TAKING ACTION: IDENTIFYING MOTIVES BEHIND

CLIMATE ACTIVISM

by

SELENA BLICK

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Environmental Studies
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Science

June 2018

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Selena Blick for the degree of Bachelor of Science
in the Department of Environmental Studies to be taken June 2018

Title: Taking Action: Identifying Motives Behind Climate Activism

Approved: _____

Dr. Kathryn Lynch

Despite frightening predictions from climate scientists, world leaders have done little to address climate change over the last 50 years. In response, citizen activists around the world have started to take matters into their own hands, but these individuals are still in the minority due to the complexity of climate change and social denial surrounding the issue. For my research, I sought to help better explain what motivates these activists to tackle this complex issue and how these findings might help to grow the climate activist movement in the future. Through interviewing a range of climate activists in Oregon, I found that social justice concerns and sense of community proved to be the most powerful motivators for activists. Time spent outside as a child also had a notable influence due to the resulting connection to place. Throughout my research, love of people and places were shown to be the most strong and prevailing motivations.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank Dr. Kathryn Lynch for all her support and guidance throughout this project. Thank you to Professor Casey Shoop and Professor Yvonne Braun for being on my committee. Thank you to my parents for their continuous support through this process, and thank you to all of my friends who have encouraged me along the way. I would like to especially thank Nicole Hendrix, an amazing friend and mentor, without whom I would not be the activist I am today.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the people whom I had the pleasure of interviewing for this project for taking the time to talk with me and aid in my research. You all are my motivation for continuing this work and you inspire me each and every day with your actions.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

Climate change is real, and it is urgent. According to climate scientist James Hansen, humans must reduce their carbon emissions globally by about 10% each year, starting in 2018, in order to reach 350 parts per million (ppm) of carbon in the atmosphere by the end of the century and stabilize the climate (Hansen et al., 2013, p. 10). Despite these numbers, world leaders have done little besides signing non-binding treaties like the Paris Agreement. As a result, citizens around the world have started to take action, but these activists are still in the minority due to many causes of climate denial and nonaction. Prior research in this field suggests that spending time outside during childhood and participating in environmental education can influence people's involvement in environmental issues (Chawla, 1999; Malone, 2004). However, little research exists about what motivates people to specifically address climate change and get involved in climate activism.

Successfully stopping climate change means changing fundamental characteristics of everyday life, particularly for American citizens (Maxmin, 2013). Because of this, climate change activism is hard to define. As 350.org, a global climate activism organization co-founded by Bill McKibben, states on their website, "Climate change is not just an environmental issue, or a social justice issue, or an economic issue — it's all of those at once." Thus, there are many different ways to be a climate change activist. In this thesis, climate change activism is defined as taking concrete actions to advocate for a change in human behavior so that everyone can have a safe climate. These actions are mainly aimed toward directly reducing fossil fuel use and other

sources of atmospheric carbon, but also may be aimed at larger environmental and social issues which contribute to climate change and climate injustice.

For my research, I interviewed 18 college students who are involved in climate activism and currently reside in Oregon in order to answer the question: "What motivates college students in Oregon to be climate activists?" I also interviewed 17 other Oregon climate activists who are not in college to help address my second question: "To what extent do these motivations change in Oregon climate activists not in college?" This second population consisted of a range of ages to help see if age was a contributing factor to these results. Through researching these questions, my goal is to provide a better understanding of how to effectively reach more people, get them involved, and grow the climate activism movement.

Personal Foundation

I decided on this topic for my thesis because of my own involvement in climate activism, my frustrations with society, and my aspirations of getting more people involved in the climate movement. My own climate activism began in college, but I was aware of the issues much earlier. This awareness stemmed from many areas of my life, including my parents, my hometown, school field trips, and spending lots of time outside growing up. However, there were not any clubs or other activism groups for me to easily get involved with when I was younger, so it took me until I started college to begin my activist journey. In college, I joined the Climate Justice League and participated in many forms of protests, petitioning, and peer education, as well as meeting with university administration about implementing changes on campus in the interest of a safe climate. I served as co-director for the Climate Justice League during my junior and senior years, and I also coordinated the Student Sustainability Network during this time, with the goal of creating more communication and collaboration between environmental and social justice student groups on campus. Through both of these roles, I have met many climate activists at the University of Oregon, in the broader Eugene community, and at other college campuses around the state.

During my junior year of college, I also participated in the Environmental Leadership Program and was formally introduced to environmental education (EE) and the Awareness to Action framework outlined in the Tbilisi Declaration (UNESCO, 1977). This framework, which states that environmental education should create environmental awareness, cultivate attitudes of concern, build knowledge and skills, and finally, promote civic engagement in solving these environmental issues

(UNESCO, 1977), made so much sense to me as a way to get more people involved in the activist community. Recruiting new activists is a key part of any form of activism in order to grow the movement and create change. In this recruiting process I have often run into people who either have little to no awareness of the issues around climate change, feel like they do not know enough about the issue to take action, or want to take action but do not feel like they have the skills to do so. This last barrier has proved particularly prevalent when recruiting people to take action on climate change. In theory, effective EE would combat all of these issues and lead to more people taking action on problems like climate change. This led me to the question of whether environmental education about climate change was living up to its goal of motivating activism around climate issues. Ultimately, I decided to broaden this into, "What motivates people to be climate activists?" and then decided to split this into two questions, the first looking primarily at college students in Oregon, and the second addressing other activists in Oregon and looking at the extent to which their motivations differ, if at all, from college students. Using the findings from this research, I hope to provide climate activists with a better understanding of how to motivate others to join the movement.

Literature Review

This literature review explores the topics of attitudes of environmentalism in the U.S., the problem of climate change, climate change nonaction, climate justice, environmental justice and science, and environmental education. This is by no means a comprehensive review of all the issues that could play into climate change activism, but it seeks to provide a better understanding of some of the key factors that may influence individuals in choosing to become active or not in climate change issues.

Attitudes of Environmentalism in the U.S.

The American view of environmental issues is complicated. In his book, *Saving the Planet: The American Response to the Environment in the Twentieth Century,* Rothman (2000) discusses how, on one hand, Americans see the environment as a source of constant resources to aid their never-ending capitalist growth, but on the other hand see the environment as "the salvation of themselves and their society, a respite from the pressures of modern life, a return to a more primitive, 'purer' way of life" (p. 3). Environmentalism challenges this capitalistic notion of growth and progress. It does not suggest that progress is bad, but instead questions "what constitutes progress and whether that progress is worth its price" (Rothman, 2000, p. 9). However, it was not really until the 1960s that this "price" became acute enough for Americans to start taking environmental problems seriously (Stradling, 2012, p. 3). At this point, old problems of water and air pollution became more significant, relatively new problems – such as nuclear bomb tests and pesticides – arose, and culturally significant species, like the bald eagle, became threatened (Stradling, 2012, p. 3). In 1969, three million gallons

of crude oil were spilled into the ocean off the Santa Barbara County coast (Mai-Duc, 2015), followed closely by Cleveland's Cuyahoga River catching on fire due to out-of-control pollution levels (Grant, 2017; Stradling, 2012). At this point, Stradling (2012) writes, "environmental rhetoric took on a new urgency, perhaps as activists attempted to match the quickening pace of economic growth and technological change" (p. 5). This urgency marked the start of the modern day environmental movement in America.

These growing concerns of environmentalism led to the implementation of famous legislation like the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Clean Air Act of 1965, and the Endangered Species Act of 1969 (Carter and Simmons, 2010, p. 6). In 1970, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was passed and the first Earth Day was celebrated by millions around the country (Carter and Simmons, 2010, p. 7). A multitude of environmental activism groups started around this time as well, including the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Environmental Defense Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Earthjustice, and Greenpeace. This increase in environmental momentum along with a study conducted by the National Science Teachers Association helped bring the Environmental Education Act into law in 1970, bringing environmental education into the federal government (Carter and Simmons, 2010, p. 7). However, this large-scale environmental concern has not lasted over the years. Beginning with Reagan's presidency in 1980, EE was dismissed by the federal government and has still not regained the standing it once had in the 1970s (Carter and Simmons, 2010, p. 9). This may also have been the beginning of a more partisan approach to environmental issues (Fuller, 2014).

In her book, *The Grassroots of a Green Revolution: Polling America on the Environment*, Guber (2003) discusses the consensus of support on environmental issues in the U.S., stating that "Of those surveyed in an April 2000 Gallup poll, 83 percent agreed with the goals of the environmental movement" and 58 percent thought that the U.S. government was doing "too little" to solve environmental issues (p. 22). However, looking at more recent data, there is a clear, growing divide in support of environmentalism between Democrats and Republicans (Anderson, 2017). While Democrats have gradually increased support for environmental protections and regulations, from 85% of adults agreeing that the country should do "whatever it takes to protect the environment" in 1994 to 90% agreeing in 2016, Republicans have quite significantly done the opposite, starting at 71% agreeing with this statement in 1994 and decreasing to only 52% agreeing in 2016 (Anderson, 2017). Additionally, the percentage of Democrats who agree that "stricter environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy" dropped from 29% in 1994 to 17% in 2016, whereas the percentage of Republicans who agree with this statement increased from 39% in 1994 to 58% in 2016 (Anderson, 2017).

