

Personal Reflection 1: What Sustainability means to me.**Description:**

At the beginning of the module my overarching thoughts and position on sustainability and climate change centred around power imbalances, humans' abusive relationship with the Earth and the Global North's abuse of the Global South. I place the blame on patriarchal Western imperialist and capitalist societies. Through studying European antiquity I know Preunkert *et al.*, (2019) argue atmospheric heavy-metal pollution increased during the Roman Empire due to emissions from mass smelting and mining. Just before this module began Supran, Rahmstorf and Oreskes, (2023) uncovered that since the 1970's ExxonMobil had hidden their knowledge that fossil fuel usage would dramatically increase global warming. It therefore came as a surprise when I scored only 15% on the Factfulness Quiz (*Factfulness Quiz*, 2023). I had been overly pessimistic in my answers. I was particularly surprised that the educational experiences of girls were not as unequal to boys as I had thought, the number of the world population living in extreme poverty had almost halved, and 80% of the world's 1-year old children are vaccinated.

Feelings:

Before the quiz I felt angry towards the blameful white Western elite men throughout history and presently. Additionally, I felt an overwhelming sense of hopelessness, pessimism and anxiety concerning climate change and sustainability. Having a distrust of Western capitalist societies to ever own their responsibility and commit to impactful sustainability when profitability pervades. All these feelings are traits of the 'fight-flight-freeze' response defined by Coleman as; automatic physiological responses to a perceived threat to survival (Colman, 2015). Brosch (2021, p. 19) and Clayton (2020, p. 2) define and evidence 'climate anxiety' as an adaptive emotional response to the real threat of climate change; an environmental stressor.

Additionally, after the quiz, I felt guilty, ignorant, and ashamed for pathologizing the lived experiences of people, in particular girls and women, in the developing world, whilst simultaneously feeling relieved; there is more hope in some aspects of humanity than I assumed. Rochat (2009, p. 127) proposes that guilt and shame are related to losing control in 'how others perceive us' and the threat of 'rejection and ostracism'. Rochat (2009, p. 127)

differentiates guilt as being self-orientated and linked to regret and repair, whilst shame to, 'the loss of social power' which can evoke attempts to mask the feeling. I do not want to mask my feelings of shame or guilt but use them as a catalyst for active reflection and, personal and academic development.

Evaluation:

I am comfortable discussing my mental health as it helps contextualise some of my experiences and I believe is relevant for this reflection. However, I do not have this expectation of anyone else. I experience depression and anxiety; automatically experiencing negative feelings including guilt, self-criticism and over thinking. Additionally having a Critical ontological belief system, can result in me having a pessimistic worldview which can be personally, professionally, and academically obstructive. Investigating the 'constructive and unconstructive nature of eco-anxiety', Verplanken, Marks and Dobromir (2020, p. 2- 8) find that repetitive worry, ' adds to distress [and] psychological impairment' resulting in unconstructive, 'cognitive and behavioural avoidance rather than engagement with relevant issues'.

I care deeply about this world and for the people who live on it. On a daily basis, I optimistically strive to positively impact equitable life experiences for individuals and groups of individuals. Colman (2015) defines empathy as the ability to understand an experience from someone else's point of view; 'the capacity to understand and enter into another person's feelings and emotions.' However, Farrow and Woodruff (2007, p. xii) argue that whilst empathetic responses can be linked to compassionate citizenship, there is correlation between 'empathic concern to interpersonal guilt and both altruism and depression'. As argued by Hodges and Biswas-Diener (2007), this can lead me to experience high emotional deficits. This is a really positive step to me understanding my own psychology; relating and learning to regulate my emotions concerning sustainability and climate change, whilst also using my emotions as an empowering force to proactively engage with sustainability, as argued by (Clayton, 2020, p. 5).

