

**THE SPIRIT OF LOCALISM:  
EXAMINING THE BELIEFS THAT UNDERLIE THE  
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION OF MEMBERSHIP IN AN ECOVILLAGE**

**by**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**in**

**THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**(Resource Management and Environmental Studies)**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**April 2006**

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## ABSTRACT

Humans in the rich nations must consume fewer resources if we are to achieve environmental sustainability. This thesis examines a group of people who have chosen to create an intentional ecovillage community in order to lower their resource use and live simply. By understanding why the members of this ecovillage have chosen to pursue the ecovillage lifestyle we can understand how to encourage others to partake in similar environmental actions.

I interviewed eighteen members of a Canadian ecovillage called Deepwater Ecovillage to learn about the factors leading to their lifestyle choice. I theorized that the members of Deepwater Ecovillage hold specific beliefs about the nature of life on Earth, and specific values about what "should be," that led them to choose the ecovillage lifestyle.

Results indicate that members of Deepwater chose to create and live in an intentional ecovillage community because they: believe that life is sacred; fear an ecological and/or economic collapse; see the inter-connection between the well-being of the Earth and human well-being; feel responsible to act to prevent environmental problems; believe that their actions will make a difference in solving environmental problems; and enjoy living in the ecovillage because it provides: a sense of belonging, community support and celebration, opportunity for self-development, and life meaning.

This thesis describes the specifics of beliefs such as "feeling responsible to act." These specifics point to ways that environmental educators, such as activists, teachers, and government, can effectively encourage environmental action. The findings of this thesis also throw into question mainstream economic models which characterize humans as consumption machines; ever-seeking greater levels of material consumption to increase well-being. The members of Deepwater Ecovillage are evidence that the desire to consume more or less resources is related to meta-economic assumptions about the nature of Earth, and definitions of "the good life."

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## Acknowledgements

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage for their gracious co-operation. You went out of your way to help me complete this research. I hope this thesis is of use to you.

Rob VanWynsberghe for intellectual and emotional support. Dr. William E. Rees for changing the frame through which I see reality, and helping to chip away the rough edges of this thesis. Dr. Shannon Binns for sharing her maternity leave with this project. Dr. Peter Boothroyd for acting as back-up external.

The Resource Management and Environmental Studies staff, faculty and students for their support and guidance. I am especially grateful for the work of the two RMES Graduate Secretaries I encountered during my program. Thank-you Jennifer Shaw and Lisa Belanger, I do not think anyone of us would get through the program without your good work. Also, thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for helping to fund this research.

Alex MacDonald for steering me back to the data when I wandered afield; Peter Bisson for his insights on Catholicism and Protestantism. Zoe Dennison and Darlene Juschka for helping me discover what qualitative methods are. Yuan Ren for insights on Buddhism and Ecology.

Dr. Norman Henderson for being a stand-up guy that I can always count on for advice and a laugh.

Courtney Pedersen for making me a sandwich one day as I worked away in my office, and for all the other acts of support offered during this test of endurance called a Masters thesis.

My family, for letting me live in the basement again for the last few months of this thesis process. It is an oasis of productivity.

My dog Kitty for making me take her for walks and not get fat and old in front of the computer.



## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Don Quixote; may we follow your lead and live according to our principles, no matter how much they are ridiculed.

## INTRODUCTION

*"Would it be an exaggeration to claim that the emergence of the ecovillage movement is the most significant event in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? I don't think so."*<sup>1</sup>

### **Purpose**

Material consumption in richer nations has begun to exceed the limits of the biophysical capacity of the Earth. The result is ecological degradation that threatens to lower the capacity of Earth to sustain life. This degradation affects not only the rich nations, but also the poorer nations where economic production and resource extraction for the rich nations occurs, and the global commons (ocean, atmosphere).<sup>2</sup> Individuals in the richer nations must lower their material consumption in order to prevent the consequences of ecological degradation; consequences such as reduced quality of life, species extinction, and the possibility of the extinction of humankind.

Environmental problems resulting from human behaviour have been a widespread social concern since the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Issues such as resource scarcity, desertification, climate change, deforestation and species extinction have caught the public's attention and aroused concern. Puzzling to researchers, action taken by individuals to alleviate

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<sup>1</sup> Ted Trainer quoted in Ross Jackson, We can do it! We will do it! And we ARE Doing It! Building an Ecovillage Future, (San Francisco: Robert D. Reed, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Biophysical capacity refers to the capacity of the Earth to provide the ecological services necessary for life (e.g. stable climate, hydrological cycling, nutrient cycling), the resources consumed through economic activity (e.g. trees for lumber and paper, fish for food), and the natural 'sinks' needed to absorb the wastes produced by human actions (e.g. to assimilate the carbon dioxide released through the burning of fossil fuels). William E. Rees, "Economic Development and Environmental Protection: An Ecological Economics Perspective," Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, 86 (2003), pp. 29-45; William E. Rees & Laura Westra, "When Consumption Does Violence: Can There be Sustainability and Environmental Justice in a Resource-Limited World?" Ed. Julian Agyeman, Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World, (London: Earthscan, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Emmet Jones and Riley E. Dunlap, "The Social Bases of Environmental Concern: Have They Changed Over Time?" Rural Sociology, 57:1, (1992), pp. 28-47.

environmental problems has been less prevalent than concern. A gap exists between environmental concern and environmental action.

In this thesis I define environmental action using Jensen's definition of action. Jensen writes that an action is "directed at solving a problem" and "decided upon by those preparing to carry out the action."<sup>4</sup> Environmental actions are actions focused on solving environmental problems.

Research into understanding the gap between environmental concern and action has focused on two things: why people act environmentally and what barriers prevent others from doing the same.<sup>5</sup> This thesis seeks to understand what leads individuals to engage in one particular, although fairly comprehensive, environmental action: membership in an ecologically conscious, intentional community called Deepwater Ecovillage.

By understanding why people choose to create and/or join Deepwater Ecovillage we can better understand why people take environmental action. With this knowledge we may be better able to encourage environmental action. My results may be of relevance to environmental educators such as activists, teachers, and government policy-makers who would like to encourage environmental action. Because "ecovillage" is an alternative economic model from the mainstream economy, this research is also of interest to

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<sup>4</sup> Bjarne Bruun Jensen, "Knowledge, Action and Pro-environmental Behaviour," Environmental Education Research, 8:3 (2002), pp.325-334, p. 326.

<sup>5</sup> Anja Kollmus, & Julian Agyeman, "Mind the Gap: why do people act environmentally and what are the barriers to pro-environmental behaviour?" Environmental Education Research, 8:3, (2002), pp. 239-260.

economists. This research helps us to understand why people chose to create the alternative economic model of ecovillage.

### *Ecovillage*

Deepwater Ecovillage is one of a number of intentional communities calling themselves ecovillages.<sup>6</sup> An eco-village is an intentional community formed by individuals who wish to reduce the negative impacts of their lives on the Earth. These communities have also been defined as “human-scale, full-featured settlements in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, and which can be successfully continued into the indefinite future.”<sup>7</sup> Within ecovillages there is a distinct focus on creating an “environmentally sustainable” human society.

The rationale for why ecovillages should be environmentally sustainable is explained by the economic approach of eco-localism. The central tenet of eco-localism is that “the road to environmental sustainability lies in the creation of local, self-reliant, community economies.”<sup>8</sup> Within these community economies, consumption ‘needs’ are lowered and met with local resources; increased cooperation and interaction occurs between community members; and impacts on the environment are minimized.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> An intentional community refers to “a group of people who have chosen to live with or near enough to each other to carry out their shared lifestyle or common purpose together.” Diana Leafe Christian, Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities, (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2003), p. xvi. Note that a common purpose brings people together in an intentional community.

<sup>7</sup> Robert and Diane Gilman in Christian, 2003, p. xvi.

<sup>8</sup> Fred Curtis, “Eco-localism and sustainability,” Ecological Economics, 46 (2003), pp. 83-102, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> Curtis, 2003.

If you were to imagine walking into an ecovillage, you might see the following:

- common play areas for children;
- common facilities such as workshops or kitchens;
- large organic gardens host to a diverse mix of plants;
- row-housing made of natural materials such as straw-bales or earth (cob);
- living sewage systems;
- and renewable energy sources such as 'run-of-the-river' hydro-electricity generators, wind turbines or solar panels.

Aside from the physical aspects of an ecovillage, certain philosophical principles are in evidence in an ecovillage:

- Self-reliance: economic activity in an ecovillage is typically characterized by a high degree of self-reliance; by simplifying needs communities meet the majority of them with local resources; revenue for products not produced by the community is generated by on-site economic activity;
- Local environmental knowledge: on-site economic activity necessitates and creates highly evolved community knowledge of the local area. Community knowledge in an ecovillage will often incorporate skills such as home-building, tool-repairing, furniture building, clothes repair, canning, and food preparation (e.g. bread-baking, yoghurt making);
- Consensus decision-making: in most ecovillages, decisions are made by consensus and conflict resolution mechanisms are in place to ensure communication between members does not degenerate;

- Informal social support systems and generational integration are additional characteristics of ecovillages: the ecovillage community cares for the sick, childcare occurs collectively, and aged members of the community remain vital contributing members well past retirement age.<sup>10</sup>

In short, the ecovillage communities attempt to live co-operatively, internalize the costs of their consumption needs as much as possible within the area of land the community occupies, and reduce their ecological footprint.<sup>11</sup> They have entrenched this common purpose in a vision document. This is a common, and recommended, practice in ecovillages.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Deepwater Ecovillage***

Deepwater Ecovillage is nestled in a coastal inlet on an island near Vancouver Island. The property stretches back from the Pacific Ocean and into a valley that stretches to the foot of a large mountain. Soil in the valley is fertile and an ideal spot for organic agriculture. Deepwater Ecovillage has operated as a certified organic farm for over

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<sup>10</sup> These characteristics of ecovillages are taken from: Ted Trainer, "Where Are We, Where Do We Want to Be, How Do We Get There?" *Democracy & Nature*, 6:2 (2000), pp. 267-286; B. Ruben & M. Harris, "Good Intentions," *Environmental Action*, 24:3, (Fall 1992) pp 28-33; Andy Kirby, "Redefining social and environmental relations at the ecovillage at Ithaca: A case study," *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 23, (2003), pp. 323-332; and Liz Walker, *Ecovillage at Ithaca: Pioneering a Sustainable Culture*, (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> As Rees writes, "the 'ecological footprint' of a specified human population is the area of land and water ecosystems required on a continuous basis to produce the resources that the population consumes, and to assimilate the wastes that the population produces, wherever on Earth the relevant land/water is located" Rees, 2003, p. 40. One's ecological footprint can be lowered by consuming less meat, driving less, choosing energy efficient appliances, growing a garden, buying local products, or building smaller and more energy efficient homes. In this way the listed behaviours could be considered environmental actions.

<sup>12</sup> Christian, 2003. Note, I do not include reference to the Deepwater vision document because to do so may compromise the anonymity of the participating ecovillage.

fifteen years. During the growing season, raised beds – carefully constructed and tilled by hand – are stock full of rich green broccoli and beautiful tomatoes.

Five years ago, the owners of the organic farm decided to create a community at Deepwater focused on living lightly on the land. They held a visioning meeting in 2001 where interested people could come and create a vision for Deepwater Ecovillage. The initial visioning meeting led to the formation of a core group of six members. This core group formed a co-operative, Deepwater Ecovillage Co-operative, and purchased the land from the original owners (who remain members today). Further meetings attracted new members who bought \$1000 shares in Deepwater. There are now over thirty members and plans are being made to create housing for these new members.

The founding members live on-site at Deepwater Ecovillage in a retrofitted barn. Once a dairy barn, the ecovillage members volunteered their labour and time, collected used building supplies, and created six townhouses within the barn structure. The barn overlooks the garden, and in the distance is the ocean. The view of the sun setting on the water is breath-taking.

Most of the founding members work on the organic farm on-site. They raise produce and eggs for their own use and to sell at local farmers' markets. The work is strenuous, but rewarding. During the growing season the farmers get up with the sunrise to beat the heat of the summer sun while they work in the garden. Around 10:00am breaks are taken for tea in the farmhouse.

The farmhouse, once the home of the original two owners, now serves as common space and guesthouse. A red and white, checkered tablecloth adorns a long table in the kitchen. Tea-breaks and common meals are shared here. During tea-breaks the taste of Caroline's special blend of earl grey tea, soya milk, and honey from a neighbouring farm bring smiles to the farmers' mouths as they sit, taking reprieve from the sun, sharing stories about recent events and discussing how to keep the worms from eating the Brassicas.

The farmhouse also offers a sanctuary during the rainstorms that sometimes rumble in from over the mountain. The farmers will often work through small spatterings of rain, but when the clouds break open and the rain really begins to pour, mud is hurriedly scraped and washed off the garden tools, which are then placed for sake-keeping in the farm shed before the farmers make a dash to the farmhouse to change into dry clothes and enjoy Caroline's sunshine tea.

Members of Deepwater Ecovillage who do not live on-site often come to visit and help in the garden. A few who live in the local area even have their own small garden plot to grow vegetables for personal consumption. When these off-site members visit, common meals take place around the big farmhouse table. The off-site members will often bring a prepared dish of food, while one or two of the farming members will quit the fields early to help prepare a meal for everyone.



During these large common meals conversations range from discussions of politics, the latest news on the Iraq invasion, to funny stories of past adventures, and of course garden updates. It is wonderfully satisfying to share a common meal at Deepwater Ecovillage. You have the feeling that you are not just filling up on nutritious offerings from the garden, but also from soulful offerings from those seated around the table. Each meal is a celebration that can stretch for hours into the night. When they end, it is time to retreat to bed, stretch out the kinks from the day's work in the garden, and enjoy a restful deep sleep that can only be earned with physical labour.

There are quieter moments at Deepwater Ecovillage as well; intimate moments in the common house when two or three members sit around the table, sharing life's hardships and triumphs. On a Friday night, a few members may be found drinking local, micro-brew beer and making pizza together. Guests at the ecovillage are welcomed into these intimate moments and the experience is mutually beneficial for members and guests. One member said that the frequent guests who visit Deepwater Ecovillage make him feel as if he is travelling all the time because he always gets to meet interesting new people. These nights are noticeably akin to nights spent in youth hostels.

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage attempt to cultivate healthy relationships with neighbours, but this can sometimes be difficult. Directly adjacent to Deepwater Ecovillage a family farms using pesticides. On one occasion, John, a farmer at Deepwater, saw that the neighbours had chosen a calm day to spray their crops. John went over to the neighbours to thank them for spraying when the winds were down.

However, the neighbour was defensive and misinterpreted John's comments as an insult. Some tensions were felt after this.

Relations with the neighbours are not always strained. This same neighbouring family visited the farm one day to ask for the leaves of mature kale plants. These leaves can be used to make a wonderful dipping sauce. The farmers at Deepwater Ecovillage showed the neighbours where to take the leaves from, and in return were given a sample of the finished sauce.

When members of Deepwater Ecovillage go to town on their island, reactions are generally positive. Members of Deepwater Ecovillage introduced their community to the town by offering a free meal of organic food to local residents. Now, townsfolk display curiosity about the ecovillage members, but no noticeable ill feelings. I visited a local shop in the town one day and told the owner that I was staying at the ecovillage. Our conversation went as follows:

"What is it you folks do out there?" The owner is old, in her seventies, and she asks innocently, truly not sure what it is "we" do at the ecovillage.

"Well, there's a piece of land there, with garden plots. They are farmed organically, without chemicals, so you have to weed it by hand." I pause, to see if she wants further information.

“Uh huh,” she nods encouragingly.

“We think it’s a way to be gentler to our surroundings. With chemicals, they might wash into the ocean and kill some fish. We don’t think they are very healthy for the surroundings.”

“Ohrrrr, yooooar BODY!” she squawks loudly. I laugh. I guess she understands!

The ecovillage is not yet fully developed, but progress is being made. Plans to purchase housing from a local trailer court are in the works. The members who live off-site would be able to live in this housing once it is in place. Educational internships are offered at the ecovillage, and researchers such as myself are welcome to stay at the ecovillage and work in the garden in exchange for room and board.

By staying at Deepwater I gained an appreciation of the value of a simple, self-reliant lifestyle. By interviewing the members I have come to better understand the beliefs that lead to the choice to live in an ecovillage community.

## THEORY

### *Preliminary Research*

In 2004 I stayed in two ecovillages, one in the spring, another in the fall, and attended the North American Ecovillage Conference, also in the fall. Within these outings I casually interviewed five ecovillage members.

One theme that continually arose in this preliminary research was a belief in alternative spirituality. For example, one ecovillage resident told of performing a special ceremony before cutting down a tree. The ecovillage members gathered around the tree and sang a song of gratitude to the tree for giving up its life for their community. A participant in another ecovillage spoke of the importance of spirituality in his community. When I asked him what he meant by spirituality he told me that it consists of a deep respect and love for land and all the things land does.

These experiences with the spiritual component of ecovillages led me to believe that there was a link between the spiritual beliefs of ecovillage members and the ecovillage choice. Looking into the research on religious/spiritual beliefs and environmentalism I found articles that supported the link.

Lynn White was one of the earlier academics to explore the relation between religious belief systems and treatment of the environment. In 1967 Lynn White wrote an article in *Science* which argued that the anthropocentric nature of Christianity; *i.e.* believing that only humans possess the Holy Spirit, and that nature exists for human use, has led to the

careless destruction of the environment.<sup>13</sup> Lynn argued that a new religion was needed. Perhaps, I began to think, the alternative spirituality movement provides this eco-centric religion.

An article by Bloch confirmed my thoughts.<sup>14</sup> Bloch did intensive interviews with 22 people who held alternative spiritual beliefs. Bloch found that to these people environmentalism and spirituality were one and the same; one is spiritual when working to protect the environment.

An intensive qualitative study of environmental activists in Australia reveals a similar connection between spirituality and environmental action. Shepherd found that the “self-denial, self-observation, and self-criticism” of the environmental activist bears a resemblance to the religious ascetics of other eras.<sup>15</sup>

Another religious analogy is found in Kozinets and Handelman.<sup>16</sup> They argue that anti-consumption activists are evangelical in their beliefs and activist approach. These activists see the world as a battle between good (environmentalists) and evil (corporate power, ignorant consumers), feel themselves ‘enlightened’ by their knowledge of the perils of over-consumption, and see environmental advocacy as their vocation. Kozinets

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<sup>13</sup> Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science*, March 10, 1967, 155:3767, pp. 1203-1207.

<sup>14</sup> J.P. Bloch, “Alternative Spirituality and Environmentalism,” *Review of Religious Research*, 40:1, (September, 1998), pp. 55-73.

<sup>15</sup> Nicole Shepherd, “Anarcho-Environmentalists: Ascetics of Late Modernity,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 31:2 (April 2002), pp. 135-157, pg. 141.

<sup>16</sup> R.V. Kozinets and J.M. Handelman, “Adversaries of Consumption: Consumer Movements, Activism and Ideology,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (December 2004), pp 691-704.

and Handelman use religious language to highlight the similarities between religiosity and environmentalism.

Greeley has also confirmed the link between belief systems – be they religious, spiritual, or secular belief systems – and environmental concern.<sup>17</sup> He found that atheists and agnostics are more concerned about the environment than Christians. He also found differences within the Christian religion. Catholics are more environmentally concerned than Protestant Christians.<sup>18</sup> Greeley hypothesizes that Catholics have greater environmental concern because they hold a gracious image of God, rather than a stern, vengeful God.<sup>19</sup> Those with a “gracious” image of God favoured as much expenditure on the environment as non-believers in God.<sup>20</sup>

This preliminary research indicated to me that the choice to move to an ecovillage might be produced by the acolytes’ belief systems. Previous experiences might have been important in changing a person’s beliefs, but it is the resulting belief and not the experience that motivates action. For this reason I focus on the beliefs of ecovillagers to understand their choice to live within an ecovillage.

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<sup>17</sup> A. Greeley, “Religion and Attitudes toward the Environment,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 32:1 (1993), pp. 19-28.

<sup>18</sup> Greeley, 1993, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> A “gracious” image of God means associating God with narrative images such as Mother, Spouse, Lover or Friend as opposed to Father, Master, Judge, and King. Greeley, 1993, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> Greeley, 1993, p. 23.

### *The Spirit of Capitalism*

In focusing on how beliefs lead to action I follow the lead of Max Weber. In his Protestant Work Ethic Weber outlined the cultural ideas that led to the formation of modern capitalism.<sup>21</sup> He noted that the meta-economic assumption that more wealth is always desirable was not present in medieval Western society.<sup>22</sup> Weber attributes the rise of this belief to a peculiar strain of Protestantism that arose in the early formation of the United States.

Influenced by Luther and his Reformation, Puritan Protestants believed that each individual was given a “calling” in life. Puritan shoemakers, farm-labourers, and business owners worked at their occupations with a great sense of purpose knowing that it was God’s will for them to carry out their vocation.

The early settlers also accepted the Calvinist doctrine of “pre-destination.” Calvin believed that some people were born destined for eternal life and others were born destined for eternal death. As opposed to the Catholics, who believed that the way one lives one’s life determines whether one goes to heaven or hell, the followers of Calvin believed that no human act could save one from eternal death. That sort of human-controlled salvation would be an affront to the absolute power of God.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958).

<sup>22</sup> Weber, 1958.

<sup>23</sup> Weber, 1958.

Calvin also argue that those “pre-destined” for eternal life were indistinguishable from those who faced eternal death; to discover the identity of the “elect” would again be an affront to God’s absolute power, humans cannot pry into the mind of God in that way.

Though the “pre-destined” or “elect” could not be distinguished from the doomed, those who succeeded in their vocation felt more assured that they were in fact members of the “true Church” (*i.e.* were pre-destined). This urge to prove oneself as pre-destined for eternal life served as a substantial motivation for Puritan Protestants to pursue worldly success. Puritan Protestants were spurred to accumulate great quantities of wealth and then reinvest this wealth in capital goods such as factories; to stop accumulation would be to not fulfill one’s vocational calling; to accumulate great wealth was an assurance of “pre-destination.” Weber attributes this practice of wealth accumulation to the rise of “The Spirit of Capitalism.”<sup>24</sup> He called the Puritans’ ceaseless work ethic “The Protestant Work Ethic.”<sup>25</sup>

The beliefs of the Puritan Protestants offered a much different way of looking at the world than Catholic beliefs. Weber highlights the importance of this meta-economic shift in beliefs by discussing the mindset of a pre-capitalist labourer. Imagine an apple-picker working for piece-rate; the more apples he picks, the more he is paid. According to modern economic theory, when this worker’s wage is increased, he will have an incentive to work more. However, Weber explains that a pre-capitalist, perhaps Catholic, worker would work less if given a raise. Accustomed to earning say \$10 a day for picking 50

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<sup>24</sup> Weber, 1958.

