Advocacy Confidential:
Narrative Accounts of Youth Engaged in Environmental And Social Justice Advocacy

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Abstract

This study explores the phenomena of burnout as a social construct with youth engaged in social change movements. Using a dialogic narrative methodology I interviewed seven youth engaged within environmental and/or social justice advocacy to explore whether burnout exists for these young change makers. The interviews provide narrative accounts exploring how and why the youth engage with their chosen advocacy vocations and what feelings are associated with their reasons for engagement. The relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, self-determination, and the emotional dimensions of social change offer an insight to the way youth construct meaning of their advocacy work, particularly in relation to their sense of agency. The exploration of experiences through open dialogue suggests that youth may be pressured by societal factors into undertaking isolating roles of leadership within contemporary social change movements. The research also points to a socially defined representation of burnout within the youth cohort.
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Prologue: Culture, Environment and Self, on the path to burnout.

I engage in the vocation of environmental work largely due to the desire to work outdoors, fuel an emotional cache of awe, and build upon my enthusiastic optimism for the future of life on earth. Memories of my early twenties include exploring the outdoors with family, following Dad’s lead. I would follow what Dad did in learning about the environment by reading all the details on interpretative signs. I also eagerly signed up to undertake volunteer conservation work, took pride in building relationships with others, enjoyed a full suite of recreational activities, and challenged myself physically, emotionally and spiritually. There were also times where I was quite critical towards my family about their behaviours based on newly formed values. I was testing my limits and developing my identity. I can remember thinking in my early adolescence that nature was bountiful. I remember the romanticizing of endless adventures in which I would encounter remote and wonderful sights, people, and places. My memories were also of awe for the world around me, and a feeling of peace and safety. These memories and experiences have greatly informed my motivations and decisions. The motivations have informed my direction in life and the ideological application for how I make meaning of my actions and the world around me.

The feelings of awe, safety, emotional connection, and inner peace would change as I matured and struggled to maintain a work-life balance. In my late twenties I was overwhelmed with a sense of despair as I worked to balance my core values for wildlife, nature, and earth with my morals for a just, equitable, and compassionate humanity. At the time I was working in Thailand overseeing an international volunteer organisation undertaking numerous projects throughout Thailand and South East Asia. These projects covered a broad scope of human rights issues, wildlife poaching, and humanitarian relief work. I grappled with self-induced stress from the workload – it
was not uncommon for me to consistently put in more than 12 hour work days – combined with the confronting cultural differences: abuse to wildlife, indecencies with children, and severe health concern to name a few. In comparison to my previous seemingly sheltered life, the magnitude of human, wildlife and social issues were at times traumatic.

I love Thailand for so many reasons. I have fond memories of the relaxed, yet purposeful greeting provided to everyone, anytime, anywhere. I continue to smile at the value given to wisdom and elders, intermixed with the awkward avoidance of confrontation. My memories of the calm and peaceful, yet exuberant lifestyle associated with rivers and water, and the insatiable appetite for buying, selling, and the fusion on western culture with eccentric elements of Thai culture. I also took pleasure in exploring the diverse landscapes, and seeing distinct changes in cultural groups working the landscapes for a variety of purposes. My spiritual connection to the people, culture, and places was so strong that I compartmentalized tensions of the challenging and emotionally draining experiences. I did not want my attraction with the more joyful experiences to be diluted. Instead of talking about how I felt, I hid my feelings from friends, family, and colleagues. I was hiding from the deep emotional contexts of my work and was not sure how to act in reality based on these experiences. The splitting of my inner self from the outer self led to a collapse in my ability to mask and compartmentalize my emotion. I was fatigued, exhausted, and fed up with trying to cope internally. Even though I had been working with numerous people face-to-face and interacting socially, I felt alone. I needed to share my feelings and manage my emotional self as much as my physical and spiritual self.

What was my internal conflict was eventually supported by the development of a relationship with an empathetic, compassionate, and nurturing soul. Heather, who
would later come my wife, listened, asked questions, and explored through her curiosity the affective container I carried but kept hidden. She provided me strength, courage, and purpose to maintain a balanced life. I felt a sense of relief in being able to share my experiences, heartache, tensions, and passions for the work with someone who did not have any stake in the outcome. I felt safe to share my feelings with someone who listened without judgment. I was no longer alone. Heather became my confessional, my therapist, my coach and champion.

It was not too long before I made the decision to move on from South East Asia and start a new chapter of life. With a newfound love and soul mate, I ventured off. I discovered how and why people share memories, experiences, and stories. They provide an emotional connection that brings reality to life, viscerally and mentally. They provide safety in feeling community and togetherness. And, they add character to relationships, magnifying the bond, or lack thereof, within a situation.

My emotional and spiritual barometer was full of hope and wonder following the time for ongoing discovery and reflection, of what I recognize now as transformative experiences. The time taken to acquaint myself with my identity in relation to the love for my wife was fulfilling. The journey of exploring the connection to the world around us, peoples, places, wildlife, and cultures added an additional layer of fulfillment. I came to Canada with a positive outlook, rejuvenated courage, a sense of mindfulness, and loads of optimism.

Soon after starting work with an environmental NGO here in Canada, my energies and mindset were shifted towards the tensions and resistance to political, behavioural, and social change, with a focus on land and resource issues. I found a niche to learn about and engage with. The issues, media, and political discourse consumed me. Challenging the political and social structures that created conflicts I was
intently interested in was not my work responsibility. My role of overseeing environmental education programming for an environmental advocacy organisation was focused on inspiring love and connection to our natural surroundings through interactive and informative programming. The politics and tensions in the climate justice campaigns were however something I emotionally consumed. It lit a fire in me and provided the spark of motivation. I found myself consumed by the overwhelming nature of the climate crisis. I feared presenting this to others, although I tried with some family and close friends, as I feared judgment associated with talking about feelings related to the climate issues. I was cautious to engage others in a conversation that I too felt slightly uncomfortable talking about. As such, I found it easier to overextend myself at work and through other learning opportunities to make up for the diminishing sense of hope. The more hopeless I felt the more I argued at work, with family, and friends. My arguments were circular. We needed to shift our consciousness to include hope, but, this would not happen unless we could open up and talk about it; but, I was afraid to start the conversations as I did not want to be outcast as a climate nut. The greater the tensions within myself, the more cynical I became. It seemed I went from being full of emotional strength and courageous wisdom to feeling disempowered, hopeless, and exhausted from hearing, seeing, and working towards a movement of resistance. I felt like the work was constantly working against something, constantly trying to change and shift thinking, policy, and / consciousness in people and groups. There seemed to be no end to the counteracting alternate perspectives of the world with reason, logic, and science. Why are we working in resistance? How can we encourage greater community resilience when advocacy and media are focused on promoting the negatives rather than hopeful examples of life? These questions I asked
myself. I wanted to know how and what I thought about these questions so I could communicate with confidence while recognizing my underlying values and ethics.

When I engaged in dialogue with colleagues and friends about the climate issues I was engrossed in, I found myself representing members of my family in Australia as “working for oil and gas.” Although true, it was not representative of who they are and the values for which I respect them as siblings and loved ones. Bringing forth these stories of my family seemed to provide pseudo-legitimacy for me to talk about the issues relating to resource extraction and climate change. I used their stories as a means to validate how my ability to understand both resource jobs and environmental protection was grounded in a lived reality. I used their vocations and relationship with the resource industry to shelter my vulnerabilities associated with my internal tensions between emotions and subjective reality. In reflection this challenged me. I am not typically an argumentative or issues-oriented person. In retrospect, I see the presentation of my family’s employment in resource sectors was overcompensation for my lack of experience in the issues based arena, in which I was stumbling.

The ambiguity in my work in relation to how and why the work I was doing supported social change added a layer of personal dissatisfaction that enhanced the stressors. I did not have any understanding for the theory of change in which my work was established and applied. There were no specific measurable outcomes, nor did I have short or long-term visions to work towards. I also did not feel like I was fitting into the culture of people I worked with and I found myself feeling guilty for certain lifestyle behaviours, such as eating bananas and other non-local foods, enjoying skiing (a high carbon output activity), and talking about global travel experiences. My work was initially interesting and fun; I was driven by my values and the connection work provided to act on these values. Gradually, however, my drive for work diminished.
and I found myself motivated by external motivators such as the necessity for an income rather than for the love of making change. I was cynical as to whether we were really making change and inspiring people to value their natural surroundings. I was not convinced that action projects encouraged long-term value for habitats, peoples, and cultures. I often came home feeling hopeless about my ability to be effective within the work, and found myself challenged by a theory of change that focused exclusively on political change over shifting consciousness.

At the same time the thesis project I was undertaking was exploring the presence of burnout in youth, particularly those engaged with environmental and social justice advocacy. The deeper I immersed myself in the transcribing of interviews for this thesis project, the more pronounced my sense of isolation within my work seemed. I noticed I was slipping away from the work culture at an emotional level. I brought the narratives and stories from participants with me to work and often challenged others based on what participants had shared in our interviews. I remember presenting to one colleague that the negative messaging of ‘stopping this’ and ‘saying no’ to that was not only disconnecting for the general public but also was noticeable in some of the conversations I was having through my thesis. I was presenting myself as the expert in the field of psychosocial youth advocacy without even feeling like I was an expert. The more I carried participants’ memories and experiences in my work the more I found myself in isolation.

It was in this time of personal and emotional isolation from my work that I recognized loneliness in the narratives of participants. Many of the participants were providing memories that suggested self-isolation from social and community practices (i.e. not joining in the candor and laughs with friends at work, removing themselves from non-work activities, and avoiding sharing experiences, personal stories, and
challenges with others). The isolation seems to have been created by the combination of passion for the work and status within the advocacy community. This passion and the need to be recognized (competition with others for recognition) wedged a significant tension between the reason for doing the work (i.e. personal values) and personal expectations from the level of engagement. I too felt this as I deepened my attention to the thesis work and distanced myself from work and colleagues, leading to feelings of inefficacy, a symptom of isolation as it relates to advocacy work. The same advocacy work that builds its profile on the fundamental tenants of community, sharing, solidarity, and cohesion, encourages the separation of self from community in order to be competitive. Much like the themes I was noticing in the transcripts of participant interviews, I too was drawn into an external motivational struggle for acclaim and recognition. I was amplifying the competitive aspect of work by challenging colleagues about their beliefs and values when it was not necessary.

Working alone and often from a ‘hot-desk’ (or individual computer) does not help reduce the isolation. For example, prior to transcribing the interviews, I helped organize PowerShift BC, possibly the largest climate justice conference in BC’s history. The organizing team worked in isolation from each other, organizing small components of the whole, coming together at times to ‘check-in.’ As one of the oldest members of the organizing team, I felt a little vulnerable. I was somewhat an outcast to the younger dynamic members I was working with. What struck me was at the end in ‘celebration’ of a job well done the group got together in a bar, got out their laptops, and got to work with the screen up in front of each of their faces. The group did not know how to be anything but isolated and ‘lonely’... so it seemed. It was after this interaction and experience that in returning to transcribing I paid more attention to situations in which youth placed themselves that lead to the feelings of hopelessness. What came to life
more and more as I dived deeper into the transcriptions was that there was a common element of loneliness. I began to question whether burnout is a construct of individuals' subjective reality, a term of convenience to represent the unconscious affective containers youth prefer to avoid recognizing, or whether it was just a construct of fear, a fear of being lonely.

As the analysis of interviews and data wrapped up I have taken ownership of my experiences and the impact they may or may not have on how I question, conduct, analyse, and interpret the data gathered. I was excited to situate my research project in the established research tradition of psychosocial research, in which the researcher’s subjectivity is part of the process. Research and interviews do not occur in silos. The subjectivity of both participant and researcher can also not be truly removed from interviews (Walkerdine, et al, 2001; Hollway & Jefferson 2000; Lertzman, 2010). “We maintain that no matter how many methodological guarantees we try to put in place in an attempt to produce objectivity in research, the subjective always intrudes” (Walkderdine, et al, 2001, p. 84). As such, and validated by a trail blazed by other researchers (Cartwright, 2004; Hollway & Jeffereson, 2000; Lertzman, 2010; Walkderdine, et al, 2001), I was excited to celebrate my own subjectivity as a tool to explore the questions I present.

While I was developing the research question, conducting the research, analysing the data, and interpreting what the data seemed to be presenting, I recorded and accounted for my subjective experience. For example, I believed I had experienced burnout through the work I had been doing in South-East Asia, I recognised that this may have impacted and informed how and why I was asking the questions I proposed and possibly been a driver for the sequencing of questions throughout the interview process. I also recognised post analysis and interpretation that I too was on a journey
through some emotional upwelling of experience as I navigated the data. This could be a combination of the participants’ experiences and subjectivity projecting onto me as much as my own experience informed how I went about the research. My curiosity in specific subjects may have been focused due to the subconscious emotions that engaged me in the work I was doing.

As you will see in Chapter Three, the process I undertook and implemented to gather data through interviews was not overly affected by my previous experiences, but rather helped create a relaxed, welcoming, and emotionally safe environment for participants. Coming from a common, mutually appreciated, and relatively understood advocacy work, added a sense of comfort that seemed to offer a sense of freedom in dialogue. Additionally, my work with youth through a variety of advocacy campaigns these past few years informed my perception of what was happening in the world of youth advocacy. This helped me navigate techniques to engage youth a little deeper in the open dialogue. The chosen method and psychosocial lens in which the research is situated, I believe, provides the scope to explore the subject matter while utilizing the relationship between the research participants and myself, as a research tool. It is truly an inclusive way to explore meaning through narrative and dialogue between two individuals.
Chapter One: Introduction

*I think some of the emotions that are at the core of us are just a lot of fear and… fear of having to do things alone (Olive).*

Ever since I was in my mid-twenties I have worked with youth. Much of my time has been spent facilitating programs and projects based on what I believed to be purposeful, meaningful, and active engagement. Behind the scenes creating, developing, and implementing youth engagement and environmental leadership programs, I often ask the how’s and what’s. How can I develop and implement programs for youth to meet youth where they are socially, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually? What are the values of youth and what motivates or inspires youth to participate, engage, and act upon their values, passions, and morals? Most of what I ask relates to the theory of change associated with youth leadership and development for social change. I believe that these questions and the theory of change that informs the answer are elastic in nature and shift based on current socio-ecological trends and current knowledge of youth development. What I have learned is that there is no single response to these types of questions. To me, effective and authentic youth engagement requires application of interrelated principles. These include time to listen to what youth are expressing, involving youth at all stages of engagement, and inviting ownership of projects, allowing youth to meet their creative mindsets.

Change movements involving youth are often associated with provocative, tense, and sometimes-invisible actions that culminate into movements.\(^1\) The commitment of individuals to engage and develop skills, knowledge, and experiences to enhance their efficacy relating to social change should not be ignored. There is wide and general recognition that those involved in advocacy relating to social change issues have high

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\(^1\) See Fendrich (1994) and Marri & Walker (2008) re the civil rights movement and founding years with significant youth contributions. It can be argued that the civil rights movement, feminist movement, and
rates of burnout (Kahn & Langlieb, 2003; Sandage et al, 2014; Strümpfer, 2003). The *dimensions of burnout* are consistently represented through the development of three distinct constructs: exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. The onset of these dimensions translates to negative effects on individuals’ health, performance, and attitude (Maslach, 2001). Burnout is often a response to overload from stressors, and not only impacts the individual, but can spread at an organizational level (Bakker, 2006).

The research this thesis presents provides a lens to the burnout frames for youth engaged in environmental and social justice advocacy. The application of findings suggests that burnout might be a labeled and social construct worn by youth rather than explicitly experienced. The hope is that the findings can support and provide meaningful and positive messaging for youth post college years.

**Stories from participants**

Over the past two years it felt like I was witnessing the disengagement of active youth leaders from environmental campaigns. Youth engaged with environmental and social advocacy appear to be presenting signs related to identified dimensions of the burnout construct: exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Cynicism and inefficacy seemed most prevalent. These observations came from facilitating workshops on environmental advocacy, environmental leadership training, and youth programming for an environmental non-government organization. I have witnessed youth shift from being significantly engaged with campaigns, programs, and organizing for change, through to commenting on the hopelessness of the situation. I hear comments such as ‘too much talk and not enough action’, ‘unable to trust the political process’, ‘what I can do is not going to make any difference’, and ‘I feel like I am burnt out.’ I see youth with massive workloads disappearing from environmental campaigns, and hear of
purposeful distancing from specific actions. Are youth experiencing dimensions of burnout? Are youth self-diagnosing the dimensions of burnout accurately?

These anecdotal observations, combined with conversations I have with youth, suggest to me that there is a sense of hopelessness at the core of their disengagement, and informed the undertaking of this project. I work closely with groups of high school and post-secondary youth diverse in social status, race, gender, employment, and interests. Upon reaching their early twenties I believe that many youth engaged with environmental advocacy display a general loss of agency, and potential loss of positive perspective in their ability to make changes for their future. With an increasing urgency surrounding climate action, habitat protection, and standing up for the rights of democracy, I think youth are feeling the burden of overwhelming pressure from the socio-ecological crisis. This seems to be more pronounced in the post-secondary age demographic in which environmental advocacy work is neither compulsory nor introductory. It is with these observations that I believe youth are experiencing characteristics of burnout -- however, I am not convinced it is a sequencing of the dimensions to burnout that provides an explanation for the magnified sense of hopelessness and disengagement.

Understanding the ways in which emotional responses to an overwhelming crisis manifest in youth could help environmental messaging and communications for climate action. There is opportunity to communicate and develop programs for youth, post-college years, in order to maintain active engagement with environmental advocacy. As such, my research questions include:

1. What are youth experiencing when referring to the concept of burnout?
   a. Does “burnout” exist within youth environmental and social justice advocacy?
b. If so, how does this manifest? What are its qualities? How may these be related to issues of agency (personal efficacy)?

c. If not burnout, what are youth experiencing that leads to their disengagement from advocacy work?

2. Based on the data analysis, what do the results of this research suggest regarding structures of support or resources to support youth engagement?

Rationale

Youth of today are more than the future leaders of tomorrow. They are the workforce, the voters, the consumers, the learners, the leaders and stewards of today burdened to adapt to a planet that will be two degrees warmer by 2050 than it was in the pre-industrial era (Bagley, 2013; Hansen, 2012; McKibben, 2012). Climate research is now suggesting that two degrees is no longer possible (without serious and drastic innovations, policies, and behavior change), and instead four degrees is likely if we do not drastically alter policy and behavior (http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2012/11/18/new-report-examines-risks-of-degree-hotter-world-by-end-of-century). Youth provide the hope for a resilient civilization amidst an urgent climate crisis. As such, there seems to be a burgeoning tension for young change makers to engage what could be the 21st century version of the civil rights movement: a post-environmentalism, climate justice movement. This is the movement for ecological justice and recognition of the catastrophic climatic impacts we are having on this planet.

As demonstrated in the civil rights and other key movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s college-aged youth are agents of change (Arnold, 2009). Engaging youth in social movements on university campuses is common, for this is where exploring the identities of self in relation to political and civic identity take shape (Arnold, 2009; Ginwright & James, 2002). University or college campuses often have opportunities for
students to engage with social, environmental, and/or political clubs, activities, and actions. Experiences at university or college help transform the self, and encourage the projecting of newly consumed ideologies to family and friends.

The burden placed on youth to live with the environmental, social, and economic debt of those who have prospered before them is significant (Bagley, 2013; McKibben, 2012). The opportunities provided for youth to present their perspectives without prejudice from the unsolicited perverse sense of ‘innocence’ remain few and far between. The anecdotal perception I often hear from youth is that they feel under-valued and under-represented within the political structures.

They [older generations] have all this work experience that they put a higher value on the education or the experience that I may have and they treat me as if they have something to teach me and I have nothing to teach them (Sarah, Interview 1).

Whether through advocacy, civic engagement, or an environmental consciousness, understanding how someone develops their internal narrative and subjective experience provides opportunity to support and enhance the ability of youth to maintain personal development and self-care (Sandage et al, 2014; Toporek et al, 2006).

Well, I had to take a break from it for a little while… because it was just starting to really weigh me down and I think taking that break and being aware that I wasn’t in the position to help people at that time is what has helped me kind of continue with it and move forward and eventually see that it really does help people. But having that self-awareness of needing to do the self-care as well is really important (Sarah, Interview 1).
Working within environmental education with an emphasis on youth engagement, I am interested in how youth make meaning from their experiences connecting them to their chosen advocacy vocation. I am especially interested in how the construction of worldviews and ideologies drive interest and passions for environmental and social justice advocacy. My overall assumption is that our memories of our experiences contain deeper psychological meaning of engagement. Our memories and process for which the experiences are retold provide access to the affective containers - the subconscious dwelling of emotions and feelings - constituting drivers for actions and the construction of self-identity. Psychoanalytical phenomenology penetrates the subjective experiences (Walkerdine et al, 2001). It is in these subjective experiences that a relational and freely associated descriptive narrative can act as the window to the meaning of oneself in relation to the changes occurring within oneself and the world around them (Lertzman, 2013; Walkerdine et al, 2001). As such the subjectivity – personal experiences that inform the values, morals, ethics, and decisions – can be celebrated as an integral part to any dialogue.

Walkerdine et al (2001), presents techniques in research interviews that include this subjectivity as a research tool to investigate the emotional dimensions of social phenomenon, such as behaviour and identity. This reflexivity – the theory that the subjective experiences and reality of all participants in interviews are equally important and should be analysed with equal significance (Walkerdine et al, 2001) – is important to recognise and account for as the researcher. The experience presented in the prologue chapter offers an insight to the genesis of this research. While owning my subjective experience and recognising that interviews are not void of subjectivity, it should be recognised that my experiences may not only inform the outcomes to this research
project, they are crucial to it. As described by numerous authors within the psychosocial realm, carefully accounting, exploring, and utilising the researchers subjectivity can add credibility to the interview design, conducting, analysis, and interpretation (Lertzman, 2010; Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Walkerdine et al, 2001).

My reasoning for looking at the deeper psychological dimensions is due to an informed understanding that humans are naturally inclined to provide false verbal indications to questions about motivations when the questions relate to potential anxieties, or psychological defenses (Lertzman, 2010; 2013, 2014; Randall, 2013). It is with deeper psychoanalytical approaches that we can access these meaning making frames that inform disengagement, emotional fatigue and cynicism (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Lertzman, 2010; 2013; Randall, 2013). The utility and purpose of this research is to deepen the understanding of how to engage youth in environmental advocacy, post college-years, and communicate positive messaging for young adults. True names of participants have been changed with pseudonyms to protect identities. Where appropriate organisations, events, and names of third parties have also been changed to provide additional protection for actions and activities associated with individuals.

Chapter Overview

The experiences, memories, and stories of the youth participants provide the underlying structure for this thesis. The voices of participants are as important as the analysis and findings. As such, excerpts from transcripts are included as much as possible and included at the start and end of chapters. Additionally, my subjective experience is of significance in this research. I therefore include a chapter that details some of my own assumptions and feelings developed and recorded throughout
designing of the research, developing the research questions, conducting interviews, analyzing transcripts, and interpreting data for this research.

Chapter two presents the context in which the research is presented and reviews relevant literature for the methodological theories informing the research, motivations for engagement, particularly relating to youth leadership, development, and social change, and the constructs for which burnout has been presented. Chapter three describes the methodology and rationale for this particular research design based on the type of investigation, context and research questions. Included in this chapter is a larger excerpt from the interview transcripts for one participant. This excerpt is included to present how the interviews were conducted. The excerpt acts as an example of how I maintained a free association, open, and unstructured dialogue, as well as how the relationship developed between myself and participants. Chapter four presents contrasting accounts that highlight how youth engaged with environmental and social justice advocacy rationalize their engagement in relation to the dimensions of burnout. One youth believes he has experienced burnout while the other represents her experiences in a more optimistic tone. Although unconventional the inclusion of these accounts prior to presentation of more detailed analysis is to first highlight the voice of youth within the research and second pay homage to the exploration of identity and engagement through narrative accounts of youth.

Chapter five offers a personal account of the experience conducting interviews and analysis. My journey through the thesis process brought to the surface a number of emotional responses to the subject matter being explored and presented by participants. The interactions and feelings transferred between each participant and myself - important components of psychosocial research – have also been recognized within this chapter. Chapter six presents an analysis of the data. In this chapter the analysis focuses
on dialogue between participants and myself. The narrative of personal experiences and
en portraits of each participant in this analysis will act as the landscape and backdrop
for which underlying themes are discussed. The connection of themes to the bigger
picture of youth engagement and environmental messaging will also be suggested. In
Chapter seven, the conditions portrayed by burnout will be presented through
exploring underlying parallel narratives in the research. I will also detail limitations,
future research, and opportunities these findings provide for application in youth
engagement.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

I think some of the emotions that are at the core of us; just a lot of fear and... fear of having to do things alone (Olive).

Introduction

The magnitude and increasing recognition of socio-ecological problems have inspired many youth to engage with a variety of well-intended initiatives raising awareness for a more equitable, just, inclusive, and sustainable future. There is growing dissatisfaction however with the effectiveness of these initiatives in the face of cascading ecological impacts (Ojala, 2012), engagement authenticity (Schulser, 2009, 2010), and loss of values relating to civic engagement (Andolina et al, 2002; Harré et al, 2009; Kirshner, 2007). Whether from loss of agency and civic responsibility, or negotiation of the emotional contexts for engagement, growing or even maintaining the number of actively engaged youth in advocacy initiatives continues to be challenging (Ballantyne, 2006; Cross & Young, 2008; Kirshner, 2008).

