SEARCHING FOR A “UNICORN”: EMOTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATORS

By

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Abstract

As more studies highlight the unconscious dynamics of environmental education it is important to understand how those dynamics impact the educators themselves so that we may better train educators and improve the efficacy of their work. Using a psychosocial and psychoanalytic methodology I explored the unconscious emotional lives of six environmental educators. The educators first participated in a professional development workshop and then in three in-depth interviews using the Dialogic, Relational Interview method. Data was analyzed using holistic analysis. The educators’ employed a variety of conscious and unconscious protective measures to manage feelings of powerlessness, anxiety, fear, doubt, and grief over loss. The educators were largely unaware of the extent to which they employed protective measures and expressed an overall discomfort with exploring the painful aspects of their work. This study is a first step in understanding how educators’ unconscious emotional experiences impact how they interact with their audiences.
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Chapter One: Introduction

… I think if you really let yourself get kind of obsessed over that it could be really paralyzing. So maybe I take the little approach of ignorance is bliss on some of those things. You know, like I almost don't let myself learn enough that it really, really scares me. Because I could see how it might. (Samantha, Interview 2)

In late October of 2012, during the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy that devastated parts of the eastern United States (Barron, 2012), I was driving home from work on the other side of the country and listening to stories about the hurricane on my local public radio station. A woman in her late seventies, whose home had been leveled by the storm, was sobbing hysterically as she told her story and wondered aloud how she would ever get her life back. If I had been listening to this story a year before that day, I might have leaned forward to lower the volume or changed the channel, hiding from the painful reality that this intense weather event caused. This time however, I forced myself to listen, to hear and understand, to allow myself to connect a voice to the terrible tragedy. After a year of exploring the emotional dimension of my work as an environmental educator I had learned that in order to heal my pain I must first be willing to face it.

The journey that became my thesis started when, after ten years of being an environmental educator, I began to wonder if what I was doing had any real impact on the world that I so desperately wanted to protect. I found myself full of doubt and worried that I would be overwhelmed by emotions; I refused to watch nature shows and avoided the news as best as I could. In the face of global environmental and societal catastrophe I worried so much about how my individual actions contributed to the issues that I often
found myself fretting over simple purchases and wracked with personal guilt. My moments of guilt were punctuated with episodes of numbness and cynicism, when I doubted that anything I did or said really mattered. All the while, I was terrified to share these thoughts with my colleagues so I internalized it all and kept it as my secret.

Research from various branches of psychology and sociology suggests that I in fact was not alone and that many others felt the pain I did as they witnessed the growing environmental crises (R. A. Lertzman, 2009; Macy, 1995; Moser, 2007; Randall, 2005). As an environmental educator, my greater awareness of environmental issues potentially heightened the possibility for me to have this overwhelming experience (Moser, 2007; Randall, 2005, 2009). So I began to wonder how many of my colleagues were having a similar experience and how I could help them to understand and manage it.

Maybe the first insight is for communicators themselves to acknowledge their own emotional responses to environmental degradation and society's responses. (Moser, 2007, p. 72)

Susanne Moser asks environmental communicators to become more self-reflexive in order to understand the psychological impacts of environmental communication and environmental events on people (ibid). As people hear about environmental degradation and such immense topics as global climate change, a variety of painful emotions can be stirred that sometimes engage psychological protective measures such as denial and avoidance (R. A. Lertzman, 2011; P. Maiteny, 2000; K. M. Norgaard & Winter, 2006; Opotow & Weiss, 2000; Stoll-Kleemann, O’Riordan, & Jaeger, 2001). When measures like denial and avoidance take over they can prevent a person from engaging in the pro-
environmental behaviors that environmental educators and communicators are teaching about, and instead the individual often continues with the same behaviors that contributed to global environmental challenges in the first place (R. A. Lertzman, 2011; P. Maiteny, 2000; Moser, 2007; K. M. Norgaard & Winter, 2006; Opotow & Weiss, 2000; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001). Moser (2007) suggested that until educators and communicators can understand the emotions that they are stirring up and the protective measures they are connected to, there may be little hope for seeing the behavior change educators are looking to inspire.

The import of Susanne Moser’s words, and the appropriate direction for my thesis research became evident to me while in a curriculum planning meeting, working with a team of environmental educators to develop a series of new school programs. When the broad topic of human-caused environmental damage came up, one seasoned and well-respected educator cautioned us to tread lightly because “we have to be careful about doom and gloom.” While her advice was sound (O’Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009; Perrin, 2011), the tenor of her words suggested some anxiety associated with the topic of environmental degradation and possibly to her audience’s response to it. Her apparent anxiety seemed to make her wary of the topic and to influence whether and how she addressed it in her programs. In over a decade as an environmental educator this was not the first time I had witnessed such a scene. This time, however I realized that perhaps my colleagues were struggling with unconscious emotions that they were not aware of. I wondered what emotional dilemmas or challenges they were having and if helping them to explore those experiences would allow them to make stronger connections with their audiences.
As I explored the topic further I found research regarding the emotional effects of environmental messages (Gurevitz, 2000; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Leiserowitz, 2006; P. T. Maiteny, 2002; Monroe, 2003; O’Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009; Perrin, 2011; K. Searles, 2010; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001), but uncovered only a few studies that explore the emotions of environmental educators themselves (Beauchamp, 2009; Henderson, 2010; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Reis & Roth, 2010). An appropriate starting point for me then was to begin to uncover the emotional experiences that environmental educators might be facing. Since there was growing interest in the potential for educators’ responses to their dilemmas to impact how they facilitated their education efforts (Moser, 2007; Randall, 2005, 2009) I also wanted to understand how the educators related to their dilemmas and if there were indications of any impact on their work.

I decided to conduct my research with a team of educators that I worked with and to not only attempt to understand their experience in-depth, but also examine the outcome of providing opportunities for the educators to discuss their experiences in a professional development setting. Since emotional dilemmas are often connected to the unconscious experience (P. T. Maiteny, 2002; Mnguni, 2010; Randall, 2005; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001) I knew I would need tools or techniques to help bring those emotions to a conscious level. With my own experience avoiding the news to escape images of degradation and loss, I was also highly interested in how the same topics impacted my colleagues and their work. Since humans experience a sense of loss when they witness or learn of environmental degradation (Kidner, 2007) and environmental education is highly focused on building awareness of and protection from environmental degradation (Gottlieb, 2004; Guidelines for the Preparation and Professional Development of
Environmental Educators, 2004) I expected it to be highly present in the educators’ experiences.

To explore the experiences of my environmental education colleagues and begin to develop an understanding of how their experiences may impact their work and how they would respond to an associated professional development experience, I worked with a team of six educators who first participated in a workshop that I designed and facilitated and then each joined me for three in-depth interviews. I framed the project with these research questions:

- What are the conscious and unconscious emotional experiences of environmental educators as they work?
  - What does it mean for them to face an emotional dilemma? How do they articulate their dilemmas?
  - How do they relate to the emotional dilemmas that they face?

- What meanings do the environmental educators bring to discussing emotional dilemmas in a professional development workshop?
  - What connections do they make between the workshop, emotional dilemmas, and their work as environmental educators?
  - What insights do they gain about themselves or their audience through attending the workshop?

- To what extent are any of the environmental educators experiencing dilemmas around loss related to the environment?
  - How do the educators talk about loss? What emotions arise when loss is discussed?
  - What connections do the educators make between emotions related to loss and their work as environmental educators?
Why Explore Environmental Educators’ Emotional Dilemmas?

It is common for environmental topics to arouse strong emotional responses such as anger, despair, fear, and anxiety (Leiserowitz, 2007.; P. T. Maiteny, 2002; O’Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009; Perrin, 2011; K. Searles, 2010). Though emotions are often experienced unconsciously they have a significant impact on how people behave consciously (Walkerdine et al., 2001). In the case of environmental messaging, the unconscious emotions can prevent people from adopting pro-environmental behaviors (P. T. Maiteny, 2002; Moser, 2007; Randall, 2005, 2009; K. Searles, 2010; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001). More specifically, people employ psychological defenses such as denial, projection, and splitting to protect themselves from the painful emotions that they feel in response to environmental messages. It is these defense mechanisms and others that may often prevent pro-environmental behaviors (Mnguni, 2010; Randall, 2005, 2009; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001).

Moser (2007) and others (P. T. Maiteny, 2002; Randall, 2005, 2009; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001) argue that many environmental educators do not understand the complex emotional effects of their messaging and as a result, continue to use methods that elicit psychological defense mechanisms and exacerbate the problems that they are working to solve. Due to a higher level of awareness of the depth and breadth of environmental issues, Randall (2009) also suggests that environmental educators and communicators are more likely to experience emotional reactions and defensive responses to environmental content than the general populace. It is for these reasons that I chose to conduct this research. Ultimately my intent is to help environmental educators to expand their own capacities and to develop impactful messaging that drives pro-
environmental behaviors. This research project was the first step toward that goal and I found it to be an essential step. Along my journey I found that environmental educators, not surprisingly, are complex people with highly complex emotional experiences that to some extent they are unaware of. This thesis is my attempt to capture and retell the story of the environmental educators that so generously shared their experiences with me so that I may contribute to helping the field of environmental education reach higher and further in the quest to improve the future of our planet.

**Overview of the Remaining Chapters**

Chapter Two examines the literature that supports and provides context for my research project. I share the research from ecopsychology, psychosocial studies, conservation psychology, and sociology that influenced the study as well as a brief overview of related queries directly in the field of environmental education. Chapter Three then begins the discussion about my research project with an in-depth description of the methodology and methods that I used to capture data and analyze the results. Chapter Four provides a description of the research results by telling the stories of the educators in my study. In the concluding chapter, Chapter Five, I discuss the results in the context of my research questions and draw connections to related fields while illuminating insights that the results bear upon the field of environmental education.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the literature in order to build context for understanding the foundation for my study. I begin with an examination of the research supporting the psychological connection between humans and the environment. I then present insight into how humans’ unconscious connection with the environment can cause emotional pain that influences environmental behaviors and how environmental communication can often exacerbate people’s environmental behaviors. The chapter concludes with an examination of techniques that have been used to address the pain caused by environmental issues and a look at how this research has been connected specifically to environmental education.

Linking the Unconscious to the Environment

The idea that our environmental crisis is linked to unconscious human emotions was first put forth by psychoanalyst Harold Searles (1972). Searles argued that ecological deterioration is the result of unconscious anxieties and that apathy toward the environment results from unconscious psychological defenses against those anxieties (p. 363). Among his supporting examples Searles connected our continued pollution with an inability to cope with losing the healthier environment we knew in childhood; knowing that we will lose the environment removes our desire to protect it (p. 366). Searles also noted a lack of networks to help people cope with loss appropriately (p. 366). Our heavy reliance on technology disconnected us from each other and from the environment, exacerbating our unanswered anxieties (p. 368). Many authors have furthered Searles’ argument, emphasizing our inextricable link to our environment and our need to rebuild
our connection to nature or face further environmental destruction (Abram, 2005; Kidner, 1994).

A parallel understanding of our unconscious link to our environment comes from Terror Management Theory (TMT). According to TMT, humans are uniquely positioned to have an awareness of our own mortality and we are continually working to ward off the anxiety that comes with that awareness (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). TMT research has demonstrated that nature and wildlife can serve as a reminder of mortality and so to protect ourselves we seek out ways to view ourselves as separate from the rest of nature (Vess & Arndt, 2008). From the view of TMT, the unconscious anxieties that drive our disconnection from and potential destructive attitudes toward nature are anxieties about our own death.

Furthering the conversation about the link between our unconscious and the environment, Joseph Mishan (1996) presented the case for the lessons the environmental movement can learn from psychoanalysis. Mishan argued that a psychoanalytic study of human relations with nature illumined a paranoid/schizoid relationship between humans and nature, which was reinforced by the environmental movement (Mishan, 1996, p. 66). In other words, Mishan argued that we unconsciously connect nature with our own mortality, potentially making us resistant to protecting nature, and that messages from the environmental movement can reinforce the connections between nature and mortality.

In addition to Mishan arguing for a psychoanalytic approach to understanding the human/environment connection, researchers from psychology and sociology worked to understand the so called “gap”, or the reason why people with positive environmental attitudes often do not translate their attitudes into pro-environmental behaviors
This question became a focus when studies began to demonstrate that the main challenge was no longer environmental awareness because people were widely aware of environmental issues (Donoghue & Lotz-sisitka, 2002; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Leiserowitz, 2006; P. T. Maiteny, 2002). The challenge was motivating people to take the steps to participate in pro-environmental behaviors.

**Our Pain for the World**

Building on the understanding of the unconscious connection to nature researchers began to examine exactly how the connection prevented environmental action. Researchers and practitioners from psychology, sociology, ecopsychology, conservation psychology, psychosocial studies, and a variety of other fields have been able to make the link between unconscious psychological protective measures to emotional pain, with lack of action and a variety of other behaviors that avoid or contribute to environmental crises (Leiserowitz, 2006; R. A. Lertzman, 2011; P. T. Maiteny, 2002; Moser, 2007; K. M. Norgaard & Winter, 2006; Opotow & Weiss, 2000; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001).

We feel fear and anxiety when reminded of environmental devastation because of our interconnections with the natural world. Macy (1995) writes about environmental despair and what she calls our “pain for the world” (p. 241). Put succinctly, since we are interconnected with the entire world, when the world suffers, she feels, so do we (p. 241). According to Macy, though we all feel deep environmental despair, our social norms encourage us to suppress the pain and we are left with feelings of disbelief and denial, living as if nothing is wrong with the environment. Macy goes on further to explain that
our inability to cope with despair stems from an amalgamation of fears inhibiting our actions, most notably (for my research) is the fear that we will lose much of nature to destruction (p. 246).

Other authors have supported Macy’s claim that we feel pain when nature is damaged: “Environmental degradation is one of most psychologically profound hardships endured by a population due to its damaging effects on personal psyche, health, and the collective well-being” (K. Searles, 2010, p. 174). Our connection with nature often begins in childhood when our immediate environment and associated sense of place equates with comfort and love. As adults that attachment we formed as children means that our sense of home and even sense of self are “entwined with the natural world” (Nicholsen, 2002), meaning that any loss of nature feels like a personal loss. What appears as apathy may actually be psychic numbing brought on to protect ourselves from the pain of loss; in other words we care so much that we cannot bear to fully acknowledge the reality of our environmental crisis (Lertzman, 2009, p. 16). Pain from loss is so prevalent that Glenn Albrecht (2006) coined a term to define it, solastalgia. Solastalgia, according to Albrecht, is “the pain or sickness caused by the loss of, or inability to derive solace from, the present state of one’s home environment” (p. 35). Albrecht suggests that solastalgia can lead to feelings of distress, loss, bereavement; a condition such as depression; and medical issues such as drug abuse or mental illness (p. 36). The effects of solastalgia have been documented in areas touched by severe weather events or other destructive climactic events (Burley, Jenkins, Laska, & Davis, 2007). From the perspective of TMT, environmental devastation can remind us of our own mortality, which can stir a variety of feelings such as anxiety and cause people to
disassociate from whatever is causing the reminder of death (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997).

Loss isn’t the only unconscious emotional dilemma we grapple with when it comes to environmental challenges. Studies show that environmental challenges can also leave people feeling overwhelmed, hopeless and powerless (K. M. Norgaard & Winter, 2006; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001). Norgaard (2006) examined responses to climate change in Norway and found that both on individual and social levels, people were managing their emotional responses of fear, anxiety, hopelessness, and powerlessness with emotional denial that manifested into the entire population diverting their attention from any news related to climate change and reframing news to dilute its relationship to their local lives. Similar studies have demonstrated that people can feel so overwhelmed with emotion related to climate change that they have little recourse other than to protect themselves and disengage from participation in climate change communication or any other related behaviors (Andre, 2011; O’Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009).

Stoll-Kleemann, O’Riordan and Jaeger (2001) spoke with focus groups about climate change issues and solutions, and witnessed the participants engaging a variety of psychological barriers to justify their inability to individually engage in solutions. Participants found it difficult to accept that personal sacrifice would lead to any actual results, they felt powerless to act alone and could only see positive results in collective action, and they blamed society instead of themselves as individuals.

A number of other studies have examined discrete emotions and associated behaviors that environmental messaging can cause. Maiteny (2002) reported that emotional appeals that played on anxiety may lead to short-term behavior changes but did
not result in permanent changes. A study of environmental public service announcements found that emotions that elicited positive affect such as enthusiasm could have the effect of creating enthusiasm for environmental action but that any kind of negative affect related emotion would invoke fear and sometimes back-lash or anger (K. Searles, 2010). Other research emphasizes that use of fear can elicit anger and anxiety for the receivers (Leiserowitz, 2006; O’Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009). Leiserowitz (2006) showed that the affect that people associate with environmental issues will influence how they respond to pleas for action and policy suggestions. When people realize that they are contributors to environmental issues through their own behaviors they can sometimes feel so much anxiety about the realization that they move into denial (P. T. Maiteny, 2002). Those who do try to alter their behaviors can sometimes feel overwhelmed or fear that their own actions are futile, which halts any further action (P. T. Maiteny, 2002).

**Anxiety Adds to the Environmental Crisis**

When people feel threatened by anxiety or fear they tend to cling more closely to their natural worldviews and whatever typical means they use to bolster their self-esteem (Arndt, Routledge, Cox, & Goldenberg, 2005; Solomon et al., 1991; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001; Vess & Arndt, 2008). Over 200 studies from the perspective of TMT have shown that reminders of death will cause people to bolster their worldviews (Greenberg et al., 1990).

TMT connects unconscious anxiety about death to behaviors that contribute to the environmental crisis, such as consumerism (Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004). Human culture is a natural derivative of our unconscious anxiety about death because culture can help provide calming explanations of our origins and what happens to us
when we die (Becker, 1973 as cited in Arndt et al., 2004). When we are reminded of our mortality through such means as communication about environmental crisis we reinforce ourselves by ensuring that we fit into our given cultural context. In western culture, since much of our cultural definition is tied to consumerism and material worth, reminders of death can result in further consumerism (Arndt et al., 2004).

Randall (2005) also connects unconscious anxiety with consumerism by drawing a connection between consumer behaviors and collective denial. According to Randall, our fears of dramatic environmental loss drive us to participate in the very consumer economy that has created the problem (p. 167). As we continually hear messages about global environmental crises and the potentially devastating effects of global climate change we collectively work to promote a sense of normalcy which means reinforcing our existing culture of consumerism (Randall, 2005, p. 168).