Analysis:

My Critical ontology and epistemology mean I see realities as complex, subjective, and socially constructed; based on societal power imbalances making societies unequal and unjust. Symbiotically I am a socialist, feminist, anti-racist and post-colonialist. As Buchanan (2018) argues, this results in a 'bleak outlook'. However, Marocco (2008, p. 320) argues that placing all blame on corporations and politicians for climate change and unsustainability is easy and can obstruct our own personal responsibility and role we play. Further to this Marocco (2008) and, Vitek and Jackson (2008) question the supremacy of knowledge itself and the need for power; emancipating ourselves into inquisitive action by taking an ignorance based view.

Additionally, Peterson (2008, p. 131) correlates empathetic responses to feminist ethics and eco-feminism; asserting in the absence of knowledge, 'compassion and the willingness to go forward in a caring manner' is a vital partner to the curiosity and humility we need to sustainability work together. This is reassuring to me and my experience. Especially when climate change and sustainability are extraordinarily complex both conceptually and experientially.

Lambert, Fincham and Stillman (2012) and Verplanken, Marks and Dobromir, (2020) challenge the 'fight, flight, freeze' response; calling for positive emotional reframing in order to broaden emotional and adaptive responses and catalyse exploration into sustainability.

Conclusion:

The cognitive dissonance I experienced completing the Factfulness Quiz (*Factfulness Quiz*, 2023) left me in a 'state of tension' as defined by Calhoun (2002). Completing this reflection has allowed me to explore and reframe my emotional reactions and presumed knowledge of sustainability. Going forward I will try to regulate my empathetic responses when researching climate change and sustainability. Clayton, (2020) and Verplanken, Marks and Dobromir (2020) found that participants who had an active role in local sustainability experienced less paralysing climate-anxiety, I will act on this. Brosch (2021, p. 17) argues leveraging emotional responses can increase 'climate change communications' and 'actual climate action'. Leveraging my emotions whilst simultaneously embracing the virtue of my ignorance, as argued by Vitek and Jackson (2008), will enable me to continually reflect on my own position on sustainability and my position as a member of the Western world.

Planning:

I am going to research into Eco-Feminism and sustainability initiatives in the developing world lead by women and girls. This will suit my Critical ontology and epistemology whilst also attempting to positively reframe my position and thinking.

I will do more of these reflective journals. Having never done this before, I have found it of great personal, professional, and academic use. I shall Gibb's model of reflection with the insights I have gained to broaden my emotional resilience and sociological curiosity.

(1106 words)

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Personal Reflection 2: The [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)**Description:**

I chose to reflect upon UN Sustainable Development ‘*Goal 5 Gender Equality*’ (United Nations, no date). I am a feminist, having a strong belief in advocating for global reproductive justice and equitable educational opportunities for all women and girls. As such I subscribe to ‘Flo’ a menstrual health tracker (Flo Health Inc., 2023). The company collaborates with the United Nations Population Fund to support equality of self-knowledge about reproductive health (UNFPA, 2022). I believe all individuals should have autonomy in their life choices. However, I realise that due to local and global levels of intersectional systemic and structural oppression in conjunction with colonialism means this ontology can be perceived as idealistic (Calhoun, 2002). I was therefore intrigued that the UN set a goal to ‘Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girl’s’ by 2030 (United Nations, no date). Additionally, I have not specifically thought before about the relationship between gender equality and sustainability.

Feelings:

As soon as I read the ambition of the goal and the ‘*Targets and Indicators*’ which include, ‘5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere’ and ‘5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights’ by 2030 (United Nations, no date) I became very angry and had to walk away from the computer. Instantly reflecting on my instinctive emotional response, I reminded myself of the psychological discoveries and development opportunities relating to emotional deficits through empathic responses, uncovered through my first personal reflection (Martin-Simpson, 2023). I believe my response to be an example of ‘frustration-aggression hypothesis’ re-defined by Berkowitz (1989, p.71) as an atavistic emotional response to the blocking of satisfaction, ‘before the higher order processing goes into operation’. I believe my frustration-aggression response, additionally aligned with my feminist ontology; the targets and indicators seemed overly simplified and hubristic, discrediting the enormously complex cultural change that is required to overturn the millennia of patriarchy thus exacerbating my emotional response as theorised by Fischer and Good as ‘the sometimes painful aspects of feminist consciousness for women’ (2004, p. 445).

