, grandmother age), active Druid and member of *Glastonbury Friends of the Earth*. Grace (adult child, grandmother) runs activist leadership workshops, follows Goddess Spirituality, and works with *Extinction Rebellion*. Robyn (two children in 20s), long-term activist, active at the 1990s Newbury Bypass road protests, campaigns for *Earth First!*, *Extinction Rebellion*, and anti-HS2 actions. Bee (two children in 20s), performs many personal activisms and co-founded *Frack Free Yeovil*. Alison (two children in 20s), enjoys low-impact, community living, and enquires into different spiritualities. Juno (three children aged 10 and 20s), began many campaign groups including *Frack Free Somerset*, and is currently working with *Stop Ecocide*. Violet (two children aged 13 and 21), co-founded *Southwest Against Nuclear* and has performed many direct actions. Carol (teenage child) lives off-grid, is a long-term activist involved in many direct action

campaigns and is a singer-songwriter for an activist band. Penny (child aged 6), is a yoga teacher, community land-owner, and member of local groups *Extinction Rebellion* and *Sustainable Wells*. Isla (young child), is part of the Goddess movement and co-founded the *Glastonbury Mothers Collective*.

Other campaigns these women have been collectively involved in include pro-social housing, anti-war, anti-racist, anti-fox hunting, anti-badger cull, anti-genetic engineering, campaigning against a local incinerator, various road protests and climate change actions.

The limits to this group of participants are that all of these women live in the same area, some of them know each other, and some of them know me to some extent. I have found, however, those who know me are likely to be more comfortable to go deeper into this enquiry.

4. Results and Findings

4.1. Motherhood and Feminism

4.1.1. Introduction

I begin my discussion with feminism because the original mother-activists discussed in scholarship were usually involved in feminist movements. Gaard understands that 'feminist research puts the lines of the oppressed (whether by gender, race, species, or other hierarchical systems enforcing inequality) at the centre' (Gaard, 2017, pp 116).

I give a full explanation of the progression of feminist thought in the literature review. To summarise, first-wave feminism takes the position that 'women's differences from men are minimal and should be minimized in the fight for equality' (Forcey, 2014, pp 356), rejecting traditional notions that women's roles are solely as mothers and nurturers (Plumwood, 1993, pp 21-22). Second-wave feminism saw this as detrimental to motherhood, because in this way women are essentially different from men (Forcey, 2014, pp 356), which liberal feminists reject as assuming that people of a particular gender 'share the same traits' (Pratt, Howarth, and Brady, 2000, pp 537). Third-wave feminisms argue that assumptions about differences between men and women are social and historical: all dualistic assumptions must be rejected (Plumwood, 1993, pp 33).

I argue that feminism is integrated into mothers' motivations for performing any kind of activism, including environmental activism. My participants were not explicitly asked about feminism, so the following chapter is my own interpretation. The first section, Feminist Mothering, focuses on the kinds of feminism articulated, particularly involving motherhood. Several participants mentioned feminism as part of their activism, discussed in the second section on Feminist Activism.

4.1.2. Feminist Mothering

Here I trace changes in feminist thought through the generations of my participants. The views of two Grandmother-aged participants allude to first-wave feminism, at a time when little had been communicated about other feminisms. Lucy is the only participant who does not have children, partly due to her academic lifestyle, partly because:

I saw womanhood as being about restrictions, not opportunities... you couldn't have the same freedom that men could have

Liberal feminism attempts to fit women into a masculine model, presented as the gender-neutral ideal human: man (Plumwood, 1993, pp 27). Perhaps Lucy chose not to have children because she realised that while she would be restricted as a mother, she would be more 'free' as an academic and worker. Grace believes this was far from unusual:

There've always been women who've chosen not to have children in the feminist movement... because they couldn't bring them into a patriarchal world

Liberal feminism may have been difficult for women who would rather concentrate on motherhood, as Elena recalls:

I wouldn't call myself a feminist because when I was bringing up my children at home on the farm my friends would question me, wondering why I wasn't 'liberated' and going to work, when I just wanted to be at home with my family

Second-wave feminism perceived this so-called 'liberation' as detrimental to motherhood, because in reproduction women are essentially different from men (Forcey, 2014, pp 356). Elena wished to be a stay-at-home mother, and Lucy

decided not to have children because of a perceived lack of freedom: both women struggled with liberal feminist pressures.

Elena's sentiments articulate a past situation, but they are echoed in the present by the *Trad Wives Movement*. A blog-post expresses:

There is a growing movement of women that are choosing to forego a career to stay home and take care of their kids, husband and domestic duties... an increasing number of young women don't feel that the feminist narrative speaks for them

(Trad Life Movement, 2020)

Some of these women have experienced a 'dreadful taste of the corporate world' (Trad Life Movement, 2020), and would prefer to go back to traditional ways. Some understand they can give better love and care to their children than strangers. Others believe that for generations 'men and women had a complementary and symbiotic relationship' (Trad Life Movement, 2020), with men as providers and women as nurturers: a reversal of liberal feminism similar to second-wave feminism. They explicitly reject all feminism, but view the dominant feminist narrative as the liberal one. Perhaps second-wave feminism is also rejected because of its emphasis on women as superior to men, giving rise to such statements as 'The Future is Female' (Plumwood, 1993, pp 31). A woman caring for a husband and possibly male children may disagree.

I question whether the *Trad Wives* could attract all classes and races, because the economic reality for many mothers is the necessity to both work and perform childcare. Two working mother participants, their children roughly the same age, express this economic reality. Juno recalls at a Woman's Liberation Conference:

A woman... said... 'feminism is a waste of time because we've got everything we need.' That statement is so believed by so many people who have been groomed by liberal feminism to believe that it's all fine now... feminism is not

about equality because there never will be equality under patriarchy⁵

This woman expresses liberal feminist beliefs, that women's differences from men have already been minimised (Forcey, 2014, pp 356). Juno stands more with second-wave feminism, acknowledging that because women are essentially different from men (Forcey, 2014, pp 356) they will never be equal inside the current paradigm. Violet thinks:

Women should be able to choose [lifestyles]... what I actually see is women haven't had a choice. As well as managing the home and managing the children, we've now got the work... on top of [everything else]

Again this is a critique of first-wave feminisms, sometimes based on socialist or humanist-Marxist feminism, which sees women as producers or workers, the same as men (Plumwood, 1993, pp 27). As 'women of colour and working-class women have always been in the 'kitchen' and 'the workforce' (O'Reilly, 2014, pp 193) at the same time, liberal feminism does not speak for all classes and races, but neither does the stay-at-home lifestyle the *Trad Wives* advocate for.

In contrast, the two participants with the youngest children have different views. Penny describes her life as a mother as equal to her partner. They both work part time, and share both parenting and activism work. Perhaps we are noticing here a move away from institutional motherhood. Ruddick examined the experience of mothering, considering that anyone, Penny's husband included, can be a 'mother', 'to the degree that they are committed to meeting demands that define maternal work' (Ruddick, 1990, pp 17). This is potentially a move towards third-wave feminism, arguing that all dualistic assumptions of motherhood must be rejected (Plumwood, 1993, pp 33).

Now, in the UK at least, more mothers insist on motherhood combined with paid

⁵ In the 1990s the term 'patriarchy' was largely rejected: 'human centredness as a whole was killing the planet'. (Gaard, 2017, pp 118)
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employment; that fathers are involved in childcare; that they can engage in activism and have a life outside mothering (O'Reilly, 2014, pp 189). However, this assumes that mothers can share parenting with a partner or someone else. Penny acknowledges this: she does not know many families who co-parent in quite the same way. Isla struggled with this as a single mother, and in consequence co-created the organisation *Mothers Collective* (Glastonbury Mothers Collective, 2019), in which mothers help each other with practical and emotional support. Their vision is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Glastonbury Mothers Collective Vision (Glastonbury Mothers Collective, 2019).

