ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: "I AM NOT JUST AN ECOMOM": HOW ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS MOTHERS MAKE MEANING OF THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

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Although publics have been recognized in the field of public relations as active players in the communication process, there is still a need for better understanding different publics and listening to the voices of individual members of publics, especially those who have been marginalized. The purpose of this study was to explore how members of a particular public, namely "environmentally conscious mothers," make meaning of their environmental engagement and communication and how their diverse identity markers impact this process. In doing so, the study also investigated how they obtain information about environmental issues of interest to them, what their best channels for obtaining such information are, and what determines the credibility of such sources of information.

Studies dealing with culture and meaning making, identity, publics, women's and mothers' environmental awareness, engagement, and communication, channels of communication, and source credibility formed the foundations of the literature review for this study. Based on this literature review, four research questions were posed, namely: What are the avowed identity markers of "environmentally conscious mothers" and how do they self-define their own environmental roles? How do "environmentally conscious

mothers" make meaning of their engagement in environmental issues and activity? What channels of communication do "environmentally conscious mothers" rely on to increase their environmental awareness and discuss environmental concerns? How do "environmentally conscious mothers"' various identities impact how they make meaning of communication around environmental issues? To allow the individual voices of the participants to be heard and expressed throughout this study, a qualitative research methodology was adopted. Through conducting 36 in-depth, semi-structured personal interviews with self-defined "environmentally conscious mothers," they were given an opportunity to speak for themselves and share their knowledge and experiences. Guided by feminist standpoint and ecofeminist epistemologies, a grounded theory approach was adopted to analyze the collected data.

“I AM NOT JUST AN ECOMOM”: HOW ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS MOTHERS MAKE MEANING OF THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

Only as high as I reach can I grow, Only as far as I seek can I go,

Only as deep as I look can I see, Only as much as I dream can I be.

~Karen Ravn

This thesis was a long journey for me, which at times I did not believe that I could ever complete. I dedicate this work to all those who believed in me and helped me to walk down the road.

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Chapter One – Introductory Themes

In recent years, more mothers have been growing concerned about the health of their children and environmental problems in light of a developing awareness of environmentally related health concerns. There has also been an increasing amount of skepticism regarding the role of government and business in attempting to address the degradation of the environment and related health conditions (Ziral & Rosenberg, 2011). More mothers have started becoming environmentally concerned (Smetanka, 2008). After becoming aware of the toxins in the world in which they are raising their children, the mothering instinct to nurture and provide for their children has often become triggered (Hutner, 2011).

In public relations, there has been increasing attention paid to looking at diversity within a public; however, although the importance of publics has been recognized in the theory and practice of public relations, scholars have still not devoted enough resources to understanding the nature of publics apart from their relationship with organizations (Stansberry, 2011; Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). This thesis qualitatively investigated how a public forms and makes meaning of its activity and communication and how diversity in identity markers of members of a public impacts this process. Another objective of this research was to investigate how members of a certain public obtain information about an issue of concern and what makes a certain information source or channel more credible for a given public. Guided by feminist standpoint and ecofeminist epistemologies, this study employed qualitative methodology to explore the meaning making of

"environmentally conscious mothers"[1] of their own environmental activity and experiences. In this study, meaning making refers to how individuals use stories to create and maintain a unique sense of being and purpose based on their personal memories, histories, experiences and identities throughout their lifetimes (McAdams, 2006). Through the act of telling our stories to others, we make meaning (McLean, 2005). "Environmentally conscious mothers" are an exemplar public through which we can gain a better understanding of publics as we move into a time period of greater multiculturalism, globalization, and digitalization, on the one hand, and more individualization and fragmentation of publics, on the other hand.

According to some scholars, public relations research has not paid enough attention to the voices of different publics (e.g., Curtain & Gaither, 2006; Edwards, 2006; Holtzhausen, 2000; Karlberg, 1996). The term "public" has been defined in different ways throughout public relations literature, as will be further discussed in the literature review. In this study, I defined a public as a group of people who are active participants in the communication process and activity around an issue of common concern; share an awareness of this common issue; have a high level of involvement and engagement in dealing with this issue; and have their own principles, motives, obstacles, and concerns while dealing with it, which may be similar in many respects, but may also be different in other respects. Vasquez and Taylor (2001) argued that public relations scholars needed to re-orient their standpoint on publics stating that, "The public is often understood as a means to an organization's end goal. Publics are, however, an integral part of public

[1]The term "environmentally conscious mothers" is a "self-ascribed" term that was coined by some mothers who participated in this study. Therefore, it will always be placed in quotation marks throughout the study.

relations practice, and as a communicatively constructed social phenomenon, they deserve serious attention" (pp. 139-140).

Tindall and Vardeman-Winter (2011) recently called for scholars of public relations to consider the diversity of the members of a public in studying and identifying publics. Diversity has not been enough of a focus in public relations research and theory (Pompper, 2004, 2005b; Sha & Ford, 2007). Not much research in public relations has been done with attention to or understanding of difference based on race or religion according to Pompper (2005a). Too often researchers in public relations operationalize minorities as one homogenous, multicultural group (Pompper, 2004). Moreover, when research has been done on a particular minority group, I generally think that there has not been enough attention paid to individuals within the group. Scholars are beginning to find that despite sharing similarities, publics may be made up of multiple smaller groups with behavior that may vary or remain constant across demographic and sociographic boundaries (Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2011, p. 5). It may no longer be possible to segment publics according to discrete categories such as race, ethnicity, or gender given that the society in which we live is composed of individuals whose identity markers are diverse and continuously in flux (Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2011). In addition, although individuals may share a demographic or sociographic variable in name, the manner in which they make meaning of an aspect of their identity may be different, which in turn may cause the way in which they make meaning of communication or their behavior to differ.

This is a qualitative study that explored "environmentally conscious mothers'" meaning making experiences of their environmental engagement and communication. In

this study, I chose to focus on "environmentally conscious mothers" as an example of a public. This is a public in which individuals share the common experience of being environmentally concerned and mothers, but in which I believe that there may be great diversity in other identity markers such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, age, geographical location and background, and educational background, which function in tandem to create difference in the daily lives of the members of this public. "Environmentally conscious mothers" represent a group for which communication must be more personalized because its individuals may have different backgrounds, resources, and everyday lived experiences that affect their opportunities and constraints.

I first became aware of mothers who were organizing around concern for the environment when I read an article in February 2008 that appeared in *The New York Times* on how "environmentally conscious mothers" are coming together to work on local (both within their homes and communities), national, and global levels towards changing their behaviors regarding the environment and to learn from one another. According to Brown (2008), mothers around the country were taking small steps to create change for a more sustainable future and were increasingly becoming involved in environmental activity. Brown (2008) focused her article on EcoMom Alliance, which was first formed in 2006 as a way to unite mothers with a concern for the environment (EcoMom, 2008), but I do not think that that group is unique in its mission. I argue that there are many other mothers around the country living environmentally conscious lives who are not affiliated with this organization. It is important that researchers and practitioners in the field of communication start to learn more about "environmentally conscious mothers" as

a public and the sources of communication on which they rely so that they can better identify and communicate with this segment of the population.

In a previous study, I researched why mothers experience greater levels of environmental concern (Schloss, 2008) and take part in more environmental activity than baseline publics (Brown, 2008). Through twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews, I learned that "environmentally conscious mothers" serve as educators in their communities regarding environmental issues and are starting to form support networks to carry on discourse about environmental issues with like-minded mothers. Most of the "environmentally conscious mothers" used the Internet to further their knowledge on environmental issues and participate in online virtual communities in which they can learn from one another. "Environmentally conscious mothers" living in different regions of the country face different constraints in their attempts to engage in environmentally friendly activity. In addition to regional constraints, there were two main constraints that participants said prevented them from environmental engagement: (1) lack of time and (2) lack of financial resources. By finding out that publics face regional as well as uniform constraints, I provided evidence to extend the situational theory of public relations to show that there is diversity among the members of a public (Schloss, 2008). While findings of my previous study on "environmentally conscious mothers" were detailed and rich, the data did not take into account identity markers such as age, ethnicity, race, educational level or background, geographical background, socioeconomic status, religion, or spirituality, which all play an integral role in one's "access to the social and material necessities of life" (McGibbon & McPherson, 2011, p. 61).

Based on their social location, mothers will experience different sources of privilege and oppression which may shape their recognition and understanding of environmental issues as well as the constraints that they experience regarding acting and communicating about environmental issues. Inequality has been found regarding the amount of toxic exposure experienced by individuals in relation to race, ethnicity, and class. Inequities in the surrounding environment in which one lives including occupational hazards, substandard housing, unfair distribution of hazardous waste sites, and air pollution occur more often in communities that are disenfranchised (Williams, Vallei, Brown & Greenberg, 2000). Within the United States, the majority of toxic waste sites are situated within minority, lower-income neighborhoods with the result that people living in these areas are more affected by social, economic, and health problems (Hutner, 2011). For example, three out of five Latinos and African-Americans live near sites of toxic waste, and three of the five biggest hazardous waste landfills are situated in communities where eighty percent of the population is people of color (Pardo, 2001). Often, individuals living within communities with substandard environmental conditions may not know that they can speak up for their rights or participate in action to promote changes in environmental policy, or worse may simply not be heard (Williams et al., 2000).

Research Objectives

This research had three objectives. The first objective was to provide "environmentally conscious mothers" with an outlet where they could express their views, hopes, and concerns about environmental issues and define their own environmental engagement and communication experiences in a place where they would

not be judged as they so often are by other individuals in society who do not understand and cannot relate to their experiences. I explored "environmentally conscious mothers"' ways of identifying themselves and making meaning of their environmental activity and communication as a group. I hope that this research will help to inform public relations practitioners and scholars regarding how to better connect with "environmentally conscious mothers" based on hearing the mothers' experiences in their own words.

Second, I looked at the potential influence of various aspects of identity on the communication and behavior of members of a public by examining factors such as gender, maternal role, age, race, ethnicity, religion, spirituality, geographical location, educational level and background, socioeconomic status, and any others that participants found to be relevant. I looked at how "environmentally conscious mothers" make meaning of and navigate their various, interlocking identities in their efforts to live an environmentally conscious lifestyle, what practices they employ and what obstacles they encounter while living in a society in which they were in the minority and desire to create social change, and how these methods and challenges reveal or do not reveal their ascribed, avowed, and intersectional identities.

Third, I investigated the ways in which "environmentally conscious mothers" initially became aware of environmental issues and the channels of communication on which "environmentally conscious mothers" rely to improve their knowledge of environmental issues or discuss environmental concerns. According to Aldoory and Sha (2007), "An active public often seeks information through a variety of media, interpersonal contacts, and specialized channels (p. 341). As Americans hear, see, and read stories daily about severe weather, new bacteria, worsening pollution, and threats to

our food supply (Hartmann, 1999), they may be increasingly worried about the environment (Griffin & Dunwoody, 2000; Schwartz, Parker, Glass, & Hu, 2006). Because concerns about environmental issues are increasing, government officials and journalists will want to know how citizens choose to receive information about the environment (Lacy, Riffe, & Varouhakis, 2007). In public relations, scholars and practitioners must learn more about the identities of publics in order to successfully reach them (Khakimova, Briones, Madden & Campbell, 2011, p. 1). Although some scholars in the field of public relations have explored how publics' identities impact their information-seeking behaviors (Aldoory, 2001; Sha, 2006; Tindall & Vardeman-Winter, 2011; Vardeman & Aldoory, 2008a; Vardeman-Winter, 2010; Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2010), studies have not often looked at the impact of publics' identities on information seeking behavior regarding environmental issues. In this study, I hoped to provide more information to other scholars and practitioners in the field of public relations about the channels of communication on which "environmentally conscious mothers" rely to receive information and which channels are found to be the most credible.

Summary of Research Methodology

In this qualitative study, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews with 36 "environmentally conscious mothers." Of the 36 interviews, 29 were face-to-face interviews and 7 were telephone interviews. I used qualitative methods to gather rich and complex descriptive data, which could not be gained using other approaches to research. Using feminist standpoint and ecofeminist theories as epistemologies to guide this research, I sought to learn about what the avowed identity

markers of “environmentally conscious mothers” are and how these mothers self-define their own environmental roles; what channels of communication “environmentally conscious mothers” rely upon to improve their knowledge of and discuss concerns about environmental issues; how the “environmentally conscious mothers”’ various identities impact how they make meaning of communication around environmental issues; and how “environmentally conscious mothers” make meaning of their engagement in environmental issues and activity. As this study utilized a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I did not attempt to test a hypothesis or obtain generalizable results. To analyze the data, I used Glaser & Strauss’s (1967) constant comparison technique.

Operational Definitions

In this section, I define terms related to my research to establish a common understanding of the language that I have used with the reader.

“Environmentally conscious mothers.” This term has been used in this study to describe mothers who live an environmentally focused lifestyle. This is a self-ascribed term that the mothers themselves came up with to describe their environmental engagement and communication. “Environmentally conscious mothers” engage in the concurrent nurturing of children and caring for the environment, which are inextricably linked (Shaw, 2011). In addition, I asked the participants to provide their own concept of their role as “environmentally conscious mothers,” which will be included in the findings sections.

Environmental awareness. In this study, I have used the term environmental awareness to signify being knowledgeable about human behavior’s impact on the

environment (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). An emotional connection to the natural environment appears to be integral in developing awareness of and concern about the environment (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). According to Kollmuss & Agyeman (2002), several cognitive and emotional limitations constrain one's ability to be environmentally aware. Cognitive limitations to awareness about the environment include gradual ecological destruction, non-immediacy of ecological problems, and the complexity of environmental problems (Kollman & Agyeman, 2002).

Environmental activity. In this study, I have referred to environmental activity as a term to include a variety of forms of behavior that function to decrease human impact on the earth. Examples of environmental activity include such things as reducing waste and consumption, treading lightly on the earth, recycling, not using pesticides or cleaners with toxic chemicals, living without air conditioning, making decisions about purchases based on demand for resources and energy, mobilizing others within one's social network to address environmental problems within the community, and on a more personal level listening to, sharing with, and getting to know those with whom mothers engage in their immediate lives (Hutner, 2011; Martin, Hanson & Fontaine, 2007). Based on their small-scale and limited scope geographically, these environmental behaviors would normally be regarded as too insignificant to be considered as activism, but have the ability to change the lives of women, their families, and their communities for the better when integrated into a person's lifestyle (Martin, Hanson & Fontaine, 2007, p. 79). Anaruk (2009) described the range of forms for environmental activity as "fighting in the frontlines of factory emissions and toxic waste regulations and land preservation …writing blogs to create awareness…, volunteering for their favorite causes, and even

creating their own non-profits" (p. 2). The daily activity and personal connections of "environmentally conscious mothers" can occur in any location allowing these mothers to take small steps to create change.

Diversity. Diversity, as used in this study, is a socially constructed phenomenon used to describe all of the different forms of social identity. In other words, differences in identity markers within a population make up diversity. Scholars have often categorized facets of diversity, or identity markers, into two groups: Visible facets of diversity such as age, race, ethnicity, and gender and facets not seen by the naked eye such as socioeconomic status, marital status, parental status, concerns, interests, personal values, life goals, activities, geographical location, principles, religion, spirituality, and educational background (Bingham, 2011; Wynne, 2012). All forms of diversity involve contradictions and inconsistencies (Grieshaber, 2008). In this study, I have looked at the influence of different identity markers such as race, ethnicity, minority status, socioeconomic class, education, geography, gender, marital status, motherhood, age, religion, and spirituality.