Lertzman (2012) offers additional explanation to the phenomenon, by revealing the strong affect that people attach to specific places or environmental events. When people lose the places they feel strongly about they will move the same affect to another object in order to cope with the loss (p. 9). The replacement objects can be anything from consumer goods to new environments and as a result of this affective relational switch we see people clinging to them (R. Lertzman, 2012), which from the outside appears to be a lack of interest in adopting pro-environmental behaviors.

Just as people cling to worldviews when they feel threatened, they also can cling to like-minded individuals (Pyszczynski et al., 1997). Fear and anxiety caused by environmental messaging can cause people to cling so strongly to their worldviews and like-minded individuals that they build up anger toward anyone who might be different,
or in the case of environmental communicators, who might be insinuating that their worldview is incorrect (Pyszczynski et al., 1997; Randall, 2005; Solomon et al., 1991; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001). As a result of their anger, people place blame on environmental communicators and doubt the validity of any messages that they share (Randall, 2005). Threatened themselves, environmental educators can grow angry and confused and resort to messaging strategies that continue to exacerbate the situation (Moser, 2007; Randall, 2005).

**The message must change.**

Moser (2007) and others (P. T. Maiteny, 2002; Randall, 2005, 2009; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001) argue that environmental educators must accept that common environmental campaigns and messages may reinforce the unconscious defenses described above (Moser, 2007). Moser (2007) implores environmental educators and communicators to pay attention to the emotional appeals that they make when striving for pro-environmental behaviors and behavioral change. We must understand that messages designed to increase the sense of urgency feed into the anxiety, denial, and psychic numbing already discussed (Moser, 2007).

Moser’s research on emotions and emotional responses to environmental messaging offers alternatives for environmental communication and education: embrace positive values, provide clear and relevant engagement opportunities, create a positive vision for the future, and develop greater self-reflexivity among educators and communicators. Nicholsen (2002) and Moser (2012) present a call for a new kind of environmental leader, one who is able to conjointly acknowledge and address both the joy and pain of the world so that psychological protective measures no longer can get in
the way of creative solutions. For these authors and many others (Macy, 1995; Meadows, 1997; Randall, 2005; van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009; Windle, 1995) environmental educators will not be able to successfully engage people if they don’t first acknowledge their own pain and associated protective strategies.

**Healing Our Unconscious Pain**

While some researchers try to find deeper understandings of our unconscious pain and its connection to environmental behaviors, others have developed ways to help people understand and address their own pain (Macy & Brown, 1998; Randall, 2009; van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009). These practitioners have designed interactive, dialogue-based experiential workshops and activities for a variety of public participants (Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy, 1995; Randall, 2009). I used the work of these two practitioners plus another (Van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009) to develop the framework and content for the workshop that I facilitated as part of this research project.

Macy (1995) developed introspective techniques to empower people when experiencing anxiety, fear, and despair. Although her work was originally created to explore the threat of nuclear war, she has applied the same techniques to coping with environmental destruction. The workshops, *The Work That Reconnects*, are compiled by Macy and Brown (1998) as a resource for potential workshop facilitators. Macy (1995) offers important insights necessary to work through the pain of loss. Most remarkably, she advocates the importance of acknowledging that pain for our world is natural and shared by all people (p. 251). Collective grief is important for overcoming our psychological defenses and drives the group work model for Macy and Brown’s workshops (Macy, 1995).
The Work That Reconnects consists of a four-part workshop guided by a facilitator (Macy & Brown, 1998). Each part of the workshop is essential for empowering people (p. 77). The four sections are: affirmation: coming from gratitude; despair work: owning and honoring our pain for the world; the shift: seeing with new eyes; and going forth. Though each workshop contains the same four components, Macy and Brown’s model has taken many forms with different facilitators. I will explore the many adaptations to better inform my own workshop development.

Interestingly, Randall’s (2009) proposed model for addressing personal identity loss associated with behavioral change follows a similar four-step process built on Worden’s model for mourning (p. 121), suggesting the importance of addressing loss related to environmental issues. Randall based her model upon successful support group interventions in the UK (p. 118). Just as we grieve for loved ones or for environmental loss, so too must we grieve for loss we will experience when we must give up an aspect of identity, such as a car or airplane travel, in order to mitigate environmental damage (Randall, 2009). Randall’s four stages parallel Worden’s grief model and are: accepting the reality of the loss, working through the painful emotions, adjusting to the new environment, reinvesting emotional energy. Randall emphasizes the importance of environmental educators and communicators to understand this grief process in order to develop a “culture of understanding and empathy” (p. 126).

Emotions and Environmental Educators

If the general population can have such strong reactions to environmental issues, it makes sense that environmental activists and communicators who have a higher level of awareness of the issues and causes might feel even greater amounts of psychological
pain (Randall, 2005). van Dernoot Lipsky’s (2009) work on what she refers to as *Trauma Stewardship* emphasizes the susceptibility that environmental educators have to increased psychological pains. She explains that *Trauma Stewardship* is a concept for people working in trauma-related fields to care for themselves emotionally so that they can maintain their physical and psychological well-being while doing emotionally taxing work. According to van Dernoot Lipsky, stewardship needs to take place at three different levels: personal, organizational, and societal. She argues that stewardship needs to happen at all of these levels because individuals are both restricted and empowered by the organizational and societal levels. The exercises that she suggests are designed to promote self-reflexive behaviors, help individuals draw connections between their own emotional state and the work that they do, and develop proactive coping strategies so that people working in trauma related roles can manage their pain and maintain healthy and productive careers.

Looking more specifically at environmental educators, several studies have documented the emotional frustrations and pains associated with being an environmental educator (Andre, 2011; Beauchamp, 2009; Henderson, 2010). All of these authors demonstrate that educators suffer anxiety, anger, fear, and powerlessness as a result of their understanding of the continuing decline of the natural world and the human-caused impacts. When educators are not able to manage their emotions they can feel unproductive and experience burnout (Beauchamp, 2009; Henderson, 2010). Environmental education and activism can be a highly stressful job (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003) even without the extra emotional stress from environmental awareness.
In my search I found little other research focused on the experience of environmental educators. May (2000) documented what environmental educators believe to be the ideal qualities of an environmental educator, and while there was an acknowledgement that the work can be stressful, the only notion of emotional connections was to state that educators must have an infectious, energetic, and optimistic attitude. This perspective is supported by the evidence that affective techniques used in environmental education can create potential for higher levels of participant engagement and build potential for more long-term behavioral changes (Gurevitz, 2000; Monroe, 2003). What has not been looked at extensively is the impact of emotional dilemmas on how environmental educators conduct their programs. The Center for Ecoliteracy has begun a conversation by emphasizing the role of emotional intelligence in creating empowering education (Goleman, Bennett, & Barlow, 2012). Reis and Roth (2010) used case studies and identified that emotional discourse is an integral component of highly engaging and effective environmental education programs. They found that emotions play a key role in establishing context and helping students to make sense of environmental content.

If emotions are so integral to what environmental educators do, and there is a potential for those emotions to also have a significant influence on the behavior of educators themselves, then it seems imperative that we look more closely at how emotions are influencing educators messaging techniques. My research is an initial step in understanding the complex relationship between unconscious emotions and the work of environmental educators. The following chapters focus specifically on my research and the insights it can build for the field. In the next chapter I begin by sharing the
methodology and procedures I used to conduct the study and gain the insight I share in chapters Four and Five.
Chapter Three: Methods

Overview

Since I intended to understand the entire experience of environmental educators, including how their unconscious interplayed with conscious actions, I approached the work from a psychosocial theoretical framework and used a variety of methods to capture data relevant to their experience, such as the unconscious emotions and protective measures that influenced the educators’ work. The participants were selected for the project using a qualitative survey (see Appendix A) and then each research participant completed a full-day professional development workshop together. The workshop was video recorded and participants recorded thoughts in personal journals. After the workshop, participants completed anonymous evaluations of their experience and then participated in a series of three in-depth interviews that were audio recorded. Details for each facet of the data collection and the final analysis are described in this chapter.

A Psychosocial Theoretical Framework

I approached this project from a psychosocial theoretical perspective. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) describe psychosocial research participants as those

…whose inner worlds cannot be understood without knowledge of their experiences in the world, and whose experiences of the world cannot be understood without knowledge of the way in which their inner worlds allow them to experience the outer world. (2000, p. 4)

In other words, to truly understand my research participants I needed to examine both the conscious and unconscious dimensions of how they experienced their work. Considering the contextual background of this project that demonstrates the role of the
unconscious in the experience of environmental communication, it was important for me to approach each aspect of my project from a psychosocial perspective. People experience environmental messaging as they do, in part, because they are psychosocial beings, and utilizing a psychosocial theoretical framework allowed me to view and understand the participants fully within the context of their own background stories. I thought of psychosocial theory in the way that Clarke and Hoggett (2009) described it as, “…more of an attitude, or position towards the subject(s) of study rather than just another methodology…” (p. 2). In other words, psychosocial theory shaped my entire study design, from how I developed and structured the workshop, to which interview technique I chose, and finally to how I analyzed the data.

From the moment I considered how to invite participants to my research and introduce them to their roles within the study, I approached with the understanding that each individual was a complex being and that at any point, unconscious protective measures could become activated. In fact, since my main interest in the research was to uncover common protective measures that were consciously and unconsciously activated by the participants while they worked as environmental educators, I needed to prepare a research environment that felt safely contained so that participants could freely express themselves without needing to employ protective measures (Macy & Brown, 1998, Chapter 5). I describe each aspect of the study design and the measures I took to consider psychosocial individuals further into this chapter.

Embedded within the psychosocial framework was a psychoanalytically informed approach to the work: “A psychoanalytically informed view of data directs attentions to the processes that are unconscious, the unspoken shared attitudes, the unacknowledged
anxieties and conflicts, as well as the quality of the atmosphere and its unconscious aspects” (Hinshelwood and Skogstad, 2005, p. 9 in Lertzman, 2009). Psychoanalytically informed methodology tends to concern “researching beneath the surface” (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, p. 2) and looking at not just what is being said, but the psychodynamic processes that inform what is being said. Though I am not a trained psychoanalyst, I was able to draw upon previously developed psychoanalytically informed methodologies (Cartwright, 2004; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; R. A. Lertzman, 2009; Walkerdine et al., 2001) to guide my project design.

Maintaining reflexivity.

An important aspect of psychosocial research and a psychoanalytically informed approach is that of the role of the researcher herself (Hollway, 2009). Being a reflexive researcher means that we are “…engaged in sustained self-reflection on our methods and practice, on our emotional involvement in the research, and on the affective relationship between ourselves and the researched” (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, p. 3). To maintain my own reflexive practice I kept field notes throughout the entire process, recording my cognitive and emotional experience of the research, any questions or thoughts that came to my mind, any reactions I felt toward the participants or the content. “…if we pay attention to our thoughts and emotions during the research process we can often come to an understanding that might otherwise pass us by” (Walkerdine et al., 2001, p. 89). So as I took notes, I knew that they may help me to better understand the experience of my participants. I also shared aspects of my experiences with my thesis supervisor and a few of my graduate cohort members, which helped me gain further insight into how those experiences might be relevant to the research data. While not true triangulation
(Walkerdine et al., 2001, p. 95) the process of sharing did provide additional validity to my analysis.

I was careful to document instances of counter-transference that happened during the interviews, which offered opportunity to further explore the unconscious dynamics of the participant I experienced the counter-transference with. Counter-transference is about the unconscious response of the researcher toward the research participant or some aspect of the participant’s narrative (Walkerdine et al., 2001, p. 90). For example, I documented shifts in my own energy or emotional state, especially when they didn’t match the state of the participant or what was being said. At one point during an interview when a participant was speaking matter-of-factly about how he copes with the challenges in his work, I felt an anxiety building up inside of me that I could not understand. When I later re-read his transcripts and reflected upon the experience, I came to realize that perhaps his unconscious resistance to speaking about the challenges in his work was creating the anxiety I was feeling. Understanding the dynamic that took place between us helped me to form a better understanding of how he relates to his own challenges on an unconscious level.

At the same time, I was careful to keep note of times when I might be transferring my own feelings about a subject on to a participant. I was able to build this awareness by remaining open with myself about what I was experiencing and how the participants’ stories related to my own experience as an environmental educator, as well as my assumptions about the outcomes of the project.
To help with the reflexive process I needed to prepare myself for the emotional experience that this research project would be. I share more details about my internal preparation in the next section.

**Pilot and Personal Preparation**

Before embarking upon my full research I had to prepare myself for the emotional experience. Macy and Brown (1998) caution any facilitator of emotional work to do his or her own work first. While I acknowledge that I still have more work of my own to do, I was able to combine my previous experience working with psychoanalysts with participation in *The Work That Reconnects* to prepare myself for the research project. I am indebted to Kevin Lay for graciously giving of his time to facilitate *The Work That Reconnects* specifically so that I could have the experience. Kevin was also a participant in my pilot workshop and offered guidance and feedback throughout. Additionally I attended a two-day training with my thesis supervisor to understand the mechanics of the psychoanalytic methodology I was using, and throughout the project she provided essential guidance for creating a safe space for my research participants.

The pilot I conducted was with six individuals who categorized themselves as either environmental educators or environmental activists. These six individuals completed the qualitative survey, participated in the full-day workshop, and completed the anonymous workshop evaluation. Several of them graciously provided direct feedback on the pilot experience. Based upon her interest and availability, I chose one member of the pilot workshop group to participate in a pilot interview series. After the pilot I was able to make critical adjustments to the workshop and the interview structure to allow for more accurate data collection.
Research Participants

My ultimate interest is in providing professional development opportunities to guide educators through the psychological domain of their work and providing a framework within which organizational leaders can easily provide the development for their own teams. With that in mind, I chose to conduct the study within my own team and therefore selected research participants from my own organization. (Details about the ethical considerations for the study are discussed below in this chapter).

I chose to draw a purposeful group of participants that met basic criteria that I had established, and although a case study can never be large enough to provide a representative sample, I had intended to at least develop a group that reflected the potential of a large-sized environmental education organization (see Appendix A for the demographic criteria that were established for the study). I developed a survey to help capture the necessary data to determine an appropriate sample.

Due to the sensitive nature of the content I was exploring, and because I was asking colleagues to explore the content together, I wanted to include individuals who demonstrated a propensity toward active reflection upon environmental issues or concerns and expressed a passion for environmental education. In other words, individuals who saw environmental education simply as a paycheck and had little connection to the environmental content they were teaching were not of interest for the purposes of this study. Though I could assume that individuals with this perspective on environmental education (instances of which seem rare in my experience) would self-select out of the study, I chose to actively eliminate them from consideration in this study. With the highly sensitive nature of the content we were exploring together as
colleagues, I felt that someone who didn’t meet the minimum criteria might unnecessarily alter the comfort level of the group.

Once participants met the minimum criteria for the study I also had hoped to include participants who expressed varying levels of emotional connection to their work, from those who were just starting to explore issues to those who were actively reflecting on environmental issues or challenges in their work. To develop a study group that met all of my established criteria I developed a survey that combined demographic questions with open-ended, reflective questions (see Appendix A for the complete survey). While the survey proved useful in drawing the group I was looking for, ultimately it was a challenge to find a single-day during which all the selected participants could meet for the workshop, so my final group was made up of six individuals who were all able to attend the workshop on the same day. I share more details about the research participants in Chapter Four.

**Recruitment.**

An invitation letter was distributed to all environmental educators in the organization via an email from a Vice President in the organization (my direct supervisor). For ethical reasons I chose to conduct my initial communication through her so that she could underscore the voluntary nature of the study and that participation had no bearing on an individual’s standing within the organization. The invitation letter (see Appendix B) contained a link to an online version of the survey with a request to complete the survey by a specified deadline. Within the survey, respondents were told that they would hear from me via email if they were selected to continue with the study.
All of my communication with the potential and ultimate research participants was conducted through my personal, non-work email account. This was important so that I could make it clear that I was operating as a graduate student, and not the participants’ employer, when communicating with regards to the project. Once participants were selected for the study I followed up via email with a description of the research project (Appendix C), a consent form for them to sign and return to me (Appendix D), and a link to an online scheduling program (www.doodle.com) to allow them to share their availability for the workshop date. Once it became evident that I would not be able to get enough of the selected participants together for the workshop, I invited the rest of the survey respondents (who met my minimum criteria) to read the description of the research project and input their availability for the workshop. At that point I made it clear to all potential participants that the final participants for the study would be chosen from the largest group of people that could gather on the same day. The final number of workshop participants was six.

**Workshop**

Once a date was established participants were sent an email to help them prepare for their workshop experience. In the email I stressed that they would be given opportunities to explore potentially emotional topics with their colleagues but that they had ultimate choice in their level of participation. The workshop was held at the participants’ workplace but in a facility that was separated from the rest of their colleagues to allow their participation to remain confidential.

The workshop (Appendix E) was designed to last eight hours; however with a small group we were able to finish the content in six and a half hours. To help the
educators explore their own experience I designed into the workshop a combination of small and large-group dialogue, personal reflection, and full-group interactive activities. The activities and approach I chose were not original but drawn from the dialogic approach of Randall (2009) and reflective activities developed by Macy and Brown (1998) and van Dernoot Lipsky (2009). All of the activities were designed to help participants to gently explore their own emotional experiences in a way that lessened the risk for participants to engage in psychological defense.

The day began with an introduction to the workshop content and a discussion about ground rules, to establish a safe space for participants to express themselves. Respect and individual choice were of paramount importance. I distributed notebooks for the participants to use as personal journals throughout the day and asked them to leave the journals with me if they were comfortable with their journal content being used as data. All participants did leave their journals with me.

While the complete workshop outline can be found in Appendix E, here I would like to give some space to explain the overall structure of the workshop and how the design met my psychosocial framework. From a psychosocial standpoint I needed to provide the opportunity for participants to gently and safely reach a space that explored the challenges and potentially more painful side of their experience. If I approached those emotions too quickly or too directly I risked participants engaging unconscious protective measures that could prove to be barriers to in-depth exploration of their experience. I chose to follow the model used in *The Work That Reconnects* (Macy & Brown, 1998), which begins with a celebration of the rewards and more positive experience of the participants (Coming with Gratitude) and then gently asks them to reflect upon their
challenges (Honoring Our Pain), followed by exploring the meaning and import of their challenges (Seeing with New Eyes) and concluding with a discussion of next steps (Going Forth). Within each portion of the workshop I chose activities that enabled the participants to share their personal stories in whatever fashion they chose, again holding true to the psychosocial framework and the psychoanalytically informed method.