My own experience is closer to that of both Penny and Isla, and I am closer to them in age. Similar to Penny's situation, when we have children my partner and I are planning on sharing childcare and both continuing to work. This is both a conscious choice, as we both want to be involved in our child's life as much as possible, and an

economic reality that we need both our wages to survive. Therefore I understand Isla's sentiments: while she does not have her child's father around to help, we do not have family close by meaning childcare is solely our responsibility. Having a network of other mothers to help with support, empowerment, community and well-being is vital for bringing up a child, because 'what a child needs is a free and happy mother' (O'Reilly, 2014, pp 192).

4.1.3. Summary

My participants articulate their views on motherhood differently depending on their age and economic reality. Grandmother aged, Lucy as an academic chose not to have children, while Elena chose to stay at home with her children on the farm. Both felt tensions surrounding these decisions, Lucy because she may have made different choices had women been more 'liberated' and Elena because she was questioned by her peers for not being 'liberated'. The next generation of mothers, Juno and Violet, notice that women's liberation has perhaps not worked the way the liberal feminists hoped. Violet thinks mothers have too much pressure to both work and look after the house and children, while Juno thinks women will never be liberated under the current system.

The mothers with younger children think differently again, recognising that sharing parenting either with their partner or with other young mothers is the way forward. This does not mean that mothers of other generations did not share parenting, only that while speaking about her lifestyle choices, Penny did not mention the word 'feminism' at all. These younger mothers have had less liberal feminist influence and cultivate non-dualism to some extent, more similar to third-wave feminism.

4.1.4. Feminist Activism

Gaard says that 'from the start, feminism has been a movement for justice' (Gaard, 2017, pp 116). Several participants' motivations for early activism were centred around fighting against oppression in forms other than environmental. Grace states:

I was born an activist because to me, the heart of activism is... having a sense that something can be better and fighting injustice, oppression

Alison says:

I'm your babe in the 70s, left-wing socialist feminist. Active student and social worker union rep, bringing out social workers on strike... very much political action. Trade Union action against poverty, very involved in anti-apartheid

These two women from working-class backgrounds describe their early activisms in terms of fighting oppression, including women's liberation, trade union actions, anti-nuclear,⁶ and anti-apartheid. Two others expressed activist beginnings in a social context: Isla, who founded the *Mothers Collective*, and Juno, whose first concern was with social housing.

My own activist beginnings were social. As a traveller I volunteered in local organisations, usually helping children in developing countries. I returned home to the UK with a shock: the social and economic systems in place did not make it easy to reintegrate. My enquiry into *Ecology and Spirituality* during my MA motivated me to include social activism in future endeavours.

Carol considers that working-class women understand these oppressions better than people of other classes:

⁶ While I discuss anti-war and anti-nuclear under the branch of feminist social issues, both can also be considered environmental issues.
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The people who need to be leading the world are working-class women, because [they] think well about the group... about how everybody will do best...

Here, Carol touches on 'intersectionality', meaning 'intersecting axes of inequality' (Sauer, 2018, pp 87): the interconnectedness of different oppressions due to gender, race, class, sexuality, age, and religion. It connects political movements, such as women's, queer, anti-racist and worker's movements (Sauer, 2018, pp 87). Through mentioning class issues, Carol acknowledges where her own feelings of oppression originated and why she rejects oppression in all forms.

One of the early ways feminists performed activism was participation in peace movements, such as Greenham Common Peace Camp. Several participants cited war as motivation for activism. Penny states:

It wasn't until [my son] was about three years old that I felt comfortable enough to be able to look out and see what was going on in the world... I started... seeing the news and just crying. It was all of the [war] in the Middle East

Elena describes her experiences at an anti-Iraq war march, which she attended with her daughter:

That was an amazing day because there was everybody there. Grannies, babies, all nationalities, a million people and it was freezing cold. It was like being inside a prayer inside a song. That was a very powerful experience of an upsurge feeling from people, just ordinary people

Violet also attended an anti-Iraq War march, which was 'the first thing that probably came into my consciousness as a mum'. However, her anti-nuclear and anti-war sentiments went back to her childhood, growing up under the threat of atomic war. War was the first thing these mothers were concerned about for their children, or

that motivated their activism.

Forcey sees the connection with women and peace as ancient: peace symbolised by the giver of life. However, this simplification denies women's differences with other women, and exaggerates their differences with men (Forcey, 2014, pp 355); a second-wave feminist viewpoint. Radical (second-wave) feminists reject masculine ideals, understanding that 'for women, the real task of liberation is not equal participation or absorption in such a male dominant culture, but rather subversion, resistance and replacement' (Plumwood, 1993, pp 30). My participants reject the dominant 'culture of misogyny and death' (Plumwood, 1993, pp 30), through feeling anti-war sentiments or marching in anti-war demonstrations.

4.1.5. Summary

Most participants were involved in feminist activisms, dealing with injustices and inequalities between genders (*Mothers Collective*), classes (Trade Unions and housing associations), countries (anti-war and anti-nuclear), and races (anti-apartheid). I term all these actions 'feminist' because feminism positions 'the oppressed (whether by gender, race, species, or other hierarchical systems enforcing inequality) at the centre' (Gaard, 2017, pp 116).

Feminisms mentioned include: ecofeminism, which insists on participation by different classes and races, expressed through mentioning working-class activism; and second-wave feminism, which rejects women's participation in war. However, I consider that while anti-war sentiments are expressed here, they may not have a second-wave feminist core, because second-wave feminists reject perceived 'masculine' mindsets. To be truly non-violent, one must reject all dualism, including the opposition of male and female (Plumwood, 1993, pp 33-34), as Mellor advocates for: 'a fundamental reorganization of human-human relationships as an essential aspect of reformulating human-nature relations' (Mellor, 1997, pp 130).

I notice that when discussing Feminist Mothering, the participants seem to have

trouble expressing feminist viewpoints, other than rejecting first-wave feminism. When in consideration of Feminist Activism, however, their feminist views are clearer: fighting against oppression in all forms; coming together as women to fight against social injustice; and anti-war sentiments as motivation for activism.

4.2 Motherhood and Environment

4.2.1 Introduction

This chapter will expand on feminist activism to include environmental injustice and oppression. There are many ways in which mothers find their surrounding environment degraded or threatened, leading to environmental concern. I have identified two main areas in which mothers experience environmental concern: physical and emotional.

O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy suggest that women today, especially mothers, are more likely to display concern for the environment (O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy, 2010, pp 558). This could be for physical reasons, such as mothers being more likely to be affected by environmental issues (Ling, 2014, pp 105), climate change (Rylander, Odland, and Sandanger, 2013, pp 1), and population reduction pressures (Butler, 2014, pp 279). Emotional reasons for environmental concern include feeling grief and guilt when experiencing environmental loss. I question throughout the assumption that mothers experience these concerns more than other people.

4.2.2 Physical Reasons for Environmental Concern.

Mothers are perhaps more likely to be affected by environmental issues such as soil fertility reduction, chemicals, pollution (Ling, 2014, pp 105), and various effects of climate change (Rylander, Odland, and Sandanger, 2013, pp 1). Sandra Steingraber describes how her pregnancy led her to further exploration of environmental issues, and inspired her to take action. She realises:

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A woman's body is the first environment. If the world's environment is contaminated, so too is the ecosystem of a mother's body. If a mother's body is contaminated, so too is the child who inhabits it. These truths should inspire us all... to action

(Steingraber, 2011, pp x).

This echoes some ecofeminist thinking, linking women and nature.⁷ Françoise d'Eaubonne named ecofeminism, calling for an ecological revolution grounded in establishing new relationships between man and woman, humanity and nature (Ling, 2014, pp 104). Ecofeminist activism includes a worldwide range of positions, voices, and locations of activism (Moore, 2011, pp 6), in which Mies and Shiva believe 'The concept... of *mata* [mother] has automatically got connected with the whole movement' (Mies and Shiva, 1993, pp 5). Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred accept, 'There is nothing quite like the mothering instinct kicked into overdrive and funnelled into the effort to protect and preserve the land, air, and water for our children' (Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred, 2010, 142).