In the literature, terms with which to refer to different aspects of identity have not been consistent due to the socially constructed nature of these categories. For this reason, I further define the terminology that is used to describe the identities of the participants in this study when I am speaking in my own voice. One definition of race, which I have used in this study, is "the classification of people based on geographic origin and shared physical characteristics like skin color, hair texture and facial features" (Parker & Chambers, 2005, p. 57). I have used a definition provided by Phinney and Alipuria (1996, p. 142) for ethnicity conceptualizing of ethnic identity as a part of an individual's

concept of oneself that arises from having a strong awareness of and connection to one's belonging to a social group and consisting of three components: principles, viewpoints, and mannerisms of a culture, a sense of one's inclusion in the culture, and experiences with in-group/out-group status. In this study, I have used a definition of gender as a socially constructed process differentiating between women and men (Hajek, Abrams, and Murachver, 2005; Pullen & Simpson, 2009; Wood, 2009). Gender identities are "created by perceiving oneself as a member of a particular gender, by actively seeking out information about a gender category, and by understanding one's gender in contrast to the 'other'" (Hajek et al., 2005, p. 59). In this research, spirituality refers to a feeling of being connected to nature, to other people, and to a greater power, an otherworldliness, and a spirit at one with the community (Thomas & Schwarzbaum, 2006) whereas religion has been defined as an organized practice constituted by six components including a canon of beliefs, ceremonial custom, wisdom, emotion, ethics, and community (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). Finally, some of the participants saw themselves as being a minority compared to the rest of the population in the United States in their environmental principles and practices or as one mother put it part of a "counterculture." Minority as included in this study refers to a group that is smaller in size and historically lacking in power politically compared to the prevailing, greater in size, and domineering majority (Murphy & Dillon, 2008, p. 31).

In my research, I am sensitive about not labeling individuals with identity markers who would not use these markers to describe themselves. For this reason, I asked participants to define their own identities, which I used as I referred to participants and analyzed the findings. When citing previous research, I tried to use the term chosen in

the studies. Thus, there is variation in the terms used throughout this thesis. When I am using my own voice in this study, I have used those terms which the majority of participants in a certain racial, ethnic, or religious group within the study used.[2] I found that participants were equally split in their choice to use "black" or "African-American" to define themselves. Not being able to find a consistent usage of black or African-American in the literature nor being able to find information on which term is preferable or more appropriate than the other, I used the word black when I am speaking in my own voice because that is the word that I tend to use. Growing up spending time with a Jewish, African-American woman who is white, African-American never seemed like an appropriate term to use for me personally to designate race unless that is what was preferred by the individual because a) the term does not accurately describe the ethnicity of all black people and b) not all people from Africa are black.

Study's Significance

The importance of this study is that it attempts to give voice to a marginalized or voiceless group by providing members of the group with the space to reflect on their own experiences, engagement, and communication as "environmentally conscious mothers." By doing so, the study hopes to add to the existing body of knowledge about this particular segment of the community. This study was done from the public's point of view rather than the organizational view. The research relies on individual experiences. I hope to inform public relations by giving voice around these important issues. The implications of having publics' voices go unheard are too great for our society if we hope

[2] I understand that in using the term that the majority of participants used to refer to themselves in the sections where I am writing using my own voice that I may be silencing those participants who are the minority within a given category, but needed to find some way to identify individuals and did not want to impose my own labels on the participants in the study when it was clear what the participants preferred.

to continue to meet the needs and enrich the lives of all citizens. The findings build upon the scholarship of public relations by better understanding publics according to race, ethnicity, age, religion, spirituality, geography, and other cultural delineations and drawing attention to the importance of listening to and communicating with the individual. My hope is that through my research, organizations will be able to learn about environmental issues from the perspective of those whom they are trying to reach and therefore create more relevant messages. The findings of my research increase the body of knowledge on the experiences of "environmentally conscious mothers," which at this point is still very limited. I also hope that my research will encourage other "environmentally conscious mothers" to feel more empowered to take action through daily activity that will make a difference for themselves, their families, and their communities in creating a safer environment in which to live knowing that although they may feel alone in their efforts at times, there are mothers with similar concerns, beliefs, and values out there.

Thesis Outline

In this introductory themes chapter, I have set the foundations for the rest of the thesis by providing the background for the research, research objectives, a summary of the research methodology, operational definitions, and the significance of the study. Chapter two of this thesis presents a review of literature of the major areas of theory informing this research including (a) culture and meaning making, (b) identity, (c) publics, (d) women's and mothers' environmental awareness, engagement, and communication, (e) channels of communication, and (f) source credibility. Chapter two concludes with a discussion of my research questions. I refer to chapter two throughout

my thesis as it is the theoretical foundation for my work. Chapter three is the research methodology chapter. In chapter three, there is an explanation of and rationale for qualitative methodology, feminist standpoint theory and ecofeminist theory epistemologies guiding the work, the sample and recruitment strategies, research limitations, the procedures for data analysis, and evaluation. The findings are presented in chapters four and five. Chapter four is a thematic chapter that details the mothers' environmental engagement. Chapter five is a thematic chapter that describes the participants' meaning making of environmental information, awareness, and communication around environmental issues. Chapter six is the discussions and conclusions. The appendices include profiles of the interview participants (Appendix A), the interview protocol (Appendix B), and the consent form (Appendix C).

Chapter Two – Literature Review

Literature from several theoretical streams informed my study and helped me to develop my research questions. Prior relevant research falls into categories including culture and meaning making, identity, publics, women's and mothers' environmental awareness, engagement, and communication, channels of communication, and source credibility. The purpose of this section is to establish a framework from which to interpret and describe the participants' meaning making of their avowed identity markers and self-definition of their environmental roles, engagement in environmental issues and activity, the ways in which they perceive that their identities influence their environmental activity and communication, the channels of communication on which they rely to improve their knowledge about environmental issues or discuss environmental concerns, and their meaning making about source credibility.

Culture and Meaning Making

Because this study looked at the everyday experiences that "environmentally conscious mothers" have and how the mothers' intersecting identities shape their realities and information-seeking behavior, a cultural studies approach was used in this research (Curtain & Gaither, 2005; Vardeman-Winter, 2010). Culture has been conceptualized in many ways including "gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, geography, class, religion, sexuality, age, generation, use of a common language, holding common moral systems, technology use, and occupation" (Tindall & Vardeman-Winter, 2011, p. 283). Culture can broadly be understood as a set of shared interpretations and understandings including ideas about what is real and important and guides to follow for taking action (Pearson, 2005). People who share the same mental representations and language can be said to

have the same culture (Dillon, Kelsey, & Duque-Aristizabal, 1999). According to Frow and Morris (2003), culture is the continuous process by which social groups make meaning of the relationship between their existence and the outside world. Cultural practices associated with religion, race, and national origin make up one's ethnicity (Buzzanell, Waymer, Tagle, & Liu, 2007). Meanings are socially constructed by humans around and inside a place, object, or event (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997). Groups of people who make meaning in similar ways can be considered to be a culture (du Gay et al., 1997).

It is important to remember that women from the same background will not necessarily have the same cultural values. For example, despite a common heritage and language, Hispanic people from areas such as Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Central America vary regarding their social, economic, and demographic characteristics (Abeyta & Hackett, 2002; Suarez et al., 2000). Many Hispanic people do share a value placed on strong family ties and look to their extended family and social networks for help in making decisions (Suarez et al., 2000). While each person is unique, there are identifiable psychological and social characteristics that distinguish Hispanic individuals from other ethnic or cultural groups (Suarez et al., 2000). Oetzel, DeVargas, Ginossar, and Sanchez (2007) found that the subjective cultural values of the Hispanic women whom they studied differed and were linked to their communication preferences. Likewise, there is no common uniform experience lived by all black women (Collins, 2000). By categorizing people solely based on their racial background, the degree to which it is possible to recognize the diverse cultural background of each individual is limited (Abeyta & Hackett, 2002).

In a previous study, I found that there appears to be a cultural dictate that influences “environmentally conscious mothers” to see the environment as more of a situation or problem than baseline publics (Schloss, 2008). The findings of the study indicated that problem recognition and level of involvement may be increased for a particular public due to cultural dictates (Schloss, 2008). In this study, I hoped to learn more about whether or not this cultural dictate is consistent for mothers of diverse identities and backgrounds.

Identity

The concept of identity as it is used in this study is one that is continuously changing and developing. It is through an exploration of identities that we can more fully understand the ways in which publics make meaning of their communication and behavior (Curtain & Gaither, 2005, p. 101). In a study of the identities and roles of women in Kafr Masoud, Khamis (2009) asserted that, "We should be looking at women as members of ethnic groups that are constantly redefining themselves, and which perceive multiple realities at once" (p. 452).

Scholars have described the ongoing identity formation process as narrative that is continuously unfolded and revealed and only can be understood fully through conversational practices (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). It is through discourse that individuals create an identity. One reason that I have chosen to make meaning of identity using a narrative perspective is that it permits the intersections of various aspects of the self (Canary, 2008). Identities may be avowed or ascribed, either declared by the individual or assigned to the individual based on how others perceive the person (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2000; Sha, 2006). Each individual or group has several identities that each

work in tandem to form whom we are and where we are positioned in space and time (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2002). According to Pullen and Simpson (2009), "Identity is about sameness – it is the identification of how we see ourselves and others in relation to being the same. Perhaps more importantly it is also about difference – whom we are not the same as. The sense of self, then, is about both who we are and who we are not" (p. 561).

While each participant in the study has her own identity, she also is part of a public of "environmentally conscious mothers," which has its own identity making it unique from other publics (Balmer, 2002). In other words, a self-concept is composed of both an individual self (one's personal characteristics) and a collective self (self-representation stemming from membership in a group) (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gaertner, Sedikides, & Graetz, 1999). In looking at identity from a narrative viewpoint, I have also paid attention to the terminology used by the participants understanding the power of words to create identification (Burke, 1969).

Publics

Although the idea of publics is a key concept in public relations practice and research (Hallahan, 2000), scholars define the concept of publics in different ways (Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2011). There are still relatively few theories regarding segmenting publics. Four approaches to making sense of publics that are important to consider include the mass perspective, agenda building perspective, homo narrans perspective, and situational theory perspective (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). The mass and situational theory perspectives on public relations have been used the most in the study of publics (Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2011). According to the mass perspective

approach to publics originating as a component of democratic philosophy, publics are considered to be permanent, collective entities that are capable of participating in self-governance (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). According to the agenda-building perspective of publics, publics arise regarding political issues. Agenda-building publics exist to generate support for and bring attention to political issues to create a place for them on the agenda of decision makers in the political arena (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). Another conceptualization of the term "public," the homo narrans perspective focuses on the communicative nature of a public. In the homo narrans view, a public is composed of a group of individuals who participate in a communicative process surrounding an event of concern and thereby create and maintain a group consciousness to act to solve that problem (McCown, 2007; Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). The homo narrans perspective suggests that publics, organizations, and practitioners make up rhetorical communities who share interpretations of realities that are constructed socially and symbolically about the practice of public relations (Terry, 2001). Based on an analysis of HIV/AIDS in Thailand, Chay-Nemeth (2001) conceptualized of four different types of publics according to their likelihood to engage in public discourse. Chay-Nemeth (2001) found circumventing (led by desires even if against social norms), critical (not satisfied with conventions), co-opted (discuss issues easily with structures of authority), and circumscribed (dependent and not likely to engage in public discourse) publics.

The fourth perspective on publics, the situational view of publics, was developed by J. E. Grunig (1997) based on Dewey's (1927) definition of publics, which states that a public is a "group of people who face a similar problem, recognize that the problem exists, and organize to do something about the problem" (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Smith &

Ferguson, 2001; Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). According to the situational theory of publics, publics are social formations that develop through spontaneous argument, dialogue, and opposition in response to a problematic issue or situation (J. E. Grunig, 1997; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Publics are situational in that different issues will bring about publics with different members. When individuals recognize a problem that involves them or for which they feel that they can make a change, they devote their time and energy and become a part of the public (J. E. Grunig, 1997). As issues change, publics take shape, reform, and shift (Dewey, 1927; J. E. Grunig, 1997; Leitch & Neilson, 2001). The situational theory of publics expands upon the conceptualization of situational publics in studying segmentation of publics according to those who are similar across three independent social-psychological variables: detection of a problem (problem recognition), constraints found in addressing the problem (constraint recognition), and perception of involvement with the problem (level of involvement) (J. E. Grunig, 1997, p. 110). These variables influence a public's communication behaviors of information processing and information seeking (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). A higher level of problem recognition and level of involvement and a lower level of constraint recognition led to more likelihood that a public would engage in active information seeking behavior. Information processing involves passive communication behavior while information seeking involves active communication behavior in which individuals purposely search for information (O'Keefe, Ward, & Shepard, 2002).

J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) found that publics could be categorized as *non-publics*, *latent*, *aware*, or *active* publics. Other than *non-publics*, these types of publics have a high level of involvement with the issue at hand. *Latent* publics are often

classified by their high level of constraint recognition and low level of problem recognition. Publics will remain *latent* until they are aware of the problem. *Aware* and *active* publics both have a higher level of problem recognition than do *latent* publics. *Aware* publics do not take action because of high constraint recognition. When *aware* publics have low constraint recognition and see no barriers towards working to solve the problem, they can become *active* publics (J. E. Grunig, 1997). *Active* publics have a higher propensity to actively seek out information, are more likely to maintain their current viewpoint, and often seek out information that reinforces views already held (Holtzhausen, 2007, p. 362).

Although the situational theory of publics remains important in the scholarship of public relations, it has also been developed further and contested. Several scholars have expanded on the situational theory of publics by identifying additional variables. Aldoory and Van Dyke (2006) found that a sense of "shared" involvement had an effect on how participants viewed risk. According to Aldoory and Van Dyke (2006), people "seemed comforted by the knowledge that they were involved in a problem situation with others who were like them, or with local officials and community members who were 'in the same boat'" (p. 356). Vardeman and Aldoory (2008a) built on the work of Aldoory and Van Dyke (2006) in emphasizing the need for shared involvement by spokespeople in an experience faced by the audience so that the news presented will be considered to be relevant by women by finding that women desired to see someone like themselves as a spokesperson for news on health risk events. Sha and Pine (2004) determined that interpersonal sources of information had more of an influence on respondents' level of involvement with an issue than did mass mediated information sources.

Some scholars have criticized the situational theory of publics for not being flexible in addressing the publics' shifting nature (Stansberry, 2011; Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2011). Vasquez and Taylor (2001) stated that, "When a public is conceptualized as a state of consciousness or as a sum of aggregate variables, the nature, role, and influence of communication are overlooked completely, or at a minimum are taken for granted" (p. 150). Some scholars have questioned the concept of publics given great advances in digitization, multiculturalism, and globalization (Bhatia, 2011; Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010; Stansberry, 2011; Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2011; Wakefield, 2008). According to Kruckeberg and Vujnovic (2010), the only public in existence given advances in communication and transportation technology is the mass public when publics can form at the drop of a dime and dissipate just as quickly.