To allow for the reality that the dialogue and activities had the potential to be highly emotional and become very personal, during and between each workshop section I facilitated brief “check-ins” with each participant to ensure their comfort with moving forward and determined any adjustments that needed to be made. I also was careful to choose activities that I felt would be most applicable to a wide variety of personality types and comfort levels. Since my goal was for any leader to be able to facilitate the workshop with ease, I chose activities that were simple to facilitate with a small amount of planning and background experience. The workshop ended with a debriefing and discussion intended to help participants apply the experience to their work.

After the workshop, participants were sent a link to an online evaluation (Appendix F) that they were invited to complete anonymously. The workshop evaluation was meant to gather basic data regarding general reactions to the workshop content and my skills as a facilitator. Data from the evaluations is not reflected heavily in the final analysis for this project but will be used at a later period as I think about recommendations for future workshop design.

The workshop was recorded using a video recorder that sat in the corner of the room. Only the content portions of the day were captured on film; the video recorder was
turned off during break times. During one activity participants separated outside of the room for personal reflection and that portion of the workshop was not recorded.

**Interviews**

The interviews were conducted using a psychoanalytically informed interview method called *Dialogic, Relational Interview* (R. A. Lertzman, 2009), which took elements from *Biographical Narrative Interview Method* (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2001) and *Free Association Narrative Interview* (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). This method supported the psychosocial framework by allowing participants to narrate their experiences using their own voices, which allowed for unconscious dynamics to potentially come out in the process.

*Dialogic, Relational Interview* methodology includes the following aspects as essential for structuring the interview process: eliciting uninterrupted narratives by beginning with a *Single Question to Induce Narrative* (SQUIN) (Wengraf, 2001), using open-ended questions and the respondent’s ordering and phrasing (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), and maintaining a dialogic approach, meaning a focus on a participant-driven dialogue throughout the interviews (R. A. Lertzman, 2009). Using the *Dialogic, Relational Interview* method allowed the participants to share their story with me in a way that the most important aspects for the participants were raised to the forefront and the dialogue that unfolded from there was driven by the participants. Participant-driven interviews are important to help access and understand the unconscious dynamics that influence the participants. If I had structured the interview differently and forced my own assumptions upon the unfolding of the conversation, I would have run the risk of eliciting more rational responses instead of the emotional motivations I was looking for.
For each participant I conducted three in-depth, open-ended interviews that began with a single prompt in the first interview and follow-up dialogue in the two subsequent interviews. While I came to the two follow-up interviews with particular topics I desired to discuss, I attempted to allow the participant to guide the interview as much as possible and allow my follow-up questions to arise organically from the dialogue. What follows is a detailed description of the interview process.

Before the first interview started I reviewed the workshop recording and journal entries for each participant, looking for themes that arose that I should keep track of during the interview process. I kept these in mind not as questions, but as tidbits of information to bring up when appropriate to jog a participant’s memory or make a connection to a theme.

My SQUIN was less a question and more of a prompt and took some form of the statement below.

*Please tell me about your experience as an environmental educator; I'm interested in any events and experiences that are important to you; they can be connected to rewards or challenges or anything that you choose.*

As the participants related their stories to me I would follow up with additional prompts, asking them to explain more about how an experience made them feel or to try to recall any other memories that made them feel the same or that were connected in some way to the story. Between each interview and as close to the next follow-up interview as possible, I listened closely to each interview and took notes on stories that the participants shared that helped shed light on my research questions.
During the second interviews, using the words of each recipient, I asked them to tell me more about the experience, clarify details, or share similar memories. I took care to reflect their stories back to them using the same language and in the same order that they told them to me, which not only demonstrated my sincere interest in the participants’ true experiences but it also minimized any potential impact I might have on shaping their story by interjecting my own interpretation (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). At the same time, if I had misheard or misunderstood any portion of a story, the participant was able to indicate the discrepancy at that time.

By the time the third round of interviews was to begin, a variety of themes were emerging that connected the research participants together and began to illuminate my research questions. To help clarify those themes, I focused most of the third-round interviews on exploring the themes with each participant by asking them to reflect upon what the general theme meant to them. For example, participants commonly shared experiences during which they felt powerless and lacking in control. Some had directly used language about control and others had expressed something that I interpreted as lack of control. I individualized the checking of that theme with each person by first reminding the person of a story that he or she had shared with me related to the theme. Then I shared with them that many of the other participants I was talking to had shared similar experiences and that I was interested in understanding how people felt about those type of experiences and how they managed the emotions that came up. The conversation that unfolded from there gave the participants the opportunity to clarify their thoughts around the topic and share with me how they consciously managed their emotions. For
me, the conversation served not only as an opportunity for member checking but also a check-in on the salience of my theme assignments.

Throughout each interview I tried to minimize my note-taking so I could keep my focus on creating a dialogue between us. After the interviews I took notes regarding patterns I saw develop during the conversation, body language and energy shifts in the room, and also instances of possible counter-transference.

Each interview lasted between 25 and 60 minutes. Originally I had intended to space the interviews evenly over a two-month period, however my own schedule and the participants’ schedules dictated the timing of the interviews and no consistent spacing took place between rounds. All first-round interviews began within two weeks of the workshop and all third-round interviews concluded within six weeks of the workshop.

Data Analysis

Throughout the project I had accumulated data in the form of workshop participation, journal entries, and the in-depth interviews. When I reviewed the workshop recording it was difficult to discern individual details and instead I used it to capture a general sense of how the participant responded to the workshop. None of the participants entered more than two pages in their journal entries so I did not conduct a full narrative analysis on those, but instead used the information recorded to help clarify details from the interview analysis. The primary focus of my data analysis was on the interviews. Holding true to the psychosocial framework I analyzed the interviews using Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000) holistic analysis and interpretation method, intended to keep the narrative context intact instead of fragmenting the data into codes which is a common method for qualitative analysis. With the use of coding I would have run the risk of
separating information from its true context and missing important aspects of the unconscious dynamics for the participant (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Holistic analysis allowed me to bring to light the unconscious emotions and defense mechanisms that influenced the way participants experienced their work.

In my analysis I also drew upon the work of Clarke & Hoggett (2009) to highlight key aspects of the data that made the unconscious dynamics apparent. Key elements I looked for within the data included: the use of metaphor; patterns in speech or patterns in word usage; how thoughts, ideas, and relationships were organized in the participant’s mind; imagery that was created by the participant; and any key concepts or ideas that I was surprised not to hear about from the participant. It was also important to look at the order that the participants shared their stories and ideas as the psychoanalytic interview presents “…the kind of narrative that is not structured according to conscious logic, but according to unconscious logic; that is, the associations follow pathways defined by emotional motivations, rather than rational intentions” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 37).

The analysis process began as I transcribed each interview myself and wrote down any thoughts about themes that came up during the transcription process. By the time I was done transcribing I had already listened to each interview two or three times and began to develop an intimate connection with the content.

After transcription was complete I first analyzed each participant separately with a series of read-throughs of their interview transcripts. At each read-through I attempted to read all three transcripts for each participant in one sitting so that I could keep all of the information together as a complete data set. I also reviewed any notes that I had taken
after and between interviews to remember key points of counter-transference that I may have picked up on during interviews or areas of confusion that came up for me.

During the first read-through I highlighted sections that stood out to me and jotted quick notes in the margins of the document. During the second read-through I started to draw connections between different sections of the interview and noted questions that came up for me about the participant, what he or she really meant by certain statements, or why certain patterns were occurring in the transcript. Then I kept reading through the transcripts until I believed I had found answers to all of my questions within the data and felt that I had developed a sense of the experience of that individual. I then sketched a quick bullet-point summary of important elements of that person’s experience relevant to the research questions, and moved on to the next participant.

After all participants had been individually analyzed I went back and read through each set of interviews, this time with the rest of the participants in my mind, looking for differences and commonalities between them. By comparing and contrasting their experiences I began to see each participant’s experience more in-depth; commonalities helped illuminate more connections between portions of the interviews for each participant and contrasting experiences highlighted areas that I needed to go back to for a better understanding of why that person’s experience might be unique.

At this point I summarized all of my notes, highlights, questions and comments into a detailed document for each participant and created a concept diagram for each participant to help draw connections between elements of their stories. From those diagrams I was able to create a portrait or “experience profile” for each participant which I summarized in a one-page document for each person.
By the time I had finalized the experience profiles common themes amongst the participants were becoming clear. For each theme I created a chart that included data from each participant that supported the theme. These charts helped inform the final results that are explored in Chapter Four.

**Member Checking**

While much of the member checking took place during the interviews when I repeated back participant’s stories and asked them to reflect upon themes, I also felt it important to give each individual an opportunity to read and briefly discuss with me how I had interpreted their experience. I prepared a packet for each participant that included a copy of the profile statement I intended to include in my thesis as well as a list of each of their quotes that I had included in my results section. For each quote I included the original quote alongside any alterations I had made to the quote in order to protect their identities. Participants were invited to comment on the profile and use of quotes and also schedule time with me to discuss any concerns or questions they had about the research and results. I also gave the participants the option to choose their own pseudonym that I used in this write-up. Every participant approved their profile and quotes and four of the six chose their own pseudonyms. One participant did ask to meet with me to discuss a few of the statements that I made in her profile description. Her questions were related to personal curiosity and did not cause her to ask for alterations to the profile or the quotes that I used.

**Ethical Considerations**

I entered this research knowing two important things: the nature of the work was deeply personal and could lead to painful experiences for the participants and due to the
nature of my supervisory role for the participants, there was significant potential for power dynamics to play a part in the research process. With those thoughts in mind I feel it important to give space to highlighting the specific ethical considerations I put in place before, during, and after this project.

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, before I began the work I sought out a mentor who had extensive experience facilitating emotional work with adults and underwent similar emotional work myself with him. In addition to his advice, I followed the recommendations of Macy and Brown (1998) for working with strong emotions. The workshop was conducted in a private location within the workplace that was closed off to anyone other than the workshop participants for the entire day. Ground rules were established at the onset of the workshop, making it clear that everyone was to respect the emotions and expressions of each participant. No individual was forced to share at any point during the workshop and everyone was encouraged to express their emotions however they chose.

From the onset of the study I provided clear directions for potential participants, identifying its personal and deeply emotional nature and clearly specifying how and when participants could withdraw all or portions of their data. I also made it clear that the participants’ names and identifying features would remain confidential.

I also conducted all of my communication regarding the study from my personal email account and away from the office so that I could make it clear when I was acting as a student. The interviews were conducted onsite at the organization for the benefit of the participants. To underscore the separation of my roles as student and supervisor I would take my work nametag off at the beginning of each interview, use only personal
equipment to record the interviews, and reminded the participants of the ethics that I had to keep in mind throughout the study. Though I cannot say that power dynamics had no influence over the outcomes of this study, I do feel confident that my existing relationships with my participants that were built on trust and integrity did help to mitigate the level of influence. I will discuss this in further detail in the limitations section of Chapter Five.
Chapter Four: The Experience of Environmental Educators

Introduction

As anticipated, the psychoanalytic methodology helped produce incredibly rich data sets with more data available than I am able to discuss within the constraints of this thesis. As such, I have focused on the aspects of the data I found most prevalent and that occurred most commonly among all the educators in the study. My research participants were incredibly generous with their time and with their personal stories – it is my hope this chapter gives adequate voice to the range of emotions they expressed during our time together. In keeping with the spirit of this project, I offer their experiences not from a place of judgment but from a place of humility and gratitude.

The stories included in this chapter are the result of analysis focusing primarily on the three interviews I conducted with each participant. I made this choice in part because the quality of the workshop video recording made it impossible to capture accurate transcripts, but more importantly because the most essential part of the story, relative to my core research questions, came from the interviews. The workshop did provide some insight into the participants’ experience so I have included a brief recap here. After the workshop recap I briefly introduce the research participants and then share the results of their interviews.

An Overview of the Workshop

Overall, viewing the workshop as a one-day professional development experience, it was a success. All participants were equally engaged in the activities and discussions, the discussion suggested that the participants understood and were digesting
the core concepts I had laid out, and the participants gave high marks in all scored sections of the evaluation (See Appendix F).

However, the “free response” section of the evaluation (see Appendix F) suggested that though the participants highly valued the opportunity to reflect upon their work with their colleagues, most of them did not make any explicit connections between the workshop content and the work they do every day with their various audiences. The workshop was mentioned twice in all eighteen interviews and both of these instances were in reference to a memory that the participant had reflected on during the workshop. When I directly questioned participants about their workshop experience, they all stated that they hadn’t thought about the workshop since it ended.

In summary, the workshop resulted in what appears as shallow and short-term engagement with the content but was an enjoyable enough experience that participants seemed open to participating in something similar again. Since the data gathered from the workshop was limited I discuss results of the interviews as the primary focus of my data analysis and this chapter.

**Introducing the Research Participants**

The data described in this chapter draws from the experiences of six environmental educators. Five of them were recruited from my organization and participated in the workshop together. These five educators range in experience in the field from eight to fifteen years and all were in supervisory roles within the organization at the time of the study. The specific audience focus and type of educational programming covered by the group members included ages from early childhood to adult and both formal programs and informal interpretive opportunities. The differences in
their program type focus did not prove to be relevant to the data (perhaps due to the number of participants) so to further protect the identities of the participants I have not included these specifics in the participant summaries. The sixth participant was part of my pilot study and works for a separate organization. She did not have a supervisory role at the time of the study and had the least time in the field with two years of experience.

What follows is a brief introduction to all the participants. To maintain anonymity I use a pseudonym for each participant and have omitted identifying details from the writing.

**Frank** is a mid-level supervisor with five years of experience in environmental education. Though the main focus of his work is with children, parents are highly involved with his programs. Frank describes himself as a positive person and many of his stories focused on taking action, remaining proactive, and building trust and respect for himself and his work. Here’s how Frank describes the core of his work,

> I would say in general what I look for, what I try to do in my job is to, to help kids and adults as well, but most of my interface is with kids, to have individual experiences that they’re going to be able to look back on for a long time and remember those as moments when, if nothing else it was just a little bit different, something a little bit more, a little bit closer to nature and animals than they’ve ever been. Or something that will just stand out for them.

Frank takes great pride in creating moments for kids that make a difference for them. The immediate change does not need to relate specifically to environmental behavior; however Frank believes that there is great potential that immediate positive changes could lead to pro-environmental behaviors down the road. He strives to create
experiences that help people to see or reach their full potential, help them see that there is more to the world than just human beings, and that the natural world is full of awe and amazement so it is worth protecting. Based on stories that Frank shared with me I felt that his feelings of awe and amazement with nature were what ultimately drew him to environmental education and that he hoped by recreating similar experiences for others, he could make an impact. Frank was relaxed when we spoke about challenges in his work and the difficult emotions that they might bring up, however he made it clear that it was not a space that he desired to spend much time in because dwelling on challenging emotions was not a part of his nature.

Ethan is a manager with fifteen years of experience in environmental education. He works with a mixture of children and adults on a regular basis. For Ethan, environmental education is about creating change which often means opening people up to new knowledge and to the ability to be open to the world around them, being able to see things differently and pay attention to the world around them, and creating curiosity and a sense of wonderment. He feels a great sense of pride and ownership over the park that he works in and considers it his responsibility to protect the park from damage created by disrespectful visitors. Prior to our interviews, Ethan had already been spending a great deal of time reflecting upon the challenges in his work and the emotions that came up for him, so the interviews turned into an opportunity to voice what was already weighing on his mind. He had many questions about the impact of his work and regarding how to manage the frustration he experienced when seeing people do damage to “his park.”
In many ways the park is overused and under-loved and it’s hard when you care and are so passionate for the location and for the natural world to see it be overused in those ways. It’s (pause) how do you, you know (pause) how do you get through that. Maybe there’s a sense of, you know, it’s a bad analogy but if you have a fire in your home and you lose that, we’re going through that sometimes on a daily basis when we see the damage to your park, intentional damage to your park. And it’s hard to stay up beat on that sometimes.

**Allison** is a mid-level supervisor who has been working in environmental education for fifteen years. She sees her role in environmental education as that of providing tools to people so that they can find their own passion and come to pro-environmental behaviors on their own. She does her work by creating activities and through having one-on-one conversations with people. Both ways allow her to gently introduce ideas to people without them feeling like the ideas are being forced upon them and she finds great satisfaction when her gentle introductions pay off.

I really enjoy conservation education and I really enjoy getting other people excited about it. Having them want to learn things about it. Having them go home and it’s like; I had no idea, Allison. I went back and learned all about plastic water bottles and I’m going to switch to this. That’s great, that’s fabulous.

At the time of the interviews, Allison was grappling with her role in environmental education as changes in her responsibilities had been making it difficult for her to facilitate the conversations and activities that helped her to feel successful. Though she came to the interviews very nervous about what might come up, Allison was
very open with me about the challenges in her work. In her stories she expressed an aura of acceptance around the painful aspects of her work; however I felt that the pain was more impactful than she was able to admit. During analysis it seemed to me that Allison’s unconscious experience had more impact on her than most everyone else in the study.

**Samantha** is a manager with eight years in the field of environmental education and oversees programs that are geared mostly toward children but she works with adults as well. Environmental education has been a part of Samantha’s life since childhood and she finds it difficult to see a distinction from herself as an environmental educator and herself as an individual.

…I really feel I'm being an environmental educator is just (pause) who I am all the time. I don't really take that hat off ever, you know, so I'm kind of always looking for opportunities to...to help educate others and shared knowledge and passion. So it's not just when I'm at work… you know not just when I'm at a program. It could be you know, I'm not on the clock at all, I'm just out taking a hike or I'm at the store or you know, wherever an opportunity presents itself.

Samantha believes that living a respectful life means living in a way that is sustainable and respectful to nature as well as other people. She believes the best way to teach respect and sustainability is by creating programs and experiences that allow people to consider all sides of issues and make their own decisions. Recently she has taken on a new role that has less direct interaction with program participants and has been examining how she can have the most impact in her current position. Samantha describes
herself as positive and optimistic and, though she can understand why people could become overwhelmed by painful emotions related to environmental challenges, it’s not in her nature to dwell. When she spoke about painful emotions in the interviews she wasn’t hesitant but spoke of them more in an intellectual manner than as if she was experiencing the emotions herself.

**Travis** is a mid-level supervisor with five years of experience in environmental education. His current role has him working with all different ages of visitors to his park. For Travis, environmental education means getting people excited about environmental concepts and experiences in order to help them learn something new, experience an internal change, or learn to pay attention to the world around them.

The important are those times that you feel that you’ve done something or are doing something that’s either new or, if not new for you for the program, for the kids themselves, and something that gets them in a new…mindset or a new dynamic or anything for them.