However, this assumes that women are in socially defined roles as mothers, concerned primarily for their children, secondarily for wider society or environment: the 'eco-maternalist narrative' (Sze, 2017, pp 162). Eco-maternalism 'makes explicit links between women's mothering and caring disposition and their unique propensity to care for nature' (MacGregor (2006) in Ey, 2020, pp 6). These generalisations exclude men and non-maternal women, and obscure 'the many ways in which women's resistance... is multiple, contingent, more-than-gendered, and more-than-human' (MacGregor (2006) in Ey, 2020, pp 1).

Juno expresses concern for her child by not taking him to a fracking site 'because of the pollution and the effect that might have on his physical body'. Juno was the only

⁷ First-wave feminists contest these links as regressive and insulting: 'images of women as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals' do nothing for women's liberation. (Plumwood, 1993, pp 20)

participant who directly expressed concern for her child's health in a given situation, but this concern had no bearing on whether she performed the activism. No participant directly alleged that their activism was performed to protect their children's health: they did not fit into the 'eco-maternalist narrative' (Sze, 2017, pp 162). However, perhaps it is given that the health of the planet and local environments will affect children's health. My own environmentalism began with concern for my future child's health should fracking become widespread in the UK, so I understand concerns that parents, not only mothers, have about the health of local environments being linked to the health of children.

Another physical issue concerning mothers is overpopulation. Women are caught up in this ethical dilemma precisely because they birth children. Fear of overpopulation focuses on the global South, positioning women, especially mothers, both as victims and as threats to Northern lifestyles (Butler, 2014, pp 279). This fails to acknowledge that people other than mothers need aid by focussing on heteronormativity and females (Butler, 2014, pp 280). Policies have led to human-rights abuses, such as those from Agenda 21,⁸ which Butler condemns as racist and sexist, failing 'to criticize global capitalism for its role in human exploitation and ecological degradation' (Butler, 2014, pp 279).

Monbiot acknowledges that while overpopulation is a problem, 'economic growth this century could be 32 times as big an environmental issue as population growth' (Monbiot, 2008, pp 20). Considering that my participants all live in the UK, population growth is not the most important issue. It was specifically mentioned once, when Lucy voiced sadness that she never had a child, but acknowledges: 'I wouldn't want to contribute to the population issue'.

However, consideration of whether it is right to have children arose frequently. Many activists question this, as Robyn recalls, at the Newbury Bypass protests her friends

⁸ Agenda 21 is a climate change document drawn up at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 (United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, 1992).
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would say 'I'm never having children because this planet is such a state'.⁹ The environmental movement Birthstrike¹⁰ has 650+ members, female and male: all decided not to have children. Their reasons include: the resources and time it takes to raise a child, meaning they cannot concentrate on activism; lessening their own impacts, or 'mothering-the-world' (Birthstrike, 2020); lessening the unjust high-consumer impact of the global North on the South; fearing what their child might go through physically and mentally due to climate change.¹¹

I notice Birthstrike reasoning in two participants' thoughts on environmental concern. Penny has decided to adopt her second child, for environmental and social reasons: 'not having another child, which is a massive carbon footprint, there's already a child out there that needs to be looked after'. Bee fears what her children might go through in the coming years, which motivates her activism:

What have I brought these human beings into the world to, when they grow up?... I've always felt a lot of pressure to do something rather than just let the world go to wrack and ruin

My own decision to have a child drove me towards environmental activism. Once you make the decision to have a child, there is a huge motivation to change the world for them.

4.2.3 Summary

Only one participant directly expressed concern about how an environmental issue might affect her son's health, but this had no bearing on whether she acted against that issue. However, all participants probably have their children's, or future generations, health in mind when considering wider environmental issues.

⁹ Grace states on page 25 that historically, many feminists also made the decision not to bring children into a destructive patriarchal society.

¹⁰ Birthstrike is closely connected with *Extinction Rebellion*.

¹¹ (Birthstrike, 2020) This last reason strikes me in particular as interesting, their concern for their yet-to-exist child is such that they believe it better for the child not to be born at all.

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The main physical issue that my participants face is the environmental impacts of having children, reflected in the movement Birthstrike. Two mentioned times in the past when friends had decided not to have children due to environmental or social concerns. Others seem concerned with their child's carbon footprint, or with what their children will face in the future due to environmental degradation. One expressed directly that this is a major motivation for her activism, and it is likely that others agree. One participant expressed reluctance to add to what she perceived as the problem of overpopulation. However overpopulation was not a big concern, because the participants live in the global North, whereas overpopulation issues generally focus on the South. They were more concerned with over-consumption.

4.2.4 Emotional Reasons for Environmental Concern.

Pompeo-Fargnoli sees human separation from nature as the major cause of psychological disorders and suffering. Many physical and emotional problems arise because we do not live in harmony with the world. Sanity, a healthy psyche, is 'dependent upon our reconnecting with and caring for the natural world' (Pompeo-Fargnoli, 2018, pp 2). Fletcher (2017, pp 226) sees this emphasis on nature connection as flawed, because it reinforces a dualism between humanity and nature, and displaces attention from larger political and economic issues, which should be the main focus of environmental concern.

While most participants were aware of environmental issues before becoming mothers, some found their thoughts and motivations changing when they became mothers. Violet communicates:

Having children... made me start to think about the world a bit differently and to have concern for what the world is that my children are going to inherit... it's incumbent on me to do something

Penny cites this as motivation for activism, fearing that one day her son will ask her

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what she did to help the environment, and she will not have an adequate reply. Grace wrote a poem called the Grandmother's Apology.¹² She describes how this poem impacted her listeners:

The youngsters love it because they're hearing [me] apologising on behalf of my generation... the older people... said: that absolutely touched me because I've not been able to apologise like that. I don't want all this guilt... But when we really go into the apology, you're not abasing yourself for it. It's just more, why didn't we do it? I'm so sorry... We didn't get it

Several mothers speak about how environmental concern can lead to deep grief, and how bringing a child into that is difficult. Alison describes her 'terrible fears for [her children] and horrific grief of the future'. Elena expresses the grief of older generations, who have witnessed the effects of environmental degradation: 'All this vanishing is so painful, all the land going under housing, all the flooding, and the change in the weather'.

I experienced deep grief after attending an *Extinction Rebellion* (XR) demonstration. The emotion came after acknowledging what extinction really means: killing beings before they are conceived. What dies is the ability to imagine a future generation of a whole species. It helped me comprehend how species that face extinction might feel.

Joanna Macy believes that grieving is important, because 'these responses manifest in our interconnectedness' (Macy, 1995, pp 258), bringing people together to organise political action. When the expression of environmental grief is supported through rituals of mourning and celebration, people can 'reaffirm faith in ecology and evolution' (Windle, 1995, pp 143). XR comprehend this, building into their campaigns opportunities to grieve together, such as funeral marches (Figure 2): 'facing feelings is not a substitute for political action, nor is it a distraction from

¹² See Appendix 1: The Grandmother's Apology. Dissertation. Motherhood and Environmental Activism. Amy Martin. Student 1604164.

action... We need to mourn *and* organize' (Farrell *et al*, 2019, pp 67).



Figure 2: Mourners placing soft toys of endangered animals into a coffin. XR Funeral March for Extinct Species, Glastonbury 2018. Photo by Amy Martin.