Historically, youth have often been catalysts for social change, initiating engagement projects that provide the initial leverage for large mobilization. Examples of social activism which has led to large scale movements include the civil rights movement, feminist rights leading to the emergence of a feminist movement, anti-nuclear demonstrations on campuses growing the anti-nuclear movement, and demonstrations of education reform initiating the development of many Student Unions advocating for youth voice.2 The world has seen youth take a leadership role in building movements and have relied on their uninhibited identities to offer provocative actions to initiate social change (Fendrich, 1993; Lombardo et al, 2002; Marri & Walker,

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2 Pink shirt day and antibullying in Canada, the German Revolutions of 1848, student protests for university reform in the early 1900’s throughout Latin America, and the 1919 student anti-imperialist movements in China, are other examples of youth / student led activism from other parts of the globe.
2008). Recently youth have been at the forefront of the climate justice movement with multiple divestment campaigns and non-traditional advocacy projects demonstrating the contemporary landscape of youth advocacy and leadership.\(^3\) Youth identity and development projects are evolving with creativity and in solidarity with a variety of allies. Combining the social constructs of youth leadership and development with the rapid socio-ecological change, and youth are faced with emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social pressure. The rapid changes threaten to institute social norms of isolation, where youth engage with projects and activities from the comfort of desktop or mobile devices (Lombardo, Zakus, & Skinner, 2002). Similarly, the changes in technology and online communication could remove barriers in which youth can participate with ease, enjoying the membership of being connected through large networks and communities of practice.

The historical influence of youth throughout movements and social change demonstrates that youth, as a collective identity, act upon a sense of agency within the social and political contexts. Whether or not today’s youth are empowered to engage in social change and invest emotional energy in civic efficacy or act out, as disinterested by-standers for civic, social, and environmental action will be particularly within the context of climate change. Some youth see themselves as agents of change rather than simply developing identities to conform to societal structures. As such, I would propose that actively engaged youth are overextending themselves to meet the expectations placed on them by society. What is fundamentally challenged in the misrepresentation

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\(^3\) This has recently been played out with innovative use of new and social media during the Arab Spring. It has also been witnessed with the development of divestment campaigns through North America, where youth are lobbying their universities to divest funds from unethical corporate industry and reinvest in longer-term sustainable ethical investments.

Additionally movements such as PowerShift have spread across the globe to raise awareness and enhance skills of youth working to save democratic rights, build solidarity across sectors, and mobilise youth for the shift in unsustainable hierarchical corporate greed. This movement is effectively this era’s climate movement – a movement to enhance resilience within socio-ecological systems, in the urgent context of global warming.
of apathetic youth is the collective sense of agency (Ginwright & James, 2002; Lange, 2009; Pearce & Larson, 2006; Matsuba et al, 2012). There is growing recognition that youth feel undervalued, underrepresented at higher social and/or political contexts, and lack congruence with the ideological perspectives of more senior leadership aspects of society (Marri & Walker, 2008; Pearce & Larson, 2006). The ‘leaders of today and tomorrow’ framing common in social discourse has created invisible pressure which youth are both repelled and obliged to own. The tension between society’s title of youth leadership and the status of youth within higher social / political contexts might suggest that framing ‘youth leaders of today and tomorrow’ does not offer many youth a sense of feeling authentically valued, but rather a meaningless title. In addition, there is limited understanding for the emotional dimensions of youth vocations. This thesis explores the deeper understandings of the subjective situations for which youth engage in activism.

This thesis and my research focuses on social change movements as a part of youth identity projects – the activities and experiences of youth in the late adolescence and early adulthood years which help create and form morals, beliefs, values, and lasting character (Harré, 2007). My focus within these identity projects relate to work, agency, and the ability to engage with socio-ecological advocacy and awareness. The literature review is therefore organised into three sections: 1) conceptualizations of "youth" and what happens in youth, 2) identity formation in youth, and 3) the representation of burnout phenomena and the youth context. The behavioural theory of self-determination has been integrated and included in this exploration of youth agency for social change movements and the motivations to act on the rapidly changing world. The overall significance of youth social change movements in relation to environmental and social justice advocacy provides the thematic overtone for which the research was
directed. As such, many of the claims and assumptions brought out in this literature review are grounded within Self-determination Theory (SDT; see later in this chapter) and *intersubjectivity* – the psychological relationship between two or more people; a shared, experiential, and emotional experience (Atwood & Storolow, 1984).

**Who are youth and what happens in youth?**

Defining youth has its challenges, as there exists various age grouping definitions. Youth within the age range of 19-25 are generally in a transition. Intellectual, emotional, and social transitions can occur between secondary school to civic society, including college or university, and transitions into professional work (McDougle, Greenspan, & Handy, 2011). Furthermore, youth are looking to engage more directly with civic responsibilities, such as becoming financially independent, integrating socially with mixed demographics of people, participating in the democratic systems, and becoming part of the larger economy. For the purpose of this research I have defined *youth* as young adults within the age range of 19 to 25 years old.

Although *adolescent youth* (age 13 to 19) have limited time to commit to extra-curricular pursuits and interests there are some who find that passion drives intention, leading to meaningful and purposeful projects. Adolescence however also provides youth with social development capacities in which identity, values, ethics, and influences are tested (Ojala, 2005). Transitioning from adolescence and secondary school, to a young adult with voting rights, civic responsibilities, and greater independence offers another set of challenges that inform the construction of identity. Social constraints such as employment, housing, relationships, trending influences, political engagement, and interpersonal management add complexity. Life for a young adult is abruptly full. Those who adapt to the rapid change quickly enough present leadership potential, those who don’t are left to explore life from an alternate landscape.
Defining the agency of youth has its challenges. Ginwright and James (2002), suggest that youth have great potential to engage in civic dialogue and be agents of change. Whether it is on the ground rallying youth to vote, or raising awareness for indigenous rights, youth have great potential to be a voice for the future they want to see. “When youth work to transform their environment the process and the results strengthen community well-being with the presence of safety, economic opportunities, and opportunities for recreation and productive civic engagement” (Ginwright & James, 2002, p.41). This definition is in contrast to other understandings of youth, where youth is considered the developmental stage towards adulthood (Harré, 2007; Matsuba & Walker, 2005). Another definition from Slonim’s (2006) represents youth developmental process as largely the construct of society. With the evidence in history of youth demonstrating considerable engagement initiating multiple movements, I would suggest that youth is more than a time to develop the capacity to be an active and engaged citizen. I would describe youth as a period for developing an identity, solidifying one’s morals, ethics, and values, while also initiating the mastery of skills, establishing a sense of belonging, and owning the autonomy of actions (emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical).

Many youth are unable to engage with leadership opportunities based on class and social status (Kress, 2006). Kress suggests that there is a failure to conceptualize youth leadership beyond what exists within traditional leadership discourse. Kress continues to present challenges for inclusivity as it relates to the usual participants in youth leadership opportunities. Kress contends that, “successful youth organizations are elite driven, as they attract into leadership involved and achieving youth, who typically come from the more educated and included groups and reflect only a small
segment of the total youth population.” This is likely true for youth engaged with social change movements.

Youth in the early years of adulthood are largely ideological in their theory of change. The moral minded cohort of youth are more likely not to join political parties but rather join the effort of advocacy and special interest groups (Bruter & Harrison, 2009). They are likely to “see their future as activist, rather than politicians” and are not “tempted by serious executive functions” of civic engagement (Bruter & Harrison, 2009, p.1284). The self-identities and particular political identities are highly predictive for the vocations sought and maintained in adulthood (Bruter & Harrison, 2009; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Pearce & Larson, 2006).

**Youth leadership for social change**

Youth leadership may be considered part of the youth development movement in which the aim is to promote contributions to society, opportunities for growth, and enhanced agency. Independence, autonomy, and being able to demonstrate efficacy are key parts to authentic youth development (Kirshner, 2008; Kovan & Dirks, 2003; Schulser, 2009; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Youth leadership is concerned with the “skills, experiences, needs, and motivations” of youth and how they can be maintained post youth years (Kress, 2006). In contrast, other leadership positions place the single acts of defiance, resistance, and innovation as catalysts for action. In this case, those that follow are more engaged in leadership than the initial individual catalyst (Christens, 2011). Youth-led social change is therefore a collective effort and one that deserves representation as a whole.

Many seasoned activists contribute their engagement in advocacy to their experiences as youth (Kovan & Dirks, 2003; Strümpfer, 2003). There is evidence that
recognizes many political careers starting with social change and youth organisations (Hooghe, Stolle, & Stouthuysen, 2004). The decline in young political party membership in Canada has been attributed to the shifting social change theories of youth (Cross & Young, 2008). There is also support for the assumption that young Canadians are more likely to join advocacy and interest groups because they think it is more effective for social change than joining a political party (Cross & Young 2008; O’Neil, 2001).

Acting on motivations for self-determination often involves life-long commitments. They can also be derived from a transpersonal experience, or they might be a way to demonstrate the connection between worldviews and the lived experience. The experiences are often transformative and involve a learning that might involve discoveries of both hope and despair, “we need to accept both the darkness and the light to find wholeness” (Kovan & Dirkx 2003, p.113). Kovan and Dirkx (2003) explored the transformative learning influences in seasoned environmental activists, recognizing risks associated with having deep and passionate concerns for the issues someone is working against. These risks are presented as emotional barriers such as overwhelming, discouraging, and depressive anxieties (Kovan & Dirkx 2003, p.112). Youth, in a time of personal character development could experience the emotional anxieties associated with the transformative influence transcending vocation and passion. Many scholars have recognized the importance of self-identity development and the influence change movements have in cementing morals, values, beliefs, and attitudes with participants of advocacy campaigns (Boggs, 1986; Foley, 2001; Kastner, 1993; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Scott, 1992). The significance of civic engagement as a transformative learning experience for young adults should also not be underestimated (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).
Environmental leadership is more than the actions undertaken within one’s vocation or upon one’s ethic, it is a “whole life, whole person commitment” that goes beyond “passionate martyrdom for sometime before burning out” (Moser, 2012, p.1). The environmental leadership that Moser talks about has relevance for the leadership of youth in social change movements. It can be and often is internalized as a life work. It is often fueled by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Pearce & Larson, 2006; Strümpfer, 2003). It is a leadership that transcends psychological, social, interpersonal, ecological, and political aspects of life and ought to be given ample recognition in the consciousness of society as a whole.

Whether it is social justice, environmental, or political engagement the motivations of youth advocacy work is also multi-dimensional. Much like the senior advocacy professionals who have made a vocation out of passions, the exploration of how youth make meaning of their engagement is neither rational nor logical. “The ideological mind-set of a young adult is likely to be experienced far more vividly than later, and the stakes associated with his or her moral positioning entail serious consequences in terms of self-identity.” (Bruter & Harrison, 2009, p.1263) While youth are at a stage of identity development and often associated with undertaking identity projects, the calling to a vocation of commitment and selflessness can still represent the position taken for the meaning of one’s life (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003). It provides the foundation by which “ongoing learning” continues and identity evolves (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003, p.101).

Engagement in social change movements may encourage individuals to ask questions about how one best makes change in the world. The development of these theories requires an understanding of the context for which change is needed, the assumptions within the change movement, and strategies in which social change can
occur. The theories youth act upon may try to shift behavior, enforce policy change, shift cultural understandings, or build resistance against undemocratic processes. Social change from a youth lens may be quite different than that from those who have established their paradigm for change. It is here that youth and well-formed movements may experience divergent perspectives for change. The way youth conceptualize and approach social change is therefore dependent on the multidimensional mix of motivations, values, ethics, and social relevance for which they are consumed.

**What is necessary for identity formation**

Youth transitioning into the adult years (age 25+) continue to forge an identity in context of the social fabric in which they are living. Knowing who they are and why they do what they do is not often asked. They often find themselves guided by a social capacity of following the trend, conforming to the social-sub groups and constructing an image of self, an intersubjective identity (Beauchamp, 2009; Ginwright & James, 2002; Kirshner, 2007). In relation to how youth navigate their civic responsibilities and social circles, Harré et al (2009) present a “strong link between their activism life-sphere and the various other life spheres they are engaged in” (p. 332). Employment, social life, community, education and economic status are therefore layers to youth identity, which challenge who, how and why youth, engage with environmental advocacy. The identity projects of youth in late adolescence and early twenties conform in some way to each other through what I would represent as an example of social mimicry. Youth consciously or subconsciously mirror other youth in trends, language, values, non-verbal communication, advocacy engagement, arts, and even fashion. This effects what is most influential to youth development.
The development of youth identity amongst a rapidly changing social reference provides the topography for the meaning in youth advocacy. The ridges act as areas for discovery and testing personal assumptions and beliefs, while the summits provide an escape from the challenge of finding one's path within the valleys below. Understanding what happens in the topography of youth when there are socio-ecological issues that attract the attention of youth requires recognition of the rapidly changing technology and communication tools that youth use. The more youth engage with social mobilization projects, advocacy campaigns, and social justice initiatives the more we see the relevance of collective identity in relation to changing, and influential circumstances around the youth cohort. The Arab Spring brought attention to the way in which social media and digitally-mobile technologies have advanced mobilization for action (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). Today youth are able to engage with greater efficiency in a wider view of paradigms and ideologies than in previous years (Cross & Young, 2008).

In addition, mobilization and organizing can be managed through an online platform and has given rise to the term rapid-response campaigning – responsive social organising to daily news items through online communication mediums and social media tools. Some suggest social change movements and associated initiatives require these technological tools for success (Lombardo, Zakus, & Skinner, 2002). The millennial demographic of youth is going to have access to and knowledge of communication technologies that could further alter the way information is not only received but transferred through educational and development activities. The more the attention is placed on these technologies, the greater the risk of disconnecting society and youth from the emotional contexts for which authentic communities are maintained (Kraut, 1998; Kraut et al, 2002; Shklovski et al 2006). The ability to find one's way across the changed landscape, while still discovering self within this changed context, might silo
and reduce the social, cultural, emotional, and intellectual interactions within the transformative processes of the journey. The technology that youth are using to engage with their passions and interests are therefore potentially going to impact how youth manage their experiences within the chosen advocacy projects.

The effects of isolation via online interfaces on younger demographics has been detailed by numerous authors (Morgan & Cotten, 2003; Shklovski et al 2006; Ybarra et al, 2005). Personal values, assumptions, and morals are tested with face-to-face interactions in which people can interrogate and explore meaning with all dimensions of the communication experience (visual, emotional, physical, intellectual). There is importance of the *intersubjectivity* – the experience occurring between and due to the presence of two or more conscious minds and that unconsciously agree to common meanings of experiences, emotions, intention, and concepts. Atwood and Storolow (1984) suggest that consciousness cannot be separated from the intersubjective context and that there are “structures of experience”, in which the “self-experience acquires cohesion and continuity.” (p. 34) We experience the world through a subjective reality informed by the experiential and emotional aspects of our life. Within the experiential aspect humans intrinsically engage in social behavior. Social interactions offer multiple levels of engagement that help to maintain personal resilience (Strümpfer, 2003; Sandage et al, 2014). As such, it is my belief that we require visceral and physical interactions to maintain a sense of self, connection, and community.

How an isolation of experience interacts with the affective management of individuals has limited exploration, especially within youth. With the enhanced technological and communications systems of today, youth environmental and social justice advocacy will undoubtedly be more capable of rapid response to day-to-day incidents and events then previous era’s. What is potentially missing from the
development of youth advocacy is what Moser (2012) suggests as a capacity to hold the emotional tensions for what is happening within ourselves in relation to what is happening with the world around us. Another way to present this is that youth will need to recognize and own how they make meaning in their experiences and commitments within the rapidly changing world, while also understanding how to invite the supportive projects of self-care, build social capital, and a collective response to change. From the emotional context, this requires ownership of anxieties, understanding a personal identity in context to the changing social and ecological systems, and it requires an appreciation for the ways to support self and each other through the process of naming and owning our anxieties (Lertzman, 2008, 2010, 2013; Mnguni, 2010; Moser, 2012).

Many authors have presented numerous relationships for how anxieties provide a defense to the true costs of engagement (Lertzman 2010, 2013, 2014; Mnguni, 2010; Norgard, 2006; Randall, 2009). There seems a collective unconscious understanding to limit or fear communicating about feelings surrounding change. Keene (2012) has represented much of this as the splitting of societies consciousness in which “tragedy” shadows doubt and fear of failure. He suggests that we have become accustomed and programmed to consider negative or positive personal experiences “moral virtue, or lack of it, and not structural societal factors.” (p. 154) The psychological inner dimensions of youth psyche in relation to engagement may offer understanding for how youth are internalizing the social unconscious pressure placed on them. As stated by Deci and Ryan (2002):

Social environments can, according to this perspective, either facilitate and enable the growth and integration propensities with which the human psyche is endowed, or they can disrupt, forestall, and fragment these
processes resulting in behaviors and inner experiences that represent the
darker side of humanity.
The increasing attention to youth leadership provides a window to the incongruence of
youth development and social change, when considering the affective states in which
social change occurs. There is a competitive mindset in youth to gain the valuable
resources, attention, status, and rewards for which society has created, a competition
focused on power and self-development over community and collective development.

**Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations**

Motivations of youth to engage with social justice and/or environmental
advocacy could be expressed as an affective-milieu that involves, friends, family,
mentors, societal pressure of agency, the demonstration of self-determination, and
ideologies accompanying the development of self-identity. There is limited literature to
support an understanding for how (and if) youth feel, make sense of, and experience
negative affective associations such as fear, hopelessness, and dread, in contrast to the
positive emotions in excitement, pride, and love, surrounding their purpose of
engagement with advocacy work. Most research has paid attention to youth
development as a precursor to socialization (Andolina et al, 2002; Kirshner, 2007;
Schulser, 2010). There is general acceptance that professional-minded youth are
virtuous for social success while the ideological and moral minded are consumed by
advocacy for social change, and possess less motivation for civic responsibility (Cross &
Young, 2008).

The personal goal setting characteristics of youth and the ability to meet these
goals has been represented by a few scholars (Sandage et al, 2014; Sheldon & Houser-
Marko 2001). Sheldon and Marko (2001) present the concept of self-concordance as “the
feeling of ownership that people have (or do not have) regarding their self-initiated goals” (p. 152). When attributed to youth, the definition can be represented as youth pursuing personal goals as a way to obtain congruence with a social identity and relational feelings for intrinsic interests and passions.

The invisible tensions builds as more youth are provided with extrinsic motivators increasing engagement in the short term in order to access the rewards. The more enhanced repercussions are when these extrinsic motivators do not fulfill youth self-concordance (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Extrinsic motivators may therefore act as barriers to fulfilling true self-concordance and allowing personal growth, personality, and intrinsic motivational characteristics to prosper over external socially constructed expectations (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). An example that helps present this is in the representation of ‘youth leaders of tomorrow.’ Labeling youth as leaders might offer unwanted acclaim. It might be that these labels are projected from the ideals of older cohorts and their internal motivations. The intrinsic desire to act on one’s passions, values, and interests in this case might be counteracted by the societal pressure of status, pride, and a hierarchical structure to leadership – power. Recognizing Deci and Ryan theory of self-determination (2002) it could be suggested that youth leaders are best supported by self-directed strategies, celebration of successes, and diverse spaces to work in collaborations and teams.

Determining oneself: a theory for personal growth and character development

Juxtapose the passions of a youthful, creative, uncensored, and independent 19 to 25 year old with the rapidly changing urgency of climate change and the elasticity for the developmental transition is tense. Youth development in the context of the significant social, cultural, environmental, and economic costs surrounding climate
change makes this a phenomenon worth paying attention to. The processes of making decisions to act are driven by intrinsic motivations of belonging, competence, and autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000). These may be counteracted by extrinsic motivations where external influences are provided as rewards (money, status, prizes, acclaim). When youth are taking on advocacy, it is believed that they are doing this in most part as a way to build their personal identity (Crocetti et al, 2012; Delgado & Staples, 2008; Foley, 1999; Ginwright & James, 2002), focus their attention towards passions, and activate interests for social change (Harré, 2007; Kirshner, 2005; 2008). Barriers to meaningful identity projects and authentic self-determination for youth, may include value of status amongst peers, acclaim by older generations, opportunity to greater wealth, access to a group or cohort of people, and appearing as part of a trend. These act as barriers as they do not provide emotional ownership of engagement and empower moral agency for decisions and actions (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001).

Self-determination theory (SDT) relates to personal growth, personality, and motivational characteristics for undertaken activities. “People tend to be driven by a need to grow and gain fulfillment” (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Skill, intellect, and mastery of experience can act as drivers for developing a sense of self. The theory focuses on the internal sources of motivation (intrinsic motivations) such as love, pride, morals, and ethics, as opposed to external-motivations (extrinsic motivation), such as money, acclaim, prizes, and status. Deci and Ryan (1985) categorise three principles for self-determination, competence (gaining mastery in skills), connection and relatedness (sense of belonging), and autonomous self (control of own behavior and actions). The ability to meet all three principles enhances intrinsic motivation and personal
sustainability when pursuing interests and passions (Deci & Ryan, 2002, 2000; Pearce & Larson, 2006; Rubino et al, 2009).

SDT begins by embracing the assumption that all individuals have natural, innate, and constructive tendencies to develop an ever more elaborated and unified sense of self. That is, we assume people have a primary propensity to forge interconnections among aspects of their own psyches as well as with other individuals and groups in their social worlds (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p.5).

Contrasting self-determination is the negative affects for controlling social contexts. Controls in the form of extrinsic motivators impede long-term motivation, encourage negative attitude towards agency, and emphasize performance-based individual capital. Although critics to SDT suggest that the theory focuses on the optimistic tendencies of life and misses out on addressing the darker sides, negative emotional aspects, and pessimistic perspectives of life, I would contend that the theory does work to highlight the anxieties and tensions within self-identity and character (Vansteenkiste et al, 2006). Further contention to SDT relevant to understanding the manifestation of burnout is the lack of recognition and inclusion for other human needs such as safety and security, self-esteem, and meaning (Miles, 2012). These needs are important containers of the affective states that engage youth to advocacy. The exploration of the emotional dimensions to agency within youth social change movements should recognise these needs.
Youth leaders of tomorrow: intergenerational expectations as an extrinsic motivator

The socialization of youth into political parties and undertaking political behavior has been well documented (Cross & Young, 2008; Jarvis et al, 2005). The influence largely comes from family and friends, with an emphasis on parents. The significance findings have on advocacy and interest group engagement should not be neglected. “Young people who might have joined a political party a generation ago are now more likely to channel their activism through an advocacy group.” (Cross & Young, 2008, p.348) While documented (Arnold, 2009; Ballantyne, 2006), it is unclear if this is also related to significant mentors and role models other than family and friends.

The development of the phrase “youth leaders of tomorrow” has inspired many exciting opportunities for youth. While there is great attention to development of leadership capacities in youth, youth are not necessarily feeling a reciprocated sense of trust when they themselves trust the system (Bibby, 2009). The evidence presented by Bibby (2009) suggesting youth are trusting of the democratic systems conflicts with the growing popularity and influence of advocacy and interest groups in the youth demographic presented by Cross and Young (2008). This might simply be the difference in efficacy between late adolescence and the early twenties. It may however also represent the affective response to socialization, challenges in constructing of self-identity, and the tension of social pressures of leadership on older youth. How and why youth seek involvement with advocacy groups in relation to their ideological influences and trust in, or lack thereof, the political systems could offer another lens for exploration. This however is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Canada World Youth is an example of where youth leaders of tomorrow have inspired positive mechanisms and transformative experiences for youth. The inclusion of youth and the leadership aspirations of youth within the Millennium Development Goals also provide further support to the positive perspective of youth leaders of tomorrow.
Exhaustion, depersonalization, and loss of efficacy: burnout frames associated with social change movements

First coined by the psychologist Herbert Freudenberger in the early 1970’s, the burnout construct was recognised as a syndrome associated within the work environment (Freudenberger, 1974). Since this early representation of burnout, the phenomenon has been explored by numerous authors across many perspectives; mental health (Jenkins & Elliot, 2004), job performance and function (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), post-secondary performance (Jacobs, 2003), occupational health (Rubino, 2009), and antecedents to burnout (Tanner, 2011) to name a few. There is a significant body of research presenting quantitative, qualitative, and mixed measures of burnout. Maslach (1980) developed one of the earlier and more utilised tools to investigate whether burnout was present by exploring twelve quantitative measures as part of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Maslach and Leiter (2008) furthered this and suggested the antithesis to burnout to be ‘engagement.’ The literature surrounding engagement is vast and would require a complete chapter alone to provide the depth and account for the quality of research surrounding this phenomenon. As such, I have focused my attention to literature associated with burnout framing within social change movements and youth engagement. Exploring the manifestation of burnout however requires more than acknowledging the previous research in the field. Attention will therefore be emphasized to the emotional dimensions surrounding engagement, motivations, and identity.

The opportunity for youth to engage with a variety of civic, social, cultural, and environmental actions are vast, and so too are the reasons for which youth make the choice to take action. Crocetti et al (2012) have presented that in adolescence there is an increased urge to develop, experiment, and create one’s socio-ecological identity. This is
an identity that forms the basis for adulthood (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Within this period there is a heightened opportunity for engagement, witnessed in the urge for discovery and experimentation, recognition of passions, development of relationships, and establishing career ambitions (Brunter, and Harrison, 2009; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Pearce and Larson, 2006).

The sequencing for the onset of burnout has been explored through many stressor-strain investigations. The causality in relation to antecedents such as personality traits and consequences such as health and wellness indicate that there are many sequences for exhaustion, efficacy, and cynicism that lead to burnout (Fernet et al, 2004; Rubino, 2009; Tanner, 2011). It is commonly suggested that exhaustion is the first sign (Tanner, 2011). There is still however a lack of understanding for the relational causality of each dimension. Some scholars argue that there is a distinct casual connection with burnout to people’s work and efficacy (Maslach, 2001; Bakker et al, 2006). While others suggest burnout should be considered as exhaustion and withdrawal (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). The criticism towards inclusion of personal accomplishment (efficacy) as a measure suggests that the precursor to burnout should not be lacking personal resources, nor should an outcome be poor self-evaluation (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005; Tanner, 2011). It is well documented however that job demand stressors at differing sequencing and intensity affect all dimensions of burnout (Rubino et al, 2009; Lee & Ashworth, 1996). My assumption leading into this work was that burnout would be understood as a clinical condition and more something other than an antecedent to depression. It is not a catchall for “over-worked, underpaid, and stressed the fuck out.” (Kirra, interview 1) Burnout is prevalent in most situations where lack of intrinsic motivation, job ambiguity, and misfit with the vocational environment are present.
Framing within Social Change

Passion, interests, theory of change, and peer influence are all drivers for the work of environmental and social justice advocates (Fielding et al, 2008; Harré et al, 2009; McDougle et al, 2011). Contemporary and popular authors like Bill McKibben (2011), Vandava Shiva (2006), and Jared Diamond (2005) offer reason for why someone might consider a need for change. There are however limited celebrations or even time to cheer successes when small accomplishments are made. As theories of change are constructed and challenged the tension for advocacy and engagement practitioners lies in understanding why they make the choices they do based on inspiring others to act as change agents (Klein, 2012; Chalwa, 1998; Delgado & Staples, 2008; Fielding et al, 2008; Kurzman, 2008). Many advocacy and engagement initiatives are loaded with a binary of winning or loosing. Further to this there is a challenge to have the self-care for maintaining a balance between rational intentions and intrinsic motivations for engagement (Darner, 2009). With lots of ambiguity associated with what is actually a ‘win’ worth celebrating and what constitutes a loss, there fuels psychological tension between efficacy, autonomy, and ethics. The more someone attaches themselves to the outcomes, the greater the challenge to maintaining personal sustainability when the challenge becomes a life-long project (Beauchamp, 2009; Thomashow, 1996).