Also critiquing and building upon the situational theory of publics, identity scholars have challenged the basic assumption that publics can be identified by using additive techniques to aggregate identities (Aldoory, 2001; Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Khakimova et al., 2011; Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2010). Using a cultural studies approach to finding out about how teenage girls make decisions about their health behavior, Vardeman-Winter (2010) concluded that the multiple identities of the girls including their race, gender, parental status, and class compounded on one another to shape their mediated health experiences. Vardeman-Winter and Tindall (2010; 2011) found in a study on health message construction for women of color that the way in which women perceive and act on messages is impacted by their multiplicative identities. In addition to variables of the STP, socioeconomic and cultural markers also had an impact on the women's perceptions of the messages (Tindall & Vardeman-Winter, 2011;

Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2010). These studies build upon Sha's (2006) findings that in situations where cultural identity (in terms of race or ethnicity) is significant, differences in identification with a cultural group will indicate differences in the variables of the STP. Through a mail survey of 632 undergraduate students, Sha (2006) found that when publics have an avowed racioethnic identity, they are more likely to be aware of racioethnic problems, feel a sense of personal involvement with those problems, and engage in communication behaviors regarding those problems.

Women as public. There have been a small number of studies in the field of public relations on women as a public pertaining to women's issues. In a study on women and their meaning-making about health communication, Aldoory (2001) found that source preference, self-identity, a consciousness of personal health, a consciousness of everyday life, and cognitive analyses of message content had an influence on women's involvement with health messages. Other research conducted on women as a public include Vardeman and Aldoory's studies on how women make meaning of shared involvement with spokespersons of bioterrorism news (2008a) and of contradictory messages in the media about fish consumption (2008b) and Briones's (2010) study on how young women make meaning of sexual assault.

Activist publics. Activist publics are often characterized by members who feel strongly about a concern and actively take steps to advocate regarding that concern (Holtzhausen, 2007). Over time, as a public becomes more active, members of the public may organize around an issue changing their behavior and communication and becoming more as J. E. Grunig (1997) put it "activist." Scholars have defined activist publics in different ways. One definition provided by the Grunigs and Dozier (2002) is that an

activist public is “a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure, tactics, or force” (p. 446). Activists are often seen by scholars as the voices for democratic dialogue and change in society (Holtzhausen, 2007). Historically, activist groups have been thought to have short lifecycles making it difficult for them to be studied (Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 296). In addition, as activist publics become more situated and institutionalized, they may act more like organizations than publics (Holtzhausen, 2007, p. 369). Activist publics may also be called special interest or issue groups or social movements (McCown, 2007, p. 52). The term “activist” may have negative connotations for some because the manner in which activists have at times advocated has seemed less than desirable by some (Holtzhausen, 2007).

Publics that are inactive, latent, or non-publics, are also important to understand in this study in that they can become more active once they are aware of an issue. Through issue activation a latent public can transform into an activist one (Hallahan, 2001). According to Hallahan (2001), an issue is “a dispute between two or more parties over the allocation of resources, which might be natural, financial, political, or symbolic” (p. 28). Dynamics of issues as proposed by Hallahan (2001) are that they arise based on a personal experience, are socially constructed, gain visibility when people come together in the public sphere to organize around an agenda, fluctuate in visibility and take on a life of their own, are a source of struggle and power, need to be personally relevant in order for members of a public to care about them, and cause uncertainty. Hallahan (2000) pointed out that inactive publics may not act not because they do not care about the issue, but rather because they are not aware of the issue, feel apathetic, or do not feel like they

can make a difference. Although Hallahan (2001) spoke of reasons that inactive publics function in relationship to organizations, his arguments for why publics may not act can also be applied to societal issues. For example, through telephone interviews, Kim and Cho (2011) applied Hallahan's (2001) Issues Processes Model in an exploration of the case of Seoul's anti-U.S. beef protest in 2008 to explain how individuals and groups became activist and how the Internet played a central role in the activation process by making people aware of and involved in the issue. Turner (2007) presented another model for understanding issue activation called the Anger Activism Model, which posits that publics can be divided into four groups according to degrees of anger and efficacy including the *activist group*, *empowered group*, *angry audience*, and *disinterested group*. In the Anger Activism Model (Turner, 2007), an *activist group* experiences a high level of efficacy and a high level of anger, which in turn leads the group to experience a desire to engage in behaviors showing a high commitment to the issue. The *empowered group* believes that it can make a difference, but does not feel as much anger about the issues. The *angry audience* does not take action because although it is enraged about the issues, it feels that nothing can be done to "fix" them. Finally, the *disinterested group* is characterized by low feelings of anger, positive feelings towards the issues, and a low degree of feelings of efficacy.

Personal activism. A recurrent theme that I found when analyzing the transcripts was mothers' conceptualization of their behavior as personal activism. For this reason, although, I did not originally conceptualize of "environmentally conscious mothers" as personal activists before heading out into the field, I think that it is important to briefly discuss the literature that serves as a foundation for my analysis of the findings. One

definition of personal activism is that "each of us individually, possess a voice that communicates our beliefs and aspirations – and when we join in community it becomes a collective voice. This aspect of the voice enables us to debate and lay plans… to advocate in the political sphere, to meaningfully participate as citizens of our towns, the nation, and the globe" (Eyring, 2010, p. 10). Personal activism involves being well informed and taking an active role in working for change regarding an issue of concern as well as becoming more humane in relationships with others. Personal activism is about the sum of the parts adding up to a whole force for change. An underlying assumption of personal activism is that individuals have control over their actions and are motivated by placing emphasis on their own efforts. Personal activism does not need to take place in a public forum, but rather can take place in private or online (Sowards & Renegar, 2006, p. 61).

The scholarship on personal activism is still limited, but a number of important findings relevant to this study have been made. In a study of male Glaswegians, Mullen (1994) found that although some participants found a way to combine their personal activism with social activism that others saw these two forms of activism as being at odds with one another. Utilizing focus groups, Yerger, Daniel, and Malone (2005) explored how urban African American participants might make meaning of internal tobacco industry documents targeting marginalized communities through advertising and relationship building with key black leadership groups and investigated whether teenage African American informants would engage in personal activism to respond to these documents from the tobacco industry. Yerger, Daniel, and Malone's (2005) findings supported Freire's (1963) argument that discourse is integral in assisting marginalized

people to become empowered and take action in their communities. Other scholars have found that personal activism is associated with a change in perspective on the world (Frenkel et al., 2011), resilience (Theron & Malindi, 2010), reduced feelings of marginalization (Levitt et al., 2009), and empowerment (Forster & Rehner, 2009). Often personal activism may be invisible or not be considered to be important compared to more vocal, public displays of activism (Honig, 1996; Sowards & Renegar, 2006), but has the potential to create social change (Sowards & Renegar, 2006). Personal activism has been studied in other fields such as education, social work, counseling psychology, sociology, theatrical studies, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender studies, library science, and health, but is not as explored in the scholarship of public relations.

Environmental Awareness, Engagement, and Communication

Pro-environmental consciousness is made up of a combination of environmental values, attitudes, knowledge, and emotional involvement (Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002). Emotional limitations to awareness about the environment include emotional non-investment in environmental issues and emotional reactions such as fear and denial (Kollman & Agyeman, 2002). People often want to believe that they are in control and can do something to fix the environmental issues that they face (Kollman & Agyeman, 2002); however, even when people are aware about environmental issues, their actions may not always reflect their concern. For example, Plax, Kearney, Ross and Jolly (2008) found that concern about the environment did not seem to influence the purchasing decisions of drivers in California.

Mothers' environmental awareness, engagement, and communication:

"Environmentally conscious mothers" are a minority group within American society,

where instant gratification and overconsumption are promoted; however, Hutner (2011) described Eco-moms, a name occasionally used for "environmentally conscious mothers" although not used by many participants within this study[3], as "a powerful force." Hutner (2011) attributed a large amount of the growing environmental awareness in American society to the efforts of women and mothers or groups that are feminist or mother-focused. In an account of her experience and that of eight other mothers residing in an intentionally environmentally focused community, Shaw (2011) explored the tie between feminism and environmentalism, the effect of growing up in such a community on children, and the power to change society outside of the community. Shaw's (2011) findings indicate that mothers whom she interviewed were divided regarding whether they thought that their environmental efforts were making a difference for those living outside of the borders of the community, have a strong sense of connection to the community, felt responsible for the destruction of the earth, and were most concerned about the future of their children given the degradation of the environment. Shaw (2011) also shared the struggle that she found in raising her child according to her principles when others in her community did not have the same values and the lack of power that she feels as a minority living in the consumerist world of Western society.

When women become mothers, they often grow to be more concerned about the environment because they want the best for their children's future and have a concern about their children's health (Belger, 2008; Schloss, 2008). For example, Hutner (2011), who described her experience surviving cancer, losing both of her parents to cancer and

[3] Some of the participants in this study said that while they considered themselves to be what they thought that the term "EcoMom" meant to them, that they had not heard the term before, did not want to label themselves with this trendy term, or associated the term with negative connotations about the perception of mothers in our society. Please see the findings for further details.

becoming a mother, shared in a personal account of her scholarship and life journey that although cancer changed her worldview that it was not until she became a mother that her environmental concerns crystallized and became more profound.

Hutner (2011) used the words “maternal ecological awakening” to refer to the environmental awareness she gained as a mother and constructed a theoretical framework she has named “ecological, feminist, and mothering awareness” to explore this concept. Components of the framework proposed by Hutner (2011) include a mother’s initial questioning of what she would pass onto her baby through her own body that has existed within a toxic society, desire to protect her child, change in behavior in an effort to not harm her child, increase in awareness of environmental damage, education through reading about environmental issues, review of personal corporeal history of interaction with the environment, need of knowing as much information as possible, research-informed decision making, personal connection to environmentalism making it more relevant, teaching of other people about environmental issues, community formation, feeling of responsibility to take environmental actions within one’s own home, meaningfulness derived from knowing that you have influenced other individuals to change their behavior who have then taught others, and work to raise awareness through social networking, writing, activism, and speaking out in public forums.

Seager (2003) found that mothers’ environmental engagement emerged from their daily concerns about the health of themselves and their families. Mothers start to see themselves as protectors not only for their children, but for the children of the world (Bell & Braun, 2010, p. 804; Hutner, 2011). In a case study in the Central Appalachian coalfields on members of the environmental justice movement, Bell and Braun (2010)

found that women make meaning of their environmental activism by connecting it with their concern for their children as mothers.

Dolliver (2008) noted that while these mothers are driven to act based on a long-term commitment that they now have to the future of the planet, they also are motivated to engage in environmental behaviors because they have a more intimate focus on their immediate households and knowledge that their children are watching their actions. Additionally, some scholars have pointed out that mothers, who are often in the position within their households to make purchasing decisions, are more likely to pay attention to advertising for "green" products for their families when they believe that there is a personal connection to the information presented (Dolliver, 2008; Ray, 2011). In addition to making many of the purchasing decisions for their households, "environmentally conscious moms" are leading their families in environmental activity within their homes conscious of using fewer resources, not buying products with excess packaging, recycling, and conserving water among other environmental activity (Blanford, 2009).

While "environmentally conscious mothers" seek to create a better world for themselves and their children, they face time constraints in their efforts to be involved in environmental organizations (Park, 2008). If mothers work full-time outside of the home, they often do whatever they need to make it through the day, even if their actions are not entirely in keeping with their ideas for good environmental behavior (Park, 2008). Mothers often do the majority of childcare and other domestic work and may simply not have the time for acting as environmentally responsibly as they would like (Tindall,

Davies, & Mauboules, 2003). Tindall et al. (2003) showed that women were less active in environmental causes, the more they did housework.

Even though women, and especially mothers, have long occupied a prominent place in communication and engagement around environmental issues (Logsdon-Conradsen, 2011; Petit, 2001), very little research has been done on how various identities influence mothers' engagement in environmental activity. In my research, I hope to fill a gap in understanding why and how there may be a cultural dictate for mothers to be environmentally concerned and engaged. I am interested in seeing if what I learned about mothers' concern for the environment (Schloss, 2008) is true among mothers of diverse backgrounds and identities.

Women's environmental awareness, engagement and communication: While there has not been much research done on women's engagement in environmental movements compared to men's, researchers have made the assumption that women are generally more involved than are men (Tindall et al., 2003). Research also showed that women in many different nations are more likely than men to engage in environmentally friendly behaviors on a daily basis such as buying organic produce or recycling regardless of the level of their concern about the environment (Hunter, Hatch, & Johnson, 2004; Tindall et al., 2003). There has not been much research done on gender variation cross-culturally in behavior regarding and/or awareness about the environment (Hunter et al., 2004). Women's concerns about the environment cover many areas including community health and safety, pollution, and social justice (Peeples & DeLuca, 2006).

Many women take action for environmental causes due to their spiritual engagement with the future of the planet (Seager, 2003). Groenendyk and Curry (2006)

found that the women whom they interviewed held the belief that the entire community should work together to achieve a balance with nature and other human beings. Through a feminist lens, Dobscha and Ozanne (2001) explored how women define themselves who are deeply concerned about nature and the role that consumption plays in their lives. They found that the extent to which women associate themselves with living in an environmentally friendly manner has an impact on the degree to which they enter the marketplace (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001).

Channels of Communication

According to Heath and Palenchar (2009), publics are becoming more dispersed geographically, integrated culturally, and informed via a variety of different information sources. To better communicate with and form relationships with a public, such as "environmentally conscious mothers," scholars and practitioners will want to know what media members of the public use (Sison, 2009, p. 10). Information can be understood as stimuli in a person's surroundings that serve to shape his or her beliefs or knowledge (Brashers, Goldsmith, & Hsieh, 2002). Both mediated and non-mediated resources make up the environment in which a person communicates. Every day, people are faced with hundreds of messages from the media, friends, family, other individuals in their communities, and themselves (Pecchioni & Sparks, 2007). Individuals have the ability to seek out information from traditional media such as leaflets, television, magazines, newspapers, newer electronic media including websites and email accessed through the Internet, and interpersonal resources such as personal conversations with family and friends (Brashers et al., 2002; Cheong, 2007). In this study, I looked at what sources "environmentally conscious mothers" rely on to learn more about environmental issues.

Lacy et al. (2007) found that a public's expectations of the performance of media influence their use of the media. Individuals are likely to pay attention to messages if they can relate to those people who are portrayed within the messages (Mastin, Andsager, Choi & Lee, 2007). Information need has been shown to predict more reliance on mass media and friends and family (O'Keefe et al., 2002). Reliance can be defined as giving disproportionate weight to information disseminated by a particular source (Pierce, Lee-Sammons, & Lovrich, Jr., 1988). People's media use may change as a result of the changing capabilities of communication media (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001). Research findings indicate that television and radio appear to be functionally equivalent sources of information in that television has replaced radio more than it has newspapers (Lacy et al., 2007).

Andsager and Powers (2001) argued that the media take responsibility for informing women and the general population with the information needed to make informed decisions. Women can return to magazines to double-check the news that they read while news on television is ephemeral (Andsager & Powers, 2001).

Internet-mediated communication: Passive publics might become active through the use of the Internet, which will allow for greater information dissemination and accessibility (Chay-Nemeth, 2001). Internet-mediated communication promotes spaces where an effort is made to create new forms of communication with the hope of sharing knowledge on a specific topic (Cardoso, 2002). The Internet provides a strategic and effective communication platform where information can be shared and opinions voiced on listservs, discussion boards, and weblogs (Nah, Veenstra, & Sha, 2006).