Several participants describe how grief or despair influenced their motives for activism: a positive feeling. Violet describes how despair is worse when she is inactive: 'I don't try and suppress the fear that I have for the planet... I spend much of my time trying to channel myself into taking some positive action'. Grace agrees:

I have accepted that we may be going into extinction... that doesn't make me feel I must give up and run away and bury my head, it makes me feel sad sometimes

Grace mentions Bendell's *Deep Adaptation Agenda*, which sees that 'climate change is... an indicator of how our human psyche and culture became divorced from our natural habitat' (Bendell, 2018, pp 19). This has led to 'inevitable collapse, probable catastrophe and possible extinction' (Bendell, 2018, pp 19). However, 'There is a growing community of people who conclude we face inevitable human extinction and treat that view as a prerequisite for meaningful discussions about the implications for our lives right now' (Bendell, 2018, pp 19). Grace suggests accepting extinction

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as likely, and then moving forward through 'nurturing, love, holding and resilience'. Perhaps for this to be successful, emotions such as grief and guilt need to be acknowledged in a healthy way.

4.2.5 Summary

Only one participant expressed how environmental concern increased upon having children: most were activists before becoming mothers. Therefore I cannot conclude that mothers show a greater environmental concern than other women or genders. However, several participants implied that concern for future generations motivated them to activism. Older generations may feel more guilt about why they did not act, younger ones may fear future guilt if they do not act.

Grief is a difficult emotion, mentioned by many participants. For some, it drives them to positive action; others see that expressing grief is vital for acting in loving, kind ways. Some view grief as important for creating community resilience for the inevitable environmental collapse. All participants who mentioned grief acknowledge it as a necessary emotion.

4.3. Motherhood and Activism.

4.3.1. Introduction

Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred (2010, pp 143) discuss different ways in which mothers perform activism at the micro-level, which will be discussed in the first section 'Relational Activism', and the macro-level, which will be discussed in the section 'Direct Action'. These terms may reflect definitions of light-, mid-, and dark-green ecology, which are different ways in which people react to environmental degradation.

Curry defines light-green ecology as where 'consideration for the nonhuman is only
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indirect, insofar as the well-being of humans is affected' (Curry, 2011, pp 61). This could also be seen as micro-level, or relational activism. Next is mid-green, in which 'there is consideration for nonhuman individuals' (Curry, 2011, pp 61), often manifesting as animal rights activism, usually involving campaigning and occasionally direct action. Dark-green is 'biocentric, or ecocentric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable' (Taylor, 2010, pp 13), often leading to macro-level, direct activism.

This chapter explores how my activist-mother participants articulate these different types of activism and the kinds of actions they choose to perform.

4.3.2. Relational Activism

This section reveals the ways in which my participants perform micro-level and relational activism. Micro-level activism includes mothers expressing themselves on internet platforms, discussions with friends at social gatherings, and making environmentally-friendly purchasing decisions (Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred, 2010, 143). Elena articulates micro-level activism:

My children have grown up with the values of treading lightly on the earth and not just buying stuff, we're a making do and mend household, most of the stuff is second-hand or third-hand

Penny hopes that discussing low-carbon issues with friends will encourage others to follow suit. Bee expresses herself on internet platforms, including signing petitions and through her Facebook group *The Little Things We Do to Save the Earth*:

All of those people making all these small changes becomes one big one... It's about being less of a burden on the planet

These are only a few examples; most of my interviewees expressed in some way that they consider the impact their own lives have on the planet and discuss these

things with others.

It could be that more women are engaged in light-green activisms because their local lives are more concerned with 'human health and habitat' (Mellor, 1997, pp 127). This is not necessarily negative, as Harvey recalls that 'The personal is political', so 'using ecologically "friendly" washing up liquid... recycled paper and local products begins to affect wider economic and political realities' (Harvey, 1997, pp 127). However, micro-level activisms may put more pressure on overburdened mothers (Plumwood, 1993, pp 23). The same could be said about other activisms, as perhaps mothers are more likely to perform environmental activism for future generations (Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred, 2010, 142). Penny remarks that a worryingly large portion of her friends:

Have either suffered from depression very recently, or anxiety... I couldn't tell you how much of that is to do specifically with the pressures of the climate emergency, but from the couple that I've spoken to, definitely... It's just another thing that they have to try and get right... really horrible pressure for them

O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy expand micro-level activisms to *relational activism*: 'attending protests and public action campaigns relies on an overlooked and underrecognized set of activist behaviours that are not "direct action"' (O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy, 2010, pp 555). The 'acts behind activism' (O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy, 2010, pp 555) are often performed by women, whose political activism may be 'curbed or limited' (Capdevila, 2010, pp 533) due to marriage and childcare duties. Direct activism is 'dismissed as something for those without such responsibilities' (Capdevila, 2010, pp 533).

My own activism probably falls into this category. While I have attended protests and marches, the majority of my activism has been through the local grassroots *Friends of the Earth*. Actions mostly concern informing the local community and creating community engagement, such as putting on film nights or campaigning for

a Plastic Free Glastonbury. Lucy is also a member of *Friends of the Earth* and Penny is a member of a similar group, *Sustainable Wells*. However, these groups and the acts behind them, while important, are perhaps less valued because, as Juno articulates:

If you are lying across the Heathrow runway or locked to a tripod... those people get so much more attention than Margaret sat her back bedroom, with a six month old baby fast asleep searching through the planning applications... we should be celebrating the back office woman...

O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy believe 'when women form networks of individuals who can be called upon to engage in conventional activism, the very act of forming and maintaining a network constitutes relational activism' (O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy, 2010, pp 563-564). Some participants have experience of creating and sustaining such networks, for example Juno, whose first major success she did mainly at home:

I could do Genetic Engineering... It didn't involve me going to a camp with a baby... I had tech skills... I could write a press release... I did a lot of political lobbying cos I had two small kids... I stopped GM crops getting planted in Somerset

Sometimes activists can feel guilty for not participating when their situation changes. Participants often expressed that direct action was important to them, but they restricted their participation due to consideration of their children. For example:

Three weeks after she was born there was a big gig for a Stop the War campaign in London... I stayed at home with the baby and we were both massively affected... it deepened commitment but there wasn't much time to do anything. In the first year I don't think I took part in any activism
Carol

Because I'm their sole parent... when I first started my job... [I thought] I get

arrested, I'm not sure [my employer] would be happy with me... that's what's paying for the house and everything that they need... it's taught me to have more self-control

Bee

I was very focused on the GM test sites... [my children] walked in looking all vulnerable and said 'mummy we want you back', so... I stopped doing any activism or campaigning

Juno

All these women decided to curb their activism in consideration of their children, but none stopped activism completely. They changed how they performed activism, focusing more on the micro-level or relational activisms: Carol maintains an extremely low-impact home and others continued to create networks and community. Many went back to more direct action later.

4.3.3. Summary

Many participants perform micro-level or relational activisms as part of their daily lives. Sometimes there is pressure to get things right, as Penny expresses about her friends. Other times they enjoy the challenge, such as Bee's '*Little Things*' Facebook page.

Some mothers may consider these activisms as less important than macro-level direct actions, but they still perform them. The last three examples above show that mothers perform different activisms at different times of their lives, according to what is possible around their current familial responsibilities. Not all have the inclination or the luxury to do direct action all the time. Therefore I consider that for mothers, no type of activism is necessarily better or worse. That they still consider the planet in their everyday actions, even with a tiny baby to look after, is remarkable.

4.3.4. Direct Activism

Kennis and Mathijs regard that micro-level activism fail to 'connect a person with real causes of climate change, the political and economic system' (Kenis and Mathijs, 2014, pp 151). The best way to affect change is to challenge the status quo, through direct action (Kenis and Mathijs, 2014, pp 152). Macro-level activism includes participating in grassroots activist groups, including campaigning and direct action. This can also be understood as dark-green activism, involving protecting ecological systems, such as the Newbury Bypass protests, or the entire biosphere, such as climate change activism.

Mellor acknowledges that 'women provide much of the grassroots support for environmental campaigning, but fall away when organisations become more formal and bureaucratized' (Mellor, 1997, pp 127). Juno embraces this 'falling away' when the organisation becomes larger: 'I've always been at the beginning of a campaign or started it. Once the movement's happening, I move onto the next one.'