In America, the "price" of progress through environmental degradation is often thought of in self-centered terms. For instance, although hunters, fishermen, and ranchers are not often thought of as environmental activists, they will take action on environmental issues if the problems start to affect their quality of life (Rothman, 2000, p. 204-205). Rothman (2000) sums up this attitude by stating,

> In the end, this combination of NIMBY – 'Not in My Backyard' – and
> quality of life held more power for Americans than any ideal of
> environmentalism. As environmentalists, Americans were pale green;

they embraced the theory as long as the practice did not cause them personal pain. (p. 205)

This distinction is important when considering climate change – a problem that most Americans believe "will most likely impact geographically and temporally distant people and places or nonhuman nature" (Leiserowitz, 2005, p. 1440).

The Problem of Climate Change

Climate change, formerly known as global warming, is much larger than previous environmental issues in America, or even globally. As Hernan (2010) writes, Chernobyl "pales in comparison" to the effects of climate change (p. 179). As Spowers (2003) states in his book, *Rising Tides*, "The crisis that we face threatens the entire planet. There is nobody for whom it is not relevant. Humanity has never been confronted with a challenge that is even remotely similar" (p. 7). McKibben (2010) summarizes,

> …the Arctic ice cap is melting, and the great glacier above Greenland is thinning, both with disconcerting and unexpected speed. The oceans, which cover three-fourths of the earth's surface, are distinctly more acid and their level is rising; they are also warmer, which means the greatest storms on our planet, hurricanes and cyclone, have become more powerful. The vast inland glaciers in the Andes and Himalayas, and the giant snowpack of the American West, are melting very fast, and within decades the supply of water to the billions of people living downstream may dwindle. The great rain forest of the Amazon is drying on its margins and threatened at its core. The great boreal forest of North America is dying in a matter of years. (p. 45)

As McKibben mentions, climate change is having many negative effects on humans and other life forms, including rising sea levels, shrinking ice sheets, ocean acidification, and extreme weather patterns. As temperatures increase, a domino effect is created by these changes and stopping climate change becomes more and more difficult (Hansen et

al., 2013). In order to reach a stable climate, the carbon concentration in the atmosphere must be restored to 350 parts per million (ppm), requiring a drop of more than 50 ppm from current levels (Jones, 2017). In order to reach this goal, humans must reduce their carbon emissions globally by almost 10% each year, starting in 2018 (Hansen et al., 2013, p. 10).

Furthermore, climate change is not only an environmental problem, but a "symptomatic fever" of a much larger issue (Eisenstein, 2013, p. 47). As Eisenstein (2013) points out:

> Carbon dioxide emissions will not change unless everything else that encourages them changes as well. Simply wanting to reduce CO_2 isn't enough as the abysmal failure of 1992 Rio climate accords shows. The world solemnly declared its intention to freeze CO_2 emissions; in the twenty years following, they rose by 50 percent. (p. 46)

Changing these factors that encourage carbon dioxide emissions means changing everything, particularly the capitalistic system in the U.S., as Klein (2014) argues in her book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate.* Because climate change is a systemic issue, making individual lifestyle changes is not enough. Klein (2014) discusses the different ways that people "look away" and deny climate change, and states:

> Or we look but tell ourselves that all we can do is focus on ourselves. Meditate and shop at the farmer's markets and stop driving – but forget trying to actually change the systems that are making the crisis inevitable because that's too much 'bad energy' and it will never work. And at first it may appear as if we are looking, because many of these lifestyle changes are indeed part of the solution, but we still have one eye tightly shut. (p. 4)

Climate Change Nonaction

The Perfect Storm

Public apathy is one of the major issues stopping people from acting on climate change (Norgaard, 2006). In her article, "We Don't Really Want to Know," Norgaard (2006) discusses the issue of denial as a "socially organized process" (p. 350). In her study, she interviewed 46 people from a small Norwegian town, ranging in age, gender, occupation, and other life experiences (Norgaard, 2006, p. 354). She chose to do her study in Norway because most citizens of Norway are educated, politically involved, environmentally engaged, and have a high socio-economic status – yet they still do not act on climate change (Norgaard, 2006, p. 353). By using this population, she was able to control for many of the factors, such as lack of education and engagement on environmental issues, low socio-economic status, and lack of general civic engagement, that are often thought to impact American citizens in regard to nonaction on climate change (Norgaard, 2006, p. 353). Through the data she gathered, Norgaard was able to identify why and how this denial was having such a strong impact on the well-educated, otherwise politically engaged citizens. One of the main problems she identifies as causing this lack of climate change engagement is the issue of separation in space and time (Norgaard, 2006, p. 362). Norgaard (2006) adds, "Social inequality helps to perpetuate environmental degradation making it easier to displace visible outcomes and costs across borders of time and space, out of the way of citizens who are most politically able to respond" (p. 367). Furthermore, citizens of wealthy nations benefit from this denial economically, emotionally, and psychologically, at least in the short term (Norgaard, 2006, p. 366). Gardiner (2006) refers to these issues of space and time

as the global storm (separation in space) and the intergenerational storm (separation in time). This separation in space and time combined with "the theoretical storm" – meaning that people do not currently have the theoretical capabilities to address climate change – Gardiner (2006) argues leads to "a perfect moral storm," resulting in moral corruption. Gardiner (2006) argues that this moral corruption is what leads to actions of denial, like complacency, unreasonable doubt, and hypocrisy, all of which increase the difficulty of actually addressing climate change.

Solution Aversion

Another explanation for climate change denial has less to do with social inequity and more to do with people's individual values and beliefs. As science has been crucial to understanding climate change, the latest response to people who are in denial of climate change has been to label them as "anti-science". Although there has been a significant decrease in funding for scientific research under the Trump administration (Zhang, 2017), Campbell argues, "People's relationship with science is much more complex and nuanced than 'pro-science' or 'anti-science'" (Campbell and Griffin, 2017). Jamieson (1992) brings up this same point when he writes,

> …the most important force driving the backlash is not concerns about the weakness of the science but the realization that slowing global warming or responding to its effects may involve large economic costs and redistributions, as well as radical revisions in lifestyle. (p. 141)

Campbell's work has helped show that this is true – people do not usually disagree with the scientific findings, but instead their denial is motivated by the implied solutions to the problem. This is known as solution aversion (Campbell and Griffin, 2017). As Campbell and Kay (2014) describe,

The solution aversion model proposed here predicts that people will be skeptical of scientific evidence supporting the existence of a problem, to the degree that the existence of the problem directly implies solutions that threaten a person's cherished beliefs and ideological motives. (p. 811)

This theory helps explain why Republicans in particular tend to deny climate change, because the proposed solutions of government intervention in the free market conflict with their political beliefs (Campbell and Kay, 2014). As Klein (2014) writes, "We deny because we fear that letting in the full reality of this crisis will change everything. And we are right" (p. 4).

Despair

Another explanation for nonaction is simply not having hope. In his book, *The Psychology of Hope*, Stotland (1969) states, "hope is a prerequisite for action" (p. 19). As such, "if the person feels that he cannot possibly escape, he does not panic, does not flee, but sits down, so to speak, to await death" (Stotland, 1969, p. 21). Although not written in the context of climate change, this psychological phenomenon is very relevant today. Spowers (2003) points out how attitudes toward climate change range from "Oh well, it won't happen in my lifetime" to "The planet will be better off without us anyway" (p. 5). However, the latter is just as dangerous as the first because it implies that the future is already set and there is no use in taking action (Spowers, 2003). Roser-Renouf et al. (2014) pointed out in their study that believing in self-efficacy and collective efficacy are key influences in climate change activism, and Feinberg and Willer (2010) found that "fear-based appeals, especially those not coupled with a clear solution, can backfire and undermine the intended effects of the messages" (p. 37).

These findings all point to the fact some form of hope is necessary to take action on climate change. Some non-activists may not be in denial, but instead in despair.

Climate Justice

As Norgaard (2006) discusses, not all communities are impacted by climate change in same way and these differences are often due to social inequities (IPCC, 2014). This issue is commonly known as environmental injustice. Bullard (2008), often regarded as the father of the environmental justice movement, explains:

> In the real world all communities are not created equal… if a community happens to be poor, black, or located on the 'wrong side of the tracks,' it receives less protection than communities inhabited largely by affluent whites in the suburbs. Generally, rich people tend to take the higher ground, leaving the poor and working class more vulnerable to flooding and environmental pestilence. (p. 756-757)

Although issues of environmental justice existed before climate change, negative impacts from climate change have further exacerbated these issues. Inequities specifically caused by climate change even get their own category: issues of climate justice. As pointed out in their report on climate justice, Boom et al. (2016) state,

> Climate justice recognises that those who are least responsible for climate change suffer the gravest consequences, and that fair and just solutions must recognise issues of equality, human rights, collective rights and historical responsibility for climate change. (p. 7)

These issues of climate justice also point to the reasons of why climate change has gone unaddressed for so long, as the people suffering the most are not the people causing it nor the people with the most power to stop it.

This is where the legal system has been a useful tool in combating this difference in power. The *Juliana v United States* lawsuit was filed in August 2015 against the Obama administration, continuing now against the Trump administration,

stating that the United States government has known about climate change for over fifty

years and yet has continued to promote the use of fossil fuels and support fossil fuel

companies (Savage, 2018). The plaintiffs of this case are twenty-one young people, all

ages 19 and younger at the time the case was filed. Their argument is distinct because

they are youth and therefore their generation has the most to lose from the increasing

effects of climate change (Stronberg, 2017). The Obama administration and Trump

administration both tried to dismiss this case, but both motions to dismiss were denied,

sending the case to trial, set for October 29, 2018 (Savage, 2018).