In a previous study, I investigated how publics use the Internet to come together around problems that they recognize, what constraints they face in communicating and organizing through a virtual medium, and how factors unique to communication over the Internet affect levels of involvement and information processing and seeking (Schloss, 2008). While I am still interested in exploring how the Internet shapes the way in which "environmentally conscious mothers" organize and communicate about environmental issues, it occurred to me that all mothers may not have the same access to the Internet and may also receive news about environmental issues through other forms of media.

Although more voices may be able to enter the public sphere through use of the Internet, current systems of power make it so that some voices appear more often and appear to be more valid than other voices (Chay-Nemeth, 2001; Harp & Tremayne, 2006). The unemployed, ethnic minorities, people with low levels of education or income, women, and the elderly may be excluded from full participation in the digital world (Wyatt, Henwood, Hart, & Smith, 2005). While the Internet may provide the promise of a public sphere, a patriarchal, intellectual hegemony is in place (Harp & Tremayne, 2006). Therefore, in this study, I explored how mothers use the full range of information sources available to them.

Sources of Environmental Information

Research has shown that people evaluate sources of environmental information differently from one another (Lacy et al., 2007). A connection has been shown between coverage of environmental issues in the news and attitudes and knowledge of individuals about the topic (Holbert, Kwak, & Shah, 2003). Greater consumption of news programs about the environment will take place among people who care more about environmental

issues (Holbert et al., 2003) because people often expose themselves primarily to those sources of information that will confirm their beliefs (Melican & Dixon, 2008). Many people obtain their environmental news from two or more sources (Lacy et al., 2007). Media users are more likely to use television as a secondary source of environmental news than they are to use any other medium when they primarily access global and national environmental news over the Internet (Lacy et al., 2007).

Overall, Griffin and Dunwoody (2000) found that interpersonal communication channels were the most effective in reaching individuals regarding their risk from lead in the tap water. They also found that mass media and pamphlets were not very effective although often respondents reported that they rely the most on television and newspapers for information about the environmental risk (Griffin & Dunwoody, 2000). In a study on message reception of bioterrorism news, Lee and Rodriguez (2008) found that the respondents, who were 69 % male, trusted interpersonal sources the most and mass media sources the least. In a study on citizen participation and gender in decision making regarding wildlife management, Anthony, Knuth, and Lauber (2004) found that scientific information was deemphasized by women in the process of making their decisions. Another finding is that those risk communication messages that have higher source diversity are often perceived to be more credible and interesting by readers (Cozma, 2006).

Ethnic and cultural differences. Researchers have shown that there are ethnic differences in awareness and exposure to advisory messages regarding an environmental issue (Silver et al., 2007). In addition, when it comes to receiving health information, a difference has been shown between the format preferred by African American and Latina

women (Documet et al., 2008). While African American participants and Latina participants in one study wanted to receive printed materials, African Americans also desired oral presentations (Documet et al., 2008). It would be interesting to see if there are also differences regarding environmental news reception among black and Hispanic mothers. Heider, McCombs, and Poindexter (2005) found that African Americans and Hispanic Americans were more likely to rely on traditional media for advice in solving community problems than were White Americans and Asian Americans. In this study, I set out to find out more about how "environmentally conscious mothers" from various identities and backgrounds receive messages about environmentalism and what sources they find to be the most credible.

Sociocultural and demographic factors. Communication patterns may also be influenced by sociocultural and demographic factors (O'Keefe et al., 2002). O'Keefe et al. (2002) examined how agricultural producers compare with rural landowners and city dwellers in their use of environmental information channels and found that the urban public was more attuned to mass media while the rural public relied more on interpersonal communication about conservation and water quality that tended to be more detailed in nature. Individuals with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to rely on discussions with friends and family for news than are individuals with higher socioeconomic status (Griffin & Dunwoody, 2000).

Source Credibility

In this paper, whenever source credibility is mentioned it will be assumed that this implies perceived source credibility as source credibility is a perceived phenomenon. Factors affecting credibility vary widely between individuals because credibility is a

perceived rather than a constant measure of quality (Freeman & Spyridakis, 2004; Melican & Dixon, 2008). Therefore, that which comprises source credibility might vary from culture to culture (Okabe, 1983). According to Yoon (2005, p. 283), source credibility may be defined as the extent to which a source's information is deemed to be accurate, trustworthy, unbiased, and fair. In one study in which perceived source credibility was measured quantitatively, a multidimensional construct was used that was comprised of an eight item semantic differential, seven point scale with attitudinal anchors consisting of reliability, accuracy, credibility, believability, unbiased, complete, and valuable (Van de Vord, 2007).

More research is needed to fully understand what leads individuals to perceive information as credible (Van de Vord, 2007). Perhaps, further research should be done on source credibility from a qualitative perspective if it differs widely between individuals. Through qualitative research, it may be possible to hear more about how mothers perceive the credibility of the news that they receive and understand more about differing perceptions rather than looking at averages across populations in which each individual woman's perspective may be lost.

Some scholars have argued that we are living in a society in which information is no longer being evaluated or filtered, due to the lack of gatekeepers and, therefore, many sources of information may not be credible (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2004; Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010). Increasingly, consumers may be aware that although there is a plethora of information available, much of it may be adopting a pre-determined agenda and, thus, may not be credible. They may become more questioning of news that they view. Therefore, it is critical for publics to be as informed as possible and on both sides of a

given issue. If mothers are living in a society in which they are not certain of the veracity of information that they are receiving, it is worth researching what makes a source credible for these mothers. Credibility judgments are made by the audience (Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2008). In other words, different levels of credibility are associated with different media by their users (Robinson, Thompson, & Tian, 2006). Information seekers who use a source more often rate that source as being more credible (Cozma, 2006; Melican & Dixon, 2008; Robinson et al., 2006). For example, although online information is often not perceived as being as credible as information found in traditional media because it does not go through the same "gatekeeping process" (Robinson et al., 2006), those individuals who have more experience in searching for information online have been found to perceive greater credibility of online information (Van de Vord, 2007). Credibility might also be an indicator for how often a media source is used (Johnson et al., 2008). In one study, Johnson et al. (2008) found that Internet users who rely heavily on blogs rated the credibility of blogs as higher than the credibility of any mainstream media or online source.

Personal networks are often viewed as credible sources (Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2006). People are also more likely to trust information when it has been endorsed by a community organization which they support (Stephens, Rimal, & Flora, 2003). More exploration is needed regarding the influence of social connections on information behavior (Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2006). Source credibility is an important element of this study because "environmentally conscious mothers" might rely on information that they can trust when attempting to learn about environmental issues. More understanding is needed on how best to communicate with "environmentally conscious mothers."

Summary of Literature

A number of bodies of literature served as the framework for this study and provided theories and concepts in the areas of culture and meaning making, identity, publics, women's and mothers' environmental awareness, engagement, and communication, channels of communication, and source credibility. These streams of literature included previous research in the areas of public relations with a focus on publics, environmental engagement, personal activism, cultural, critical race, feminist, and women's studies, environmental and health communication, journalism and mass communication, narrative inquiry, and social and developmental psychology. Several viewpoints within the larger field of communication as well as in the subfield of public relations were represented including management, rhetorical, cultural, global, feminist, and critical perspectives.

Cultural studies (Curtain & Gaither, 2005; du Gay et. al, Vardeman-Winter, 2010) offered an approach with which to look at the daily lived experiences of "environmentally conscious mothers" and how the participants make meaning of these experiences. Research on culture provides us with a lens through which to look at participants' interpretations and ways of understanding the world. Meaning making is shaped by individuals' culture, which is comprised of a common set of conceptualizations and behavioral standards (Pearson, 2005) as well as "shared vocabularies and grammars" (Walker, 2007, p. 68).

The literature reviewed on publics for this thesis includes scholarship fundamentally from perspectives of the strategic management model (e.g., Botan & Taylor, 2004; J. E. Grunig, 1997; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984), rhetorical and

philosophical paradigm (e.g., Chay-Nemeth, 2001; Edwards, 2006; Sowards & Renegar, 2006; Terry, 2001), the critical paradigm including postmodern standpoints (e.g., Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010; Stansberry, 2011; Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2011; Wakefield, 2008), feminist theories (e.g., Aldoory, 2001; Aldoory, 2007; Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2000; Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2010, 2011), and global conceptualizations (e.g., Holtzhausen, 2000; Khamis, 2009, 2010; Kim & Cho, 2011). Founded on different epistemologies, some of these perspectives on publics conflict and others go hand in hand with one another. For example, feminist and critical approaches to understanding publics tend to argue that the traditional ways in which to understand publics such as the strategic management approach (J. E. Grunig, 1997; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984) are organization-centered and do not take into account the voices of the publics (Aldoory, 2007; Chay-Nemeth, 2001). While the focus of rhetorical scholarship is on the content of messages and their effectiveness (Toth, 2009, p. 52), research done from a social science perspective often looks at how people function together as a society (Dewey, 1927, J. E. Grunig, 1997). Although it is important to acknowledge the strategic management approach to understanding publics, this is only one way in which to understand publics and does not focus on the voices of the publics, which are so critical for gaining greater knowledge about publics.

In this study, I primarily used publics-oriented and feminist approaches to comprehending publics and specifically "environmentally conscious mothers," which allowed me to move past the traditional ways of understanding publics to give voice to an oppressed and trivialized public and better cognize the ways in which "environmentally conscious mothers" make meaning within their cultural frameworks. Much of the

literature on “environmentally conscious mothers” which I found in my review of previous research in this area consists of authors’ personal accounts of their environmentalism. When literature on “environmentally conscious mothers” was not autobiographical, the focus of the research did not tend to be on diversity within the group. In this study, although I am still focusing on the personal standpoints of “environmentally conscious mothers,” I am able to give voice to a greater amount of mothers than has often been the case in primarily autobiographical accounts. As a result of including the voice of more than one mother, I have aimed to shed light on the diversity that exists among members of this public. In addition, rhetorical scholarship is useful as a lens for understanding the ways in which mothers use language to talk about their own experiences as well as in better understanding the concept of personal activism because previous research on this topic within the field of public relations has been rhetorical in nature.

Finally, this study seeks to better understand how “environmentally conscious mothers” obtain information about environmental issues, the channels of communication on which “environmentally conscious mothers” rely for obtaining such information, and what determines a source’s credibility for “environmentally conscious mothers.” Literature used to inform this part of the study primarily consisted of research on health and environmental communication. Much of the literature included within this study has focused on an individual’s meaning making of the media in his or her surrounding environment. Previous research on preference for sources of communication has highlighted greater reliance on a communication source when there has been a personal connection to the information and the inefficacy of mass media in reaching individuals

regarding risk messages. A review of the literature on environmental communication indicated a need for more research to be done on individuals' perceived source credibility which may vary from culture to culture (Okabe, 1983) and individual to individual (Freeman & Spyridakis, 2004). To find out how individuals make meaning of source credibility, I used a qualitative approach in this study to give "voice" to members of a public who may differ in their meaning making.

Research Questions

Using the literature described above, the following research questions were developed to guide the data collection and data analysis of this thesis study:

RQ1. What are the avowed identity markers of "environmentally conscious mothers" and how do they self-define their own environmental roles?

RQ2. How do "environmentally conscious mothers" make meaning of their engagement in environmental issues and activity?

RQ3. What channels of communication do "environmentally conscious mothers" rely on to increase their environmental awareness and discuss environmental concerns?

RQ4. How do the "environmentally conscious mothers"' various identities impact how they make meaning of communication around environmental issues?

Through these questions, the intent of this study was to contribute to the existing literature on publics and environmental communication. By analyzing how "environmentally conscious mothers" from different backgrounds and with different identities come together to communicate about and act regarding environmental issues, I attempted to extend our understanding of publics in the field of public relations.

Chapter Three — Methodology

Overview of Method

For this thesis, qualitative methods were used in data collection and analysis. The epistemologies that guided my research were feminist standpoint theory and ecofeminist theory. I used feminist standpoint theory because I sought to understand that which I was researching from the unique situated viewpoints of the mothers whom I interviewed. Ecofeminist theory served as a major influence for this study because a goal of mine in conducting this kind of research was to bring the voices of those who may not have been previously heard to the forefront as well as draw attention to the ways in which we have been impacting our environment so that it may no longer be trampled upon. The rationale and purposes for using qualitative methodology, reflection on the epistemologies that guided my research, and detail of the data collection and analysis methods I utilized are outlined below. I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this study and upheld the procedures and policies of the IRB regarding the use of human subjects for research purposes.

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

My goal in conducting this research was to listen to and learn from "environmentally conscious mothers" regarding how they make meaning of environmental communication and activity. Rather than setting out to test or prove a theory, I approached this thesis research in an exploratory manner to describe and explain the experiences of "environmentally conscious mothers." Researchers can gain insight regarding others' perceptions and understandings and explore how people make meaning of their lives by using qualitative techniques (Berg, 2007). Corbin and Strauss (2008)

explained that a main reason for conducting qualitative research is to "enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge" (p. 16). Thus, a qualitative methodology was the most appropriate for this exploratory and descriptive study of "environmentally conscious mothers"' experiences.

Purpose of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methodology can be used in thinking about a problem to research, collecting and analyzing data, and writing up the findings. I conducted in-depth interviews with my participants in order to explore the thoughts and perceptions of "environmentally conscious mothers." The qualitative approach constitutes its own field of inquiry making use of a variety of methods to discover how people make sense of their surroundings including historical analysis, ethnography, cultural studies, phenomenology, participant observation, textual and documental analysis, and interviews (Berg, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). According to Berg (2007), qualitative research "properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings" (p. 8). Therefore, with an interest in "human understanding" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 19), qualitative researchers can go beyond numbers and obtain individual and collective feedback regarding perceptions and ideas. When conducting research to obtain information that may be subjective or interpretative in nature, qualitative research can be a useful tool. Qualitative research can provide outlets for increased understanding when asking *how* or *why* questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005).

Most qualitative researchers aim to describe the relations among groups of phenomena and those themes pertinent to these relations (Shields, 2008). Wolcott (1994) suggested that qualitative researchers pay attention to the "'everyday life of persons'" (p. 113). Drawing from fields such as education, sociology, anthropology, medical science, and social work, qualitative research is not unique to the field of communication (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Qualitative research is also usually associated with the feminist paradigm because it allows for reflexivity on the part of the researcher and the ability to hear women's voices (O'Neil, 2003). Through interviewing, researchers can gain access to participants' perspectives and experiences through their own words rather than in the researcher's words (Khamis, 2009, 2010; Reinharz, 1992). In other words, through qualitative research, women have the power to speak for themselves. The qualitative approach to inquiry strives to take notice of the voices of individuals, recognize and welcome any emerging variances, and be receptive to the intricacies in the data.

Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

I believe that it is important for me to describe my epistemology, or how I understand reality, in terms of my research. In this study, I was guided by feminist standpoint epistemology as a way of knowing and making sense of the world around me. It is important to me that my research serves to advance the status of women and better their lives (Harding & Norberg, 2005). Researchers interested in study that integrates feminism and generation of knowledge in the area of communication work for the improvement of the lives of women and consistently strive to improve their research procedures (Pompper, 2005a). Research that is conducted by women and for women can be considered to be done in the vein of feminist epistemology (Olesen, 2003).