Travis is a highly energetic person and teaches environmental education by putting his own excitement and energy into activities and experiences, with the hope that his energy will transfer into the people he interacts with. Throughout the interviews, Travis seemed hesitant to discuss challenges and painful emotions in his work. Though he thoughtfully answered my inquiries, I sensed his discomfort and confusion with why so much of the interview was focused on what he considered to be the negative side of environmental education. Travis chooses to spend energy thinking about challenges only long enough to learn from them and create solutions for moving forward.
Jessica has two years of experience in environmental education and at the time of our interviews was not in a supervisory role. I met Jessica through a colleague and she participated in my pilot workshop and interview series. Being very early in her career, Jessica is still in the process of shaping her core values and goals concerning environmental education. Right now she sees environmental education as a tool to provide access to scientific and environmental knowledge to people so that they may be empowered to become ecologically literate citizens. She also finds joy in nature and uses it herself as a way to cope with the ups and downs of everyday life. Since I was just learning my interview method when I worked with Jessica her interviews weren’t as focused as the rest, but I still was able to learn a lot about her experience. It was clear through her stories that not only did Jessica see environmental education as needing to be hopeful and optimistic but that she was drawn to it because it helped her to stay hopeful and optimistic. Jessica seemed to feel deep sorrow for adults that had lost the ability to lose themselves in what she called “the joy of nature” and was eager to keep her work focused on children.

And I think just adults tend to be more negative than kids and, you know, they’re just more jaded and all those things that come along with being an adult. I guess for me the kids are like an escape from the adult world, you know, like having to deal with the realities of life and you know, money, and … all that stuff. They don’t have to think about that so they can just think about all the great things … and I think that adults have lost the ability to be like, okay I want to put all these horrible things that I have to think about … aside, I’m going to look at this flower, because it’s beautiful and that makes me feel better. … I wish that adults could still
have what I think kids have where they just lose themselves in the details of nature.

**Pain and Protection – The Educators’ Emotional Experience**

Each educator in this study had a unique story to tell, however they all shared some common experiences that highlighted the painful aspects of their work and the protective strategies they used to maintain their resolve. In this section I share those common experiences to give insight into the emotional world of environmental educators. Wherever possible I have included the participants’ actual words to illustrate points, however there were occasions when sharing direct quotes could potentially reveal too much about the identity of the individual. In those instances I have paraphrased their stories. Each section is designed to provide specific examples of the common experience and, where necessary, to take the reader through the analysis so as to provide an understanding toward how I came to my interpretation of the data.

The section is divided into five sub-sections that I felt were most poignant to the educators’ stories, with a brief conclusion at the end. First I share their experience of powerlessness, efficacy, and doubt, followed by an examination of the role of loss in their work. Then I highlight the most prevalent protective measures that I drew from their stories, including a separate section on what I call “an allergy to negative emotions.” Before I conclude I bring attention to ambivalence that I noticed some of the educators felt toward the protective strategies they maintained.
Powerlessness, efficacy & doubt.

… going out to rural areas and hearing kids’ stories and getting super excited about the time that their dad killed a rattlesnake (pause). How am I going to tell a little kid that his dad’s killing animals? All I can do is tell him that, what do the snakes eat? They eat rats; do you like rats on your farm? You can try to make that connection but you can’t tell him directly that his dad’s doing a bad thing. (Travis, Interview 1)

Above, Travis describes his experience with feeling powerless to make the impact he would like with a child in one of his programs. Not only did he fear he would insult the boy’s father and potentially cause pain for the boy, he wondered if his effort would be in vain because the behavior of killing rattlesnakes was so embedded in the culture the boy lived in. Reflecting further upon this thought during the interview, Travis shared the frustration that it’s not necessarily just this one boy’s experience, but that of an entire group of people. “That’s his story, and that’s his story, and their dads get together and do it. And they bring out their kids and show them that. I mean that’s his story, that’s what you know, that’s your life.” I felt Travis’s frustration when he admitted his perceived inability to do anything about the situation, “But I mean that’s, that’s (pause) a huge (pause) I can’t affect how parents parent.”

Powerlessness in this study refers to the perception that taking action will make no difference to the outcome and that no one has the power to affect an outcome (Stern, 2000). For Travis and many others in this study, feeling powerless to make their desired impact on a person consistently led to feelings of frustration and sometimes anger, fear, sadness, and doubt. Educators felt powerless when they considered their actions to be futile, when they worried that there were too many people to change, and when they
questioned their efficacy because the outcomes of environmental education are so intangible.

**When action feels futile.**

In the previous example, Travis felt that he did not have power to affect that child’s way of thinking because the undesired behavior would continually be reinforced by his parents and surrounding culture. Even though he chose to adopt a strategy that might have a small impact on the boy, he felt any action he took would in actuality be futile.

Like Travis, Frank and Ethan also expressed feeling powerless from futility when they witnessed parental behavior that counteracted what they were teaching in their programs. Frank became frustrated with parents because they unintentionally undermined his work, “…when we’ve put so much work into getting that message out there and making it clear and something that the parents can share with their kids, and then parents either don’t or can’t or whatever.”

Ethan often felt so powerless that his frustration sometimes came out in the form of anger. He recalled a time when he discouraged an intern from stopping a child from chasing birds,

And I said what does it matter? The parents are encouraging it and there’s no point of saying anything….If the parents are encouraging the behavior in the first place, for us to come and tell them it’s wrong we’re taking away credibility of the person in the first place. So that to me is the most frustrating part.
His complex emotions and the fact that he could gain no control over the situation sometimes left him doubting himself, “I question myself most of the time and say am I judging those parents too much…”

Feelings of powerlessness from futility came up with more than just parents. Most of the educators recalled at least one interaction with a person that they felt, no matter how hard they worked to influence them and help them understand a pro-environmental point of view, it just didn’t matter. Speaking about a conversation with a friend that she frequently argues with about environmental issues Samantha said, “I’ve accepted that it’s kind of useless. Like we’ve each sort of said our piece and that’s as far as it’s gonna go. So I’ve just learned to move on, I guess.” While her tone was very matter-of-fact, when I asked her about it again in another interview she shared with me that conversations like that sometimes left her doubting her own abilities; perceived failure surfaced her insecurities about the depth of her knowledge.

The unreachable “unicorn”.

Related to futility, educators also felt somewhat powerless because even when they did connect with people, they worried that they could never actually reach everyone that needs to be and often the educators could not understand why some people were unreachable. Frank referred to this reality as a “unicorn” because educators are continually searching for an answer for it.

…the idea that for whatever reason there’s people that remain inaccessible even though there’s no good reason that they should be….There’s a lot of people that I think the only thing standing in their way is the fact that they haven’t done it yet. For a lot of people they know what we do and they really want to do it, but…they don’t.
Feeling overwhelmed and helpless from the immensity of the problem is something that is echoed by people when they consider trying to contribute to environmental solutions in general (R. A. Lertzman, 2011; P. Maiteny, 2000; K. M. Norgaard & Winter, 2006; Opotow & Weiss, 2000; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001). Wondering if what they were doing would really make any difference left educators questioning the overall efficacy of environmental education.

That it is frustrating and sometimes I feel defeated. That all this environmental interpretation that we’re doing is beating our heads against the wall because there’s all that stuff still going on. And so there are times where I will feel what’s the point? (Ethan, Interview 1)

Questions of efficacy were a natural outcome of feeling powerless to make change. After all, when you can’t see success, how do you know if you’re successful?

The intangible nature of EE.

How do we know, once they walk out to their car and head out, that we really have done any of that? Sometimes we justify it by saying membership is up and attendance is up, we’re doing something right. Well (pause) I don’t (pause) for me I don’t have a way sometimes to tell myself that (pause) I have made that. There’s no immediate, there’s not always an immediate return on that investment when you know that you’re successful. So it’s hard to judge your success. And that’s sometimes tough about it. (Ethan, Interview 2)

In the quote above, Ethan laments that he may never know if what he does every day leads to a change in environmental ethic. I call this the intangible nature of
environmental education and every educator in the study acknowledged it as a challenge. Without protective measures, the intangible nature left educators open to feelings of doubt, and questions about their own efficacy and that of the overall field of environmental education.

Not everyone had such strong conscious doubts as what Ethan expressed in the quote above. Most of the educators acknowledged the intangible nature as a typical part of the job. For Samantha it brought up feelings of powerlessness:

You can have the best program of your life and have the kids that are the best group in the world. And yet you end it and you can’t take it anywhere else. You can’t help to take the next step. You don’t know if they’re going to take the next step.

Frank recognized that he often had to make a conscious effort to overcome the feelings intangibility brought up for him.

It would be really easy to get very frustrated in general because a lot of the work that we do in some ways is not, the results of it are not very tangible. Oh it’s not like we reach this person today and now they’re going to make major change in their life, they’re going to remember this experience forever. You don’t know that. And so I think having, if you weren’t staying positive and thinking about just kind of maintaining the idea that … we’re hoping to have planted the seed. If you’re waiting for something rock solid, I think you would often not get anything back. So I think it’s about just being positive and thinking the best of people and having the best expectations of people….But just having that perspective, everyone can really have an impact. Everyone can really do something. A lot of what we do is leaving it in other people’s hands and you won’t see that end result.
Personal doubt.

While Ethan and a few others shared doubt on a conscious level related to the intangible nature of environmental education, for Allison her questions of efficacy appeared to be taking place more at an unconscious level and they only came to light as I examined her interview transcripts. Allison’s questions of efficacy were embedded in her personal stories.

Throughout her interviews Allison often used the phrase “shoving it down their throats” to describe what she saw as aggressive education tactics. She presented this technique as opposite of her preferred technique and as she kept repeating the phrase even to describe tactics that didn’t seem aggressive to me, I began to see that Allison had some reservations about the overall effectiveness of environmental education as a field. Her reservations became even clearer when she told two poignant stories.

In the first story she revealed her fear that people were waiting for educators to make a mistake. She emphasized that educators could never speak incorrectly in front of a crowd. When I asked what made her worry she replied,

Because if you’re wrong on one thing it means you could be wrong on the rest…. I’m sure some people are still little suspicious about, not so much environmental education, but more activism. So they’re probably still nervous about that one so it’s probably for me better for me to say that, you know, I don’t know…. I like to think that people trust that more.

The second story was about the personal rejection she has experienced because she allowed the environmental side of her personality to remain prominent in a crowd that was uncomfortable with it.
So they would always invite {us} over for their dinner parties…. And so you go to these things and people ask how you’re doing, and you chat about {work}, what’s going on {with work}. And I was apparently talking about {work} too much and I stopped being invited to the parties. And it was very deliberately just me. And I had asked about it, and … well you only talk about weird things at {work}. I’m like what weird things? … well weird things like you not eating whatever type of seafood and you’re not eating this type of chicken now and eggs have to be free range or organic. … it’s just weird. … they just find it weird and they didn’t invite you on this one. And so that was… I had… talked too much about {work} and too much about interesting conservation. And I was probably just really excited about it and everybody’s heard me go on about it. So I was probably just excited to share this with somebody and not even thinking about that they were finding it weird. I didn’t fit in with that group. So… yeah so I don’t get invited to those parties anymore. So since then, all the things with their neighbors, I just really shut up about it a lot until somebody asks me directly.

As she relayed this deeply personal and painful story to me I understood where her doubts came from. Very different from a general fear of whether what we’re doing matters, Allison shared an example of direct and painful evidence that environmental educators can sometimes fail in their work. For Allison, the pain was so intense that it seemed to have led her to feel tentative in her approach to reaching out to others. In addition to the example above where she refrained from openly sharing her work in social situations, Allison also shared with me that she preferred facilitating activities and avoiding large group presentations so that she could use a cautious and subtle approach to
communicating environmental messages and avoid the risk of appearing aggressive and subsequently “turning people off”.

**Pain from loss.**

When I first began this study I anticipated that loss would have a significant emotional impact on environmental educators. My expectation was that educators would, at least unconsciously, always be aware of the environmental degradation that they fight against. While it was true that loss was a theme for many of the educators, how they experienced it and what type of loss they grieved varied. I witnessed three major forms of loss: grieving the loss of nature; fearing the loss of awe, curiosity, and wonder; and healing from the loss of self and personal credibility.

**Loss of nature.**

Ethan’s experience of loss most closely resembled what I imagined I’d find in the study. He spoke of the pain he felt when people were destructive to his park by littering, chasing the animals, or damaging the landscape.

…and in many ways the place is overused and under-loved and it’s hard when you care and are so passionate for the location and for the natural world to see it be overused in those ways. It’s…how do you, you know…how do you get through that? Maybe there’s a sense of, you know, it’s a bad analogy but if you have a fire in your home and you lose that, we’re going through that sometimes on a daily basis when we see the damage to your park, intentional damage to your park. And it’s hard to stay up beat on that sometimes. You know.
Ethan’s feelings were so strong that he sometimes found himself expressing his anger toward guests. He recalled a story that had taken place shortly before our interview when he caught several middle-school-aged children scratching their initials into a tree. He asked them to stop vandalizing the tree and when they responded that the tree was already vandalized he couldn’t stop himself from making a big issue of the instance and felt somewhat embarrassed afterwards.

And I use the word vandalize. I did that intentionally. I know it’s a harsh word but it, it was you know it, it, it is. I use the word vandalize intentionally….You know that I would’ve let it go if they wouldn’t just have thrown that back and I felt it was a challenge because of the tone.

Ethan also seemed to worry so much about his park being damaged that he found himself distrusting that others could care for it properly, including colleagues and guests who had given him no apparent reason to distrust them. I first identified his lack of trust when I noticed that he wanted to keep others from having direct interactions with animals even though he empathized with their need to connect and celebrated his own interactions with the park’s animals. When I asked him about the difference between his interactions with animals and a guest interacting with animals he said, “…the guest doesn’t have that ability to acknowledge that difference.” The pain he felt when people harmed the animals led to a general distrust that meant he needed to keep every guest away from the animals.

Samantha spoke about protecting herself from the pain she could feel related to the degradation of nature, not what she saw every day however, but what she knew was going on “out there” in the world. In the first interview she shared her need to spend time in nature partly as a reminder of nature’s resilience.
I think just in general having that time to feel connected to, for me; it’s having the time to feel connected to nature. To … refresh my understanding of why that’s so important to me and why I’m so passionate about what I do…. So it could anything from taking a hike here locally and you know, seeing birds that I don’t know what they are... or like going out here you know in the spring time when everything’s growing back and blooming. And you know you just feel a sense of newness and um…kind of rebirth or hope or…you know that, that. Something comes back here (laugh). You know I think that’s kind of a, well, that nature is hardy. You know, that, that we do a lot of damage but there’s still a lot of hope to because nature’s really hardy. It gets through a lot of shit that we (laugh) put it through.

During the second interview I asked her to tell me more about what made the reminder of nature’s resilience so important for her.

…because you have to, you have to have those thoughts I think. Or anytime you saw something, when you see the guy sitting in his truck throwing his cigarette out the window you’d be like, Oh no we're all going to die. (laugh) Not really like that but. Oh, how could you go on with any hope that there’s going to be a world for you to live in or for children that you know around you or your children to live in? I don't see how you could.

Then she went on to share a story from her childhood when a novel she read produced in her fears of nuclear war. She remembered having nightmares about war starting and how terrifying a time it was for her. Thinking back on that experience made her empathize with people today:
... I can see how some people let themselves think like that. Still, because there are so many things to kind of be afraid of happening you know in our world to our world. To us, along those lines (pause) I just, I guess I really try not to think like that now. I guess. I don't allow myself to think like that but I can only imagine that as an adult it would be almost worse. Because you have the ability to understand things more deeply to … read more reports about what the truth is, or research regarding one of these things that could be really catastrophic. … I think if you really let yourself get kind of obsessed over that it could be really paralyzing. So maybe I take the little approach of ignorance is bliss on some of those things. You know, like I almost don't let myself learn enough that it really, really scares me. Because I could see how it might.

**Loss of curiosity, awe, and wonder.**

For other participants the loss that they experienced was expressed unconsciously in how they spoke about the work that they do. In Frank’s stories I saw the need to prevent people from losing passion for nature because he felt that passion was necessary for conservation.

I think that’s one of the most important things we can do is just instill that, just that idea of wonder and that, that on its own I think will do the most to inspire things like conservation and action that people actually take in their lives.... I feel that’s very important as an educator, is how I feel and what I do because of the way I feel. Most people aren’t going to do it if they only reason they’re doing it is to, whatever prove a point to some other person or something. That’s not enough motivation. It has to come down to how they feel.
Frank creates experiences that will help instill a sense of wonder in people so that they will be hopefully inspired toward conservation action. The importance of his work making an impact on people was present throughout all of his interviews. When he spoke about people declining participation in the experiences it seemed that the disappointment went beyond the personal rejection of his efforts and that it represented a failure to inspire a person to engage in future conservation efforts.

I mean it’s disappointing when you set up something that you’re hoping is going to be this great experience, it’s gonna be a lasting memory… you know you’re picturing ten years down the line they’ll remember…and that it’s going to be this priceless moment for them. And then you realize that they’re probably not even going to remember it in a week. It’s definitely disappointing…

Travis also expressed some grief when he recalled a moment that he had realized his own feelings of awe were missing.

I remember coming out one day and looking up at a tree and looking back down and I was like, that tree used to be absolutely awe-inspiring to me. And then just kind of doing a run around the courtyard and looking around and opening that back up. And then all of a sudden realizing that it’s just as awe inspiring as it was and trying to remember what it felt like.

Losing that awe was a shocking experience for him. He described the core of his work to help people remain open to the world around them. When I asked him what was so important for him about helping others remain open, his unconscious fear about anticipated loss of awe showed.
You know you’ve got this idea that people are becoming more and more separated from nature because we’re inside these structured environments. And then when you take them out and send them to go out on a hike, you remove them from all the noise of the city but they’re still not picking up on the noises of (pause) nothing. You’ve got the birds that are singing and if you’re walking on the trail there’s a quick dart of movement off to your right from a lizard scurrying away. But they’re not open to the possibility that all these things exist. They’re kind of focused on the silence cuz that’s what’s there now. There is a lot of silence but there’s so many things to pay attention to and miss if you’re not open to it.