The arguments of the plaintiffs of *Juliana v United States* are based on human

rights, mainly the right to life, liberty, and property, as well as the public trust doctrine,

which is the "principle that certain natural and cultural resources are preserved for

public use, and that the government owns and must protect and maintain these resources

for the public's use" (Cornell, n.d.). Stemming from these rights and obligations, the

plaintiffs argue that they have a right to a stable climate and that it is the government's

duty to protect this right. An important note about this case is that it is based on rights

set up by the US Constitution, and not environmental protection laws. Judge Ann Aiken

(2016) discusses this distinction in her opinion denying the government's motion to

dismiss the case. She states:

> [The defendants] are correct that plaintiffs likely could not obtain the
> relief they seek through citizen suits brought under the Clean Air Act,
> the Clean Water Act, or other environmental laws. But that argument
> misses the point. This action is of a different order than the typical
> environmental case. It alleges that defendants' actions and inactions -
> whether or not they violate any specific statutory duty have so
> profoundly damaged our home planet that they threaten plaintiffs'
> fundamental constitutional rights to life and liberty. (p. 52)

The rights at stake in this case are not environmental rights, but simply the right to survive on our planet – the right to life, the most fundamental human right of all.

Environmental Justice and Science

As technology and scientific discovery become more pervasive in our society, the reliance on science within the environmental movement has caused controversy within the activist community. In his essay, "Justice: The Heart of Environmentalism," Jamieson (2007) points out that environmentalists who are motivated by sense of place tend to be mistrustful of science because "They see environmental problems as largely caused by failed attempts to manage complex systems and are skeptical of the idea that even more intensive management is the solution to these failures" (p. 86). Those motivated by global change issues have more faith in science because "it is scientists who have alerted us to climate change and the biodiversity crisis" (Jamieson, 2007, p. 87). While many environmentalists "drink from both wells," these perspectives offer almost opposite answers to environmental issues, depending on whether more science is viewed as the solution or the problem (Jamieson, 2007, p. 87).

Akaba (2004) displays this dichotomy in his article, "Science as a Double-Edged Sword," when he explains how science can both be helpful and hurtful to communities experiencing environmental injustices. On one hand, scientists and other academics can provide expertise to community groups, by helping to provide "a basis for policy changes at the local, state, and national levels" (Cole & Foster, 2001, p. 26). In this way, science can give more credibility to activists in the environmental justice movement (Brown). On the other hand, Akaba (2004) writes,

> Historically, powerful and dominant institutions such as polluting
> industries have manipulated science to serve their own profit-making
> interests, with poor communities and communities of color paying the
> severe price in our health and well-being. (p. 9)

For instance, natural scientists tend to not focus on issues of environmental injustice because of their government funding and training (Akaba, 2004). Furthermore, because scientific research often requires large sums of money and expertise, this knowledge is often limited to those who can afford these costs and discourages participation from community members (Akaba, 2004).

In recent times, science has come under attack, not from social justice leaders, but from those opposing social justice and environmental movements. The March for Science is an excellent example of how President Trump's attacks on science, the environmental movement, and communities of color can provide opportunities for coalition building. However, it has also provoked dissonance between these groups (Petrella, 2017). In 2017, the March for Science website stated, "The application of science to policy is not a partisan issue. Anti-science agendas and policies have been advanced by politicians on both sides of the aisle, and they harm everyone — without exception." However, as Petrella (2017) points out in his article, "Race, History, and the #ScienceMarch," "Science is and always has been a function of power and politics." This power has been historically used against communities of color, and ignoring this fact further perpetuates the racist history of western science and the problems that it has caused (Petrella, 2017). In response to the critiques of the March for Science movement, the mission statement on their website in 2018 now reads,

> The March for Science champions robustly funded and publicly
> communicated science as a pillar of human freedom and prosperity. We
> unite as a diverse, nonpartisan group to call for science that upholds the

common good, and for political leaders and policymakers to enact evidence-based policies in the public interest.

In 2018, March for Science organizers also decided to specifically not hold their event on Earth Day, like it was in 2017. One of the founders of the movement, Weinberg, states, "Earth Day is a very powerful event, and we decided to let it stand on its own" (qtd in Mervis, 2018).

Yearley (2005) points out how odd it is that the environmental movement relies so heavily on natural science and does not incorporate much social science (p. 115). This is unusual for a social movement. For example, the abortion debate uses science, but the arguments for or against it are primarily moral (Yearley, 2005, p. 116). But within the environmental movement, science is often used as an argument of appeal to authority, despite the fact that science is always changing and open to revision (Yearley, 2005, p. 116). Jamieson (2007) argues that in order to reconcile the opposing views about science, environmentalism should instead be "informed by considerations of justice," which would "help us to see science as an institutional agent with important powers and capacities, but also its own interests" (p. 88). By framing the movement in the manner, Jamieson (2007) argues that "Justice also gives environmentalism a heart in the sense of motivating people to make change" (p. 86).

Environmental Education

In order for people to be involved in the environmental movement and act on current issues, they must have the knowledge and skills to do so. Environmental education, framed by the Tbilisi Declaration of 1977, specifically articulates the goals of providing environmental awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and motivation to

act (UNESCO, 1977). This is known as the "awareness to action framework" and lays out steps for environmental educators to not only provide knowledge to students but encourage attitudes of care and critical thinking skills that will motivate students to change their behaviors.

Simply spending time outside is an important aspect of environmental education and is particularly important for place-based education. Place-based education, as described by Clark and Glazer (2004), "is learning about, learning from, and learning within the context of where we are" (p. 1). In their book, *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature*, Young, Haas, and McGown (2016) discuss the importance of wandering as part of environmental education, even advocating for education programs to use this for half of the time spent in the field (p. 53). Wandering is so crucial because it allows students to connect with a place on their own terms and based on their own curiosities (Young, Haas, & McGown, 2016; Zwinger, 1986). As Snyder (1999) writes, "Our relation to the natural world takes place in a *place*, and it must be grounded in information and experience" (p. 193). Snyder (1999) takes this a step further to explain the consequences of not only building a relationship with a place, but then acknowledging it as home:

> …we must consciously, fully accept and recognize that this is where we live and grasp the fact that our descendants will be here for millennia to come. Then we must… learn it – defend it – and work to hand it on to the children (of all beings) of the future with its biodiversity and health intact. (p. 194)

This theory has shown to be true in studies about influences on environmental activism, where spending time outdoors in natural areas emerged as a dominant influence (Tanner, 1980; Chawla, 1999).

Another important aspect of successful environmental education is community involvement. In her book chapter, "Critical environmental adult education: Taking on the environmental challenge," Malone (2004) explains the importance of students getting involved directly with local environmental issues, which allows them to see how they can make a difference in their own community (p. 142). In the past, most education programs have relied on the "information transfer" model, where the authority figure identifies environmental problems and develops solutions and the community has limited opportunities to respond or participate in decision-making process (Malone, 2004, p. 143). Malone (2004) instead suggests a different model: the "knowledge production and information critique" (p. 143). In this approach, education is a lifelong, critical process, where knowledge is produced by the participants instead of derived from experts. Thus, the educator's role becomes a collaborative participant instead of an authority figure (Malone, 2004, p. 144). Furthermore, this approach involves the community as "co-learners" and uses their lived experiences to shape understanding of environmental issues and possibilities for change (Malone, 2004, p. 144-145). In her book chapter, "Rainbow warriors: The unfolding of agency in early adolescents' environmental involvement," Blanchet-Cohen (2010) echoes these statements and emphasizes that "Children's involvement is critical to learning" (p. 52).

When it comes to climate change, even the National Research Council (2011) in Washington DC admits that the science of climate change is very difficult to teach, especially considering the politicization of the topic. Teaching with the goal of changing societal behavior is even more difficult because it requires blending many subjects and disciplines (p. 2). In their book, *Climate Change Education: Goals,*

Audiences, and Strategies, the Council points out that climate change education needs to have similar goals to environmental education to be successful, i.e. the awareness to action framework, pointing out that "climate change education efforts will have limited impact if educators do not recognize that knowledge alone is insufficient to motivate changes in behavior" (National Research Council, 2011, p. 7). Psychologist Susan Clayton emphasizes the role of education in providing a social context as well as teaching skills effective in addressing climate change:

> In an age of information overload, social context helps an individual decide whether to pay attention to a message, encourages the individual to continue to think about a message after the delivery, and provides an interpretive framework for making sense of information. (National Research Council, 2011, p. 7)

This social context can also increase community and social connections relating to climate change, increasing their engagement about the issues (National Research Council, 2011, p. 28).

An example of climate change education by the National Wildlife Federation involved developing training programs for the hunter and angler community. Results from pilot courses suggested several key approaches: use local examples, focus on habitat and wildlife, and allow participants to describe their own experiences (National Research Council, 2011, p. 36). This approach ties directly back to the idea of community-based learning, with the focus on community issues and experiences. This is key as sustainable livelihoods have shown to be rooted in community knowledge, practice, and innovation (Global Environment Facility, 2012, p. 139)

All of this literature displays the complexity of environmentalism within the U.S. and particularly the climate change movement. The literature regarding climate

change nonaction offers a few explanations for why people may choose to not be involved in climate activism, whereas the literature regarding environmental justice, climate justice, and environmental education provides a background on some aspects that may provide influence and motivation for activists. My research uses this background information as a framework for understanding climate activism motivations and influences, particularly in college students. Little research has been done about motivations around climate activism, and this research seeks to help fill this gap.