Standpoint theory is about what women experience, what they hold to be true within themselves, what they perceive from their point of reference, and how they make meaning of this from their situated being which allows them only certain views on the world. All individuals do not share the same knowledge, or ways of seeing and understanding, according to standpoint theorists, but rather each person has a reality which they hold to be true given their situated position in the world (Hartsock, 1983; Haraway, 1988). Based on each individual's personal history, each person has his or her own unique perspective on the world which shapes his or her daily experiences, values, and motivations (Collins, 2000). According to standpoint theorists, that which one knows is always partial and never completed giving each person both areas of blindness and sources of power in which he or she has greater understanding (Haraway, 1988). In my research, through bringing light to personal and social sources of knowledge that previously may have been oppressed and ignored in our society, I aim to generate more awareness about the experiences of women (Rose, 1983). While I may learn from one "environmentally conscious mother" how she makes meaning of environmental engagement and communication, I will never know how all "environmentally conscious mothers" make sense of environmentalism because each woman has her own unique standpoint. Similarly, feminist standpoint theorists would argue that there are some perspectives on society from which the reality of humans' relations with nature and with each other are not visible no matter how well intentioned one might be (Hartsock, 1983). Those who have privilege and power may actually see less of the way in which the world operates (Hartsock, 1983).

In fieldwork, feminist researchers strive to reduce or eliminate differences in power between the researcher and those being researched (Harding & Norberg, 2005). According to Dougherty (2001), women tend to be dominated and marginalized. Through feminist standpoint epistemology, those who are in disadvantaged social positions can gain power by serving as guides for scholarship and learning (Harding & Norberg, 2005). As my study progressed, I looked to the participants for guidance regarding what topics were relevant for further research. For example, I added questions to the protocol related to areas mothers expressed that they were curious to know more about such as mothers' decision making regarding environmental issues and interviewed mothers in rural areas of Virginia who had had the experience of living as outsiders in their communities based on the environmental views. My research aims to focus on the voices of women and their subjective experiences (Choi, Henshaw, Baker, & Tree, 2005). This study contributes to research on segmentation of publics and feminist standpoint theory by focusing on an underrepresented group in research using a methodological orientation through which I hoped to learn about the subjective experiences of the women whom I interviewed. I have conducted my research inspired by a remark from Dow and Condit (2005) that "The growth of feminist scholarship that pays attention to race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and globalism is a heartening sign, although there is a need for much more of it, as well as a need for it to spread across methodological and content categories" (p. 467). Feminist standpoint theorists assert that research should be based on women's experiences (McClish & Bacon, 2002).

Haraway (1988) coined the term "situated knowledges" to refer to a constructivist and feminist way of understanding the world as a way to challenge the traditional

paradigm of mainstream, traditionally quantitative epistemology. Haraway (1988) critiqued the idea that knowledge is an objective phenomenon arguing that no researcher can be completely removed from his or her biases and situated position. Situated knowledges are not about the perspectives of isolated individuals, but rather of communities (Collins, 2000; Haraway, 1988). No individual woman's standpoint exists in isolation. Collins (2000) argued that, "There is no essential or archetypal Black woman whose experiences stand as normal, normative, and thereby authentic" (p. 28). Aldoory (2007, p. 406) asserted that they only manner in which to gain more of a comprehension of lived experience is to listen to the voices of different individuals weaving together the different strands of knowledge and vision. In this study, I sought to understand how individuals make meaning of environmentalism in connection with others within their communities. Through solicitation of the perspectives of women on their social reality, feminist standpoint theorists argue that it is possible to construct knowledge and contest claims of dominant knowledge (Allen, 1998). Rather than essentializing the category of *woman*, feminist standpoint theorists encourage interviewing many types of women (Buzzanell, 1995). Each group of women will share their standpoint with me contributing to a more "objective" truth (Collins, 2000). Because I recognize that all women are not the same, I tried to interview as diverse a group of women as I could given the constraints and limitations of my study.

By combining the situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) of “environmentally conscious mothers” from backgrounds diverse in gender, religion, class, age, race, ethnicity, education, geographical background, and physical ability, I attempted to answer my research questions. In analyzing the data, I considered the perspectives of all of the

"environmentally conscious mothers" whom I interviewed individually and together so that I could learn how mothers from different backgrounds make meaning of their environmental communication and activity. Not all "environmentally conscious mothers" will have the same experiences, and, therefore, will make meaning in different ways which cannot fully be understood by others.

Ecofeminist Research

This study was also guided by theory on ecofeminism, which was introduced by French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 as a call for women to solve the world's ecological problems and has emerged over the past two decades (Li, 2007). Ecofeminists assert that there is a relationship between the domination of women and the exploitation of the environment (Banerjee & Bell, 2007; Hutner, 2011; Miller-Schroeder, 2011; Ray, 2011). Ecofeminist philosophers, historians, and researchers argue that all bodies are connected to the earth's ecosystem, this ecosystem is polluted, and thus are bodies are polluted (Hutner, 2011). As the environment has come to be seen as a feminist issue over the past few decades, ecofeminism has evolved into the study of the linkages between feminism and other types of oppression such as racism and ecological destruction (Li, 2007). In this time period, a great amount of interest has been paid to the women's movement, the environmental movement, and the relationship between the two movements (Warren, 1993). Both of these movements involve generating new knowledge about the world and ways of acting that are not in consistency with the practices of a world in which men have dominated (Warren, 1993). Ecofeminism calls for questioning of some of the assumptions that exist about "women" and "environments" that might be based on a masculine model of viewing the world (WEspeak, 2001). I have

used ecofeminist theory to guide this study to see how women relate to nature. In my efforts to conduct ecofeminist research, I have joined with other feminists who work on environmental issues in our commitment to shedding light on the manner in which race, class, and gender shape the lives of people in their local environments (Seager, 2003).

Sample Selection

For this thesis research, I recruited and interviewed a total of 36 participants between December 2008 and April 2009 who represented various ages, marital statuses, religions, races, ethnicities, geographic locales and backgrounds, types and levels of education, professional experiences, and socioeconomic statuses. I relied on mothers' self-report of being environmentally conscious and desire to participate in the study as ways to determine if participants were part of the population that I wanted to study believing that it was important for the mothers to define their own identities rather than operationalizing an environmentally conscious mother on my own. In the findings section, I share more of how the participants make meaning of their self-identified roles as "environmentally conscious mothers." I expected that mothers of differing backgrounds would have similarities and differences regarding their experiences of environmental activity and communication about environmental issues and thus would provide a broader and richer understanding of the questions posed in this study. According to H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin (2005), recruiting individuals with relevant, first-hand experiences and knowledge regarding the research questions at hand produces the most convincing and richest data (p. 65).

To find and recruit the interview participants for this study, I used purposive and snowball sampling procedures (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005). Purposive sampling

methods are used when a researcher wants to "ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study" (Berg, 2007, p. 44). The purposive sampling methods assisted me in finding mothers from different backgrounds, identities, and geographic locations. Using purposive procedures, I started finding mothers to interview for the study by talking with acquaintances, informal contacts, and friends and family in locations in which I knew people and could therefore gain access more easily (Maryland, Washington, D.C., New York, and California). I asked these informants if they knew any "environmentally conscious mothers" whom they would suggest that I contact. In addition, I posted flyers up for my study in public places such as on community boards in coffee shops, restaurants, cafes, and food co-ops, put out recruitment announcements on Craigslist.org and websites whose mission was to serve mothers, and sent out announcements about my study via special interest group email listservs and to schools in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.

To facilitate recruitment, I used snowball sampling to try to identify informants who were well-situated to gain access to participants or knowledgeable about the population that I was researching and ask them to locate other people who possessed information regarding the research questions (Patton, 1990). Through the use of snowball sampling, I was able to gain greater legitimacy, rapport, and access into the participants' lives (Khamis, 2010). When I interviewed participants, I would then ask them if they knew of other individuals whom they would suggest that I contact to take part in the study. A significant number of the participants in the study were referred for the study by other participants in the study.

The participants in my study facilitated my efforts to recruit other mothers for this study in a number of ways. They provided recommendations to me for where I should post the flyer for my study in order to reach other mothers. Based on the recommendations from the mothers, I also posted copies of the flyer for my study at a yoga center and a breast feeding center. Participants who had already been interviewed sometimes would send me emails with the names and contact information of people they knew whom they thought might be interested in participation in the study. In other instances, a mother whom I had interviewed would introduce me to other possible participants via email. Additionally, in some cases participants and other individuals who saw information about my study shared with me that they would post information about my study to listservs of which they were members or forward it to other individuals. There were times when participants would inform me that they had learned about my study from a listserv on which I had not posted my study or that they had been forwarded information about my study from co-workers who thought that they would be interested in participating.

When I initially set out to collect data for this study, my goal was to interview eight "environmentally conscious mothers" from each of the following racioethnic backgrounds: black, Hispanic, white, and Asian. According to McCracken (1988), for the purpose of gaining understanding, eight interviews is a sufficient number. Although, I did try to find more racially diverse participants, I received minimal interest in my study from mothers who were not white. I was, however, able to get in get in contact with and recruit some black mothers by reaching out to Java Mamas[4], whose mission is to be "a

[4] For the purpose of protecting the participants' privacy and identity, I am using this as a pseudonym for the group.

support group for mothers of color who have chosen not to work full-time outside of the home in order to devote more time to their families and communities." In addition, by posting a recruitment announcement for my study in a forum for environmentally active mothers on CafeMom.com, I got in touch with one mother through that forum living in Jacktown[5], Virginia, who then notified other mothers whom she knew would be interested in participating in the study as well. These other mothers living in Jacktown, Virginia, subsequently contacted me and we arranged a weekend where I would drive to Jacktown, Virginia and interview four mothers there. By interviewing mothers in Jacktown, Virginia, I was able to add geographic diversity to the participant pool and find out what life is like for some mothers living in a very conservative area to be environmentally active. According to H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin (2005), the credibility of a research study increases when individuals who reflect a "variety of perspectives" and who can offer "complementary understandings" or "different vantage points" are interviewed (p. 67).

Due to the multiple ways in which diversity can be conceptualized, I felt that I had interviewed a diverse group of mothers even though they were not as racially diverse as had originally been the plan. Because of the need for more participants for the study and the permission that a grounded theory approach provides to qualitative data collection, I did not believe that being flexible with the composition of the participants would hinder my ability to collect data to sufficiently answer my research questions. Perhaps, the demographic makeup of those who were recruited and interviewed for this study was more diverse in other ways than I had imagined and better reflects the reality of the society in which we live. In addition, McCracken (1988) argued that "less is

[5] This is a pseudonym for the city.

more" in deciding how many participants to interview – favoring thick, in-depth data gathered by talking to a small number of people rather than superficial data obtained from many people (p. 17).

Traditionally, in qualitative research, it has been thought that a researcher should try to reach a saturation point, a time at which each single interview no longer brings unique information to the source of data with the result of gathering the same information (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008), it is not possible for a researcher to completely reach saturation. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested that a researcher may stop collecting data when the primary categories of the research have been developed in depth and with variation, which implies that satisfactory sampling has taken place. As H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin (2005) put it, "what is important is not how many people you talked to, but whether the answer works" (p. 73). At the point in my data collection when I noticed that I was hearing similar, consistent answers from the participants whom I was interviewing and was no longer discovering any new, significant information from the interviews, I decided that I could stop interviewing because I had a sufficient amount of data to answer my research questions in breadth and detail.

Below, I summarize the demographics of the participants of this study as well as the methods used to interview them. Participants were mothers over the age of twenty-one who expressed that they were actively involved and interested in environmental issues. The resulting sample of "environmentally conscious mothers" emerged as follows.

Demographic Characteristics

Age: The mothers ranged in age from to 26 to 69 years old with the average age of 40. The majority of mothers were in their 30s with three mothers in their 20s, nineteen in their 30s, five in their 40s, seven in their 50s, and two in their 60s.

Geographic location: Of the interviewed mothers, five lived in Southwest, Virginia, five lived in Northern Virginia near Washington, D.C., three lived in California, eighteen lived in Maryland, four lived in Washington, D.C., and one lived in Massachusetts. The majority of participants lived in suburban communities with the exception of a few mothers living in urban areas including inner city Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C., and a mother living in a rural area near Jacktown, Virginia.

Geographic background: The vast majority of the participants lived in the United States throughout their lives. Several mothers moved to the United States after growing up in other countries including one mother from France, one mother from India, one mother from Hong Kong, and one mother from the Caribbean. In addition, six other mothers had spent time living overseas for more than one year and up to nine years for a couple of mothers. Three other mothers had traveled abroad for three to six months.

Religion and spirituality: There was some diversity in the participants' self-proclaimed religions. Eleven mothers identified themselves as Christian, four mothers identified themselves as Jewish, two mothers identified themselves as Roman Catholic, and two mothers identified themselves as Muslim. Other religions in which there was only one mother identifying herself as being of that religious group included The Religious Society of Friends, Paganism, Unitarian Universalism, and Hinduism. Three mothers said that they were raised Catholic, but were no longer practicing. Ten mothers

described themselves as having no religion including two mothers who said that they were atheists and one mother who said that while she grew up Baptist and believes in the Bible that she prefers not to affiliate with any religion. A couple of mothers said that while they did not identify themselves as being religious, they felt that their spirituality played a significant role in their lives.

Race: Of the 36 mothers, 21 participants identified themselves as Caucasian or white with the majority using the term "white," 6 participants identified themselves as African-American or black with half of the mothers using one term and half using the other term, 5 participants identified themselves as Asian-American or specified what their racial background was within the category of Asian-American, 1 participant identified herself as Hispanic, 1 participant identified herself as Indian, and 2 participants identified themselves as biracial. One biracial woman identified herself as Filipino and black and the other biracial woman identified herself as white and African-American. A significant limitation in this study is the lack of racial diversity among the participants. Several possible factors leading to the lack of racial diversity are as follows. This limitation may have resulted due to my use of purposive and snowball sampling in my study. The sample may be representative of how I perceived or targeted the population that I was trying to study rather than the population itself. In addition, I did try to go outside of my acquaintances to recruit for this study by posting flyers and advertisements for my study on online and community bulletin boards and asked participants if they could recommend mothers from different backgrounds for my study; however, when these methods attracted interest in my study from mothers, many were also white. Sometimes, I would not know the race of the mother until I showed up at the interview and asked how she

self-identified. When I tried to follow up on some leads from participants, at times this worked and at other times I received no response. Another possible reason for the lack of diversity in the study is that some black mothers whom I interviewed informed me that while there are black mothers who are active in terms of living a sustainable lifestyle that they are turned off by words such as “green” and “environmental” and use other terms to refer to their behavior such as “natural family living” and “doing what your grandmother did.” In addition, these mothers informed me that often black mothers can be mistrusting and skeptical of white environmentally conscious women. Perhaps, because I identified myself as a white woman, I had difficulty in recruiting this population. In a future study, I would post information in neighborhoods outside of my own and in predominantly non-white areas. In future studies, I will also show my recruitment advertising to members of different racial groups to see if it is culturally sensitive. For example, if I were to recruit black mothers again for an environmental study, I would consider incorporating other terminology such as possibly natural family living into the verbiage of my advertisements. In these ways, I would strive to work towards greater variation in my sample.