With limited reference of success and hope associated to mechanistic and patriarchal paradigms other than the rise of power and hierarchy, changing society’s collective consciousness seems ambitious. Sandage, Crabtree, and Schweer (2014) presented the link between healthy and mature selfhood with enhanced commitment and hope for social justice. “Those who have low levels of ‘DoS - differentiation of self’ [relational measure of selfhood] tend to have trouble self-regulating anxiety, leading to fusion or emotional cutoff” (Sandage et al, 2014, p.72). The challenge for youth entering
the advocacy vocations is to develop strategies to turn knowledge into applied social change skills, while developing the wisdom to maintain centeredness and a sense of self in regards to the inner and outer worlds that affect us.

Running parallel to selfhood in relation to potential predictors of burnout are measures for life satisfaction and well being (Rostami & Abedi, 2012; Strumpfer, 2003). While correlations between life satisfaction and burnout are inconclusive, there is evidence that supports the subjective well being, and burnout may relate to one’s ability to maintain and develop positive emotions while also flourishing relationships with others (Strumpfer, 2003). Put another way, how we engage with our passions in relation to vocation and interpersonal relationships affects self-regulation of emotional contexts for which we make meaning for the work and world around us. The application for this has implications relating to self-care and personal development (Sandage et al, 2014; Toporek et al, 2006).

Beauchamp (2009) found that aligning the inner and outer world of self, celebrating accomplishments, and letting go of outcomes were primary precursors for self sustainability of activists, while Rubino et al (2009) suggested that intrinsic motivation can act as a “mediator to perceived fit” and “role ambiguity,” reducing the affect of inefficacy associated with job strain. There are however wide theoretical conceptions of how the multiple dimensions of burnout manifest. Some would suggest that the path to burnout is a sequential occurrence following each of the dimensions as stages in the sequence (Maslach, 2001), while Schaufeli and Taris (2005) suggests exhaustion and withdrawal act as the two primary dimensions to burnout. Rubino et al (2009), Schaufeli and Taris (2005), and Tanner (2011) recognize that when the demands of work are not met with the available resources (time, money, knowledge, and physical and emotional energy) then someone is more likely to experience burnout. A common
thread through much of the literature on burnout is the recognition of burnout as a clinical syndrome. Within the social change and advocacy vocations, burnout has been represented more broadly. The recognition and care for the health and wellness aspects to social change movements is unorthodox at best, laughed upon at worst (Beauchamp 2009; McFarlane & Boxall, 2003; Toporek et al., 2006). With the numerous definitions and sequencing for manifestations of burnout the doors seems open to further investigate other interpretations of depersonalization, inefficacy, and emotional exhaustion.

**Summary**

Within this chapter I have discussed and presented the context in which youth engage with social change movements. Understanding youth and validating the process of identity development that occurs within youth provides the contextual background for which youth engagement and advocacy work are related. I have explored here the importance of identity, self-determination, and motivations in relation to the emotional aspects of youth advocacy and social change. By presenting the different framing for burnout I have attempted to bridge youth development, social change, and the emotional tensions within this work. The youth ‘leader’s of tomorrow’ framing offers a window to social tensions within youth advocacy work and motivations. What seems to be unexplored is the complexity of burnout in relation to social mobilization, society’s constructs of youth, and youth development. The following chapter provides the theoretical context in which participant portraits, interviews, and analysis were conducted.
Chapter Three: Methodology

The power of open and honest conversations like the one that we just had … will have a big impact on activism and burnout. I think just having these kinds of conversations in those networks is really important (Kirra).

Overview of Methodology

I engaged in this research with the intention of exploring the meaning and existence of burnout in youth engaging with environmental and social justice work. I hoped to understand the experience – subconscious and conscious – of advocacy from a youth perspective. I approached this through a psychosocial lens, in which the relationship between an individual’s inner and outer world is explored. Specifically I have maintained an emphasis towards the unconscious influences, relationships to unconscious framing, and the complexities in motivations for engagement. I explored these with the use of Dialogic Relational Narrative Interview Method (Lertzman, 2010). The narratives and descriptive experiences explored within this research where obtained through audiotaped (and transcribed) personal interviews. Participants checked the transcribed accounts for accuracy. This chapter describes in more depth the process for collection, analysis, and interpretation of data.

Rationale

When youth present a story there is often rational coherence to how it is constructed and delivered. Often this construction of narrative is based on socially acceptable constructs and the ‘self’ an individual is hoping to portray (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). What lay at the heart of their motivations for engagement does not come from intellectual logic, nor is it a rational decision (Cross & Young, 2008; Fielding et al, 2002; McDougle et al, 2011; Pearce & Larson, 2006). Instead, the unconscious
dwelling of emotion inspires action or creates a barrier to engagement (McDougle et al, 2011; Pearce & Larson, 2006).

To access participants’ meaning frames for experiences, motivations, and interpretations I hoped to get deeper than the surface content of stories and coherence in which they are told. I hoped to go beyond the social mimicry from which youth present their values, morals, and motivations, and understand how a youth perspective for engagement is constructed. The chosen method provided the process and opportunity in which to analyse the whole narrative experience, from the memories, purpose, character, and tensions youth carry with them. The way the youth tell their stories, the emotions expressed in retelling experiences and interpreting situations, are processes that create their affective context, informing their subjective reality.

My social, supportive, and personable character was also considered in the choice of this method. I find my best work is done face-to-face and in the comfort of open dialogue. I was truly interested in having conversations with youth participants, sharing experiences, memories, and tensions within our lives as a way to learn. It also provided a way to explore the affective states that lay underneath what I believed to be the courageous, passionate, unnerved, stoic, and resilient young change makers. My intention was to provide a safe space where participants felt comfortable to let go of the persona or image they wanted to present to the world. The method and resulting interviews were intended to be a place where free associated dialogue could be enjoyed. I found this was successful in that many participants offered similar comments in regards to the frequency in which they have conversations with others about their motivations and emotional context for engagement. All participants suggested that the conversations and space provided in the interviews would be useful outside and beyond a research project.
Dialogic Relational Interview Method

The research utilised a method coined by Lertzman (2010) called the Dialogic, Relational Interview Method. In this method Lertzman draws upon elements from the Biographical Narrative Interview Method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2001), the Free Association Narrative Interview Method (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) and the Starting Question to Induce Narrative Method (SQUIN) (Wengraf, 2001). A number of other psychoanalytical narrative interview approaches are also considered within this method (Walkerdine 2001, Cartwright, 2004). As the research is endeavoring to draw from narrative and explore the phenomena of burnout the Lertzman’s integration of multiple qualitative research methods (i.e. FANI, SQUIM, BNIM) serves the study well.

Free association, open dialogue, and participant driven narrative are essential parts for maintaining integrity with the use of this method. Three fundamental concepts of this method include: a single starting question to elicit uninterrupted narrative (SQUIN), the use of open ended questions, and an unstructured, freely associated narrative (Lertzman, 2010). The method emphasizes the participant frames as the most important aspects. As such open-ended questions within the dialogue follow the participants’ sequence and framing. The unstructured freely associated narrative provides opportunity to access the unconscious emotional motivations of participants (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Overall, the focus for this method is on participant-driven dialogue. The interviews I conducted invited participants to present experiences, memories, and stories in the order that best suit them. The dialogue took on no pre-determined structure. The dialogue was therefore informed by the participant and the dynamic that developed between the participant and me.

As described by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) the emergence of the whole narrative is enhanced when subjects are given the opportunity for free association.
Interviews should therefore invite participants to present experiences, memories, and stories in the order that best suits them. Lertzman (2010) focused on opening dialogue within interviews and offering no structure to the interview, except for what is informed by the participant and relational dynamics (participant – interviewer relationship). The interview is therefore dialogic and relational in the way the participants and I engaged in the interviews, with self and each other.

The interview process is never truly removed from the personal circumstances and subjectivity each person brings to the interview (Walkerdine, Lertzman, 2010). The related experiences and memories of the researcher / interviewer are equally valuable to the dialogue, as the experiences presented by the interviewee. Walkerdine (2000) interrogated the assumption that the subjectivity of the interviewer creates invalid interview data due to bias. Through a longitudinal psychosocial research with girls growing up and reaching adulthood, Walkerdine provides evidence to support the validation of interviewer subjectivity and emotional experiences as a reflexivity – the theory that the subjective experiences and reality of all participants in interviews are equally important and should be analysed with equal significance (Walkerdine, 2000).

Not only is the interviewer subjectivity of equal importance to the analysis, but it adds validity to psychosocial research by recognising the researcher as research subject equally to participant. As such the experiences of the researcher and interview subject should be applied equally to the analysis of interview transcripts. Reflexivity in psychosocial research emphasizes that interviews and the interrogation of experience and memory could not occur without accepting the subjective realities or all participants. As such recognising my own assumptions and understanding how my experiences created the emotional context in which the interview developed is a significantly important piece of the methodology.
Additionally, analyzing the meaning frames of subjects as a whole, rather than breaking narratives into small parts, is valuable when looking for links in contradictions and inconsistencies (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). As such, my analysis focused largely on the themes recognized within each participants narratives and the collection of themes from the collective whole of all participants. The analysis also considered the reflexivity of the interviews – the complete interview transcripts interdependent with the intersubjective experience outlined in Chapter Four.

Assumptions and potential bias

I found it personally centering to detail my assumptions relating to the methods, theories, existence of the phenomena explored, and practical implication of the research (see Chapter five). Of significance was that I entered into this research with an assumption that burnout exist across youth social change movements. I also assumed that burnout was more than being stressed and exhausted by work commitments, that it involved emotional contexts hard to personally recognise. Finally, I assumed that the implications of not taking care of oneself (emotionally, professionally, and socially) could reduce ones capacity and self-efficacy. Moreover, I assumed that not everyone displayed or presented burnout as a depressive disorder. My auto-ethnography presented as a prologue adds context to the genesis of my assumptions. The process and purpose for including this was of a personal nature and one that I believe supports an account of subjectivity – laying things out as you see them – within the methodological framework.

Limitations and methodological consideration

The research is bound within phenomenological psychoanalysis and brings forth narratives of uneasy anxieties such as hopelessness, fear, despair and loneliness – within the participants and myself. The use and recognition of researcher subjectivity
and accounting for reflexivity limits the bias on data from researcher assumptions and enhances validity. The limitations to the research and interpretation of findings across larger subset of youth is recognized and discussed in Chapter Seven.

Preparing for psychoanalytical interviews

Piloting research methods

Prior to conducting the interviews used in analysis, I piloted the method with three pilot participants and four pilot interviews. I conducted two interviews with one pilot participant and one interview with each other pilot participant. Two of these interviews were conducted via Skype, while the others were conducted in person. This provided opportunity to hone the skills for maintaining open and free association dialogue, while also improving inconsistencies and awkward articulation while helping me prepare for the emotional contexts and intersubjectivity. Feedback from the pilot participants was sought directly after each interview.\(^5\) The pilot interviews allowed me to make the required changes in order to coherently and accurately best represent the chosen method.

Preparation adjustments and design improvement

Three specific improvements were made after the pilot interviews.

1. Refining the preamble allowed the participant to have more clarity on how the interview would be conducted. Participants seemed to feel more comfortable with the opening questions in the real interviews as opposed to the pilot interviews.

\(^5\) For future research I would follow up with transcriptions of the pilot interviews and ask participants to account for the experience from their perspective and learn from all dimensions of the interview rather than just my personal experience, and the immediate feedback of participants.
2. The starting question was adapted to allow for greater free association while also confining boundaries somewhat within the context of the research question.

3. Numerous questions were developed to ‘fill-the-gap’ in interview dialogue when and if the dialogue went stale. I noticed that the comfort level of participants and myself was reduced as I kept prompting for more out of the unstructured dialogue content. Being prepared with back up questions enhanced my ability to keep the interview free flowing, unstructured, yet purposeful. These questions gave me something to look towards based on where the dialogue was going and where we were within the conversation.

A pilot participant noted that she was expecting to be asked a question about ever “wanting to leave advocacy work.” I therefore included as a ‘back-up’ question in my mind a question such as “Have you ever wanted to stop for any reason/s?” These modifications allowed both the participants and myself to be more relaxed within the interview process. I noticed that between the pilot interviews and the research interviews, my thoughts and process for maintaining dialogue was less disjointed. I was therefore able to offer participants a greater sense of emotional safety and understanding. Having made these minor modifications to my original design therefore reduced barriers for which participants could engage with unstructured dialogue.

Although it is recognised that the slight change to the unstructured interviews – by having questions on hand – might have reduced the free-association process for the interviews, the example transcript below between myself and Dempsey offers an insight to how these questions were utilized. Pauses and silences in the dialogue were neither forced nor prevented from occurring.
Interview Protocol

Following confirmation for participation and prior to the first interview all participants received and signed a letter of informed consent. Interviews started with a preamble and outline of what to expect within the hour or so interview (see Appendix C). Following a preamble was a starting question designed to offer participants an opportunity to freely present any memories or experiences associated with their vocation. I kept a number of ‘back-up’ questions on hand to help guide the interviews if and when needed. Although not completely an accurate representation of free association narrative interview methods, I utilized these questions at times where the dialogue seemed stale. Interviews took on more of a conversation and open dialogue prose as I felt more comfortable with this as opposed to sitting quietly trying to limit my interaction within the dialogue. The interviews were therefore dialogic and conversational. I believe that participants also found this approach more accessible for sharing memories and experiences reducing dialogical barriers.

Recruitment of Participants

Participants were recruited through a process in which invitations to participate were distributed through a network of known environmental and social advocacy organisations and leaders. As such all participants were engaged at some level with environmental and/or social justice advocacy. A invitation letter (Appendix A) was sent to potential candidates referred via my personal connections with environmental organisations, social justice organisations, youth leadership networks through BC, or leaders within the sector. Candidates were referred by these organisations and leaders via email and word-of-mouth. Over 20 youth initially expressed interest to participate. The individuals invited were youth who had been represented as leaders by at least one
organisation. My affiliation with Sierra Club BC, an environmental non-profit, and the work I was doing at the time of research with advocacy movements such as Powershift, Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, Youth in Parks, and university divestment campaigns placed me in a position that required specific tact and discretion when building a list of candidates for participation.

I worked either alongside some of the youth within campaigns and projects, or had a direct connection to their colleagues. As such, it was made clear that all information garnered in the interviews would be confidential and I would remain non-judgemental and impartial to any relevance the information may have on mutual projects or campaigns.

**Participants**

Nine participants confirmed involvement in the research, with seven participants completing all interviews with usable transcripts for analysis. The other two participants either pulled out due to personal circumstances or did simply not show up at times scheduled for interviews. The median age for all participants was 22 with an age range of 19 to 25 years old.

The research design allowed for up to twelve participants with a minimum of six. The success rate of 32% (7 participants / 22 interested youth) was considered good for non-incentive-driven research. All participants interviewed had at least two years experience working with environmental non-profits, climate advocacy groups, social justice organisations, or within youth civic leadership. One participant felt she did not explicitly meet the requirements for inclusion.\(^6\) She believed her work on a suicide

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\(^6\) Requirements for inclusion: between the ages of 18-25 years old; at least two years experience in environmental or social justice advocacy; available to participate in two interviews.
prevention crisis-line did not really meet the advocacy requirements. This participant was still included with her work being very much related to social justice.

Four participants lived in Greater Victoria, British Columbia, and three lived in Metro Vancouver. All individuals gave informed consent by reading and singing a consent form at the start of the first interview (see Appendix B).

**Conducting Interviews**

I conducted two interviews with each of the seven participants. The 14 interviews were approximately one hour and fifteen minutes each, giving a total of 18 hours of audio. Interviews with four participants were conducted face-to-face, while interviews with three participants were conducted via video Skype. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Example of Interviews: Excerpt from Interview #1 with Dempsey**

Kieran: I’m here with you to discuss your participation with environmental or social justice advocacy work. Now, I’m especially interested in how you come to be the person you are and what experiences and feelings you’ve had throughout your journey becoming the person you are around the work that you do. I’m especially interested in the experiences and the feelings… if you can dive into some of the feelings that led you to this work.

Dempsey: Okay.

Kieran: Now, you’ve been selected as you are considered a youth aged 19 to 25 years, you’ve worked within the area of interest for at least two years and you have direct contact with numerous other youth, numerous project, organisations and initiatives going on in the area. I know this doesn’t sum you up as a person because there’s… it’s much bigger than that but those characteristics, you feel you fit to that?
Dempsey: Mm hm.

Kieran: Yep? Great. Now, I’d like to give you a bit of detail of what you can expect in the next… we’ll shoot for just under an hour. My hope is to allow… basically to allow you to just freely and openly talk about what comes to mind following a first opening question. That question is really just designed for you to just feel free to speak whatever comes to mind.

Dempsey: Okay.

Kieran: The nature of this interview is for you to express whatever you feel and just keep the dialogue kind of open. It’s going to be following a pretty unstructured manner. There’s no right or wrong way to present what you’re thinking and there might be times throughout the interview that you feel… that you’re asking yourself “Where is this conversation leading?” If I could just let you know that there’s no need to worry about that.

Dempsey: Yeah.

Kieran: Just let whatever comes to mind come out, don’t need to worry so much. I’ll try and create a fairly safe place in here to just let that kind of come about. Now, as I mentioned, I’ll start with a question and hopefully this question will give you space and the opportunity to tell me a story and that story’s simply a way for you to describe some experiences you have with the subject.

You can also expect the odd silence or pause. They’re not meant to be any way of kind of feeling… directing conversation. It’s just a space for both of us to collect our thoughts and keep the dialogue kind of rolling, just recognise and provide comfort in the space for that.
Is there anything that I’ve said that does not make sense?

Dempsey: Mm hm. Oh, in… no.

Kieran: It all makes sense?

Dempsey: Mm.

Kieran: Do you think you’d feel comfortable with this type of structure?

Dempsey: Yeah.

Kieran: Yeah, and so we should proceed?

Dempsey: Yeah.

Kieran: Sweet. So this is the first question here. We’ll just…

Dempsey: Okay.

Kieran: I’m interested in learning about some of your experiences and memories as someone who cares for the people, planet, culture. Can you share a personal memory about how you became involved with environmental or social justice advocacy work?

<pause>

Dempsey: Yeah. It sort of… I’ve been involved in sort of a full-time professional, if you will, capacity with this kind of work. It’s essentially all I’ve done since university. Couple of odd jobs right after graduation just to fill the time, make some money, but both my major, more serious employment positions have been in environmental justice since graduating university about three years ago.

My interest in it goes back further than that. When I entered university in Victoria, I knew I wanted to get into geography, resource issues right away and that came from an interest in high school. Environmental geography right off the bat was what I was interested in. I had a great teacher, Geography 12 teacher, who encouraged that spark
and that interest. I still meet with him from time to time now, years later. I graduated high school in 2006.

So yeah, about in high school, teenage formative years, I guess, whatever you want to call it, I was interested in the way we use our environment and the way we interact and support ourselves and the impact that that has on the environment through that on other people.

I’ve only been able to articulate this part of it in the last year or so but it came from personal experiences when I was younger. My father was a commercial fisherman from a few years before I was born until I was about 10. He’d go every summer and he worked on this coast as a gillnetter on… he’d fish every system, every salmon system, between Alaska and Washington State, essentially, work them down the Fraser River last and up rivers like the Skeena systems like that first.

Kieran: That’s a huge area.

Dempsey: Yeah, yeah, really big. Lots of time away. So on the one hand, I mean, I wouldn’t see him… my mum and I would maybe go and visit him and that once or twice in the summer but other than that, I wouldn’t see him too much on… between May and September. He used to write me letters and I’d write them back so right away, the power of written communication became really important, which was sort of a side benefit, but him being in a resource industry and him… so much of my family’s… so much of what we did and what our family was about, him being in a resource industry, it really instilled pretty early on… you know, not consciously; I didn’t say “I’m gaining a really strong understanding of British Columbian families, experience of the resource industry or supported by resource industries” but that’s what was happening.
And ah… when that fishery… I mean, the history of that fishery, it’s not quite as devastating as, say, the East Coast cod fishery but it was essentially mismanaged into the ground, you know, and talking with my dad about it now, he remembers getting dispatch calls from DFO that would say “Go to Rivers Inlet and set your nets and fish until you can’t catch anymore”, right?

Kieran: Wow.

Dempsey: And at the time, he would think, you know, “This is crazy” and, you know… but he’d be sitting there, thinking about “This isn’t how you manage a resource” and all the other rest of the fleets passing, just going by heading there to do it. So those fish were going to get caught whether he did it or not and he had a wife and young son at home so he went and did it.

Years later, I learned that this was a pretty good example of tragedy of the commons, you know? One of the first things you learn in Grade 12 Geography and pretty central theory to Geography 101 and courses like that. Pretty simple resource management concept. I have firsthand experience of that. When the resource did basically go, it got to the point where it went from one year… it was cut back. His last couple of years, he fished less and less. There was less and less openings and basically, in 1998, the postings that came up, the anticipated openings, he knew he couldn’t even come close to making a living on that so he didn’t go that year.

Then experiencing what happens when those resources do sort of finish up and the impact of that; in my family, it was largely an emotional impact. Fishing… other than me and my mum, fishing was probably the most important thing to my dad in his life and he had to give that all up, you know? He… it was a job, it was his employment. He
owned his boat, he made his money but he… it was more about a love of the ocean. He could have done lots of other things but he wanted to be out on the water. He wanted to spend… he said “It’s a big area, right?” and he got to see it all in a really intimate way. So him giving that up was a hard thing.

At the time, I kind of thought that was the worst of it because my family was a fortunate one in that we didn’t feel the financial aspects of that as badly as some, because my dad before… actually, he’d become a fisherman and bought his boat, he’d got his certificate as a welder so he had a journeyman’s ticket as a welder to fall back on. In the late ‘90s, you know, that was as good as it is today; you could find work. So we didn’t lose as much as a lot of the other fishermen did.

Again, I wasn’t 100% aware of that at the time in the late ‘90s because I was so young but I am now and so… I mean, yeah, I didn’t… even when I was doing my degree, I was conscious of that but only in the last few years I really have understood that that has… it’s dictated a lot of the reason why I was always interested in how to manage resources, why I’ve always been frustrated with finite resource industries, for example, or the inequity of a lot of the resource industries. It came from those pretty early experiences.

So I think it’s a neat thing. I’d like to… in a way, the story’s personal but it’s… I think it could be a more powerful thing for me to use, you know? It’s sort of… lots of people say “Why do you do what you do?” or “It’s hard work” and I think the story is a pretty compelling reason. Salmon reproduce themselves in two to four years, depending on the species, as opposed to something like coal which forms on a geological timescale. It’s not even close and if we couldn’t make it work with salmon or timber and you…
getting a little bit older and travelling to Port Renfrew or Port McNeil, Ucculet these places that had all the eggs in the extraction basket.

When those resources went down, the communities were pretty hard hit and those were again trees and salmon resources that renew themselves in a matter of decades or a matter of years; you couldn’t make it work with that. If we’re going to make it work with bitumen or coal, it’s the same old thinking and that drives a lot of what I do, a lot of my motivation, and you can explain the salmon were a booming resource and it went into decline but timber was a booming resource that went into decline. But I think my understanding of that and my commitment to advocate on these kind of things is grounded in my personal experience.

Kieran: And so it seems like you’ve had a fairly good time to reflect on that and your relationship with your family and your dad’s relationship with the sea and how that brought you to where you are.

Dempsey: Mm hm.

Kieran: Are there any significant feelings or stories that you remember from those times that maybe you had with your dad that you reflect on a lot in regards to… how it… brought you to where you are?

Dempsey: Yeah. There’s sort of… I mean, I think a lot of the criticism… and this is changing with environmental advocacy. It’s the early 2010’s. I think in the early, say, 1990s or 1980s or 1970s, the environmental movement, you know, it was kind of ‘them’ versus people who worked in environmental… pardon me, resource industries. If you’re a logger, you like to kill forests. If you’re a fisherman, you like to kill fish. That’s changed, the understanding of that.
Forest rallies you go to now, there’s always union leaders speaking. There was a union leader speaking at the Defend Our Coast big pipeline climate rally. That is shifting a little bit but there still is a lot of criticism and some of it still is deserved. Lots of people who are in environmental advocacy, they don’t have the understanding or maybe there is some doubt that resource workers care about the resources and care about the planet that they’re working on.

You know, maybe there’s some that don’t but to say that there’s none who do, I’ve never even had to think about that and it comes from cumulative memories of being out on the boat with my dad and just the way… even now, the way he talks about it, the way he talks about fishing, the way he talks about fish, the way he talks about the coast. Can’t help… you can’t even doubt his commitment to it, his feeling towards it.

So I think that keeps me grounded in a lot of things when I’m trying to figure out sort of where in… the basis for some of the decisions we make around resource policy goes to; pipeline decisions and decisions to support things like coal mining at the highest levels of government. I think you waste a lot of time and weigh down your heart if you had to say “Oh man, I’m going up against everyone. Everyone wants this, everyone feels good about this” whereas I don’t. I know that’s a small group that’s controlling… that’s making these decisions and because of that, I know that it’s possible that some change can happen.

Kieran: And so how does it make you feel when people talk about change in a way that’s maybe less insightful as to what you seem to have?