Research Methods

Through my research, I sought to answer the questions, "What motivates college students in Oregon to be climate activists?" and, "To what extent do these motivations change in Oregon climate activists not in college?" My goal is to provide a better understanding of how to get more people involved in the movement and combat the prevalent climate change nonaction in our society.

For my research, I conducted semi-structured interviews with climate activists about their background, their experience as a climate activist, and their motivations for getting involved with this work. Semi-structured interviews are defined as being open-ended while still adhering to a set of prescribed topics (Bernard, 2016). This format allowed me to follow up with additional questions as necessary based on the participant's answers. The population that I interviewed was selected based on their involvement in climate activism. This activism is defined as taking concrete actions to advocate for a change in human behavior so that everyone can have a safe climate, and thus my population includes people who have been involved in climate rallies, marches, demonstrations, petitioning, education, or conversations with elected officials or other decision makers. In the interview, I let people define their own climate activism, but all participants were selected because I knew that they had been involved with one or more of these actions.

I interviewed 35 individuals over the course of 3 months, consisting of 18 college students, 5 high school students, 4 adults less than 5 years post-college (referred to as PC5), and 8 adults over 15 years post-college (referred to as PC15). These interviews lasted anywhere between 10 and 45 minutes. I recorded interviews and took

notes on my computer. All interviews were conducted in person in a location of the participant's choice.

During the interview, I first asked each participant for their birth month and year and preferred gender pronouns. Then I asked them to describe their climate activism, whatever that meant to them. Based on their answer, I then followed up with additional questions as necessary, including number of years involved, time input, and types of activities. I then asked what motivated them to first get involved in climate activism and whether there are specific things that continue to motivate them. I wanted to differentiate these two motivations, to see if initial reasons for wanting to be involved are also what continue to motivate people to stay involved. Based on these answers, I then asked about the political environment of the participant's hometown and household, how much time they spent outside as a child, and how much formal and nonformal environmental education they received growing up. I also asked if they felt like any of these influenced their involvement in climate activism. Finally, I asked if they felt welcome in the climate activism community and if they were involved in any forms of activism outside climate activism. I asked these questions to see if issues of inclusivity were affecting how much people were involved and whether being involved with other forms of activism had helped them become involved in climate activism. A complete list of the questions I used in my interviews are included in Appendix A.

Definitions

In my semi-structured interview, I specifically asked about five different influences that I thought may have helped lead to the participant's involvement in climate activism: hometown, family, time spent outside, formal EE, and nonformal EE

(see Appendix A). I picked these influences primarily based on my own experiences of what influenced me to get involved with climate activism, as well as influences that I have heard many other activists discuss. The influence of time spent outside was also prevalent within the literature (Chawla, 1999; Tanner, 1980). **Hometown** as an influence refers to political and/or geographical atmosphere of where the participant grew up. Although I initially framed my question as only referring to the political environment, many participants answered the question with reference to the geographical environment of their hometown as a major influence, so I decided to include this factor in my results. **Family** refers to the political environment in the participant's childhood household and to what extent their family was supportive or unsupportive of activism. **Time spent outside** refers to the amount, and quality, of time that the participant spent outside while growing up, through causal playtime, hiking, camping, skiing, etc. This variable is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify based on how many different experiences one can have outside. In order to even get close to quantifying this variable, much more specific and in-depth research would need to be done. For the purpose of my study, I was more focused on whether the time they spent outside later influenced them to become activists instead of the exact quantity and quality of this time. **Formal EE** refers to the number of environmentally-focused classes taken in a formal school setting, either in K-12 or in college, whereas **nonformal EE** refers to the amount of environmental education received through other programs, such as summer camps, museums, national parks, wildlife exhibits, or media. Like time spent outside, amount of EE is difficult to quantify, especially only based on the participant's memory. However, information about what EE that stood out to them

24

enough to remember it is still useful in thinking about effective EE. In my analysis I did not include answers of nonformal EE influences that only referred to personal research about environmental issues.

Site Description

Eugene

Most of my participants (31/35) currently live in Eugene, Oregon, although only 7 of these participants grew up in Eugene (5 of which are high school students). Eugene is located in the central Willamette Valley and is the third largest city in Oregon. The population of Eugene is 80% white, 9% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 2% African American, and 1% Native American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The student population at the University of Oregon is closer to 60% white, 11% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 2% African American, and less than 1% Native American, with 7% identifying as multi-racial and 12% as international students (University of Oregon, 2017). The median household income for Eugene is $44,859, which is considered middle class, however 23% of people in Eugene are below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). In the 2016 election, 70-80% of residents in the campus, downtown, and South Eugene areas voted for Clinton (with only 7-15% voting for Trump), whereas up to 40% of residents in the North and West Eugene areas voted for Trump (Lane County, 2016).

In 2010, Eugene created its Community Climate and Energy Action Plan and in 2014, adopted a Climate Recovery Ordinance, which was updated in 2016 (City of Eugene, n.d.). Eugene was also the second government entity to endorse the UN Declaration on Human Rights and Climate Change in February 2018 (Arkin, 2018).

Activist Groups

The following list provides an overview of some of the main climate activism groups in Eugene. Almost all of my participants (33/35) have been or are currently involved with one or more of these groups.

1. **Earth Guardians 350 South (EG 350)** – Founded in 2015, this club is the only climate activist club at South Eugene High School (SEHS). The club's name references its affiliation with both the international Earth Guardians organization and 350 Eugene. They meet once a week during lunch. Their club works on local issues at SEHS and advocates for changes at the city and state levels, as well as supports national efforts like the *Juliana v. United States* lawsuit (see http://theaxe.xyz/2017/11/club-profile-earth-guardians-350/).

2. **Climate Action Club Churchill** – Shortly after EG 350 was founded, students at Churchill High School (CHS) started a similar club. They meet twice a week during lunch. Their group has been working on sustainability issues at CHS, like compositing, and educating their peers on issues of climate justice through guest speakers and art installations.

3. **Climate Justice League (CJL)** – Founded in 2010, the mission of CJL is to empower UO students to be leaders in the climate justice movement by using direct-action campaigns. CJL meets once a week, averaging 20-30 members, and works to address local environmental issues on campus and in the Eugene community. The club is run by two Co-Directors, several campaign coordinators, and five other steering members. One of CJL's most famous campaigns was Divest UO, working to get the UO Foundation to divest from fossil fuel companies. This campaign included a 10-week sit-in outside the President's office in winter and spring of 2016, several rallies and marches, two petitioning drives, several meetings with administrators, public comments to the Board of Trustees, and a "mock wedding" of the UO marrying the fossil fuel industry. This campaign resulted in the UO Foundation releasing a statement about their intent to let all of their carbon-based investments expire. As of 2018, CJL is mainly working on getting the UO to update its Climate Action Plan with specific steps for reducing its carbon emissions. CJL often partners with other student groups on campus as well as 350 Eugene (see http://climatejusticeleague.weebly.com/).

4. **Cascadia Action Network (CAN)** – Early in 2017, CAN was formed in order to create more crossover between environmental and social justice activism on the UO campus, as well as engage UO students in activism

movements happening at the city, state, and national levels. They have general meetings once a week, as well as separate campaign meetings. As of 2018, their current campaigns focus on getting REI to divest from fossil fuel industries and bringing awareness to the *Juliana v. United States* case.

5. **GTFF Environmental Justice Caucus (EJ Caucus)** – Also founded in early 2017, the EJ Caucus was started by members of the UO's Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF) as a way for graduate students to get involved with EJ issues both on campus and in the Eugene community. They currently meet once every three weeks. They often partner with Beyond Toxics, a Eugene-based EJ non-profit organization.

6. **350 Eugene** – As a chapter of 350.org, the 350 Eugene chapter was founded in early 2014. They focus specifically on climate legislation, like the Oregon cap and trade bill or Eugene's Climate Recovery Ordinance, and stopping fossil fuel industry, such as the proposed Jordan Cove LNG pipeline. They meet as a whole group only four times a year but have separate campaign and event planning meetings as needed. This group is mainly comprised of retired and working Eugene community members but collaborates with many of the college and high school student groups listed above (see http://world.350.org/eugene/).

Limitations

One of the limitations to this study is the geographical scope. I limited this study to Oregon in order to narrow my research and allow me to meet with all participants in person. However, even within Oregon, a larger sampling may produce different results as the participants in this study were mainly from Eugene, and many of them have been exposed to the same college curriculum and involved in the same activist groups.

Another limitation is that all of the participants were currently involved to some extent in climate activism, so this study did not include the perspectives of those who choose not to participate in the climate activism movement, or the perspectives of people who were previously involved in the climate activism movement but are no longer involved. Interviewing both of these groups would help provide more insight into the barriers preventing people from becoming involved and staying involved in the

movement. However, I chose to only interview people currently involved partly to limit my scope and partly because asking people why they are not involved in such an important movement has the potential of causing feelings of guilt and, as a result, less truthful answers. In order to get accurate results, a study including these people would likely have to be conducted anonymously. The participants that I interviewed were also all people that I knew, at least to some extent, so the sampling was not random.

This study was framed in the context of environmental education because of my background and my initial question of whether EE influenced climate activism. Using this framework was useful in thinking about how to get more people involved in climate activism moving forward but did not do much to explain people's current motivations, partly because there is a lack of good, accessible EE particularly dealing with climate change and partly because climate change is much more than just an environmental issue. In addition to EE, providing a framework of social justice movement literature would have been useful to help understand climate activism as a social justice movement instead of just environmental activism.