I also saw unconscious grief that Jessica felt over the loss of wonder and curiosity. I felt her grief in the stories she shared about protecting children from adults that might squander their awe. Here she expresses frustration toward parents whose inhibitions affect the curiosity of children in one of her programs:

And, I’m like, ok, could you just keep your adult opinions to yourself because we’re trying to talk about this and up until a second ago he thought it was okay to be interested in this and you just told him that it’s not okay and that it’s disgusting. … so I get really frustrated with that cuz it’s like you are stopping your child’s interest in this. I hope that I will never do that even if I’m totally weirded out by some weird thing that they totally like… I hope that I’ll, encourage them to be interested even if I think it’s gross…”

Jessica’s frustration with adults and perhaps that they represent the loss she fears and grieves, has led her to prefer working with children and desiring to avoid doing programming with adults.
... I think that there's more potential to change kids than there is to change adults because adults have kind of like shutdown their interest in the world or their ability to observe nature and feel uncomfortable and ... that was never shutdown in me. So I think if you foster that, then you know I am now an EE citizen because I wasn't shut down. You know I kept thinking about it particularly like with my parents. We kept going outside and kept talking about certain things and the people I was around you know would talk about similar topics.... I wouldn't have as much fun teaching adults...

**Loss of credibility and sense of self.**

Allison experienced a loss that I had not anticipated but, based on my own personal experience, did not find surprising. Her grief was from losing part of her credibility and a sense of her own values through personal rejection. Allison shared with me that she sometimes sacrifices her personal sustainability ethics when she dines with particular people because she fears that if she discusses her food preferences she will lose the ability to influence them at all. During the interview she referred to her situation as a cost-benefit analysis, hoping that if she didn’t force her ideas on people she would eventually be able to slowly influence them in gentle ways. When I asked her how she felt about changing her eating habits temporarily, she admitted to the pain it caused her.

It’s a little bit of a personal disappointment in terms of, (sigh, starting to tear up) okay. But...going back to you can't shove this stuff down these people's throats. It'll antagonize them; it'll make them turn away from the issues. I'm not going to complain. It’s just going to make them angrier about it. They're going to shut down entirely. I, like so, in the several years working on this they only buy wild salmon. So, one little thing. I have a feeling if I got really really...if I got really confrontational about it, if I got
really nitpicky about it, they wouldn't listen whatsoever. Whereas you know, sit back, wait, wait for good opportunities to bring up the topic...and not in a blame type of way. and they're still okay, I'm willing to listen a little bit.

**Protective measures.**

Every educator in this study revealed painful aspects of environmental education through the stories they told in the interviews. I knew that because they were highly functioning educators, they each were engaging in some type of coping strategies to manage the emotions associated with those painful aspects (Beauchamp, 2009; Henderson, 2010). Though I did find some individual variances, there were three significant protective strategies in which every educator engaged. In this section I share two of the protective strategies, selective attention, and a focus on awe, curiosity, and wonder as tangible outcomes. The third strategy, avoiding “negative” emotions, I felt warranted its own section because of the impact it has on the educators and environmental education.

*I won’t waste my time on something I can’t control!*

I guess it just seems like a waste of my energy, you know why would I waste my energy and time on something that I can’t control, that I’m just dwelling on when instead that energy could be put toward something that I can control and make a difference in. (Samantha, Interview 3)

When I asked Samantha how she coped with moments when she felt powerless she quickly and easily responded that dwelling on the powerlessness was a waste of
energy. What she did to cope was use selective attention by tuning in to who or what she felt was most productive to her goals and distancing herself from everything else (K. M. Norgaard & Winter, 2006). This coping strategy was common among every educator in this study.

When I asked Travis how he felt about his experience of futility his response illuminated a journey from anger to acceptance.

When first hearing them telling the stories, you know it was okay let's change the subject, let's find something. But over time you start to realize that that's their life, that's not the reality that I live but that's their reality and it's going to continue to be their reality no matter what we say or do within this one week timespan…. Now it's just kind of a sadness you know. Recognize that there's something that's different that's going on there that you're not going to be able to, to work into. I think it used to be a frustration and anger and now it's…sad.

Travis was able to reach acceptance by acknowledging the limits of his power and focusing his energy toward what he can have control over; his own responses and his personal action. The drive to take back control by continuing to produce programs for people that can be impacted was a common response in the study.

It's a very grandiose gesture to think that we'll be able to change somebody’s life by a few things that we can do throughout a week. For singular cases on extremely rare basis that may be true. But you never know who it’s going to be so you keep working and doing whatever you do for everybody…
When practicing selective attention, it was common for the educators to categorize people so that they could focus their attention on the people who they felt they could make the most impact upon. People who were unwilling to change or who came from radically different cultural backgrounds were easily categorized as “out of my control.” When I asked Travis how he manages people that he feels he can’t affect he said he just accepts it, “You’re not going to get everybody but if you have the opportunity to go one on one and work a little harder and find out, you may not get it, they could just be closed. Some people are like that.” Allison shared a similar sentiment:

And if you watch the large group, you know there’s going to be like the ten people yawning, the four people on their cell phone and like…and so if you just focus on, this person is kind of paying attention to me, okay I’ll put my efforts there.

And later she shared this about an audience member that kept challenging her, “… you kind of go into your brain and classify them as, you know general butthead and you just move on.”

_Awe, curiosity, and wonder: The search for tangible outcomes._

After hearing Frank and Samantha’s matter-of-fact recognition of the intangible nature of environmental education, I wondered what allowed them to overcome the doubt and frustration more easily than it seems Ethan has. The answer came when I compared their daily experiences and also looked more closely at the stories from the other educators in the study.

Since I began each interview with an open-ended opportunity for each educator to share their personal stories, every one of them started by telling me about the times when
they felt most satisfied and successful in their work. Though many of their experiences were quite different, the one commonality was that satisfaction and success came in the form of seeing an immediate and positive impact in another person, no matter what that impact was. Success was contingent upon a visible and tangible outcome. I also noticed that the majority of the stories that the educators shared with me had less to do with long-term outcomes, and almost always they were focused on the immediate outcomes of programs and interactions. In other words, the educators weren’t talking about creating environmental stewards; for the most part, they were talking about creating reactions of awe, seeing the “light bulb turn on,” and helping people see things differently.

I was able to compare these moments of success and satisfaction to the painful moments that the educators shared with me. For Ethan, the bulk of his challenging experiences came when he witnessed and tried to counteract disrespectful acts toward animals: chasing pigeons, throwing rocks at animals, etc. Allison talked about the pain and frustration she felt when her job duties changed and she was no longer able to have the one-on-one conversations with guests or facilitate the activities that she was used to doing. Samantha spoke about needing to redefine her role in environmental education because she wasn’t able to get out with the kids as much and see those moments that made her feel so good. After looking at these two different types of experiences I began to recognize a pattern that satisfaction was paired with immediately visible or tangible outcomes. Doubt, anxiety, and pain were paired with difficult to see and intangible experiences.
My theory was further underscored when the educators told me that they coped with the various painful parts of their work by continuing to do programs so that they had more success to focus on.

…you never know who it’s going to be so you keep working and doing whatever you do for everybody. (Travis, Interview 2)

I think by just focusing on who we have and what we’re doing and the great things that we are doing, that’s just another way to kind of keep that perspective. I think it’s really great to be kind of moving forward and trying to reach more people but it’s really important for me that I can see the people that we’re already reaching and really see why we’re trying to do it. (Frank, Interview 2)

I think luckily for me, I was doing a lot of programs and I could forget…that there was this negativity back in the office when I was surrounded by 60 kids saying this is the best field trip I’ve ever been on or like what’s this bug or you know that kind of stuff. For me those little things are constant reminders of the joyous nature of what we do. (Jessica, Interview 2)

If tangible outcomes mean satisfaction, then for the participants in this study, the only way to maintain satisfaction is to keep on producing tangible outcomes, i.e. keep doing their work in a way that produces tangible outcomes. In Ethan’s case, we see that when the ability to see tangible outcomes is taken away, it is easy to be left with questions of efficacy.
An allergy to “negative” emotions.

I approached this project with the assumption that it would be difficult for most of the research participants to discuss their emotional experiences, and that assumption proved to be correct. When I conducted the interviews all the participants had gone through the workshop where they had the opportunity to explore both the challenges and rewards of their work. I anticipated that the prompt from the workshop would help them feel more open to discussing their challenges during the interviews. Even with the prompting, each participant chose to steer the interview toward stories about the rewarding aspects of their work and only brought up challenging experiences when I directly asked. I had noticed a similar trend during the workshop; participants freely spoke when the topic centered on their warm experiences but felt resistance when the focus moved toward the more painful side. During the pilot workshop, Jessica expressed her discomfort out loud noting that environmental educators are encouraged to remain positive so discussing challenges felt out of character.

I had designed the workshop to de-emphasize the positive and negative associations with the different ends of the spectrum of emotions, and chose to instead use the terms challenging and rewarding or pleasant and painful. Even so, during the interviews participants considered our conversations about their challenging experiences and painful emotions to be negative.

During Travis’s second interview I felt an uncomfortable energy. Though his statements were thoughtful and genuinely reflective, there seemed to be a hint of confusion in his tone. When the interview was ending he said, “Seems like you’re focusing on negative aspects for today.” It wasn’t until he made that statement that I
realized the energy in the interview may have been his discomfort with my interest in the challenging aspects of his work. For Travis, time spent thinking about the “negative” was mostly only worthwhile for problem solving and growth and it was not meant for dwelling.

…it’s an idea similar to like a doctor losing a patient. If you focused on every single one you lost, like that’s going to be a normal part of your routine, you can’t save everyone. When you’re dealing with groups of people they’re just going to be some that are less interested or they’re not going to want to get engaged. So you have to be able to take ownership and pride and accept that there are all these other ones that you did reach. I mean you can look at the one and see if there was something you could have done or you know trying to find a way of maybe you could have set it up differently. Maybe there was a reason why you weren’t able to get them. But after some point you just have to be able to let it go….I’d feel sad that you’re not being able to focus on all those ones you did get.

Samantha shared a similar sentiment and gave me the impression that she felt it unnecessary to spend time thinking about the painful aspects of her work. She seemed to see little distinction between thinking about those feelings and dwelling on them. “I would be a miserable depressed person if I really let myself get frustrated over things that I couldn’t control so that’s part of who I am. I try not to do that….” When I asked her why this was problematic for her she responded,

I guess it just seems like a waste of my energy, you know why would I waste my energy and time on something that I can’t control, that I’m just dwelling on when instead that energy could be put toward something that I can control and make a difference in?
The resistance to think about difficult experiences was so strong that many of the educators expressed pity or sadness toward other individuals that did focus on the difficult aspects of their work. In her first interview, Allison told me about a proud moment when two high school students that she worked with presented at a local conference with university students. A point of pride for her was that the high school students were more prepared than the university students for their environmental education efforts having a limited reach.

… it was kind of funny because [my students] were totally prepared. They were totally prepared for it. I think it's because they actually do [these activities] on a weekly basis ... out with the visitors. So they were, like me, totally happy with you know, you’re only going to reach like one in 50 or one in 100 and that’s okay. Whereas all the college students, who I don’t think had a lot of opportunities to engage beyond the group that was already involved, didn’t understand how we viewed that as okay. … they thought it was wrong, ‘What about all these other people? You have to reach them!’ Well they’re not interested or ready for it right now. But this one person was so we’re going to teach them. So… the two of them were really funny cuz they kept looking at college students who said, well we’re going to do this type of activity and everyone has to do it because if they don’t we’re a complete failure.

Allison felt that her students were more prepared and perhaps, more realistic or mature because they were able to maintain focus only on those that they were able to reach with their activities. When Frank spoke about training his new staff he also
presented a focus on “positive” as a more mature and seasoned way of seeing things, so that work could still be done and everyone could remain productive.

I would say for those that have been on staff for a little bit longer they kind of recognize it a little bit more as, well this just happens sometimes and it wasn’t a great experience or whatever but… for some that are more relatively new into the experience it can feel like failure…. one of my most important roles as a supervisor is to just kind of help people have perspective. … I think it’s really important for me to just be like, look even if everything goes wrong today it’s not the worst thing in the world. … we can talk through and figure out exactly where that parent was coming from and understanding those things, but at the same time just having that perspective you’re never going to make everybody happy and … yes this is your job and yes its important but the most important thing is that we learn from this and that we move forward.

Jessica expressed sorrow for her colleagues and other adults who struggled with maintaining a positive outlook because she saw little benefit in focusing on negative emotions. She told me about a colleague that struggled with “negativity.” ...positivity for me and optimism I think is just really what I’m drawn to and I’m really just turned off by negativity, it really frustrates me and I think there’s a really big difference between realism and negativity. … because I think there’s a definite place for practicality and realism… I think it would have been easy, and sometimes I did get really pulled down by it and frustrated but I think luckily for me, I was doing a lot of programs and I could forget … that there was this negativity back in the office when I was surrounded by 60 kids saying ‘this is the best field trip I’ve ever been on’ or like, ‘what’s this bug?’ or you know that kind of stuff. For me those little things are constant reminders of the joyous nature
of what we do. And I think in some ways (pause) my sympathy for her when she doesn’t feel that way has also helped me…

For Jessica, doing her work is a way to remain positive and later on she expressed, like many others in the study, that she didn’t feel she could do her work if she wasn’t able to always remain positive.

…and I think that's it's impossible to be enthusiastic about something if you're not happy or I think it's very obvious when it's fake or forced and that I think is like one of the keys to effective EE…. I think it just comes out in your voice and your attitude and you know it is truly infectious. And the kids I think will remember it more and the adults too…so I think that’s super important.

At the same time, Ethan expressed that he thought he would be more effective and more comfortable with his work if he was able to more readily shift his focus toward the rewarding outcomes,

You know what, instead of focusing so much on the third that doesn’t get anything out of it - the third that were pushed a little farther with their passions that should be what we feel good about. Sometimes I’m bad at this, sometimes I hang with the third that there was no movement whatsoever with, the 33% that were just saying I don’t care. Sometimes I get in there and feel, you know, boy we’re failing. And I need to stay with this group that we actually helped break a threshold and that will be lifelong ambassadors for us.

To all of the participants in this study, any time spent on thinking about their work challenges that wasn’t directly focused on creating solutions felt like dwelling on the
negative because it took drew them away from staying active and productive. The import
they gave to action became apparent to me when several of the educators shared with me
that their main means to cope with their struggles was to keep on doing the best they can.

But I think, I mean I think part of the way that you deal with it is by just
trying to make everything so good and so…outstanding that, you know,
even if you just get a few more people that are so interested in what you’re
doing that they’re willing to take that extra step and they’re willing to find
out more on their own…. I mean, like well I’m just going to make it really
good that way if you don’t come than you’re really missing out. I mean I
don’t really thing that there’s, at least for me, I don’t know that there’s any
other way that I can do it and still feel, to deal with it, and still feel like
I’m being proactive. (Frank, Interview 2)

It’s a very grandiose gesture to think that we’ll be able to change
somebody’s life by a few things that we can do throughout a week. For
singular cases on extremely rare basis that may be true. But you never
know who it’s going to be so you keep working and doing whatever you
do for everybody. (Travis, Interview 2)

For a few, they feared that thinking about the people they couldn’t reach or the
times they didn’t succeed would be too painful to bear.

Because it is overwhelming if you just think about how we could be doing
so much more, if we had some more resources we could make this work.
Instead I think about it with what we’re doing right now we’re doing a
great job right here. I think by just focusing on who we have and what
we’re doing and the great things that we are doing, that’s just another way
to kind of keep that perspective. I think it’s really great to be kind of
moving forward and trying to reach more people but it’s really important
for me that I can see the people that we’re already reaching and really see why we’re trying to do it. (Frank, Interview 2)

But…it would just be, it would be really, really frustrating. It would be horr- I think if you hung on to those things it would become a really, really horrible job. It would just, you know, cuz not everybody is going to be interested, that’s just the way it goes. So to sit and hang on to the ones that aren’t, you’re just going to get really ticked off at yourself for failure and really ticked at them for how could they not believe this is super important. And just be angry all the time. Or really depressed that you’re not making a difference. You can’t make a difference with everybody, classify it in your brain, move on. You’ll be invited to a different dinner party. (Allison, Interview 3)

Juxtaposed with the urge to avoid thinking about painful experiences was Ethan’s regular battle with and personal reflection about the pain he experienced while doing his work. When he first brought up the grief he experienced as he witnessed damage to his park, he shared that he felt somewhat alone in his experience and wanted to reach out:

“… the area that I’m having some, that I’m having a little …trouble with, justifying and figuring out… I know there’s gotta be other interpreters that feel the same way.” Ethan felt embarrassment and frustration when his feelings got the best of him and it drove him to question himself. He told me about the mental checklists he went through to make sure that he wasn’t overreacting to situations,

… And that’s why sometimes I have to pause and go through a mental checklist and ask myself is this really a problem or is it a problem that I have? And if I don’t go through that checklist I can come off as a real jerk…
Sometimes Ethan only found true relief when he was able to separate himself from work, and in some cases, to be around people that reminded him that not everyone was the kind of person that caused damage to his park or acted disrespectfully toward the animals.

… you know it used to be a lot worse because I didn't have any other, it’s about outlets. You know … before … I really had no outlets I would go home and I would be frustrated. And you and I talked about it that I need to take a week of [vacation]… I need to take the time away to recharge. My place to recharge is back in wildlife but it’s a very different type of setting. But I think of being out, when I go whale watching and I'm out in the wide open ocean, it is so...peaceful and... primitive and, you know it’s...it’s really something. Though one time when I went to Mexico, it was amazing when we were whale watching we saw a six-pack ring and I walked over to the naturalist who hadn't seen it …. And it was great, because he, I didn't have to ask him {to stop the boat}. … And that even felt good for me because everyone on the boat was going to help... that's how I try to deal with it.

The last note I’d like to make about the participant’s perspectives on painful emotions is about the difference in tone and energy I felt during their interviews and while I read the transcripts. I already commented on the resistance I felt in Travis’s interviews and how I felt a discomfort in the room when our focus was on the challenging aspects of his work. That energy felt strikingly different compared to when Samantha and Frank spoke about their interest to focus on the positive aspects of their work. For those two I sensed that they both felt so comfortable with their abilities to remain positive that
it didn’t cause stress to reflect upon the painful experiences for the purposes of my research. Ethan seemed pleased to be able to verbalize his challenges in a safe setting and while Allison clearly felt safe in expressing herself, as I re-read the transcripts I found a pattern that suggested an unconscious need to remind me or her that she felt okay with her work. Since Jessica’s interviews were my first and they were structured differently than the others, I do not feel it appropriate to comment on the difference in energy and tone other than to say that Jessica’s interviews were almost devoid of painful experiences, which was not surprising since she admitted during her interviews that she tries to avoid anything she views as negative.

**Sometimes protection hurts – ambivalence and coping.**

A benefit of the psychoanalytic methodology that I have mentioned is that it enables the user to see beneath the surface and understand the unconscious meanings of the stories the educators expressed. Through the psychoanalytic lens I was able to see that even though all of the educators engaged in protective strategies, they at times would feel ambivalent toward those strategies, particularly when unconscious strategies came to their conscious awareness.