Dempsey: Sorry, what?
Kieran: So when people talk about change in a way that’s maybe not as positive and really separating industry, say, from the work you do and…

Dempsey: Mm hm. Like, I mean, more kind of… I don’t want to say radical but more… not like other activists or… I’m not 100% good in the question…

Kieran: Sure, yeah. Yeah, I didn’t really frame that well. Let’s see. I’m just interested to see how you feel in regards to… how you make sense of the stories you bring to your work and then what you see happening around you.

Dempsey: Again, yeah, it’s sort of… it’s something that I’m hopeful for. To me, positive social, environmental change, it’s… the key to it is reframing how we communicate the issue rather than reframing how people think about it. At the heart of environmental justice is social justice and there’s some clever slogans that don’t quite capture it – “No Jobs on a Dead Planet” is one of them – but changing the narrative to a social, to a family issue, to these causes that we’re advocating for and these systems that we don’t agree with, these policies that we’d like to see change, it’s not for any other reason when it comes down to it other than making things better for the people that live here.

In some cases, you know, depending on what’s the narrative of climate change, you’re looking at… it’s not just making things better, it’s making things kind of all okay, survivable on the long term. So yeah, I think by looking at it that way, how do we communicate that across, it’s a big challenge. It’s the main challenge, I’d say; communicating environmentalism. It’s a big uphill but to me, it’s got to be easier than changing minds of the majority of the people on the planet. So I look at it as a hopeful thing.
Kieran: Yeah, great view. Do you still get out on the boat with your dad a little bit?

Dempsey: A little bit, yes. So he doesn’t have his gillnetter anymore. His… that boat was 35 feet, it had a big sleeper cabin and I mean, he could go out for… when things were really booming, the packer boats would come and buy his fish off of him at sea so he didn’t even have to go in, right? He’d have fishing rods on board and he was bringing in depending on the runs, depending on the year, depending on the week or day, hundreds of pounds of the most nutritious food in the world on his boat so he really didn’t have to go in too often. He’d get some water and maybe some carrots, apples, things like that on his boat and get a lot of the rest, yeah…

Kieran: Yeah.

Dempsey: So he doesn’t… that kind of lifestyle, my memories of it are really early but they’re some of my best. He’s always had… since then, he’s had a pleasure boat, something like a speedboat, and we go out from time to time out to Sooke, just sports fish this time of year, when the salmon are running.

The last couple of years, I mean, being based in Victoria as a welder, it’s been fortunate because he has had a lot of work here in the shipyard, in Victoria Shipyards, in the ‘90s, and a lot of my childhood, they built a lot of boats there so in the winters, he’d always be working in the harbour, summers he’d always be fishing and that continued for a little while after he stopped fishing.

That’s declined quite a bit, the activity in the shipyards. Most of it’s military based which is a whole other bag of worms but the last couple summers, he’s been away for work, other parts of BC, other parts of Canada. He’ll go for a month at a time and
then come back. All of this is… it’s what we dealt with on the norm. I could deal with it when I was a kid, I can definitely handle it now as an adult or I can handle it as an older teenager and when I’m in my early 20s. It’s just… always been used to it.

So yeah, we don’t get out as much as we used to but I still spend a lot of time with him and we know about our mutual connection to the ocean and it’s an important part of… way we both feel about things, the way our outlook is on things and I think… he knows it’s a big part of what I do and I think he’s proud of that, which is what… you know, makes you feel good as a son.

Kieran: Right, yeah. Would you say you have a lot of conversations with your family about the work you do?

Dempsey: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they’re really supportive. I’m an only child so they’re going to be interested in whatever I do. They understand that there’s a bit of a dichotomy. A lot of the work I’m doing is advocating against the way we do a lot of our resource industries, it’s advocating for change in those industries, and on my dad’s side of the family, fifth generation born on Vancouver Island which is about as far as non-Aboriginal people go back.

Kieran: That’s a long ways back, yeah.

Dempsey: On my mum’s side of the family, it’s not quite as long but it’s still a couple. Both of them were born in Victoria where I live and work so… which…

Kieran: Wow, strong roots here.

Dempsey: Yeah, it’s not super common. They often say after Calgary and Edmonton, Victoria’s the biggest city in Alberta [chuckle]. But lots of friends from university are from other places. So the point I was making there is they both know my
relationship and my frustration with the way they operate our resource industries. There’s no way you can have strong roots on Vancouver Island as we do without benefiting hugely from the resource industries.

You know, it might not be the same for families that have been here for three generations and another 100 years; tech and tourism and industries that are solely based on resource extraction as the main economy has been in the past here. They know that I know that and that the reason why globally especially but even locally we’re pretty lucky, things haven’t been too bad in our family, it’s because of resource industries.

I was able to go to university, things were never real ugly in… financially for my family. Obviously hardships here and there, working as a tradesman, especially in the non-union days right when my dad stopped fishing. There was really a lot of instability. He’s still… he’s nearing retirement and he’s still sort of in that sector. You can get laid off at any time as projects slow or shut down.

Yeah, so they know that’s a huge thing but they know that I don’t disrespect that and they know that I think about that a lot, I’m not ignorant to that fact. So that’s probably the most important thing for me, is that they understand I know it’s a complicated issue. And yeah, other than that, they’ve come to some rallies and events that I organise. My mum shares all the stuff I write on Facebook and stuff like that so that’s… it’s nice and it’s good.

At the end of the day, they know that a lot of the decisions that were made by their generation and their parents’ generation aren’t working out so well for us environmentally or socially and why would… they’re reasonable people. Why would they ever not think changing that is a good thing?
So no, the relationship there is good and I’d say obviously my dad’s story and his experience and our first hand family experience with the resource industry is a big part of who I am or what I do in my work in activism but my roots… my relationship with them is a big part of it too. I think to get into activism… you know, it’s not the easiest field to work in and obviously having strong family and family support is a big part of that…

Kieran: Strong support structures, yeah. Totally.

<pause>

Over the course of my life, it’s somewhat similar stories but a little bit different. As you know, I grew up in Australia and my family now are… apart from a couple of us are all pretty much working in… we I’m obviously not but pretty much the rest of my family are pretty much working in oil and gas in some way or another and ever since I was young, I’ve been called kind of like the tree-hugger of the family and I’ve had that label kind of carried with me for a fair chunk of my life. Seems just… people I know, family members and just friends from uni and I grew up with and stuff like that. So I’m interested... can you describe any experiences where you’ve had a situation or an experience where someone’s presented you passionate around an issue and how’s that made you feel to be presented in a certain kind of way?

Dempsey: Yeah. I’m the one… I mean, yeah, I think everyone in Canada and from what I know about Australia, it’s similar. Just about everyone has family or friends, at the very least people they graduated high school, say, with that were in the fossil fuel sector and eventually they’re going to… especially with things like Facebook where it’s hard to not know what the people you went to high school with are doing, people you
went to university with too, they… you’re going to know what they do, they’re going to know what you do.

On my mum’s side of the family which is still largely based in Victoria, there’s a strong trades presence on that side of the family too. My grandpa, uncle and a cousin are all electricians, commercial and residential here in town, and then there’s other family members that work on banking, manufacturing, service industries; a pretty good array. There’s none on that side who would… say, gone to the tarsands to work… like so many other people have.

But definitely, you know, being called the hippie of the family or whatever it is and partly because I don’t even see myself so much that way, I’m sort of plugged into a bit… different community in Victoria and just being at U Vic and it’s sort of… it’s kind of… I own a car. That’s not what that means! I don’t drive it very often and it’s small but still, you can’t… the hippie of the family and it’s sort of… I don’t know.

I don’t take it too… there’s worse things to be called, for sure, and yeah, I guess I haven’t really reflected too much on how it makes me feel. But I’d say… It’s just… that’s the funny thing and amongst my high school group of friends too, of my closest friends that I’m still in touch with, none actively work in, say, the fossil fuel resource sector but none of them… none of my high school friends anyway are working in activism either, be it social or environmental, and those friendships are built through a long while and they know that the reason I do what I do is because of the way I grew up and things that impacted me and they’re all still the same things that made me their friend years ago.
So there’s nothing to change so… you know, I haven’t lost any close friendships or anything over what I do but I know it’s always a conscious thing. Most of my friends are conscious of my views and to greater and lesser extents, depending on the individual, friends and family members will engage me on those, ask me about them and yeah, it doesn’t make me… yeah, it’s not… I wouldn’t say it’s really a negative or really positive feeling either way. It’s just… it’s important to me that my family understands what I do so I’m happy to talk about it with them but at the same time, I don’t want to always be pushing my messages on them.

There’s definitely a generational thing too in the family context. I have my cousins that are all similar age bracket to me and then aunt and uncle who are a generation above then my grandparents, right? And there’s totally different levels on not just environmental issues, social issues, all the rest of it.

Kieran: Different stories, yeah.

Dempsey: Yeah, yeah. So… but in terms… there’s never… in my specific case, there’s never really been… you know… anything confrontational or anything like that. There’s definitely awareness that I do what I do and on one side of the family, my cousin and her fiancé both work in the outreach and support industry, I guess, for the homeless.

Kieran: Wow.

Dempsey: Homeless and at-risk community. They both work for… one works on transition from… you know… shelters or from the streets to housing and the other is a program manager at one of the biggest shelters in town. So… you know… there’s some similarities there and more so similarities between our relationships with other families. You know… They know that they’re really passionate and really engaged and have
strong commitments and are willing to… you know… make a lot of sacrifices in
everything from pay cut to free time to taking your work home with you at the end of the
day, in a similar way to what I am. The issues are different but the commitment’s the
same. Yeah, it’s generally supportive. So yeah, my feelings are pretty positive around
that whole sort of family reaction, yeah.

Kieran: Yeah, nice. Would you feel compelled to elaborate any more on the
importance to you of the value of that, having those conversations with those around you,
family and friends?

Dempsey: Yeah, I mean, to me, it’s really valuable. I feel sort of my position is
Vancouver Island campaigner or just saying “I work for an environmental group” or “I
work in the environmental industry”.

For people my own age that, say, were my cohort at university; the geography,
environmental studies, biology strain, that field, a lot of the people that I met and had
classes with or interacted with or been friends with in university. When I say that, if I ran
into someone that I had classes with everywhere at U Vic and said “I’m a campaigner
with the environmental protection group”, they… if they don’t say “Oh yeah, I read your
op ed the other week”, they say “Oh cool, that’s awesome. What kind of issues are you
working on?” They know exactly what that means.

For other… you know, say, my cousin that’s an electrician. When I got this job, I
kind of said “Yeah, I’m going to be working for an environmental group, advocating on a
lot of different issues, everything from forest conservation to climate change to salmon”
and, you know, having no experience in the field or academic experience, say, he knew
what I… he was on board with that, what I was talking about, just because… I mean, he
can’t be, I don’t think, between 19 and 25 and not know that climate change is a pretty big issue…. You know… your level of commitment towards working on it or caring about it or how much it affects you, but you’re going to be aware of it.

Whereas… you know… the next generation up, my parents… you know… lots of uncles and friends or family members, parents, neighbours, people like that, it’s sort of… sometimes they say… “Yeah, I’m a campaigner and an advocate” and they kind of… you know… it depends on the person. Some of them say “Oh yeah? Neat” and they won’t know what I’m talking about but they won’t press it. Some say “What does that mean? What do you do day to day? Are you”… it’s hard to kind of articulate it sometimes, right?

It’s just sort of… you know… getting exposure to, say, environmental activists in university… you know… the guest lecturers in classes, they… you know… are organising events in town, events on campus. You get to know what they do a little bit more, even if you can explain it, but people that aren’t around and in the youth activism community don’t have that same understanding. So to articulate it can be difficult and having family members or older friends that are curious about that, it gives you a chance to work on your shtick, work on explaining it with people that you’re comfortable with.

So for me, it’s a positive thing… you know… The reality is maybe because my parents’ generation, they’re the… in a country like Canada, they’re the biggest demographic in a way and in the short term, they’re the most important to engage in a lot of ways. I think the demographic also the environmental movement needs to be successful with engaging because they have the highest voter turnout, for example, and keep voting in politicians that are the most illiterate on environmental issues, so that’s
where a lot of the work needs to be done in the short term rather than just sort of waiting and hoping that my generation… once we start to replace the generation ahead then things will just be better.

So having all the older people in your life, the 40 or 60 year old range, and having a chance to talk to them in a more comfortable setting of people that you have relationships with, are part of your family, it’s a positive thing. It gives you a chance to talk about it. It can also be a bit more uncomfortable but no, I think it’s definitely an opportunity.

Was that… I was talking for so long, I kind of felt like…

Kieran: No, that was great.

Dempsey: I can’t even remember what your original question was…

Kieran: No, that’s great. That’s exactly the process I’m looking for, totally.

<pause>

So what comes to mind when you hear people say ‘youth leaders of tomorrow’?

Dempsey: I don’t know. I kind of… it interests me a little bit. I’ve always wondered what it would be like to be 25 in 1963 or 1943 or 1913 instead of 2013 and see if… was that term around then? It’s kind of… because, I mean, the youth… the leaders now, they were youth at one point, right? I imagine a lot of them were engaged. They say lots of old people ‘lifetime politicians’. Harper has that term attached to him, lots do.

Yeah, so it’s an interesting concept. I mean, there’s youth active in lots of different fields. I obviously have the most interaction with environmental advocates so, I mean, I think it’s important to say ‘youth’ and then to say ‘leaders’. That is a big part of it but in a way, it’s shirking the responsibility of a lot of changes that need to happen, that
need to be made by… we call them leaders and we call them politicians and ministers and heads of state and leaders of industry but in the political realm, so many of these decisions around resources and climate policy and even social policy are made. They’re… I think a big part of the problem is that we do frame them as leaders and not what there should be which is servants. They’re to serve us, they’re public servants and if they’ve always been called leaders and then they get into power and then just do that, lead the way regardless of what we should be doing or what the majority of people want to be doing then calling us the ‘leaders of tomorrow’, it’s kind of… we’re just going to do the same thing.

I think a positive term would be the ‘youth servants of tomorrow’. It’s a neater…it’s a neat way to look at it; learning what we are right now in order to better serve when we’re in that leadership generation, which seems to be between 40 and 70.

Kieran: That’s an interesting perspective, yeah. Haven’t heard that one before.
Dempsey: So yeah, the term sort of… I mean, for us to call us that, you don’t hear it self-referenced very often. There’s conventions that are organised and it’s all ‘youth leaders of tomorrow’ but it’s the event organisers usually rather than the people who are speaking, because I just think… I know there’s lots of people who are engaged but say they’re engaged with social issues. There’s rights around gender, sexual orientation, all those things.

I know I’m not in a leadership role at all to them so to say that’s an all-encompassing term and just like advocates on those campaigns on those issues aren’t really in a leadership role to me, or to me five years ago. I was looking up to…
environmental activists and sort of resource policy experts and people like that. So yeah, I think it’s useful but it could almost do more harm than good.

Kieran: Yeah.

Have you ever felt uninspired to continue doing the work that you’ve been doing?

Dempsey: Yeah but sort of that… I know it’s the term around a lot of your research but ‘burnout’, you know, it’s not a term because it’s sort of a myth or anything like that; it’s a real thing. We do… you do get tired. Most of my experience in the… after graduating and… they call them… we used to call them ‘real jobs’. You know, “Are you just working construction or are you getting a”… when you’re going to university and you’re showing your interest in a field and then go to work and it’s in that field, that can be seen as something you’re really interested in, something you’re passionate about rather than just work.

Just like tradespeople who work towards an apprenticeship and then… in their town, if it slows down then they take a job doing something else, that’s sort of… it’s what you want to be doing based on… contrasted with what you’re doing because you need to do something for money or something to support yourself or someone else. So in terms of working in the field you’re in, I can’t speak to other fields because I don’t have that much experience with it but you definitely get worn down. There’s lots and lots that you take home with you, even though I’ve always been pretty conscious of not doing that.

So yeah… but it’s a fine line between… it’s hard to tell whether you’re just uninspired or just sort of beat down. I think if you’re ever uninspired, it would kind of…
you’d really have to really re-look at things. I don’t know if I’ve ever been uninspired so much as just tired but again, because a lot of the reason that I do… my personal motivation for a lot of the campaigns that I work on and issues that I work on and speak to, are personal, the inspiration’s always there. It’s just the level of how much personal drive I have to bring those forward. It can fluctuate based on a whole number of things; they can be personal, they can be just workload, stuff like that.

So uninspired… I wouldn’t say ever completely uninspired but I have a holiday coming up in a couple weeks and I’m really looking forward to it. I don’t think that means I’m uninspired; it just means I need a break.

<pause>

END example transcript. 43 minutes of 75 minutes.

The continuous forty-three minute excerpt from the seventy-five minute first interview with Dempsey above helps provide a clearer picture to how the interviews were conducted. The pauses contained within this excerpt range from 20 seconds to almost one minute. Although I provided input to keep the interview going at certain times the majority of the narrative and dialogue was that of the participant. Neither of us really took possession or control of the interview, we rather let the dialogue navigate as best it could through whatever was on Dempsey’s mind pertaining to the advocacy work he is involved. Opening with a memory or experience from the starting question, the dialogue takes on a fairly free association with both Dempsey and I informing the content of the dialogue. Both of our experiences played a role in where and to what manner the dialogue would travel. On a few occasions I added some direction to the conversation following some pauses. These pauses were usually quite clearly an end to the particular idea, subject, memory, or experience being shared.
Data Analysis

Once interviews were transcribed verbatim, I re-listened to the audio files while reading through the transcripts to confirm accuracy. During this process I paid attention to the stories being presented and what seemed to be significant influences, motivations, emotional response to experiences, worldviews, and significant events. In concert with highlighting excerpts I made notes about how these related to the question. Following this I listened again to sections of the audio to see if it related to the experience detailed in my journal.

Thematic tables (Appendix D) were developed for each participant. The themes were produced based on the combination of notes, highlighted excerpts and the overall relationship this seemed to have to the question. The thematic table provided a guide to an interpretation of the psychosocial dimensions of youth advocacy as a whole. Laying out all participants’ thematic tables side-by-side allowed for broader view of similarities, differences, and perspectives of youth. Viewing all thematic tables alongside each other offered a glimpse to the complete context for which youth engage with advocacy. Wider context themes seemed to pop out of the collective group of participant experiences thematically summarized in the tables. These were crosschecked with the intersubjective frames represented in my journal. I made notes within the tables when the potential projections of emotions or feelings described in my journal were present.

Credibility, Validity, and Trustworthiness

After all audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed I invited each participant to check, comment, and provide confirmation that they were accurately represented in the transcriptions. The thesis research was conducted within the ethical standards of Royal Roads University. As such all participants received an invitation
letter outlining the expectations and commitment for participation, how the interviews would be used, and the reason for conducting the research.

The voice of the youth participants is the core to what this research presents. As such, I provide complete portraits of the participants and include their direct excerpts, edited only for coherence where appropriate. My aim has been to respect the participants, demonstrate the rigor of my research, and demonstrate credibility and validity for the information being presented throughout this thesis. The addition of outlining my bias, providing a self-reflective assessment of interest in this subject matter (prologue), and recording an honest review of my emotional state throughout was presented to demonstrate trustworthiness. In the following chapter, I present pen portraits on the remaining participants and provide an initial collective analysis of all interviews. The concluding chapter navigates the themes and that have stood out within my exploration of burnout in youth environmental and social justice advocacy.
Chapter Four: Advocacy confidential – contrasting accounts of burnout

I foresee really bad problems in terms of the impacts of run away climate change... I see flooding, I see hurricanes, storms, droughts; all these pieces continuing to just get worse and worse. I see water being… suddenly becoming the most important commodity in the world, well trumping oil, natural gas, and anything else (Jeremy).

The following portraits offer a glimpse into two youth identities that diverge from each other in their theory of change, motivations and values regarding their purpose for advocacy engagement. Effectively, these two portraits offer an overview of the two poles of engagement. Jeremy is a high achiever, with significant family connection to social justice advocacy and engagement. He presents a story of being engaged with advocacy via his father’s work within the Anglican Dioceses and travelling abroad to advocate for human moral rights. Jeremy’s identity appears closely tied to this family connection to social justice advocacy. His high achieving status is a product of the role modeling of his father. He is a little lost as he struggles to relate to his identity and the intrinsic motivations that seem to guide him and the identity his advocacy engagement has created. He is in a time of identity crisis and is looking at how and why he does what he does. As such he feels burnout has been part of his struggles and represents burnout as the behavioural concept that he struggles to control.

Amy is somewhat a polar opposite to Jeremy. She is reluctant to call herself an activist and is actively trying to avoid engaging with negative messaging. She feels she lives activism through her lifestyle choices and vocational directions. Amy constantly protects herself from negative messaging, walking away from engagement that promotes negative or fearful strategies. Amy owns her avoidance of negative messaging and in recognizing her values and ethics she is able to find emotional balance.
The following portraits provide background mini-biographies, including what appear as significant influences that have driven them to do what they do. I then highlight the beliefs, concerns, and causes these youth choose to work with, and the signs of imbalance, stability, and/or burnout for each youth.

**Jeremy: Forging social alchemy from climate justice activism.**

At the age of 24, Jeremy has accumulated a diverse range of organising and advocacy experiences. He has been engaged with advocacy work for more than five years, and describes his focus area of work as “Climate justice and youth mobilization with a secondary focus on Creation Care and faith-based mobilization.” Today, Jeremy works as a campaigner advocating for change in federal and provincial government with an emphasis highlighting the need for climate justice surrounding social well-being, human rights, and impacts of resource extraction. He has work commitments with six organisations, campaigns, and/or projects. Jeremy spends a large part of his time organising online and social media venues. He presents his job as “rapid response organizer.” He predominantly has an organising base with young adults, encouraging action against the current government and undemocratic practices. Jeremy also talked intermittently about his time as a Canadian youth delegate to the sixteenth session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Cancun (COP16). His highest level of education is graduation with a Bachelors degree in Geography. He would describe himself as a “serial organizer.” He is often the first person among his peers to get involved with multiple advocacy campaigns and activities.

Upon being asked to describe a personal memory or experience about how he became involved with environmental and / or social justice advocacy Jeremy presented a lengthy story about his relationship with his family, focusing on the role of his father.
Dad went to the 10th anniversary of the Rio signing in 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa. When he came back, he really had a different perspective on environmental issues. And I don’t know if he necessarily had a major epiphany himself to social justice but it became a much more public facing or forward facing say, within the family… Around that time as a family, we started to talk a lot more about environmental issues and about social justice because his experience within South Africa was one very much of not only environmental justice, but also social justice in terms of connecting with HIV/AIDS work as well as poverty as well as maternal health, reproductive justice and many other issues, a lot of which I didn’t really understand at the time but in hindsight, had a pretty dramatic impact on me.

Jeremy believes he became the organiser and environmental and social justice campaigner he is because of his family’s progressive faith-based tradition and his father’s work.

Dad being an Anglican priest and his role in a lot of ways is a community organiser, is to bring people together, to bring them together to talk about issues, to have meals, to go on trips … So much of his job is about logistics and I think it was just something that by osmosis or through diffusion or something that being around him throughout childhood that I picked up on quite easily.

Jeremy’s relationship with his dad is still quite strong. He remembers growing up being introduced to crowds as “Kevin’s [pseudonym] son.” He now enjoys it when his dad is introduced as “Jeremy’s dad.”
Early on in Jeremy’s life, it was evident that he would be in a leadership role and organising to make change for the world he wants to see. Jeremy described his work as a camp counselor fondly remembering how much he loves working with kids: “Children and youth work’s always been a major passion of mine. I really love working with kids, both from the mentorship and educational perspective but also just fun and rewarding (Interview 1).”

Talking about his leadership skills he provided examples of being sent to a leadership seminar in Grade 5 and engaging with social justice advocacy from the age of 11.

We were the youngest ones there by five years. It was primarily for high school students but there were just a few spots for some elementary students... It didn’t sink in as much. A lot of the workshops were on child and youth security and all sorts of other things that at the time... frankly, they were geared to people working with someone my age at the time rather than actually directly to me, but the fact that we were even being invited to that space and being able to be a part of it was such an amazing opportunity.

These early opportunities have helped Jeremy in his role facilitating workshops on story-based strategy and campaign development. When not focusing his attentions to the many organising activities he is involved with, Jeremy enjoys being outside, hiking and skiing. These activities, although infrequent, provide Jeremy opportunity to escape and reconnect himself with his surroundings.

As the dialogue with Jeremy deepened it was obvious that he understands his ambitions as derived from a combination of his dad as a role model and the leadership
opportunities presented to him throughout his life but notably in Grade 11 and Grade 12. In Grade 11, he organised the inaugural event called *10,000 Tonight*, an initiative that raises 10,000 items or more to donate to needy organisations and people.

It was really the first time that I felt like I’d really done something that had a very tangible impact on the community, in my local community. But to come back to that second piece for me, it was also the first time that I really recognised that I was good at organising but that I also enjoyed it. So it was moments like that that really solidified what... values, ethics and feelings that I think had long been with me but had taken some time to surface.

This direct organizing led to interest in more and more opportunities.

From that point, I became a lot more involved with Amnesty International, did a big fundraiser for them when I was in my Grade 12 year as well and for my first two years of university was really involved with them. I was at the University of Ottawa. At a later point, it was in large part, actually, through being involved with PowerShift that I was suddenly introduced to the concept and the theory and practice of climate justice and suddenly becoming much more passionate and much more interested in environmental organising when I developed a much better understanding of the broad-based implications of it.

Jeremy and I were introduced to each other via a colleague and fellow youth climate justice activists. Our work integrated significantly while organizing a youth-driven climate justice conference. From my first encounters with Jeremy, I pegged him as a young leader who exudes a sense of calm and charismatic confidence. He presents
strong knowledge of the issues with a relaxed poise. The excerpt below provides some understanding of Jeremy’s beliefs for equitable wealth and happiness, and his discontent with the disparity and injustices between the privileged global north and under-privileged global south.

I think that the level of consumption and the indicators of wealth and happiness and social wellbeing that we’ve developed ourselves for ourselves, particularly within the global north are absolutely unattainable to achieve within a finite system within one planet.