Findings

In analyzing the different motivations that participants discussed regarding what motivated them to get started and what continues to motivate their involvement in climate activism, I identified nine main categories: connection to environment, concern about environment, values of fairness/justice/empathy, concern about other people, community, sense of duty/privilege, empowerment through action, vision of future/hope, and urgency.

College Students

In answer to my first question, "what motivates college students in Oregon to be climate activists?" I found three major themes: 1) concern about the environment shifting to concern about other people, 2) values of fairness, justice, and empathy playing a large role, and 3) the importance of community.

Shifts in Concerns

As shown in the Figure 1, concern about the environment was the most prevalent motivation for first getting involved, listed by 8/18 (44%) of participants, but was only listed by 1/18 (6%) of participants as a continuing motivation. However, these numbers switch for the motivation of concern about other people, with only 1/18 (6%) of participants listing it as first motivation, but 7/18 (39%) listing it as a continuing motivation.
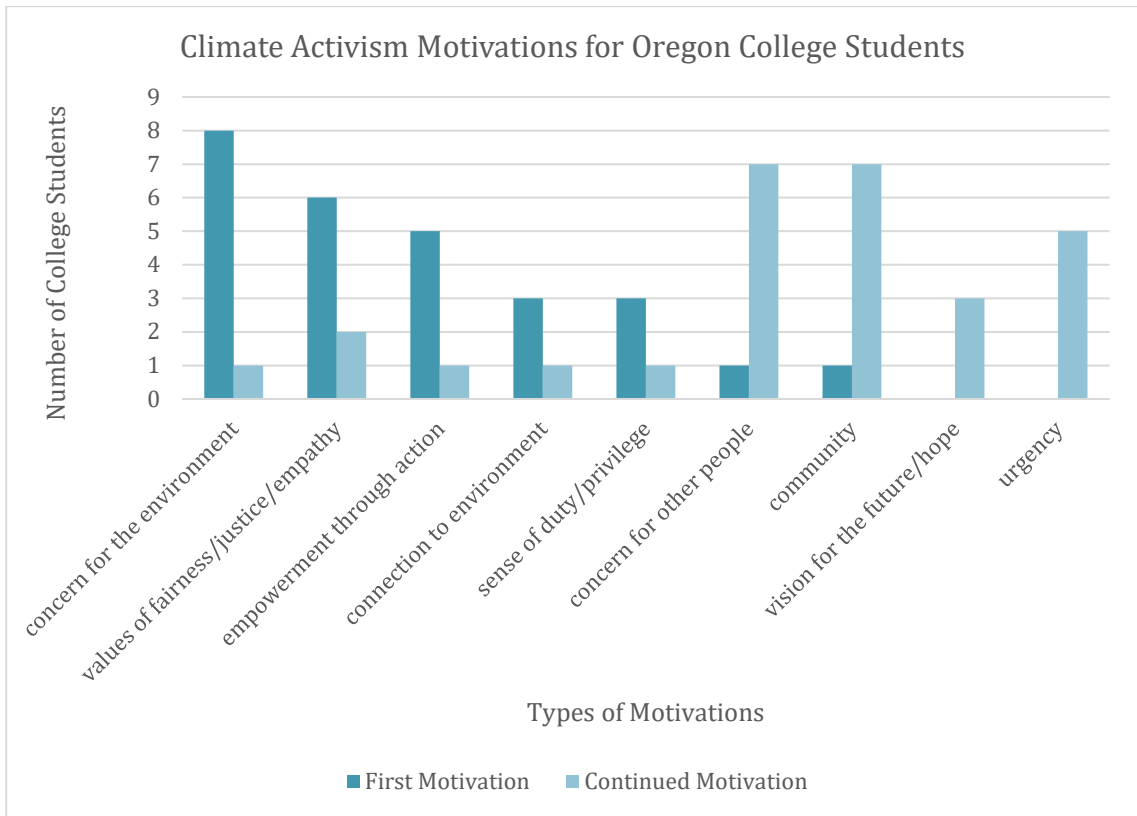
Figure 1. Climate activism motivations for Oregon college students

The initial concern for the environment that many participants experienced was often formed by spending time outside growing up and then learning about the changes that were happening and would continue to happen to this natural space because of climate change. However, after getting involved in the movement and learning more about the effects of climate change, many college students mentioned that their continued motivation did not stem from the environment itself, but instead from concern about other people and how they would be affected by climate change.

When I interviewed Tia, one of the plaintiffs for the *Juliana v. United States* lawsuit and a member of CJL, she talked about her experience outside as being her first motivation for getting involved with climate activism:

I grew up in Bend, Oregon and weekly activities on the weekends included going on hikes. I'm a big Nordic skier and trail runner and my favorite part about those activities was really just getting out in the fresh air and enjoying the environment and there's just a connection that you build when you spend so much time out there, and you realize that you want to protect those places that you love… my main concern when I learned about climate change was that there wasn't going to be any snow for me to ski.

But when I asked her what continued to motivate her, she talked about her concern for other people, including her fellow plaintiffs:

I try to put myself in other people's shoes a lot… some of my fellow plaintiffs who I've become really good friends with, like Miko… the lands that she's from, the Marshall Islands, are literally going underwater and she gets really sad about that. That's one person out of all of these people that are literally losing their land and their cultures and it's devastating.

Matt, a campaign coordinator for the CJL, had a similar story. When I asked what had first motivated him to get involved, he discussed his personal connection with being outdoors:

I've been passionate about the environment for a long time…I grew up spending a lot of time outside which was super formative to me and it never really occurred to me when I was younger that that might not be something that would be a lasting or a permanent thing in my life.

However, Matt discussed his concerns about social justice issues caused by climate change as his continued motivation for being involved. In response to "are there specific things that continue to motivate you?" he stated:

Mostly environmental justice concerns. I think it's pretty fucked up that issues of racism like institutional bias are present even in environmental issues. So it's more of a social issue… I still deeply care about the fact that glaciers are melting and the fact that oceans are rising and these physical changes, but definitely learning about the social ramifications of it has made me even more motivated to care about it.

This shift in motivations shows how climate change being framed as a social justice issue instead of just an environmental issue can create more motivation for people to act. Especially for those who may not already be motivated by environmental issues, learning about the "social ramifications," as Matt stated, could provide new motivations for people to get involved in climate activism.

Fairness, Justice, and Empathy

The college students that I interviewed were also motivated to get involved in climate activism due to a sense of fairness, justice, and empathy. Although related to having concern about other people, 6/18 (33%) of the participants specifically listed caring about one or more of these values as a reason for why they first got involved with climate activism.

In response to the question, "what motivated you to first get involved?" Gentry, a member of both CJL and CAN, brought up fairness in relation to her privilege as a white person:

> I think a combination of a sense of duty and not believing that it's fair
> for me to live in this world in a place of privilege and then not do
> anything to try to change the way that I have acted as an oppressor
> because of that place of privilege, even though it's not intended.

Gentry talked about she became aware of her privilege through her church, which she attended because of her family. Skye, a member of CAN, CJL, and Student Labor Action Project, and former intern for the Civil Liberties Defense Center, brought up her interest in wealth inequality and how that led her to act on climate change:

> I had already been interested in inequality, mostly about wealth
> inequality and distribution of resources, which is super correlated to

ecological degradation… just seeing all the negative impacts on the environment that capitalism has perpetuated.

Finally, Kelsey, the lead plaintiff of the *Juliana v. United States* lawsuit and member of CAN, discussed how empathy was a huge motivator for her because it was such an integral part of the way she was raised. In response to the question, "what motivated you to first get involved?" Kelsey responded:

> The whole community that I grew up around. I went to the Village School, which was a very close school where the motto was 'head, heart, and hand,' so it was all about service and the community and working hard and having a good heart and building a village, essentially. So growing up that was really drilled into me as an intrinsic part of how I want to live and how I see the world.

Along with concern about other people, the prevalence of values of fairness, justice, and empathy as motivators points to the power of framing the issue of climate change as a social justice issue. This framing allows people to feel connected to the issue of climate change through these values that they likely already hold.

Community

Besides concern for other people, the other main motivator for continued involvement was community, with 7/18 (39%) of participants listing this motivation. Having a sense of community within activism work can provide hope to activists and makes doing the work easier. As Kade, a co-founder of CAN, said:

> Meeting all these people that I've met in the community and on campus… Once you get past [the fear of climate change] and once you take constructive steps and your organization grows and you find out that there's other people working on it that care about it as much or more than you do… it's a jolt of hope almost… Even when it sorta wears you down a little bit because you're working all the time, when you have that hope, that knowledge that other people are working, it's like, well I'm going to continue to do *my* part.

Skye emphasized how inspired she gets by the activist community:

> Everyone in the community of activism is really inspiring and what they do and the risks that they take in their daily lives to continue their activism.

Marley, a member of CAN, talked about how fun it can be when you have a good activist community:

> The people I do [activism] with, they're so much fun and we hang out outside of activism and we have a good time together… it makes doing activism a lot easier.

Josh, a college senior and other co-founder of Cascadia Action Network, even mentioned how he might not still be involved in activism if it wasn't for his community:

> The people that I do [activism] with are the only thing that really keeps me going at this point.

All of these quotes point to how hope and even joy around activism can be caused through a sense of community and maintaining this is key to maintaining motivation.