<sup>25</sup> Weber, 1958.



pounds of apples (\$.2 per pound), a raise to \$.25 per pound of apples would allow the worker to pick only 40 pounds of apples to earn the customary \$10. The raise allowed the worker to work less, and retain the modest standard of living to which he was accustomed. Acquisition of wealth for the sake of acquisition was not sought; it was not a “natural law” that workers would seek ever-more wealth; and religious moral codes generally tended to discourage this sort of materialistic attitude.<sup>26</sup>

With the rise of ‘the Spirit of Capitalism’ Protestants had an incentive to continue to work, and accumulate wealth past that which was needed for subsistence. Put in a similar apple-picking situation, a Puritan Protestant would continue to pick 50 pounds of apples a day, eager to prove their membership in the “true church.”

Weber’s work highlights the theory that cultural ideas have a great influence on human behaviour, especially in the way we structure our economy. Weber’s theory demonstrates that the penchant for wealth accumulation, and the consumption that follows from wealth accumulation, may be rooted in the Protestant beliefs of early settlers. Stripped of religious motivations, “The Spirit of Capitalism” and the “Protestant Work Ethic” remain powerful forces within modern society. I use Weber’s theoretical approach to investigate the way the beliefs of ecovillagers affect the ecovillage choice.

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<sup>26</sup> Weber, 1958, p. 73; in early Catholicism piety and poverty went hand in hand. Catholics lived the belief that ‘it is easier for camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter heaven.’ Rob Van Wynsberghe, Personal Correspondence, February, 2006.

## *Research Context*

Van Liere and Dunlap recommend at the end of their seminal paper "The Social Bases of Environmental Concern" that future research in the field of environmental behaviour should evaluate the cognitive dimensions of environmental actions.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Samdahl and Robertson recommend that future research in the field of environmental behaviour focus on revealing the belief structures that underlie environmental behaviour.<sup>28</sup> With this thesis I have helped to address that research gap by exploring the way that beliefs (a cognitive phenomenon) affect the decision to join or create an ecovillage.

Maiteny highlights the importance of a facilitating belief system to environmental action.<sup>29</sup> He interviewed participants in an environmental program aimed at encouraging environmental action. One participant told of a defining event in her life that had reinforced her environmental convictions,

Walking to this garden [in bare feet], I stood in this slime [laughs]. Oh God, it was awful! It was cold and wet and I jumped out of it quick. It was underneath a copper beech tree and I – Argh, it was absolutely disgusting! Real rotting, cold stuff. And I looked at it, when I'd wiped my feet on the grass, and it was actually decaying bluebells. You know how they rot down pretty quickly after they're flowered and they go slimy

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<sup>27</sup> Kent D. Van Liere and Riley E. Dunlap, "The Social Bases of Environmental Concern: A Review of Hypotheses, Explanations and Empirical Evidence," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 44 (1980), pp. 181-97.

<sup>28</sup> Diane M. Samdahl and Robert Robertson, "Social Determinants of Environmental Concern: Specification and Test of the Model" *Environment and Behavior*, 21:1 (1989), pp. 57-81.

<sup>29</sup> Paul T. Maiteny, "Mind in the Gap: Summary of Research Exploring 'Inner' Influences on Pro-sustainability Learning and Behaviour," *Environmental Education Research*, 8:3 (August 2002), pp. 299-306.

and a bit thick. I suddenly recognized that what I'd done was jump away from that acknowledgement of death and rot – and I didn't want to know about it. So I deliberately stood in this rotting bluebell mass on purpose as a sort of symbol of, 'I too was part of that cycle'.<sup>30</sup>

We can ask, without a *Worldview* that valued being 'part of that cycle' would the woman interpret her disgust in a positive light? The meaning she made of her experience likely relied on the beliefs she had about what is important: being a 'part of that cycle' of life and death and rot is important to her.

In this thesis I recognize E.F. Schumacher's astute observation that, "we think with or through ideas."<sup>31</sup> What he meant was that we don't just think about ideas, we actively use ideas when thinking about anything around us. Each of us possesses a suite of ideas with which we make sense of the world. As Weber has demonstrated, one may view the world through certain religious ideas, which then motivate certain actions (*e.g.* working for material wealth beyond one's basic needs).

As we experience new things, our pre-existing ideas are used to interpret the experience, and the experience in turn refines and polishes the "lens" of our existing ideas.

Sometimes experiences will even smash the lens to pieces and we are left to reconstruct our understanding of the world around us in a new fashion. This thesis uncovers the lens through which a group of ecovillagers view the world.

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<sup>30</sup> Maiteny, 2002, p. 303.

<sup>31</sup> E.F. Schumacher, small is beautiful: economics as if people mattered, (Vancouver: Hartley & Marks, 1999), p. 63.

## METHODS

### *Methodology*

Previous research into environmental action has not suitably illuminated why people engage in environmental action. A great deal of the research is quantitative, and highlights factors that are *correlated* with environmental action – such as higher education levels, liberal political ideology, female gender, and young age – while failing to explore *causation*; why are these variables correlated with environmental action?<sup>32</sup>

Qualitative research has been conducted to understand what causes people to take environmental action, but has operated from a narrow deterministic stance. Research has focused on the way “significant life experiences” have affected people’s decision to act environmentally.<sup>33</sup> This research often concludes by recommending experience in nature as a way to stimulate environmental action. But it fails to recognize that experience will mean different things to different people; there is a cognitive component to experience that cannot be ignored. A simple nature walk could be heaven to one person, and hell to another; I want to understand the beliefs that lead Deepwater Ecovillage members’ to interpret ecovillage life as a desirable lifestyle choice.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980 (young, educated liberals); Jones & Dunlap, 1992 (young, educated, liberal and urban); Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002 (gender and education).

<sup>33</sup> Louise Chawla, “Life Paths Into Effective Environmental Action,” *Journal of Environmental Education*, 31:1, (Fall 1999), pp. 15-26; Louise Chawla, “Significant Life Experiences Revisited: A Review of Research on Sources of Environmental Sensitivity,” *Journal of Environmental Education*, 29:3, (Spring 1998), pp. 11-21; J. Palmer & J. Suggate, “Influences and Experiences Affecting the Pro-Environmental Behaviour of Educators,” *Environmental Education Research*, 2:1, (February 1, 1996), pp. 109-122; Maiteny, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Belief is defined as acceptance of a statement or fact as true or accurate. “Belief.” *Gage Canadian Dictionary*, 1983 ed.

I used hypothesis-generating qualitative methods to elicit the beliefs of ecovillage members. Auerbach and Silverstein define hypothesis-generating qualitative research,

Qualitative hypothesis-generating research involves collecting interview data from research participants concerning a phenomenon of interest, and then using what they say in order to develop hypotheses. It uses the two principles of (1) questioning rather than measuring and (2) generating hypotheses using theoretical coding.<sup>35</sup>

Hypothesis-generating qualitative methods are useful because they allow unanticipated beliefs to arise. In an interview one can ask general questions of participants such as "what is important to you?" The field of possible answers is not restricted and the responses of participants guide the interview to a great extent.

Hypothesis-generating qualitative research thus generates the evidence that allows the development of "grounded theory."<sup>36</sup> I use theory to mean, "a description of a pattern that you find in the data."<sup>37</sup> Grounded refers to the process of theory-generating; rather than testing a theory proposed by the researcher *a priori*, the theory arises out of the data, *i.e.* theoretical constructs are "derived from and grounded in the participants' own understandings."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Carl F. Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein, Qualitative Data, (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> J.A. Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design: An Alternative Approach, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, p. 142.

Grounded theory in the field of environmental behaviour will help us to understand why people take environmental action.<sup>39</sup> As well, by exploring the specific beliefs held by members of Deepwater Ecovillage I generate hypotheses regarding how to encourage environmental action.

### *Sample*

In studying members of ecovillages I have made a conscious sampling decision. I am studying people who are atypical of mainstream Canadian culture. Ecovillagers live in places where environmental sustainability is a key tenet of the community.<sup>40</sup>

Ecovillagers strive to design their homes, their gardens, their economy; their lives in a way that minimizes impacts on the environment. I assert that creating or joining an ecovillage is an environmental action.

Often studies of environmental concern or environmental action will sample a “representative population” of “ordinary” people, for example of university students, in order to make links between environmental action and other factors.<sup>41</sup> These large-scale studies are useful once theories have been developed, but intensive study of those somewhat atypical people, such as ecovillagers, who take extensive environmental action, allows the development of theory. Studying those who have chosen to live in an

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<sup>39</sup> For a review of competing theories to explain environmental action see: Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), Website: <http://gen.ecovillage.org/about/index.html>, Last accessed February 11, 2006, Last modified 2005

<sup>41</sup> Many of the research studies I cite in this thesis sample “representative populations.” One such example is the paper by Paul C. Stern, Thomas Dietz, and Linda Kalof, “Value Orientations, Gender and Environmental Concern,” *Environment and Behavior*, 25:3 (1993), pp. 322-348. For their research Stern *et al.* sampled a group of 100 university students.

ecovillage allows me to delve deeply into the reasons why these people take environmental action.

I selected an ecovillage research site after meeting two members of Deepwater Ecovillage at a conference on intentional communities. They were interested in participating and were friendly and helpful. I sent Deepwater Ecovillage an Initial Letter of Contact (See Appendix A) to ask for their participation in research and they responded that they would like to participate. Though Deepwater Ecovillage is a forming community – *i.e.* it is not yet fully developed – I decided to study their ecovillage because few fully-functioning ecovillages yet exist in Canada.

There are currently over 30 people with membership shares in Deepwater Ecovillage, though less than ten live on-site. Plans are underway to increase the number of housing units so that more members may live on-site. Current residents earn a small income from selling organic produce, grown onsite, at the local farmer's market. Other income is needed to supplement this.

Within the ecovillage I used purposeful sampling to select participants for interviews. This means that, not only did I interview prominent members, I also sought out people who had left the ecovillage, and who seemed to deviate from community norms. This helped insure that a full range of beliefs about the benefits and costs of ecovillage life was represented in my data.

This sampling method differs from that used in a similar study of ecovillage members by Kirby at the Ecovillage at Ithaca.<sup>42</sup> He selected his participants using ‘snowball sampling’; which meant that he began by interviewing one person, who then suggested the next person he should interview and things progressed from there. Kirby suspects that his sample was biased because individuals who lie outside the ecovillage community norm were excluded from the snowball sample. In the case of the Ithaca study, families who had decided they did not enjoy life in the ecovillage were not interviewed.

Using purposeful sampling I interviewed fifteen current ecovillage members, two former ecovillage members, and one member who subsequently left the ecovillage after my research was complete. I hope that a fuller representation of beliefs was obtained as a result.

### ***Data Collection***

I stayed at the ecovillage for a period of two weeks in April of 2005. During this time I interviewed a total of 18 people, and participated in community activities by farming, cooking meals, and “hanging out” with people at the ecovillage.

### ***Observation***

Living onsite I was able to observe the way that people relate to one another and carry out the activities of the community. This was beneficial because I was able to discover aspects of people that were not revealed in an interview setting. Observations of behaviour allowed me to point out areas where the beliefs and aspirations that

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<sup>42</sup> Kirby, 2003.



ecovillagers expressed did not harmonize with behaviour (See Discussion). These observations were recorded in a field journal at the end of each day. Comments by ecovillage members on the behaviour of other ecovillage members helped to corroborate my observations.

Participating in community activities also allowed me to vividly experience ecovillage life. Comments made by ecovillagers were all the more meaningful when I could connect them to actual experiences I had at the ecovillage. For example, members often told me that one of the best things about the ecovillage is sitting around the farmhouse table at the end of the day and enjoying the company of other ecovillagers. These affirmations were emphasized by the enjoyment I felt sharing meals and conversation in the farmhouse. By sharing some of these experiences and observations herein I hope to allow readers to vividly experience aspects of the ecovillage.

### *Interviews*

Interviews form the bulk of my data. As stated above, I interviewed 18 participants in total. In terms of participant numbers Morse explains that there is a relationship between the number of participants needed and the quality of data received from each; the better the quality of data, the fewer participants needed.<sup>43</sup> After interviewing about ten participants I began to clearly identify repeating ideas. These repeating ideas informed further interviews. Maxwell refers to this as “theoretical sensitivity”; *i.e.* by reviewing notes made during interviews at the end of each day I was able to refine and focus my

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<sup>43</sup> J.M. Morse, “Determining sample size,” Qualitative Health Research, 10:1, (2000), pp. 3-5.

questions.<sup>44</sup> After interviewing 18 participants I felt I had reached data saturation; I could identify repeating ideas and speculate as to potential themes.

Interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to over three hours. All interviews were tape-recorded. The semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B) was used in these interviews, but was modified over the course of interviews as I honed my “theoretical sensitivity.”

For example the first five questions and sub-questions were shortened to four, more direct questions: Can you tell me about yourself? Can you tell me the story of how you came to be a member at the ecovillage? What do you enjoy about the ecovillage? What do you dislike about the ecovillage? These questions helped create a more natural flow to the interview and were as effective at eliciting responses as the extended list of questions.

The question regarding, “what is sacred to you?” was removed following the second interview. The second participant problematized my use of the word sacred telling me that; “sacred to me puts it beyond the realm of the human and gives it a certain power that often is for evil.” The loaded nature of this word became evident to me then and I took the question out of the mix.

Looking back at the research, I feel that the decision to completely eliminate the question of “what is sacred to you?” was a mistake. This I say secure in knowing that mistakes are part of doing research. As Auerbach and Silverstein write “qualitative research cannot be

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<sup>44</sup> Maxwell, 1996: 77.

done without making mistakes so we will discuss our mistakes, oversights, and failures as well as our successes.”<sup>45</sup> Though sacred is a loaded word I could have substituted the word value – as I did in the last few interviews – to ask participants “what do you value?” This different “frame” would have allowed a wider variety of responses than I received by just asking about concerns.<sup>46</sup>

A cautionary note is needed regarding interview data. Interviews are a form of self-report data, and as such, the data they produce is limited. The main problem is that participants may misrepresent their beliefs and interests, or at the very least will likely hold back information about themselves that is not flattering. For this reason reported beliefs may differ from actual beliefs, and reported behaviour may differ from actual behaviour.<sup>47</sup> Observation allowed me to confirm or deny some of the statements made by participants, but undoubtedly there are contradictions and omissions I did not spot.

### *Survey*

A short survey instrument was also administered at the end of the interview. The survey asked ecovillagers for demographic information (See Appendix C); the standard information retrieved in quantitative studies into environmental action. It is used in the thesis when needed to corroborate interpretations stemming from the qualitative data.

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<sup>45</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, p. viii.

<sup>46</sup> For an interesting discussion of framing effects please see Daniel Kahneman, “A Perspective on Judgement and Choice: Mapping Bounded Rationality,” *American Psychologist*, 58:9 (September 2003), pp. 697-720.

<sup>47</sup> Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 164.

## *Consent*

The first step in obtaining consent for this research was sending an initial letter of contact to the chosen ecovillage (See Appendix A). This letter outlined the purpose of the study, the planned research methods and the risks involved in participation. The community of Deepwater Ecovillage provided consent for the research after discussing the research at an ecovillage meeting. I was present at the meeting to answer questions about the research.

After obtaining consent to study members of Deepwater Ecovillage I arranged interviews with ecovillage members. It was necessary to obtain consent from each participant I interviewed. Before the interview began I asked participants to consent to participating in the research study. I provided the participant with a consent form, and asked them to look it over (See Appendix D for consent form). I remained in the room to answer questions, but did not rush the participants to complete the form. Once participants consented to their participation in the research the interview began, and I hit record on the tape-recorder.

The consent process did not end with the signed consent form. It continued throughout the data analysis and the writing of the thesis. This extended consent process is necessary for two reasons. First, the intensive nature of qualitative research means that individuals reveal a great deal of personal information. Researchers must at all times respect the wishes of participants in using this personal information. In this thesis, distinguishing features of ecovillagers have been omitted or altered to hide the identities of participants.

As is discussed in the Data Analysis section, research materials have also been sent to the participants to ensure that consent is maintained.

The second reason for the ongoing consent process is to check the validity of my interpretation of the data. In qualitative research the informant is the expert.<sup>48</sup> A researcher's interpretation of the data must be checked with participants to determine whether the interpretation is accurate. A further discussion of the process of ensuring validity occurs below.

### ***Data Analysis***

Preliminary data analysis began during the data collection process. By taking time after each interview, and at the end of each day to review my notes, I began to discover repeating ideas and themes in the interviews. These ideas and themes helped to focus later interviews.

Serious data analysis began once the interview process was complete. As this point I personally transcribed all eighteen of the interviews. Before transcribing I would review the notes made during the selected interview and field-notes (if applicable) regarding the participant's behaviour. Transcribing was an opportunity to test my original theories as to why the individual chose to join the ecovillage. I kept notes during the transcription process to track my understanding of why participants joined the ecovillage.

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<sup>48</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, p. 26.

After completing each transcription I conducted a “contextualizing analysis.”<sup>49</sup> This analysis was done to “look for relationships to connect statements and events within a context into a coherent whole.”<sup>50</sup> The result was a narrative account of how each participant’s beliefs do or do not create a coherent network, and also how the beliefs relate to the decision to join the ecovillage. This narrative was usually between two to three pages long and resembled a character sketch of each participant. At this stage, each participant was treated as a case study.

When all of the transcriptions and narratives were drawn up I sent each participant their personal transcription and narrative for review. As another part of the consent process, this step allowed participants to once again decide whether they consented to participating in the research. It also allowed a validity check to ensure that my interpretations of the reasons why participants joined the ecovillage were accurate. Seven of the eighteen participants responded; some suggested minor changes, but all continued to consent to research participation.

At this point a comparative analysis was conducted to search for similarities between participants in terms of their belief networks. This comparative analysis is based on an approach outlined by Auerbach & Silverstein in their book Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis.<sup>51</sup> This book offers a step-by-step coding approach to turn a seemingly unmanageable amount of data (I had over 160 pages of transcriptions) into a coherent Theoretical Narrative. The steps proceed as follows:

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<sup>49</sup> Maxwell, 1996, p. 79.

<sup>50</sup> Maxwell, 1996, p. 79.

<sup>51</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003.

1. **Select relevant text:** Clearly post research question above computer, and work through each transcription extracting all the text that is relevant to the research question. Create new computer files for each participant's relevant text;
2. **Identify "repeating ideas":** Review each participant's relevant text file and group text into repeating ideas. Further group repeating ideas that occur across participants. A repeating idea is "an idea expressed in relevant text by two or more research participants."<sup>52</sup> Create a new text file containing all of the repeating ideas. There may be "orphan text" at this point (ideas that do not repeat). This orphan text can either be discarded, or the transcripts can be searched again for a linked idea, or the piece of text can be reported as a unique experience.
3. **Name "repeating ideas":** Use a vivid quote to summarize each group of repeating ideas. For example, in this thesis the idea that our well-being is inter-dependent with the well-being of the Earth is captured with the quote: "I'm being wounded. I'm being wounded in the forests, I'm being wounded in the lakes." These repeating ideas are presented in "quotation marks."
4. **Organize repeating ideas into *themes*:** Repeating ideas that seem to hang together are grouped into themes. These themes are summarized with easy to understand titles, such as *Ecological sense of self* (this theme includes the repeating idea listed above) and are presented in *italics*.

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<sup>52</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, p. 51.

**5. Organize themes into THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS:** A theoretical

construct “is an abstract concept that organizes a group of themes by fitting them into a theoretical framework.”<sup>53</sup> This step is the most challenging because it demands researchers to come up with their own theories to explain the subject, or apply existing theories in new and creative ways. THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS are written in ALL CAPS and numbered with roman numerals.

**6. Write Theoretical Narrative:** The final step is to present the organized data.

The theoretical narrative uses the THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS, *Themes*, and “repeating ideas” to present a coherent story of participants’ subjective experience. As Auerbach and Silverstein write, “It employs people’s own language to make their story vivid and real.”<sup>54</sup>

I used the Theoretical Narrative to obtain further feedback from the participants regarding my interpretation of why they created and joined the ecovillage, and to ensure their continued consent to the use of my research data. The Narrative was sent to all of the research participants. At this stage only two responded. One respondent asked for a single word to be changed, another respondent asked for a theme to be re-evaluated as this respondent did not believe it was a true description of the group. Changes were made to my analysis and I received the consent of the respondents to continue the research process. This step helped the research obtain validity.

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<sup>53</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, p. 67.

<sup>54</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, p. 73.



## *Validity*

For the results of this thesis to be valid I had to ensure that my interpretation of the data was justified. In the course of this thesis I took three steps to ensure the validity of my results.<sup>55</sup>

First, I had to ensure that the research process was transparent. The steps taken to arrive at my interpretation had to be clearly outlined. By following the data collection and data analysis process outlined above, this thesis has proceeded in a transparent manner. The organization of THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS, *Themes*, and “repeating ideas” in the Results section provides a clear map of how my theory of environmental action is “grounded” in the data.

Second, I had to make the themes and constructs communicable so that other researchers and the participants could understand them. The consent process has shown that the ecovillage participants understand my interpretation of the results. The feedback participants offered was useful in clarifying my interpretation of their reasons for taking environmental action. Feedback from my supervisory committee has also shown that other researchers can understand my interpretations, and has led to the improvement of my arguments and presentation.

Third, I had to make my research results coherent. Theoretical constructs should relate to one another in a way that allows tells a coherent story. The style of presentation used in the Results section and Discussion section ensures coherence.

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<sup>55</sup> This discussion of validity is informed by Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003.

### ***Generalizability***

Generalizability is a test of how applicable the results of this thesis are beyond the study population. Maxwell says that generalizability can be of two types: internal and external.<sup>56</sup> Using the Theoretical Narrative to receive feedback from the participants was a means of establishing internal transferability within Deepwater Ecovillage. Based on “repeating ideas” echoed by more than one ecovillager, it outlines the shared beliefs of ecovillage participants.

External transferability is the degree to which the THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS developed in this thesis may be transferable to explain the behaviour of members of other ecovillages and those who take other forms of environmental action. While the specific beliefs of individuals engaged in environmental action will vary, the THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS that I developed are likely transferable “in that you can expect the more abstract patterns that they describe to be found in different (populations).”<sup>57</sup>

### ***Lessons Learned***

The application of qualitative research methods to the study of the motivations of environmental action has been a great learning experience for me. Several times I felt that I was going to have to throw the whole study out because of a “mistake” I felt I’d made. Thankfully, the Auerbach and Silverstein book reassured me that you cannot do research without making “mistakes.” I now hope to look at the shortcomings of this thesis as opportunities for learning, rather than “mistakes.”

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<sup>56</sup> Maxwell, 1996.

<sup>57</sup> Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, p. 87.

One of my biggest lessons was that in using qualitative methods one should not impose theory too early in the research process. I theorized that beliefs lead to action after conducting preliminary research. This theory was used to guide further research. However, it may have been fruitful to remain neutral with my approach and allow participants to be expert in an even greater capacity. Instead of the semi-structured interview that I used I could have substituted one question: Why do you think you joined this ecovillage? Though this seems the most obvious question to ask, the early development of theory prevented me from asking it.

However, it was likely beneficial to use a semi-structured interview guide on my first outing as a qualitative researcher. I did not sufficiently know how to conduct interviews when beginning the research process. I still have a lot to learn.