It is worth noting here that Jeremy believes the biggest challenge in years to come will be surrounding water, and access to water. Other beliefs and causes that drive Jeremy in his work include the focus on a society of praxis, believing that in organizing work you “learn by failure.” He also worries how kids will grow up in an “unsocial world full of technology.” This drives him to be cognizant of the way he engages with social mobilization from a computer, but is hesitant to change the way in which he engages with this part of his work. Jeremy’s mantra for social organising is “leaving people more radical then we found them.” During our second interview Jeremy presented an analogy that summed up how he likes to think of organizing. Acknowledging his friend as the source for the analogy, he presented it as the “picnic or the campsite rule.”

With the campsite rule, you’re always leaving the campsite cleaner than when you found it. With organising and with young leaders of tomorrow, we need to look at it from we’re always leaving people more radical than when we first found them in terms of their ontology, their pedagogy and their… just their general understanding of how things function as well as their role and their sense of purpose within that, which isn’t to say that we
bring everyone to a point where we’re all Paul Watson, we’re all chasing
down Japanese whaling boats, but it’s that we’re bringing people up
through that ladder and encouraging people to bring other people into
that.

Jeremy represented the outcome of his current organizing as social alchemy. In
reference to his current work with mostly younger people he believes the organization
is trying “to be that melting pot but ultimately, once they’re melted together to forge
more than just steel but to, you know, make alchemy.”

Since his time in high school, Jeremy has found it difficult to classify his
organizing work as fun. “A lot of professional organizing circles, I find it challenging to
really have a lot of fun at times. They can be rewarding but to authentically have fun
can be quite tough.” He continues to highlight what makes his current work tough in
relation to the type of person who he often works alongside “this cynical, jaded,
asshole-ish manner can very much be incorporated into some of the most effective
campaigners in the country.”

It is obvious that caring for humans and caring for community is at Jeremy’s
core. Presenting the tensions for the choice between significant workloads – largely
online organizing – and having face-to-face meaningful engagement with younger
people was a significant moment in the dialogue.

It’s not having that direct relationship with someone... which is actually really
what I like. I would... I’d frankly prefer... and this is actually the reason why
I’ve always considered and I’m still considering to this day going into formal
Teaching. I like being able to have that... I love that direct contact with people
and doing that type of capacity development - through email and through Skype I find to be very challenging.

I picked up on some uneasiness surrounding his current work and drive to keep going. In my personal notes I wrote, “tears seemed to be swelling... when talking about his potential leaving the movement and fear of what guilt this might bring.” The tension he is grappling with is one of identity and purpose.

I’m going to really try to seriously re-evaluate what I’m involved with... there would be a much clearer sense of purpose and clearer sense of identity as well... I think a lot of it is how much of an identity, how much of a clear purpose does the position have.

Jeremy struggles to say no. He likes to help others and this has led to being challenged by his own character of service: “That’s one of the reasons that I’m so open to taking on so many projects all the time, is this fear that I’m going to piss someone off or that I’m going to insult them by not being part of their project.” It might be possible that Jeremy’s difficulty for saying no has added additional stress and possibly a further antecedent to his representation of burnout.

By the end of my third year [of university], I was really burnt out. I’d gone through a bad breakup that year so at a personal level, I was very tired. I was exhausted, really emotionally drained. I was involved with way too much organising that year. I was an intern with the Polaris Institute in Ottawa, was working on starting to create something that eventually became Climate Justice Ottawa... I had my hand in a whole bunch of different projects and ... was involved some days with a whole bunch of arrestable direct actions and then other days, I’d be going to
press conferences put on by Michael Ignatieff. We’d try to set up meetings with him and members of the Liberal Party because I really didn’t know which ones made more sense to me in terms of trying to work within the party system or do I go work completely against it and just show how they’re all not doing anything?

Jeremy presented his feelings around the possible change in careers.

That’s one of my really big challenges because… and in some ways, it’s a horrible reason to get out of organising at a professional level but I think part of that is why I’m interested in leaving, because I really cannot decide which way and to me, one of the things that I have the most respect for, which requires the least compromise, would be working for a rec centre, working for… even doing something like, I don’t know, working for a municipality doing community outreach work or something, teaching formally; anything like that. It requires much less of a cop-out because you can talk about both sides, you can work with both sides but then you can also just choose what makes the most sense at that time.

Jeremy thought about taking a year off completely from the line of work he is in to go travelling, but did not. “I’m a pretty big homebody.” He feels somewhat cynical about the work he does: “as soon as you give them money, suddenly you go onto a donor segment and then you’re just screwed for life.” He sees value in making a difference in society to support the need for political change. As such, he finds it difficult to commit to traveling especially with the weight of the 2015 federal elections on his mind.

Interestingly, though, and it’s actually not that unrelated at all, a lot of the reasons for not doing it come back to what we were just talking about
though in terms of what am I leaving behind here and 2015’s coming up. I don’t want Harper to get elected again. What’s it mean if I just take off now? It’s like, well, I should really wait until 2015 before I do anything like that. It’s like, well, shit, by 2015, Fall 2015, I’ll be turning 26, you know? Why would I not want to go do that right now, if that’s what I really want and/or need? The how would I finance it question is frankly another one as well but, you know, maybe just doing it as cheaply as possible would be appealing. Because frankly, I’d like to do more travelling. I’d like to have some more experiences like that.

Jeremy validates his guilt and fear of leaving everything behind, especially the thought of not impacting the next federal election. This is validated in my notes as I wrote that I sensed a “potential feeling of guilt if he went on a world tour.”

Jeremy is at a crossroads in his personal professional development. Although committed by his morals to his work, Jeremy is looking for something more meaningful, more purposeful, and with greater personal contact with people. I’m fearful of how continually dependent people will become on technology without a proper understanding of how to integrate technology into further building community as opposed to replacing community with technology… I think that it’s troubling how much people replace both their day-to-day interactions as well as just their day-to-day functions with technological tools, failing to recognise that they actually have very few social skills as well as just the general appreciation and understanding of how to interact with one another.
Jeremy feels this both within his social life and throughout his current work. Jeremy’s tension seems to be in accepting the theory of change that he finds he is working within.

That’s a bit of a tough piece in terms of there’s a lot of different theories of change within social justice work and within different organisations, within different movements… If I don’t authentically believe in the work that I’m doing then it would be time to leave and time to look for another job.

Jeremy would love to be doing more of these activities but will have to improve how he prioritizes his work commitments to be successful with the lifestyle – career balance. His father will continue to play a significant role in his life and likely be the role model he has been, supporting, encouraging, and admiring Jeremy’s commitment to his passions. Jeremy however recognizes he will need to find creative ways to switch off if he is to maintain a sustainable work-life balance.

**AMY: Adventures of a forest girl**

Amy is an intelligent, proactive, confident 19 year-old with an infectious sense of wonder, and obvious comfort around other people. Amy has been working within environmental advocacy from a ‘reconnection to nature’ movement perspective since the age of 16. Many of the campaigns and projects Amy has been involved in relate to outdoor environmental recreation, play, health and well-being, and the need to maintain a connection to nature from childhood for sustained protection, care, and passion for natural surroundings. Amy describes her work as “reconnecting youth to nature and developing leadership skills in young people so they can mobilize teams in their community.” Her recent work includes leading youth through programs to promote positive place-based connections to nature at a provincial, national, and
international level. Amy also coordinates large gatherings of youth fostering environmental understanding through outdoor recreation and experiential learning. Alongside studying at university, Amy says her work is “awesome, challenging, largely independent but then super collaborative, inspiring and sometimes intimidating!” She has been an active member on the board of an organization enhancing the connection between ecological health and human health, and has been a strong advocate for the value of getting outside. Her advocacy work would therefore be considered behavioural and shifting consciousness as it relates to purpose and outcomes of her work. Amy considers herself an early follower, being one of the first people to get involved with advocacy but usually not the first of her friends and peers.

She was excited to highlight her recreation activities; much of her time outside of work is spent camping, rock climbing, hiking, sea-kayaking. Amy emphasizes a more than spiritual connection to nature and lives a low carbon lifestyle, riding her bike and eating vegan. Many of Amy’s memories include being outside, being with family, and sharing experiences with others. Amy often brought up family and the important role they play in her progression through the child and nature movement as well as providing her with the grounding in her own relationship with her natural surroundings:

At the root of it all, your family and your home is your foundation. I guess I can’t speak for everyone but it’s my foundation. So everything that I do stems from them… It’s nice to have that… those people to talk to and those people to be silly with and stuff, because they set your tone for the day. Being able to talk to your family about things and stuff is pretty awesome… Yeah, then there are obvious role models like my family and stuff.
Amy gains strength and courage from the presence of her parents in her life. Unlike Jeremy, Amy’s parents are not involved in environmental and or social justice advocacy and find it difficult to keep track on what she is doing. She does take ownership for not communicating with her parents what she does and why she does what she does.

My parents don’t even know the depth to what I work on and I’ll just be like “Okay, I’ve got to go to a meeting now.” My dad will go “What’s this for?” and I’m like “Blah-blah-blah” and he’s like “Oh, so is that connected to that?” and I’m like “No, Dad, that’s a completely different thing.” He’s like “Oh, good. Well, what’s it connected to?” I’m like “Well, it’s connected to A, not C and B is sometimes connected to C but not always connected to A” and he’s like “What? Can you write this down for me or something?” and I never write it down for him and I’ve never really truly explained how each one of where I work is connected or if it’s not connected.

Having been home-schooled from a boat traveling the coasts of Western Australia, Amy recognizes her transformative connections to the natural surroundings were shared at a young age with her brother.

My brother and I were learning math and science and social studies just by being outside and we were given the freedom to go off on our kayaks for the whole day and come back when we wanted to… Just that freedom and that feeling of independence when you’re outside; it’s obviously pretty awesome for an 8-year old and then considering that I had up until I was 12, the unstructured, free kind of environment… and it was a positive relationship for my brother and I.
Amy and I were introduced through the child and nature movement and programs that encourage youth to engage with the outdoors. As we are both Australian born, and shared interests in youth outdoors engagement I recognized similarities with Amy early. From the start, Amy spoke candidly, twisting a little tongue in cheek at some questions and situations. For example upon opening with the criteria for participation and asking if this “about summed you up”, Amy replied, “No, I am much more than that [chuckle], but for the sake of this research, yeah, I fit those characteristics.” The conversations that followed were easy and comfortable. Amy and I shared many related experiences such as travel, family activities, challenges, and our work. This is validated with notes in my field journal “I think I sensed in her what I sensed in myself especially with my work and the vulnerable aspect of being born and raised elsewhere.” I recognized that Amy had similar experiences to me as a young adult and found excitement in living through her stories.

The beliefs, concerns and causes Amy connects with are largely grounded in a spiritual connection with nature. Amy dislikes the role competition plays in youth advocacy. She presented competitiveness in her work for resources, employment, status, and acclaim added unnecessary tension. The expectation is that youth will compete out of necessity to improve ones skills and enhance experiences.

There is always that competitive thing and I think it’s not even noticeable all the time because you’re so used to people trying to one-up each other. Not even just one-up each other but try and silently prove that they are capable of whatever it is. It seems so silly but you’re always trying to prove that you’re capable of doing whatever it is and that you can do a
better job than someone else so you should have that position over someone else.

Amy believes that getting outside and being with nature offers some of the best mechanism for inspiring change. Although she avoids being labeled an activist “I don’t really see myself as an activist or anything like that” she sees hope in “so many good people who make such great influences in your life,” and feels society should be “able to embody something more than just sustainable.” Amy found the years of structure and prescribed learning at high school a struggle. Her infectious attitude for the natural surroundings demonstrates her persona and the values she places on demonstrating the change you would like to see. She believes that demonstrating a connection to nature will encourage others to also enjoy nature, and act to protect it. “It’s so awesome to see people doing things that they’re really into and they just evoke a sense of love and excitement about whatever. It’s so really cool and so true that when you are excited, people will come.”

She prefers learning from doing and being in the outdoors learning from her surroundings. Her experiences traveling throughout South East Asia for a gap year after grade 12 offer an important glimpse to how passionate Amy is about her work.

Oh man! I really should get back there so that there’s something happening… I’d feel like… I’d be in, I don’t know, Thailand or something and I’d be like “When I get back, I’m so excited to do this”, kind of just trying to make up for something… So I guess that was always there and then when I… at the end of my trip… actually, this was in Indonesia. There was a chance to go to this Legacy [leadership] Camp that I was in last year and this year again as a trainer. There was this big application
process that I had to do and I felt like I needed to devote tons of time to it so I was taking two days out of the end of my trip to just sit down at this computer in this tiny little hole because I felt like I had to do it, I really didn’t have this choice.

Amy’s nurturing yet consuming passion to support others in experiencing the balanced human-nature relationship as she does are considerable. A story she presented about a young boy she mentored, as part of a get outside – reconnect with nature – program, provides a good example of how Amy views the world and the value of nature and young people connecting to create change.

At the start of the week, he [young boy participant] was pretty shy and stuff and then by the end, he had a connection with everyone and we each got these little bracelets. He put it on and then at the end, we did a sharing circle and everyone shared something about their experience and memories they’ll take away. He held his wrist up and was like... “Each of you are family and you were the first friends I’ve ever had and probably the best I’ll have” ... he was so emotional about it that it was so powerful because it was really real and him feeling those feelings for the first time that he connected to people, he could have that confidence to approach people and make friends, was just awesome.

She followed this with a story about how the boy took what he had learned with her and created a program enhancing his own community connection to the outdoors.

He had eight kids in the end and all of them were kind of like misfits and he emailed us later to tell us what happened. The bunch of people that came, none of them really got to hang out with people at school because
they were kind of pushed away so it was one chance for all of them to come together and have fun. There was this one girl, he said, that was always bullied and has never really connected with anyone at school and she came up to him afterwards and said she really enjoyed hanging out with everyone and that she thought that she made friends and had a really good time.

As Amy presents in her memory of the experience lived through the boy, Amy believes these human-nature relationships have significant value to support communities, social understanding, and youth development.

So just hearing those stories is so cool, especially for a 13-year old kid who had no confidence to saying at the end, he was like “You know, I have the confidence that I can make a difference in my community and then I can make friends and I just want to thank you for it”. It was just so cool to see. Amy holds onto the hopeful narrative in her work with youth and reconnection to nature, but struggles communicating this work with other close friends and colleagues. Amy presented a feeling of disconnect to those who are seduced by what she suggests is a “dark sense of hopelessness.” This was validated in my journal.

I felt on a few occasions that Amy was trying to avoid responding and elaborating on certain stories. These mostly related to tension in the idea of seeing a ‘dark’ side to the future. She seemed uncomfortable to talk about (at least visually uncomfortable) climate crisis, the rhetoric (as I think she might represent it), and the political nature of advocacy work. Her representing herself within the ‘connection to nature’ paradigm related strongly to how I also see myself.
I asked Amy if she had ever felt exhausted, cynical or unable to effectively do what she wanted to accomplish with her work. This led to dialogue about Amy’s reasons for avoiding climate advocacy.

I think it’s kind of funny the reason that I don’t do a lot of climate change advocacy or anything like that. I don’t think that I know enough information to back myself up and so that’s the kind of thing where I’ve shied away from because I feel like if I were to be isolated, I wouldn’t be able to handle it because I don’t know enough information about everything, just scientifically-based. That’s why I kind of more lean towards the idea of getting outside and reconnecting with nature. It’s more open and people can relate to it easier than the more scientific issues.

Amy not only avoids climate advocacy she finds the negative messaging associated with most climate advocacy and communications uninspiring.

[When messaging such as] Climate catastrophe! Everything’s going to flood unless you do this! It puts me off and I feel like it puts people who don’t necessarily know the information off as well so they won’t be able to take a part of it. It feels like you’re just kind of preaching to the choir and pushing people [away] who maybe want to be a part of this movement.

Amy however is also uncertain what she thinks the future of the planet will look like. Her thoughts for the future and the way she envisions what the planet will be like for people when she is much older is split into an optimistic and pessimistic vision.

When I think about the future, I think of some really exciting things that could happen but it all depends. That’s kind of a fuzzy thing for me, looking into the future, I like to think positively and I hope that it’s going
to be a little bit, you know, different. It could be a little bit scary and daunting I guess but I think it’s kind of pointless to think about it that way because fear may mobilise some things but not others.

This splitting of the reality and the hopeful vision demonstrates why Amy separates herself from climate activism. She validates the fear associated with many doom and gloom campaigns creating a “dark sense of hopelessness (Interview #1).” Instead she finds a more hopeful approach working towards positive and hopeful messaging.

It is such a large deep abyss. I guess I look at it more realistically than anything. [Hopeful messaging vs. fearful messaging] Then we’re just pulling each other in two different directions and the future won’t align into something that is positive for everyone. So that way, it’s kind of disconcerting.

While taking “time out” and enjoying a gap year travelling, Amy found it hard to completely separate herself from her advocacy work back home. This is evident in her stories and adds to why Amy believes she might have experienced something like burnout, but is not completely sure.

Yeah, I think I have, [experienced burnout]. I think it was actually more… well, I’ve always been really bad at saying no to things and I feel like a lot of people are pretty bad at that but I’m getting somewhat better. I remember towards the end of high school, I was a lot more involved in various different things rather than just focusing my energy on one and I was just shot. By the end of high school, I wasn’t even really thinking about school at that point and I was stretching my hands and feet and
head and whatever it was in different directions. So that was not a good feeling [chuckle].

Amy followed with details highlighting the potential loneliness in her work.

I noticed that when I’m alone, my motivation for things really drops down and even though I’m so passionate about it, when you’re working through on your computer just the whole organising thing, you totally lose sight of the reasons why you’re doing it… I was having a really hard time towards the end of it because I was like “Why am I doing this? I’m spending 12 hours a day trying to organise these people and I haven’t been able to see you [them]” and it just… it didn’t feel right but then once the week happened [event being organized] and you ran it by 30 young people who were so stoked then it gets you motivated and then … it keeps you going for the next couple of months and then you have another experience like that and it keeps you going for the next couple of months. It kind of goes up and down a windy road which is really difficult but it’s lovely for that one week.

Like Jeremy, she considers herself a bit of a homebody but in contrast to Jeremy has a burning sense of adventure to explore and discover. Unlike Jeremy her adventurous spirit has roots in her families wanderings over the years.

I think it was rooted in, I don’t know, my experiences as a kid… my brother and I were home schooled and we lived on the coast, going up and down on a boat. So I think just learning this serious, deep love of nature and the world around me… and then it’s also a positive relationship with myself and all this beautiful stuff around.
In addition to traveling, reflection and meditative techniques have been part of Amy’s repertoire for managing her emotional and spiritual connection. The combination of all her strategies to remain balanced offers personal support for her in dealing with the emotional dimensions of how she envisions the future. Some of Amy’s most vivid memories come from her experiences practicing her solo-sit-spot, a place where she sits for an hour or more and reflects on whatever comes to mind. When probed further about where her heart goes while visioning, reflecting, and mediating with her solo-sit-spot she presented a place that inspires her, connects her, deepens her relationship with nature, and centres both her emotional and spiritual reality. This place however also highlights her desire to “run away” and disassociate with society.

The most recurring thing is that I just want to run away and that I just want to become… I always say to myself “I want to be forest nymph”, this goddess of the forest that is always surviving on the necessities of shelter and finding comfort in that, not having to spread myself thin and just really be connected to my roots and doing that.

She has a few favourite places and returns to them often to sit and reflect on life, her place within the environment, and absorb the energy from nature. Without consciously trying, she takes time to recognise the beauty in nature, paying attention to the smaller details, “the scattered pebbles in a puddle”, as much as the more charismatic aesthetics. Amy has fond and visceral memories of dramatic sunsets, storms crossing oceans, and the hue changing within mountain scenery.

Then there are other days where the wind just smacks you in the face. You can see the tide crashing against the shore… I was writing my journal up and I had three dogs with me… I love dogs. They were all around me, just
sleeping because we had this really long walk so we were all exhausted…

It was just before this storm was coming in and I remember writing it down; it was like this dragon… I always think of Gonzales Point as this dragon because there’s a Chinese cemetery down there and it seems to fit. So the storm was coming in and it was pushing out the orange sunset. I remember writing about the orange and how there was the fire of the dragon and it was getting pushed away and pushed towards the mountainside and Mt Doug. Then yeah, it’s like the dragon came closer and closer and the wind started picking up and then it kind of rests, like it’s had its last big fire and just dissipated all around and then it started raining.

Experiences like this, where her mind is allowed to wander without connecting to her work or purpose in her actions seem to balance Amy. It provides her balance within her work, family, outdoor pursuits, and vision for the future. Within these memories Amy prefers to engage herself in positive messaging of hope and love. She believes this is found in being within and amongst the natural surroundings. Amy does not so much surround herself with optimistic people, as much as people seek Amy’s company and shared experience.

Summary

The two contrasting accounts of advocacy and engagement from Jeremy and Amy offer a glimpse as to how youth might form their identity through the exploration of values, beliefs, morals, and passions. Jeremy and Amy, although working towards an overall similar objective in their engagement – a more livable, equitable, just, and sustainable future – have differing theories of change. As we will explore later in
Chapter 6 and 7 youth identity and formation of self plays a significant role in the level of engagement and processes undertaken to maintain emotional well-being within advocacy. In the following chapter I will present my personal account of the research and highlight the emotional themes I recognized in reviewing my reflections and notes entered after each interview in my field journal. These reflections and emotions offer accountability to the themes I suggest later in chapter six and seven and act as a guiding post for how I personally engaged with the research.
Chapter Five: An account of inter-subjectivity and reflexivity:

The only reason my emotions are involved in it at all, it’s because the thought of losing some of the things we have through the continued disrespect of our environments, that’s an emotional thing for me…. Part of it could be in my control, lots of it won’t be but it’s just refreshing to have the chance to do that (Dempsey).

Dialogue between my participants and myself include a number of nuances that do not appear in written transcript. The way in which I interacted with the participants adds depth and importance for understanding the meaning frames conjured through free association and open dialogue. Throughout the analysis, I referred to and cross-referenced excerpts from a personal field journal written after each interview to account for my interpretation of themes. As suggested by Walkerdine et al (2001) and Hollway and Jefferson (2000) the intersubjective account between research participant and the researcher provides substantial data for relational analysis. In exploring the relationships of social class, safety, and ethnicity for females growing up in the UK, Walkerdine et al (2001) recognized that feelings and emotional containers were transferred between subject and researcher during the interview process. These feelings and emotions were suggested to impact the relationship between both researcher and participant and have impact on the relational content presented throughout the dialogue. There is importance and validity for using the researchers’ own experiences in the interview to triangulate meaning. The transference and counter-transference of experiences, emotions, and tensions between both interviewer and subject should be included in the analysis in order to add validity. Situating “self as researcher” in the analysis can assist the triangulation of thematic references within interviews (Ely et al, 1999, p.337-339). The intersubjective relationship is therefore an integral piece of the method, applied through reflexivity of the interview experience.
As a means to demonstrate the experience I had within the interview process I have extrapolated a number of key emotions and feelings described within my field journal. I used the emotions described in my field journal as a cross check against analysed themes whilst analysing interviews. Appendix D provides an example of how I used emotional themes in my field journal within the thematic table created as part of interview analysis.

My memories and experiences that led me to undertake this research (see prologue) have also been considered. The overall direction for the thesis purpose and intention is informed by the perspective I brought to the research after feeling exhausted, cynical, and disempowered by my ability to make change in previous and current work. This chapter is therefore a summary of the feelings I have expressed in my field journal written directly after each interview and cross checked for the projection of emotions to themes associated with participants. Recognition of these emotions provided me the cautious understanding for what was being presented by participants during the interviews.

**Power and control**

At times I found it hard to completely engage with some participants. There seemed to be a power dynamic, surfacing in analysis of transcript and journal.

While interviewing Sarah, I felt awkward, lost, and questioned my ability to conduct the interview. My notes present an internal power struggle. I knew Sarah was well skilled with open dialogue as it was part of her work on the crisis-line. Why was this a problem for me? I wanted to not only come across as her equal and adequate peer but to also demonstrate control of the interview. This is presented in the number of times and length of time in which I spoke (controlled the dialogue) in our first interview. I did not allow for Sarah to just engage and maintain an open dialogue.
My interviews with Sarah provide relevant examples:

*I felt kind of stale in the interview. I do not think that Sarah was unenthused but she was also not completely present. I often found myself trying hard (maybe too hard) to open Sarah to more depth in her dialogue…*

Further to the dialogue and prose with Sarah are references to power in my reflections to the interviews with Olive:

*I got frustrated with myself and on a couple of occasions placed blame on Olive for not responding clearly…. Did I have control? Was power and control as the interviewer important to me? I was upset and frustrated that this had been taken from me. I was stressed in this part of the interview and even thought about how it would be if either of us just ended it. We continued and it was great that we did.*

Although I recognised the dynamic of power and control across interviews with Kirra, Sarah, Olive, and Torrance the strongest feelings were throughout interviews with Sarah. As such, my analysis in relation to overall findings has very cautiously included interpretation of themes from the interviews with Sarah.

**Inadequacy and doubting ability of self**

I entered the research with limited experience and understanding of psychology and its many specialised fields. My understanding for ecopsychology and psychoanalytic research was based within one graduate course called the *Psychology of Environmental Education*. Prior to the interviews I spent hours reading and reflecting on psychosocial literature, yet I still felt like I was exploring foreign territory once interviews commenced. Throughout the interviews I recognised that I was feeling a sense of inadequacy, doubt, and insecurity about my ability to carry out the research interviews. It is possible that I projected these anxieties onto participants and I made note of this in my field journal.
My clumsy nature with presenting some questions caused a little confusion at times. I think I am clumsy in that I am trying too hard to be good at this method. Is there anxiety around my effectiveness as a researcher?

**Fear of being judged:**

Developing from the feeling of inadequacy and anxieties surrounding my ability to conduct the research came a fear of being judged. I was afraid that the participants, my supervisor, other academics, and reviewers of this research would judge me for the quality of my research. Although my relationships with my supervisor and participants were strong, respectful, and honest I still carried this fear into the work and recognised the tension this produced when interviews became stale, awkward, or incoherent.