Different Ages

Motivations

I included high school students and post-college adults in my study to compare their motivations to current college students and see if there were any major differences. While there were some slight differences between age groups, I did not find anything noteworthy. However, one motivation that showed up in all age groups was empowerment through action. As Ian, a high school student involved in EG 350 stated:

> A lot of times it seems like youth don't have a voice, but with [the Juliana v. US] case it's been proved that no, youth are so powerful and we can make so much difference, so that's been a big inspiration.

34

Michaela, a college student and campaign coordinator for CJL, explained: "I continue to be motivated by a greater sense of ability to change things." Megan, a PC5 and past co-director for CJL, discussed how making change can even be a bit addicting: "Learning how to make change and actually affecting change were like bites of the apple, once you have it, you want to keep on doing it." And finally, Patty, a PC15 and co-founder of Eugene 350, pointed out that action is how she and her partner stay hopeful. She explained: "We never despair because action is the antidote to despair and we're very active!" Whether it is through inspiration, motivation, or simply staying hopeful, gaining empowerment through taking action is a powerful motivator for activists of all ages.

Contributing Influences

Along with motivations, I also examined factors in the participant's life that later influenced their motivations to be involved in climate activism. The influences that I specifically asked about were hometown, family, time spent outside, formal EE, and nonformal EE. The way that I see these influences being related to the motivations I identified is shown in Figure 2.
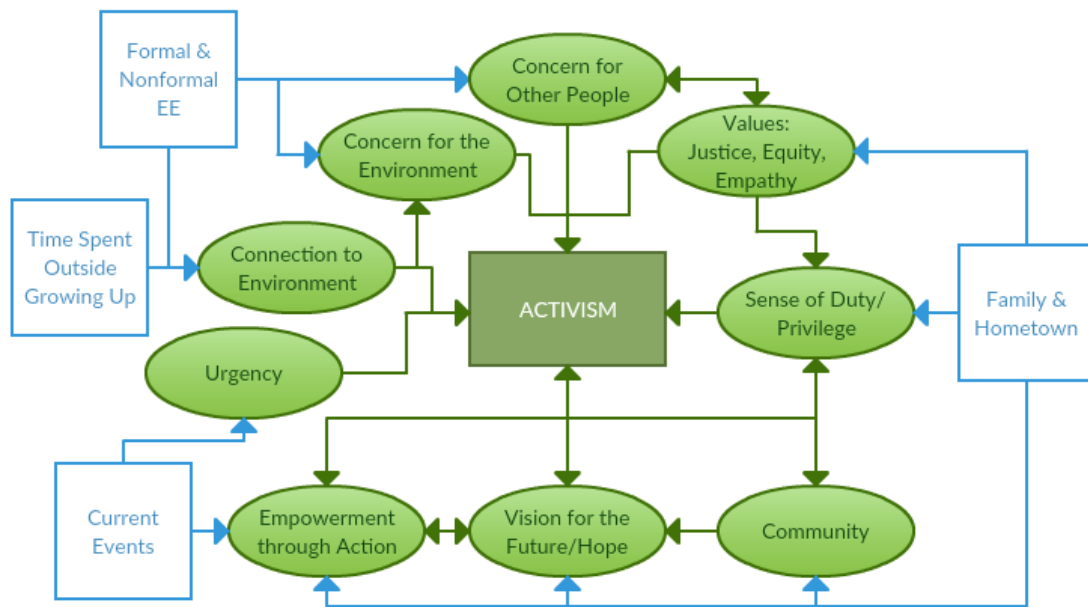
Figure 2. Influences and motivations that affect climate activism

In this diagram, the blue boxes represent different influences, and the green circles represent motivations identified by participants. Each arrow represents the way that these influences, motivations, and activism affect each other. Double-sided arrows signify that these factors have a two-way relationship. This is not to say that these are the only influences or motivations that affect activism, these are the one focused on in this study. In this diagram, I combined formal & nonformal EE and family & hometown because based on my interviews and previous experience, both groups of these influences had similar impacts on motivations. I also included current events as an influence because many participants identified it as an important factor, even though I did not specifically ask about this influence.

The influences that I identified seemed to correlate more with age than motivations did. Hometown and family were most influential for high school students, as all of the students I interviewed grew up and still live in Eugene and currently live

with their family. These influences both tended to decline with older participants, who were often not still in their hometown or living with their family. Formal EE was more influential for college and recent grads, many of which was due to college experiences, while nonformal EE was more influential in high school students and PC15. However, time spent outside while growing up proved to be influential for all ages, with 75% or more of participants in each group saying that this influenced their involvement in climate activism, as shown in Figure 3.
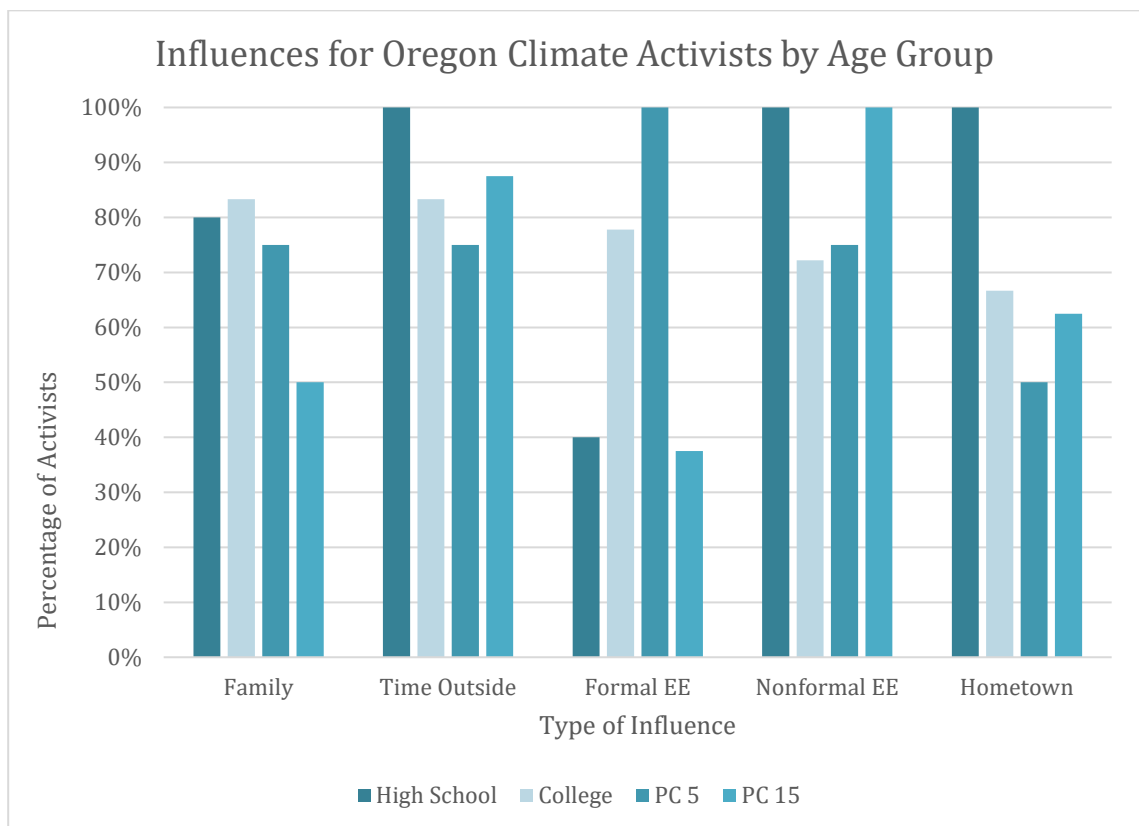

Figure 3. Influences for Oregon climate activists by age group

Many participants discussed how spending time outside led them to be connected to the land, which motivated them to want to protect it and share it with others. This finding agrees with previous findings by Tanner (1980) and Chawla (1999). Rye, a high school

student involved with Climate Action Club Churchill and other local activist groups,

pointed out when discussing his outdoor education experience:

> It wasn't like we're here to protect the forests, but I just spent so much
> time in the forests that it was like, yeah I don't want this to all get
> chopped down or burned down… my love for the natural world
> translated into wanting to protect it.

Sage, a college student and co-founder of EG 350, discussed how spending time outside

helped him understand the urgency of climate change:

> I started to see the effects of climate change… people in my family and
> social environment had told me about climate change, but what really got
> me worried about it was I've been able to notice it, primarily through
> backpacking… I backpack every summer up in the mountains in Idaho
> and Oregon… and I'm a skier, a Nordic skier, and through both of those
> alpine sports I've noticed snow melting much, much earlier in the year,
> mosquitos are worse earlier in the year, and most visually dramatic is
> I've noticed bark beetles killing off massive swaths of forests.

For Sage, spending enough time outside to see the effects of climate change over many

years of knowing the same landscape was crucial to his motivation. Zach, a PC5 and

member of Eugene 350, talked about how spending time outside influenced him

because he wanted other people to be able to experience what he had:

> In terms of what inspires me, the peaks were getting to go snorkeling in a
> rainforest at one point and just catching stuff as a kid by the creek and
> wanting to pass some of that stuff down.

Finally, Deb, a PC15 and co-founder of 350 Eugene, discussed her connection with the

outdoors because of her childhood:

> When I was about maybe 10, we moved to the Black Hills… Being a
> little kid and running around where there were buffalo and we would
> find projectile points, arrow heads all the time… for me, as a kid, to be in
> that National Park was deeply, spiritually connecting to the environment
> and the land. For me, that was really pivotal.