As well, I would have liked to ask "why else?" more often in the interview process. The final exercise in the interview was to ask participants what they were concerned about, and then follow their reply with an endless stream of "why? why? why?" until they could no longer answer. Asking "why else?" at this point could have allowed a greater freedom of responses, and would not have painted participants into a corner with their responses.

A final lesson came not from any "mistakes" I made, but from close calls. Before interviewing a strong Catholic I nearly made a snide remark about all the media coverage

being handed out to the Pope's death. That would have surely distorted the interview.

As well, I took a shirt with me to the ecovillage – a standard piece of my wardrobe – that stated 'Saskatchewan Uranium – Depleting Lives for 50 Years' and on the back 'Let's think of a better legacy.' I was wearing this shirt when I interviewed a member who had been involved in the uranium industry. Luckily I was wearing a sweater over top of the shirt. Both close calls highlighted the possibility that the appearance and mannerisms of the researcher can bias the responses of the participants. There is no getting around influencing participants, but some messages are stronger than others.

## RESULTS

### *The ideas we see the world through*

E.F. Schumacher believed that it takes three or four generations before a novel idea becomes an intrinsic part of the way a society sees the world. Writing in 1973 he felt a great many Western minds saw the world through nineteenth century ideas such as:

1. Darwin's theory of evolution; which has been interpreted to mean that history is a progression of lower forms to higher forms;
2. The theory of competition and natural selection; which purports to explain evolution;
3. Marx's theory that all history is a class struggle;
4. Freud's theory that all behaviour is motivated by subconscious sexual urges;
5. Relativism; denying the existence of absolutes; and
6. Positivism; the idea that knowledge is only genuine when based on observable facts.

Schumacher lamented that the world seen through these ideas is bleak; instincts continually threaten to over-ride reason; humans struggle to survive; yet lacking any absolute hierarchy of values, survival has no explicit purpose.

In the Results section I outline the important ideas through which members of Deepwater Ecovillage see the world. Collectively I have called them the *Ecological Worldview*. In some regards they are strikingly different than the ideas that Schumacher outlined; but for some members of Deepwater Ecovillage pieces of the nineteenth century ideas remain a part of their idea "lens".

The novel elements of the Ecological Worldview are of great relevance to this thesis. For one, they may help explain the motivation for living in an ecovillage, and in turn shine light on the motivation for carrying out environmental action generally. My thesis asserts that those who carry out environmental action see the world through a different set of ideas – *i.e.* a different worldview – than those who do not carry out environmental action. While this is not a comparative study, we can use qualitative methods to understand how certain ideas logically justify and explain the behaviour of creating or joining an ecovillage. The findings are relevant to those who wish to encourage environmental action, such as environmental educators.

Secondly, the novel elements of the Ecological Worldview offer a glimpse of the “meta-economic” values and beliefs that underlie the ecovillage economic model.<sup>58</sup> Meta-economic is a term used by Schumacher to describe the pre-analytic beliefs about the nature of humanity, and the world in which we live, that underlie any given economic system. For example, the current capitalist system is based on the meta-economic belief that ever-greater wealth is to be desired; *i.e.* it serves the ends of humanity, and that continual economic growth is possible on Earth. By exploring the meta-economic beliefs that underlie the ecovillage economic model, I highlight the way that culture affects economic structure.

I have constructed two tables to summarize the results of my research. Table 1 summarizes why members of Deepwater Ecovillage created the ecovillage. Table 2

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<sup>58</sup> Schumacher, 1999, pp. 31-32.

outlines two emergent themes that require further research. Following the tables, the results are presented in detail.

Table 1

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS, *Themes*, and Repeating Ideas

<b>I. SACRED VALUES ARE THREATENED</b>	
A. <i>We face impending collapse</i>	78% <sup>59</sup>
1. We're only three days away from a revolution	
2. We're not going to have any resources to keep us alive	
3. That ice up there is the summer water for down here so now that it's not there anymore is the summer water coming down?	
4. We kind of realized that there was an end point involved in oil production	
B. <i>Life is sacred</i>	72%
5. I think that the mystery is that we get to experience life	
6. I have an innate belief that there's value in life	
7. I feel spiritually fulfilled in forests	
C. <i>I am spiritual, not religious</i>	72%
8. Religion has killed more people throughout the history of the world than anything	
9. It doesn't matter what religion you are if you live by it and not harm others	
10. Buddha didn't say he was Buddhist, he just was	
11. My spirituality is with real things	
D. <i>Ecological Sense of Self</i>	56%
12. Matter isn't created or destroyed, so when you die you might become a tree	
13. I'm being wounded in the forests, I'm being wounded in the lakes	
E. <i>Consumption by the rich impoverishes the poor</i>	28%
14. I don't understand living like the world is infinite when it's finite	
15. We're totally enslaving the people in underdeveloped countries	
16. Globalization is going into nations and totally disrupting their whole way of life	
<b>II. INDIVIDUALS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE ACTION</b>	
A. <i>Over-consumption is the source of problem</i>	89%
17. You look at the rate we're consuming, it's just inevitable that there has to be a collapse	
18. My father he worked six, seven days a week, and ten hours a day, I didn't get to see much of my father	
B. <i>Desire to live simply</i>	61%
19. All my life I wanted to live lightly on the Earth	
20. What is it exactly that I need, and not just want?	
C. <i>Humans consume because they are insecure and afraid</i>	39%
21. I think it probably comes basically down to fear; fear of not being taken care of	
D. <i>Competitive culture and economic structure encourage consumption</i>	44%
22. I'm very opposed to the competitive nature of our society	

<sup>59</sup> Indicates percentage of participants who expressed this *Theme* during their interview.



**Table 1 cont.**  
THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS, Themes, and Repeating Ideas

<b>III. INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS AFFECT CHANGE – <i>Internal Locus of Control</i></b>	
A. <i>Individuals can pursue self-development to advance beyond self-interest</i>	78%
23. We're climbing up this ladder of consciousness.	
24. I'm here to self-actualize	
25. You just have to be quiet and let your mind rest and just feel connected	
26. You're ultimately trying to move that little self out of the way	
27. If we buy the new SUV we're not going to feel that much better about ourselves	
B. <i>We can learn to interact co-operatively and in the interest of the common good</i>	50%
28. Like a beehive you need to learn to act as a collective	
29. The ecovillage is kind of a laboratory for how people can live together in a co-operative way	
30. Better decisions come out when we look for that best thought between a consideration of all thoughts	
31. Really the loggers and the environmentalists share a lot of common views	
C. <i>We can build an alternative economy that is environmentally and socially just</i>	72%
32. If you see Ghandi for instance he is making his own clothes, growing his own food	
33. Bringing food from Florida, it's crazy! You should just eat what grows here now	
34. Making the world a better place is growing healthy food in a sustainable manner	
35. When I'm alone out in the field I just feel really part of nature, really connected	
36. We have a co-operative structure which helps maintain that people working aren't in a slave situation and their creativity can all be applied	
37. Ultimately we have to network ecovillages so we're not an isolated pocket, creating a whole new structure	
38. Deepwater Ecovillage is an opportunity to try and be proactive	
D. <i>Leading by example is an effective way to make change</i>	83%
39. If we can model living happily and simply here that's a beacon for people to see	
40. I've been preached and taught to enough	
41. An underlying basis for this project is all about education	
<b>IV. ALTERNATIVE SOURCE OF WELL-BEING</b>	
A. <i>Ecovillage life is rewarding</i>	72%
42. I do not have to have a differentiated home life and social life	
43. There seems to be more unconditional acceptance here	
44. I was looking for something a little more stable	
45. It's just a joy to wake up knowing that there's purpose in my life	
46. If you make such a commitment to sustainability, it is fundamentally spiritual	
47. I mean it's just a beautiful place	
48. It's a part of my family, it's part of who I am	
49. There's always people around to do stuff with or celebrate with	

**Table 2**  
*Emergent Themes*

<b>EI. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP</b>	
A. <i>God gave humans a duty of environmental care</i>	6% (1)
1. When God put man in dominion over the Earth and all it's creatures what he was doing was putting us as responsible	
<b>EII. CONFLICT IN NON-HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATIONS</b>	
A. <i>There is conflict relating to leadership, power and contribution</i>	56%
1. Everyone is supposed to be equal but there are some who are more equal than others	
2. They have a lot of knowledge in many areas	
3. A lot is done by a few	

## I. SACRED VALUES ARE THREATENED

### *A. We face impending collapse*

If you were told that “you are going to die tomorrow, *unless...*” would you stop what you are doing and eagerly obey the “*unless*” directions? Members of Deepwater Ecovillage have an overwhelming sense that *unless* rapid change is made to the way individuals live, and larger society operates, the world will experience an economic and/or ecological collapse. This idea of collapse is supported by awareness of problems such as climate change, peak oil, and disappearing fish stocks.

In the case of an economic collapse, the ecovillagers imagine social chaos erupting in the streets of major Canadian cities. As Caroline darkly told me, “we’re only three days away from a revolution ‘cause that’s when the shelves start emptying if no food comes to the city.” Both Caroline and Paula cite a collapse in the value of Canadian currency as a tipping point for an economic collapse. They are joined by others who agree that if the world is now reaching the peak in oil production; *i.e.* if we are right now extracting the most oil out of the ground that we will ever potentially extract, and after this point less and less oil is available for human use, then it is only a matter of time before demand for oil outstrips supply, the price of oil skyrockets, trade networks shut down, and the global economy collapses. In an economy where we depend on distant trading partners for even our basic food needs, a collapse of the economy would pose a great hardship on citizens and would lower standards of living.

The scenario of an ecological collapse is perhaps even more frightening. Members of Deepwater Ecovillage worry that humans are using up resources to the point of extreme scarcity. Veronique stated plainly; "if we don't look after the environment then we're not going to have any resources to keep us alive." Pollution caused problems such as climate change could heighten resource scarcity, especially in terms of water resources. A warmer climate may cause more frequent drought on the prairies, and the melting of glaciers in mountainous areas.<sup>60</sup> Regions that rely on glacial meltwater for water supply could face severe water shortages if glaciers disappear. As Stan related, "that ice up there is the summer water for down here so now that it's not there anymore is the summer water coming down?"

As resources become ever scarcer ecovillage members fear that an ecological collapse will lead to human suffering and possibly the extinction of the human species, as Shirley said, "environmentally if we don't do something it will be a horrible existence for those who are eking out say maybe the last days of human life existence." Caroline sees the prevention of collapse as a question of inter-generational justice: "to destroy our own nest as humans is to destroy our own futures and hand the grandchildren something less than we received."

Not only will future generations suffer directly due to resource scarcity and pollution caused problems, scarce resources also set the stage for indirect suffering caused by resource wars. Several members cited the Iraq war as an example of the sorts of conflict

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<sup>60</sup> Government of Canada, Climate Change website: <http://www.climatechange.gc.ca>, Last accessed, February 12, 2006, last modified August 20, 2004.

we can expect as resources become scarce. Gerald made the link between oil scarcity and global conflicts, “just in the last couple of years we kind of realized that there was an end point involved (in oil production). And we’re seeing you know the Iraq war, the invasion of Afghanistan, all oil-related things.”

The belief that human society faces an inevitable collapse encourages a concern for environmental and social justice issues, and is a spark to ignite environmental action.

### ***B. Life is sacred***

Members of Deepwater Ecovillage have come to see the world through the idea that life is of absolute value. As George said, “I have an innate belief that there’s value in life, that there’s value in what’s on this planet.”

Another way to say this might be to say that life is sacred to the members of the Deepwater Ecovillage. As one ecovillager related: “I don’t believe that the mystery is in death. I think that the mystery is in birth. I think that the mystery is that we get to experience life.”

The ecovillagers’ sacred view of life was most apparent when I asked if they were spiritual or religious.<sup>61</sup> George told me, “I’m sort of a person who finds spirituality in

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<sup>61</sup> The terms religious and spiritual refer to two distinct ways of relating to the sacred. Religious refers to those who accept traditional forms of religious authority such as the Catholic Church. Traditional religious authorities, like the Catholics, provide a space for public worship and communal methods of worship. Spiritual refers to those who seek their own understanding of the sacred. The spiritual create their own space for worship, borrow from various religious and mythical traditions, often blend Eastern and Western religions, and place emphasis on self-growth, self-fulfillment, and the sacredness of ordinary objects. This definition of religious and spiritual is taken from: Paul Wink and Michele Dillon, “Religiousness,

nature.” I asked him how finding spirituality in nature might come about, “Just by watching the trees or the wind blow in the trees or frogs laying eggs.” Victor, a farmer at the ecovillage, echoed George’s sentiments, “I feel spiritually fulfilled in forests or on mountains or in nature and so I don’t say – I’m not saying that God is nature, but spirituality for me comes about in nature. I feel a connection to a much larger force or being.” Shirley provided an eloquent description of how she experiences spirituality at Deepwater Ecovillage,

You can just walk out to the back there and hunker down by that little creek and get down because the creek goes down in a little ravine, if you slide down the bank you’ve just got that world there. You don’t have much noise, the water blanks it out, then you can be as spiritual as you want. You can dangle your feet in the water if you want or be very careful and patient and maybe the little birds will come close. The wind is blowing and singing sweet songs in the trees, you know?

Spirituality for the ecovillagers takes the form of appreciating the Earth that provides life. As Kate said, “when you ask me what really matters to me it’s that being in a forest and seeing the cycle of birth, growth, decline, death, rebirth, that’s it.” A few ecovillagers hold the deep ecology perspective that nature’s intrinsic value is motivation enough to protect it from human destruction, as George said, “even if humans aren’t around I would

still like to see the rest of nature survive.” By believing that life on Earth is sacred the spectre of collapse becomes a threat to the sacred values of Deepwater’s members.

### *C. I am spiritual, not religious*

It’s important to see that this way of viewing the world is not a traditional religious outlook. Though many members of Deepwater Ecovillage were raised in the Catholic Church, almost all of them now reject the Catholic Church. Many ecovillagers feel the Catholic Church, and organized religion generally, is a source of intolerance and as a result can be dangerous when it incites violent conflict. As Magnolia says, “religion has killed more people throughout the history of the world than I think anything else.”

This does not mean that members of Deepwater Ecovillage dismiss the importance of religion, but many members have a non-traditional view of religion. These members could be characterized as “spiritual seekers.” Spiritual seekers refuse to commit to only one religious tradition and instead explore the world for their own truths because, as Carl says, “why we’re in such a mess is people accepting whole codes and whole worldviews that are dictated instead of coming from within.” Shirley shares this belief telling me, “What is important is the exploration.” In their search for truth spiritual seekers are open to many different religious traditions; they may accept the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of Buddha. Kate tells me, “It doesn’t matter what religion you are if you’re trying to live by your religion and not harm others.” Magnolia focuses on the importance of living according to your beliefs, rather than claiming to be a member of any particular religion, “Buddha didn’t say he was Buddhist, Christ didn’t say he was Christian, they

just were.” Shirley tells me that many people are afraid of this more open, “new-age” perspective because, “it draws young people away from the traditional religions.”

One way that members of Deepwater Ecovillage differ from holders of traditional religions are that they do not take a literal interpretation of religious texts. When I asked about where humans came from most ecovillagers disagreed with the cosmological tenets of Christianity, telling me things like “I’m not a creationist,” and “We evolved (laugh) I mean don’t you believe in evolution?”

But the cosmological beliefs of ecovillagers are not wholly those of modern science. The acceptance of the theory of evolution is sometimes tacit, “I believe in evolution cause I haven’t heard anything better,” and a few of the ecovillage members say that they believe it is a mystery where humans came from, “it’s just a mystery and I’ve just become comfortable with that idea.” One strong Christian attributed the origin of Earth and humanity to God, but was not a biblical literalist in her interpretation.

A higher power is often invoked when ecovillagers speak about where life comes from. For many ecovillagers the greater power that provides life is the Earth. We come from the Earth and we will return to the Earth. As Martin says, “I think I’m made up of the same stuff as the stars in the heavens and I’ll become part of that again.” Carl told me that life is a cycle that continues, and we can rest assured that though we die in human form, the components of our bodies may be born again: “Matter isn’t created or

destroyed. So when you die you might become a tree, you might also become another person.”

For the Deepwater community the material has become sacred. They have taken God out of the heavens and placed Her in the Gulf Stream and the Nitrogen cycle. Whereas the nineteenth century ideas listed by Schumacher as defining our modern worldview have made the universe seem cold and heartless, the ecovillagers have infused the material with the sacred; and so for them the sacred is all around us. To quote Stan, a very practical minded ecovillage member, “my spirituality is with real things...the real air, the trees, wildlife, the people, all of the people.”

#### ***D. Ecological Sense of Self***

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage believe they are not separate from the Earth; rather, they are completely inter-connected with the Earth. This belief is rooted in both a strong understanding and acceptance of the principles of ecology, and an Eastern spiritual outlook.

The ecovillagers recognize the ecological principle that human well-being is completely inter-dependent with the well-being of the Earth when they describe how environmental problems such as resource scarcity and climate change are leading us towards economic and ecological collapse. An ecovillager summarized this belief with the statement: “I’m being wounded. I’m being wounded in the forests, I’m being wounded in the lakes.” I will use the term *Ecological Sense of Self* to refer to this inter-dependent sense of self.



When the members of Deepwater speak about the “oneness” of life on Earth – as above when Carl reassured me that even in death, my component parts may be born again – they display an Eastern understanding of the seamless unity and inter-connection of all life on Earth. These views of the Earth lead the members of Deepwater Ecovillage to care for the Earth, not exploit the Earth.

Eugene Odum - a renowned ecologist – expresses the ecological view when he encourages his readers to think of the Earth as our life support system. As he says, “We are able to breathe, drink, and eat in comfort because millions of organisms and hundreds of processes are operating in a coordinated manner out there in the environment.”<sup>62</sup>

Because we are not able to easily point to any given area of the environment and say, “there is our life-support system” the economic value of the ecological services provided by Earth is often overlooked. But processes that allow food production, waste recycling, waste assimilation, and air purification are occurring right now without any human involvement. For example, marshes and wetlands have a great capacity to assimilate undesirable pollutants and residues from our freshwater supplies. If we did not have healthy marshes and wetlands, we humans would have to perform a greater amount of water cleaning for ourselves. This would be likely be a great expense, especially when we realize that nature is providing the water purification service for free right now.<sup>63</sup>

Ecovillagers are aware of these services. A fear of collapse includes fearing that a

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<sup>62</sup> Eugene P. Odum, Ecology and Our Endangered Life-Support Systems, (Sunderland, Mass: Sinauer Associates, 1989).

<sup>63</sup> Odum, 1989.

collapse of these sorts of services will lead to economic hardship, and a lower ability of Earth to sustain life.

The “Eastern” view of the Earth as a seamless whole is related to Buddhist influences in Deepwater Ecovillage. Some members of Deepwater Ecovillage follow the teachings of Buddhism. As Andy, whose interest in Buddhism predated his environmental commitment, told me, “Buddhism really speaks directly to what is going on today.” An interview with another member of Deepwater merged into a lengthy discussion of Buddhist metaphysics and meditation. Sitting cross-legged on the floor together we discussed Buddhist ideas such as the idea that all of reality is an illusion. This member also discussed making plans to attend a meditation retreat.

The Buddhist cosmological outlook focuses on the interconnection between all things, and the lack of division between human and Earth. As opposed to Christianity where humans and the Earth environment are viewed dualistically as separate and distinct entities, Buddhism is a philosophy of holism, not dualism.<sup>64</sup> Through cause and effect every one of us is linked together: because I am writing this now (in my life), you are reading it now (in your life). Buddhist theorist Thich Nhat Hahn calls this inter-dependent co-arising.<sup>65</sup> He explains,

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<sup>64</sup> T.N. Jenkins. “Chinese traditional thought and practice: lessons for an ecological economics worldview,” *Ecological Economics*, 40, 2002, pp 39-52.

<sup>65</sup> Thich Nhat Hahn, *The Heart of Buddha’s Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*, (New York: Broadway Books, 1998).

For a table to exist, we need wood, a carpenter, time, skilfulness, and many other causes. And each of these causes needs other causes to be. The wood needs the forest, sunshine, the rain, and so on. The carpenter needs his parents, the breakfast, fresh air, and so on. And each of these things, in turn, has to be brought about by other conditions. If we continue to look in this way, we'll see that nothing has been left out. Everything in the cosmos has come together to bring us this table. Looking deeply at the sunshine, the leaves of the tree, and the clouds, we can see the table. The one can be seen in the all, and the all can be seen in the one. One cause is never enough to bring about an effect. A cause must, at the same time, be an effect, and every effect must also be the cause of something else. Cause and effect inter-are.<sup>66</sup>

As this quote describes, all of reality is completely inter-connected and inter-dependent. This understanding helps the members of Deepwater Ecovillage to feel an affinity to the Earth and people removed in space and time. John told me "(some people think) by giving to charity and giving to alleviate this poverty you are just trading your seat in the lifeboat with someone else. And my thinking is that we're all in the lifeboat." This quote reveals the belief that all of us are connected on this planet, for better or worse.

Scholars such as Colin Grant and Ken Wilber have argued that Buddhism is sometimes tacked onto a worldview mainly rooted in ecology; implying that the Buddhist beliefs are

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<sup>66</sup> Hahn, 1998, p. 222.

secondary to the ecological beliefs.<sup>67</sup> It is not apparent that this argument is required in explaining the presence of Buddhist beliefs among Deepwater's members. Instead the two belief systems appear highly complementary. One member of Deepwater Ecovillage was raised Buddhist and saw the world through those ideas before becoming concerned about environmental issues, another member spoke of her interest in Buddhism and ecology as "coterminous," while others came to Buddhism only after beginning to view the world through the idea of ecological inter-connection.

No matter how they arrived at a belief in the inter-dependent well-being of humanity and the Earth, it is clear that seeing the world through this belief has a deep effect on the consciousness of Deepwater Ecovillage members. I propose that this belief creates a change in a believer's very definition of *self*. David Suzuki often summarizes this new conception of self by saying that "We *ARE* the air, We *ARE* the water, We *ARE* the earth in the most profound way."<sup>68</sup>

#### ***E. Consumption by the rich impoverishes the poor***

Our modern economic system is based on the meta-economic assumption that human well-being is increased through economic growth, and that this growth can continue indefinitely, unhampered by "limits to growth" such as scarce natural resources (*e.g.* the energy supplies used to produce and transport the goods across the globe) or problems generated by pollution and waste. According to mainstream economic models, prosperity

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<sup>67</sup> Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything*, (Boston: Shambala, 1996), p. 153; Colin Grant, *Myths We Live By*, Religion and Beliefs Series, No. 8 (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1998).

<sup>68</sup> David Suzuki, "Sustainability in One Generation," Communities of Tomorrow, *Building Our Communities: Solutions for Sustainability* conference, Regina, Saskatchewan, October 23-25, 2005.

resembles a ladder; rich countries have climbed the ladder of economic development to achieve their status, poor countries are offered a helping hand to climb out of poverty.