Quickly into the interview my feelings went from excited and comfortable to disappointed and anxious, and wishing I had better designed some of my questions. I found I was back tracking, backing up, and covering up for miscommunicated and poor articulation of questions. Olive, was honest and direct about her comfort with certain framing of questions and it added a tension that I found I wanted to avoid… My feeling then went to wondering if Olive actually thought I was a good interview facilitator, and whether our values were similar, did she like me?

This fear added tensions within my analysis. Throughout the analysis the challenge was recognizing my fear of judgment. This may have been projected on some of the participants as I noted this same affective container with multiple participants. Fear of judgment and its relevance to my interpretation of interviews was therefore navigated with great caution. For interviews where this was a strong theme represented within participants’ dialogue, I have rechecked interview transcripts to explore the sequencing in the dialogue for which the theme was established.
Introspection

In the process of conducting the interviews I often found my mind wandering off and thinking about how the story being presented had a connection to something I personally had experienced. It often made me think of family, friends, loved ones, influential experiences, and tensions in my life.

The emotions developed throughout the interview went from joy to intrigue to respect and connection to tearful introspective. We both seemed at times to have tears swell in our eyes. For Jeremy this was when talking about his potential leaving the movement and fear of what guilt this might bring, for me it was when the family scenario was described and my thoughts went to how empty I feel for having a disconnected relationship with my family in Australia.

The recognition of this emotional behavior helped in understanding why depth in certain areas of dialogue were achieved with participants compared to dialogue that did not seem to get too deep. I found that introspection tendencies enabled me to ask deeper probing questions as I found myself unconsciously more connected with the participants.

Attraction

It seemed hard to maintain complete disconnect from the experiences and stories being presented by many participants. I caught myself feeling a sense of intrigue and attraction to a couple of participants. The attraction was at times much like the attraction of a likeable character in a theatre production. The attraction may be presented as an emotional closeness in which I felt a stronger presence when particular moments and memories were being presented. This provided a connection that seemed to be unique and spontaneous.
My level of attachment and connection to [Kelvin] seemed strong. This may be because I see myself a little bit in Kelvin: optimistic, adventurous, outdoors enthusiast, and positive framing to almost all questions.

Particular sequencing of dialogue following moments where I felt emotionally closer to the participant were dealt with in analysis by looking at the sequencing before and after the moments to confirm whether the dialogue was guided by the emotional connection or not.

Joy and warmth

There were times where I felt extremely comfortable with participants as if the interview was really two friends ‘hanging-out’ over a coffee.

I really like Olive and her warm, yet somewhat goofy presence. She reminds me of a Buddhist nun I knew in Thailand (although a younger version). The warmth she creates helps engage in open conversation.

The level of comfort in the interview was such that I felt I could wander off course and dive into other questions… I did not really care if it was not legitimate or suitable for the research, I wanted to have a conversation with Kirra as I liked her style, character, and felt compelled to enjoy the conversation rather than focus too much on the research.

The dialogue that was produced by interviews in which complete sense of warmth and comfort was established was rich with open and free dialogue. Participants presented memories and experiences with greater clarity and description. It should be noted that all interviews conducted face-to-face offered this feeling, while the three participants interviewed over Skype had a more sporadically associated sense of joy and warmth. I was cognizant and weary of being biased in analysis to the experiences where the interview was most comfortable compared to parts of interviews where I felt
a little more mechanical in my approach. The one stand out interview that seemed most challenging to gain the comfortable, hanging-out relationship was with Sarah in our first interview. My analysis was therefore very cautious in representing themes when not supported by two or three other participants when recognized from the first interview with Sarah.

**Protectiveness**

I felt a need to protect some of the participants and questioned why I was protecting their stories or character.

*Throughout the interview I found myself hesitating on questions which probed Dempsey further for emotional based tensions. On a couple of occasions I relaxed the atmosphere with softer tone, laughter, over expression of comfort… I noticed I tried to calm things with more intent listening… why did I refrain from asking deeper questions?*

*I felt in the first part of the interview I was a little protective of Amy and her emotions surrounding her experiences. I refrained from going too deep into her stories / experiences and struggled prompting the ‘how did that make you feel’ type questions. Was this me being a protective father figure or was it the Australian connection and wanting to protect a fellow Aussie?*

All interviews were conducted with the unnamed safety regarding vulnerabilities. Jeremy and Amy were both immediately open to removing tensions of vulnerabilities and this surprised me. I took this as a need to protect the space and limit how much I probed, even though the opportunity was presented and likely welcomed. This is likely a reflection on my own vulnerabilities relating to my understanding of my personal beliefs, values, and theory of change.

In my analysis I noticed areas that I wished for more detail. On a couple of occasions I recognized that the participant also was looking to open up and engage with
a more emotional dialogue. My protective self was trying to limit the amount of emotional context I would have to manage after each interview. Being an emotional person, I expected some emotions to be projected onto me and that I would have to deal with these feelings. Protecting participants from going into depth on particular subjects, such as struggles with identity, may have been a self-protecting mechanism. I did not want to have to answer the questions about my identity in relation to motivations, beliefs, and values within work and lifestyle.

Pride and excitement

When things were going well, I felt a sense of pride, I felt I was made for this research and had the know-how to conduct engaging and meaningful interviews. I felt compelled to find an emotional connection to each participant so that we could share some type of inner experience. It was not particularly evident, but in hindsight I sense I wanted to feel connected as a means of reducing the isolation associated with being the interviewer.

I actually noticed myself feel proud about how well the interview was going [with Kelvin]... It was interesting that I also wanted to present my story. I wanted Kelvin to know more about me.

A note on reflexivity and my personal journey with this method.

The personal experience for me was as equally valuable as the information collected through the interview method. It was like I was a participant and the experience helped me explore my personal theory of change, values, beliefs, and motivations for doing the work I do. The research also helped me deepen an understanding of how youth relate to the world around them, the challenges of working with the emotional contexts in socio-ecological issues, and authentic youth
engagement. From a personal learning perspective, the use of follow-up reflective journal entries helped validate what I was feeling after each interview. There were so many emotions contained within each interview and some that did not seem to relate to the content or dialogue. Body language, outside distractions, personal experience, mood, activities undertaken prior to the interviews, and relationship with the participant seemed to be key categories for my personal learning experience. I was equally awkward, nervous, and cumbersome throughout all interviews. With this, I was consistent.

What was not written explicitly in my journal but remained very cognizant in my mind are the tensions I carry within my own work. Part of this exploration was to understand, in general perspective, how youth interact with their emotions. My interests were exploring the passions and interests of youth and how emotions informed decisions for engagement and personal efficacy. What was not prevalent at the start of the research was that how I make meaning of my vocation, motivations, and values is something that I am personally trying to answer. I am not sure if I am the right fit, personality and ideology for environmental advocacy work. There are internal tensions I have to address in order to feel the fulfillment in this line of work. Over the past couple of years I have felt disempowered, hopeless, and uncertain about the purpose of the work I do. I recognized through the reflection process of this research, with acknowledgment of the transference of emotions from participants, that my personal feelings for the world and my work surfaced. I fear the future that my children will inherit. I do not agree with messaging based on fear and negativity to make change, yet, I find myself engaging with it regularly. I believe that we cannot advocate for change without reaching the emotional contexts that inform how we act. These were all feelings and beliefs that surfaced through the reflective process of the research.
As such, I feel this research was equally about my personal efficacy and sense of agency as much as asking about youth burnout. The feelings detailed above demonstrate the breadth of emotional experiences involved with undertaking work outside one’s usual area of expertise. There were many times within the research timeline that I felt like my process was hopeless, not worth it, of little interest to a wide audience, and too big of a question to answer. At times I felt like the more I had to do, the more I wanted to let it all go. There were similar attitudes, feelings, and emotions that were presented to varying degrees of intensity throughout the interviews with participants. Most important and further to the complete narrative within this thesis is my newly acquired hope. I have hope for our future based on the tremendous skills, experiences, passions, and courage that youth like those included in this research. The reflective component of this research was like a companion providing therapy for the loss of efficacy.
Chapter Six: Portraits of youth engagement and advocacy

It’s almost like the baseline for being a young activist is to be overworked, underpaid, stressed the fuck out, and to have unhealthy habits (Kirra, Interview 1).

Introduction

Youth lead diverse, busy, and multi-directional lives (Andolina et al, 2002; Bibby, 2009; Christens, 2011), developing a sense of self and establishing the identity or character to serve them throughout the rest of their lives (Ginwright & James, 2002; Harré, 2007; Kirshner, 2007). The youth within this research support Bibby’s (2009) assessment of the emerging millennial generation in Canada not feeling reciprocal trust of social systems in Canada. Although it is possible to put the finger on the pulse of engagement and motivation, as with Bibby’s assessment, there is a rapidly changing landscape of youth engagement, values, and ethics within tighter age ranges. For example the youth age range for this research showed some interesting differences in how they believe change can occur. Many of the older members in this cohort had assumptions for the influence of ‘people power’ at the political level: “Youth are different from the people who are holding office right now, they’ve got a lot of great, new, bright ideas and they’re the kind of people who we kind of want to put in seats that are currently occupied” (Kyle, Interview 2), while the middle age group presented uncertainty in what approach would be most effective for change “I’ve been thinking actually a lot about anarchism and socialism and wondering [laughter] what is the best way to move forwards.” (Victoria, Interview 2). The youngest members of the participant cohort presented a struggle between the power dynamics of obligation, trust, and ownership in relation to change movements “We basically do what the people in power tell us to do, which is a really twisted way of working and I don’t think it really resonates with me and my values.” (Kirra, Interview 1) The commitment to
creativity was shared by all but the older members of the cohort. A common thread throughout all participants however was the sharing of core values such as the importance of family, the earning of trust, the belief that we have a responsibility to earth and its inhabitants, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. In addition, other values that stood out amongst this group of youth include: passion towards a movement, a commitment to make change and the assertion that change is needed, loyalty to mentors, boldness in the face of adversity – courage to fail, and truth-seeking.

The lifestyle and responsibilities of participants also have similarities. Participants noted enjoyment for time outdoors, yet all indicated the significance technology has on their life: “I’m creating content for a website and doing social media work for other people and doing a community engagement piece” (Kelvin, Interview 2). Participants indicated they were in a time of mixed personal – professional growth and discovery “I know that I’ll be very surprised if I’m... you know, in 20 years or 30 years I’m still doing the exact same thing, right?” (Dempsey, Interview 2). It was also acknowledged that competition for resources, employment, and opportunity was significant within youth.

A lot of it is just young people who care and they’re like “I only slept two hours, woohoo!” Also just getting the best jobs or getting the best internships or getting the signatures on a petition... there’s a lot of competitiveness, just ill feelings and I think like for that reason it is probably why people normally get depressed if they’re not doing ok because they think they are in a competition or something (Kirra, Interview 2).

The participants had strong convictions for the positive role of youth leadership in society and believed that youth should be provided with enhanced responsibilities.
Right now, the vast majority, I’d say, of young people aren’t given responsibilities or opportunities that lead to them having a lot of power in society, whatever that might mean; whether it means having a lot of money or being in politics, making policy. (Kirra, Interview 1).

This was however in contrast to how most youth perceive the effectiveness of being called ‘Youth Leaders of Tomorrow’, “It could almost do more harm then good” (Torrance, Interview 1).

Overall the youth I interviewed struggle with their work-life balance. “How can I be more comfortable saying no to certain things so that I can frankly be able to prioritise and have a better work/life balance” (Jeremy, Interview 2). All participants understood that they had civic obligations. Additionally the dependency on an income was acknowledged, if not despised

I think it’s a little bit more about trying to sustain it and trying to figure out a way to make it work so that 5, 10 years down the road, you’re going to be well off enough that you don’t really need to think about how little that pay cheque is and you’re okay with living the life that you live” (Kelvin, Interview 2).

Aside from the time and energy they commit to the issues, causes, and passions they advocate for, this group of youth did not seem all that unique in contrast to other less environmentally or social justice engaged youth within the same age range as described by Bibby (2009) in an assessment of the millennial generation in Canada.

**Introducing the Participants: Pen Portraits.**

**Kirra: Youth civic engagement and social justice advocacy**

Kirra has a soft, gentle, yet poised demeanor. For a 19 year old, she is quite an accomplished organiser, campaigner, and youth engagement practitioner. Kirra works
multiple positions with four different organisations from youth civic engagement leadership to social justice organising. Kirra has been engaged with advocacy work for four years, and describes her focus area of advocacy work as youth engagement, mobilization, and child-youth and nature connections. She describes her actual day-to-day work as community development, youth empowerment, and organizing. Her highest level of education is graduation from high school. She suggests that she is sometimes hesitant to join campaigns and activities, choosing pragmatically for what to engage in. She also at times wishes there were not so many campaigns and activities for youth in Victoria, BC.

Kirra has participated as a youth delegate at the UN Convention on Climate Change, has been a board member for different organisations, and is often approached by regional district councils to provide recommendations on youth engagement. Since high school, Kirra has been called “compost,” “the enviro person,” and “hippy”. These are labels Kirra is proud to own. Kirra considers herself a facilitator “helping others direct their energies and passions to action.” In her work she also leads mindfulness workshops with an emphasis on connection with nature.

She attributes much of her environmental ethics to her Mum, such as starting her high school’s environment club at the age of 15 and initiating a composting campaign. She has worked on many projects such as organising to prevent development within a pocket of coastal ecosystem, working on climate justice and resource issues, and generating awareness surrounding health and well being for youth within her regional district. She enjoys the practice and emotional balance provided by yoga and meditation. She also finds the time to get outside and be with nature. Kirra lives a basic lifestyle with limited luxuries and although quite passionate about the issues she works within suggests that a large part for her doing the work right now is to pay the bills.
Kirra is quite mindful, compassionate, and seems to have a strong sense of self. She has a spiritual and holistic view of the environment, combining health, well-being, and community resilience. Kirra sees the beauty in people coming together around a common passion, something she calls the “power of possibility.” She finds comfort in rituals such as shared meals, heart circles, and community gatherings. She believes that “cultivating community is the most important thing we can do for our happiness.” Additionally, Kirra is a proud and passionate feminist supporting anti-oppression and woman’s rights: “Feminism inspires me a lot, seeing the power of women doing really awesome stuff.”

On multiple occasions throughout our time together, Kirra brought up the challenges associated with power dynamics. We basically do what the people in power tell us to do, which is a really twisted way of working and I don’t think it really resonates with me and my values… it’s not as important to feel I have power in my work necessarily as much as it is making sure everyone has power and feels like it’s evenly distributed.”

Power is an important concept in Kirra’s personal development, “young people aren’t given responsibilities or opportunities that lead to them having a lot of power in society.” Kirra places significant importance to power in shifting the momentum and making change for a more “hopeful future.” She believes that respect and trust should be earned rather than expected. Kirra has deep passions for a just and sustainable world, she carries much of this on her shoulders and demonstrates courage to maintain composure “I can’t just take on the world and change the entire world. I can just work to do what one person can and that belief is a lot less paralyzing than having to take care of the world.” With this weight of the world on her shoulders Kirra believes she has experienced burnout:
I feel like I’ve experienced burnout and this may lead to some of my overdramatic-ness but at least three times or something. … I felt perpetually exhausted over the last two years through all the different work I have done, but also due to my own poor time management.

Although Kirra recognizes part of the reason she is so “worn thin” is due to her own “poor time management,” she finds it difficult to switch off. “I think it is still like glorification of busy, I feel like I need to be busy all the time.” She wants to focus more on self-care and maintain her energies in one or two areas of advocacy, rather than spreading herself thin across a large set of passions. With this said, Kirra does not feel she has found her life calling, she is still forming her identity and exploring where her passions and values lie: “I don’t think I’ve found my real niche kind of thing for my work.”

**Kelvin: Conservation campaigner and youth leadership advocate**

As a kid, Kelvin loved water. Even though he could not swim he was often trying to get into any body of water. His parents had to rescue him on numerous occasions. As a young boy Kelvin enjoyed being outside, somewhat reckless, and getting himself into a little mischief. The landscape of Ontario provided the backdrop for Kelvin’s formative years building a strong bond with nature. Kelvin, now 24 years old, spends the majority of his time raising awareness to protect grizzly bears and their habitat in south-western BC. In addition to his academic achievements (Undergrad in Biology; Masters Degree in Resource Management), Kelvin co-founded a youth-based environmental organisation while in his early 20s. He continues to direct this organisation alongside a team of youth across Canada. Kelvin has been engaged with advocacy work for two to five years, and describes his focus area of advocacy work as environmental conservation and protected
areas. He describes his actual day-to-day work as community engagement and communications. He suggests that he is often in the first wave of followers to campaigns, choosing pragmatically about what to get involved with.

Kelvin spends time reflecting on his experiences, visioning the future, career, and identity he sees for himself, and seeks advice when needing further perspective. Kelvin is fairly modest about his accomplishments and gives praise to those he has worked with over the years. He attributes much of the influence in his life to experiences as a kid.

A lot of the memories I have as a kid in playing outdoors and stuff are just fun memories and I think that’s the way in which I keep my fun and so I think that’s how thinking of those really cool memories about being outside and being a little bit reckless or something like that kind of informs how I do stuff now and working in the frame of environmentalism kind of helps me keep my fun.

Kelvin’s passions for the environment, education, and commitment to conservation have led him into a campaigning role with a leading environmental non-profit.

I think the reason why I have hope and strength and courage is because I know that we’re not there yet… meaning that there’s something out there to find and that’s one thing that gives me strength, so that I know there’s not just a hopeless situation, that there’s something to work for and although we might not be quite able to see it, it’s in the distance and it’s something worth running toward.

Although Kelvin does not explicitly engage with climate change advocacy he believes it to be a significant issue that affects the future of everyone. He sees the issues as having a mix of behaviour and politically based solutions. Politically he sees those on the right much more united than those on the left. In relation to alternatives and proactive
environmentalism, he believes that the left is “so divided on things that it is hard to get stuff done.” Kelvin recognizes tensions within advocacy for which he is striving to prove wrong. His optimistic outlook gets challenged, although he does not seem to be too upset or deterred.

It’s something that you’re kind of told about when you get into the whole environmental field: “When you get into your 30s, you’re just going to stop caring about it and you’re going to want to get married and have children and you’re not going to want to care about the environment. You’re going to care about your family first” and all this kind of stuff that… I don’t know if it’s completely true. I guess I’ll just have to wait until I’m 30 to find some of that out.

With respect to youth in leadership and taking responsibility for advocacy Kelvin admits that youth are in a learning role, understanding balance, challenge, and power.

It’s actually really important to push someone a little bit further than they’re comfortable in order to understand whether or not you can be a leader, can be a follower, what things you’re good at or what things you’re not good at and I don’t think that happens a lot with some people, where they don’t understand exactly what they’re capable of because they’ve never been exposed to it and they won’t be exposed to it unless someone pushes them a little bit more. … I don’t think that we need to consistently be pushing youth and they always have to aim for perfection or whatever but I do think that we need to go a little bit outside of what we’re comfortable with and then understand whether or not it’s something that we really like or don’t like.

He believes that the messaging might also be a turn off and this combined with the fickle attributes of youth can cause them to step out of advocacy work: “a lot of youth in
society are used to really quick information or quick changes or all that kind of stuff and so when something’s a little bit tough, sometimes people feel like dropping out.” Kelvin believes that the “dooms day” messaging, particularly with climate change advocacy, is ineffective and a focus should be on more hopeful messages. In his line of work, this translates to using messages such as “saving grizzly bears” as opposed to “there are less than 200 or so remaining.”

With his knowledge and wide networks of youth across Canada, Kelvin has very few stories of others experiencing burnout. He does however believe that the power dynamic and fear of failure may lead to youth feeling uninspired.

That idea of you just really wants to be a success and so if you are not a success you automatically deem yourself a failure... I think that it’s fine to admit that there’s a failure; it doesn’t mean that you need to completely dismantle everything in your mind that associates with environmentalism. I think that happens a lot of the time, which is unfortunate.

He feels fortunate for the people that are around him and the ethical perspective his work and other activities provide.

I think for future generations, there’s still hope which I think is always a key factor... like, a change is going to come. I think that there is these youth and they’re different from the people who are holding office right now and they’ve got a lot of great, new, bright ideas and they’re the kind of people who we kind of want to put in those seats that are currently occupied.

Dempsey: Forest and Climate campaigner

Dempsey is a 25 year old forest and climate campaigner who has been working in his position with a long-time established environmental non-profit for two years.
Dempsey spends a large amount of his time campaigning for the protection of Vancouver Island forests and protection of the coast from oil spills. Dempsey has been engaged with advocacy work for two to five years, and describes his focus area of advocacy work as sustainability. He describes his actual day-to-day work as campaigning-advocacy. His highest level of education is graduation from a Bachelor degree in Geography. He suggests that he is often in the first wave of followers to campaigns, choosing pragmatically about what to get involved with.

He refers to his work as largely driven by family “I think at the heart of it, a lot of us that work in this field are coming at it because of those family reasons. That’s why I’ve spent so much time explaining sort of the reasons why I’m involved in this work.” Dempsey is Vancouver Island born and bred. He is a fifth generation resident and accounts much of his privileges in life such as university schooling to the income his family has earned over the years from a variety of resource industries. “My connection to that is precisely why I got into the kind of work I do and I’m not saying that’s ubiquitous and right across the board with every environmental activist but it is in my case.” Dempsey presented some frustrations towards the “movement”, and highlighted a number of scenarios emphasizing his cynicism towards part of the movement.

I think part of it is just the way that we look at a lot of these issues. I think the terms ‘expert’ and ‘analyst’ and ‘scientist’ are thrown around a lot. A lot of the debates around the issues that I work on in environmental activism are really fact-based, you know? It’s sort of keep the bias out of it, keep the emotions out of it whereas I think these heart-driven, emotional reasons should be more part of the conversation.

Dempsey’s family and the family roots to Vancouver Island are two of the most important things to him. Growing up Dempsey spent many years writing letters to his
Dad from home while his Dad was out at sea fishing as a gill-netter along the west coast from Alaska to Washington State. He believes that he experienced first hand the impacts of a “tragedy of the commons” with fish depletion from overfishing. His memories of the time his Dad was out working the fish run is vivid. He remembers the collapse of fish stocks along the west coast and loss of his Dad’s job. In contrast to the oil and gas industry and overwhelming costs associated with resource extraction Dempsey appreciates the position he has as coming from a resource family. Because of this he enjoys and values his work at the interface between environmental and labour movement and hopes to reduce tensions between the two movements.

It’s easy to get overwhelmed and defeated. You know, there’s times where oil and gas hasn’t been on the radar that it is today, where forestry and fishing did take up that role and that these are people that, just want to cut all the trees, catch all the fish, drill all the wells and that make money and that’ll take care of us. Because I have the connection, because I’m from a resource family, I know that’s not true and I don’t think it’s true in the oil and gas sector as well.

Dempsey is passionate for the connection between environmental issues and labor issues. He recognises his unique position to have grown up within the resource industry and working within environmental advocacy. He believes that everyone has the right to experience the beauty of the west coast and those who have greater generational connection have the right to consider the value of the resources. Dempsey has great respect for the traditional perspectives of First Nations. The following presents a little about Dempsey’s character and values for working in solidarity with First Nations.
You know, if we go forward trying to stop environmentally destructive projects and to move our economic systems towards more sustainable, more equitable, more responsible ways of operating but we’re not doing it in a responsible way and with enough recognition of indigenous rights and title then while our motivation, our cause, we may see it as more noble, we’re really no better than corporate, industrial, political interests which have been trampling First Nations’ rights for decades, centuries. So it’s a big thing and in a way, it’s frustrating. Environmentalists can get a job, you can get involved, you can do volunteering, you can do outreach. If you’re lucky, you can get a job as an advocate. But things like recognising indigenous rights or aboriginal sovereignty, things like that, that’s not our place, we can’t get involved, so in a way, it’s frustrating.

When prompted about the role of youth in leadership positions and the future of youth leaders Dempsey inversed the dialogue to highlight the definition he believes to represent leaders at a political level. It indicated that Dempsey is both frustrated with the way society tags youth leaders while also frustrated at the way political leaders are celebrated.

I think a big part of the problem is that we do frame them as leaders and not what there should be which is servants. They’re to serve us, they’re public servants and if they’ve always been called leaders and then they get into power and then just do that, lead the way regardless of what we should be doing or what the majority of people want to be doing then calling us the ‘leaders of tomorrow’, it’s kind of… we’re just going to do the same thing.

When asked about what is needed to be more effective in his role and work his reply was immediate
More money, more people! ...We have to invest a lot of emotion into it. With this kind of work, it’s really hard to do it without making emotional investments … the emotional payoffs are a way important part of it, so nothing’s more rewarding than people [engaging in issues]… nothing’s more rewarding than someone coming up at a community event and saying that they really appreciate your work or they really like what you’re doing.

Dempsey is a thoughtful and matter of fact communicator. He expresses himself with a sense of rugged grace.

The view that I have at the end of the day is if I wasn’t doing this, I could try and get a job in something that I think in a lot of ways has a bigger impact than advocacy, things like local organic farming or homesteading or something like that, living in the ways that I think a lot more of us need to in order to solve a lot of the problems that are just based on simple math – there’s not enough resources to allocate in the way that we do globally – but none of that’s easy.

Dempsey may hold his cards close to his chest but he does find time to share his feelings and opinions with his girlfriend, family, and close colleagues. Although he does not present any personal experiences associated with burnout, he does recognise that he at times needs to take a break from it all. “I wouldn’t say ever completely uninspired but I have a holiday coming up in a couple weeks and I’m really looking forward to it. I don’t think that means I’m uninspired; it just means I need a break.” He defines burnout from the exhaustion perspective and relates stories he has heard from older campaigners to his perception of burnout. “Burnout, you know, it’s not a term because it’s sort of a myth or anything like that; it’s a real thing. We do get tired, it’s hard to tell whether you’re just uninspired or just sort of beat down.”
Olive: Social, climate and migrant justice campaigner

Olive is a 22-year-old migrant justice campaigner who has been working in her position with a new creative, provocative, and engaging advocacy group for almost two years. Olive’s life is fast paced. She spends a large amount of her time working with the organisation she is employed in addition to volunteering on numerous other advocacy projects. Olive’s five plus years of community and social justice organising is combined with her passion for creative engagement, for example Olive gets “stoked on spoken word” and poet laureates.