Some mothers identify their duty as both mother and activist as to be a direct activist. For example, lists of ecofeminist activism show examples of more recent women's movements (Moore, 2011, pp 7), but historically 'As far back as Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, we have accounts of women intervening in politics... On a more grassroots level, women were involved... in the anti-slavery movement... and the civil rights movement... in the Greenham Common protests' (Capdevila, 2010, pp 530).

Capdevila interviewed a mother at the Newbury Bypass protests, who said: 'involvement in the road protest was her responsibility "as a mother."... A "good mother" is one who teaches her children to be aware of and involved in "the struggle"' (Capdevila, 2010, pp 534).¹³ While this lady states that to be a good mother one must encourage a child to be involved in 'the struggle', and some

¹³ However, 'An idealized figure of the Good Mother casts a long shadow on many actual mothers' lives' (Ruddick, 1990, pp 31).
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participants agree, most consider good mothering to be the opposite: protecting their children from the struggle.

Robyn would probably agree with her. We discuss bringing up children to respect nature:

I wouldn't call that activism, that degrades activists... that's responsible parenting and being a responsible human being... activism is you do something to actually stop something, it's not giving out leaflets, activism is where you are activating other people, it's not about you being active, it's doing something to either stop something happening or making other people think... activism is where you actually take a risk, whether it's your own personal liberty, you're stepping outside of any comfort zone

Carol perceives that performing direct activism means she is a good role-model for her daughter:

I am planning on getting arrested [at XR protests in London]... While she was little I wouldn't risk arrest... until I think she is ready, I see it as part of my empowerment of her... I want her to know it's not just her dad who does this, it's her mum, who cares as passionately and is as brave and can stand up, cos there is a role-model thing here for young women

Participants who have performed direct actions include Violet, who says:

Being a mum, there's a limit to how far I can take it... [However] it's funny, the amount of people that talk to me 'I've got children, I couldn't do that'... I'm a single mum and I still found ways to do it... You [find childcare] for an action

Robyn took her children with her to the Newbury Bypass protest camps. She considers this better for her mental health than had they not been there:

I'd try and shelter them, try to make things normal, try to keep things calm... I turned into camp mum usually... the girls would go off either with my mum or their dad and then I'd full sprint ahead. I didn't go into depression like most people... I think I was safe because I had children... there might have been absolute annihilation,... they just made me smile

A more extreme example is the Earth First! Movement, which encourages activists to put their bodies and lives at risk to defend the biosphere (Mellor, 1997, pp 132). Robyn became involved with Earth First! and agrees with putting one's body at risk to defend nature. However, she views the macho thinking behind this kind of activism as uncaring, often leading to burnout:

Our bodies were tools and we had to use those tools to stop a machine

...

That's all you can do, put yourself in front of a machine that is killing your mother, that is killing your earth

Where do mothers' bodies fit into this collective organisation? Capdevila thinks that 'the involvement of mothers normalizes political involvement through their very subscription to ordinariness' (Capdevila, 2010, pp 534), but this contradicts Robyn's example of putting her body in front of a machine. These contrasting images of mother as ordinary and mother as direct activist perhaps reflect differing views of mothers as pure and peaceful versus impure and dangerous (Rich, 1997, pp 34). Both stereotypes of motherhood could be used affectively within activism.

4.3.5. Summary

Mothers consider many things when performing direct actions. Issues such as: when to leave a campaign; how to perform direct action whilst being responsible for children; when do mothers feel they can be arrested for an action; how do mothers become good role-models for their children; and how are mothers' bodies used

during actions? Some mothers see direct action, including putting ones' body and freedom on the line, as vital, whereas others view less extreme activism as more appropriate when they have children.

This chapter contains contrasting and contradictory views, many questions that have no easy answers. These complex issues often have their roots in questions surrounding what makes a good mother; what are motherly duties concerning looking after both children and our planet; and whether seeing mothers performing direct action changes the mindsets of onlookers.

4.4. Motherhood and Sacred Activism

4.4.1. Introduction

Keating defines spiritual activism as:

a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics, a way of life and a call to action. At the epistemological level, spiritual activism posits a metaphysics of interconnectedness and employs relational modes of thinking. At the ethical level, spiritual activism includes specific actions designed to challenge individual and systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of social injustice. Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation (Keating, 2005, pp 242).

I will use the terms *spiritual activism* and *sacred activism* interchangeably. These definitions bring together the previous chapters through: feminism (chapter 4.1), as spiritual activism challenges social injustices; environmentalism (chapter 4.2), which includes non-human beings as worthy of ethical consideration; and activism (chapter 4.3), how ethics become ways of life and calls to action.

This chapter investigates how spiritual activism is articulated by my participants. As I did not directly ask my participants to define spirituality, I will utilise the study by La Coura *et al*, who discovered six different understandings of 'spirituality' in secular Denmark: '(1) positive dimensions in human life and well-being; (2) New Age ideology; (3) an integrated part of established religious life; (4) a vague striving, opposed to religion; (5) selfishness; and (6) ordinary inspiration in human activities' (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 63). As my study is based in another secular country, the UK, I apply these understandings of spirituality to the ways in which my participants articulate spirituality in regards to their own motherhood and environmental activism, but acknowledge that this list may not be exhaustive.

4.4.2. 1. Positive Dimensions of Human Life and Well-being.

This expresses 'positive human feelings, activities and characteristics' (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 72), such as 'gratitude, love, wisdom, meaning in life, light, identity, sharing, profound person, engagement' (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 72). This was articulated by participants in two ways: through acts of non-violent communication, and through acts of service and self-sacrifice. Both show love, sharing, and engagement.

Examples of non-violent engagement include Carol's actions at the Newbury protests:

Part of my effectiveness was communicating with the police and the security guards that had been hired to stop us from getting to the diggers... I wrote a song with the security guards, [it] went onto BBC2, which was really great, cos it was their words... someone wrote this verse 'chainsaws gleaming as the trees are screaming for mercy'... we've got to remember that we're on the same side

I consider this an example of spiritual activism, using Keating's definition of

'spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation' (Keating, 2005, pp 242), as Carol recalls the commonalities between activist and opposition, and utilises this to transform that relationship.

The miracle of non-violence in difficult circumstances is prominent among activists such as Gandhi, whom Carol mentions as one of her influences. Gandhi uses *ahimsa*, meaning 'not injuring any living being, whether by body or mind' (Godrej, 2012, pp 441). This has spiritual connotations, as Alison states that her Buddhist sentiments meant that she practiced not harming any living thing.

With regards to motherhood, Ruddick implies that non-violent engagement is a prominent aspect of mothering practice (rather than being intrinsic to mothers) (Ruddick, 1990, pp 157). While many mothers struggle with non-violence (Ruddick, 1990, pp 31), Ruddick has often witnessed 'resilient, non-violent mothers under considerable provocation in difficult circumstances' (Ruddick, 1990, pp 163).

Grace uses acts of service and self-sacrifice:

My sacred activism, it's always been through people... The sacredness and the activism is from the interconnectedness... Service is huge for me. Sacred activism is a form of service

Robyn views protecting each tree as a sacred act of service:

After the sacred is destroyed, activism kicks in... cutting down trees... the life force of the planet, this was something that was seen as so sacrilegious

Harding suggests that through environmental activism 'every breath we take and every decision we make is a pledge of service and allegiance to Gaia' (Harding, 2009, pp 274). Robyn connects this with motherhood:

When you have a child you are working for something greater than yourself...
that's true of activism... you are nurturing something outside of yourself

This association between mothering children and being of service to either community or the environment can be problematic. Ideas of Mother Earth and Mother Nature could be 'potentially liberating or simply a rationale for the continual subordination of women' (Warren, 1996, pp xv). Roach questions the metaphor: associating earth with mother could lead to further environmental degradation, because the patriarchal version of mother gives all and wants nothing in return (Roach, 1996, pp 55).