Evaluation:

Having become aware of my frustration-aggression response and reflecting in that moment, I gave myself permission to continue with my initial reading of Goal 5 and to feel/react however my instinct took me. I then re-read the Goal when my 'higher order processing' was operating (Berkowitz, 1989, p. 71). Blackburn (2016) defines this process as, 'Dual Process Theory', dividing cognitive processing into two types, the first giving 'snap judgements, or instant emotional reactions', the second allowing 'conscious thought [and] rival hypotheses.' I shall consciously use this process from now on in my academic, professional, and personal development to transpose my sometimes-obstructive reactions into constructive proactive thought. Additionally, consciously re-reading the Goal through an ignorance-based (Vitek and Jackson, 2008) and Complexity Theory (Anderson, 2016) perspective enabled me to understand the importance of sustainability and gender equality on a micro level rather than solely focusing on the realisation of the macro overarching Goal.

Analysis:

As highlighted in my first Personal Reflection (Martin-Simpson, 2023), my critical ontology and epistemology leads me to understanding the world through power struggles and resultant privilege and oppression (Lincoln, Lynham Susan A and Guba, 2011). Postcolonial feminism is a theory that I am aligned to and one that relates to Goal 5 and my reactions. Through a postcolonial feminist critique of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Struckmann (2018, p. 18) highlights that though the SDGs have been commended, there has been many critiques of the 'strongly aspirational agenda' being focused on the Global South where women and girls' lived experience of oppression and power relations are lost through 'simplification' of targets and indicators. Mohanty (1988) critiques Western feminism as 'othering' the theory, praxis and lived experience of women from the Global South. Due to this, I specifically searched for articles representing the lived experiences of women and girls in the Global South to support this reflection. This is a practice I will consciously continue in all further work.

Conclusion:

Part of my frustration in reading Goal 5 was the lack of specificity in implementation of targets and recognition of how gender equality spans and impacts all the SDG's. Though negative in conclusions, it is personally reassuring that my reflections on Goal 5 are evidenced through professional research where it is argued that stronger policies and clear monitoring of implementation is needed to affect change (Agarwal, 2018; Struckmann, 2018; Bloodhart and Swim, 2020; Núñez, Bandeira and Santero-Sánchez, 2020; Louis, Shyleen and Tirivangasi, 2021). Louis, Shyleen and Tirivangasi (2021) found a tension between Goal 5 targets and the reality of country policy and practice in Zimbabwe, particularly when comparing lived experiences, via social capital, of women and girls living in rural and urban communities.

However, SDG 5 is having positive impacts, Agarwal (2018, p. 29) highlights the initiative in India by the National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development, 'linking women to subsidised formal credit', a positive action directly related to Target 5.a 'to give women equal rights to economic resources' (United Nations, no date).

Planning:

It is evident there is a need for more specificity and power in SDG 5. Struckmann, (2018, p. 18), Agarwal, (2018, p. 29) and Louis, Shyleen and Tirivangasi (2021, p. 49) all conclude that without further clarity and monitoring, the targets are open to normative and nationally appropriate interpretation leading to selective implementation via patriarchal social and cultural norms.

I think 2030 is over ambitious, though understand the need to give credence to the SDGs by including a deadline. I think there needs to be incremental and realistic stages to the goals to support the sustainability of hope and achievement.

(939 words)

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Personal Reflection 3: Changing Personal Behaviours

Description (a):

Initially when thinking of a personal practice to explore from the perspective of sustainability I was going to focus on the fact I have three to five baths every week. I know baths use a lot of water and the UN and UNESCO recently warned of the 'imminent risk of a global water crisis' (Connor and Miletto, 2023). Additionally, I am experiencing the impact of the cost of living crisis and related increase in energy and water bills (Clark, 2023).