Olive has a strong connection to her family. She has been raised with fairly traditional Chinese-Canadian experiences and seems to value these as much as confronted by the constraints they induce. Her passions for the work she does have stemmed from her traditional upbringing, her family’s roots, and a vivid refugee simulation she undertook as part of a training exercise with the Canadian Red Cross. Olive explained her feelings after this experience as “really humbling” and “why I’m motivated to do the work that I do.” She feels these simulations assist with acknowledging “the injustice of these realities, that these actually happened to people.” It was the experience with the Red Cross simulation that has forged Olive’s passion to action.

She believes we need creativity to remain soulful. Her cheerful, inquiring, and honest character is often directed to encourage other youth to recognise their leadership qualities reducing barriers to engagement.

I know that I can’t be responsible for everybody’s feelings but if I’m creating spaces that are actively discouraging people to participate then that is a problem that I want to address… how many people don’t even care enough to think about
how our presence impacts the spaces we create for other people? How many people have never thought of that?

Olive does not think her work is a motivation but rather a responsibility. It is something she must do. It is a calling for her to do all she can to see a world she hopes for the future. Olive is humbled by the reality of refugee and migrant struggles. She wants to acknowledge the injustices of these realities.

I think sometimes we have this larger goal in mind of “We have to save this planet.” This is so fundamental that we don’t realise a lot of the internal dynamics of getting to that larger goal that we are stepping on other people to get there or organising in a way that’s really exclusive. I’m skeptical we can ever get to any larger goal if we don’t have our shit figured out to even work together.

Of significant importance for Olive is the respectful, inclusive, and anti-oppressive work she and others do working with diverse cultures and peoples. One of Olive’s strongest values is that of community. She believes that working together, sharing knowledge, acknowledging injustices, supporting each other, and recognising the benefit to society of a “collective oriented thinking” is most inspiring and powerful. Olive represents this collective strength in the form of a Chinese proverb, “You can break one chopstick easily, but a bundle of chopsticks is unbreakable”. One mantra she lives by is being able to do something is better than not doing anything at all.” Olive has friends with similar values and interests, but does not exclude friendship based on aligned beliefs and values. One of Olive’s best friends does not know what Olive does. Olive has purposely left this out of conversations as she values the friendship and recognises her friend has different values. She does not want to be characterised as a “shit disturber” because of her work, values, and passion for migrant justice.
Olive also feels personal tension in frustration and cynicism towards the environmental movement. “Realising how frustrated I was from what little I was aware of at the time, that made me really skeptical that this environmental organising could go beyond perspectives that I’d already had and include more people.” She spends much of her time working to raise awareness, shift policy, and support migrant justice issues in Canada. Her work crosses into environmental advocacy as much as social justice. Much of what she does relates directly to climate change, extraction of oil, and injustices to migrant and indigenous cultures. What challenges her most in her work however is the barriers to engagement and inclusion.

Olive, like many youth in their early twenties, struggles with her family at times. For Olive, there is tension in relation to the amount of time she commits to her passions for advocacy, volunteerism, and organising. She often thinks about whether she needs to choose “between my family and the community that I have in doing this organizing.” That has been a really big struggle for me in doing this work.” She finds this causes tension and struggle with her family for the time she commits to work and volunteering for the numerous issues she engages with.

I get a lot of flak for “Why aren’t you home for dinner?” Like, “Really? Really?! I’m 22. Give me a break here!” [laughter] And I’m not even out to some mischief, I’m not doing their worst fears; I’m volunteering [laughter]. Yeah. I think a lot of it is actually a cultural thing in that my dad doesn’t understand the lifestyle. Her tension with her family provides one of the only tangible reasons for which she might stop working on the things she has such strong passion “Having this tension between two things that I really value in terms of the people in my life and working towards creating that world I want to see and resisting injustices… they don’t always jive.”
Sarah: Youth leadership and social justice advocate

Sarah, 25 years old, was immediately comfortable upon opening a dialogue, and had no trouble maintaining meaningful conversation. This comes from Sarah’s 7 years experience working on a crisis and suicide prevention line responding to callers looking for support, help, comfort, someone to listen, or last minute attempts to establish purpose for life. Sarah presents as a graceful, charming young woman with edginess in both style and manner. Outside of the Crisis Line, Sarah has focused her time enhancing her knowledge, experiences, and skills for leading youth engagement with a focus towards suicide prevention and youth street and gang violence. In addition she is also doing work with the Vancouver Police gang crime unit, visiting high schools and doing presentations to empower youth into more productive activities. Sarah finds she can relate and associate with greater confidence to the issues surrounding social justice issues in contrast to environment and climate issues.

Sarah attributes her engagement with the suicide prevention line and much of her ethics in her work to her Mum.

She influenced me to take more of a proactive or preventative role... What really got me started [with the crisis line] was my mum. She kind of pushed me into it, but she ended up getting really sick and I was taking care of her. So I had to quit my job and I was going crazy just staying at home the whole time and so I decided to take up [the crisis line].

Family is important to Sarah and she continues to have a close relationship with her sister, brother and Mum. She admits that her parents’ “idealistic” values helped her believe she can “do whatever you want and be the best at it.” Culturally, Sarah grew up isolated in a small town of 10,000 people. At the age of 21, she did not know what different cultures were and how to relate to them.
I think that through our kindergarten to Grade 12 or whatever, we’re indirectly taught a lot of racism. I mean, how do you teach a class of white kids what a Mexican looks like or their traditions without using the stereotypical symbols? So it’s really indirectly taught that way and I personally think I had trouble with understanding people culturally and only recently am I really shifting it from this understanding of what culture actually is and not thinking that culture’s only a race, thinking that an organisation can have a culture and even a household can have a culture and stuff like that and shifting that thinking and looking for the bits of culture that are in relationships right now and identifying them and being more open to seeing them and having that shift.

Sarah projects modest confidence and enjoys opportunities to connect with younger youth through her work in high schools. She thinks, “Things like suicide, violence and bullying, need to be solved in younger people.” Sarah believes to make change you need to start with and empower youth. Sarah also finds the “gap in social systems and health care systems’ heartbreaking, and feels upset that something such as the crisis line needs to exist. Sarah often plays the supportive role. Her work on the crisis line helps demonstrate this character.

On my second or third call that I had ever taken this person just had such a sad, sad story and they were looking for help that they needed and they just couldn’t get it and everybody was turning them down – the healthcare system, their doctors, their family. They just had a very sad story and I just started crying on the phone to them [laughter]. They were like “Oh, I’m so sorry to make you cry!” and I was like “It’s just so sad!”
Sarah has focused on her education so she has “the power to make the change on issues I am most passionate about.” Sarah is currently completing a Master’s program in Conflict Analysis and Management. She is empowered when her knowledge does not create a barrier to her interests and ambitions. As such she sees hope in an educated world and a world where youth have the access to innovate and be creative in developing an alternate vision.

I mean, technology’s taking off clearly, and that’s great and I think it’ll be helpful for a lot of things and medicine is making a lot of advancements as well. I think we’re going to have a lot of really awesome things; a lot of really cool gadgets, some cures to some terrible diseases and stuff like that. But I don’t see that really saving many people, to be honest. Bit of a downer [laughter].

When promoted to express what she thinks about the future Sarah presented:

I shouldn’t speak to it, I have no idea, but things like global warming seems to me irreversible… There’s just always going to be these scars on our planet, on our society that are always going to be there but maybe we can learn to live with them.

Although Sarah has not explicitly experienced all dimensions to burnout, what she presents here does indicate an emotional exhaustion from the magnitude of her work and in particular the compounding affect of one significant experience.

It was three or four hours on the phone with one person who was about to commit suicide. I don’t remember how the conversation ended but this person was sort of in and out of consciousness. They had taken some pills and we were trying to trace the call with the police and some ambulance out there but the phone line cut off.
Her experience and emotional response is likely very typical for anyone who is faced with this type of stress.

Well, I had to take a break from it for a little while because it was just starting to really weigh me down and I think taking that break and being aware that I wasn’t in the position to help people at that time is what has helped me kind of continue with it and move forward and eventually see that it really does help people. But having that self-awareness of needing to do the self-care as well is really important.

Sarah has maintained her composure throughout her experiences by taking time to reflect, focusing on day-to-day life chores, focusing her attentions to her academic studies, and spending time with friends.

**Advocacy supporting development of self-identity in times of socialization**

What these portraits demonstrate for this group of youth is that youth are eager to make change and be the leaders for that change, but at the same time are finding it challenging to break the societal mold cast by previous generations. This has created tension. Jacobs (2003) explored similar tension within the academic pursuits of youth, highlighting personality (i.e. negative temperament), frustration of personal accomplishment, and the subjective experience of being overworked, “predispose” (p. 298) youth to burnout. While, social support, lifestyle outside of chosen vocation, optimism, and workload all played a positive role in “buffering” burnout (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003, p. 298). What seems to stand out in the youth of this research are dynamics of power, passion, autonomy and belonging. There are discrete reasons why youth are driven to manage an overwhelming unbalanced work-life ratio. The portraits above deepen the perspectives provided in Chapter Four and suggest that these youth have a
reduced sense of agency. Their emotional cache is full. There seems to be the presence of struggle. A struggle with the emotional context to advocacy combined with the transformation of identity within enhanced social pressures.

The motivations of engagement for youth in service, civic, or advocacy work is likely as result of various sequencing of mandatory requirements for school (Henderson et al, 2012), passions (Arnold, 2004), parental influence (Christens, 2011), influence of peers (Christens, 2011; Dawson, 2007), and the development of a psychological engagement to an issue or movement (Anonymous, 2011). Pearce and Larson (2006) present three levels to the process of engagement for adolescence. At the second and third stage of this process individuals transition from an entry point to a personal connection, understanding that their concerns are similar to others, and then to an “intrinsic motivation” (p. 125). At this third stage of engagement Pearce and Larson suggest that participants take ownership of the work and commit beyond the initial expectations. They develop a psychological connection for engagement. Why someone participates or takes action on a particular issue is informed by the personal values, beliefs, morals, and the anticipated result of the action. Stories of engagement in activism during the civil rights movement indicate that college age youth experience diverse but similar motivations for engagement (Dickson, 2011; Marri & Walker, 2008). Brutler and Harrison (2009) present motivations of politically active youth in Europe as a mix of moral, social, and professional motivations. The experiences presented by participants in this research support these findings and add importance to the emotional dimensions of engagement as intrinsic motivators and stressors.

The portraits of youth participating in this research present examples of how youth build character and act upon identities informed by socialization of values and personal ethics. The values that have carried over in this generation of youth from the
baby boomer generation include humour, honesty, concern for others, politeness and forgiveness. This is supported by Bibby (2009) and the longitudinal research of the emerging millennials. The portraits of youth in this research also suggest an importance for transformative experiences in developing values, morals, and character; intrinsic motivators enhancing affective processes; the appetite for autonomy and independence; diverse theories of change challenging a collective understanding; and the importance of belonging.

**Youth development and transformative learning**

Almost all youth participants in this research depicted a significant event or person that introduced them to their advocacy work. These experiences go as far back as childhood and to as recent as post secondary experiences. For Dempsey it was his father “it comes from cumulative memories of being out on the boat with my dad” For Amy it was two mentors in high school “I mean, they’re my two biggest mentors I think in working with youth and reconnecting them to nature… so it’s definitely been something that’s been kind of like a steering point over the last four or so years.” Other participants found the calling to advocacy through their teachers in secondary / post secondary education. “My biology teacher. That’s the reason why I got into biology and conservation in the first place… the first foray into things and she was a great teacher” (Kelvin, Interview 2).

Kelvin also presented transformative experiences in relation to being outdoors “I’ve apparently fallen into a body of water [as a kid] and my parents had to come save me because I didn’t know how to swim… maybe there was something in my subconscious [as a kid] that I wanted to be outdoors.” Olive however, presented her an experience in her early twenties as part of an activity:
I remember being sort of this out-of-body experience, about knowing on one hand – “This is a Red Cross camp. They’re not going to do anything to me. I am perfectly safe and perfectly fine” – but still being scared and confused and not sure what was going to happen.

The purpose for advocacy and entry of engagement is therefore largely the product of significant people and/or transformative experiences in the lives of youth as much as the urgency for the environmental and social justice issues they commit to.

**Youth Leaders of Tomorrow – society’s leadership stress**

The response to questions about the phrase ‘youth leaders of tomorrow’ provides added depth to the juxtaposition between youth identity development and self-autonomy within the context of socialization.

Why can’t we just forget about all of that? Really, right now, all of us are working together so just keep it at that. I think more people now are saying ‘leaders of today’ without ‘leaders of tomorrow’ beforehand, but then they think they’re really clever when they say it, which kind of points that they’re really old (Amy, interview 1).

While on one hand the development of self is associated largely with the self-interrogation of meaning for the lived reality, and approached through self-determination, the social constructs of leadership that society places on youth creates a power imbalance. Older generations who are projecting leadership pressure to youth, and the youth who are testing vocations against values, morals, and identities whilst struggling to find employment raises tensions.

I think when people say ‘youth leaders of tomorrow’, I think to them the word ‘leader’ is synonymous with power because they can see that young people have
leadership now and they’re doing neat projects but I think when they say ‘leaders of tomorrow’, it’s people who have a lot of power of tomorrow because right now, the vast majority, of young people aren’t given responsibilities or opportunities that lead to them having a lot of power in society, whatever that might mean; whether it means having a lot of money or being in politics, making policy (Kirra, Interview 1).

There seems to be incongruence with older generational constructs of youth leader and the self-determination of youth. The struggle of trusting and respecting power in leadership as a values-based concept is something that youth might be morally challenged by. Torrance provides an interesting perspective of this in relation to tensions for what the vision of ‘youth leaders of tomorrow’ infers for a future in politics.

I think a big part of the problem is that we do frame them as leaders and not what there should be which is servants. They’re to serve us, they’re public servants and if they’ve always been called leaders and then they get into power and then just do that, lead the way regardless of what we should be doing or what the majority of people want to be doing then calling us the ‘leaders of tomorrow’, it’s kind of… we’re just going to do the same thing (Torrance, Interview 1).

This exemplifies disconnection between intergenerational visions of leadership. An imbalance such as this adds stress in the form of an external motivator for youth advocacy. As suggested by Ryan and Deci (2000) external motivators can be emotionally uninspiring at the core of people’s values and create a barrier for long-term engagement, rather than the intended purpose of inspiring action. The status and acclaim offered by senior and seasoned advocacy professionals does not have relational
significance to the intrinsic motivators associated with self-concordance (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Another way to express this is that by offering youth a chance to progress through the social structure of responsibility and power with titles from leadership, the internal motivations for engagement are not met. Instead, youth are attracted to the short-term gains and hence not authentically engaged at an emotional level. The emotional output for engagement might therefore be unsupported and the affective dimensions of youth advocacy disassociated from society by society’s constructs of youth leadership. In opposition to the ‘power’ driven construct of leadership, presented by many participants, Olive presents an insight to the “quality” that could account for authentic and values-based leadership. A style of leadership that according to Olive could transcend societal constructs of the ‘youth leader of tomorrow.’

I have issues with the word ‘leadership’ for those same reasons in that we often are taught to think of leaders as, I don’t know, the President or this director of whatever. Really, people are leaders in their everyday lives. I feel like leadership is more of a quality than a position that you have to occupy. Even somebody who’s just modeling what their ideal person would be by living their life that way, that is leadership in its own way. That’s also what comes to mind when I think about the idea of leaders of tomorrow (Olive, Interview 2).

Or as expressed by Sarah representing leaders of tomorrow adds challenges: “people judging you by your age is just another hurdle that I feel is unnecessary.” Kirra presented the defensive mechanism for youth by putting up a wall and make oneself seem busier to mask the deeper anxieties from socio-ecological pressure. “The glorification of busy. You need to be busy. It doesn’t matter what you’re busy doing. If
you’re busy then you’re good… for environmental youth leaders and other leaders if you’re busy then it’s okay” (Kirra, Interview 1). What this seems to demonstrate is that leadership expectations from older generations and competition within youth advocacy circles are projected through socialisation constructs compromising the autonomous self. The compromise reduces the ability to act, corrupts intentions, and clouds desires for change through the society’s lens of expectation.

**Affective dimensions of youth advocacy**

The way in which youth make meaning of their vocations within advocacy offer an important window to the emotional influences on the constructs of burnout. For the youth in this research emotions hope, and lack thereof, appeared regularly in experiences and memories. “The tarsands are ridiculous and depressing and fucked up but I think there needs to be a bit more advocacy for positive alternatives” (Kirra, Interview 2). This was made clear with the splitting view youth presented about the reality they see for the future. The split may be a defensive mechanism to provide access for a greater sense of hope in framing an optimistic vision “I think we’re becoming more and more disconnected from each other and our planet. I think more and more people are thinking about just themselves but we can’t keep doing that or we’ll just keep exploiting everything and everyone” (Victoria, Interview 2). The establishment of a well-constructed response to how youth think about the future may be the avoidance of owning one’s fear. The fear presented as avoidance was represented through indecisiveness, judgment, failure, decision-making, choice, and sense of belonging. Are these structures of avoidance a projection of fear? Avoidance of the emotional context for many youth provided a superficial calm and comfort for the here
and now. A mix of feelings seemed to drive engagement including, hope, hopelessness, fear, anger, avoidance, and being valued and belonging.

**Conclusion**

The findings offer an insight to the lives of seven youth with a passion for environmental and social justice advocacy. As a whole, the collective experiences and memories of these youth participants present an overview for the values, motivations, identity development, and socialization of the average youth engaged with environmental and/or social justice advocacy. Although often a privileged subset of the overall youth population (Kress, 2006), there is potential for these findings to be explored further within the greater context of youth learning and development. The collective representation also offers insight to the tensions and challenges faced by youth – emotionally, intellectually, physically, and socially – in relation to advocacy vocations. Although each participant has their own narrative, the transformative learning experiences exist within their emergence to advocacy work. It should not be underestimated the importance of these transformative experiences. Additionally, the *societal stigma of leadership* – an assumed and expected skillset for leadership projected by society’s on youth, such as the “youth leaders of tomorrow” branding – should not be ignored in this situation. While the role and significance of influential individuals or role models, in the lives of participants of this research would suggest a greater understanding for these influential relationships, the relevance this also has on the ‘youth leaders of tomorrow’ framing and the affective dimensions of youth development requires more research and exploration. The socialization of youth in relation to the economic, political, and civic views that society desires youth to develop might also add tensions that inform the dynamic complexity of youth leadership and social change.
Chapter Seven: Advocacy confidential

We’re so afraid of being alone and if we are so afraid of being alone then why in God’s name are we not spending more time actually going out and meeting people and spending time, in physical environments? (Jeremy)

The portraits presented throughout this research help provide context to what intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are driving youth engagement in environmental and social justice advocacy. In this chapter I will endeavour to present an interpretation of findings as it relates to the questions posed at the start of the research. In relation to the first research questions: What are youth experiencing when self-reporting the concept of burnout? I’ll offer framing similar to Randall’s (2009) discussion on parallel narratives, however I will use the phrase parallel affective narratives to present the two underlying stories that seem to influence how burnout is presented in the narrative accounts of youth. The sub-question, ‘Does “burnout” exist within youth environmental and social justice advocacy?’ I’ll answer immediately by saying that the research was unable to definitively answer this question. However, I will provide an explorative perspective to burnout phenomena as socially defined by youth. How does burnout manifest? What are the qualities of burnout? How may these be related to issues of agency (personal efficacy)? In answering these sub-questions I will look back to one or two youth who presented some narrative that suggested characteristics associated with burnout. What are youth experiencing that leads to their disengagement from advocacy work? In answering this third level of sub-questions I proposed for the this research I’ll explore the experiences of these youth in which two dominant affective themes, or dimensions seemed to be presented. The first dimension is going to be contentious for some youth as it presents a theory that burnout is not necessarily being experienced but rather labeled for the emotional defensive strategy of avoiding an inner experience of
loneliness and ennui. Here I believe a fear of loneliness has been an internal driver for taking on more than one can truly handle and manage. This fear of loneliness seems to be amplified by the combination of societal pressures placed on youth to live up to leadership expectations of an aging population and the lack of self-care.

The second dimension highlights the ways in which youth view the changing world and a vision of the future. In this second theme the splitting of a future vision, one pessimistic, and one hopeful, places additional pressure on youth. Depending on the social situation and emotional safety they find themselves, youth are required to externalise the social, emotional, spiritual, and physical attributes to both visions. The result is a sense of ennui and surfeitedness - a feeling of overindulgence, and enjoying the role within social change to excess. What more could one do when they are exhausted by the fulfillment of overconsumption of passions? Yet, simultaneously, neglect to own the distancing from personal agency? The window to an optimistic and hopeful future of possibility is shadowed by the darkened fear of the future and its uncertainty.

As a wrap up of the narratives I’ll offer some thoughts and response to my second tier research question: Based on the data analysis, what do the results of this research suggest regarding structures of support or resources to support youth engagement? In response to this question I will present a potential opportunity for future engagement with youth to celebrate their experiences, stories, memories, and provide space for the reflective process. The following chapter is therefore laid out first with question one and its sub-questions explored under the “Truth about Burnout.” The second tier of questioning for this research has been explored within the “Externalising the contradiction” and “Implications for the future” sections of this chapter.
The truth about burnout…

As Dempsey presented in his process of being uninspired, “it’s hard to tell whether you’re just uninspired or just sort of beat down,” there are vague representations for the constructs of burnout represented within youth consciousness. While at the same time burnout seems to be a common term used to describe the feeling of uncertainty in work and displacement from the social constructs placed on youth. As Jeremy noted, “It was good to recognise that a lot of my burnout was due to capacity and needing to kind of refocus on what I was working on” (Jeremy, Interview 2).

Attitudes about and definitions of burnout seemed to be largely informed through a series of stories from colleagues, friends, and fellow advocacy members who share stories without explicit perspective from the source. As such the definition of burnout is transferred like knowledge and wisdom is transferred -- through to different generations by educational experiences, interpretative activities and retold stories. The understanding is therefore one of subjective reality. As reflected by Kirra:

What she was explaining was she had experienced burnout like the environmental social organising scheme in a big, big, big way, she’s an incredible activist; tree sits and all sorts of radical stuff and then she ended up taking three, four, five years off entirely from anything relating to activism and then when she came back into it, it was with complete understanding that she could only do what one person could do. That’s what she would do in her work; just do what one person could do (Kirra, Interview 2).

While Kirra and Jeremy presented experiences that they believed met a type of sequencing for burnout, overall the accounts of youth do not seem to be conclusive to the presence of depersonalisation and inefficacy.
Sarah’s memory of having to leave her work for a period of time to recover from the emotional stress associated with the non-closure to a suicide prevention call offers a significant stressor–strain example in which the stressor was a significant one-time event. Apart from this experience Sarah did not seem to present any antecedents to depersonalization, exhaustion, or inefficacy. It seems that while participants experienced some degree of exhaustion there is limited evidence of depersonalization, and loss of efficacy relating to the advocacy vocation. There was however ambiguity in the how youth see their role and where they believe they will be most effective for change. Two themes I identify that relate to the burnout frames of Maslach include depersonalization and inefficacy. Dempsey presents an example of the type of depersonalization experienced by some of the participants.

You know, you kind of... people have been trying to address these issues and yeah, we know more about climate change now, there’s more ghost towns because of resource collapse now than there were in the early ’90s when some of them started but it’s basically been a lot of the same stuff and, you know, the first Earth Day was in the ‘60s and it’s sort of like “Where are we going? What are we doing?” (Dempsey, Interview 1)

While the account from Olive below provides insight to the inefficacy experienced by youth participants engaged in advocacy work.

We spend a lot of our energy denying that creativity in... and trying to channel that into what we’ve been taught is the right structure and way of thinking and way of doing. But no, really, we just need to throw some of that stuff out the window when we need to and just do what we need to [laughter] (Olive, Interview 2).
Taking a juxtaposed position of Kirra’s representation of youth advocacy being “overworked, underpaid, and stressed the fuck out” and the burden of the world, including the splitting view of future reality, offers an insight as to why some youth find it difficult to say no. The intrinsic motivators such as ideologies, values, and morals are driving their passion for their vocation while society’s imposed leadership stigma and pressure to act is encouraging caution in youth openly sharing and communicating feelings:

“Sssh! You’re Not supposed to say that” or it seems like you’re weak or something, like your weakness is showing or I think there’s also a bit of a worry that if adults hear youth talking about burnout, they’ll be like “Youth can’t handle this shit. We need to not give them this much power or responsibility because they will freak out about it or something. So it’s like you gotta keep it under wraps for that reason kind of thing (Kirra, Interview 2).

The external resources required to undertake work within any advocacy vocation are significant, especially in the non-profit sector. Money, people, time, materials and recognition are all capacity challenges for advocacy initiatives. “In some ways, that’s kind of becoming engrained and it’s seen to be essential because everyone’s fighting for resources, they’re fighting for time, they’re fighting for media space, for funding or any of those things” (Jeremy, Interview 2).

Competition for resources and enhanced capacity to organize has been transferred throughout youth advocacy and may be part of the cause for increasing isolation of youth within their vocation. “There is always that competitive thing and I think it’s not even noticeable all the time because you’re so used to people trying to one-up each other or try and silently prove that they are capable of whatever it is” (Amy,
Interview 2). In addition to this is the struggle to simply share experiences and stories about the work “I don’t always talk about activism with them because I’m scared of losing that friendship, yeah” (Olive, Interview 2). Here Olive presents an isolating frame that potentially leads further towards establishing disconnection from the visceral interactions with people in person. These were also represented from the context of isolation within the advocacy community “You can’t even feel confident or comfortable in one spot or the other because you legitimately agree with a portion of what they’re saying [regarding theory of change]” (Jeremy, Interview 2).

**Fear of Loneliness**

For the most part, the social isolation of these youth comes from within the work sphere, although some participants had positive social outputs that made them feel more connected to the surroundings, to the work, and to knowing themselves. Others made time in their lives to ‘recover’ from experiences of isolation and loneliness, and on one occasion Amy highlighted her need to create the “solo sit spot” space in order to collect herself and center her within the work, values, and relationship with earth. Loneliness, although often considered a negative social characteristic, for some, may be a virtue; states of solitude to prepare, maintain, and recover self from previous practices.