However, seeing Gaia as Mother Earth interconnecting all life also gives motivation for environmental activism. This is especially strong for those who consider the liberation of women as how the world will be saved. My participants mainly communicate this in terms of Indigenous worldviews. Violet mentions the Abenaki tribe,¹⁴ who say:

Your warriors, who are always gunning for a fight because they're trained to be warriors, don't give them the decision making power: they're gonna take you to war. The women and the mothers and the grandmothers made those decisions... because they know... what's gotta be done for the tribe and for the children.

Elena speaks about sacred activism being women's work, saying that 'bringing the sacred back into life... [is] work that only women can do, because... If women don't do this work, then something new can't be born that is trying to be born'. Her version of sacred activism comes through sitting in meditative circles with groups of women.

Alice Walker would understand Elena's wisdom: 'women united in close circles can

¹⁴ The Abenaki are a Native American tribe who live in Northeastern Vermont. (Abenaki Tribe, 2017)
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awaken the wisdom in each other's hearts... As bringers of life, the Grandmothers say, we have no choice but to join together and raise our voices for humanity and for our Mother Earth, for the sake of the next seven generations to come' (Schaffer, 2006, pp 144).

Some feminists would disagree with the sentimentality of women saving the world, another way of associating women with love and nurture. It is highly questionable whether women are more emotional towards environmental degradation than men (Ruberg and Steenberg, 2011, pp 5). Again this is an eco-maternalist narrative, positioning 'caring' women as closer to nature (MacGregor (2006) in Ey, 2020, pp 6). This excludes men and other genders from the narrative and puts further pressure on women who may already feel societal pressure (Plumwood, 1993, pp 23), by encouraging them to be 'of service'.

4.4.3. 2. New Age Ideology.

This includes 'healing, crystals, clairvoyance, alternative treatments, astrology, and energies' (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 73), including yoga, guru-worship, breath-work and meditation. In my introduction I mentioned my conversation with an activist who expressed a negative attitude towards this kind of spirituality, because these people are 'navel-gazing' rather than actively taking care of the planet. Others may disagree with this, for example Penny, who discovered a deeper love of Earth through yoga:

Spirituality was a bigger factor in connection with the earth than having a child... I link it heavily to yoga because of the concept behind yoga being... a union between the duality of life

While no participant mentions crystals, clairvoyance, and so on as part of their activisms, Isla mentions healing people through massage, and Alison, Elena and Grace use meditation as part of their spiritual and activist practice. I consider all these as valid means to perform sacred activism, agreeing with Macy, who says

there are many different ways of being responsive to environmental degradation: 'for some of us it can be through study or conversation, for others theatre or public office, for still others civil disobedience and imprisonment. But the diversities of our gifts interweave richly when we recognize the larger web within which we act' (Macy, 1995, pp 259).

4.4.4. 3. An Integrated Part of Established Religious Life.

This means 'search for the sacred, striving towards God, personal relation to God. Spirituality is the natural inner life and practice of the religious person' (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 74). Religious influences mentioned by my participants include Buddhism (Grace, Alison), Sufism (Alison, Elena), Paganism (Lucy, Isla) and practitioners of Western Shamanism (Violet). Activists can call upon all these traditions for inspiration and guidance. Violet says:

My spiritual practice is concerned with looking after the water and food, that's ecologically really important... There's so many different spiritual traditions that we can draw on to inform us... I think there's wisdom in a lot of them... it's all very linked to me, the spirituality, the ecology. The ecological crisis is also a spiritual crisis; does one exist without the other?

The only participant who declared themselves belonging to a particular religion was Lucy, a Druid. Druidry¹⁵ allowed her to find a spiritual connection with nature, which translated into her activism. She says: 'I'd always loved the countryside, but it wasn't until I became a Druid that I began to feel nature as a living entity'.

Druidry and other religious practices include prayer, pilgrimage and ritual (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 74). Harvey mentions that 'some Pagans go beyond meditation to symbolic action. If they cannot actually stand between a rainforest and a lumberjack... they might plant a seed of the next apple they eat in the hope that not

¹⁵ Harvey describes Druidry as 'a variety of Paganism, an honouring of Nature and of ancestral sacred sites' (Harvey, 1997, pp 29).
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only will it grow, but that a rainforest seed will grow too. The action combines imagination, intention and a first step in the direction of a reforested planet' (Harvey, 1997, pp 127). Robyn discusses activism through ritual as follows:

I don't think the sacred on its own is enough, the activism [is needed]... you do a ritual on a piece of land that you are about to occupy so that it keeps you safe... you can't do activism without the sacred, and you can't do sacred without activism

A direct example is Juno's experiences with the 'Nannas' initiative the 'Women in White', at Preston New Road fracking site. The success of this sacred activism was more poignant because they are women: 'Nannas'. The women gather in white outfits, walk to the site and stand in silence:

It was called a Call for Calm. There was a really clear intention. Let's be calm, let's be quiet, let's be silent. Let's protect our young. It's just women. It was a way of communicating to the security and the police... After the quiet time was over... some women would dance, others would sit, knit and crochet

This weekly ritual, while not directly connected to a religious practice, has elements of pilgrimage, silence, prayer, harmony and balance that are often associated with religious practices (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 74).

Examples of mothers performing spiritual-based activism include the women's peace camp at Greenham Common, connected to the Goddess Movement (Feraro, 2016, pp 226), and the Fridays for Future climate strikes and Extinction Rebellion demonstrations, both including a range of rituals underpinning actions (Kidwell, 2019, pp 1). Ideas for ritual often come from ancient traditions or Indigenous cultures. Metzner implies a major change in environmental treatment will not arise 'unless supplemented by a recovery of ancient traditions of initiation and ritual celebration and a strong dose of ecological literacy' (Metzner, 1995, pp 63).

4.4.5. 4. Spirituality as a Vague Striving, Opposed to Religion.

This involves 'striving for the essence of existence, universal consciousness', and 'striving... for another world than the mundane' (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 74). This could refer to the epistemological aspects of sacred activism: the 'metaphysics of interconnectedness' and 'relational modes of thinking' (Keating, 2005, pp 242). Participants mostly articulated this interconnectedness through reference to nature connection.

Women articulate nature connection through pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood. Steingraber describes how through being pregnant she found a greater connection to Earth, a feeling she terms 'mother-earth-hood':

Childbirth anthropologists call this growing awareness of a two-in-one-self "motherselfhood." It's the sensation that one is now inhabited by another conscious being whose moods, needs, and habits are not identical to one's own. What I am experiencing in Alaska during my seventh month of pregnancy is another kind of identity shift. Call it mother-earth-hood: an awareness of how my own doubled self is contained within the body of the world... Prenatal care means taking care of water, fish, and glaciers

(Steingraber, 2011, pp 148).

If this is true, then motherhood and environmentalism seem to go hand in hand. Violet considers that spirituality, motherhood, and environmentalism are very closely linked.

To me, ecology and spirituality are deeply interwound because... giving birth is a profoundly spiritual experience... it gave me another level of spiritual awakening... really powerful, empowering... I see them as linked, the earth is our mother

Elena describes an animistic¹⁶ connection with the Earth since childhood, and has transferred this spirituality into her mothering and activism:

I talk to everything in the garden... my kids were just used to me talking and seeing to everything... we talk to everything. Everything's alive. Everything's got a soul. Everything's family

Cheng and Monroe comprehend that children's connection to nature results in a sense of responsibility towards nature: 'Children's connection to nature, their previous experience in nature, their perceived family value toward nature, and their perceived control positively influenced their interest in performing environmentally friendly behaviors' (Cheng and Monroe, 2012, pp 31). Nature connection could be a catalyst for future activists to emerge.