Ethnicity: Participants from each racial background are not a homogeneous group, but vary widely within each group as well. For example, Asian Americans come from a wide range of countries including Japan, China, India, Singapore, and Korea, which each have its own unique culture (Pearson, 2007). For this reason, I asked the mothers how they would identify their ethnicity as well to look at greater variation than racial background alone can provide. The 36 mothers provided the following self-identified ethnicities. One mother identified herself as Japanese, one mother identified herself as

Korean, two mothers identified themselves as Chinese-American, four mothers identified themselves as Ashkenazi Jewish, five mothers identified themselves as African-American, one mother identified herself as French-American, one mother identified herself as Vietnamese, one mother identified herself as Irish, one mother identified herself as Polish-American, one mother identified herself as Danish, ten mothers identified themselves as European-American, two mothers identified themselves as Hispanic, one mother identified herself as Peruvian and white-Hispanic, one mother identified herself as Caribbean, one mother identified herself as Native American and European-American, one mother identified herself as African-American and Swedish-American, one mother identified herself as Filipino-American and African-American, and one mother identified herself as Indian-American.

Marital status: 31 of 36 mothers identified themselves as married, one mother identified herself as being separated from the biological father of her child, one mother identified herself as not married, but living with the biological father of her child, two mothers identified themselves as divorced, and one mother identified herself as single.

Occupation: For the most part, participants who worked outside the home had occupations in the fields of education, health care, computer science and engineering, and environmental research and organization. Some mothers said that they had found a way to work at home or work part-time as temporary office or communications staff so that they could spend more time with their children. Other mothers explained how they started companies that they could run from their homes in consulting, human resources, online media, graphic design, and international development nonprofit management. Seven participants worked full or part time in education serving as teachers and tutors.

Six participants worked in environmental roles including as environmental business managers, environmental researchers and consultants, and directors of environmental nonprofit organizations. Three participants worked in health care in roles including as a health care consultant, a clinical psychologist, and a hypnotherapist and mind-body coach. Seven participants were full-time stay at home mothers. A few mothers used to work outside of the home in schools and environmental organizations, but had retired. Other mothers worked as project managers, researchers and developers in science and education, and building and community planners.

Household composition: The majority of the mothers lived with their partners and children or only with their partners if their children had grown up and moved out of the house. Mothers who were divorced, separated or never married lived with their children. One mother lived alone with her son, one mother lived at times with both of her children, but mostly alone with her son, one mother lived with two roommates and her daughter, and one mother lived with her children as well as their nanny. A few mothers lived with their partners as well as another individual such as a family member or a live-in nanny.

Socioeconomic status: I did not ask participants directly about their income bracket due to the sensitive nature of this topic. I also felt that if income were relevant to a mother in terms of her meaning making experience, then she might bring it up herself when I asked more general questions about how her socioeconomic status influenced her environmental activity. The cost of living an environmentally active lifestyle may also have been different for participants based on how they make meaning of their environmentalism. Some participants may have found income to be a barrier for them not because they had less income, but because of how they chose to spend their money.

For example, one mother might choose to buy more “green” products than another mother who focuses mostly on reducing consumption and not replacing older items with newer “green” alternatives. The mother who bought more “green” products might therefore perceive that being environmentally active is more expensive than the other mother who was not buying these types of items.

Sample Recruitment

I invited potential participants to be a part of the study via email or through a telephone call when I had received their contact information. Once I had made contact with the participants, I explained the reasons for my study and the significance of their potential participation. I also informed all of the mothers with whom I spoke that it was their choice whether or not to participate in the study.

If a mother agreed to participate in an interview, I asked the mother for her suggestion of a place to meet. Based on her preference, we determined a place for the interview. My goal was to interview participants in a location in which they thought that they would feel most comfortable. Of the 36 interviews, 29 were in person interviews and 7 were telephone interviews. Of the 29 in person interviews, 23 took place in coffee shops and cafes, 1 was held in a community center, and 5 were in participants’ homes. I hoped that meeting in coffee shops and cafes outside of the mothers’ homes or workplaces would enable them to engage more freely in conversation without being overheard by co-workers or family members and in an environment where they may be less likely to be distracted. The telephone interviews took place with five participants who lived too far away for me to interview them in person (California, Massachusetts,

and Virginia) and with two participants when the participant and I could not find a time to meet each other in person.

As an incentive for participants to take part in the interviews, I offered to provide food and drink for the participants when we met in person. Most participants would not accept my offer to provide them with food or drink. When I asked the mothers if I could purchase a drink or food for them to compensate them for their time in the study, they tended to say that they were actually appreciative that I had met them in order to hear their stories and that they hoped that the research would be presented not only in scholarly forums, but also in non-academic contexts so that other mothers could learn more from what they had to share. Thus, it is my intention to take what I have learned in this research and present it in a number of different formats.

Data Collection Methods

Face-to-Face Interviews: To collect data, in-depth individual interviews were conducted with "environmentally conscious mothers." These interviews mostly took place face-to-face and ranged from 30 to just over 120 minutes in length. I used semi-structured interviewing to find out about participants' feelings and experiences (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to approach the world from the subject's perspective and gain an appreciation for the varying ways in which individuals perceive the world (Berg, 2007, p. 107). Through dialogue with the mothers, I hoped to better understand their standpoints (Dougherty, 2001).

In addition, the in-depth semi-structured interview process provided room for the participants to guide the conversation away from the prepared standardized questions and

toward what they found to be most important to share with the interviewer (Berg, 2007; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005). In accordance with the feminist standpoint that guided my research, treating each participant as a "conversational partner" (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005) and encouraging her to participate freely, I tried to decrease my control over the interview to allow for greater participant interaction and trust between myself and the interviewee (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005; Letherby, 2003). According to Reinharz (1992), interviewing is an appropriate technique for understanding the ways in which women make meaning because it is a method which is "consistent with many women's interest in avoiding control over others and developing a sense of connectedness with people" (p. 20).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews allow for thick description, narratives, and conversation that have the ability to provide more explanation than a quantitative study can. According to H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin (2005), "If what you need to find out cannot be answered simply or briefly, if you anticipate that you may need to ask people to explain their answers or give examples or describe their experiences, then you rely on in-depth interviews" (pp. 2-3). In-depth, qualitative interviews, help researchers to "understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate," describe "social and political processes," "fill in historical blanks," come to a better understanding of "personal issues," and "shed new light on old problems" (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005, p. 3). Although they are time-consuming, in-depth interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to explore different practices and actions without violating an individual's privacy (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Telephone interviews: When participants were interested in being interviewed but could not meet in person due to scheduling or distance, I interviewed them over the telephone. Research has shown that the quality of data that emerge from telephone interviews are comparable to those from in-person interviews (Rogers, 1976). Telephone interviews have their advantages and disadvantages compared to in-person interviews. Telephone interviews are not as costly or time consuming as face-to-face interviews and allow for anonymity of the participant. Increased anonymity may allow the participant to feel more comfortable when answering questions (Hagan, 2006). One limitation of telephone interviews is that you cannot see the participant's nonverbal communication, which makes it difficult to sense when a participant may be uncomfortable with a question (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005). I thought that another limitation of telephone interviews for this study is that it would be harder for me to show interviewees the public service announcements, but did not wind up showing the public service announcements to interviewees in person after a few interviews when I realized that they provided no new information that was not shared with me by the interviewees earlier in the interviews and the interviews were already long in duration. In addition, interviewees did not all have the same experience of being interviewed because there were some interviews that took place over the phone in addition to those that took place in person. I was open to the possibility of interviewing participants over the telephone though because I did not want to miss out on the opportunity of talking to a participant if we could not meet in person.

To conduct these interviews, I used an *interview guide* (Lichtman, 2013, p. 203), also known as an *interview protocol* (Rabionet, 2011, p. 563), an *interview agenda* (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 185), an *interview schedule* (Berg, 2007, pp. 97-98), and a

conversational guide (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005, pp. 161-164), to loosely guide the interview process (please see Appendix B). The interview guide was helpful in providing me with direction regarding what questions to ask, when and how to ask them, as well as in outlining the main points that I wanted to touch on during the interview. Although I asked participants to share with me their experiences in their own words, I also needed to play an active role in the interview. Interview guides enable the researcher "to balance the need for predictability with the freedom to explore unanticipated topics" (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005, p. 150). I wanted to make sure that my primary research questions were answered within the interviews, but also allow for freedom and flexibility.

H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin (2005) and Yin (2003) have suggested including main questions, follow-up questions and probes in the interview guide to encourage rich description and explanation. I arranged the questions in the interview guide in such an order as to help the interviewee respond most easily. The first part of my interview guide consisted of several "grand tour" questions that asked the mothers about their families, daily lives, and general environmental concerns before moving into questions associated with my actual research questions (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005). My interview guide had primarily broad and open-ended questions that could be re-ordered and transformed in order to allow participants to provide responses with information containing both breadth and depth and control the pace and order of the interview. Open-ended, semi-structured interview questions allowed the interviewees the chance to self-define their roles and activity as "environmentally conscious mothers" (McCown, 2007). The selected questions allowed me to learn more about how the interviewees' make sense of their own lives. Interviewees were asked open-ended questions about what comes to

mind when they think about environmental problems within their communities and their environmental activity, what information sources they rely on to learn about the environment, and how credible they find these sources to be (Riffe, 2006). Some questions were designed to get alternative angles to a mother's story. For example, I encouraged mothers to share with me how they felt that others reacted to their environmental activity, what it was like to communicate with others about environmental issues, and what types of obstacles they faced in getting others to be more environmentally engaged if they attempted to do so. I used "example questions" to ask participants to provide examples such as times when they utilized communication channels or took part in different types of environmental activity. I followed up interview questions with probing questions or "prompts," which were developed both before and during interviews to elicit more information and generate dialogue (Berg, 2007). I used follow up questions when I wanted to obtain more detail about what the participant had said such as when an interviewee presented a new idea that I had not heard previously in other interviews, I wanted to hear a story that seemed relevant to my research or explore a theme that seemed to be emerging in the data, or it seemed that information had been provided without being developed or had been omitted (Berg, 2007, pp. 173-200). Having an interview guide designed for a semi-structured interview allowed me to adapt my conversation to the interviewee. From my experience conducting interviews, I have noticed that it is essential for the interviewer to remain flexible because each interview has its own pace and order arising from factors unique to an individual interview such as conversation partners, interview environments, and the

meaning making occurring between the interviewer and interviewee. Interview questions were developed and revised several times before they were used within actual interviews.

When I first started conducting interviews, I also asked participants for their opinions regarding media materials that I provided to them from various environmental campaigns that I believed attempted to target mothers. Researchers have recommended that the interviewer provide participants with media to review during a discussion (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). With this in mind, I initially presented my participants with public service announcements from Ad Council on environmental issues to see how they make meaning of the topics portrayed from the perspective of mothers. When I first started collecting data, I showed a few PSAs from environmental campaigns produced by Ad Council during the interviews. I selected PSAs from campaigns produced over the past two years because they were developed more recently and thus were more likely to be congruent with the current meaning-making of interviewees. I viewed all of the PSAs before showing them to the interviewees and selected which to use based on whether their messages seemed to be targeted at mothers. I asked participants for their reactions to and opinions regarding the PSAs which I showed them. The main purpose of providing the participants with media was to generate discussion. When interviews were already taking longer than one hour many times to complete and the participants were not providing any new information in response to the media that was not already shared during the rest of the interview, I decided to no longer show the PSAs after receiving permission from my adviser to change this part of the protocol.

To prepare for fieldwork and assist in the development of the interview guide, I pre-tested the interview questions with several graduate students prior to beginning the

actual research process (Berg, 2007). To pre-test the interview guide, I read the interview questions aloud and asked the students to provide responses. After conducting these mock interviews, I asked the students for any feedback on the interview questions regarding rewording and changing questions and altering the order of the questions. The purpose of this pre-test was to evaluate the flow and order of the interview questions. Through pre-testing the interview questions, I was able to feel more comfortable asking my research participants the questions in the actual interviewing process. Additionally, I was able to remove or edit any questions from the interview guide based on suggestions for improvement offered by the interviewed students.

The Interviewing Process

During the interview process, I engaged in the following interview protocol (see Appendix B): First, I introduced myself as a graduate student at University of Maryland's Department of Communication, informed the participants about the purpose of the study, reviewed the confidentiality agreement and statement of informed consent with the participants, and asked the interviewees if they had any questions before participating in the study, which I tried my best to answer. Participants were informed before the interviews began that they could choose not to answer any questions with which they felt uncomfortable, that they could decline from participating at any time without penalty, that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions, and that they could ask me as many questions as necessary about my questions or about the topic. I also informed the participants that I would use a pseudonym for each mother that would help me to identify her in the final report in order to protect her identity.

Following review of the confidentiality agreement, I conducted the interviews with the participants. Prior to asking questions from the interview guide, I asked the participants to complete a demographic form in which I asked about racial and ethnic background, age, marital status, length of stay in the United States, geographical background, current occupation, number of people residing in their household, and number of children (Ali et al., 2008). I have also included profiles based on the demographic information (please see Appendix A) which was provided by the participants showing how they self-identified.[6] I then asked the participants for permission to record the interview to more fully capture all dialogue that took place. If the participants agreed to be audio-taped, they initialed the "I agree to be audio-taped" section of the confidentiality agreement (to see the consent form, please turn to Appendix C). All participants agreed to be recorded except for one. Not feeling comfortable with being audio-taped, this mother chose to write down most of her responses and gave them to me at the end of the interview. In addition, I asked the interviewees if it would be alright if I took notes during the interview to facilitate with the conversation and come back to responses made by the participants if needed later on in the conversation. During interviews, I wrote down notes regularly on the interview protocol as the interviewees shared information with me trying my best not to be obtrusive. Periodically, throughout the course of interviews, I would remind the interviewees that my notes and recordings would be used in the study.

[6] Given my desire to empower the mothers to share their own stories through my research, while analyzing the findings, I did not want to assume that a mother expressed a certain viewpoint because of any demographic variable. Thus, I have provided information about the participants in profiles compiled from the mothers' own self-reports. In this way, readers can refer to the profiles as they read the findings sections if they want to learn more about the demographic information of any mother.

After the interviews, I thanked the participants for sharing their time and knowledge and participating in the interview and explained that I may contact them later if I had any additional questions while reviewing the transcripts of the interviews, needed clarification on responses, or to share and discuss the interview transcripts with them. I concluded the interviews by asking the interviewees if they had any questions, reviewing the confidentiality procedures I would take with the interviews, and thanking them again for their participation. I also asked participants if they knew of any other mothers whom they could refer to participate in the study. By increasing my pool of interviewees based on references that I received from participants whom I had already interviewed, I was employing the snowball sampling technique (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Potter, 1996). The procedure for telephone interviews was the same as for the in-person interviews except that I read the confidentiality statements to the participants over the phone and received the participants' verbal permission to be interviewed and audio-taped.

Opportunities and obstacles. During the data collection process involved with in-depth semi-structured interviews, several opportunities and obstacles may present themselves. Less structured interviews can be shaped by both the researcher's and the interviewee's concerns (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005, p. 14). Paying particular attention to issues of empowerment and oppression in my research, semi-structured interviews allowed room for me to work with the interviewees collaboratively on making meaning together regarding the topics that were discussed (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, p. 26). In providing room for participants to engage in "talking back," semi-structured interviews enable some control of the conversation to move from the researcher to the participants thereby empowering the participants (hooks, 1989, p. 6).