Exactly as Gary Snyder (1999) argues, these quotes show that being connected to specific places through spending time outside is a big influencer in acting to save these places. However, having the ability to spend time outside, especially in places like National Parks, is a privilege and not something that everyone is able to access. This issue is where environmental education could play more of a role and enabling students to spend more time outside, especially as part of a formal school setting.

Discussion

Focus on People

A main theme that emerged through my interviews with college students was the importance of focusing activism on people, justice, and empathy instead of just the environment and scientific research. As college students learned about climate justice issues, they were much more motivated to take action. Furthermore, the values of fairness, justice, and empathy that surfaced throughout the interviews are not uncommon for most people to experience. As Megan pointed out:

> I've heard people say that focusing on fairness is something that children do and that as adults you grow out of that and that has always bothered me. I think that's one reason that I focus on climate change as an issue because it just struck me as so unjust.

Megan pushes back on this assumption that unfairness is something children need to learn to accept. As stated earlier, *Juliana v United States* is groundbreaking not only because of its framing of climate change as a threat to fundamental human rights, but by emphasizing the impacts of climate change on people, and particularly children. Focusing more on the societal impacts of injustices of climate change may prove to be one of the best motivators for action.

Feeling Welcome

The other big motivator for college students was feeling a sense of community with other activists. Although this was mainly identified as a motivator for staying involved, if this aspect is emphasized more, it could become a motivator for people to initially get involved. The easier and more fun it is to get involved, more people will want to join. This sense of community also provides hope for activists and thus helps

people feel like it is worth it to take action. However, in order for sense of community

to motivate people, they must first feel welcome. When asked whether they felt

welcome in the climate activism community, most of the activists I interviewed 23/35

(66%) said unequivocally yes, while the other 12/35 (34%) said they mostly felt

welcome with some exceptions or recognized that they might only feel welcome

because of their privilege (being white, male, etc.). Recognizing privilege is important

in this context as it can often play a role in feeling welcome within communities,

especially in Oregon where the population can be predominately white. When asked if

he felt welcome, Matt said:

> I would say so… It might not be the most representative group, but I feel
> like it's usually good people who are involved with it. I'm also a white
> man, so it's hard not to feel welcome.

Other people mentioned that sometimes it can be cliquey, and people might not feel

welcome until they are established within a group. When asked if she felt welcome,

Sahalee, a co-director for CJL, stated:

> Yes, I do. And maybe that's because I have a place in it now, but even
> when I first joined CJL it was pretty immediate that I felt very
> comfortable and welcome there. And sometimes it can be cliquey… but I
> always feel comfortable to talk to different student leaders and stuff on
> campus.

Tyler, a member of CJL and CAN, brought up this problem as well, but he also

mentioned that people are still figuring it all out:

> I personally feel welcome, though I see sometimes new people come in
> and everyone's all friends and happy giddy, and the new person's like
> 'oh, I'm not your best friend as well. I'm the outsider.' And you know, it
> sucks, but it's hard to solve that problem… But, again, I still feel like it's
> growing and people are learning and we're all getting better at doing
> this.

Gentry, who is also involved in Greek life, brought up the fact that the climate activism community can be judgmental about what other activities they expect a person to be involved with. When asked if she felt welcome, she said that she had felt shunned initially because of her sorority. She pointed out, "Now I do [feel welcome] but it's also because I've distanced myself from sorority life, which I don't think has been fair."

As these quotes show, the climate activism community is not perfect in terms of inclusivity. However, when asked if she felt welcome, Roslyn, a PC5 and past CJL Co-Director discussed her experience at the beginning of college:

> Freshman year, just by one meeting, I was like, 'I'm in.' And that's why I stayed because I felt like that group of people was my people, was people that I could relate to, and that were very like, anyone can come join what we're doing, we really could use everyone we can. I think that that was very important and I think that that is the key moving forward too is that we do have that environment where everyone feels welcome.

As Roslyn points out, sometimes the movement can be very inclusive and continuing to work on keeping the climate activism community welcoming is key to increasing further participation in the movement.

Staying Involved

Despite feeling welcome, staying involved with climate activism can still be difficult, especially outside of the college environment. This difficulty came up as a theme amongst recent graduates (PC5), even though I specifically picked these participants because I knew they were still involved in climate activism, at least on some level. Although I did not interview them because I chose to only interview people currently involved in climate activism, I also know many other recent graduates whom were heavily involved in college and do little, if anything, in the movement now. This is

not a gauge of their character, but instead an indicator of a barrier that occurs outside of

the college environment. This barrier often stems from having to prioritize employment

over activism and a lack of easy ways to stay involved with the activist community. As

Megan explains:

> [After college], you feel like you have so much to offer the world and
> then you might have a hard time finding a job and that was a come down
> that I think was also tied to like you're so worried about other stuff,
> maybe joining an activist group would be really nice because it would
> make you feel empowered, but it sort of fell off the wayside for me.

Roslyn further articulated this barrier and why she felt like it is much easier to be

involved while still in college:

> In terms of sustaining that energy and motivation, I think that is the
> number one challenging thing. I think that in a school environment, it is
> easier to really have the time and motivation because you have that
> accountability around you and the classes to relate it to and all of that
> momentum pushing you forward in all aspects that is helpful. I think that
> outside of that it's much more challenging to find those things that do
> motivate you and get you to do things in your spare hours.

While college provides motivation through learning about issues and having many

easily accessible activist groups to be a part of, life right after college provides neither

of those. Instead, graduates must figure out how to live on their own outside of college,

which often means working more and being an activist less. This barrier is likely to be

even more pronounced in graduates who do not come from a wealthy background or

who may be subject to racial discrimination. In these cases, participating in activism,

particularly protests, is very risky as this may put their job or even physical wellbeing at

risk. In comparison, college students tend to be more supported by their families or

financial aid and their free speech is more protected within the college campus.

Although there is no easy solution to this barrier, it is important to acknowledge how

involvement in activism might change through different periods of a person's life. More

research could also be done in the future into how best to decrease this obstacle in the

context of social movement theory.

Other Types of Activism

The final question that I asked all participants is whether they have been

involved in other types of activism outside of the climate movement. Of all the activists

I interviewed, 30/35 (86%) said they were involved in other forms of activism, either

before, after, or around the same time that they got involved with climate activism. This

involvement ranged from activism around other environmental issues, such as ocean

and forest conservation, to reproductive rights and health care. Several people

mentioned that while they were involved in forms of activism that were not specifically

around climate change, they saw it as all being related. As Zach stated:

> They're all intertwined, many of them, whether it's campaign finance
> reform or any of these other issues that we're dealing with that are also
> exacerbated by climate change… it's gonna make things so much harder
> to do all the other things that we wanna do in terms of world poverty,
> disease, and hunger, and protecting the environment. It's one of these
> things that touches everything else.

Kelsey summed up this view by explaining, "Climate is the umbrella." This is not to say

that fixing the carbon concentration in the atmosphere is the most important problem,

but instead that the problem of climate change presents a key intersection of both social

justice and environmental issues. Furthermore, it is impossible to fully solve either of

these types of issues without addressing climate change. Viewing climate activism in

this way could be useful not only as a theoretical tool but in helping to engage people

already involved in other types of activism. This framing brings in the importance of people, both in a social justice context and in a community context, as the concept of climate activism expands to incorporate all of the ways that climate change will impact our world.

Conclusion

Climate change is complex and combatting it through climate activism is difficult. However, addressing climate change is crucial, and staying motivated is a key aspect of addressing this issue.

The answer to my first question, "What motivates college students in Oregon to be involved in climate activism?" was people. I found that focusing on people, through justice and sense of community, proved to be the most powerful motivator for activists to stay involved in climate activism. By focusing on people and social justice, this framing plays into values of fairness, justice, and empathy, which was also a powerful motivator for activists first getting involved. In answer to my second question, "To what extent do these motivations change in Oregon climate activists not in college?"

I found that empowerment through action was a key motivation in all age groups. This motivation is important for combatting feelings of despair around climate change that lead many people to not take action (Roser-Renouf et al., 2014; Feinberg & Willer, 2010). I also found that spending time outside while growing up proved to be a notable influence for climate activists of all ages, as was suggested by previous studies (Chawla, 1999; Tanner, 1980). This finding emphasizes the importance of non-formal, even unstructured, environmental education, and even adding this aspect of environmental education to a formal school setting to enable all children to experience the outdoors and form a personal connection with the environment.

Some ways that the climate activism movement could improve and help gain more participants is through being more inclusive, finding ways to help college graduates stay involved, and actively framing climate justice as the umbrella around

46

other social and environmental issues. Being more inclusive as a movement means not only actively welcoming new members but working more with other social justice groups and helping with the issues these groups are facing instead of only focusing on climate change.

In recent years, this is beginning to happen more within 350 groups across the nation as well as in Eugene and with climate activism groups at the University of Oregon. However, this work is difficult, so continuing to put emphasis on building these relationships and networks is important. Building this network may also help with keeping college graduates involved, as this begins to create this umbrella of climate justice and includes all aspects of social justice and environmental issues. This framing allows people to be involved in different forms of activism that may be more directly relevant to their lives while still feeling a part of the climate activism community.

Future studies around this area of research could include interviewing people who care about climate change but are not involved in climate activism. This research would help identify some more barriers associated with the climate movement that people within the movement might not be aware of. However, this research would likely need to be conducted anonymously so that participants felt comfortable telling the truth about their lack of involvement. Further studies could also broaden the geographical frame to see if there are regional or national differences in motivations.