Fletcher (2017, pp 226) sees this emphasis on Connection with Nature (CWN) as flawed, because it reinforces a dualism between humanity and nature, and displaces attention from larger political and economic issues, which should be the main focus of environmental concern. Dickinson agrees, arguing that: 'the core issue lies in how psychological, interpersonal, and cultural fracturing promote disconnection in the first place, leading to the notion that nature is outside of humans who suffer from decreased contact with it' (Dickinson, 2013, pp 328).

4.4.6. 5. Spirituality as Selfishness.

This person 'possesses neither serenity nor harmony, nor tranquillity nor peace. Meditation and healing are not related to her/him' (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 75). They are anti-intellectual, unappealing, superficial, self-absorbed, and connected with egoism (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 75). While I do not consider this applying to

¹⁶ Harvey defines animism as: 'the understanding that the world is a community of persons, most of whom are not human, but all of whom are related, and all of whom deserve respect' (Harvey, 2019, pp 80).

any of my participants, as all of them mentioned some kind of personal spiritual practice, several articulated this regarding other activists.

Elena articulates how she usually avoids protest marches because she witnessed several times a peaceful march becoming a riot. She rejects the anger she sees as inherent in many activists, including some of her friends who were involved at Greenham Common. While some activists may see themselves as spiritual in their care for the environment, egotistical traits may take over. Juno refers to this when she expresses that some direct actions are performed for superficial and self-absorbed reasons, such as recognition for being a 'hero'.

4.4.7. 6. Spirituality as Ordinary, Secular Inspiration in Human Activities.

This includes 'activities such as sport, general and medical science, diet, coziness, and sex... such activities can be inspired and improved by spirituality and that spirituality, as understood here, is a completely secular affair' (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 75). This kind of spirituality could be present in some participants' understanding of community and how their children were brought up. Activities such as cooking, gardening, education, even knitting and crocheting, as Juno mentions above after the 'Women in White' ritual, could be considered secular activities that may be 'inspired and improved by spirituality' (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 75).

An example is the emergence of intentional communities that challenge the status quo and resist social norms (Jarvis, 2017, pp 435). Several participants have been members of such communities, where their ways of living could be considered spiritual. Alison reminisces:

We were growing food... it was the social psychology of it rather than necessarily for the land... We always lived in community, we always shared, we always were non-competitive

Penny is currently creating a community on her land, focussing on educating people

about permaculture principles and lowering carbon footprints. Grace mentions how the village she lives in has many ways in which people live differently to social norms, including permaculture farms and people living off-grid. These examples show that secular activities such as growing food, creating community, and child-rearing have activist aspects to them, which can be 'inspired and improved by spirituality' (La Coura *et al*, 2012, pp 75).

However, speaking about communities in this way can sometimes feel idealistic, as Lucy expresses:

It is easy to romanticise, but sometimes when I hear people talking about little communities... if I hadn't been able to get away from my family, I would have, probably, lived my life with severe mental health problems. There must have been loads of people who grew up... in difficult conditions... especially women who didn't have the wherewithal to go. They live lives of miserable repression and desperation. I do think of that when people are talking about how lovely it would be to live in a small community

Another dimension mentioned as a spiritual part of the secular is diet. Several participants mentioned being either vegetarian or vegan as part of their activist lives (Carol and Alison), while others are considerate of where their food comes from (Bee), or have previously attended vegan activist events (Robyn). Veganism is closely connected with animal rights activism, which has a long history in feminist activism. 19th Century women challenged the use of 'plumage', or wearing feathers from exotic birds in hats; 20th Century vegan feminists and ecofeminists tried to end animal suffering in scientific research, beauty product industry, and food production. The 21st century sees scholarly studies emerging such as animal studies and post-humanism, which positions 'humans as but one among many life forms on the planet, challenging the myth of human superiority' (Gaard, 2017, 116-119).

4.4.8. Summary

Participants articulated sacred activism in many ways including: through non-violent communication with 'the opposition'; acts of service and self-sacrifice for both people and environment; meditation and yoga; women's circles; ritual and pilgrimage; interest in religious traditions such as Buddhism, Sufism, Paganism and Indigenous traditions; direct action to save specific parts of nature (whether or not one practices spirituality and non-violence); belief in and practice of nature connection; creation of community; and vegetarianism/ veganism.

Motherhood can be incorporated into these activisms through the following sentiments: mothers practice non-violence; mothers are naturally self-sacrificing; mothers are associated with Mother Earth; women will be the ones to 'save the world' from environmental destruction; environmentally-friendly community is a positive thing for families. These assumptions are still present within the current narratives around sacred activism, and which in various ways can be detrimental to both women's liberation and environmental degradation. However, these sentiments can also motivate women and lead to positive actions for the environment, as well as personal spiritual growth.

5. Conclusions.

5.1. Introduction

The overall aim of this study was to advance an understanding of how motherhood and environmental activism complement or contrast each other. The specific research objectives were to 1) to identify why mothers become environmental activists and 2) to identify how mothers perform environmental activism. This section will revisit these research objectives, summarise the findings of the work, and offer conclusions based on these findings. Recommendations for future research will be discussed, and the limitations of this study explored. Finally I have included a section reflecting on the research process of the study.

5.2. Research Objectives: Summary of Findings and Conclusions

5.2.1. Research Objective 1: to identify why mothers become environmental activists

5.2.1.1. Summary of Findings

My findings suggest that firstly, it was not only environmentalism that impelled mothers to perform activism, but that feminism is often an underlying influence. I did not specifically question my participants about feminism, but it frequently arose in discussions around both motherhood and activism. According to both my literature review and the interviews, I found that feminism informs each generation differently according to dominant narratives at the time, including liberal feminist thinking about how women are repressed under patriarchy; notions that liberal feminism has not worked to liberate women; and finally an ignoring of the concepts of feminism, to the extent that equality between the sexes, at least concerning parenthood, appears to have been somewhat achieved in the younger generations.

Feminist activism generally focuses on inequality between genders, races, classes and countries (Gaard, 2017, pp 116). This was articulated by my participants in the Dissertation. Motherhood and Environmental Activism.
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following ways: fighting against oppression in all forms; coming together as women to fight against social injustice; and anti-war sentiments as motivation for activism. I discovered that these feminist notions of activism informed mother-activist views of environmental activism, as they can easily extend to include inequalities between and injustices against species, nature, and planet Earth.

Secondly, in consideration of environmentalism, much of my literature review focused on how mothers care more for the environment or are more likely to perform environmental activism (O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy, 2010, pp 558). Ecofeminist writers often express that mothers get involved in environmental activism to protect their children and communities from environmental degradation (Moore, 2011, pp 7). The assumption is that mothers and children are more physically affected by environmental degradation (Rylander, Odland and Sandanger, 2013, pp 1). However, through my interviews I discovered that the reality is more complex than that. The majority of my participants care about the environment despite being mothers; most were activists before becoming mothers. Also, the main concerns my participants articulated were about global over-consumption rather than overpopulation issues, which may affect mothers in the Global South to a greater extent. Different people are affected in different ways in different places by environmental degradation, and assuming that mothers and children are affected more than others is not necessarily helpful.

When discussing emotional reasons for environmental concern, the emotions expressed can often appear negative: grieving and guilt. However, my findings suggest that these emotions are precisely why mothers are often motivated to perform environmental activism. I cannot conclude that mothers feel these emotions more than other women or men, or that these same emotions do not lead people other than mothers to perform environmental activism. Concern for future generations is often articulated as predominantly a mothers' prerogative (Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred, 2010, pp 142), but I have found that others also show these concerns and emphasis on future generations may exclude others from environmental activism if they consider other concerns more important.

5.2.1.2. Conclusions

My findings suggest that mothers become environmental activists for various reasons including differing feminist influences about inequality and injustice; performing early activisms including feminist, social, anti-war and anti-nuclear; environmental concern in general, not necessarily focussed on children or future generations; concern about global over-consumption; emotions such as guilt and grief about environmental degradation.