Feelings (a):

As soon as I started thinking about reducing the number of baths I have weekly, I started to panic. For me, baths serve the purpose of sanctuary, relaxation, and mindfulness and an important practice as part of sustaining my own well-being and mental health. However, I then felt guilty as I recognised my privilege; I as a member of a white western society and the Global North, have raised anxiety thinking about reducing my bathing habits, when '10% of the global population live in countries with high or critical water stress' (Connor and Miletto, 2023, p. 2).

Evaluation (a):

Having reflected on my reaction and being mindful of my need for routine to alleviate and manage my mental health, as argued by Jacobson, Martell and Dimidjian (2001), I decided to not change my bathing practice. Concluding from this I am an Accommodationist and at present willing to only change my behaviour whilst still working with a personally beneficial framework (Bouzarovski, 2022, p. 1012). I see this as a positive decision, in protecting and sustaining my personal wellbeing (Adhanom Ghebreyesus, 2019).

Description (b):

I decided instead to reflect on the sustainability of my gardening practices. I have a concrete back yard and as such all my plants are in pots. As a result of this, I use a lot of potting compost

within my gardening practice. Argued by Etherton (2022) and evidenced by Paoli *et al.* (2022) I understand the production chain of typical potting compost has a negative environmental impact; it is chemical reliant, peatlands that store the world's largest amount of carbon are in decline, huge amounts of water are needed, and the carbon footprint is immense.

Feelings (b):

Gardening brings me immense joy and peace and a change in my practice does not feel invasive but exciting. Gardening has brought me to appreciate nature more intensely and as such I ensure I've a variety of bee friendly diverse flora. Like many other individuals privileged enough to have the option, I got into gardening during the first 2020 Covid-19 lockdown, having become unemployed as a consequence of the pandemic. Theodorou *et al.*, (2021, p. 4) argue that individuals who engaged in gardening during Covid-19 had lower psychopathological distress during the lockdowns as the activity moderated the psychological distress experienced globally by the pandemic.

Evaluation (b):

Studying the relationships between self-transcendent emotions, self-interested emotions and sustainable behaviour, Jacobs and McConnell (2022, p. 8) argue that individuals with greater self-transcendent emotions have greater environmental and sustainability concerns/values whereas self-interested emotions correlated with more 'egoistic concern...viewing nature as relatively smaller than the self'. I find this interesting as it directly correlates with my decision not to reflect and adapt my bathing practices but to modify my gardening practices instead.

Through the lens of climate activism Kleres and Wettergren (2017) argue that guilt felt by individuals in the Global North is experienced as an initial stage of activism through the recognition of belonging to the dominant power-holders; guilt then transforms to responsibility and then to activism. I do not consider myself a climate activist, but this emotion-related cognitive process is useful for me to consciously use when feeling guilty to leverage my privilege into action.

Analysis:

Acting on my previously held knowledge about the unsustainability of typical potting compost, I had already modified my soil to include coconut coir. My rationale for this was at least I could make the compost I had already bought last longer having read about the sustainability qualities on a coconut coir on a company's website (Trident, no date). However, whilst researching evidence for this reflection, I read Etherton's (2022) argument that the production of coconut coir is worryingly unsustainable on two counts; the majority of coir is produced in Sri Lanka and India where despite there being water crises the process requires a large amount of water and that the coir industry is known for, 'low wages, child labour and dangerous work conditions'. Furthering my investigation, has unfortunately shown this to be evident in academic research, Bordoloi, (2017, p. 62) found the coir industry in Kerala, India to have, 'high levels of exploitation [and] social reproduction of inequalities.' This experience is a direct reminder to myself to always use the epistemological practice of critical thinking in my personal practices as well as my academic (Zhang, 2021).

Conclusion:

This reflection has enabled me to conclude that to modify my gardening to a more sustainable practice, I need to source a potting compost that ideally is chemical free, peat free, uses minimal water, has a zero-carbon footprint, and has evidenced equitable working practices (Anderson, 2016). For a potting compost to have a zero carbon footprint, will mean it needs to be produced in the UK to mitigate against shipping emissions (Anderson, 2016). The compost needs to be organic; relying on natural substances and 'biological processes to maintain soil quality' (Anderson, 2016). Using my learning from purchasing coconut coir, the company needs to be their sustainability claims verified in some way.