While the issue of recruiting new members for the climate activism movement will never be solved in a formula, identifying significant motivations, influences, and barriers, can help current activists find better ways to get people involved. Overall, the people in my study proved to motivated by love, both of people and places.

47

Emphasizing and cultivating this love through all aspects of environmental education and climate activism, may prove to be significant for the future of the climate movement.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

To get started, I just have a few demographic questions:

1. When is your birthday (month, year)?
2. What are your preferred gender pronouns?

Great, thanks. So now, to get to issues of climate:

Can you describe your climate activism?

If they don't answer these questions in their answer above, I will ask:

3. So, how many years have you been involved?
4. What does your involvement look like, in terms of time input?
5. What does your involvement look like, in terms of activities?
6. What motivated you to first get involved in climate activism? Was there a specific experience that got you involved?
7. Are there specific things that continue to motivate you?
8. Can you describe the political environment of your hometown? Do you feel that this influenced your involvement in climate activism?
9. Can you describe the political environment of your childhood household? Do you feel that this influenced your involvement in climate activism?
10. How much time did you spend outdoors as a child? Do you feel that this influenced your involvement in climate activism?
11. How much formal environmental education have you received in a school setting? Do you feel that this influenced your involvement in climate activism?
12. How much nonformal environmental education have you received, such as through summer camps, public education services, or media? Do you feel that this influenced your involvement in climate activism?
13. If you received environmental education, was it geared toward learning skills and taking action?
14. Do you feel welcome in the climate activism community?
15. Are you involved with other forms of activism? If so, did you get involved before, after, or at the same time as climate activism?

Bibliography

350.org. (n.d.). About. Retrieved April 22, 2018, from https://350.org/about/

Aiken, A. (2016). *Juliana v. United States opinion and order*. United States District Court for the District of Oregon.

Akaba, A. (2004). Science as a double-edged sword: Research has often rewarded polluters, but EJ activists are taking it back. *Race, Poverty & the Environment*, *11*(2), 9-11.

Anderson, M. (2017, April 20). For Earth Day, here's how Americans view environmental issues. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/20/for-earth-day-heres-how-americans-view-environmental-issues/

Arkin, L. (2018, February 15). Eugene embraces climate justice (on a global playing field). Retrieved from http://www.beyondtoxics.org/blog/2018/02/eugene-embraces-climate-justice/

Bernard, H. R. (2011). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (5th ed.). Retrieved from https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.uoregon.edu

Blanchet-Cohen, N. (2010). Rainbow warriors: The unfolding of agency in early adolescents' environmental involvement. In R. B. Stevenson & J. Dillon (Eds.), *Engaging environmental education: learning, culture and agency* (pp. 31-55). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Boom, K., Richards, J., & Leonard, S. (2016). *Climate justice: The international movement toward climate litigation*.

Brown, P. (1993). When the public knows better: Popular epidemiology challenges the system. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, *35*(8), 16-41.

Bullard, R. D. (2008). Differential vulnerabilities: Environmental and economic inequality and government response to unnatural disaster. *Social Research*, *75*(3), 753-784.

Campbell, T. H., & Griffin, L. (2017, April 6). Who are you calling anti-science? *Scientific American*.

Campbell, T. H., & Kay, A. C. (2014). Solution aversion: On the relation between ideology and motivated disbelief. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *107*(5), 809-824. doi:10.1037/a0037963

Carter, R. L., & Simmons, B. (2010). The history and philosophy of environmental education. In A. M. Bodzin, K. B. Shiner, & S. Weaver (Eds.), *The inclusion of environmental education in science teacher education* (pp. 3-16). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.

Chawla, L. (1999). Life paths into effective environmental action. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, *31*(1), 15-26. doi:10.1080/00958969909598628

City of Eugene. (n.d.). Climate recovery summary. Retrieved May 16, 2018, from https://www.eugene-or.gov/3210/Climate-Recovery-Summary

Clark, D., & Glazer, S. (2004). *Questing: A guide to creating community treasure hunts*. London, England: University Press of New England.

Cole, L. W., & Foster, S. R. (2001). *From the ground up: Environmental racism and the rise of the environmental justice movement*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Cornell Law School. (n.d.). Public trust doctrine. Retrieved from https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/public_trust_doctrine

Eisenstein, C. (2013). *The more beautiful world our hearts know is possible*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Feinberg, M., & Willer, R. (2010). Apocalypse soon? Dire messages reduce belief in global warming by contradicting just-world beliefs. *Psychological Science*, *22*(1), 34-38. doi:10.1177/0956797610391911

Fuller, J. (2014, June 2). Environmental policy is partisan. It wasn't always. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://washingtonpost.com

Gardiner, S. M. (2006). A perfect moral storm: Climate change, intergenerational ethics and the problem of moral corruption. *Environmental Values*, *15*(3), 397-413.

Global Environment Facility. (2012). *20 years community action for the global environment*. New York, NY: UNDP.

Grant, J. (2017, April 21). How a burning river helped create the clean water act. *The Allegheny Front*. Retrieved from http://alleghenyfront.org

Guber, D. L. (2003). *The grassroots of a green revolution: Polling America on the environment*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hansen, J., Kharecha, P., Sato, M., Masson-Delmotte, V., Ackerman, F., Beerling, D. J., … Zachos, J. C. (2013). Assessing "dangerous climate change": Required reduction of carbon emissions to protect young people, future generations and nature. *PLoS ONE*, *8*(12), 1-26.

Hernan, R. E. (2010). *This borrowed earth: Lessons from the 15 worst environmental disasters around the world*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jamieson, D. (1992). Ethics, public policy, and global warming. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, *17*(2), 139-153.

Jamieson, D. (2007). Justice: The heart of environmentalism. In R. D. In Sandler & P. C. In Pezzullo (Eds.), *Environmental justice and environmentalism: The social justice challenge to the environmental movement* (pp. 85-101). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Jones, N. (2017, January 26). How the world passed a carbon threshold and why it matters. *Yale Environment 360*. Retrieved from http://e360.yale.edu

Klein, N. (2014). *This changes everything: Capitalism vs. the climate*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Lane County. (2016). *General election precinct results*.

Leiserowitz, A. A. (2005). American risk perceptions: Is climate change dangerous? *Risk Analysis*, *25*(6), 1433-1442. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6261.2005.00690.x

Mai-Duc, C. (2015, May 20). The 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill that changed oil and gas exploration forever. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from http://latimes.com

Malone, K. (2004). Critical environmental adult education: Taking on the environmental challenge. In D. E. Clover (Ed.), *Global perspectives in environmental adult education* (pp. 139-150). New York, NY: P. Lang.

March for Science. (n.d.). Our mission. Retrieved February 28, 2017, from https://www.marchforscience.com/our-mission

March for Science. (n.d.). Out mission. Retrieved May 4, 2018, from https://www.marchforscience.com/our-mission

Maxmin, C. (2013, April 4). Why the climate movement is historically unique. *The Nation*. Retrieved from http://thenation.com

McKibben, B. (2010). *Eaarth: Making a life on a tough new planet*. New York, NY: Times Books.

Mervis, J. (2018, April 4). 2018 March for Science will be far more than street protests. *Science*. Retrieved from http://sciencemag.org

National Research Council. (2011). *Climate change education: Goals, audiences, and strategies*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences.

Norgaard, K. M. (2006). "We don't really want to know". *Organization & Environment*, *19*(3), 347-370.

Petrella, C. F. (2017, February 7). Race, history, and the #ScienceMarch. *NationofChange*. Retrieved from http://nationofchange.org

Roser-Renouf, C., Maibach, E. W., Leiserowitz, A., & Zhao, X. (2014). The genesis of climatechange activism: from key beliefs to political action. *Climatic Change*, *125*(2), 163-178. doi:10.1007/s10584-014-1173-5

Rothman, H. (2000). *Saving the planet: The American response to the environment in the twentieth century*. Chicago, OH: Ivan R. Dee.

Savage, K. (2018, April 12). Youth climate case vs. U.S. government will head to trial in October. *Climate Liability News*. Retrieved from http://climateliabilitynews.org

Snyder, G. (1999). The place, the region, and the commons. In *The Gary Snyder reader: Prose, poetry, and translations* (pp. 183-199). Washington, DC: Counterpoint.

Spowers, R. (2003). *Rising tides: The history and future of the environmental mpvement*. Edinburgh, UK: Canongate.

Stotland, E. (1969). *The psychology of hope: An integration of experimental, clinical, and social approaches*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Stradling, D. (Ed.). (2012). *The environmental moment, 1968-1972*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Stronberg, J. (2017, December 22). Juliana v US: For children of all ages — Part one. *Renewable Energy World*. Retrieved from http://renewableenergyworld.com

Tanner, T. (1980). Significant life experiences: A new research area in environmental education. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, *11*(4), 20-24. doi:10.1080/00958964.1980.9941386

U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). QuickFacts: Eugene city, Oregon. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/eugenecityoregon/PST040217

UNESCO, U. (1977). The Tbilisi Declaration. In *Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education*.

University of Oregon. (2017). Enrollment reports. Retrieved May 14, 2018, from https://registrar.uoregon.edu/statistics/enrollment-reports

Yearley, S. (2005). *Cultures of environmentalism: Empirical studies in environmental sociology*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Young, J., Haas, E., & McGown, E. (2016). *Coyote's guide to connecting with nature*. Owlink Media.

Zhang, S. (2017, March 16). All the ways Trump's budget cuts science funding. *The Atlantic*.