My findings appear to reject dominant assumptions, such as: environmental activism being separate from previous, more social, activisms; mothers caring more than other people about the environment and therefore being more likely to perform environmental activism; mothers being more concerned about their children and future generations than other people, and therefore being more likely to perform environmental activism; and mothers and children being more likely to be physically and emotionally affected by environmental degradation.

Therefore, through discussions of why mothers become environmental activists, I have concluded that there are various and complex answers to that question. Differing generations of mothers, differing environmental concerns, being from different parts of the world or in different social situations can all influence why mothers perform environmental activism.

5.2.2. Research Objective 2: to identify how mothers perform environmental activism.

5.2.2.1. Summary of Findings

My findings suggest that, firstly, mothers perform different activisms at different times of their offspring's development. Many perform micro-level (Logsdon-Conradsen and Allred, 2010, 143) or relational activisms (O'Shaughnessy and Dissertation. Motherhood and Environmental Activism. Amy Martin. Student 1604164.

Kennedy, 2010, pp 555) all the way through their motherhood years, but often they begin this kind of activism before becoming mothers and continue after their children have grown up, and often this is performed alongside other kinds of activism. These are not necessarily activism that only mothers perform, but many participants did increase participation in this type of activism and decrease activism such as direct action, when their children were young. However, the assumption that more women are engaged in micro-level activism because their local lives are more concerned with 'human health and habitat' (Mellor, 1997, pp 127) can be questioned.

Secondly, in consideration of more direct actions, or macro-level activism (O'Shaughnessy and Kennedy, 2010, pp 555), the view is contrasting. Macro-level activism is often perceived as more important than micro-level activism (Kenis and Mathijs, 2014, pp 151), which can lead to mothers feeling guilty that they are not doing enough, or to other people being hero-worshipped for doing larger actions than mothers are able to. My participants hold differing opinions on how mother-activists can be good role models for their children, how mothers can use their bodies during direct actions, and how a mother is rewarded for performing activism. These issues often have roots in questions surrounding what makes a good mother, what are motherly duties concerning looking after both children and our planet, and how mothers are viewed by society.

Thirdly, mothers often perform sacred activism in the following ways: through non-violent communication with 'the opposition'; acts of service and self-sacrifice for both people and environment; meditation and yoga; women's circles; ritual and pilgrimage; interest in religious traditions such as Buddhism, Sufism, Paganism and Western Shamanic traditions; direct action to save specific parts of nature (whether or not one practices spirituality and non-violence); belief in and practice of nature connection; creation of community; and vegetarianism/ veganism. These actions can be performed through a mixture of micro-level and macro-level activism, which I suggest blurs the line between the two. Bringing the sacred into activism means that micro- and macro-level activism can be performed at the same time, bringing the

personal and the political together.

Mothers can be caught up in assumptions surrounding sacred activism, including: mothers practice non-violence; mothers are naturally self-sacrificing; mothers are associated with Mother Earth; women will be the ones to 'save the world' from environmental destruction; environmentally-friendly community is a positive thing for families. These assumptions are still present within the current narratives around sacred activism, and which in various ways can be detrimental to both women's liberation and environmental degradation. However, these sentiments can motivate women to perform positive actions for the environment, and contribute to personal spiritual growth.

5.2.2.2. Conclusions

My findings suggest that for mothers, no kind of activism is necessarily better or worse, they simply adapt to what is available to them at the time in terms of alternative childcare, child development or age, and considerations of what is best for their child at different stages. These stages are far from the same for every mother, for example one participant was happy to live with her children at a direct action camp, while another decided not to take her child to direct actions.

These findings appear to reject dominant assumptions, such as mothers only performing micro-level or relational activism; micro-level or relational activism being less important than macro-level activism, therefore mother-activists not being as 'good' as other activists; being a good mother means being an activist; and the list of assumptions above concerning women and sacred activism.

Therefore, through consideration of how mothers perform environmental activism and why they choose these types of activism, I conclude that there are varying reasons for these choices. The choices made often are due to external circumstances surrounding familial responsibility or concern with how the mother is viewed by other people (their employer, or their own children). Societal pressures placed on

mothers can inform their choices in subtle ways that are sometimes imperceptible to the mother herself. All of this can inform how and why mothers perform different types of environmental activism.

5.3. Limitations and Recommendations

These conclusions were based on an extensive review of related literature and on participant interviews, and only on these two sources. Therefore the study has limitations in that it may not apply to activist-mothers in other places and societal situations, or those of different races, ages and experiences. The main limitation of this study is that all my participants were based in Somerset, UK. All are white and heterosexual. Interviewing mothers of different backgrounds in different places around the UK and in other countries would have added richness to the study, but this would have compromised the focus of my research and made the workload unmanageable.

For further research I would recommend narrowing the study to focus more on one particular type of activism, such as direct action or sacred activism. My conclusions suggest that there are many variables considering the types of activism mothers perform and reasons for doing so, that a focus on one type of activism may bring deeper insight. Another option is to widen the study to include parents of all genders, as it often came up in my conclusions that it is not only mothers who feel drawn to environmental activism.

5.4. Self-reflection

I immensely enjoyed conducting this study and especially found conducting the interviews enlightening. As mentioned in my introduction, my own motivations for conducting environmental activism, and the activism that I have chosen to perform, were very specific to my own perceptions at the time I realised I wanted to have children. Therefore it was fascinating to me to listen to the experiences and perceptions of other mothers, some of whom had similar views to me, others vastly

different. I would advise anyone conducting a dissertation to choose something that is close to your heart, as this kept me going even when I felt demotivated.

Being a distance learner and not connected much with my university throughout this study, I struggled with motivation on several occasions. I found the help of my supervisor Andy Letcher invaluable during these times, and indeed at all times. It has now taken me a year and a half to complete this dissertation, whereas I aimed to complete it in one year. Personal circumstances sometimes held me back, and on one occasion even halted the work completely for several months whilst I recovered from a miscarriage. The delicate emotional nature of the thesis, concerning motherhood and environmentalism, combined with my desire for a child, meant that I could not face the research for several months. However, I am now grateful for the learning and development through combining the academic and the emotional, that this experience gave me.

During the last stint of this dissertation, the write-up stage, I have been growing another baby, which has been a journey in itself. Feeling propelled into primordial soup for the first few months as my baby developed his body, I felt I understood many sentiments connecting Earth with motherhood, and I sometimes struggled to keep my academic head on. Now I am reaching the end of both the dissertation and the pregnancy, I feel I have grown through the writing at the same time as growing a person inside me. My two creations, my child and my dissertation, have excelled side by side and I am now feeling excited for what the next chapter will bring.

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Appendix 1: Grandmother's Apology.

Inspired by Extinction Rebellion
my fading hope and passion ignite
willing rebel in the climate change fight.

My generation failed to save the planet
worsening inequality - destroying biodiversity
planet dying - politicians lying
young souls crying - hungry for what might never be
because of our toxicity.

We created even greater gap
between those who have and those without
breeding deeper despair
taking away your clean air - your breath of life

We preyed like mantis rather than a saint
gobbling Mother Earth with our voracious greed
we should have worshipped Her
bowed on our knees in reverence
found the soul we've lost or thrown away
amidst the plastic and the dead debris.

Why didn't we hold the planet
precious as a new born baby safely in our hands?
Why didn't we see the earth's fragility?
Instead we chose dominion of our green and pleasant land
turning her barren and brown
we stole Her beauty, ravaged Her heart
murdered each species one by one.

Those who have the most take everything away
serve their selfish shadow onto your empty plates
expecting gratitude.

I apologise for everything we didn't see
every action we still refuse to take
each crazy, stupid, mindless, surreal mistake

Why did we not serve the greater good
leave a rich inheritance
bequeath a safe and healthy planet
full of growth and love.

To our children living now and still to come
My sincere apology.

Written by participant Grace.