Planning:

Through this reflection, I have been researching sustainable potting composts and have found RocketGro (RocketGro, no date b). This company appears to be legitimately doing all they can to be sustainable, however I will now do further research into their working practices in

particular working conditions for team members in ‘Latvia, Lithuania and Poland’ (RocketGro, no date a).

(1343 words)

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Personal Reflection 4: Changing Professional Behaviours**Description:**

I already incorporate sustainability into my own professional practice in several ways; I use public transport to and from work and bring my own lunch and coffee cup. I have also noticed that I have unconsciously integrated the concept of sustainability into my professional language and dialogue; I find myself frequently asking my colleagues, 'how can we develop this to be more sustainable?.' In this last example, I am mostly using the term from an anthropocentric equality, diversity, and inclusion perspective in relation to policy and practice. However, because of this module I've noticed the A4 lined paper pads that are available to staff members, albeit sparsely, are not made from recycled paper. Therefore, I shall use this aspect of my professional practice to reflect upon.

Feelings:

I use lined paper pads daily at work. My comprehension and organisational skills are more efficient when writing or reading from paper than using a screen. I have noticed many of my colleagues that I work with also use paper/notebooks. This causes me to experience cognitive dissonance; I'm confused as to what 'pillar of sustainability to put first' (Purvis, Mao and Robinson, 2019); people (to use paper) or planet (to not use paper).

When thinking of this situation and how I may action change, I am apprehensive. To impactfully do my job as the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Adviser, I advocate, question, and constructively provoke to initiate development of sustainable equitable practice across the institution. I am therefore apprehensive to additionally advocate for changing institutional behaviour in environmental sustainability as this could be seen as unnecessary provocation.

Evaluation

Markkula and Moisander (2012, p. 118) argue that when engaging with sustainable consumption, consumers experience 'discursive confusion' when comprehending their role in

sustainable development which becomes a barrier to 'knowledge-to-action'. I believe I am experiencing this concept.

Barlow (2000, p, 1251) defines apprehension as a symptom of anxiety where the individual assumes 'impending doom' when thinking about a future event and as such may exhibit 'subtle avoidance behaviours.' This is exactly the behaviour I have exhibit in the 'Feelings' section of this personal reflection. This revelation is of great value to my professional development and directly correlates with me experiencing occasional 'imposter phenomenon' which interestingly is more prevalent in women (Colman, 2015).

Analysis:

The UN asserts that every individual on this planet is responsible for securing the wellbeing of everyone and the planet (United Nations, no date). Vitek and Jackson (2008) argue that part of the theory behind ignorance-based sustainability includes acknowledging you are ignorant of what is going to happen and that should not stop you from giving yourself permission to act using understanding and responsibility. This is related to my professional practice on two levels; I must take personal responsibility and enquire about the institution purchasing recycled writing pads for staff use; the institution should take responsibility to at least listen to my enquiry. I need to use understanding to listen and navigate any institutional response.

Conclusion:

This reflection has turned out to be more about my own behaviour and psychology than the idea of changing the University's practice to purchasing recycled paper. However, I think that through these realisations and further revelations about my own cognitive processes, I will be able to effect more sustainable change both within my own professional development and within the institution I work for. All universities in Wales have a both a social and legal responsibility to practice sustainability; it is very interesting and encouraging that my institution is playing a role in decarbonising industry in South Wales (Welsh Government, 2023)

Planning:

I will continue to research this point of action by investigating the purchasing and availability of recycled writing paper at my institution, this will include visiting the printing and reproduction department.

(628 words)

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Personal Reflection 5: Reflecting on a grass roots response**Description:**

In this personal reflection I shall be exploring the Incredible Edible Network as an example of sustainable practice. Incredible Edible is a community garden network which support communities to grow vegetables in unused public spaces through a process the network describe as 'propaganda gardening' (Incredible Edible, no date). Incredible Edible works within, 'three plates', 'Learning', 'Community' and 'Business and by member's individual skills and trust, Incredible Edible catalyses communities into holistic sustainable action (Incredible Edible, no date).