Though much of the ambivalence was subtle, I noticed several instances of it surrounding the strategy of selective attention, especially when it pertained to categorizing people. The categorization method became problematic when the educator either expected more of an individual or felt a kinship or empathy with the individual. I saw this challenge arise in several different ways.

For Ethan a new-found empathy for parents meant he couldn’t easily classify them anymore. At one point in his interview he commented on how a “person of
character” would handle a situation regarding a child throwing rocks at turtles. Then later in the interview he revealed that his categorization was troublesome, “But realistically (pause) I can’t tell someone how to be a parent. It’s my criteria, who says that I’m right?”

Allison who had just easily categorized away an 80-year-old woman because of her age, felt anguish when she couldn’t do the same with people close to her who she knew had the knowledge to understand specific environmental issues:

…you’re an age where you’ve got another forty years here where you can make a difference. Come on folks. It bothers me that they think it’s silly. Well you came with me to that talk. You saw the data on these things, how can you think this is silly? ….Why am I being weird?

Samantha showed some discomfort when she spoke about her frustrations with the formal school system and the overall limited reach of environmental education. She compared the formal system with the non-formal system that she works in and prefers, and realized that the non-formal system provided her more options to be in control of her choices and outcomes. Yet, as she talked about her preferences she struggled with her feelings toward the formal system,

…I kind of cringe at committing to that too because I, I don’t want, I don’t want to think that way. Like I don’t, I don’t want to have those feelings toward formal education. That’s disappointing to me I guess that I have those sorts of feelings.

The struggle that Samantha felt is not only an indication of her troubles with difficult emotions but it also demonstrates that her desire for control is not something that she necessarily seeks consciously.
I also noticed that Allison felt ambivalence toward her strategy of selective attention in a different way. It appeared to me that though she claimed she was focusing on the people she felt she could impact, she was really preemptively stripping herself of power so that it could not be taken away. Her ambivalence came about when she was reminded of the power she had given up.

Very early in Allison’s first interview she told a story about an impact she had made on a teenager and then quickly emphasized,

… I know you're not going to affect every single one of them….You know, 99, 95/100, they really don't care…but that one of five who are kind of like, wow I had no idea, this is really cool. It's so exciting to actually reach them. So the other 95, it's okay if they’re not interested, that's fine.

Right away, Allison was expressing to me her comfort with the limits of her power and her ability to focus selectively on the one person in 100 that she could impact. She frequently underscored her comfort with this limited power throughout her interview by emphasizing multiple times that it did her no good to be forceful with her educational outreach because she wanted people’s changes to feel “authentic.” However, as the interviews progressed I began to question how comfortable Allison really was with her limited power. She was frequently reminded of her limited power when the staff who she supervised rejected the tools she provided for them. At one point she struggled out loud with the limitations.

So I can put out the [lectures], I can invite the guides to the [lectures]; if they don’t go should I be forcing them? I could force them, it’s a manager thing I could do it. It’s just…but then it’s just like am I just shoving it
down their throats. They’re not going to do anything with it; they’re just going to get even more bitter over things.

In her view, if Allison tries to exercise power, in this case actual supervisory power, it will feel futile because the interpreters won’t experience a real change in behavior; they’ll only be doing it because they are forced to. Allison’s early announcement of her acceptance of her limited power may have actually been a way to give up her power to try to protect herself from the pain.

**Conclusion**

As expected, the participants in this study all reflected on experiences in their work that were psychologically painful and required engagement in protective strategies in order to cope. Common among all of the educators was a feeling of powerlessness, questioning their own efficacy and that of the field of environmental education, and dealing with various types of loss. The educators protected themselves by choosing where to focus their attention, creating new tangible outcomes, and avoiding negative experiences as much as possible. Though they sometimes felt ambivalent about them, the protective strategies that these educators employed allowed them to maintain focus toward their overall goal, which was to engage people in programming to inspire their growth as environmental stewards.

Though I did not discuss it explicitly with any of the educators in the study, their stories made it clear that they chose environmental education to make a positive contribution against environmental destruction. Subsequently they all experienced stress and pain when people or events threatened to slow or halt their progress toward their
goals. Any threat against their progress may have served as a reminder of how powerless and helpless they can sometimes feel in the face of the enormous threats to our planet. In a way, loss was an underlying factor for all of the educators in that they were driven to prevent future loss and were frightened when they felt their methods were ineffective.

Though most of them had little conscious awareness, the story for each of these environmental educators was about avoiding inevitable pain so that they could remain resilient in the face of environmental adversity. In the next and concluding chapter I will demonstrate that their experience of pain and protection is not unique in environmental education or in any field that is built around caring for others. I will also examine the lessons we may gain from understanding their pain and the impacts their experience may have on the field of environmental education.
Chapter Five: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

In this concluding chapter I first discuss my results within the framework of my research questions and the larger context of related and similar fields of study. My intent is to demonstrate the validity and import of my results. After I discuss the results I then connect them to the field of environmental education by examining the broader implications. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are also discussed.

Understanding the Emotional Dilemmas of Environmental Educators

When I began this study I sought to develop an understanding of what emotional dilemmas or experiences environmental educators face in their work, how they relate to those experiences, and how they respond to discussing those experiences with their colleagues. I also anticipated that loss would be a significant factor in the emotional experiences of the educators. This section discusses the results of the study within the context of my research questions and in light of broader research from related and similar fields. My intent is to demonstrate that the experiences of these educators are not unique and thus worthy of further exploration and understanding. In the first sub-section I examine the question of what emotional dilemmas environmental educators experience and show that painful emotions are a common part of working in caring fields. Then I discuss the relevance of the finding of ambivalence in the experience of these educators. Following that I turn to the question of how educators relate to their emotional experiences by exploring the challenges and reasoning behind their avoidance of negative emotions. This section concludes with a brief exploration of the role that loss played in the educators’ experience.
With caring comes pain.

The emotional experiences of the environmental educators in this study parallel the experiences of environmental educators in other studies (Beauchamp, 2009; Henderson, 2010) and of individuals that work in similar fields such as nursing (Kornhaber & Wilson, 2011; Menzies-Lyth, 1988; Pieranunzi, 1997), child care (Rutman, 1996) and in any field that “…interacts with the suffering, pain, and crisis of others or the planet” (Van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009, p. 32). Caring for and addressing the pain of another makes the individuals that work in these fields vulnerable to emotional stress as they do their work, even when they are focused on addressing the suffering of non-human beings (Menzies-Lyth, 1988; van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009; Windle, 1995).

Many of the parallels that I found between the educators in this study and those in other fields related to the emotional stress that they experienced or protected themselves from during their work. Powerlessness, doubt, loss, and their associated frustration, anger, fear, and anxiety are common threads through many of these fields. Studies of nurses demonstrate that feelings of powerlessness were evoked because the nurses felt inadequate to properly address the pain of their patients, which left them feeling full of doubt, and depressed, frustrated, and angry (Kornhaber & Wilson, 2011; Menzies-Lyth, 1988). Just as the educators in my study worried about the future of children’s stewardship intents after they left programs, the nurses’ sense of powerlessness was increased as patients were discharged (Kornhaber & Wilson, 2011). The same experience of powerlessness and questions about efficacy arose for child care workers who developed caring relationships for the children in their care and then worried about them outside their care (Rutman, 1996). While the educators in my study most definitely cared
for the children in their programs as individuals, the children also represented an opportunity to improve the situation for nature and wildlife, so a perceived inability to affect the children likely meant not being able to care for the planet.

Van Dernoot Lipsky (2009) in her work on *Trauma Stewardship* suggests that in caregiving fields, the more an individual is connected personally to the population being assisted, the more likely the individual is to take on the pain of that population (p. 39). For environmental educators, feeling connected to the world that is suffering can potentially make every success and failure in their work very personal. Additional studies of environmental educators support this idea by demonstrating the stress that educators experience related to their knowledge of environmental challenges (Andre, 2011; Beauchamp, 2009; Henderson, 2010). Henderson’s (2010) work with environmental educators showed that in response to increasing environmental adversity educators experienced fear, feelings of being overwhelmed, frustration, despair, and discouragement. Additionally, Beauchamp’s research (2009) revealed that environmental educators sometimes liken themselves to warriors on the battlefield, driven by their sense of urgency to combat ongoing environmental crises. Without protective measures to help address the stress that comes with battle, educators face physical and emotional burnout (Beauchamp, 2009).

Burnout and the other emotional stressors of environmental educators are not surprising in light of the research illuminating the response of humans to environmental destruction and environmental messaging. After all, environmental educators are humans too, and just as others do, they will experience pain in response to witnessing or hearing of environmental damage (Albrecht, 2006; R. A. Lertzman, 2009, 2011; P. Maiteny,
can become overwhelmed by the immensity of environmental problems and can sometimes feel helpless to solve them and can feel conflicted when they consider their own behaviors in the context of what should be done to protect the environment (Moser, 2007, 2012; Randall, 2005). In fact, though not every educator indicated this explicitly in my research, it is likely that almost all of them became environmental educators in response to the psychological pain that they felt for the world and their drive to find productive means to contribute to overcoming the global environmental crises (Beauchamp, 2009; Mnguni, 2010). When the work they chose to create empowerment and solutions reminds them of the psychic pain they are trying to escape, the burden can sometimes be too difficult to bear.

**Even with protection there is still pain.**

With so much potential for positive impact on the world around them at stake on top of their personal emotional investment, it seems appropriate that educators would be driven to find strategies to allow themselves to continue thriving and continuing their work. Just as the general public engages unconscious and sometimes conscious protective measures to ward off the painful emotions associated with environmental messaging (R. Lertzman, 2012; P. T. Maiteny, 2002; Moser, 2012; K. M. Norgaard & Winter, 2006; K. Norgaard, 2011; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2001), environmental educators engage in similar behaviors. As I discuss, I have found through my research how educators engage in a variety of protective measures including selective attention, categorization of people, creation of tangible goals and outcomes, and an avoidance of negativity.
Not surprisingly, the protective measures deployed in this study resonate with the work of Henderson (2010) and Beauchamp (2009) as they examined the strategies that allow for resilience in environmental education. What was surprising was the ambivalence that many of the educators experienced when they spoke about or came to realizations about the protective measures that they engaged.

Even before finding the parallels between the three studies I was already inclined to describe the participants in my research as “resilient educators” because they continued to thrive in their work, even when faced with adversity (Henderson, 2010). The methodology I used, however, allowed me to view their resiliency from a different perspective that illuminated the existence of ambivalence. While at times educators felt comforted by the protective measures that they took, when they considered the impact of those strategies they felt conflicted. Samantha described her preference for non-formal education, and as she realized that non-formal education allowed her more control to exercise over her own outcomes, she began to struggle with the idea that she had categorized formal education as unpredictable and immovable so that she could comfortably keep her focus where it was. Knowing what she had done brought up feelings of disappointment and frustration. Almost all of the educators seemed to experience ambivalence about their selective attention toward positive people when they struggled to categorize people that they felt a connection with or empathy toward. I listened as Frank and Ethan wrote off parents with a matter-of-fact manner then quietly and slowly realized what they had done and began to share their sympathy toward them. Allison easily classified some people as “butt heads” but spoke with obvious pain about how she wanted to but could not write off people who were close to her. Ethan felt
conflicted when he came to the realization that he had classified all guests in his park as untrustworthy simply because he couldn’t manage the pain he might feel if they betrayed his trust by jeopardizing the well-being of the park’s animals. Many of the educators only came to the realization of their strategies as they spoke about them in the interviews. I could hear in their voices the struggle that they felt when they realized that many of the people they had categorized could be struggling with issues that were out of their control. As I saw this ambivalence, I began to wonder what would happen when educators truly understood the psychic pain that many of the people they wrote off could actually be feeling.

Some of the ambivalence was likely due to the challenge that many people have with holding onto conflicting perspectives or emotions around a particular subject (Esbjorn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009; Moser, 2012). The educators didn’t know what to do when they realized that a strategy that provided comfort also could cause pain for themselves and others. The educators were taught to be unbiased in their work (North American Association for Environmental Education, 2004), but at the same time they were using bias to protect themselves from powerlessness and grief. Anxiety may also sometimes be increased when dissociation is chosen as a protective strategy (Arndt et al., 2005, p. 204) so the ambivalence demonstrated in the study participants’ interviews could be tied to the increased anxiety that the educators may have felt when they moved their attention away from an entire group of people to focus on a select few.

Another contributor to their ambivalence could be that the educators were adopting strategies that aligned with the social strategies of their organization and those strategies may not match their own (Menzies-Lyth, 1988; Mnguni, 2010). Social Defense
Theory states that people will use social institutions (such as an environmental education organization) to collectively protect themselves from anxiety (Mnguni, 2010). In this case, the educators as a group could be unconsciously adopting similar strategies to protect themselves from the anxiety they feel when confronting the realities of environmental tragedies. Any individual who does not adopt the strategies of the social group can quickly become an outcast (Mnguni, 2010). I witnessed what appeared to be social anxiety at work when Allison told me about her early years at the organization. When she started working there, the trend in environmental education was to bombard people with facts, a social defense common throughout environmental communication as a social institution (Moser, 2007). This strategy was not useful for Allison, potentially because it brought up painful memories from her past where forceful interactions led to negative results. Allison’s preferred strategy was to engage people in activities so that they would be excited by a topic and want to explore it more on their own. Her tactics, which were different from everyone else’s, led her to feel like and be treated as an outsider by many people in the organization. I also felt that Frank was experiencing this conflict because he spoke about his need to focus his attention away from people that rejected his programs, but at the same time believed that everyone is basically good. Classifying people may not be a strategy that Frank would consciously adopt, but he was driven to that end due to the organizational need to continually produce effective programs that address and/or combat environmental challenges.

Henderson (2010) argues that by examining resilient educators we can learn how to help other educators adopt their strategies and continue to thrive. Considering the ambivalence that educators can feel toward their protective strategies and that these
strategies can be created at a social level as well as the individual level, I suggest we take a deeper look at what it means to be resilient and what impacts might come from helping educators understand their own protective strategies.

**Relating to emotions.**

A second research question that I sought to answer is how educators relate to the emotional experiences that come up in their work. The results were as anticipated, that educators would feel some discomfort related to talking about and thinking about their emotional experiences, when those experiences were thought be negative. Many of the educators shared with me that focusing on emotional challenges felt unproductive because it meant that their energy was turned away from producing experiences for the people who showed potential to become environmental stewards. Henderson’s (2010) work supports my work, noting that resilient educators demonstrated a propensity to focus on hope and optimism, and to maintain an action and solution-oriented persona.

So why does discussing painful emotions need to be counterproductive for environmental educators? Where does the resistance come from? I propose that the association between challenging emotions and negative experience, and the resistance to focus on negative experiences is deeply embedded not only in Western culture where this study is focused, but also in environmental education as a field with its close association with the sciences.

A study of environmental educators’ own perceptions of their field suggests that environmental educators must demonstrate that they can maintain energy, enthusiasm, infectious passion, a “consistent can-do vision,” and must give of themselves to their work, all while modeling environmentally sustainable behaviors in their personal lives.
(May, 2000). The current North American Association for Environmental Education Guidelines (2004) focus on fair, balanced and science-based environmental education that is led by people with infectious passion and positive attitudes. Also environmental educators have been taught to stay away from fear (O’Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009; Sobel, 1996) or anything that is biased toward one particular lifestyle or cultural choice (North American Association for Environmental Education, 2004). With a strong emphasis on science, environmental educators are also taught that too much emphasis on emotion is counter to the goals of their work (Windle, 1995).

The educators in my study exhibited the same understanding of what it meant to be an environmental educator and they felt that focusing on negative emotions would prevent them from being able to maintain the standards that are set forth by their own field. With the pressure to remain unbiased, neutral, and infectiously positive, there is little room for environmental educators to discuss the painful aspects of environmental messaging that their audiences might endure or even their own painful experiences. Additionally, many of the educators in this study focused their work on young children who are not psychologically ready to understand the painful reality of our planet (Sobel, 1996) so they feel extra pressure to maintain their own positive affect and therefore steer away from allowing themselves to experience painful emotions.

Their discomfort is common, not just among environmental educators but also in Western society in general (Macy & Brown, 1998; Macy, 1995; Moser, 2007; Nicholsen, 2002; Randall, 2005). Environmental education is practiced within a risk-averse culture (Randall, 2005; Vess & Arndt, 2008) that is fearful of expressing or experiencing pain (Macy, 1995; Moser, 2012; Pyszczynski et al., 1997; Randall, 2009; Windle, 1995).
People fear that allowing themselves to feel will become too overwhelming to handle (Lertzman, 2009) and environmental educators fear that if they cannot do their work they will be unable to prevent or slow global environmental crises (Beauchamp, 2009; Henderson, 2010; Randall, 2009).

There are many potential challenges associated with the allergy to negative emotions that currently exists within environmental education. These challenges have to do with how well educators are able to care for themselves, how prepared they are to handle the environmental leadership that is really needed, and how they will relate to the people they are working to inspire and educate.

The downside of emotional allergies.

Future leaders will need to be not just experts in climate change, or a particular environmental field, but be capable of holding that which is happening to and in our world. They will need to mentor, guide, and assist people in processing enormous losses, human distress, constant crises, and the seemingly endless need to remain engaged in the task of maintaining, restoring, and rebuilding – despite all setbacks – a viable planet, the only place the human species can call its home. (Moser, 2012, p. 7)

While we’ve seen that avoiding painful emotions can serve as a useful protective strategy, the outcome won’t always be the successful educational outreach that educators anticipate and desire. One particular challenge is in how avoidance strategies affect how educators relate to their audience members. The educators in this study and others (Beauchamp, 2009; Henderson, 2010) chose to selectively move their attention away from people who they felt were negative or overly resistant to environmental messaging.
With the psychoanalytic methodology I was able to show that the educators felt ambivalence toward this strategy, understanding intuitively that they run the risk of discounting certain individuals that they didn’t want to discount. They also run the risk of labeling individuals as apathetic or unchangeable when those individuals are actually in the midst of experiencing their own psychic pain that prevents them from becoming engaged (R. Lertzman, 2012; Moser, 2012; Randall, 2009). If someone who is suffering from doubt, anxiety, grief or anger caused by their environmental awareness is discounted by an environmental educator who may be viewed as capable of helping that individual, the pain for that individual may be exacerbated. We already know that people transfer their anger about the environment upon educators and activists that remind them of their pain (Randall, 2005); rejection or alienation by an educator might reinforce for those people why there weren’t engaged in environmental solutions to begin with.