The social stigmas that accompany loneliness are labels of being unnatural, a social outcast, and awkward. If someone is unable to enjoy one’s own company and have confidence to brush off the status and labels of being lonely then the negative feedback of defensive mechanism might take affect. These psychological defenses, may be presented by youth taking on more and more to appear less lonely, more in control, and striving for recognition. The process manifests antecedents similar to those
reported by Jacobs (2003) and Rostami and Abedi (2012) for the dimensions of burnout in youth academia: stopping for a period of time due to stress, cynicism towards the effectiveness of effort to study, health issues, and feeling hopeless about personal identity/purpose/ability. Having little to no sense of meaning in ones work combined with the competitiveness of NGO’s and social change movement organising, and the need to balance ones own lifestyle – income may provide further stress-related pressure.

The experiences and stories presented in this research relate more to a fear of loneliness manifested from isolation: a requirement of being a passionate activist. The more youth start to feel isolated and lonely in their work the more they take on, as a defense against validating their true loneliness. An “interpersonal distancing” (Sandage et al, 2014, p.72) manifested by ignoring the affective dimensions of advocacy. Is this interpersonal distancing a fear of loneliness or a fear of ridicule, judgment and being outcast? The social constructs in which youth have grown up with the prescribed learning of competition, glorified value of status and recognition, and the pressure to find (and explore) an identity, I believe add to the genesis and amplification of this fear. “I like to be so busy at all times and I don’t really like having to ask myself a lot of these questions because if I come out with a certain answer, it’s going to require some really big change” (Jeremy, Interview 2).

At the same time there seems to be significant pressure from external motivators such as social status and acclaim stigmas (i.e. youth leaders of tomorrow), social judgment (i.e. illusion of being busy representing leadership), socio-ecological crises (presented in the splitting vision of the future), and youth socialization as a prerequisite for social capital. The combination of these stressors seemed to have overwhelmed the internalized system of youth within the advocacy vocation creating a defensive
response in the form of taking on more and more. Although not a representation for all youth undertaking advocacy work, the indications present that those who are experiencing loss of efficacy, depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion from the work are doing so because they are finding it difficult to switch off. This I represent as a mechanism induced by the subconscious anxieties. In this case a fear of loneliness may be the true antecedent to symptoms appearing like burnout.

In the current age where it is all too easy to disconnect oneself from true meaningful physical and emotional relationships, the same can be seen in the vocation of advocacy. In the effort to maintain autonomy of one’s actions, feel a sense of belonging, and develop mastery of diverse activities, interests, and vocations youth have compartmentalized the affective experiences that enhance social and textural community building capacities. As such the construction of self through advocacy for some youth is acting as a barrier to true personal resilience and community fellowship. Jeremy for example has struggled with friendships and creation of a community outside of the advocacy environment. He has limited associations away from organising and as such has trouble disconnecting. Kirra on the other hand talked about escaping the hold of advocacy and finding auxiliary community fellowship through a communal share house. Her experiences with the share house offered a sense of excitement, trust, and hope in contrast to the fear, competitiveness, and pressure within advocacy.

The socio-ecological crises, combined with a number of other social expectations and constructs act as the agents for anxiety. Loneliness provides the shadow and a greater effort is placed on avoiding the world within the shadow. Avoiding loneliness in this case may sequence the fear-induced spiral through which emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal efficacy may manifest.
“Why Bother” – Ennui and Hopelessness

The feeling of not being able to do anything about the ecological crisis makes youth think, ‘why bother?’ There is a sense of hopelessness combined with a feeling of ennui (weariness, discontent, and surfeitedness). Youth present stories of excitement for engaging in work they are ‘passionate’ for and feel a sense of glory from seeing small tangible change in individuals, however, the role this plays in the bigger picture of massive global change is laughed at, literally. “The world goes to shit, basically, is one answer [laughter]” (Kirra, Interview 2). Several youth highlighted two versions of how they see things in the future. The optimistic vision of the future included sustainable frames of community resilience, ecosystem stability, inclusivity and equality. The ‘realistic’ vision suggested discontent and hopelessness. While a third vision may relate to the pragmatic view of our future.

I can’t say the same for every environmental issue and I think that some of them, like climate change, are going to be pretty important to deal with and if we don’t mitigate those then maybe future generations are going to really feel it. (Kelvin, Interview #2)

The ‘realistic’ vision included dialogue that was often laughed at, in condescension for thinking with an optimistic mindset. Olive for example suggested that the planet, people, and culture, is heading to a “scary place [laughter]” (Interview 2). On a few occasions some youth expressed specific decisions to avoid working within climate justice, as it frames things with a dark and negative tone, while working to engage people in the outdoors demonstrated a more optimistic vision. The pragmatic framing of the future also came out in the form of what is likely going to work as a means of making change. For example Amy presents “I feel like we should be able to embody something a little more than just sustainable.” (Interview #1)
Weaving through all narratives was an undertone of ‘why bother?’ “Why would I involve myself in the negative framing when there is enough of it already?” (Kirra, Interview #2). Laughter would also follow statements like this, indicating a sense of uneasiness around the context. This sense of ‘why bother’ (hopelessness?) mixes with a deep weariness, discontent, and over-indulgence, splintering motivations and values. It’s almost like weird to hear someone say, “Yeah, I feel really good today. I had a great sleep. Been working on a few things but not feeling too overwhelmed.” I’ve never heard some young leader say that and it’s almost like if they said that, everybody would hate them. Probably go “You’re not a good activist. What are you?” [laughter] (Kirra, Interview 1).

It seems that youth are taking on so much to ‘fill’ their lives that they overindulge with the desire to make change and simultaneously there is a discontent for the senior leadership, and misunderstanding of youth social values. There is a misrepresentation of the youth stereotype of apathetic and over-indulgent. There is equally an avoidance to the framing of calling youth ‘leaders of tomorrow’, and ignorant to the socio-economic systems. Based on the focussed sample of youth in this research, there is reluctance to be part of the overall experience associated with a movement driven by senior leaders who tokenize youth and youth engagement.

We can’t ever actually bring it and narrow it down to one single quality because everything is so influenced by everything else, yeah. But when people try to narrow down to just one thing, one impression or one quality, and base everything else off that, I think it’s lying to yourself or being in denial because it’s never that simple (Olive, Interview 2).
There is a falsehood of labeling youth empathetic, leaders of tomorrow, and ignorant to the socio-economic systems. There is reluctance to be part of the overall experience associated with a movement driven by senior leaders who tokenize youth and youth engagement.

I get emails from people and they’re like “Hey, you guys are youth council right, will you come volunteer at my car wash?” The media is coming so it would be good to have like youth showing, doing positive things and yeah, “Can you come do that for a few hours?” That’s their perception of what youth engagement is (Kirra, Interview 1).

It is a mixture of ennui and hopelessness. Do external motivators enhance emotional defensive states related to ennui and boredom? Although this research is not able to answer this question it is one that would be worth exploring from a psychosocial perspective.

**Externalising the contradiction**

The stories youth have presented seem somewhat contradictory when speaking to the motivations, inspirations, and passions for undertaking the work. They mention the passion for taking the work on as a means of wanting to make change and be the leaders for a future they want to see. While at the same time they present experiences were being recognised seems to be more important than the actual change that is going to be made. Additionally, there seems to be a contradiction between the idea of community within organising and advocacy. Youth are organising in silos. They talk about the ‘community’ of advocacy, and recognising that work cannot happen without the support of the community, yet, at the same time they present experiences of wanting to be valued, noticed, and important. They seem to want relationships that are
more meaningful than the shallow community developed through organising for change, particularly in the digital age of online organising. One example is Jeremy, who recognises that he is in a “bad place” and is contemplating “getting out” yet at the same time seems to be afraid to make that leap. He suggests that although he feels this way he will probably take on more work and laughs at how he has no time but more work is “his kind of thing.” He just takes the work because he does not want to be alone and without action in his life. Like Jeremy, many of the youth seem to be working in isolation, by design, taking on more and more. When they recognise they are at capacity, they don’t know what to do, even though they recognise that completely taking time out is an option. Often the taking time out option is laughed at, as it does not represent what society expects them to be doing as ‘leaders of tomorrow.’

**Implications for Youth Engagement**

Understanding the emotional dimensions for which youth engage with and maintain ongoing involvement in social change movements could provide important insights to youth engagement and development for positive social behavior. What seems obvious to me is that youth are more then leaders of tomorrow. Youth are members of the current social fabric with significant leadership qualities. Integrating youth within civic and social opportunities is only one step to the authentic inclusion of youth perspective. Treating youth with equality, respect, intent, and equal curiosity to other social cohorts could enhance the quality of safe emotional engagement with social change movements.

Loneliness framing may not apply to all youth and all participants; however it is possible it applies too much of what is expressed in social discourse as burnout, especially for youth engaged with advocacy, political membership, and special interest groups. There are the more hopeful and balanced narratives, which appear from a
couple of youth. Based on the sample in this research, youth that have a more explicit and purposeful connection with external activities (non-advocacy) seem more centered and balanced in their work. They still present some stories of feeling lonely, ennui, and hopelessness, however seem to have developed mechanisms to bring about clarity, purpose, and drive. The “Why bother?” framing, ennui, and hopelessness is also a characteristic that might weave together with loneliness to describe an overall picture of the antecedent to contemporary youth advocacy burnout, or at least what is often self-diagnosed and socially defined as burnout.

One of the most important findings of this research is the therapeutic experience for youth in openly talking and discussing how they feel about the future and their place within it. The transformative influences for engagement act in concert with motivations and often provide the genesis for intrinsic motivators. My assessment of the narrative accounts and experiences of youth in their chosen advocacy is that youth who are motivated intrinsically are better set up to engage with a longer-lasting influence to the cause/s they take on. Following I will suggest two opportunities that could support youth with their passions and interests relating to acting upon the change they want to see for their future.

**An Ecological Burden and Focusing on Hopeful Narratives**

Youth seem to switch off and respond with awkward laughter when discussing the reality (i.e. massive change in socio-ecological systems) we are facing. The dark side of the future is something that youth seem to avoid thinking about. There is a contradiction of optimism (hope) / pessimism (despair) in their visions. It seems they want to tell the hopeful story but are struggling as deep down they feel that reality in their world is going to be a challenging place to live compared to their parents
generation. There is however a slight sense of stoicism in that they feel they are growing up with this and will find a way to adapt with technologies, innovation, and creative flare that will provide opportunity amongst huge ecological and social change.

I think [youth is] the time in your life when you feel like you could take on the world and apparently when I’m 30, I may not think that but I feel like right now, I’m kind of full of energy and enthusiasm, so to diminish that by talking about fear and anxiety, I don’t see it... I don’t understand why we would do it. I think that’s one of the reasons why I really like that hopeful message, because I think it actually caters to people my age (Kelvin, Interview 2).

**Advocacy/Climate confessional**

Finally, I believe that the use of despair and fear framing for the socio-ecological crisis enhances the emphasis of isolation, as many youth are unable to articulate how they feel and prefer to avoid the associated tensions. As such and as a final recommendation I would suggest that youth development, environmental and social justice advocacy, and other transformative learning experiences that engage youth to offer unstructured, barrier-free, open, safe, and without unsolicited advice in order to talk about their feelings associated with the world they see, and their sense of agency within it. This I propose can be presented as a climate confessional remotely moving from place to place.

I think people underestimate how much strength they have and how much power they have to actually make change and in that, I think a lot of people keep waiting for the tomorrow (Olive, Interview 2).
Limitations of findings

The research was conducted with a sample of youth engaged in advocacy vocations on the west coast of Canada, specifically in Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia. As such the explorations and narratives presented here should not be considered a complete and accurate representation of all youth within the age range. The limitations for the methodology are also closely related to the experience and mastery of conducting interviews encouraging free-association. I recognize that although I learned a considerable amount about my personal emotional connections to vocation and self, my limited experience with these methods made for a unique and challenging project. The concept and use of reflexivity in collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data proved to be one of my more significant learning experiences. Although I believe that the data obtained through interviews is credible and valid, I recognize the need to further develop the skills used within the chosen methodology if / when I consider psychosocial research for future explorations of social phenomena.

As mentioned in the prologue chapter, there were many experiences that I entered this research with that informed my point of view surrounding the subject matter. I believed that burnout did exist and that youth participants would likely present details that validated the phenomena within both the age group and social change movement. Although I still believe that burnout is prevalent amongst many passionate change makers, I recognise that not all that is spoken about burnout relates to the loss of efficacy, development of exhaustion, and cynicism. There is a socially defined representation which offers a definition that might neither fit the previous definitions of burnout nor be a condition with the antecedents to workplace burnout (i.e. job ambiguity, misfit, undervalued, limited recognition). This is not to say that this socially defined burnout does not have as equal importance in trying to understand
how and why it manifests, and what it represents for personal sustainability. I would encourage deeper explorations as to the socially defined representation of burnout.

**Future Research Suggestions**

One of the most significant opportunities this research presents is to ask the question of whether burnout is a socially misrepresented phenomenon. I would encourage deeper exploration of youth demographics in relation to socialization, self-determination, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. In addition the deeper understanding for the affective management of ennui and loneliness within youth could inform programs and projects emphasizing youth transformative learning. The findings however suggest opportunities to further explore and understand why youth do what they do and how they manage the affective dimensions of engagement vocations. Further research would also be possible in relation to the affect social discourse, such as ‘youth leaders of tomorrow,’ has on the emotional preparedness of youth for the rapidly changing socio-ecological systems.

**Conclusion**

The journey youth undertake in developing their character and identity is full of adventure, curiosity, challenge, opportunity, and the dynamic influences of people, culture, and environment. The participants of this research have all experienced a significant amount of character development and demonstrate honesty, compassion, integrity, independence, love, curiosity, and an appetite to develop leadership qualities. Not all youth would fall into the category of values, ethics, morals, and passions similar to these youth. For that they are somewhat unique. At the same time this group of youth is diverse enough that they could represent some of the youth demographic, particularly those engaged with social change movements.
The explorations of this research would suggest that youth who self-report experiencing burnout might in fact not be experiencing burnout, but rather some degree of an affective parallel narrative. In this case, fear of loneliness and ennui (or advocacy overindulgence) combine with an unhopeful vision of the future to cause the loss of agency. Although this research was unable to provide a clear answer to whether burnout exists or not within this cohort, the exploration of the phenomenon leads to suggest that youth have developed a socially defined representation of burnout.

The socialization and pressure youth are faced with through the need to represent the ‘leaders of tomorrow’ labeling enhances the experiences associated and described by the socially defined representation of burnout. The structures of support although numerous, are uncertain. Youth are part of the civic community and should be recognised as such. The leadership qualities and value of youth in social, civic, and cultural settings is at risk of continuing to be tokenized for the comfort of society. It seems the comfort is in providing adequate and integrated space without fully including the values, worldviews, ethics, and belief systems of youth in the dialogue. Offering places for youth to be heard and listened to, combined with experiences that help the transformative nature of development would be recommended.

My journey through this process is also not to be ignored. The reflexive researcher that I am – that all of us social scientists are – has greatly impacted how I see and experience the world around me. My values, ethics, beliefs, and worldview are largely unchanged, however, I know not to think that we are not influenced by those we associate with nor do not influence those around us. There is importance in the transference of thoughts, concepts, and experiences within dialogue. There is also importance from an academic perspective and in particular from a psychosocial perspective, to recognise that we can never truly remove the subjectivity of either
researcher or subject from the interview process. In fact, we should not want to remove this, as it is rich in qualitative information, and rich in experience worth validating.

Final Word

Youth is a time for challenging the nuances that are our dreams, values, beliefs, identity, independence, and sense of freedom. The youth within this research are all real, honest, loving, caring, passionate, and primed for whatever life presents to them. I wanted to honour their participation and ethic by closing with this quote from Rachel Carson:

“In nature, nothing exists alone” (Carson, R. Silent Spring, 1962)
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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in Research

May 14th 2013

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN GRADUATE RESEARCH

Title of Study
Environmental and Social Justice Advocacy Burnout: Youth Perspectives

Principal Investigator:
Kieran Dowling, Graduate Student, School of Environment and Sustainability, Royal Roads University

Faculty Supervisor:
Dr Renee Lertzman, Professor (Psychology of Environmental Education and Communication), School of Environment and Sustainability, Royal Roads University

I, Kieran Dowling, a graduate student undertaking the Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication, in the School of Environment and Sustainability at Royal Roads University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled Environmental and Social Justice Advocacy Burnout: Youth Perspectives.

The purpose of this research project is to explore if burnout exists in youth environmental and social activists, and if so how burnout develops. The findings from this research are intended to add to a limited body of research surrounding burnout in youth activists. It is expected that the findings will provide better understanding for positive youth engagement in environmental and social justice advocacy post college years, and communicate positive messaging for climate actions with young adults.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a focus group with up to 11 other participants. This focus group will be on burnout in youth activist and will draw upon your experiences, knowledge and perspectives of burnout. The focus group will work towards answering questions on motivations for engaging with advocacy work, what burnout means to you, whether you have experienced burnout, and stories about burnout from you or second hand from people you know.

The expected duration is one to one and a half hours. Light refreshments and snacks will be provided.

This focus group is the initial stage of a two-part research thesis. This first stage will be conducted in the Month of July. The second stage will be conducted in August to September 2013. The findings from both parts will be written up as the required submission of a master’s research thesis. The information from the focus group will help inform the questions for interviews conducted in the second part to the study. The combined research is expected to enhance environmental advocacy by helping understand how burnout happens in youth leaders. This will hopefully lead to greater awareness and protection for the environment. I hope that the findings from this study will improve how advocacy work engages youth, leading to a heightened sense of efficacy for young adults in the post college years.

Participation in this research is voluntary and no compensation will be provided for participation. I will be conducting the research entirely as a Graduate Student of Royal Roads University. Any connection I have with environmental non-government organisations and social non-profits has no association with this research.
If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Officer OR contact Dr Renee Lertzman.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,

Kieran Dowling (Principal Investigator)
Graduate Student – Master’s of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication
School of Environment and Sustainability
Royal Roads University

Dr Renee Lertzman (Academic Supervisor)
Professor – Psychology of Environmental Education and Communication
School of Environment and Sustainability
Royal Roads University

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Royal Roads University’s Research Ethics Board.
Appendix B: Letter of Informed Consent

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE OF THESIS: Environmental and Social Justice Advocacy Burnout: Youth Perspectives

Principal Investigator
Name: Kieran Dowling
Supervisor: Dr Renee Lertzman
University: Royal Roads University
Department: School of Environment and Sustainability
Address: 2005 Sooke Rd, Victoria, BC, V9B 5Y2

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kieran Dowling, a graduate student at Royal Roads University, and is supervised by Dr Renee Lertzman graduate research supervisor and professor with the School of Environment and Sustainability at Royal Roads University. This research is being conducted as part of the requirements for the Master’s of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are classified as a youth leader (aged 20-24 years old) working with environmental or social justice advocacy campaigns or projects. A total of 14 participants have been invited to participate in this research. To participate it is important that you confirm you are available to attend the first stage of research on July 18th 2013. Following this first stage of research six participants will be sought to continue with the final stage of research August 24th to September 24th 2013. Further details for the following stage will be provided in the invitation for the second stage of this research.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this study is to explore if and how burnout develops in environmental and social justice activists. The findings from this research intend to add to a limited body of research surrounding burnout in youth activists. It is expected that the findings will provide better understanding for positive youth engagement in environmental and social justice advocacy post college years, and communicate positive messaging for climate actions with young adults.

PROCEDURES
If you volunteer to participate in this study, your expected time commitment will be approximately one to one and a half hours. You will be asked to do the following things:

Individual Interviews:
Participate in two one-hour long interviews. The interviews will follow the same questions of the focus group discussing whether burnout exists in youth advocacy and how it might manifest. The interviews will start with an opening question, but will allow for participants to freely express their thoughts and feelings towards advocacy burnout.
What you can expect:
You can expect to be provided with an opportunity to express how you feel and relate to environmental or social advocacy. Kieran Dowling, the primary investigator, will conduct the interview. Throughout the interview Kieran will take notes and prompt dialogue, with occasional questions. At the conclusion of the interview and transcription of recording participants will be asked to verify the recorded notes and transcript to make sure that all transcripts are accurate.

Recording of interviews:
All interviews will be recorded. A digital sound recording device will be used to capture all interview dialogue. The recorded interviews will be transcribed and participants asked to verify the accuracy of transcription. Recordings and transcripts will be saved, filed, and password protected on Kieran Dowling’s personal computer.

Timing of interviews:
Selected participants will be asked to select up to four times for interviews. The interviews will then be scheduled with best times and dates being agreed upon with participants. The time between the first and the second interview is designed for 7 days. We will do our best to stick to this timeframe.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
There are no major risks expected for participants in this research. There is however potential for emotional tension and distress. Participants will be prompted throughout the focus group to talk about their experiences with advocacy work. This could lead to some uncomfortable discussions around the climate crisis, burnout and the ability of individuals to be agents of change. Kieran will do the best he can to mitigate and navigate possible tensions and emotional stress by providing a safe place for participants to share stories and invite participants to leave at any time if the emotions are too strong. It should be noted that Kieran is unable to provide council or therapy for any emotional stress that may arise from participation in the focus group or interviews.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
There will be no direct benefits for you from participation in this study. However, it is expected that the findings of this study will enhance environmental advocacy by helping understand how burnout happens. This may lead to greater awareness and protection for the environment. Additionally, I hope that the findings from this study will improve how advocacy work engages with youth, leading to a heightened sense of efficacy for young adults in the post college years.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION
There are no costs or compensation for participation in this study. However, a reference of participation can be provided for individuals seeking recognition of participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding names with numbers and letters; filing all records in a locked, safe, and personal filing cabinet; password protecting the video of the focus group uploaded to a personal computer and keeping copies of the video locked in with the records. Only Kieran Dowling (principle researcher) and Renee Lertzman (Academic Supervisor) will have access to these files, and records. All video / audio recordings will be
erased and destroyed one year upon the convocation of the principle researcher, Kieran Dowling.

The findings of the study might be released in summary to organisations, academics, conferences and journal articles. In these instances, no personal details will be disclosed.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**
You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You may be invited to complete a ‘withdraw from participation’ form to prevent any further use of material and statements made throughout the research.

**IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Kieran Dowling (Principle Researcher), or Dr Renee Lertzman, Academic Supervisor, Professor, School of Environment and Sustainability, Royal Roads University.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**
The Royal Road Ethical Review Board has reviewed my request to conduct this research. If you have any concerns about your rights in this study, please contact...

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

________________________________________
Printed Name of Subject

________________________________________
Signature of Subject Date

________________________________________
Signature of Witness Date
Appendix C: Interview Preamble, Starting Question, and Auxiliary Questions

Preamble:

As you are aware I am here with you to discuss your participation within environmental and/or social justice advocacy. I am especially interested in how you come to be the person you are and what experiences and/or feelings have led you in your journey with advocacy work. You have been selected as you are considered a youth (age 19-25), have worked within your area of interest for at least 2 years, and you have direct contact with numerous other youth, organisations, and projects. Do you feel that this about sums you up? I mean, do you see yourself fitting within these criteria?

I would like to give you a little bit of detail for what you can expect over the coming hour or so. My hope is to allow you to freely and openly talk about what comes to mind following an opening question that I will present. The nature of this interview is for you to express what you think and feel and for the dialogue to follow-on in an unstructured manner. There is no right or wrong way to present what you are thinking, and at times, you may be asking yourself where the conversation is leading. Try to not worry about where things are going and feel comfortable about expressing whatever comes to mind. I’ll start out with a question that will hopefully give you space and opportunity to tell me a story, or simply describe some experiences you have with the subject. You can also expect the odd silence or pause. These are useful to reflect on what you are thinking and for the two of us to feel comfortable about where we are in the dialogue. Is there anything that I have said that does not make sense to you? Do you think you would feel comfortable with this type of structure? Should we proceed?

**SQUIN: Single Question Aimed at Inducing Narrative**

I’m interested in learning about some of your experiences and memories as someone who cares for people, planet, and culture. Can you share a personal memory about how you became involved with environmental or social justice advocacy?

**Auxiliary Questions:**

- Over the course of my life I have been told that I have passion for the environment, or a passion for the mountains, or a passion for raising awareness around certain issues. Can you describe any experiences where you have been presented as being passionate for an issue? I would also be interested to hear how you would describe any feelings that you have when these stories are presented about you.

- I would like to tell you a story about some of my experiences. While working on the combination of community development projects with ‘at-risk’ children (child labour) and animal poaching campaigns in Asia, I had feelings of doubt and felt cynical for how effective the campaigns were on the wider issues within Asia. There were times when I felt like I was isolated in my work, not so much by land but by the culture, government policy, and the paradigm that was very different to my own. Tell me about your experiences and times when you may
have felt exhausted, cynical, and/or unable to effectively do what you had hoped for (hopeless).

- Have you ever felt uninspired to continue doing the work you have been doing? Describe how you feel when you are not inspired to continue with the work you do? OR Have you wanted to stop for any other reasons? Can you describe how this came about and what you were feeling?

**Auxiliary questions to draw more from dialogue (used where needed):**

- That is interesting can you elaborate more on this?
- And how did that make you feel?
- What do you think that means to you?
- What comes to mind when you think about this?
- What did you do?
- How did you react?
- How do you make sense of it all?
- Can you explain that in more detail?

**Auxiliary questions to help keep dialogue going (used where needed):**

- How do those around you make sense of your passions towards these issues?
- Do you feel you have opportunity to navigate through these challenges you have expressed?
- What feelings do you have about this, which you carry about with you?
- What direction do you think the condition of our planet is heading?
- What do you think the world will look like for future generations?
- What happens when you try and share these feelings with other people?
- How do you avoid expressing feelings about your work with others?
- How do you avoid experiencing these feelings?
- Have you ever before discussed your personal feelings towards your work and that which we have talked about with others? And why? Why not?
- What gives you hope, courage, strength? What do you think the world that we are leaving for future generations will look like?