This model is a different perception of reality than that held by the members of Deepwater Ecovillage. For ecovillagers, material wealth requires natural resources. Because we live on a finite planet, natural resources are finite. As Carl told me, perplexed and exasperated, "I don't understand living like the world is infinite when it's finite." For the members of Deepwater Ecovillage, economic development resembles a tug-of-war rather than a ladder; if one country has resources, another country cannot access those resources.

Andy, a young member of Deepwater Ecovillage with a passionate interest in Buddhism, explained to me that when we see that economic development is a tug-of-war, not a ladder, we understand that our wealth is a result of a denial of wealth to others. The poor in other countries mine minerals for us, produce goods in sweatshops for us, and in reality, Andy says, "We're totally enslaving them."

This understanding that an inequitable consumption of the Earth's resources is a cause of global poverty extends the ecological concerns of the members of Deepwater Ecovillage into concerns for social justice. As they see it, not only does the path we are taking threaten to either upset the comfort of the lives of Canadians (in the case of an economic collapse), or to decrease the possibility of life for future generations (in the case of ecological collapse), the path also does violence to the poor of the world, right now! In

this regard, the members of Deepwater Ecovillage echo concerns outlined by Dr. William E. Rees and Dr. Laura Westra in their paper "When Consumption Does Violence: Can There be Sustainability and Environmental Justice in a Resource-Limited World?"<sup>69</sup> Using ecological footprint analysis, Rees and Westra highlight that rich countries are only rich because they "appropriate" a great portion of the Earth's wealth-generating capacity from poor nations and future generations.

Seeing that the wealth of the rich is gained at the expense of the poor has led many members of the Deepwater Ecovillage to develop a sophisticated and critical analysis of our economic system. Ecovillagers reject the current economic model with vigour, as Paula said, "North America is trying to take the world in a certain direction and it's not a good one."

The economic model ecovillagers oppose is global capitalism, or globalization for short. In the globalization model, nations encourage economic growth by eliminating barriers to trade (*i.e.* tariffs on imports, regulations that favour domestic firms over foreign firms). By lowering these barriers, countries can exchange goods more easily.

The perceived benefit of global trade is that countries can specialize in certain commodities for which they possess a comparative advantage. For example, while Saskatchewan can produce both wheat and automobiles, and the Golden Horseshoe region around Toronto can produce both wheat and automobiles, each region should specialize in the production of the commodity that it produces most efficiently. If one

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<sup>69</sup> Rees & Westra, 2003.

region produces both commodities more efficiently, one must look at the relative efficiency of production; *i.e.* if in one production hour Saskatchewan can produce 30 units of wheat or 1 unit of automobiles (30:1 ratio), and in one hour the Golden Horseshoe region can produce 10 units of wheat or  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit of automobiles (20:1) we see that Saskatchewan is relatively better at producing wheat than the Golden Horseshoe region. In this situation Saskatchewan would specialize in producing wheat, the Golden Horseshoe region would specialize in producing automobiles and the two regions would trade wheat for autos and vice-versa.<sup>70</sup>

The actual results of globalization are quite different. Carl pointed out that the trade agreements used to further the globalization agenda reinforce global power inequality, and contribute to environmental destruction:

I see it as all related; it's fuelled by oil, fuelled by resources, and certain areas of the world having those resources. So environmental destruction and sustainability is totalled tied into this concept of empire and neo-colonialism; it kind of goes hand in hand with unfair trade agreements.

Paula tells me that the free-flow of trade and investment dollars enables exploitation,

Whereas you look at what capital does and globalization, it's going into nations and totally disrupting their whole way of (life); tens of thousands

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<sup>70</sup> Tom Tietenberg, Environmental Economics & Policy, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Toronto: Addison Wesley, 2001), p. 188.

of years of life are being disrupted by the capital process. They're looking at seeking those areas for cheap labour and they can literally flow trillions of dollars into those nations, so it's just wreaking havoc with the whole world now...

The argument that the consumption of resources by one group denies others from using those resources, adds a concern for social justice onto concerns over ecological and economic collapse. Even if collapse never occurs, a concern for social justice provides the members of Deepwater Ecovillage with a good reason for caring about how the Earth's scarce resources are used.

### ***Summary - SACRED VALUES ARE THREATENED***

I have outlined the beliefs that lead members of Deepwater Ecovillage to possess strong environmental concern. To begin with, members of Deepwater worry that a looming economic or ecological collapse awaits human society. This dark prospect is a strong impetus for environmental concern. Secondly, the members of Deepwater Ecovillage view life as sacred; threats to life on Earth are thus of great concern. Ecological and Buddhist beliefs teach ecovillage members that their own personal well-being is dependent on the well-being of Earth and enhance Deepwater Ecovillage members' concern for the environment. I refer to this understanding of inter-dependent well-being as an *Ecological Sense of Self*. Lastly, concerns for future environmental or economic collapse are made more urgent by an understanding that the rich nations are currently



exploiting poor nations. Concerns for social justice thus enhance environmental concerns.

## El. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

### *A. God gave humans a duty of environmental care*

I have theorized that environmental concern amongst members of Deepwater Ecovillage is linked to their new-age spiritual-ecological beliefs, especially the belief that the Earth is sacred, and the belief that our personal well-being is inter-connected with the well-being of Earth.

The finding that ecovillagers see the world through what we could call a “new-age” spiritual outlook supports the Lynn White thesis. White posited that Christianity was to blame for our ecological crisis because it teaches that humans are superior to nature. In Genesis Christians are told that God made humans, male humans in particular, in “His” image. God then gave “man” dominion over all of the Earth. White argues that this view of our species’ place in the universe is disruptive. When we consider ourselves superior to Earth, rather than a part of the Earth, we do not feel remorse in destroying the Earth. The solution to the environmental crisis for Lynn White was for humanity to find a new religion that defined humanity as part of the Earth, rather than an authority with a divine right to act upon the Earth.<sup>71</sup>

If we define religion using Jack Hitt’s definition as a structure of beliefs that “provides a wide frame of understanding, a worldview that gives a devotee a sense of how everything

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<sup>71</sup> White, 1967.

works” the members of Deepwater possess a worldview that could be described as a new religion.<sup>72</sup>

The exception to a rule or theory is often of most interest to researchers. Caroline, a young ecologist and a member of Deepwater Ecovillage, offers a striking exception to the Deepwater norm. Her beliefs are decidedly traditional Christian in many regards. When I ask about human nature she tells me,

We are created and God loves us. We’re limited. We’re both physical and spiritual beings...we have death and a continued spiritual life and a resurrection, coming from my Catholic beliefs. So it’s an eternal life and the purpose of it is to love and serve God and to love one’s neighbour as one’s self. So these are the purposes I’d see for human life, as given to me by Jesus Christ who is God.

Though she appears to negate my theory, I would instead suggest that Caroline points researchers towards another area of research focus: environmental concern within Christianity. Spiritual-ecologist beliefs, such as those held by many Deepwater Ecovillage members, are not the only path to environmental concern. I highlight them here to illustrate how these beliefs motivate some members of Deepwater Ecovillage to become involved in the ecovillage. As Caroline illustrates, Christian beliefs can also motivate environmental concern and ecovillage membership.

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<sup>72</sup> Jack Hitt, “A Gospel According to the Earth: Sown by science, a new eco-faith takes root,” Harper’s Magazine, July 2003, pp. 41-55, p. 43.

Caroline's describes how her Catholic beliefs relate to her environmental concern,

Many people get confused with the word dominion in Genesis. When God put man in dominion over the Earth and all its creatures what he was doing was putting us as responsible. We're responsible to God. We didn't have the say of life and death, we had the say of care, the duty of care; in other words we had a job to do...

Caroline retains a hierarchical view of humanity's dominant position over nature, but tempers this view with a commitment to stewardship of God's creation. From her description we can see the meaning of "stewardship"; as privileged occupants of God's Green Earth we have a responsibility to respect and care for God's creation.

Does the case of Caroline refute the Lynn White thesis? I believe that it does not. White did not argue that Christianity was necessarily opposed to ecological care. He argued that a view of the Earth that places humans in a dominant position over the Earth would not promote ecological concern. White lists Francis Assisi as a Christian saint known for his love of nature (Assisi used to preach Christianity to animals in the woods), and called upon ecologists to view Assisi as a patron saint of ecology.<sup>73</sup> While in Caroline's stewardship view, humans are higher beings in the eyes of God; they are also commanded to be stewards of the Earth. By serving the interests of Earth they serve God. Perhaps

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<sup>73</sup> White, 1967, p. 1207.

what we can conclude from the case of Caroline is that certain interpretations of Christianity are compatible with environmental concern.

Catholicism may be a branch of Christianity that facilitates environmental concern more than others. Greeley explains that Catholics are more environmentally concerned than Protestant Christians because they hold a gracious image of God, rather than a stern, vengeful image of God.<sup>74</sup> From their gracious image of God, Greeley speculates that Catholics are less rigid in their beliefs than Protestants.<sup>75</sup> This lack of rigidity allows for the acceptance of new phenomenon, such as environmental problems, and the ability to not take a literal view of the Bible. Greeley is not sure whether rigid personalities are attracted to Protestantism or whether Protestantism creates rigid personalities.<sup>76</sup> Weber's theory seems to indicate that Protestantism creates rigid, ascetic personalities. Perhaps Catholicism creates personalities that are not so rigid.

It is of interest that a great number of Deepwater's members, besides Caroline, were raised in the Catholic Church. Though many reject the teachings of the Catholic Church, it is likely that there are Catholic ideas that the ecovillagers see the world through. If my extrapolations from Greeley's findings are correct, perhaps the Catholics see the world through more flexible ideas that allow them to accept the importance of environmental problems.

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<sup>74</sup> Greeley, 1993.

<sup>75</sup> Greeley, 1993.

<sup>76</sup> Greeley, 1993, p. 27.

There may be other explanation for why Catholics should possess a greater level of environmental concern than Protestants. Dr. Peter Bisson at Campion College in Regina speculates that the Catholic Church may encourage environmental concern because the Sacrament of the Eucharist (also called communion; when Catholics receive the body of Jesus Christ in the form of bread, and the blood of Jesus Christ in the form of wine) teaches Catholics that the material can be sacred.<sup>77</sup> Further research in this area is needed to confirm or deny Bisson's observation.

Caroline made a comment they may shed some light on why Catholics would be encouraged to worry about environmental issues. As she said, "I'm a morally flawed individual by birth and so one makes mistakes in self-interest but not in care of others." I outline below that members of Deepwater Ecovillage believe human self-interest to be a root cause of the problem society is facing: human over-consumption. Perhaps the Catholic belief in original sin; *i.e.* that we are born morally flawed because of Adam and Eve's fall from grace, encourages this group to agree with assertions that human self-interest is at the root of environmental problems, and to hold faith that improvement of self and society is possible. After all, if we are born with original sin, then virtue comes from a life of improving ourselves to rise above this sinfulness. This is similar to the belief held by members of Deepwater Ecovillage that we are born self-interested, and virtue comes from conquering self-interested urges through self-development. This theory is in agreement with the results I outline below.

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<sup>77</sup> Dr. Peter Bisson, Assistant Professor Religious Studies, Campion College Regina SK, Personal correspondence, August 16, 2005.

This discussion of Caroline's alternative path to environmental concern reminds us that the theory I am presenting is not a universal theory, but is instead a description of a pattern of data originating within Deepwater Ecovillage. A greater exploration of Christian environmentalists would allow us to identify similarities and differences between the beliefs and motivations of these individuals, and the beliefs and motivations of the members of Deepwater Ecovillage.

## II. INDIVIDUALS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE ACTION

### *A. Over-consumption is the source of problem*

The members of Deepwater agree that if human weren't taking so much from the Earth, collapse could be avoided. Presently, the rate of consumption is greater than can be sustained. Martin, an aged, reclusive member of Deepwater told me "you look at the rate we're consuming, it's just inevitable that there has to be a collapse."

Deepwater's members recognize that if the rich nations consumed less, more resources would be available for poorer nations. As Carl says, "I don't think it's fair that some people in the world have nothing and it's directly because of the material comforts that myself and my fellow Canadians, or certain Canadians receive."

Seeing the world through the idea that human over-consumption is threatening life on Earth has a great affect on one's psychology. Actions take on new and disturbing meaning. For example, a visit to the supermarket becomes a contribution to a runaway society. Veronique expressed this perception when she said, "I walked into a supermarket just recently and I just felt like a total alien." Within the hyper-consumer atmosphere of a supermarket, aisles filled with over-sized cereal boxes, shiny ads enticing you to buy, buy, buy, the reason we are facing a consumption-fuelled collapse becomes overwhelmingly apparent. The supermarket is part of the problem, a threat to global survival. People like Veronique who connect human consumption patterns to our ecological crisis feel like "aliens"; spectators who see the unsustainable path humanity is on and reject the behaviours and institutions that carry us down that path.



A lifestyle based on excessive material consumption can also take its toll on families. Martin told me that his parents had to work long hours to maintain a high material standard of living,

I come from a family where like I said before, we've always lived very well and lived in big homes and never lacked anything, but I think there was a price for that. My father he worked six, seven days a week, and ten hours a day to maintain that and you know I didn't get to see much of my father.

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage understand that over-consumption is undesirable both for its effect on the stability of life on Earth, and because of its negative impact on family relationships.

### ***B. Desire to live simply***

Knowing the undesirable effects of over-consumption the members of Deepwater understand that they each have an individual responsibility to consume less. Brent refers to his low-consumption lifestyle as living lightly on the Earth and tells me, "All my life I wanted to live lightly on the Earth." George, a stay-at-home dad tells me, "The less I need, the less I can get by on, the better." The ecovillage members agree that by choosing to live simply and consume less they lower their impact on the Earth, and in that way contribute to a healthier future for the Earth.

In practice, living simply means a variety of things. For a few of the members who do not yet live onsite at the ecovillage, simple living has meant choosing to live in cohousing. In a cohousing community residents own modest condo style units, and share common spaces for celebrations and common meals, play-areas for children, and also share tools and appliances like washing machines. The modest units and shared spaces conserve scarce resources, as well as encourage a sense of community. This strong sense of community may lead to further resources savings. Bailey, a passionate advocate for cohousing, tells me that due to community activities like car-pooling and car-sharing, “50% less traffic comes out of a cohousing community (than an average subdivision).”

Living simply also means choosing to buy less. When deciding on purchases, Brent tells me he always asks himself, “what is it exactly that I *need*, and not just want?” He tells me that though he wants a car in order to visit friends and jaunt out to social events more easily, he feels that he doesn’t really *need* a car and so he does not own one. Instead Brent will take the bus if he needs to travel, and focuses on enjoying the neighbourhood around where he lives to avoid travelling.

Living simply can also mean producing what one needs. Many members of Deepwater Ecovillage expressed a love for growing and eating their own organic produce. As one member told me, “I really love being able to plant the seeds, grow the food, cook it myself and eat it. That’s the ideal I have.” Later in this thesis I demonstrate the importance of self-reliance to the model of simple living at Deepwater Ecovillage.

### *C. Humans consume because they are insecure and afraid*

Not all members of society have committed to living simple lives. Some members of the Deepwater Ecovillage are angry with those who live “unconsciously”; unaware of the effects their lifestyles have on our collective future. Other members of the ecovillage feel a kind of mute sadness, a baffled feeling. They ask, “why do we continue on this path if we know it is unsustainable?”

For Brent humans are driven to consume out of fear, “I think it probably comes basically down to fear; fear of not being taken care of.” Underlying this statement is a belief that every one of us desires security. Consumption of ever-greater amounts of material goods is a way for people to obtain a feeling of security. Veronique shared Brent’s observation: “the real problem is a human psychology of grabbing for things, we think for security that wealth or power will protect us.”

There are three ways to understand why consumption would make us feel secure: a biological argument originating from Darwinian psychologists, a cultural argument critical of the values taught in our culture; and an economic argument critical of our competitive economic system.

#### *It's our genes*

For the biological argument we need only consult a recent edition of the Economist.<sup>78</sup>

The editors of the Economist see the world through the ideas of Darwin; and make a

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<sup>78</sup> Geoffrey Carr, “The Proper Study of Mankind,” insert in The Economist, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2005, pp. 3-12 (page number in insert).

strong case that the rest of us should view the world through Darwin's ideas as well. In the article "The Proper Study of Mankind" the author presents the argument that all of human behaviour is underlain with a genetic drive to successfully sexually reproduce.<sup>79</sup> From a Darwinian perspective, life, and the continuation of life, is the reason for existence.<sup>80</sup>

Relevant to a discussion of human over-consumption is how we express our drive to reproduce. It is argued in the Economist that women will prefer to "mate" with a man who is of high status.<sup>81</sup> Such a man will be better able to invest in the well-being of his offspring. Because women invest much more into the process of creating a child; for example, by carrying the foetus within their body for nine months, and nursing the infant for months after the birth, they have an interest in finding a mate who will offer a similar level of investment into the child, even if the investment is financial, for example. Men, who biologically invest little more than a few minutes of time and energy into the creation of a child, will prefer to "mate" with fertile young women; the more the better, to ensure their genes are reproduced.

These observations of human reproductive choices may seem heartless, and lacking in any understanding of emotions like love and compassion, but Darwinian psychologists defend their thesis with observations of animal behaviour in nature. As Carr states,

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<sup>79</sup> Carr, 2005.

<sup>80</sup> Recall that members of Deepwater Ecovillage believe life to be sacred: the ultimate value. The difference between the Darwinian view, and the Ecovillager view may be that members of Deepwater Ecovillage understand that human life, and their individual lives, depend on a healthy, living ecosphere. The instinctual interest in the continuation of life is much more narrow, pertaining to the lives of our offspring and genetic material.

<sup>81</sup> Carr, 2005, p. 10.

The males of many other species gather harems, but females rarely do so; female swallows prefer their mates to have symmetrical tails and they are also more faithful to high-status males; both male lions and male baboons kills the infants of females in groups they have just taken over; and so on.<sup>82</sup>

If we have an innate drive to reproduce, and men are more successful at reproducing when they are of high-status, we should expect that men would be driven to increase their status at any cost. Carr argues that that is exactly what we are doing when we seek ever-greater incomes, and consume ever-greater amounts of material resources in conspicuous consumption. The big houses, the Hummers, the “get rich or die trying” philosophy, may all be expressions of men’s quest for status, and in turn man’s quest to reproduce.

Conversely, if women are rewarded with high-status mates because they appear fertile and healthy then perhaps we can begin to understand the drive for beauty that often expresses itself in the female sex. The make-up, clothes shopping, and even cosmetic surgery, may all be expressions of women’s quest for youth and beauty, and in turn to reproduce.<sup>83</sup>

If we view Brent’s comment that consumption comes from “fear of not being taken care of” through the ideas put forth by Darwinian psychologists, than the reason for insecurity

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<sup>82</sup> Carr, 2005, p. 10.

<sup>83</sup> These are gross stereotypes of men and women’s interests used only to highlight the Darwinian theory.

and fear is poignant. In a culture where status is expressed through material consumption, those who do not consume risk being left behind; *i.e.* they risk not finding a mate and they risk not fulfilling their life's calling: sexual reproduction. This is certainly cause for insecurity.

While the members of Deepwater Ecovillage often wonder how humanity can continue its obsession with economic growth when that growth is detrimental to the survival of the species and potentially all life on Earth, Darwinian psychologists observe that because there is no cap on how far individuals will go to achieve "high-status," there is also no cap on economic growth or personal wealth.<sup>84</sup>

This Darwinian interpretation of why humans over-consume may appear pessimistic at first. If we are driven by biological urges then how can we possibly change? Our genes have evolved over thousands and thousands of years; it would be folly to think we can alter our genetic make-up to decide to consume less. However, many ecovillage members believe in the power of the human mind. They believe that humans can develop themselves to be less selfish, or at least to equate self with a larger moral sphere (such as the entire ecosphere – remember the *Ecological Sense of Self* discussed above?) After discussing the cultural argument of why humans over-consume, I will outline the belief

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<sup>84</sup> Carr, 2005. Also note, studies conducted on the link between happiness and economic growth have offered support of this Darwinian view of human psychology. Across countries with varying levels of income there is relatively no difference in happiness levels past an average income of \$10,000. There is, however, a noticeable difference between happiness levels within a country; the rich are generally happier than the poor. To highlight the relative nature of status; in one country someone who owns a large herd of cattle may be rich, in another country someone who owns \$1 billion of stock in a large corporation is rich. What matters is not the absolute amount of money a person has, but the amount of money they have comparable to their neighbours. To read more about the relationship between happiness and income a good start is Richard Easterlin, "Does Money Buy Happiness?" *The Public Interest*, Ed. D. Bell and I. Kristol (New York: Warren Manshel, 1974).

that human nature is in a sense malleable, in that it can be shaped by self-development. Several ecovillagers support this interpretation of human nature, and attempt to act on it with personal "self-work" and spiritual practices.

#### ***D. Competitive culture and economic structure encourage consumption***

The cultural argument for why consumption makes us feel secure rests on a critical analysis of our economic system. The cultural and economic arguments are thus intertwined. If the idea that we have an innate drive to compete is *not true*, we have made it true through the design of our economy. Within the capitalist system competition is encouraged in order to generate "efficiencies" of production. Firms must learn how to cut costs in production, and sell more units in order to remain "competitive"; *i.e.* in order to remain in the market and beat the prices offered by competitors. Workers must educate themselves and prove they are good workers in order to obtain and secure employment, and avoid being replaced by a competing worker. If firms or individuals do not continually strive to increase productivity they risk being "left behind." This is what I call the efficiency of fear. A constant feeling of insecurity is cultivated in order to encourage ever-greater productivity.

Deepwater members such as Veronique are critical of modern culture, "I'm very opposed to the competitive nature of our society and the individualism that seems to be a big value in Western society." Veronique draws a link between our competitive culture and our lack of care for the Earth,

Well I think we not only need to co-operate with each other as people but we need to co-operate with Mother Nature and steward the Earth from which all our needs are met. And I'm very concerned that we're exploiting the Earth as a people and not taking care of it.

Paula, a spiritual member of Deepwater Ecovillage encouraged me to remove the influence of media from my life in order to escape the competitive culture, "So the first thing you do is get rid of the TV and stop reading the paper." In her view, we are taught to fear and feel insecure because then government and corporate interests (operating hand in hand) have an easier time controlling us; consumer goods are promoted as a salve to chase away the feelings of insecurity created by the very businesses selling the goods.

Viewed through the cultural/economic theory, human over-consumption is a means of feeling secure within a competitive economic system. The logical consequence of this argument is that we need to change the culture and the economic system that influences culture.

Again this explanation for the cause of over-consumption may be viewed pessimistically. Changing both our culture and economic system is a daunting task. The members of Deepwater Ecovillage would be disempowered to act if they believed that this task was not possible. It is only through believing that their actions make a significant contribution to change that the members of Deepwater Ecovillage can remain hopeful and



take action. The next section will discuss the beliefs that lead Deepwater members to feel their actions will be effective.

### **Summary - INDIVIDUALS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE ACTION**

The ecovillagers blame human over-consumption for leading us towards collapse, and for the poverty experienced by the world's poorest peoples. Acknowledging that our individual actions contribute to global problems, the ecovillage members feel a responsibility to act to reduce their contribution to the problems. This understanding causes members of Deepwater to reduce their consumption and "live lightly on the Earth".