The environmental educators and leaders of today need to be prepared to help address the emotions of individuals that are suffering from the pain of environmental catastrophe (Moser, 2012; Nicholsen, 2002; van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009). These leaders will not be ready to help address the pain of others until they are able to acknowledge and address it in themselves (Macy & Brown, 1998; Meadows, 1997; Moser, 2012; van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009). Furthermore, as people often adopt the emotional strategies of the institutions that they trust (Menzies-Lyth, 1985), when the educators continue to engage in protective measures they may be unconsciously teaching those same strategies to the people that they try to work with. If educators understand their own emotional strategies they may be able to model more productive strategies for their audiences.
Understanding their own strategies may also help educators to consciously choose different strategies that have better outcomes for themselves and their audiences. When examining powerlessness in nurses, researchers asked the nurses to define what power meant to them (Kornhaber & Wilson, 2011). The nurses derived their power from being able to develop intimate relationships with their patients. Intimate relationships helped them to provide more appropriate comfort to their patients and thus feel more in control (Kornhaber & Wilson, 2011). Being able to provide individualized attention to patients helps nurses feel less anxiety, fear, and anger in their work (Menzies-Lyth, 1985). While individualized attention may not be a feasible solution for many educational programs, understanding how educators define empowerment might help organizations and individuals to adopt proactive strategies and create less threatening environments for educators. The same may be true for the other protective strategies that they adopt.

In addition to developing proactive and productive emotional strategies, educators would also benefit from acknowledging and accepting that there are both joyous and painful aspects to environmental work, and that holding on to both emotions is appropriate and encouraged (Moser, 2012; Nicholsen, 2002). This ability to hold on to paradoxes (Moser, 2012) is also referred to as mature hope or binocular vision (Nicholsen, 2002), and seen as a more complete perspective of ecological self (Esbjorn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009). The reality of today is that our interconnection with the world brings us both joy and pain (Macy, 1995; Moser, 2012; Nicholsen, 2002) and discounting the painful side can not only cause physical and emotional damage (Nicholsen, 2002; van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009; Windle, 1995) it can also cause us to
underappreciate catastrophe and limit our own creativity in solving environmental challenges (Macy, 1995; van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009).

There is already an example of work being done to help educators overcome their emotional challenges to better engage with their audiences. The Center for Ecoliteracy is contributing to this discussion by recognizing the necessity to create a “safe container” for students and educators to acknowledge and discuss the emotional impacts of the environmental challenges that they hear about (Goleman et al., 2012). Their work has demonstrated that acknowledging and processing emotions has created empowering opportunities for people to engage in creative environmental solutions.

It is important to note that work with individuals is not enough if those individuals continue to work within a culture or institution that does not support the new strategies that the individuals might employ (P. Maiteny, 2000; van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009). Individuals who try to work against social norms face potential conflict with colleagues (Mnguni, 2010) and may struggle to maintain their new outlook without a social network to support them (Goleman et al., 2012; van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009).

We are all grieving and preparing for loss.

I had suggested when I began this research that loss would be a significant stressor for the educators that I studied. In Chapter 4 I shared that they did experience three different types of loss: loss of nature; loss of awe, curiosity, and wonder; and the loss of sense of self and personal credibility. After examining the full emotional experience of the educators in my study as I did above, I suggest that though it was not explicitly discussed by any of the educators in the study, the aftermath of experiencing loss and the anticipation of further loss may be an underlying current driving the
experience of every environmental educator’s work. The idea is not far-fetched or original (Kidner, 1994; R. A. Lertzman, 2009; Macy, 1995; Mishan, 1996; Nicholsen, 2002; Randall, 2005; H. F. Searles, 1972).

I call attention to this point distinctly because of the reasons I’ve already expressed about why addressing pain is an essential step for environmental educators. The story of the educators in this study suggests that environmental educators are driven to their work because they need a way to heal the pain of the world and the related personal pain that they feel, whether or not they are aware of that pain. The action-oriented nature of the field and the understanding that environmental educators are expected to serve as models for a better way of living (May, 2000) further supports the idea that the goal is to prevent future loss and hopefully repair the damage of the past. I hope that I have demonstrated the imperative that the environmental education field listens to the psychodynamics of those facilitating environmental education, so that we may continue to improve upon the great work we already do.

Implications for the Field

This project has underscored the growing understanding that environmental educators face painful emotional challenges in their work and that the strategies they adopt to protect themselves may sometimes be counterproductive to their work. The educators indicated that they are currently only reaching a very small percentage of people that need to heed environmental messaging. While they acknowledged their limited reach as frustrating, the protective strategies that the educators engaged reinforced their limited reach by causing them to discount individuals that they perceived as negative. Those negative individuals may actually be struggling to engage in
environmental solutions due to their own unconscious emotional stressors. If educators continue to perceive those individuals as negative and disconnect from them for their own protection, then environmental education will be dismissing the audience that it most needs to reach (Moser, 2007; Randall, 2009). Continuing to deny the existence of unconscious stressors for environmental educators could lead to burnout and may continue to exacerbate the emotional challenges that prevent people from engaging in environmentally positive solutions (Beauchamp, 2009; Henderson, 2010; Moser, 2007; Randall, 2009).

Since the educators were largely unaware of the existence of their unconscious pain and the impacts it may have on their work, it seems imperative that tools are created to help educators acknowledge their pain and understand how to address it. While there are already some tools available to help people address their emotional challenges (Macy & Brown, 1998; Randall, 2009; van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009) the experience of the educators in this study suggests that work needs to be done at the level of the organization and the field in order to allow for any appreciable impact. While the educators seemed open in the workshop that I offered, the lack of explicit understanding of the content suggests that more preparation needs to be done prior to these experiences, and that support systems need to be set up within organizations or like-minded communities of practice (P. Maiteny, 2000; van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009).

The ambivalence that the educators felt toward their protective strategies suggests that a deeper examination of resilient educators would be worthwhile. In no way do I suggest that current resilient studies (Beauchamp, 2009; Henderson, 2010) are incorrect or faulty, but that additional studies of resilient educators from a psychoanalytic
perspective may develop greater insight into what resilience means and how to develop it in new environmental educators. Transformative learning and continual professional growth can be an important part of maintaining resilience (Henderson, 2010; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003) which supports the idea that emotional work could provide far-reaching benefits to the field.

Since dealing with loss is such a significant factor in the emotional experiences of environmental educators, a place to start may be first to fully understand from a psychoanalytic perspective why educators are drawn to the field. If educators understand their own emotional motivations they may be more receptive to further exploring the emotional aspects of their work. Insights from such a study may also better prepare the field for recruiting and maintaining quality environmental educators, which could be crucial to the success of the field. Clearly environmental educators would benefit from exploring the psychological dimension of their work (Moser, 2007, 2012) and the research described here further underscores that need.

**Study Limitations**

This was an in-depth study on a small group of individuals, so it is difficult to generalize the results across the field of environmental education. The findings do resonate and are consistent with others’ work (Beauchamp, 2009; Henderson, 2010), which lends credibility to the outcomes. There is also the possibility that my role as both researcher and supervisor of most of the individuals in the study could have limited the reliability of the results, however, since each participant reviewed and approved the personal description I wrote for them along with all of the quotes I used in this write-up, I feel that the findings have a significant enough level of internal reliability to make them
relevant to broader connections within the field. I also had the opportunity to present my preliminary findings at two different professional conferences (Hebert, September, 2012; Kool, Lertzman, & Hebert, October, 2012) during the writing of this thesis and the enthusiasm and understanding that the results were met with indicate that the results represent a common experience among environmental educators across North America.

The study did lack diversity relative to the type of environmental education that the participants conducted, the roles that the participants held within their organizations, the span of experience within the environmental education field, and also, though age and ethnicity were not examined in this particular study, there was also very little diversity within those two demographics.

The psychoanalytically informed methodology also has its limitations. Though many experts have advanced the use of this methodology (Cartwright, 2004; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; R. A. Lertzman, 2009; Walkerdine et al., 2001) the methods are difficult to learn and my personal inexperience could have had an impact on the overall results. My work was reviewed by a highly competent practitioner and researcher, which did provide additional credibility to the accuracy of the results. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) also claim that the reliability of the holistic analysis lies within the data and evidence that they used to build the methodology. Psychosocial-based analysis assumes that meanings are unique to people and individual experiences, so the specific elements of any qualitative study, by their very nature, cannot be replicated (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 79).

I believe it also important to acknowledge how my own personal bias may have interplayed with the outcomes of this study. Though I worked hard to bracket my own
perceptions and understandings based upon my personal experience as an educator (see Chapter 3 for a full description of the methods I employed) it is impossible to say that I could have approached the work with a truly unbiased mind (Hollway, 2009; Walkerdine et al., 2001). That being said, there is also the possibility that my work as an educator helped me to draw insights and create connections that may have been missed by an outsider to the field because I understood the language and culture of these individuals in a way that an outsider could not without extensive background research and ethnographical study.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Building upon the limitations of this particular study, I recommend conducting further studies using the psychoanalytically informed methodology with a broader representation of environmental educators. Though it was difficult to assess its significance due to the small amount of diversity within this group of research participants, there did seem to be a difference between the emotional experience and protective strategies of Jessica, who had limited professional experience in environmental education, and the rest of the participants who not only had more experience but also held supervisory roles within their institutions. Examining the strategies of environmental educators early in their careers and how those strategies may or may not change as their careers progress could give important insight into how educators learn their emotional strategies and when might be the best timing for intervention or proactive strategies.

Most of the educators in this study were from the same organization and since they experienced many common stressors and protective strategies, there could be benefit to exploring the role of environmental institutions in shaping and reinforcing the
emotional challenges and strategies of environmental educators. This importance of this research is underscored by what we know about social anxiety and the impact of social institutions on the shaping of the emotional strategies of their constituents (Menzies-Lyth, 1988; Mnguni, 2010).

Most of my work was conducted within a zoo. Visitors attend zoos with a variety of motivations (Fraser & Sickler, 2009) that may have influence on the experience of the educators that work within them. In light of the increased amount of research that is being focused on the impact of zoos upon their visitors (Bronnenkant, Heimlich, & Falk, n.d.; Fraser & Sickler, 2009; Heimlich & Ogden, 2009), additional research focused on the specific experiences of zoo educators seems both timely and warranted.

Further research on the experience of individuals within the field could lend credence to making widespread changes at the cultural level of environmental education, but at the same time it will be important to begin to understand other ways to influence widespread change among the field. Gatherings of influential leaders within environmental education from across North America to further discuss these issues may be important for influencing change.

This project was only the beginning of an attempt to understand the larger question that framed my research, which was how increasing the emotional awareness of environmental educators could impact their ability to understand and support the audiences with whom they work. It is critical that we better understand this connection if we are to shape appropriate and effective environmental leadership in our current global situation (Moser, 2012). As such, longitudinal studies of environmental educators working through their own emotional experiences are essential to the growth of the field.
Conclusion

Being an environmental educator is a highly complex and emotional experience. The stories of the educators in this study told of anxiety, fear, doubt, and pain related to feeling powerless, questioning the outcomes of the field, and struggling with the reality of loss. I have demonstrated through my results that environmental educators are resistant to exploring their painful emotions, but if they allow themselves to, the results could lead to stronger connections with audiences and an increase in pro-environmental behaviors.

There is much work to be done to prepare educators for a journey into their own unconscious experiences. My workshop demonstrated that they may be ready if given the right amount of support and preparation. Since every educator in this study was full of hope, optimism, and a drive to build a brighter future, I have hope that the field is ready to take on this new challenge. The warm reception that was given to the presentation of this project at professional conferences is an initial indication that we may get there soon.

While the emphasis of my research focused on the exploration of the painful side of environmental education, I in no way intend for the field to abandon hope and optimism. I wish for the field to develop a mature hope (Nicholsen, 2002); to be able to responsibly acknowledge the tragedies we have witnessed and continue to face, while simultaneously preparing people to bring forth creative solutions for the future of our planet.

My journey into the emotional lives of environmental educators was as much an exercise in understanding my field as it was in understanding myself. I am grateful to my colleagues who joined me on this journey and hope that they may take something away from this research to benefit their own growth and understanding. I look forward to
continuing my own personal work as well as taking the next steps to help prepare the
field of environmental education to continue to be the leaders of tomorrow.

Feelings, like knowledge, don’t directly change anything. But if we don’t
rush past the feelings or stuff them down, if we take time to admit even the
most uncomfortable ones, to accept them, share them, and couple them
with knowledge of what is wrong and how it might be fixed, then feelings
and knowledge together are motors for change. (Meadows, 1997)
References


Fraser, J., & Sickler, J. (2009). *Why zoos and aquariums matter: Handbook of research key findings and results from national audience surveys*. Silver Spring, MD.


Hebert, G. (2012, September). First look inside: Exploring the emotional experiences of educators to better understand our audiences. Poster presentation at *Association of Zoos and Aquariums Annual Conference*. Phoenix, AZ.


Appendix A

Pre-Screening Survey

Demographics

Intro: First I'd like to know a bit about the kind of environmental education you do and how long you've been in the field.

How long have you been working as an environmental educator?

With what age groups do you feel your work mainly focuses on? (mark all that apply)
- Early childhood
- Primary school
- Secondary school
- Higher education
- Adults

Which category best describes your primary type of environmental education work?
- Formalized, structured programs
- Informal interactions with visitors
- Interpretive writing
- Other: ________________

How would you characterize your current status as an environmental educator?
- This is my job until I find something different (disqualify)
- I plan on making a career out of this
Environmental education is my career

I have another career but I am passionate about environmental education

This is a fun job but I am not passionate about it (disqualify)

Other: ________________

**Short Answer Questions**

**Intro:** Now I would like to know more about you and your relationship with your work. Before you answer the questions on this page, think back to when you found yourself in the field of environmental education.

What were the circumstances that brought you to environmental education?

Why did you decide to stay in the field, if you can recall?

Do the same things that motivated or excited you to stay in the field still motivate or excite you now?

Yes

No

If your motivations have changed at all, in what ways have they changed and why?

How often do you talk about your work in environmental education with your friends and family?

Never

Sometimes
Often

Unsure

Can you give an example of a recent conversation you had with your friends or family about your work in environmental education?

Do you find yourself outside of work, watching or reading environmental programs, books, magazines, movies, etc.?

Yes

No

What is the most recent environmental content that you accessed outside of work that comes to mind?

Do you find yourself thinking about a particular incident or environmental issue more often than others?

Yes

No

Please describe the incident or issue that you find yourself thinking about more often than others.

Do you ever find yourself sometimes wanting to “take a break” from environmental content?

Yes
How often do you feel that you are doing your best as an environmental educator?

Never
Sometimes
Often
Always
Unsure

What do you think prevents you from always doing your best as an environmental educator?

Think of the last experience you had in environmental education that made you feel good about what you were doing. Can you describe the experience?

What do you love most about being an environmental educator?

Thank you for completing this survey. If you are selected to continue in the study I will contact you to discuss the next steps. Please leave your contact information below.

Name:

Email:
Last Screen:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey and for considering participation in my research. I greatly appreciate your contributions to environmental education. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.
Appendix B

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study
Project Title: The Experience of Being an Environmental Educator

You are invited to participate in a study that explores the experience of being an environmental educator. The purpose of this study is to understand more fully the challenges and unique nature of working in environmental education. I am conducting this study as partial fulfillment of a Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication through Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are employed as an environmental educator with the Phoenix Zoo. Since a potential outcome of this study will be a professional development tool for environmental education leaders to use with their staff, I am interested in conducting the study with educators that all work for the same organization.

Participation in this study includes completion of this brief open-ended survey, an eight-hour workshop with colleagues that I will facilitate, and three follow-up interviews that may last up to one hour each. You may be asked questions regarding your feelings, thoughts, perceptions and emotions in relation to your work or the content of your field. You may also be asked to share information of a more personal nature than you are accustomed to sharing with colleagues. You will be free to say as little or as much as you choose and may withdraw your participation at any time. All of the information you provide will be confidential and used solely for the purpose of conducting and reporting the research. If I publish this work I will use pseudonyms and remove any information that could connect you or the Phoenix Zoo to the study.

By offering your valuable time to this study you could be contributing to a greater understanding of how to create and facilitate impactful and effective environmental education messages that inspire people to adopt pro-environmental behaviors. Participation in this study will have no bearing on your employment status, relationship with the Phoenix Zoo or your relationship with me. Whether you participate in the study is solely your decision. If you do choose to participate you will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, which will again have no impact on your work at the Phoenix Zoo or in your relationship with me.

My research is being supervised by Dr. Renee Lertzman of Royal Roads University. Ruth Allard of the Phoenix Zoo is sponsoring my project and will be closely following my work to ensure that all confidentiality, privacy and employee protection guidelines are followed. Contact information for both individuals is included at the end of this letter.

In completing the following survey you are agreeing to be contacted to discuss further participation in the workshop and interviews. If both you and I agree on your continued participation you will be given a participant information sheet and consent form to sign.
Click on the link below to complete the online survey. Please note that the survey data is stored in a U.S. database and may be subject to the terms of the U.S. Patriot Act.

http://kwiksurveys.com?u=The_Experience_of_an_Environmental_Educator

Thank you for considering to participate in this study and contributing to the broader field of environmental education. Your time is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Gabrielle Hebert
Masters Candidate, Royal Roads University

Thesis Supervisor          Thesis Sponsor
Renee Lertzman, PhD        Ruth Allard
Adjunct Faculty            EVP, Conservation and Experiences
Royal Roads University     Phoenix Zoo
Appendix C

Research Project: The Experience of Being an Environmental Educator

I would like to invite you to participate in my study that explores the experience of being an environmental educator. This information sheet is to help you understand the purpose of the research, what is involved for you, and what will be done with the information that you share. Please take the time to read through this document thoroughly before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Who am I?
My name is Gabrielle Hebert and I am conducting my Masters at Royal Roads University. You know me as the Director of Experiences for the Phoenix Zoo. The research I am conducting has the approval of the Research Ethics Committee of Royal Roads University. I am receiving no funding for the study but have been granted permission by the Phoenix Zoo to conduct my work. Ruth Allard, EVP of Conservation and Experiences will be overseeing my conduct throughout the study. Dr. Renee Lertzman of Royal Roads University is my thesis supervisor. While conducting this research I am not acting as an employee of the Phoenix Zoo; all of my research will take place on my own personal time.

What is my research interest?
Environmental education is a unique field full of challenges. There have been various studies conducted on the experience of participating in environmental education programs, but little has been done to understand the experience of the educators themselves. I would like to pilot a process to help environmental education leaders to understand the experience of the educators that work with them. A potential outcome of this research is a professional development workshop that educational leaders across the country can use with their staff.