Feelings:

I had never heard of Incredible Edible before researching for this personal reflection. It therefore came as a wonderful uplifting surprise to learn about the initiative. The ethos kindness that pervades the initiative and the passion that is conveyed through the website and Ted Talk made me feel enthused, hopeful, and emotional. Human beings can be intuitive, creative, and supportive, which sometimes has proven not to be my first emotional reaction to the other topics of personal reflections.

I do, as explored in previous reflections, have a critical worldview and this can transform into scepticism. When reading the Incredible Edible website, I did read with a critical eye and wondered where the power imbalances lay; do all members of each community treat the gardens with respect? Do the vegetables get stolen? How are the communities managed to ensure equitable opportunity of involvement?

Evaluation:

Colman (2015) correlates hope with optimism and the psychological phenomena of positive psychology which focuses on 'positive subjective experiences'. Honderich (2005) discusses one definition of optimism as the anthropocentric positive value of human existence. Brosch (2021) argues that hope can be induced and used to promote climate change and sustainability

action. When studying the Incredible Edible whilst exploring the need to create sustainable green urban initiatives, both Court, Kelly and Hardman, (2022;) and Hardman, Clark and Sherriff (2022) found that the network did offer a more realistic and optimistic model of local urban sustainability through which hope was ignited. These findings link both to my emotional reaction and to the concept of kindness, which Colman (2015) includes as a trait of ‘agreeableness’, one of the ‘Big Five fundamental dimensions of human personality’.

Heilbron and Bartholomew (2003) define scepticism relating to the ‘reliability of knowledge’ and the philosophical stance that ‘humans [can] not know how things really [are]’. Consequentially I find the link between scepticism and Vitek and Jackson's (2008) epistemological ignorance-based stance on sustainability fascinating and it motivates me to develop my confidence in critical inquisitiveness.

Analysis:

As argued by Marocco (2008), Smith and Leiserowitz (2014) and Brosch (2021) for people and communities to be catalysed into sustainable practice, the practice needs to be actualised on a small scale, where local people directly reap the benefits and therefore enter into a needs based symbiotic relationship; this relationship is built through emotional engagement, trust and a sense of belonging. Critically exploring the Incredible Edible as an example of the rise and need for “radical sustainability” Court, Kelly and Hardman (2022, p. 1) assert that emotional engagement in sustainability is garnered by enabling ‘community-generated narratives’ to drive the Incredible Edible networks and communities thus using narrative as an impactful tool in inclusive sustainable place-making. This action aligns strongly with both my eco-feminist and eco-socialist ontology.

Honderich (2005) states that for the concept of optimism to exist, pessimism must also. In the context of sustainability and complexity theory, Peterson (2008) and Heltne (2008) both argue that human nature includes moral diversity, purposeful blindness and destructive ignorance. My critical questioning, or cynicism, whilst reading the Incredible Edible website has evidence by Hardman, Clark and Sherriff (2022, p. 9) finding that vandalism was a considerable barrier to sustaining some Incredible Edible communities, with qualitative data showing there was a prevalence for vandalism typically at the beginning of a project and is ‘expected’. However, through Incredible Edible’s extensive commitment to Learning, a sense

of pride and understanding has been evidenced to grow in these communities thus the vandalism reduces (Farrier, Dooris and Morley, 2019; Hardman, Clark and Sherriff, 2022).

Conclusion

I think the Incredible Edible is an excellent example of sustainable practice, not just because it satisfies both the definition of sustainability in the Brundtland Report (Keeble, 1988) and adheres to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, no date), but because it appears to embrace, collaborate and adapt to the complexity of human beings and of creating sustainable communities.

Planning

I am going to see if my institution is part of this or a similar initiative, and if not I am going to propose that our team start one.

(757 words)

(Total words 4773)

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