The ecovillagers also realize that in order for collapse to be averted and social justice to be achieved, members of society at large have to also reduce consumption. To understand how to encourage that shift, Deepwater's members must understand what motivates over-consumption. One ecovillager suggested that consumption is motivated by "a fear of not being cared for." This implies that humans have a need to feel secure, and that somehow consumption can fill that need. I outlined three ways that we might understand why consumption would fulfill our need for security. From a Darwinian perspective, consumption increases our status, and provides us with a greater chance of successfully reproducing. From a cultural and economic perspective, consumption is also a response to the insecurity created by competition.

We can see that their understanding of root causes offers the members of Deepwater Ecovillage three key starting points from which to work to avert collapse and create social justice: individual, culture and economic structure. I will now explore the beliefs that empower members of Deepwater Ecovillage to take these actions of self-development, cultural change and structural change. And I will show that the desire to carry out these actions lead logically to the formation of an ecovillage.

### III. INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS AFFECT CHANGE

To address the possibility that over-consumption is motivated by instinctual self-interested urges, members of Deepwater Ecovillage pursue self-development. To address the possibility that over-consumption is motivated by a sick culture and a flawed economic structure members of Deepwater Ecovillage have come together to create a co-operative culture and economic system. I describe these actions below.

#### *A. Individuals can pursue self-development to advance beyond self-interest*

Recall the six "nineteenth-century ideas" that E.F. Schumacher pointed to as shaping the modern mind. One of those ideas was that of relativism; that there are no absolutes or hierarchies save for those we decide to create. Schumacher tells us that this belief denies the distinction between higher and lower levels of being.<sup>85</sup> I have already pointed out that Deepwater Ecovillage members see the world through a different idea in their belief that life is of ultimate value. Deepwater Ecovillage members also deny relativism in regards to human development. According to the beliefs of ecovillagers, there are higher and lower levels of human development. This belief empowers Deepwater's members to pursue self-development in order to reign in urges to over-consume. Deepwater's members come to this shared belief from different starting points.

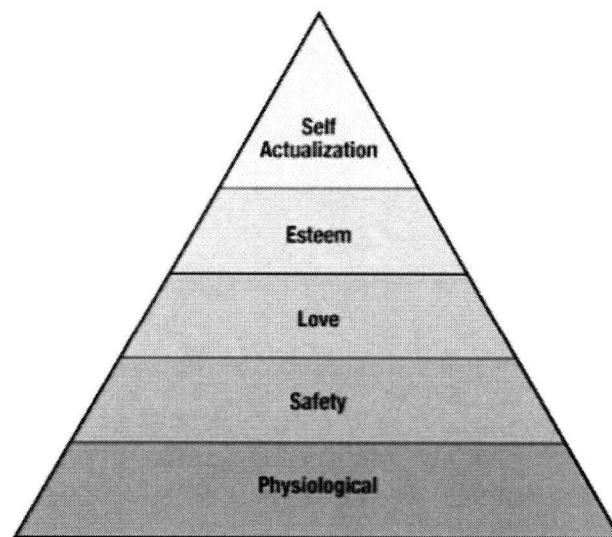
Three different members of Deepwater Ecovillage referred to philosopher Ken Wilber in interviews. As Veronique told me, she agrees with Wilber's theory that "we're climbing up this ladder of consciousness." Ken Wilber makes the argument that people progress

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<sup>85</sup> Schumacher, 1999, p. 68.

through moral stages during their life. At each stage you can “see further,” and your “moral sphere” grows more extensive. We may begin by caring only about the interests of our family and self – Darwinian psychologists would argue that this is due to our selfish desire to pass on our genes – but as we climb the ladder of consciousness Wilber argues that we can extend our circle of caring to distant others – and perhaps the Earth as a whole.<sup>86</sup>

Victor expresses support for a similar theory of human development – Maslow’s hierarchy of needs model – when he tells me “I’m here to actualize myself.” In the Maslow model, once we have met our basic needs of food, water, and shelter, we seek to fulfill “higher” needs such as the need for belonging and the need for love. Self-actualization is the “highest” need on Maslow’s pyramid (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1 – Maslow’s Pyramid<sup>87</sup>**

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<sup>86</sup> Ken Wilber, Jack Engler & Daniel P. Brown, Transformations of Consciousness: Conventional and Contemplative Perspectives on Development, (Boston: Shambala, 1986). See also Lawrence Kohlberg, The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice, (New York: Harper & Row, 1981). Wilber uses Kohlberg to construct his model.

<sup>87</sup> Guru to you, Website: <http://www.gurutoyou.com/images/pyramid.gif>, Last accessed February 8, 2006.

The assumption underlying this model is that we can develop our interests beyond physiological needs; of which the drive to reproduce may be one, and pursue higher ideals; such as perhaps, seeking ecological salvation and social justice. Victor seeks to self-actualize through his involvement in Deepwater Ecovillage.

Buddhist beliefs offer another model of self-development. I mentioned earlier that several members of Deepwater Ecovillage see the world through Buddhist beliefs. Many of these members also actively practice Buddhist meditation. Paula, Brent, Carl, Andy, Kate, Martin and Regina all told me that they meditate; some meditate daily; others meditate only occasionally.

Meditation also allows practitioners to, as Regina says, “liv(e) more fully in the present.” In Buddhist meditation, one attempts to become aware of the present experience, letting no thoughts of analysis, or memories of past and future, cloud the experience.<sup>88</sup> This sort of “pure” experience has many benefits, listed below.

Brent told me that it is possible to experience a sense of oneness with nature through walking meditation: “Just walking and noticing what’s going on. You just have to be quiet and let your mind rest and just feel connected.” Paula tells me that by seeking this *immanent* feeling of harmonization of self with the Earth one is able to move beyond narrow self-interest: “you’re ultimately trying to move that little self out of the way” and towards an expanded view of self-interest. As discussed in regards to the *Ecological*

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<sup>88</sup> Dana White, Personal correspondence, March 2005.

*Sense of Self*, the ecovillage members who practice Buddhism seek to obtain a spiritual feeling of connection with the Earth that enhances their ecological beliefs that human well-being is dependent on the well-being of the Earth.

Regina believes that through meditation she reaches an awareness that happiness is found in appreciating each moment, not in purchasing consumer goods,

If we buy the new SUV we're not going to feel that much better about ourselves or our lives in twenty seconds...No matter how much you have, no matter what your life is there's going to be some level of dissatisfaction and by living more fully in the present then it's not as dissatisfying and you won't do as much harm because you will be aware of what you are doing.

Through meditation practice one can recognize cravings for consumption as a natural response to suffering, and can accept these cravings without acting on them. For a Buddhist, consumer goods are a means to the goal of human happiness, no more. Several members of Deepwater Ecovillage display this sort of approach to material possessions. George told me about a shopping experience with his daughter, "she kept saying 'why don't you get another pair of shoes' and I kept saying 'well why? I have a pair of shoes.'" Shoes for George are a means of protecting his feet, no more.

Buddhists have an important precept that is aided by meditation; "do no harm."

Buddhists believe that because life is full of suffering our goal should be to cause the least amount of suffering to ourselves and others. Focusing on awareness of the present moment helps meditators to be aware of their actions, and leads to a better understanding of whether they are in fact doing harm. Donald tells me that through a Buddhist practice of self-conscious awareness virtuous behaviour becomes a habit: "you build that inertia."

Inspired by thinkers such as Ken Wilber and Abraham Maslow, as well as philosophies such as Buddhism, the members of Deepwater Ecovillage believe that self-development is possible.

***B. We can learn to interact co-operatively and in the interest of the common good***

As a group, the members of Deepwater Ecovillage are attempting to move beyond self-interest to create a co-operative, collective-minded culture. Paula compares ideal social relations at the ecovillage to a bee colony, "Like a beehive you need to learn to act as a collective, instead of an individual." Martin tells me that one needs to care for the group in making every decision, "I have to think of the entire society or the entire group before I decide on something." Magnolia explains her personal goals in this light, "I really have a desire to work together for the common good, I know it sounds cliché, but I don't want anything that I do to make someone else unhappy, or to stifle someone else."

This sort of collective-minded culture is institutionalized in Deepwater Ecovillage in the way that decisions are made. The members of the ecovillage hold regular meetings

where they decide on matters ranging from what sort of housing to build, to the policy on stray cats, and whether to hold educational workshops and when. At these meetings decisions are made using consensus.

Consensus decision-making is based on the idea that “process matters” and that traditional decision-making, for example majority-rules or top-down executive decision-making, is flawed.<sup>89</sup> A quote from an on-line manual on consensus decision-making outlines the flaws of traditional decision-making,

The values of competition, which allow us to accept the idea that somebody has to lose; the structure of hierarchy, which, by definition, creates power elites; and the techniques of domination and control, which dehumanizes and alienates all parties affected by their use, are the standards of group interaction with which we were all conditioned.<sup>90</sup>

The basic principle of consensus decision-making is that a decision is not made until everyone involved supports the decision, or those who object do not disagree enough to block the decision and so allow the decision to pass. This is a much higher standard to achieve than a simple majority-rules decision rule. Bailey tells me it can lead to better decisions, “better decisions come out when we look for that best thought between a consideration of all thoughts.”

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<sup>89</sup> C.T. Butler, “A Revolutionary Decision-Making Process,” Available on-line at <http://www.consensus.net/revolutionary.html>, Last Accessed November 15, 2005.

<sup>90</sup> Butler, 2005.



To achieve consensus, clear and honest communication is encouraged. In consensus decision-making people are given equal opportunity to state how they feel about an issue. Disagreement is a time for learning and reaching mutual understanding. It is also a time for creative problem-solving. In Deepwater Ecovillage, if a member strongly disagrees with a decision they are asked to become part of a team that will work to come up with a better decision. This commits a person who would like to "block" a decision to invest personal time and energy into finding a solution that is agreeable to everyone and discourages excessive "blocking" of decisions.

Some members of Deepwater Ecovillage believe that consensus decision-making could be revolutionary if practiced in society at large. They express hope that through the consensus decision-making process groups that appear to be in conflict might actually find common interests. These members believe that as John stated, "Really the loggers and the environmentalists share a lot of common views."

This is perhaps the most important effect of consensus decision-making; moving participants past the "us versus them" mode of thinking, and to the point where there is no *them*; there is only *us*. Andy tells me that we need to move beyond traditional thinking and as he says, "by traditional I mean thinking of the world in terms of good and bad." Though we will always find ways to see differences between people, many ecovillagers believe that in the end none of us is truly "bad" as all of us share common goals and interests. As Donald says, "everybody wants to be happy." And as Bailey tells

me, "what's underneath all our behaviours is that we're all looking for the same thing which is peace, joy, love."<sup>91</sup>

Ecovillage members who are residents of cohousing have had experience with consensus decision-making. These members stress the transformative effects consensus decision-making has had on themselves and their children. One member told of how children in her cohousing community are given an equal say in community decisions and in that way learn the value of democracy and mutual understanding: "And I find the children take it to the school too. They would be more likely to help stop a fight in the schoolyard by getting the two people to learn how to listen to each other."

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage consider themselves an experiment in co-operative culture. As Veronique told me, "(the ecovillage) is kind of a laboratory for how people can live together in a co-operative way." They believe that through consensus decision-making they can begin to shift interpersonal relationships away from competition, insecurity and exploitation. Bailey tells me that this will have great repercussions, "If we feel more connected with each other and more connected with the planet we're going to care for the planet."

For the members of Deepwater Ecovillage, cultural change is a key component of preventing ecological collapse and achieving social justice. As Gerald says, "To me, it's the same issues, food, shelter, energy, social life, lack of dominance, co-operation, people

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<sup>91</sup> This latter belief is a different explanation of human motivation than the instinctual self-interest drive described by Darwinist psychologists.

getting their needs met, education..." Co-operative culture cannot be separated from a search for environmental sustainability; it is an intrinsic part of that search.

## EII. CONFLICT IN NON-HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATIONS

### *A. There is conflict relating to leadership, power and contribution*

I want to here note another emergent theme in this study. That is the theme of conflict in non-hierarchical organizations and it relates to issues of leadership, power inequality and contribution.

The ecovillage members are nearly unanimous in their belief that a co-operative culture can be created. Consensus is believed to be a way to achieve that culture. Because each person is given an equal say in decision-making there is an assumption that each person has an equal amount of power. This works for ecovillagers because, for the most part, they dislike hierarchy. As Brent said, "I don't believe in leaders." The assumption that everyone has equal power in consensus is made problematic, however, because several ecovillagers perceive there to be power inequality in the ecovillage. As one ecovillage member told me, "everyone is supposed to be equal but there are some who are more equal than others."

Several participants felt that one or two powerful individuals dominate meetings, make decisions without consulting the community, keep the community in the dark over decisions that have been made, control the ecovillage through membership on committees (which meet separately from the larger group), and block progress on aspects of the ecovillage they do not personally support. The accusation thus seems to be that these individuals value their own input into the ecovillage more than they value the input of

others. In this way, some ecovillage members feel disempowered by the consensus process.

Three possibilities exist to explain this perception of power inequality. The first is that the individuals blamed for excessive control of the ecovillage have not sufficiently accepted the egalitarian nature of the ecovillage project. In her book, Ecovillage at Ithaca, ecovillage pioneer Liz Walker speaks about a revolt that occurred early on in the creation of Ecovillage at Ithaca (EVI - an ecovillage in New York).<sup>92</sup> Joan Boaker was the founder of EVI and a powerful voice of the original vision. The other members of the ecovillage dethroned Joan because they were eager to have more input in the direction of the ecovillage. Joan's voice was still heard, but was given equal power with the other voices in the ecovillage. This "revolt" led to an increase in democracy within the project. Perhaps Deepwater will at some point experience a similar revolt to correct the perception of power imbalance.

The perception of power inequality is not universally shared in Deepwater Ecovillage. As another member said, "I feel that I have equal power with anyone else, but I'm not sure that everybody feels like that." The second possibility is that those parties who perceive power inequality have not taken steps to exercise their power. Perhaps they are not sufficiently confident to make their views known. One member who expressed concern about power inequality was described as "shy" in an interview with another ecovillage member. Perhaps they are not as well-spoken as other more "powerful" members of the group. One member explained that powerful members have more

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<sup>92</sup> Walker, 2005.

influence “because they’re good presenters, good speakers, they have a lot of knowledge in many areas.” Another member talked about there being pressure to conform to group decisions, “there’s a real problem of peer pressure to agree with the group so along with consensus you’ve got to have some sort of support for being the red card.”<sup>93</sup> The inequality may thus be solved, not by restraining the influence of one or two “powerful” members, but by enhancing the “power” and support of other members, or by finding new ways for all members to have their voices heard.

A final possibility is that those who perceive power inequality have willingly given up power because with power comes responsibility. And as one highly active member of Deepwater told me, within the ecovillage “a lot is done by a few.” Liz Walker found herself in a similar situation at her Ecovillage at Ithaca (EVI). As a highly skilled promoter of the group Liz has steered EVI through financial difficulties, negotiations with local planners, and group conflicts. In the process some members of EVI began to resent her authority and blamed Liz when things did not go well. She sees this as a common phenomenon in group dynamics, “It is a surprisingly common group dynamic, in which individuals relinquish their power to a perceived authority figure, who then becomes a convenient scapegoat for whatever issue is controversial.”<sup>94</sup> It seems that there is a fine line between leadership and authority, and between power and responsibility within both EVI and Deepwater Ecovillage.

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<sup>93</sup> During consensus meetings at Deepwater Ecovillage coloured cards are used to indicate support for an idea (green), questions or concerns about an idea (yellow), and serious problems with an idea (the red card). The participant felt that there was sometimes pressure from the group to conform to a decision and not put up the red card to “block” the decision.

<sup>94</sup> Walker, 2005, p. 203.

The fact that the issue of leadership, contribution and conflict is a shared concern between ecovillages leads me to believe that more attention should be paid to the presence of this type of conflict in the Ecovillage movement and non-hierarchical organizations at large. This research may be of particular value to progressive social movements, many of whom aspire to create a non-hierarchical state of governance, but collapse under the weight of group in-fighting.

### III. INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS AFFECT CHANGE cont.

#### *C. We can build an alternative economy that is environmentally and socially just*

By now you should have a clear understanding of the principles by which Deepwater's members live. The ecovillage members live simply to lower their impact on the Earth and to ensure wealth is shared equitably with poorer nations. Ecovillage members seek self-development in order to move past self-interested drives. To create a co-operative, non-hierarchical culture Deepwater Ecovillage makes decisions using consensus. These principles of simplicity, equitable sharing of resources, spiritual growth, co-operation and egalitarianism are also realized in the economy of Deepwater Ecovillage. In fact, they are the motivating principles that underlie the Ecovillage economic model. I will outline the nature of this economic model and then conclude by talking about why the members of Deepwater Ecovillage feel their project will lead to larger structural change.

#### *Self-reliant economy*

In the introduction I provided a standard definition of ecovillages as "human-scale, fully-featured settlements in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, and which can be successfully continued into the indefinite future."<sup>95</sup> A focus on ecological awareness is evident in this definition, but turn your attention to the beginning of the definition where ecovillage is defined as a "human-scale, fully-featured settlement." A fully-featured

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<sup>95</sup> Robert and Diane Gilman in Christian, 2003, p. xvi.



settlement is one where food, water, shelter, employment, energy supply; all the necessities of life, are present. It is a *self-reliant* settlement that meets its needs locally.<sup>96</sup>

The goal of Deepwater Ecovillage, and, in principle, all of the ecovillages in the global network (GEN), is to create a *self-reliant* economy.<sup>97</sup> Inspired by thinkers such as E.F. Schumacher – who is also a key inspiration of the approach I take in this thesis – the ecovillagers seek to meet their needs within the bounds of the ecovillage and its immediate surroundings. Using the example of Gandian simplicity, Andy explains that a self-reliant economy displays a commitment to low environmental impact and social justice,

If you see Ghandi for instance he is making his own clothes, growing his own food completely, not buying any cotton from anywhere. You can go really far with your commitment towards social justice and environmental awareness.

The Ecovillagers believe that when you are producing what you need locally, using local resources, you are not exploiting the poor. A familiar quote from Ghandi himself illustrates the principles behind this philosophy, “live simply so that others may simply live.” Concerned with the effects of globalization the members of Deepwater Ecovillage hope to build an alternative to the exploitative global capitalist economy.

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<sup>96</sup> A city and surrounding region may be considered a fully-featured settlement, but villages are closer to the “human-scale” size that allows direct communication between all of the members.

<sup>97</sup> GEN networks together hundreds of existing ecovillages by hosting a website and organizing conferences to facilitate communication and support amongst ecovillages. Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), 2006.

A local economy also has environmental benefits. In the modern capitalist system goods are shipped back and forth across great distances. This transportation requires huge amounts of fossil fuel energy. In Canada, the transportation sector releases 25% of greenhouse gas emissions (the gases known to be responsible for climate change).<sup>98</sup> As Brent tells me, local food production is a no-brainer, "Bringing food from Florida, it's crazy! You should just eat what grows here now." The on-site organic farm (discussed below) is a fundamental component of Deepwater Ecovillage.

A self-reliant economy also offers security for ecovillagers concerned about economic collapse. Growing food locally, and creating local energy systems may allow Deepwater Ecovillage to remain a "lifeboat" in the case of collapse. Gerald believes becoming more self-reliant will make Deepwater Ecovillage "a lot stabler society." This is a psychological comfort for the members of Deepwater Ecovillage, knowing that they are building the infrastructure to "carry-on" if economic collapse occurs.<sup>99</sup>

### *Organic Farm*

Deepwater's organic farm is not designed to maximize profit, but rather to provide a service to members and the public (fresh organic vegetables) and employment for members. Growing vegetables on-site for local consumption eliminates the ecological impact of transporting goods long-distances. On-site production also means that the local ecovillage residents face the impacts of their agricultural decisions; they see topsoil erosion if it occurs and choose to farm organic, and thus avoid using harmful pesticides,

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<sup>98</sup> Transport Canada, Website: <http://www.tc.gc.ca/>, Last accessed February 13, 2006, Last modified February 13, 2006.

<sup>99</sup> Whether the same comfort exists for the case of ecological collapse is not so certain.

in order to prevent negative health impacts on people and the environment. Compare this to a globalized trade system where the effects of production are “masked” by the use of money to denote the value of a product: topsoil depletion in Colombia is not listed on the price tag of coffee bought here in Canada.<sup>100</sup>

Labour is the greatest input on the ecovillage farm; machinery is limited to a lawnmower, a Roto-tiller, and, one day, a small tractor (an ecovillage member is currently working to fix up the antique unit, as he says, “people will be proud that we recycled a 55-year old unit!”). Though the labour may be strenuous (my aching back can attest to that!) growing organic food is meaningful work. Carl enjoys working in the fields and tells me, “I guess making the world a better place is growing healthy food in a sustainable manner.”

Selling organic produce at local markets has further benefits. Farmers establish relationships with customers and these customers provide appreciative feedback for the farmers’ efforts. This is a perk that is absent from the global economy. Farmers Markets are also a chance to educate the public about organic agriculture and its relation to environmental sustainability.

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<sup>100</sup> Over one hundred years ago, Marx saw that one consequence of an economic system that uses money for exchange is a “masking” of the origins of a product. This masking creates a state where one does not see how the high level of material consumption that occurs in the industrialized world is built on exploitative social relationships (e.g. low wages paid to child labourers in other countries make products affordable to industrialized consumers) and exploitative environmental relationships (e.g. the diversity and inexpensive cost of food products in supermarkets is made possible through the exploitation of cheap fuels for transportation, and industrial farming practices that despoil the land base, but allow inexpensive grains, fruits, legumes, and vegetables to be grown). Marx observations taken from David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change, (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1989), p. 100.

## *Spiritual Farming*

For some, farming can also be spiritual. One ecovillage member reported feeling a connection to something outside of himself when working on the farm: "Especially when I'm alone out in the field and yeah just feeling really part of it, part of nature, really connected." It is a connection I felt while working onsite:

*As I work shovelling dirt into rows, carefully ensuring they are straight with a string tied between two sticks, my back begins to ache, and Thomas shows me a useful stretch, and switches tasks with me. He is concerned for me, yelling, "Remember to take breaks!" from across the field.*

*My next task is to rake weeds from the newly formed garden beds, which are now rewardingly taking form. As I begin running the rake through the black soil, collecting clumps of weeds in the tines, I notice a golden light suddenly present on the soil, highlighting the contours with dark shadows. I sigh and gaze around, breathing deep. The sun is setting. As I look at the finished beds they seem to glow with green auras. I stretch my arms up to the sky to ease the pain in my aching back, and soak in the beauty of the surrounding meadows and the garden, life glimmering gold and green all around. A deep peace sets into me and I begin to understand the real attraction of this life.*

This moment of feeling peace while watching the setting sun in the garden was very spiritual. I felt an overwhelming sense of happiness and that what I was doing was good.