Who is invited to participate?
I am focusing my study on environmental educators that work for the Phoenix Zoo. My intent is to pilot the workshop in the same manner that it is intended to be used, with teams of educators that work together regularly. I am interested in individuals that have chosen environmental education as a career or as a dedicated passion. Beyond that, there is no expectation for you to feel any particular feelings or hold any particular beliefs about environmental education.

What is your involvement in the study?
If you choose to participate I will ask you questions regarding your feelings, thoughts, perceptions and emotions in relation to your work as an environmental educators. You will be free to say as little or as much as you choose and may withdraw your participation at any time.
During the eight-hour workshop I will facilitate group discussion and activities to help you think about the information that you’d like to share. I will also ask you to record your thoughts in a journal. The workshop will take place at the Phoenix Zoo and will be relaxed and comfortable. You will only be asked to share what you are comfortable sharing and you can exit the workshop at any time, without explanation. In the workshop you will be connected with some of your colleagues who have also agreed to participate in the study and you may be asked to share information of a more personal nature than you are accustomed to sharing with your colleagues. Before we begin, as a group we will agree to guidelines that protect your privacy and confidentiality. The workshop will be video and audio recorded so that I have a record of what was said and I may take notes periodically for follow-up during the interviews.

After the workshop I will ask you to leave your journal with me and I will contact you to schedule three follow-up interviews; the first will be 1 -2 weeks after the workshop, then approximately one and two months after that. The interview will be as relaxed and comfortable as the workshop and I will ask you to share more detail regarding your thoughts, feelings, perceptions or emotions associated with your work. You can speak as long as you like, I will not interrupt. You may end the interview at any point or decline to answer a question. We can hold the interviews at the Phoenix Zoo or at another location of your choosing. I will audio record the interview so that I have a record of what was said and I may take notes periodically for follow-up in subsequent interviews.

What will I do with your information?

I will transcribe the workshop and the interviews and will share a copy of the transcripts if you request it. My thesis supervisor and I will be the only people to view the transcripts and they will not be used for any other purpose than for this study. I will also use your journal entries solely for the study and will give the journal back to you at the end of the study if you’d like. The information from the transcripts will be the basis of my Masters thesis which will be assessed in order for me to gain the Masters degree. I may also use the transcripts as a source of quotations when I write for both professional and academic journals. You are welcome to see a copy of the thesis and any of the articles before they are published.

All of the information that you share with me will be kept confidential. Your name, the names of anyone you mention, and any identifying features that could link back to you will be removed from the final thesis and any other publications. I will use a pseudonym whenever referring to you in any of the publications. The transcripts and recordings will be stored on a private, password protected hard-drive that only I and my thesis supervisor will have access to. I will retain the transcripts for future research papers; however the audio and video recordings will be destroyed after five years and I will contact you when doing so. Although I do not intend to use the audio or video recordings in any public exhibition, if the circumstance should arise I will only do so with your written permission.
What if you change your mind about participating?
It is your voluntary decision to take part in the workshop and the interviews and you are free to change your mind and withdraw from the study at any point, without giving a reason. At that point any information that you have already shared with me will only be used with your written permission.

What if you have questions?
If you have questions at any time feel free to contact me or email: You may also contact my thesis supervisor. Additionally I would be happy to supply additional contacts within Royal Roads University to discuss the study, if you request. If you agree to participate in the study please complete the attached consent form and contact me to set up your schedule.

Thank you for sharing your time. I look forward to working with you.

Gabrielle Hebert
MA Candidate, Royal Roads University
Appendix D

Participant Consent

**Research Project:** The Experience of Being an Environmental Educator  
**Researcher:** Gabrielle Hebert, Royal Roads University

Please Initial Next to Each Statement:

_____ I confirm that I have read and understood the information for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

_____ I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

_____ I understand that my participation in this study has no bearing on my employment at the Phoenix Zoo or my relationship with my supervisor or colleagues.

_____ I agree to take part in the study, to participate in an eight-hour workshop, to complete a journal, and to be interviewed for up to three sessions of one hour each.

_________________________    ________________________  
Name of Participant            Date

_________________________    ________________________  
Name of Person Taking Consent  Date
Appendix E

The Experience of Being an Environmental Educator

Workshop Outline

Outline

9:00 Welcome (20 minutes)

1. Research introduction and consent statement
   - Thank you for participating
   - Reminder that participation is voluntary and has no bearing on work
   - Everyone is free to withdraw participation at any point and I will not ask questions
   - The session will be video and audio recorded, a transcript will be produced; only I and my thesis supervisor will have access to the transcript. I will also be using your journal entries for analysis.
   - Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

2. Overview of the day’s structure and activities
   - Why we are here: the importance of exploring our experience of being environmental educators.
     - Description of the types of things learned from the survey (be sure to phrase in a way that keeps it confidential)
     - We have all decided to be environmental educators because of a passion and compassion for the living and natural world. Being an advocate for the world can sometimes make us feel wonderful and at other times make us feel a lot of pain. Today’s workshop is about exploring both ends of the spectrum to help us become fully aware of our experience. It’s about learning to become mindful and open to our entire experience so that we can take care of ourselves in what can sometimes be a difficult work world but also be more open to new ways to thinking about and doing our work. There are two areas of the experience of environmental educators that we’ll be exploring today; your experience as a professional working in environmental education and your experience as a person that is connected to a world that is in trouble. Both are integral to who you are and how you go about and your work. My hope is that today we can work together to help each other become more open and mindful. I suspect that by understanding how our work affects us we may be able to take better care of ourselves and by understanding how our experience of the world affects us, we may be able to understand that same experience better in others. Later on today I’ll share some of the research that this workshop is based upon but for now I’d like to share with you what has inspired me to explore this area. (Discuss what inspired you to be interested in this work).
   - An explanation of the structure of the workshop.
   - The workshop and its activities are modeled after the work of several authors. The work of Joanna Macy and her work with Brown call The Work That Reconnects from Coming Back to Life, psychologist Rosemary Randall and her work on
climate change related behavior change and Laura van Dernoot Lipsky and her work on Trauma Stewardship. This overall workshop structure follows the spiral established by Joanna Macy to help us fully explore our connections with life. Ideas from Lipsky and Randall are intertwined throughout the workshop. There are four parts to the spiral: Coming from Gratitude helps ground us and focus on by acknowledging what makes us grateful about our work, after that we are able to fully open ourselves up to the painful parts of our work and begin to explore what happens when we don’t feel or do our best, what makes us feel that way. When we’ve acknowledged and embraced both of our grateful and painful aspects of our work we can then See with New Eyes the greater picture of what we do, who we are, and how we and our work are connected to a greater system. Then finally, we will determine how to Go Forth and use our new and whole experience to contribute whatever we can to the greater system. Today is just a beginning. I hope that you’ll get something out of the work we do today and want to continue in your own way to be open to your entire experience.

- This experience is meant for you to take away from it what you want. How you feel about the content could be different than others and different from me. You may feel differently about it depending upon your target audience. All that I’m asking of you today is that you consider the content, nothing more.

- Journals – purpose of and how to use them

3. **Ground rules for the group:**
   - No one is required to share at any point and when you do share you only need to share what you are comfortable with
   - Everything said and done in the workshop will remain completely confidential
   - Listen to others with an open heart and open mind, don’t interrupt but feel free to express your support.
   - There is no right or wrong way to feel; there is only respectful means to express ourselves. We will demonstrate respect to each other in everything that we do today. If you feel that someone is being disrespectful, gently point that out. If disrespect continues we may ask a person to leave the workshop.
   - You may feel discomfort during the workshop. This is completely natural. If you, however, would like to remove yourself from the activity there is a quiet space set up to give you the space that you need. Take as much time as you need in that space and we will welcome you openly when you return.

**Part I – Affirmation: Coming from gratitude**
The goal for this section is to identify what motivates the participants to be environmental educators and what it means for them to be at their best as environmental educators.

**9:20 Icebreaker (20 minutes)**
Share with us your name, what your connection to environmental education is and a story about something you did in environmental work that you are particularly proud of. What happened and what makes you feel good about it?
9:40 Gratitude Open Sentences (30 minutes)
What I love most about being alive on this earth is…
Being in or thinking about nature makes me feel…
What I love most about environmental education or my environmental work is…
I feel like I’m making a real difference in my work when…
The greatest gift I can give to the world is…

10:10 BREAK (10 minutes)

Part II – Despair work: Owning and honoring our pain
The goal for this section is to explore what challenges and dilemmas the participants experience during their work as environmental educators. What does it look like and feel like to not be at our best as environmental educators? What is difficult and challenging about our work? What makes us struggle?

10:20 Council of All Beings (40 minutes)
No matter what path brought you to EE, all of you seem to stay because of your love of nature. Undoubtedly a love of nature means feeling pain when nature suffers. In this activity we will take on the persona of a non-human being and give the being a voice in a council to express to humans what the being needs to express. When we give voice to a being that has no voice, it can be a very powerful experience and we might just learn something about ourselves in the process.

- Take a walk and see if a being calls to you to become its voice. If one doesn’t choose you, you may actively choose one, that’s okay. The being can be any part of the environment (an insect, a tree, a flower, a bird, a plant, any feature of the landscape)
- Listen to the being and become its ally in a conversation with the humans
- Remember there are no humans in the council. You are speaking to the other non-human beings about humans.
- Feel free to express yourself as your ally in any way that you’d like.
- When you come to the council you will introduce yourself and describe how you see life on the earth at this time.
- Each being can share suggestions for how we can help humans stop harming us and the planet.
- We can also share any gifts, skills, or teachings that we can pass on to the humans.

11:00 BREAK (15 minutes)

11:15 Open Sentences (30 minutes)
Participants pair up and take turns completing the following sentences. While one partner is talking the other listens and does not talk. After both partners have spoken, provide
everyone five minutes to write down any thoughts in their journal and then give time if anyone would like to share their experience with the group.

Sentence threads:
- Being an environmental educator is important to me because….
- Thinking about being an environmental educator, I feel most frustrated or bothered when…
- My work makes me sad when…
- Ways I handle my frustrations and sadness in my work are…
- If I could change one thing about my work it would be…
- What I hope can happen for us in this work is…

11:45 Group discussion (30 minutes)
We’ve looked a little at pain about the world and a little about challenging things about being an environmental educator.
- What has come up for you so far that you’d like to discuss more with the group?
- Are there times that you can think of that your pain for the world impacts your work one way or another? What does that feel like? How have you responded to those moments?

12:15 Journaling (15 minutes)

12:30 LUNCH (60 minutes)

Part III – The shift: Seeing with new eyes
The goal for this section is to help participants see the emotional effects of our work and to understand that the positive and negative emotions of our work as environmental educators are both important. When we acknowledge both the positive and negative we can be more connected to the work and ultimately feel more empowered to do our part. Avoiding the pain can also be detrimental to our health.

1:15 Lecture and Discussion: How this workshop fits into the big picture (45 minutes)
See lecture notes at the end of the document.

What do you think this might mean for your work?

2:00 BREAK (5 minutes)

2:05 Widening circles – looking at issues from multiple perspectives (45 minutes)
This activity is about seeing things that concern us from different perspectives. I think it’s important to explore this idea right now because it can help open us up to how our own
emotions about a particular topic could be influencing how we present the topic and therefore how people in our audience might respond to us. Since we can’t separate our own experience from how we do our programs and we’ve seen that if we try it is unhealthy, let’s try to understand a bit more the role our experience plays. Think about an environmental topic that deeply concerns you. You are going to speak about this topic for about three minutes each from various perspectives. When you speak from each perspective use the pronoun “I” and really try to take on the perspective of that person.

- First we’ll start with your own viewpoint.
- That of someone that feels strongly different than you on the topic. It’s important that you don’t speak with judgment but consider how the perspective really feels.
- From the viewpoint of someone that may know little about the topic and feels overwhelmed by it.

Discussion: thinking about the different perspectives you took on, how might your own perspective impact their response to any programming or messaging you use on the topic?

2:50 Journaling Time and mention of mindfulness (20 minutes)
One of the ways that we can stay open to our full experience is to practice mindfulness and ways to keep ourselves connected to the moment and centered or balanced. Let’s just take a few moments to practice something that helps each of us to stay centered, refreshed, and open. You can do anything you’d like for the next 10 minutes or so. Here are some suggestions for you but you are not limited to these options. The important thing is that this is not a time to take a break from our experience and talk about other things or check your emails and voicemails. We’re practicing finding our center. When you come back we’ll have a brief discussion about your experience.

- Breathing exercise
- Partner walk
- Solitary walk
- Meditation
- Journaling
- Drawing or doing other art

3:10 BREAK (10 minutes)

Part IV – Going Forth
The goal for this section is to help participants discover what they will do with what they have learned in the workshop. Where will they go from here?

3:20 “Corbett” (35 minutes)
This exercise helps participants to articulate something that they would like to do as a result of the workshop experience and get feedback from others in the group. Participants divide into groups of four and each person considers something that they want to do as a
result of the workshop today. Person A shares what they desire to contribute while the others listen attentively. Then the others in the group have an opportunity to respond, one by one in the order of:
Voice of Doubt
Voice of Support
Voice of a future student or program participant or guest

3:55 Final Group Discussion (20 minutes)
Wrap up of Going Forth section
Any final thoughts from the day

4:15 Final journal entries (10 minutes)

4:25 Closing and Evaluation Reminder
Evaluation will be sent via email and will be anonymous

Lecture and Discussion: How this workshop fits into the big picture

Note: Reference topics and experiences that have come up for the workshop participants so far.

What we’ve experienced so far today demonstrates how there are many strong emotions tied to the environment, our experience of it, and our experience of the destruction of the environment. The reason I felt this was an important element of our work to explore is that not only may you be feeling these emotions daily, but the people you are working to educate are experiencing them too.

Research studies are starting to identify that environmental content produces strong emotions in people and when those emotions are too difficult to bear, people respond with defense mechanisms that cause them to (provide details for each point and ask for examples that participants have experienced):

- Deny that any real environmental issues exist or avoid the issues
  - Some professionals contribute denial to a stage of mourning our loss of the environment. It is too painful to acknowledge the environmental loss so we avoid it as much as we can. How many of you have experienced this? Would anyone like to share an experience?
  - We also may avoid the issues in our programs and in a sense sugar coat the content we provide.
- Give up on trying because they feel that they can’t make a difference
  - This can be either a conscious or unconscious decision to give up. We sometimes see it take the form of rationalization – “why should I bother when it won’t make a difference?” How many of you have encountered this type of response from someone in your programs? How many of you have felt this way yourself at some point?
• Lash out at environmental activists
  o Often change is difficult for people to face. When we learn through environmental messaging how our behaviors are causing environmental destruction, it can feel like a part of our identity is threatened.
  o For some people they need to protect themselves and their identity so they embrace their same behaviors even more strongly and become angry with the people who are telling them that they need to change.

• Be further compelled to consume
  o Also learning that our own behaviors have contributed to environmental destruction can cause us to feel a lot of guilt which in turn makes us feel badly about ourselves. There are theories that suggest that since we have become a consumer society we look externally for validation of ourselves, which often takes the form of consuming more goods to have more stuff. When we feel badly about ourselves we look for that external validation and for many people that means more shopping and consumption.

• Lash out at non-environmentalists
  o Environmentalists and environmental educators develop their own anger and negative behaviors when faced with environmental destruction. This can contribute to the concept of the elite environmentalists. How many of you have felt anger toward a person because of his/her attitude or behavior related to the environment.

• In some cases become depressed or develop other ailments
  o Solastalgia is a term that has been coined to define the “pain or sickness caused by the loss of, or inability to derive solace from, the present state of one’s home environment.” Because of our intrinsic connection with the world around us, when it is sick, we can become sick. That is one way that environmental messages can contribute to ailments.
  o Environmental educators often experience similar feelings as trauma workers; we just don’t talk about it. Dealing with the realities of environmental destruction and the loss of things you love every day is a very difficult thing to do. That we work in a zoo is a constant reminder of environmental loss.

As you’ll hopefully experience in the rest of this workshop and beyond it, when a person explores the emotions that are driving their behaviors, they feel more empowered to do what they feel is the better path to follow. It is also more physically and psychologically healthier to acknowledge and address our own negative emotions.

So what could this mean for your work?
• The importance of mindfulness in your work
  o If we slow down and listen to ourselves and our entire experience we can be more open to solutions and creativity about how to go about your work
• The importance of self-care for environmental educators
  o How many of you have experienced times when you feel extra grumpy toward our guests? How many of you have an issue that pops up in your programs that just nags at you constantly? I propose (and others do as well) that if you acknowledge the pain that you can feel because of your work, those experiences will be easier to work through. They certainly won’t go away – in fact an important part of what we’re doing today is understanding that those parts of our work will always be there and we should stop seeking out a time when they won’t be, but instead embrace them and learn from them.
  o Many environmental educators and other activists have been known to experience burnout, depression, episodes of time when they feel they have to work so hard to accomplish a positive outcome for the environment or organization that they forget to care for themselves. Does any of this sound familiar to you?

• Avoiding overuse of emotional appeals
  o Another aspect of this which can be useful for you understands how emotional appeals in our work can have detrimental effects. We won’t go into this in much detail today. I’m happy to provide a list of resources if you’d like to investigate this further.
  o Thinking about different age groups that you work with. Even though we know not to discuss painful stuff with young audiences, what advantages might there still be for you being aware of and understanding your own reactions to the painful stuff?
Appendix F

Workshop Evaluation Questions

For each statement below indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement
(Strongly disagree, disagree, neither, agree, and strongly agree)

The workshop was enjoyable.
The workshop was the right length of time.
The activities were appropriate for the content.
I was given the appropriate amount of space to express myself as I chose.
The workshop was structured in a way that helped me to feel comfortable expressing myself.
My thoughts and feelings were respected by the facilitator.
My thoughts and feelings were respected by other participants.
I felt safe throughout the workshop.
I will take something away from this workshop that will benefit me in my work.
The facilitator was appropriate for this workshop.
I would recommend this workshop to other educators.

Short Answer Questions

Please share at least one thing that you will take away from the workshop and how it may benefit you in your work.

Were there any activities that didn’t seem to work for you? If so, which activities were they and why do you think they didn’t they work for you?

Were there any activities that were especially beneficial to you? If so, which activities were they and why did they seem to most beneficial?

What did you like most about the workshop?

What did you like least about the workshop?

Was there anything that you were hoping to get out of the workshop? Did the workshop help you achieve that goal? Why or why not?

Is there anything else that you’d like to share about your experience?