Potential problems with semi-structured interviews include researcher bias, participant interaction or lack of interaction, participant discomfort, and keeping the interview on track to address the research questions. It is not always possible to predict what will take place in an interview. Just like having a conversation, interviews are new each time that they take place (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005, p. 12). During the course of an interview, a participant may become hostile or threatening, imply that the researcher was not asking the right questions, take control of the interview, or change the subject (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005, p. 12). According to Yin (2003), it is important for researchers to be aware of common problems with interviewing including poor interviewer recall, interviewer bias, and inaccurate or poor articulation of responses given by the participant (p. 92). Similarly, Berg (2007) spoke of the potential bias of both the interviewer and the interviewee based on observable social characteristics and personal attributes (p. 118). Because interviews are intimate and interactive, it is essential that there is cooperation between the participant and the researcher. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), "Interviewees may be unwilling or may be uncomfortable sharing all that the interviewer hopes to explore" (p. 102). Finally, qualitative researchers may have participants who agree to be interviewed, but then do not speak up once the interview begins perhaps due to not knowing what to share, feeling discomfort with the interview situation, or not feeling comfortable "revealing what they consider 'sensitive information' when the tape recorder is on" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 28).

I overcame these obstacles of qualitative interviewing by engaging in several strategies. Underlying the different strategies was the basic premise that I would treat those with whom I came in contact during the research process in a manner in which I

would want to be treated or would want my family members to be treated if we were participants in a research study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Whenever faced with a decision to make regarding my research, I would make the choice that I thought would be the most respectful to the participants. I do acknowledge though that although my intention was to treat participants with respect that I can never fully know if participants had sensitivities of which I was not aware. To address the potential pitfalls provided by Berg (2007) and Yin (2003), I reflected on how my own background and experiences might influence my interpretation of the subject matter, the participants' responses, the questions that I would ask during interviews, and how I have made meaning of the data. Through the use of proper interview techniques, collection of data, interpretation of findings, and maintenance of the confidentiality of respondents, I also aimed to avoid bias and overgeneralization as much as possible.

When it seemed to me that participants were struggling to find words with which to respond to a given question or appeared to be thinking about what they wanted to share, I worked to exhibit active listening skills by maintaining good eye contact and sitting in the silence even when it may have been difficult to wait without interrupting with a possible response or prompting for additional information. I followed advice given by Kvale (1996) that, "By allowing pauses in the conversation the subjects have ample time to associate and reflect and then break the silence themselves with appropriate information" (pp. 134-135). If a period of time had gone by and participants still had not responded, I would attempt to rephrase the question. Many times, after I had stated the question again in other words or provided clarification, the participants would respond. If the participants still did not have a response, I would move on to the next

question. In cases where I realized that perhaps the participants were hesitant to respond to a question because I had accidently raised a stressful issue for them, I would back off and only if it seemed important raise the question again later sensitively or in an indirect fashion that would provide the participants with an opportunity to discuss it if it they wanted (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005, p. 119). According to Rogers (1961), three conditions that promote growth are genuineness, unconditional acceptance, and empathic understanding. I attempted to convey to the participants that I was genuinely interested in them and listening to what they had to say, was not judging them, empathized with their perspective, and did not want to hurry them. I respected participants' ways of exploring each of the topics in the interview and their decisions to change the focus of the discussion to share other issues that they felt were relevant during the course of the interviews (Raskin, 1996).

Regarding respondent interaction and possible discomfort during the interviews, I engaged in the following practices. To encourage the respondent's participation in the interview and to show that you are listening, Berg (2007) recommended that the interviewer should often restate what the interviewer has said and avoid unintentional interruptions. At times, mothers asked me to turn off the tape because they wanted to share information with me, but did not want it to be recorded. At other times, mothers requested that the names of environmental organizations for which they worked or examples that they provided to remain confidential. I honored these requests and shared with the participants that all information would be de-identified and that they would be given pseudonyms in the transcripts to protect their identities.

Regarding the establishment of rapport with participants, H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin (2005) recommended that researchers establish trust by conveying to participants that "you share a common background," "having someone vouch for you," and "being seen as honest, open, fair, and accepting" (pp. 92-93). I attempted to be honest and open in my efforts to gain access to participants. When I met with the participants, I worked to establish rapport with them before and while engaging in the actual interview process. Prior to starting an interview, I would spend several minutes chatting with the participants to get to know them better and give them a chance to get to know me. I gave the participants clear and honest reasons about why I wanted to interview them, the goals for the project, and my personal motives for carrying out this study. Whenever I deemed that it was appropriate during the interview, I shared bits of information about myself to let participants know who I was and where I was situated at this point in my life. I shared with mothers that I was a Jewish, 26 year old, unmarried woman with no children and that I had recently become more interested in environmental issues in the past year. I believe that most of the participants appreciated the fact that I was also sharing information about myself and that at times this served to make the participants feel more comfortable when we established some basis of common ground. A number of times a participant whom I had interviewed or a key contact vouched for me to other mothers during the sampling and recruiting process. A key contact in San Francisco, California who is involved in environmental activity herself knew other "environmentally conscious mothers" who could participate in the study. Because I know this contact well, she was able to vouch for me to encourage other mothers to participate in the study. Often, I would hear from mothers whom I interviewed that they had decided to participate in the

study after another mother whom I interviewed had told them about my research project and recommended that they contact me.

Regarding the allotment of time for the interview, I tried to be respectful, accommodating, and flexible. If I thought that we were going to run over time with the interview, I informed the participants and asked them if they would like to spend a longer amount of time talking, but stated that I understood if this was not possible.

After each interview was conducted, I took a couple of specific actions to ensure that this research was done in an ethical manner. To guarantee confidentiality, participants' identities remained confidential by assigning pseudonyms to each participant and describing them without specific details that might give away their identities. Participants' names were not associated with direct quotes or listed anywhere in the reporting of the research. All data that emerged from the study were handled according to IRB guidelines in that I kept all recordings and paperwork in my home in a locked drawer. All written notes and transcripts were kept in a confidential location in my apartment.

Research Limitations

There were some limitations to my study, particularly regarding the recruitment of participants, the research methods utilized, personal biases, and the research process and its duration.

This study is limited in the diversity of the sample of "environmentally conscious mothers." The data would have been richer and additional information would have been learned about the experiences of "environmentally conscious mothers" if I had been able to interview mothers from a wider range of races, ethnicities, religions, work experiences,

ages, sexual orientations, marital statuses, geographies, socioeconomic classes, as well as other cultural delineations. For instance, 17 of the 36 participants identified as being Caucasian or white, middle class mothers who had lived in the United States all of their lives, or most of their lives, in small nuclear families with one to two children. My recruitment pool resulted in this particular demographic profile because these were simply the easiest mothers for me to reach and who responded to my recruitment efforts. In other words, it was an issue of availability of the research participants. There was some diversity in terms of mothers' self-identified ethnicities, religions and occupations, but not enough diversity in the sample overall. Interviewing a more diverse group of participants may have increased the validity of the study (H. S. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005).

Attempting to recruit a more diverse population, I emailed listservs for mothers of different racial and ethnic groups, contacted local schools, posted flyers in areas in which I thought a more diverse population frequented, and conducted telephone interviews with mothers living in California, Massachusetts, and Virginia to reach a more geographically diverse population. Unfortunately, I received limited interest in my study using those recruitment attempts from mothers who were not white. Also, I may have been too sensitive about asking questions about race because I did not ask mothers before I went to the interviews what they avowed as their racial identity. When I would show up at interviews, I would not know the racial background beforehand because I did not ask and wound up recruiting additional white mothers for my study in my efforts to actually recruit a more racially diverse sample. I found that the telephone interviews were shorter and did not allow me to gather information provided by nonverbal communication, which

can tell the researcher much more than verbal communication can alone. Almost all of the interviews that I conducted with Asian-American mothers were done over the telephone; so, this may have constrained the data that emerged from this part of the sample.

Another limitation is that I wish that I had had the opportunity to talk with more mothers from a lower socioeconomic class because themes that seemed to emerge were the expense of environmental practices in the United States, the possibility that environmentalism may be a "luxury" given the way in which it has been commercialized in the United States, and alternative ways in which mothers practiced their environmentalism outside of mainstream, white culture. Living in a society in which being environmentally friendly is considered to be an extra expense by some mothers who participated in the study, I would have wanted to explore more how those mothers who affiliate with environmental activity and engagement and who do not have as many financial resources make meaning of their environmental practice and communication.

When conducting qualitative research, it is not possible to fully separate oneself as the researcher from the research process. As a result, my own identities and possible bias served as limitations in this study. Growing up in a white, Jewish, upper middle-class family, it is possible that I resonated more and could better understand the experiences of mothers in the study who shared similar avowed identities and that this was reflected in conceptualization of the study, participant recruitment efforts, data collection, analysis, and presentation. Another possible way in which I may have been biased in the study is through previous knowledge about the population being studied due to previous research on the topic. I may not have been hearing how the participants made

meaning of their environmental engagement and communication free of my previous understandings. It is possible that I did not fully question responses from those participants who made meaning in similar ways to my own interpretations. I also do not think that I probed deeply enough about mothers' meaning making of environmentalism, especially in terms of issues of diversity. While reading through the transcripts, I found many times when I should have asked the question *why*. Because I did not ask *why* more often, it is likely that I missed out on some opportunities to learn more. I may have not been as active in listening in these interviews because I was not hearing as much that was new. In addition, I have found that in qualitative research, I personally can become absorbed in the work, finding it very hard to bring myself away from the conversation and look at things more objectively. I wrestle with on the one hand listening to the participants and fully engaging with their perspectives and on the other hand maintaining objectivity and purpose. As is the case with qualitative research, full objectivity is not possible (Philaretou, 2007). In other words, I may have been too receptive rather than taking a critical look at what we were discussing.

I was not fully aware until I spoke to a couple of the black mothers in the study of their perception that the way in which environmentalism is communicated in the United States is as an upper class, white thing to do. I was blind to the diversity of experiences and the resulting differences in language with which to communicate about behavioral practices (Burton, 2009, p. 172). I naively thought that other individuals of different backgrounds would communicate about environmentalism in similar ways as I did and did not see my understanding of environmentalism as being only one interpretation based on my own identities. Although I acknowledge the critical importance of diversity in

theory, I am not sure if I actually was culturally competent in practice. The research process was influenced by the invisibility of my whiteness and privilege in society based on my race (Vardeman-Winter, 2011). In order to work to counteract the limitations that resulted on account of my personal biases, I worked to better understand and bracket my subjectivities by writing reflexive memos, doing member checks, and situating the study's research questions, interview protocol, and data analysis in previous literature and theory. In the future, I will take more chances to engage in topics that may be sensitive for me and the interviewee to explore and work to be more mindful of the role of my personal interpretations and biases in the research process.

Another limitation of this study is that although some participants coined the term "environmentally conscious mothers" to describe themselves, when I began to use this term in recruitment and in explaining the purpose of my study during interviews, I may have inadvertently ascribed the identity of "environmentally conscious mothers" for the participants that they would not have avowed for themselves (Sha, 2006). Due to the power that a researcher has in the research process, it is possible that this influenced the participants' meaning making about their own environmental engagement and communication. It is also possible that some participants did not say that they would not have applied the term to themselves. This is a significant limitation in a study in which the purpose was to hear the ways in which individuals made meaning and allow their voices to be heard.

Because I did not use other forms of data collection, I was not able to help to compensate for the deficiencies in methodology of qualitative in-depth, individual interviews by relying on the strengths of other data collection methods. According to van

Zoonen (1994), use of more than one method of data collection "will modify the weaknesses of each individual method and thus greatly enhance the quality and value of interpretative research projects" (p. 139). In the future, I would like to conduct focus group interviews as well to see how participants make meaning together in addition to individually. Perhaps, also, there could be potential participants who were hesitant about coming to an interview who might come if they knew that other people would be there with whom they perceive that they could possibly relate. Other qualitative research methods that I could have incorporated for additional learning include, but are not limited to participant observation, field notes, participant journaling, and textual analysis of print and online content produced for and by mothers engaging in environmental communication and activity.

A final limitation is that the time period between collecting the data and writing up the study was significant. During this time period, the research participants may have changed their meaning making processes around their environmental engagement and communication processes. When conducting studies dealing with identity and meaning making, it is important to remember that identities are continuously in flux and ever-changing (Curtain & Gaither, 2005). In addition, through discourse, individuals come to have new understandings of their meaning making processes and ways in which they view their identities (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000); so, even right after or during the interviews, participants could have already shifted their thinking regarding the concepts discussed in the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Reflection: After most interviews, I took notes to record my initial feelings and reactions as well as any important findings and observations. Throughout the interview process, I wrote reflexive memos in which I recorded any biases that I had which had the potential to influence my research and findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These memos are ideal in feminist research because they allowed me to put aside my personal prejudices and impressions and focus more on listening to the interviewees (Reinharz, 1992). In the memos, I also wrote down any fears, assumptions, judgments, and stereotypes that I had about the topic, study, or participants.

Transcription: Each audio-recording was fully transcribed to assist in the collection and analysis of data, providing a rich collection of data on which to base my findings. While I transcribed the majority of the interviews, there were also some interviews that were transcribed by a college student whom I paid to help me with the transcription process. When interviews were transcribed, I inserted observer comments (OCs) (Miles & Huberman, 1994) throughout the transcriptions to reflect on themes emerging in the data, connections to previous interviews, my personal views on the interviews, and suggestions for conducting future interviews.

Analysis: I started to analyze the data during data collection and while writing transcripts. The data analysis process involves forming themes and patterns with which to study, analyze, and interpret the data (Wolcott, 1994). Data analysis is a dynamic process of looking at a phenomenon to better understand what it is and how it operates. For this thesis research, I used the grounded theory approach to data analysis and interpretation formalized by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which operates under the assumption that "human behavior is characterized by latent patterns or processes that

grounded theory seeks to make visible and explain" (Lakeman, 2011, p. 929). Inductive in nature, the grounded theory approach allows a researcher to generate theory regarding a given area of study through the collection of data about a phenomenon, identification of key elements found in the data, and categorization of the relationship of elements to one another (Elliott & Jordan, 2010). This method of data analysis attempts to theorize about and provide an explanation of a phenomenon directly from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

According to the grounded theory approach, constant comparison of the data occurs as an ongoing process throughout the collection of data and transcription procedure as well as afterwards (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). From the moment that I started data collection, I tried to find the meanings in what I was hearing from the interviewees by noticing patterns, explanations and regularities as well as by paying attention to any outliers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In grounded theory, while knowledge of the subject matter is often considered to be necessary to provide orientation and direction to the research, it is important to stay open-minded and reflexive throughout the study and keep an objective viewpoint regarding previous knowledge (Walls, Parahoo, & Fleming, 2010, p. 11).

I started my analysis of the transcripts by using open-coding procedures to examine the transcripts line-by-line to locate emerging themes and potential categories according to Glaser's (1978) recommendations. Rather than focusing on testing any specific theories or operating under any assumptions or expectations about what the data would reveal, I listened to what the data were telling me (Richardson & Taylor, 2009). As I conducted my analysis of the interview transcripts, I identified possible common

themes in the data attempting to remain free from the influence of ideas that I may have had about the topic and previous knowledge of theory in the field. My goal was to remain naïve and allow the participants to share with me as experts on their own experiences (Elliott & Jordan, 2010). I tried my best not to impose themes upon the experiences expressed to me by the participants (Dougherty, 2001).