**Figure 2 - Organic Garden at Findhorn Ecovillage, Scotland<sup>101</sup>**

### *Simple Economy*

A local, eco-village-sized economy demands “human-scale” technology. For example, nuclear power is too complex and high-risk to be managed by a small group of local people. Even if this group of people had the technological know-how to build and operate a nuclear reactor, no insurance company will insure a nuclear power plant because the potential liabilities are too great. Nuclear power is only possible because it is underwritten by governments, such as the Government of Canada, that promise to cover any liability resulting from a nuclear power melt-down.<sup>102</sup> For these reasons I would argue it is not “human-scale.”

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<sup>101</sup> Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), 2006.

<sup>102</sup> Schumacher, 1999.

Local economies can, however, operate “human-scale” technologies such as: solar panels, wind turbines, small hydro-electric generators, and energy-efficient housing. These technologies are relatively low-risk and more easily administered by a small group of people. Deepwater Ecovillage has yet to install any of these technologies but may consider doing so in the future in order to lower dependence on fossil fuel energy.

A local economy also encourages simplicity and conscientious consumption because it connects goods to their source. For example, if the members of Deepwater Ecovillage would like to create new housing out of local materials they will be very aware of where those materials came from. If a house is built with straw-bales, the farmers who grew the hay will be conscious of the work it took for that hay to be grown and cut and baled. They can also be reassured that the production of that hay did not result in topsoil erosion and water siltation because they know that they used zero-till, organic agriculture methods. If the house is supported with wooden beams Deepwater’s members will have to choose the trees to cut down for those beams. At another ecovillage I visited during my research study I was told of a special ceremony that was conducted when a large tree was cut down. All of the ecovillagers gathered round the tree and sang songs to honour the spirit of the tree for giving its life to the ecovillage. This story showed me that reliance on local resources creates conscientious consumption, sometimes to the point of reverence.

### *Co-operative Economy*

The ecovillage property is owned as a co-operative, which means each member receives an equal vote in decisions made by the co-operative: one member, one vote, no matter how much they have invested in the property. The farm is owned by the larger cooperative.

The principles of a co-operative are different than that of a standard corporate business structure. A standard corporate structure has one purpose: to maximize returns for shareholders. As Stan told me, “Big corporations, their biggest need is for money, as much as they can get, and at the backs of people that pay, you know?” Co-operatives have an extended set of principles. These include:

- Voluntary and Open Membership (to ensure discrimination does not occur)
- Democratic Member Control
- Member Economic Participation
- Autonomy and Independence
- Education, Training and Information
- Co-operation Amongst Co-operatives
- Concern for Community<sup>103</sup>

These principles mirror many of the principles of Deepwater Ecovillage. Democratic member control ensures a non-hierarchical structure; autonomy and independence corresponds with the self-reliant approach of the ecovillage; concern for community is a large reason the ecovillage exists; and I explain below how education, training and

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<sup>103</sup> DEVCO, The Prairie Hub: Co-op Developer Training Manual, (Vancouver, BC: Westcoast Development Cooperative, 2004).

information fit into the ecovillage, and how co-operation amongst co-operatives defines the larger economic structure ecovillagers envision. Voluntary and Open Membership is a tricky endeavour at the ecovillage as members must share the values and vision statement of the ecovillage. New members are accepted only after a probationary period in which the community, and the potential member, can assess their compatibility. A committee exists at Deepwater to decide on accepting new members. At the same time, the Deepwater community strives to be an open and accepting environment.

Gerald had praise for the co-operative model, "We have a co-operative structure which helps maintain that people working aren't in a slave situation and their creativity can all be applied." Brent told me how the ecovillage may one day be made up of a group of co-operative businesses all supporting each other, "I see a lot of people living here and that we have little businesses where we support each other's businesses. You know, we buy at the grocery store that's here, food off the farm. Self-supporting as much as possible, a lot of co-operation." Already there has been talk of setting up a natural building co-operative on-site at the ecovillage. This co-operative would sell eco-conscious building supplies and develop natural buildings.

### *Network of ecovillages*

Ecovillage members envision an economic structure where autonomous economic units, such as ecovillages, network in reciprocal trading relationships. This will enable trade for goods that cannot be produced within a region or locale. I will again restate Paula's concerns over globalization, but now include her prescription for remedying the problem,



Whereas you look at what capital does and globalization, it's going into nations and totally disrupting their whole way of (life); tens of thousands of years of life are being disrupted by the capital process. They're looking at seeking those areas for cheap labour and they can literally flow trillions of dollars into those nations, so it's just wreaking havoc with the whole world now...*So what we need to do is get back to local, get back to not consuming, not being heavy-duty into the material realm.* But that's totally alien and foreign to how capital works and the need for growth and increased economic activity. And that's really the sense that ecovillages need to be about, *ultimately the networking of them so you're not an isolated pocket, creating a whole new structure*, which will be much healthier.

From this comment we can see the focus on building not just one ecovillage, but also an entire alternative economic structure that can replace global capitalism. Paula also told me that she could see Deepwater Ecovillage initiating another ecovillage in a different region to begin building a network. Already Deepwater Ecovillage has expressed hopes to connect to the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN).<sup>104</sup>

The creation of an alternative economic structure inspires the members of Deepwater Ecovillage. Several members had worked previously in movements opposing the spread of globalization. Being a part of the ecovillage is a refreshing and proactive alternative.

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<sup>104</sup> GEN, 2006.

Magnolia tells me that she enjoys this aspect of the ecovillage, "It is an opportunity to try and be proactive. It's an opportunity to actually do it, not just think about it, not just talk about it." Carl similarly tells me that working on ecovillage projects such as the organic farm helps him to be hopeful, "organic farming's such a great thing because it feels like something very positive, because I tend to have a very sceptical and negative view of the world." A vision of a better world gives the members of Deepwater Ecovillage hope that a better world is possible.

***D. Leading by example is an effective way to make change***

The ecovillagers believe that by leading by example, both in their personal lives and in creating a self-reliant, environmentally conscious economic model, they can change the world. As Carl says, "If we can model living happily and simply here, together, than that's a beacon for people to see, that it can happen."

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage want to show that living in a way that is gentle to the Earth and other people can be fulfilling. As Carl says, "I think it's always good to have examples of things that are positive and you know buildings and places where people can come and learn and see again that idea of how people aren't actually starving and uncomfortable and wearing potato sacks for clothes." Paula hopes that she can help create an ecovillage that is approachable for non-ecovillagers, "So that people come and say 'hey it's nice here I wouldn't mind doing that.'"

Ecovillagers like Martin believe that example is more effective than words in encouraging people to take environmental action, "I've been preached and taught to enough and it's only when I've seen how things can be or how they can work that I've made that choice." And Kate came to the realization that she needed to take that approach in her own life, "I spent a part of my life trying to see if I could convince other people to do something about it. Came to the realization that I hadn't done enough about it myself."

Ecovillage members already work to offer educational and work opportunities so that people can visit Deepwater Ecovillage and see the example they are creating. There are organic farm internships, and interested researchers (such as myself) are welcomed at the ecovillage. This fits with the intention of the ecovillage, as Gerald says, "An underlying basis for this project is all about education."

Because the ecovillagers believe that *Leading By Example* creates social change ecovillage members are reassured that their actions make a difference. This belief is empowering and inspires the members of Deepwater Ecovillage to create and build their community.

### **Summary - INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS AFFECT CHANGE**

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage believe that over-consumption is motivated by selfish, insecure urges. To overcome these urges the members of Deepwater Ecovillage practice various forms of spiritual self-development, including Buddhist meditation.

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage also believe that over-consumption is motivated by insecurity resulting from a competitive culture. To counter this culture Deepwater Ecovillage uses consensus decision-making.

Global capitalism is a final root cause of over-consumption and the exploitation of workers and the Earth. Deepwater Ecovillage offers an alternative economic system. This economic system is based on principles of self-reliance, co-operation, simplicity, environmental awareness (*e.g.* farming is organic), and meaningful, spiritually rewarding work. The goal of Deepwater Ecovillage is to network with other like-minded communities and create a networked alternative economic system. Ecovillagers believe that this economic model will spread as others visit the ecovillage and learn from example that an ecovillage is a workable, enjoyable mode of living.

#### IV. ALTERNATIVE SOURCE OF WELL-BEING

##### *A. Ecovillage life is rewarding*

I have made the case that Deepwater Ecovillage is a place for members to act on their environmental and social justice concerns. The ecovillage is also a rewarding environment in which to live for the following reasons:

##### *Multi-use Site*

If the ecovillage is able to develop more activity on-site, social well-being could result. In a world where more and more people face two and three hour commutes for work, the live/work multi-use nature of the ecovillage offers members a chance to, as Regina hopes, “not hav(e) to have a differentiated home life and social life.”

##### *Acceptance*

Deepwater Ecovillage offers an accepting environment for those who do not feel at home within mainstream Modern society. For members like Bailey this is important, “I don’t seem to fit a lot of places, but there seems to be more unconditional acceptance here.” It is also important to members who have become alienated from their family because of their strong, non-traditional beliefs. One member told me that she joined the ecovillage after leaving a long-term relationship, “one of the things that took my partner from me was my refusal to participate in the uranium industry.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Luckily, I did not have my uranium protest shirt on at this interview.

### *Support*

Members also enjoy the way that an intentional community such as Deepwater Ecovillage, creates a supportive extended family. Donald believes the ecovillage will provide him with a fuller experience of humanity than the “nuclear family” model. He laments traditional neighbourhoods where, “A lot of people could die and their neighbours won’t know about it, and it’s very sad.” Donald looks forward to living within a supportive community environment where people will care about his well-being.

A community-minded environment promises stability, a characteristic that attracted Magnolia to Deepwater Ecovillage,

I was looking for something a little more stable. A group of people who were a little more mature in their attitude – not necessarily their age – but certainly people who know what they wanted and were committed to a certain lifestyle that was community oriented.

Being around others who share one’s beliefs and values also helps ecovillagers to not feel alone in their struggles. George tells me, “Via repeated contact with other people who have similar values I don’t feel quite so lost in the wilderness.” George has felt “lost in the wilderness”; *i.e.* isolated, in the past because his immediate family is not sympathetic to his environmental concerns. The ecovillage is a place where George can reaffirm his commitment to environmental sustainability, and feel supported in doing so.

The shared vision of Deepwater Ecovillage also empowers the ecovillagers to achieve more than they could on their own. Martin tells me, "one person can make a difference, but it's certainly a lot easier when you have twenty-six sets of helping hands." There is a feeling that the collective efforts of the ecovillage members will have a great effect on the world, and that is a source of hope.

### *Life Meaning*

Being part of a proactive project to make change has helped some members overcome a feeling of helplessness. Magnolia tells me that membership at Deepwater has taught her that, "I can make change, rather than let it eat away at me and feel helpless." In the place of helplessness is feeling of fulfillment. As Martin says, "it's just a joy to wake up knowing that there's purpose in my life."

For those members who believe that life is the ultimate value (recall: "I think that the mystery is that we get to experience life") life at the ecovillage is spiritually fulfilling. As Kate stated, "Some people in our group believe that if you make such a dedication, such a commitment to sustainability, it is fundamentally spiritual, and I'm one of those." The sort of fulfillment described by Martin and Kate is *Existential Fulfillment* in that it results from feeling that one's life has a higher meaning.

### *Place of Happiness*

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage enjoy farming and gardening at the ecovillage. Regina tells me, "I really love being able to plant the seeds, grow the food, cook it myself

and eat it.” They also remain in awe of the beauty of the ecovillage site, as Brent says, “I mean it’s just a beautiful place.” For some highly involved members of the ecovillage it has already become a part of their identity: “it’s a part of my family...it’s part of who I am.”

At the ecovillage members interact with people of all different ages and interests.

Veronique appreciates the diversity of the Deepwater community; “I just enjoy living with all these supportive people. Living with people of all ages.” And everyone enjoys the social interactions that occur at the ecovillage: “There’s always people around to do stuff with or celebrate with.”

I myself enjoyed the lively discussions around the farmhouse table, the connection I felt towards those I stayed with in the farmhouse, and the ecovillage celebrations (that included a farewell concert by yours truly).

One day while walking along the rutted road to the fields, the splendour of the ocean filling my vision, the crisp morning air invigorating me, I remarked to one of the ecovillagers that this was indeed a dangerous place, he asked what I meant. I told him the ecovillage was dangerous because a guy could fall in love with it and not end up leaving. Part of me never did.



## DISCUSSION

### *Introduction*

Much evidence suggests we must make great changes to our lives, our culture and our economy to attain environmental sustainability.<sup>106</sup> We cannot continue to pursue ever-increasing economic growth in order to attain ever-increasing levels of wealth and consumption. When we grow our economy we use up scarce resources, upset ecological processes and release ever-greater quantities of pollution. These actions threaten modern society with collapse. I have sought to understand ways that individuals come to take environmental actions, specifically the environmental action of creating an ecovillage, in order to learn how we can change the destructive course of humanity.

A qualitative approach has allowed me to understand the logic by which Deepwater's members understand their membership in the ecovillage. I have sought to find the ideas that the members see the world through, and in the process have gained insights into the cognitive processes of those who live in intentional communities to carry out environmental action. This idea-focused, cognitive approach was largely absent from the research on environmental action, which focused on applying surveys on general populations (*e.g.* university students) to test pre-existing theories of environment concern and action.

The population of ecovillagers has been studied before, most notably by Andy Kirby who visited Ecovillage at Ithaca (EVI) in New York.<sup>107</sup> Kirby asked EVI residents, "How did

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<sup>106</sup> Rees & Westra, 2003.

<sup>107</sup> Kirby, 2003.

you get here? What factors and influences were important in making the decision to settle at EVI?” Participants listed a desire to live in a community setting, environmental concerns, and a desire to create cultural change as factors leading to their lifestyle choice. Cultural change was composed of three focus areas: personal growth and self-actualization; living in a community with increased social interaction; and presenting an alternative living model to the world. Deepwater’s members are influenced by similar factors. This consistency is reassuring and adds to the validity of my findings.

Kirby also found that EVI members’ expressed a desire to experience “connectedness” in their ecovillage community.<sup>108</sup> EVI members desired to connect spiritually with the natural world; to connect with other people in community; to cultivate and use nature in a benign manner, and therefore connect with nature; to integrate various aspects of their personal lives (*e.g.* work, home, and play) into a unified experience; and to connect to people of many different ages.<sup>109</sup> Kirby believes that a desire for “connectedness” in all of these five areas defines sustainable living for EVI members. Similar desires for “connectedness” were found at Deepwater Ecovillage. Deepwater Ecovillage offers a similar opportunity for connecting to nature, community, food production; to connect personal and work life; and to connect to people of many different generations. I want to understand why the ecovillage was chosen as the place to seek those connections, and, if possible, what beliefs underlie the desire for connection.

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<sup>108</sup> Kirby, 2003, p. 331.

<sup>109</sup> Kirby, 2003, p. 331.

Participants in Kirby's study of EVI spoke of key, perhaps transformative, personal experiences such as divorce, kids leaving home, and aging that led them to create or join the ecovillage. In my interviews I focused less on the experiences that led people to join Deepwater Ecovillage, and more on the beliefs that people possessed and how these beliefs influence the choice to live in an ecovillage. This focus comes out of my theoretical approach. I believe that a given experience will mean different things to different people depending on how that experience is interpreted. By understanding the ideas through which members of Deepwater Ecovillage see the world, we can understand why the ecovillage is a fitting lifestyle choice for them. Kirby did not delve into the underlying beliefs of ecovillagers in any great depth. This thesis complements Kirby's work by displaying the beliefs held by members of a similar ecovillage community.

My results can teach us specifically how one sub-group: ecovillage members, came to engage in one particular environmental action: ecovillage membership/creation. The factors that led people to join or create Deepwater Ecovillage can also illuminate broader themes in the field of environmental behaviour. The headings I discuss below are signifiers of broader themes that are likely influential in encouraging other forms of environmental action. I discuss each of these themes with reference to the specific environmental action of membership in Deepwater Ecovillage.

Though the themes are presented in a linear fashion both here and in Table 1 and Table 2, the themes could be better envisioned as an inter-woven fabric of beliefs; reinforcing each other and creating a strengthened resolve to carry out environmental action. For

example, I show that alternative spiritual beliefs lead members of Deepwater Ecovillage to value life as sacred; these same spiritual beliefs also encourage individual responsibility in that they recommend seeking truth oneself, rather than relying on an authority figure such as the Church. I could have grouped these points under the heading of alternative spirituality, but chose a different presentation based on a review of the literature surrounding environmental behaviour and my own internal logic.

## **I. SACRED VALUES THREATENED**

### *Knowledge of Environmental Problems*

Knowledge of environmental problems alone does not lead to environmental action.

Early environmental behaviour theorists speculated that providing people with information about environmental problems could encourage environmental concern and action. Kollmus and Agyeman refer to these early theories of environmental action as ‘deficit’ models; wherein an information deficit is the main barrier to environmental action.<sup>110</sup> This model has been shelved after researchers found that while many people express a concern for the environment – assumingly demonstrating their knowledge of environmental problems – very few are willing to change their behaviour to take environmental action.<sup>111</sup> This does not mean that knowledge of environmental problems is not necessary for environmental action; instead it means that knowledge of problems is not sufficient for environmental action.

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<sup>110</sup> Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002, p. 241.

<sup>111</sup> Sheldon Ungar, “Apples and Oranges: Probing the attitude-behaviour relationship for the environment,” *Canadian Review Sociology and Anthropology*, 31:3 (1994), pp. 288-304.

Many theorists have highlighted the importance of knowledge to environmental action. Gigliotti has shown that those who believe that the Earth has only limited resources are willing to accept political changes such as increased gasoline taxes.<sup>112</sup> Stern *et al.* demonstrate that an awareness of the harmful consequences of environmental problems to self, other humans or the ecosphere can encourage environmental concern.<sup>113</sup> Knowledge of environmental problems is thus thought to be a starting point for environmental action.

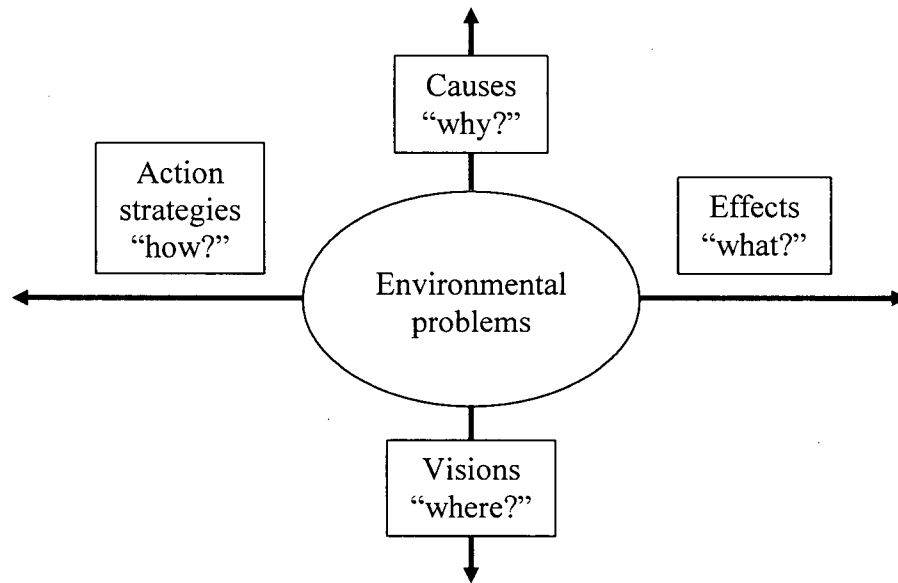
In Bjarne Bruun Jensen's action-competence model of environmental action, knowledge is key in inspiring environmental action. Jensen proposes that knowledge is indeed a necessary and sufficient cause of environmental action, as long as this knowledge encompasses more than just awareness of environmental problems. The action-competence model specifies four different sorts of knowledge needed for environmental action: knowledge of the environmental problem; knowledge of the cause; knowledge of action strategies to address the problem; and the possession of a vision for what the situation would look like once the action strategies are implemented (See Figure 2).<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Larry M. Gigliotti, "Environmental Issues: Cornell Students' Willingness to Take Action, 1990," The Journal of Environmental Education, 26:1 (1994), pp. 34-42.

<sup>113</sup> Note that environmental concern is often not sufficient to create environmental action, but within this thesis I argue that it is a necessary condition. Stern *et al.*, 1993.

<sup>114</sup> Jensen, 2002.



**Figure 3 – Action Competence Model**

Jensen argues that knowing about a problem without knowing why it exists or how one can correct it can actually decrease environmental action as people lose hope that change is possible.<sup>115</sup> The findings of this thesis support Jensen's action-competence model and so I refer to the model throughout this discussion.

Knowledge of environmental problems amongst the members of Deepwater Ecovillage is encapsulated in the belief that society faces the threat of economic and/or ecological collapse. This collapse belief involves awareness of several different environmental problems. Participants spoke of a looming oil shortage that could send the economy into a tailspin. Participants also spoke about: water shortages caused by a changing climate; species extinction; and habitat destruction in the form of forest clear-cuts. Members believe that cumulatively these problems threaten to overwhelm the ecological life support systems of Earth. As Veronique said, "if we don't look after the environment

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<sup>115</sup> Jensen, 2002.

then we're not going to have any resources to keep us alive." The collapse belief is thus the basis of environmental concern for the members of Deepwater Ecovillage.

The collapse belief is effective because it simplifies environmental problems.

Environmental issues are complex by nature. It is hard to imagine the infinite interdependencies in any given ecosystem. The many ways that humans may influence ecosystems is similarly difficult to envision. This complexity can act as a barrier to understanding and environmental action.<sup>116</sup> The collapse belief offers an over-arching framework in which ecovillagers can locate specific environmental issues. The simplicity and totality of the collapse belief provides ease of understanding and a strong reason for environmental concern.

Ungar has written that a general concern for the "environment" does not lead to environmental action because the category of environment is too large to mean anything.<sup>117</sup> Everything from noise pollution to climate change to devastated cod stocks is lumped into the "environment." A collapse belief is of a similar large scale. This belief points towards the possible extinction of life on Earth and suggests a total approach to solving the problem: *i.e.* building an alternative, ecologically conscious society.

But a belief in collapse is not enough to motivate every possible environmental action.

There was one member of Deepwater Ecovillage, deeply concerned about climate change in interviews, who was also very preoccupied with driving and building luxury cars

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<sup>116</sup> Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002.

<sup>117</sup> Ungar, 1994.

outside of interviews. Ungar's observation is still relevant; environmental concern cannot predict environmental action because the environment is too broad a category. Specific actions such as consuming resources to build and drive cars can be overlooked by an overly broad concern for collapse.

I believe that there will always be a gap between environmental concern and action due to imperfect information; no one can always know perfectly which of their actions enhance or detract from the health of the ecosphere. Though it cannot create perfect environmental action, a collapse belief does offer a broad lens through which to see environmental problems and suggests that significant changes are needed to the way humans in society operate.

### *Sacred Values*

Collapse is not important unless those affected by the collapse are important. I pointed out in the Results section that the members of Deepwater Ecovillage are concerned about collapse because they value life: their own lives, the lives of other humans, living nature, and the life of the ecosphere as a whole. The spiritual beliefs of members of Deepwater Ecovillage, which I characterize as new-age, spiritual-ecological beliefs, facilitate this concern for life. Ecovillage members combine an understanding of the inter-connection of life as taught by ecologists with the understanding of the oneness of life taught by Buddhism. Seeing the world through these ideas, members of Deepwater believe that life is inter-connected and sacred. As Kate said, "when you ask me what really matters to



me, it's that being in a forest and seeing the cycle of birth, growth, decline, death, rebirth, that's it." Because life is sacred, collapse is of great concern.

Without the spiritual beliefs, collapse would be of less concern. Recall that E.F. Schumacher listed relativism as an idea by which the modern mind views the world. Schumacher defines relativism as "denying all absolutes, dissolving all norms and standards."<sup>118</sup> While it is unrealistic to speak about relativism in regards to certain biophysical phenomenon (*e.g.* gravity), moral relativism is a common philosophical perspective. In practice moral relativism fuels arguments that there really is no right or wrong: right and wrong are relative to the observer. This is a favoured tenet of existential philosophers; while killing a man may be absolutely wrong to a judge in the criminal justice system, in existentialist Albert Camus' The Outsider the main character has no remorse over killing a man, and little sadness that his mother has just died.<sup>119</sup> Camus' character does not share mainstream societies definition of right and wrong.

Schumacher complained that the modern education system encourages moral relativism by focusing on value-free scientific "know-how" instead of humanistic "know-*why*",

And what do we get from it today? A view of the world, as a wasteland in which there is no meaning or purpose, in which man's consciousness is an

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<sup>118</sup> Schumacher, 1999, p. 67.

<sup>119</sup> Albert Camus, The Outsider, Trans. Joseph Laredo (Toronto: Penguin, 1982).

unfortunate cosmic accident, in which anguish and despair are the only final realities.<sup>120</sup>

From a moral relativist perspective, economic or ecological collapse simply doesn't matter. Human comfort in an ordered society is not superior to the chaos of an economic collapse; human existence is not superior to non-existence. This is an admittedly extreme form of moral relativism, but different people may accept the idea to different extents. I assert that moral relativism is a poor motivator for becoming concerned about the state of our planet. Schumacher goes further and argues that seeing the world through moral relativism makes the meaning of our lives unintelligible,

While the nineteenth-century ideas deny or obliterate the hierarchy of levels in the universe, the notion of an hierarchical order is an indispensable instrument of understanding. Without the recognition of "Levels of Being" or "Grades of Significance" we cannot make the world intelligible to ourselves nor have we the slightest possibility to define our own position, the position of man, in the scheme of the universe.<sup>121</sup>

Members of Deepwater Ecovillage reject extreme forms of moral relativism. Though they may value specific living entities differently (*e.g.* some have a greater concern for humanity than for other species, others profess a greater concern for other species than humanity), the members of Deepwater Ecovillage share a moral conviction that the

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<sup>120</sup> Schumacher, 1999, p. 69.

<sup>121</sup> Schumacher, 1999, p. 74.

presence of life on Earth is of absolute value. As George said, "I have an innate belief that there's value in life, that there's value in what's on this planet." This belief provides purpose in their lives, and order to their existence. It is a strong impetus for environmental action.

### *Ecological Sense of Self*

I outlined the *Ecological Sense of Self* to display that members of Deepwater recognize the inter-connections of personal well-being with the well-being of the Earth. Sentiments like, "I'm being wounded. I'm being wounded in the forests; I'm being wounded in the lakes" display a belief that an interest in the well-being of Earth is equivalent with self-interest.

This assertion that ecovillagers possess an *Ecological Sense of Self* is relevant to 'altruism' theories of environmental concern. For example, Stern *et al.* have theorized that environmental concern can result from an altruistic concern for the suffering of other human beings, nonhuman species or the biosphere, as well as from self-interest.<sup>122</sup> With an *Ecological Sense of Self*, a concern for other human beings, nonhuman species and the biosphere *is* self-interest.

In similar research, Allen and Ferrand found support for Geller's theory that environmental action is more likely taken by those who express altruistic concerns for

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<sup>122</sup> Stern *et al.*, 1993.

others.<sup>123</sup> For a member of Deepwater Ecovillage, concern for the suffering of other humans can be seen as concern for the Self.<sup>124</sup> The greatest spur to environmental action may be to understand that the well-being of self, other humans and the ecosphere are all inter-connected.

The science of ecology is important in teaching about inter-connection. Ecology teaches that we must have a healthy ecosphere to have human health. Ecological footprint analysis, rooted in ecology, teaches us that when we take resources beyond our fair share we negatively affect other people.<sup>125</sup> Hungerford & Volk have confirmed in their meta-analysis of environmental behaviour research that knowledge of ecology creates “environmental sensibility” (akin to environmental concern).<sup>126</sup>

Eastern religions like Buddhism are also influential in encouraging an understanding of inter-connection. By viewing the world through a holistic cosmology, the idea that environmental problems are “someone else’s problem” is shown to be naïve.

In summary, this first theme: SACRED VALUES THREATENED teaches us that encouraging environmental concern is a first step in encouraging environmental action. Environmental concern amongst members of Deepwater Ecovillage is motivated by: knowledge of environmental problems – especially knowledge of the spectre of collapse;

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<sup>123</sup> James B. Allen and Jennifer L. Ferrand, “Environmental Locus of Control, Sympathy, and Proenvironmental Behavior: A Test of Geller’s Actively Caring Hypothesis,” Environment and Behavior, 31:3 (May 1999), pp. 338-353.

<sup>124</sup> A capital-S is used to emphasize the broader definition of self.

<sup>125</sup> Rees & Westra, 2003.

<sup>126</sup> Harold R. Hungerford and Trudi L. Volk, “Changing Learner Behavior Through Environmental Education,” Journal of Environmental Education, 21:3 (1990), pp. 8-21.

valuing life on Earth as sacred; and understanding ecology and eastern ideas about holism that display the inter-connections between self-interest, altruistic concern for other humans and the ecosphere as a whole.

## **II. INDIVIDUALS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE ACTION**

Research has shown that in order for environmental action to occur individuals have to feel a personal responsibility to solve environmental problems.<sup>127</sup> Conversely, individual environmental actions may seem trivial if industry and government are implicated as responsible for solving environmental problems.<sup>128</sup> The members of Deepwater Ecovillage feel responsible for the looming threat of collapse because they believe that collapse is rooted in human over-consumption; government and industry enable and promote this consumption, but individual behaviour sustains the system. With this understanding the members of Deepwater Ecovillage see immediately that they must decrease their own consumption so as not to contribute to the threat of collapse.

We can see in Jensen's "action-competence" model (Figure 2) that knowledge of the "causes" of environmental problems, as well as knowledge of "action strategies" to solve the problems, is necessary in order to encourage environmental action. This thesis demonstrates that understanding the causes of environmental problems creates a feeling of personal responsibility to address the problem, and suggests action strategies.

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<sup>127</sup> James Blake, "Overcoming the 'Value-Action Gap' in Environmental Policy: Tensions Between National Policy and Local Experience," Local Environment, 4:3 (1999), pp. 257-278; Nancy Newhouse, "Implications of Attitude and Behavior Research for Environmental Conservation," Journal of Environmental Education, 22:1 (1991), pp. 26-32; Hungerford and Volk, 1990; Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002.

<sup>128</sup> Ungar, 1994.

One ecovillager told of the empowering effect of learning about action strategies such as simple living:

I was pretty aware but didn't really have the tools. I didn't know that there was something going on out there that could help me carry out those things. So the awareness was there from the beginning, I just needed the knowledge that it's possible to change.

The spiritual beliefs of Deepwater's members also contribute to a feeling of individual responsibility. To start, a spiritual approach to discovering the truth of the world involves exploration, and finding one's own truth. There is a lesson of personal responsibility in that approach to knowledge. As well, Deepwater's members believe it is important to live according to one's beliefs. Recall Magnolia's comment, "Buddha didn't say he was Buddhist, Christ didn't say he was Christian, they just were." This sort of experiential spirituality enhances a feeling of personal responsibility to act, and not just express concern.

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage act on their beliefs by leading a self-conscious, simple life. This sort of self-conscious simple living can be compared to the lifestyle of a religious ascetic. In her study of an environmental group in Australia, Nicole Shepherd reported that members of that group were similar to religious ascetics in the way they: applied their ethics to daily life; worked on the self; and committed to activism as a

“vocation.”<sup>129</sup> Members of Deepwater Ecovillage do much the same. They apply their ethical belief that one should “live lightly on the Earth” throughout their everyday activities.

The feeling that life is sacred encourages the steadfast ascetic discipline of living according to one’s beliefs. The members of Deepwater Ecovillage are not just conducting environmental action for themselves, they are serving a higher purpose: protecting that which is sacred, life. Kate confirmed this assessment when she told me, “Some people in our group believe that if you make such a dedication, such a commitment to sustainability, it is fundamentally spiritual, and I’m one of those.”

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage are not content to simply change their own lives; in creating the ecovillage they also hope to create cultural and structural change. By providing an example of a co-operative, self-reliant, eco-conscious community, the members of Deepwater hope to inspire the creation of other like communities. These communities may then join together in a non-hierarchical trading system to create an alternative to the competitive, capitalist economy. Taking on the challenge of creating an alternative culture and economy is an extended level of individual responsibility than that typically measured in environmental behaviour research, which often focuses on individual behaviour such as recycling habits and willingness to accept higher gasoline taxes.<sup>130</sup> The desire to create social change is encouraged by understanding the global context of environmental problems; *i.e.* that consumption by the rich impoverishes the

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<sup>129</sup> Shepherd, 2002.

<sup>130</sup> Allen & Ferrand, 1999; Gigliotti, 1994.

poor, and that a competitive culture and economic system encourages consumption. For a substantial commitment to environmental action, an awareness of the roots of the problem is necessary.

I turn to the literature on risk and trust to further understand the extended feeling of individual responsibility held by the members of Deepwater Ecovillage. Flynn, Slovic, and Mertz found that people who trust government, industry, and science are more likely to tolerate environmental health risks such as the construction of nuclear power plants.<sup>131</sup> People who did not trust government, industry, and science had less tolerance for environmental health risks. Flynn *et al.* also found that educated, white males with higher than average incomes were more likely to trust in these institutions than white females, and both male and female non-whites. From their findings Flynn *et al.* infer that those who trust in these institutions do not do so because they are male; if that were the case the non-white males would have also trusted in the institutions. Instead, it is people who are in positions of power and authority – educated, white males with higher than average incomes – that trust government, industry and science.<sup>132</sup>

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage do not trust traditional hierarchical institutions. This is inferred from their focus on creating a non-hierarchical structure, criticisms of corporate greed and government corruption; for example Stan's comment, "the politicians, they're in there too with their need for money, like they're just as greedy as

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<sup>131</sup> James Flynn, Paul Slovic and C.K. Mertz, "Gender, Race, and Perception of Environmental Health Risks," *Risk Analysis*, 14:6 (1994), pp. 1101-1108.

<sup>132</sup> Flynn *et al.*, 1994.



these corporations” and comments such as Brent’s “I don’t believe in leaders.”<sup>133</sup> This distrust of traditional institutions likely encourages a sense of personal responsibility. As Caroline said, “try to solve your problems don’t expect the government to do it for you. In fact they won’t, they’ll get in the way.”

This theme: INDIVIDUALS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE ACTION teaches us the importance of a sense of personal responsibility to environmental action. An understanding of the causes of environmental problems enhances personal responsibility; when individuals realize that material consumption is contributing to ecological degradation, some feel responsible to lower personal consumption levels. Spiritual teachings may also reinforce this feeling of personal responsibility and increase the commitment to leading a materially simple life.

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage also feel a responsibility to take extended environmental action by creating an alternative culture and economic structure. This extended responsibility comes from awareness of the wider context of environmental problems. It may also be enhanced by a lack of trust in institutions such as government, industry and science that are typically in charge of decisions involving environmental risk.

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<sup>133</sup> Some of the ecovillage members could fit into the demographic of educated, white male with higher than average income that have worked in positions of authority. However, an anti-establishment bent was present in most of these men as well.

### III. INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS AFFECT CHANGE

A sense of responsibility encourages environmental action, but it can also overwhelm.

Kollmus and Agyeman discuss apathy as a barrier to environmental action.<sup>134</sup> Apathy results from feeling “pain, sadness, anger, and helplessness” at the same time.<sup>135</sup> An individual could have a high level of environmental concern, and even understand that they have a responsibility to act to address environmental problems, but if they feel that their actions will not change the situation they may resign in apathy. To quote Agyeman and Kollmus, “strong feelings, together with a sense of helplessness will not lead to action.”<sup>136</sup>

Conversely, people do take environmental action when they are empowered to feel that their actions make a difference.<sup>137</sup> Newhouse refers to this empowered feeling as possessing an *Internal Locus of Control*. Someone who has an *Internal Locus of Control* attributes change to actions they can take, rather than to the actions of powerful others such as God, government or parents.

In a study of what factors lead to environmental action, Allen and Ferrand found that personal control – similar to *Internal Locus of Control* – increased sympathy towards others, which in turn increased environmental action.<sup>138</sup> I suggest, based on the finding that members of Deepwater Ecovillage feel empowered to make a positive impact in the

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<sup>134</sup> Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002.

<sup>135</sup> Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002, p. 255.

<sup>136</sup> Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002, p. 255.

<sup>137</sup> Hungerford & Volk, 1990; Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002; Newhouse, 1991.

<sup>138</sup> Allen & Ferrand, 1999.

world, that an *Internal Locus of Control* means the difference between environmental action and apathy.

Based on their understanding of the root causes of environmental problems the members of Deepwater Ecovillage know what sort of environmental actions are needed. The first step is to reduce one's own material consumption and live a simple life. But, the sum effect of leading a simple life is quite insubstantial if it is confined to a group of only thirty people. The members of Deepwater Ecovillage believe that for collapse to be prevented others must decide to live simply, and changes must be made to our competitive culture and the exploitative capitalist economic system to encourage others to live simply. The members of Deepwater Ecovillage hold specific beliefs that create hope that these larger changes can occur and will be effective. In review:

Members of Deepwater Ecovillage believe that self-development is possible through spiritual practices like meditation. This belief provides hope that humans can escape from instinctual calls to consume more out of self-interest.

Members believe that social relations can be co-operative if the proper structures are created, such as consensus decision-making structures. This provides hope that humans can escape cravings to consume that stem from feelings of insecurity created by a competitive culture.

As well, members believe that an alternative economic system can be created that embraces the values of: self-reliance, co-operation, simplicity, environmental awareness, and meaningful, spiritually rewarding work. Note that the fourth factor on Jensen's 'Action-Competence' model (Figure 2) is a vision of where the environmental action will lead.<sup>139</sup> A vision of an alternative economy fulfills that requirement for the members of Deepwater Ecovillage.

They also believe that others will follow the lead of Deepwater Ecovillage and create similar structures if they see that Deepwater Ecovillage is functional and effective. The belief that leading by example will create change reassures the members of Deepwater Ecovillage that their actions will make a difference.

All of these beliefs share a common root: belief in human social progress. The members of Deepwater Ecovillage believe that humans can be more than we are; that we can move beyond base instinct and achieve collective restraint in order to stabilize the Earth. A belief in human progress reassures the ecovillagers that their actions matter and will not be carried out in vain. It is interesting to note the paradox in this belief. Ecovillagers to some extent do not trust the possibility of technological progress to solve the limits to growth dilemma we face on Earth, however they do place faith in our ability to evolve our collective culture and institutions. As Martin said, "I think the big leap in our evolution is going to be spiritual and mental."

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<sup>139</sup> Jensen, 2002.

The members of Deepwater Ecovillage believe that for human progress to occur, change must start with the individual, continue within a community setting, and eventually expand to encompass a global consciousness. By changing their own lives, and establishing an alternative lifestyle within community they hope to act as evidence that change is possible. This is again similar to Shepherd's "ascetics." Shepherd writes,

The establishment of a green identity and the achievement of an ethical lifestyle create a definition of "the situation," the state of the contemporary world, as one where social change is possible: if group members can change themselves, so can others.<sup>140</sup>

So not only do environmental activists such as Deepwater Ecovillage members and those studied by Shepherd believe that social change is possible, they also act to prove this change is possible. Such is the strength of their convictions that we can avert collapse if we try.

Whether the ecovillagers are correct in believing that we can create social change and avert collapse, we must wait and see. Sceptics, such as Takis Fotopoulos, do not think that "lifestyle" movements – as he calls the ecovillage movement – are effective in creating social change.<sup>141</sup> Fotopoulos argues that social change does not occur by affecting values, but instead by confronting those who hold political and economic power,

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<sup>140</sup> Shepherd, 2002, p. 144.

<sup>141</sup> Takis Fotopoulos, "The Limitations of Life-style Strategies: the Ecovillage 'Movement' is NOT the Way Towards a New Democratic Society," *Democracy & Nature*, 6:2 (2000), pp. 287-308.

So, social transformation towards an inclusive democracy would never come about by 'example and education' alone, since the required change in values and culture can only be the outcome of a process of continuous interaction between changes in institutions and changes in values. In other words, the change in values would have to come about as part of a programmatic political movement with an overall goal for systemic change, rather than as part of the activities of some fractionalised movements to create a new relation between the sexes, identities, or society and nature.<sup>142</sup>

Without a complementary political wing, Fotopoulos believes the ecovillage movement will fail to create lasting change. His understanding is rooted in a belief that "the existing institutional framework, as defined by the market economy, crucially conditions our values and ideology."<sup>143</sup> Fotopoulos argues that our growth-focused, hierarchical institutions create values; without challenging these institutions, the same values of competition and exploitation will be re-created in each successive generation. Structural change must precede culture change.

Ted Trainer disagrees with Fotopoulos.<sup>144</sup> Trainer believes that the debate Fotopoulos is creating (they openly debate on the usefulness of ecovillages in the journal Democracy &

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<sup>142</sup> Fotopoulos, 2000, p. 289.

<sup>143</sup> Fotopoulos, 2000, p. 290.

<sup>144</sup> Ted Trainer, "Debating the Significance of the Global Eco-village Movement: A Reply to Takis Fotopoulos," Democracy & Nature, 8:1 (2002), pp. 143-157.

Nature) is the classic debate between Marxists and Anarchists as to what comes first: cultural or structural change.<sup>145</sup> Trainer believes that both cultural and structural change are necessary, but that it is not possible to create the sort of co-operative, self-reliant, non-hierarchical society being proposed by the ecovillage "movement" by seizing the reigns of government and implementing the new structure from the "top-down." Instead, we must focus on creating model settlements, and building the capacity of those around us to create similar settlements. A non-hierarchical society must be built village by village, and person by person.<sup>146</sup>

I believe that both Fotopoulos and Trainer are correct. I agree with Fotopoulos in his belief that political power leading to structural reform is a necessary condition for lasting social change. I agree with Ted Trainer that we must begin to build settlements that display an alternative vision of society in order to inspire others to follow our lead (and support political action). Structural change allows cultural change, and cultural change allows structural change.<sup>147</sup> Whether these can be achieved before we face collapse, I do not know, but I can hope.

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<sup>145</sup> Trainer, 2002, p. 145.

<sup>146</sup> Trainer, 2002.

<sup>147</sup> This point was illustrated to me effectively by Dr. Peter Boothroyd, School of Community and Regional Planning, UBC, Personal Correspondence, April 2004.

## BARRIERS TO ACTION

The psychological factors necessary for environmental action are becoming clear, but research conducted by Blake has shown that there can be situational or structural barriers that prevent environmental action.<sup>148</sup> As Blake writes,

There are still practical social or institutional constraints that may prevent people from adopting proenvironmental action, regardless of their attitudes or intentions. These include lack of time, lack of money and lack of physical storage space (in the case of recycling), as well as lack of information, encouragement and pro-environmental facilities such as recycling and adequate public transport provision. Some people may also be physically unable to carry out some environmental actions.<sup>149</sup>

This is an important point to make here. Not everyone has the time or money to become involved in an ecovillage. I attended a Deepwater Ecovillage meeting when housing prices were discussed. At the time, housing costs were estimated at \$200,000 a unit for cohousing style housing. One ecovillage member was vocally opposed to housing costs of that magnitude, expressing concern that high-costs would exclude people with low incomes. The point was made that simply dwelling structures such as yurts could be used to create low-cost housing. Also attending the meeting were three people in their twenties who were considering membership. After the meeting two of these people told me that the cost of living in the ecovillage made it unlikely they would join.

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<sup>148</sup> Blake, 1999.

<sup>149</sup> Blake, 1999, (page number unknown as I reviewed the electronic html version of this article).



In my interviews, a member expressed concern that the high housing costs could create a two-tiered ecovillage: “maybe even having a layered structure of having some people who can afford to live in the nice housing, or in the more village, and then maybe there’ll be separate housing for the farmers who aren’t actually earning shit all because of organic farming (laugh).” Other members commented on the financial hardship that a \$1000 membership share (a requirement of full ecovillage membership) places on a limited budget.

This income barrier to ecovillage membership may justify critics who decry ecovillages as “yuppie subdivisions.”<sup>150</sup> In many ways, ecovillages are a middle-class phenomenon. Liz Walker states in her book about Ecovillage at Ithaca (EVI) that EVI was aimed at middle-class Americans in order to be practical.<sup>151</sup> This is not to discredit the actions of the ecovillagers, but is stated to bring attention to the fact that time and money constraints get in the way of environmental action. In the current economic structure, living simply requires first earning enough money to buy and develop a property.<sup>152</sup>

By creating a local economy on-site (*i.e.* organic farm, natural building co-operative) the members of Deepwater Ecovillage hope to lower income barriers to environmental action. The long-term vision of Deepwater Ecovillage is to create a society and economic structure where it is possible for everyone to meet their needs with local resources and live in a way that is ecologically low-impact.

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<sup>150</sup> B. Ruben & M. Harris, “Good Intentions,” Environmental Action, 24:3, (Fall 1992) pp 28-33.

<sup>151</sup> Walker, 2005.

<sup>152</sup> As Dr. William E. Rees says, we may first have to be bad in order to be good. Personal correspondence, December 2005.

Already people with low-income have been welcomed into Deepwater Ecovillage. These people typically 'earn their keep' by working on the organic farm. A look at the income distribution highlights the dual membership of the ecovillage (both middle-class and low-income). The top eight income earners display an average (mean) income of \$55,875; the bottom six earners, an average (mean) of \$16,283.<sup>153</sup>

Efforts to lower housing costs offer hope that less income will be required to live at Deepwater Ecovillage. Already, cohousing style housing has been scrapped in favour of less expensive single-detached housing (the single-detached housing is less expensive because it is existing housing that is being moved to the ecovillage site). Producing food on-site similarly presents an opportunity to lower living costs. This opportunity has yet to be fully realized as much of the food consumed at the ecovillage is bought in supermarkets, and little evidence of canning was visible at the ecovillage during my stay.

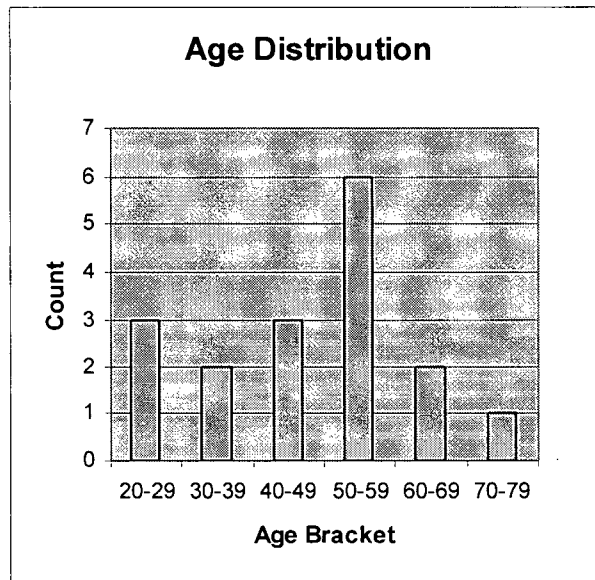
Time is a substantial barrier to ecovillage involvement. Frequent meetings, work bees, and committee duties can take a lot of time. This may explain why the most active members of the ecovillage are retired pensioners. These individuals have income security, and the time to put their skills and experience to work. Older members may also have accumulated assets with which to secure a mortgage for the ecovillage property.

Figure 3 displays the age distribution of the participants.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> I received income information from only 14 of the 18 participants I interviewed.

<sup>154</sup> Also of note, those who are between 50-59 now, were likely in their twenties during the 1960s. The types of experiences and interpretations that played out in this time period could have played a role in the development of their beliefs.



**Figure 4 – Age Distribution of Ecovillagers**

Some ecovillage members are also quite aware of time barriers to environmental action, as they have experienced these barriers previous to joining Deepwater Ecovillage. Brent told of how the demands of being a single-parent, living in the city and earning an income prevented him from “liv(ing) lightly on the Earth”:

I found I lived in the city I had a regular type of job I went to the office everyday for many, many years. And I found it – the lifestyle – just didn’t...just wasn’t supportive of my beliefs. I still would try, you know I’ve always tried to recycle, compost, grow some plants. But when you work all day, well first of all I had my children to take care of, it just did not support being able to do this.

Self-development is another goal of ecovillage members that requires access to money and time. Andy, a Buddhist scholar, described the conditions necessary for the development of consciousness:

To have a safe home, to have a safe place where you grow up, where you have teachings of all kinds available and that are delivered gently and lovingly. I think that's a condition and that doesn't seem to happen very often, as silly as it sounds, but that's the reality I think for most parts of the world.

When Andy contemplates how people come to develop consciousness we see the irony of needing money in order to recognize we should live simply:

It's increasingly happening more because we have the resources, and the thing about it too is *those resources actually come from the exploitation of the third world!* So it's a little bit funny – like we actually need to simplify our way of living if we want to have some balance with the rest of the world because we are living on top of them, like we're totally enslaving them.

Andy's comments insightfully reveal that not everyone is in a situation to pursue either self-development or environmental action. This realization strengthens the resolve of the

members of Deepwater Ecovillage to create a community where simple-living and self-development are both possible and encouraged.

The discovery of barriers to ecovillage membership is in agreement with the model of pro-environmental behaviour proposed by Kollmus & Agyeman.<sup>155</sup> They recognize that factors like money and time play a defining role in enabling environmental action. At Deepwater Ecovillage individuals who do not face time and income barriers are leading the way in taking environmental action, and creating a situation where others can take environmental action. Only after the ecovillage was established were those with higher income and time barriers able to partake in ecovillage life.

#### **IV. ALTERNATIVE SOURCE OF WELL-BEING**

Even if the ecovillage does not inspire the change needed to prevent collapse, a desire to create an ecovillage is buoyed by the belief that ecovillage life is more enjoyable and meaningful than life in mainstream society.

Members of Deepwater Ecovillage enjoy community support, social acceptance, and festive celebrations at the ecovillage. They are inspired by opportunities for spiritual development at the ecovillage. And in the process of building Deepwater Ecovillage, the members have found self-esteem and life meaning.

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<sup>155</sup> Kollmus and Agyeman, 2002.

Allen and Ferrand hypothesized that before environmental action can occur a person has to feel a sense of belonging and self-esteem.<sup>156</sup> This hypothesis is rooted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs model (see Figure 1) and the belief that humans meet basic needs before moving on to higher needs. The results of Allen and Ferrand's research did not support that hypothesis; belonging and self-esteem were not predictors of environmental action.

I believe that Allen and Ferrand had causation reversed, and that belonging and self-esteem follow environmental action. This assertion is supported by a statement by Martin who says of his ecovillage involvement, "it's given me such a desire to do new things and it's just a joy to wake up knowing that there's a purpose in my life."

Maiteny reported a similar finding in a study of participants of an environmental action program in England called 'Action at Home.'<sup>157</sup> The participants found meaning in living a life of environmental action. Maiteny proposes that humans may have an innate yearning for "completeness and well-being."<sup>158</sup> In recent decades this yearning has been filled by material consumption. When people find an alternative source of completeness and well-being they are able to let go of desires to consume and take the environmental action of living simply. At Deepwater Ecovillage, the joy of community interaction, the opportunity for spiritual development, and the significance of working for a higher purpose all contribute to a sense of completeness and well-being that replaces the need to consume.

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<sup>156</sup> Allen & Ferrand, 1999.

<sup>157</sup> Maiteny, 2002.

<sup>158</sup> Maiteny, 2002, p. 300.

## SUGGESTED FURTHER RESEARCH

I have outlined beliefs that are influential in creating environmental action. Research is needed to examine the route by which people come to hold these beliefs. Research in environmental education has attempted to show that significant life experiences, such as childhood nature experiences, can be formative in the development of “environmental sensitivity” (a variable linked to the “predisposition to take environmental action”).<sup>159</sup> The studies conclude that environmental educators could find more success in raising environmental concern among the general population by featuring a greater number of wilderness outings in their curriculum.

Several ecovillagers told of significant life experiences in nature. They said things like: “my roots are in the country,” “I lived on a farm and very much was into being outside and around animals,” “we did a lot of camping.” Others told of significant life experiences in community: “There’s a lot of the small-town Saskatchewan that I grew up in there,” “We all lived in our granddad’s house and there was about, say first cousins there was about a hundred of us,” “I come from a large family.” These early experiences may have been formative of beliefs that led participants to join Deepwater Ecovillage. This could lend support to the significant life experience hypothesis, but further research is needed to confirm or deny the link and understand the way that people come to see the world through certain ideas.

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<sup>159</sup> Chawla, 1999; Chawla, 1998; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Maiteny, 2002.

The results of this thesis can also be used to create quantitative surveys. By comparing beliefs against the level of environmental action taken, researchers can test whether this theory of environmental action is applicable across a larger sample size.

Further comparative qualitative research studies can likewise test the applicability of the results of this thesis. It is likely that beliefs will vary in another community of people involved in environmental action, but that some of the over-arching themes will be shared.

It would also be useful to conduct a qualitative research study on people who engage in low levels of environmental action and outline the beliefs through which they see the world. Research focused on those who do not conduct environmental action would identify 'blocking' beliefs that stand in the way of environmental action.

In this thesis I have compared the beliefs of Deepwater Ecovillage members with E.F. Schumacher's list of beliefs that influence the modern mind. Research is needed to test the validity of Schumacher's list.

If the phenomenon of Ecovillage is indeed representative of a new cultural "lens", we can ask: will the ideas that compose this lens spread even further? Will they one day become an integral part of the lens through which North Americans view the world?



Olsen *et al.* conducted a study that asked whether more people are beginning to see the Earth as finite, and threatened by the activities of humans.<sup>160</sup> Their results said that yes, more people do look at the world through these ideas. At the time of their research they reported that 22% of people held what they called the Ecological Social Paradigm.<sup>161</sup>

Further research is needed to determine how many people: value the Earth as sacred; feel personally responsible for acting to solve environmental problems; possess hope that their actions will make a difference; have a positive vision of a way of life that does not contribute to environmental problems; and have experienced that environmental action is rewarding.

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<sup>160</sup> Marvin E. Olsen, Dora G. Lodwick, and Riley E. Dunlap, Viewing the World Ecologically, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).

<sup>161</sup> The Ecological Social Paradigm is composed of both "ecological beliefs" and "ecological values." Ecological beliefs were operationalized with four statements: "people must learn to live in harmony with nature to survive," "the earth is like a spaceship, with limited room and resources," "modern industrial countries are very seriously disturbing the balance of nature," and "despite our special abilities, humans are subject to laws of nature like other species." Ecological values were operationalized with four other statements: "people should adapt to the environment whenever possible," "natural resources should be saved for the benefit of future generations," "nature should be persevered for its own sake," and "environmental protection should be given priority over economic growth." Agreement with the statements was taken as support for the belief or value. Olsen *et al.* 1992, pgs 62 and 66.

## LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

It is possible that we cannot change the way people see the world. Grant criticizes the “ecology myth” for asserting that we can change people’s “worldview.”<sup>162</sup> He feels that this belief arises from the scientific “we-can-control-nature” worldview, and furthermore that this scientific worldview is the true root of the ecology crisis. The basic beliefs and values through which any one of us sees the world may be quite fixed. This means that teaching people a sense of personal responsibility or that their actions make a difference may not be possible.

However, I am prone to trust in the ability of our human minds to learn new beliefs and values. Research in cognitive psychology has demonstrated that it is possible to encourage people to switch their thinking from pessimism to optimism and in the process lower depression levels.<sup>163</sup> Participants in this thesis also spoke of learning. They learned about environmental problems and action strategies to deal with these problems. This learning empowered participants to take environmental action. Still, we must conduct further research to understand how greatly beliefs and values can fluctuate during a person’s lifetime.

As Blake writes, barriers such as time and money may prevent environmental action.<sup>164</sup>

While I mention barriers to environmental action in this thesis, I did not focus on those barriers. Instead I focused on beliefs and cognitive components of environmental action.

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<sup>162</sup> Grant, 1998.

<sup>163</sup> Martin E. Seligman, Authentic Happiness : Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment, (New York: Free Press, 2004).

by Martin Seligman

<sup>164</sup> Blake, 1999.

For this reason, this thesis cannot speak a great deal to the influence of barriers on environmental action.

Another limitation of this thesis is that I did not ask context-specific questions of ecovillagers. Satterfield outlines that when people are asked general questions about environmental action they may respond positively.<sup>165</sup> However, when asked specific questions, such as “would you give up your car?” people are less favourable towards environmental action. The inconsistencies in behaviour found in this thesis, such as the ecovillage member that worried about climate change and enjoyed driving luxury cars, deserve a greater amount of scrutiny. Environmental psychologists refer to this variance in environmental concern as “attitudinal specificity.”<sup>166</sup> Future research could ask questions about specific behaviours of people who appear dedicated to environmental action.

Finally, though I have conducted this research to understand why people choose to create and join ecovillages, I have not evaluated the desirability of ecovillages. It is not certain that a world where everyone lived in ecovillages is possible or the best route to deal with environmental problems. Liz Walker writes that an ecological footprint analysis of Ecovillage at Ithaca showed that residents of the community had footprints 60% of the American average.<sup>167</sup> Still, one must ask, is this footprint lower than someone who lives

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<sup>165</sup> Theresa Satterfield, “Numbness and Sensitivity in the Elicitation of Environmental Values,” Assessing the values of cultural heritage, Ed. M. de la Torre, (Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2002).

<sup>166</sup> P.A. Bell, T.C. Greene, J.D. Fisher, and A. Baum, Environmental Psychology, 4th Edition, (Montreal: Harcourt Brace Publishers, 1996).

<sup>167</sup> Walker, 2005.

in a compact high-rise apartment? Comparative ecological footprint analysis of ecovillages and other lifestyles is needed to ascertain the desirability of this particular environmental action.

## CONCLUSION

### *Refocusing Our Cultural Lens*

Recall that E.F. Schumacher once said that we see the world *through* ideas.<sup>168</sup> He also stated that it takes three or four generations before a novel idea becomes incorporated into the mainstream worldview. It is interesting to note that Schumacher's ideas, written in 1973, are evident in the worldview of Ecovillagers.

Schumacher titled his book small is beautiful and within it put forth a vision of a low-impact, self-reliant local economy. Schumacher based his vision on the idea of Buddhist economics. Schumacher explained that Buddhists do not view the consumption of goods and services as an end goal, but rather the means towards reaching the goal of human well-being. With this in mind, a Buddhist economist would focus on "obtaining the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption."<sup>169</sup> The modern practice of sacrificing the natural resources that sustain our well-being in order to consume more than we need would appear ludicrous to a Buddhist economist.<sup>170</sup>

One of Schumacher's contributions to environmental issues was to highlight that the desire of humans to consume is influenced by culture. This thesis confirms that finding. Viewing the world through a different "lens" of ideas, Ecovillagers reject the value of a high consumption lifestyle and seek to create an alternative lifestyle that is just as fulfilling, but less damaging to our Earth.

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<sup>168</sup> Schumacher, 1999.

<sup>169</sup> Schumacher, 1999, p. 41.

<sup>170</sup> Schumacher, 1999.

Academics such as Bill Rees have called for a new “cultural myth” to replace the maladaptive consumer ethic.<sup>171</sup> This thesis offers hope that this new cultural myth is arising. The members of Deepwater Ecovillage see the world through beliefs that encourage a feeling of responsibility to act to solve environmental problems, and that reassure ecovillagers that the actions taken will be effective in preventing collapse. As well, the members of Deepwater Ecovillage believe that actions such as simple living are in fact a greater source of personal well-being than material consumption. Their beliefs support the will to pursue environmental action.

The finding that we can, and do, choose not to over-consume refutes conventional economic models. These models treat humans as consumption machines: ever-seeking higher levels of wealth and consumption as a source of happiness. Deepwater Ecovillagers are proof that not all of humanity fits into this description.

Policy-makers would do well to understand the link between cultural beliefs and the desire for more consumption. A policy of environmental education may do more to raise happiness levels than a policy to promote economic growth. Through such education citizens may realize that increased consumption can actually decrease quality of life by undermining ecosystems, and exploiting the poor in other countries. They may also come to realize that decreased consumption; and the resulting reduced pollution levels and reduced pressure on ecosystems, can improve quality of life. As an example think of

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<sup>171</sup> William E. Rees, “Globalization and Sustainability: Conflict or Convergence?” DRAFT VERSION, final version to appear in *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society*, 22:4 (2002), pp. 249-268.

childhood asthma in Toronto: the answer to that health problem is not increased spending on hospitals but is reduced pollution.

Environmental educators would do well to test the findings of this thesis and determine whether the beliefs held by members of Deepwater Ecovillage can in fact encourage environmental action in others. If they can, then research must be conducted to discover how to teach these beliefs.

In participating in this research, members of Deepwater Ecovillage may have proved what they hoped to prove: that cultural change to prevent collapse is possible. This thesis thus stands as another ray of hope that humanity may yet recognize the dangerous course we are on, and steer towards a better future. Amen.

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*Appendix A – Initial letter of contact*

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH  
COLUMBIA



**Resource Management & Environmental  
Studies**

464 –2206 East Mall

Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z3

Tel: (604) 822-9249 Fax: (604) 822-9250

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Dear community contact,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project which is exploring the motivation of proenvironmental behaviour such as living within an ecovillage. The Research Project is entitled: **The Ecovillage Choice**.

This study is being undertaken by Brett Dolter, a graduate student in the Resource Management and Environmental Studies program at the University of British Columbia, and his supervisor, Dr. W.E. Rees of the School of Community and Regional Planning at UBC. This research project is being undertaken to fulfill the thesis component of a Master's graduate degree in Resource Management and Environmental Studies. The results of this research will be available to the public in the form of the final thesis.

The purpose of this study is twofold. We would like to first explore the motivations of individuals who have chosen to live within an ecovillage. We are also interested to understand the belief systems of ecovillage members, and how these beliefs translate into behaviour. We hope this will help us understand how individuals engaged in proenvironmental behaviour come to make those behavioural choices.

Your community has been identified as a potential study site for this research because your community qualifies under the criteria of this study as an ecovillage. We are interested in sending Brett Dolter to live within your community for a period of between one week to one month. Brett will offer to help with the community workload while in the community, but this is not to be taken as compensation for participating in the research project. Nonetheless we hope to negotiate a time when Brett's presence would be least burdensome and potentially even useful.

While you will NOT be receiving compensation for allowing Brett into the community to conduct this research, Brett will pay for the cost of living to support

## ***Appendix B – Semi Structured Interview Guide***

1. Can you tell me about what you do for a living? (Prompt: Are there things you especially like? Dislike?)
2. Can you tell me about your family? Your partner (if applicable?) (Prompt: How do they feel about your lifestyle?)
3. Can you tell me the story of how you came to live here? (Prompt: Is life here what you expected? Where do you see yourself in the future?)
4. Can you tell me about any community involvement you engage in? (Prompt: Can you describe any specific interactions you have had with your community?)
5. You've touched upon community involvement. Interacting with others has great rewards, but also opens up the possibility of conflict. How do you deal with conflict in a work environment? In a family setting? In a community setting? (Prompt: Can you give me an example? Can you tell me about an example when the process didn't work?)
6. What are your greatest concerns about the world we live in today? (Prompt: Can you tell me about any environmental concerns you might have? How do these concerns affect the way you live your life?)
7. What can we do to address these concerns and make a better world? (Prompt: What would a better world look like? How do you try to create a better world?)
8. You have spoken about the things that concern you in this world, and also about the possibility of addressing the concerns. I want to ask you now about the role of education in meeting these concerns. What should we be teaching the next generation? (Prompt: How can we best educate our children?)
9. What sort of world do you expect the next generation to face? (Prompt: Is there any way that the future could be different? Would living in a self-reliant, environmentally conscious community, where one grows one's own food, builds structures out of natural building materials such as straw-bale - keeping in mind strategies to maximize energy efficiency - help to make a different future? Do you believe that such a community lifestyle will be able to meet the challenges of the world we will live in fifty years from now?)
10. You've talked about your beliefs about the future; I'd now like to ask you about the past. Can you tell me your beliefs regarding the history of the human species and the Earth? (Prompt: Where did we come from? Where are we going?)
11. What do you think about choice? (Prompt: Did you choose this lifestyle?)

12. Can you tell me about your spirituality? (Prompt: Specific spiritual practices you engage in? Can you tell me about a time when you might have doubted your beliefs?)
13. Sacred is a word given to things that are entitled to reverence and respect. Something that is sacred is highly valued and important (Mirriam-Webster On-line dictionary <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary>). What is sacred to you? (Prompt: Have you had any strong feelings of connection with something that is sacred to you? If so, can you tell me about the experience or experiences?)
14. Spirituality can often provide us with a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives. Meaning and purpose might also come from other areas as life as well. Can you tell me where you find meaning and purpose in your life? (Prompt: What meaning or purpose does your life have?)

This next exercise might make you feel a bit uncomfortable. I'm going to ask you a question, and then ask you to further explain your answer. The uncomfortable aspect comes from me continuing to push you to explain yourself. Please keep in mind that my intent here is to uncover useful information, and not to make you uncomfortable. It would be most useful for my research if you could answer as best you can.

15. We've talked about your greatest concerns about the world; can you tell me why these concerns are important to you? (Prompt: Why is THAT important to you? Again, why is that important for you?)
16. We've also talked about things that are sacred to you. Can you tell me why these things are sacred to you? (Prompt: Why does that have value? Why does that have value? Etc.)

***Appendix C - Demographic Information***

***Remember that all information gathered will be referred to by the subject number only.***

**Subject Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_

Years married or co-habiting with partner \_\_\_\_\_

Years living at present address \_\_\_\_\_

Years living in present community \_\_\_\_\_

How long do you expect to live in your present community \_\_\_\_\_

Your occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/partner occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate family income (yearly) \_\_\_\_\_

Previous occupations \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
If you are planning to change your type of work, what kind of occupation are you planning to change to?

\_\_\_\_\_  
How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

How many children living at home? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any other close relatives who live with you? If so, how many and what is their relationship to you:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Do you have any close relatives in this community or a nearby one? If yes, how many?

\_\_\_\_\_  
Do you or anyone living with you require physical assistance to manage daily tasks? Yes / No

Do you or anyone living with you require cognitive assistance to manage daily tasks? Yes / No

If you identify yourself as belonging to a specific ethnic group, please write the group name here:

---

(e.g. Indo-Canadian, Chinese-Canadian, First Nations, etc.)

If you have formal post-secondary educational experience, please list it here (e.g. degree and area of specialization)

What type of recreational activities do you prefer (list your three favourite activities)

- i)
- ii)
- iii)

of between one week to one month. Brett will offer to help with the community workload while in the community, but this is not to be taken as compensation for participating in the research project. While you will NOT be receiving compensation for allowing the research project to occur in your community, Brett will pay for the cost of living to support himself within the community (i.e. Brett will pay room and board as negotiated between the community and Brett). Note that if research is to proceed, all community members, regardless of whether they are interviewed or not, must consent to Brett's presence in the community.

The second component of the study involves interviews with ecovillage members. These interviews will consist of questions such as "What are your greatest concerns about the world we live in today?" and "What can we do to address these concerns and make a better world?" Each interview will last approximately one to two hours. Each interview will be recorded with a tape recorder.

### **Keeping your identity confidential**

The information provided in each interview will be kept secure to keep your identity confidential. Pseudonyms will also be used in the thesis and any other public documents created in the course of this research to further protect your identity. Once the interviews are complete, the interview tapes will be stored in a safe and secure place, accessible only to the three researchers Brett Dolter, Dr. R. Van Wynsberghe and Dr. W.E. Rees. Brett will be responsible for transcribing the tapes (i.e. listening to the tapes and typing out the proceedings of the interviews). These transcripts will be stored on a computer accessible only through a protected password. Brett Dolter, Dr. R. Van Wynsberghe and Dr. W.E. Rees are the only individuals who will be able to access these transcripts. With the transcripts Brett will create a narrative of each individual's responses; i.e. he will combine the responses you relay to him into a cohesive story format. Once the interviews are transcribed and a narrative complete for each individual, you will be provided with the transcript and narrative from your interview(s). At this time if you wish to provide feedback you are free to do so. As well, if you wish to remove your consent you are free to do so.

### **Potential risks of participating**

Possible risks incurred by participating in this project include stress caused by revealing personal information, a greater interest by outsiders in the activities of your community; which could lead to a loss of privacy, and a possibility that conflict may arise in the community if community members are unhappy with things you or another participant has said. Ensuring the confidentiality of your identity, and maintaining your consent throughout the research process will minimize the risk you face by participating in the interview process. This process will ensure that information that you would prefer not to be shared remains confidential.



I consent to allow Brett Dolter to live within my community for a period of between two weeks to one month in order to conduct research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I consent to allow Brett Dolter to interview me as a part of this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date