After open-coding, I engaged in the data analysis process of axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During axial coding, I looked at all of the open codes and phenomena to figure out how they related to each other through causal conditions, particular relationships, interpretations, and intervening conditions as well as how they related to the concepts presented in the literature review. Axial coding is used for the integration and connection of categories developed during the open-coding process (Docan-Morgan, 2010). This integration and connection process of axial coding serves to narrow down the number of codes by identifying similarities across disparate, but meaningfully-similar codes with the purpose of clarifying the data and making overarching themes more understandable (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). A number of phenomena can be grouped together under a larger, broader category, or meta-theme in the participants' comments (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interview transcripts were then coded for these larger categories that started to emerge over time (Bowen, 2006).

To organize and categorize the data by theme, I used a modification of the process suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). I created a list of codes based on the common themes and made note of text that supported the theme while marking it in the transcripts. Once I coded all the transcripts, I sorted the data by theme using a Microsoft Access database to create a codebook, which contained more than 300 codes, each of which was

put into categories that drew roughly back to the research questions. I then looked across the transcripts for similar themes and color-coded the text accordingly. I examined the themes looking for consistency across participants by looking at coding in my database as well as the transcripts themselves. The database was helpful not only when I wrote the findings because I could quickly find an ideal quotation for support, but also allowed me to see the range to which there was indication for certain codes across the interviews. In this way, I could determine the degree to which certain themes emerged in the data and see where there were outliers. The final themes were then placed into Microsoft Word documents with key quotations from the transcripts illustrating each theme. Categories that emerged during the coding process were environmental role, characteristics of mothers, community formation, communication channels, environmental communication, environmental awareness, concerns, motivation, obstacles, source credibility, environmentally friendly activity, definition of environment, and decision making.

I created a list of common and situational factors found within the transcripts to help me keep track of my findings when writing up the findings. The coding system was subjective to some extent because it reflected the themes that I saw while reading the transcripts. Another researcher could make sense of the data in another manner. Multiple interpretations of the data do not decrease the validity of the data itself. For each viewer of an event, there is another version of the story because different things catch the attention of different people (Wolcott, 1994).

While writing up the final report, I worked to provide rich description, a thorough analysis of the findings, and an interpretation of what my findings mean. According to Wolcott (1994), “description, analysis, and interpretation are the three primary

ingredients of qualitative research" (p. 49). After analyzing the data, I completed the interpretation of my data. Using the constant comparative approach of grounded theory, I synthesized all of the data and compared and contrasted my findings to the extant research in the literature review in order to answer my research questions.

Examples from the interview transcripts were included in the findings section to illustrate themes. I referred to each participant in the findings section of the thesis by her pseudonym in order to maintain confidentiality for each of the women whom I interviewed while allowing her to still maintain a unique, visible identity. Quotes used in the findings section were cleansed of inarticulate sounds and repetition. Whenever a quote was revised, care was taken to retain the original meaning of the interviewees' statements. I made sure to allow for the interviewees to speak as much as possible for themselves with the intent that "including as much as possible the 'voice' of the researched balances the power of representation vested in the researcher" (Murphy & Kraidy, 2003, p. 303).

Although I make no claims that my participants represent all "environmentally conscious mothers," I have shared the experiences of these mothers as I attempt to make sense of their experiences as a whole (Buzzanell et al., 2007). In an effort to protect against presenting too much coherence in my findings, incomparable, unique or different perspectives were also included (Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2006; van Zoonen, 1994).

Reliability and validity: When evaluating research, reliability and validity are frequently discussed. Reliability is the measure of how dependable a research instrument is in terms of generating similar findings when used in different contexts (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000). Although while conducting this study, I attempted to work to not allow my

biases and assumptions to shape the research, I acknowledge that another researcher would have engaged in the research process in his or her own manner. Thus, my own background and identities have influenced this research unable to completely free myself of my subjectivities and ways of understanding the world. Therefore, I support the notion that reliability as traditionally conceptualized in quantitative studies is not an appropriate standard to apply to qualitative research (Miller, 2008).

Validity signifies whether a construct is truly measuring what it is intended to measure (Gravetter & Forzano, 2006; Kvale, 1995). Although qualitative research may not accept the "notion of a universal truth," its validity is based on its acceptance of "the possibility of specific, local, personal, and community forms of truth, with a focus on daily life and local narrative" (Kvale, 1995, p. 21). Kvale (1995) extends the idea of predictive validity, which is generally used in quantitative research, to the domain of qualitative research. According to Kvale (1995), "a construct and its measurement are validated when the discourse about their relationship is persuasive to the community of researchers" (p. 22). To achieve validity in this sense, researchers must depend on "the quality of craftsmanship in an investigation, which includes continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings" (Kvale, 1995, p. 27). Throughout a research study, Kvale (1995) suggests using various tactics to ensure for validity including "checking for representativeness and research effects, …weighing the evidence, checking the meaning of outliers, using extreme cases, …looking for negative evidence, … replicating a finding, … and getting feedback from informants" (p. 27).

I used craftsmanship throughout this study in a number of ways. I wrote reflexive memos throughout my study in order to reflect on and keep in check any personal biases,

thoughts, and feelings that I had towards participants, the data, and the research study as a whole. Interviewing a variety of mothers from different identities and backgrounds, I attempted to get data from a representative sample of the population. In this final report of my research, I have used the first person and tried to provide as comprehensive a report as possible so that hopefully readers will find that they do not have many questions about my study that were unanswered. I have also dedicated a section of my thesis to my participants by providing descriptions of those whom I interviewed. I have aimed to avoid bias and overgeneralization by not implying that although my study only deals with the daily lived experiences of mothers that it can apply to fathers as well (Eichler, 1988) and by not assuming that all members of a cultural background will think about issues in the same or in different manners. Finally, through member checks, I strived to make sure that my interpretations of the findings are aligned with their perceptions and intended meanings (Meloy, 2002). Member checks were conducted by periodically asking participants if I understood them correctly throughout the interviews and summarizing at the end what I believed that I heard from them. In addition, I asked a couple of participants from differing backgrounds to review my analysis before I wrote up the final report to check for the accuracy of my reporting. Finally, my thesis advisers, both Dr. Linda Aldoory and then Dr. Sahar Khamis, supported me in evaluating issues that I encountered during my research.

Reflexivity: Reflexivity may be considered to be one of the key criteria for 'good' qualitative research (Gillespie, Jr. & Sinclair, 2000, p. 189). According to Kvale (1995), reflexivity is one way in which a research project can be considered valid as the researcher is considered to be trustworthy and credible. It is essential to look at that

which I brought with me into the field when interviewing mothers for this study because of my awareness that my previous knowledge and personal background have influenced how I conducted my research, what questions I asked, what I reported and did not report from my interviews, and the manner in which I analyzed my data in terms of what I may have seen and to what I may have been blinded. Also, it is important to me that I situate myself within the research to reduce the power dynamic between myself as the researcher and the participants in the study, especially when in the case of this project those being interviewed may already often feel powerless (Harding & Norberg, 2005; Pompper, 2010). According to Pompper (2010), "Positioning the researcher as both the subject and object is highly constructive when probing issues of *difference* between *constituents* and *authorities*" (p. 1). This section on reflexivity presents a conversation that I had with myself while working on this qualitative study (Berg, 2007, p. 198); however, it only can provide a glimpse into my understanding of myself because I am still learning about the role that my various identities have played in influencing my meaning making, perspective, and understanding of the world.

While collecting and analyzing the data, I reflected on how my different identities including being female, in my late 20s, white, heterosexual, a liberal democrat, professional middle socioeconomic class, a graduate student, married after I had completed interviews for the study, without children, and Jewish with Askenazi Jewish ethnicity, with upbringing in the urban area of Brooklyn, New York, and time spent living in Rochester, New York, Barcelona, Spain, College Park, Maryland, Brookline and Westborough, Massachusetts, and Durham, North Carolina, combine to form my identity and situate me to experience privilege in certain circumstances and oppression in others.

It is important though for a researcher to remember that reflexivity is not "simplistic rendering of biography for its own sake," but rather a "theoretical, critical, and analytic process" that the researcher undertakes during the course of research (Pini, 2004, p. 176). Over the course of this research, I have asked myself again and again how my identity is changing and how that impacts the way in which I am making meaning. It is my own identities that have shaped avenues that have been open to me or not open to me in gaining access to participants and data, interpretations that I have made about the data that I have collected, and the questions that I did and did not ask to the participants in the study (Pini, 2004).

What did it mean that I was not a mother? Why was I interested in studying mothers? How could I fully understand the experience of being an "environmentally conscious mother" if I were not one myself? I wondered if the participants in the study would trust me, would find me to be a worthy conversation partner or researcher, and would not conceal things that perhaps they might think that I would not yet understand. I shared with the mothers that I was not yet married nor did I have any children of my own. I also revealed that I was just starting to take steps in my own life to be more environmentally conscious in my choices. It was important to me to be honest with the participants. At times, I could not help but feel guilty when the mothers would share the sacrifices that they made to live environmentally conscious lifestyles. I knew that personally I did not always pick the most environmental choice due to time constraints and frankly the ease in our society of making the "wrong" choice.

This study helped me to grow in my understanding of how other individuals may make meaning in different ways than I do and in my cultural competence. When I first

started recruitment for this study, I was not as aware of how individuals may make meaning of issues in as varied ways as I have learned that they do. For example, I incorrectly assumed that because black, Hispanic, and Asian mothers were not responding to my recruitment efforts but white mothers were responding and I had tried to recruit by contacting so many different types of places where I thought that I could reach all mothers that perhaps just white mothers were really interested in environmentalism. It puzzled me that I had not targeted specifically white mothers, but for some reason for the most part only white mothers were getting in touch with me to participate. In addition, when I asked the participants about the presence of racial diversity in groups of environmentally concerned mothers in which they were involved, the mothers said that for the most part it is only white mothers. I am grateful to those black mothers who informed me that many black people make meaning of environmental issues from a framework in which they do not think of their actions as being environmentally friendly per say, but rather as part of "natural family living" and are in fact turned off by the idea that environmentalism is something new. Because the framework in which these black mothers look at their behavior is different from the ways in which I and perhaps other white women may conceptualize about environmentalism, their terminology to describe their actions may reflect this difference.

I grew to be interested in the meaning making of women from different backgrounds for a number of reasons. Being a naturally curious person and having had an interest in how individuals' backgrounds influence their behavior for as long as I can remember, I have always enjoyed qualitative research as it allows me to gain insight into how others think about the world and listen to the stories that they have to share. I am

sensitive to issues of diversity based on my experiences as a Jewish person. As a Jew, I am part of an invisible minority in that I often feel like an outsider, but don't appear visibly to be any different than other white people who are generally in positions of power in our society. Being a Jewish person living in North Carolina prior to attending graduate school and again as I complete this thesis project has particularly drawn my attention to the lack of resources and community available to Jews compared to those pertaining to individuals of other religious backgrounds and the prejudiced views that other individuals may have towards me when I reveal my religion to them. As a result of my awareness of diversity issues, I notice when all voices are not present at the table. In a previous study, I researched "environmentally conscious mothers"' meaning making of environmental communication and community formation with other mothers over the Internet. While I learned from this study, I also knew that there were certain voices noticeably absent from the conversation and that therefore my understanding of the topic was limited in scope. I was left desiring to discover more about how mothers from different backgrounds and with different identities make meaning of environmental communication and activity.

Finally, early on in my life, I learned to treasure the universe and treat nature with respect. My mother like many of the mothers whom I interviewed wanted to instill an appreciation for the environment and understanding of the impact of our actions on the world around us. My siblings and I were often told by my mother to make sure that we did not use too much water when we showered and to not leave faucets running. Although I grew up in Brooklyn, New York, we spent a lot of time outdoors in Prospect Park, at my grandmother's country house on a lake, and in the mountains of Vermont and

New York. I came to find a sense of calm being outdoors and would take long walks to reflect on my feelings and experiences. As a result of how I was raised, I have become interested in doing what I personally can to protect the environment. I too want my children, my children's children, and the world's children to grow up in a healthy environment where they do not have to suffer the consequences of damage caused by a lack of awareness or care for sustainability. Through my research, I have become more environmentally conscious. I still have a long way to go though in terms of making my own behavior more eco-friendly and learning more about ecological challenges.

Through comparing and contrasting what individuals perceive as others' motivations and behaviors with their own, they often form their ideas about other people (Dillon et al., 1999). To be able to know others, people must first understand themselves. Thus, while engaging in this research, I sought to be as reflexive as I could about various aspects of my identity, beliefs, values, privileges, group affiliations, and experiences. Although I did not always have the same perspectives as my interviewees, I aimed to not impose my way of viewing the world onto their experiences. While there may be blinders due to differences that exist between me and those whom I am interviewing, these blinders have influenced the questions that I asked in this study, the idea that certain topics should be explored in the first place, and the themes that I saw emerge as I was reading through the transcripts (Duneier, 2000).

Chapter Four – Findings: "Environmentally Conscious Mothers"' Environmental Engagement

RQ1. What are avowed identity markers of "environmentally conscious mothers" and how do they self-define their own environmental roles?

Findings suggested that "environmentally conscious mothers" self-define their environmental roles as passionate and committed, conscientious, conscious, and concerned, "It's who I am," being informed, being responsible, uncertain, trying to be optimistic, "having the good morals," and a phenomenon involving health.

Passionate and committed: Qualities that mothers reported distinguished them as "environmentally conscious mothers" are that they are passionate about and committed to the care of the environment when they thought that many others with whom they came into contact are not to the same degree if at all. Often mothers said that others consider them to be passionate about the environment and sometimes tell them that they are taking things to the "nth degree" or "the extreme." Participants claimed that most people know about their commitment to the environment just by knowing them and that they do not need to verbally tell others. Already describing themselves as perhaps the most environmentally concerned person whom they know, some mothers expressed wanting to engage in activity that has more of an environmental impact. Some mothers thought about turning their passion for the environment into a career working in the environmental field; some desired to become more active in environmental groups; and

some spoke of sometimes feeling overwhelmed by all of the things that could be done seeing many other ways in which they could become more involved.

Conscientious, conscious, and concerned: Other terms that mothers often used to describe themselves were "conscientious," "conscious," and "concerned" with some mothers coining the term "environmentally conscious mothers" to define themselves and one mother describing her environmental role as a "concerned citizen." Mothers voiced that being "conscientious," "conscious," and "concerned" differentiated them from the majority of other people in their communities. For example, Janet[7] said that in her community, "I'm kind of like their little social conscience. I always think people look at me that way. We want to do the right thing, and Janet will do it for us. We have Janet working on that so we don't have to think about it." An underlying premise of the concerns voiced by "environmentally conscious mothers" appeared to be their concern that not enough people are sensitive to and aware of human's impact on the environment. As long as people were not environmentally aware, many mothers stated that big business and consumerism would continue to take precedence over care for the environment.

It concerned mothers that other individuals were not also taking actions to reduce their "carbon footprint" on the environment because they could not see the results of their actions. According to Daphne, many people are "myopic" and only are concerned about what they can see. Mothers stressed that it was important to recognize humans' place in

[7].I have chosen not to identify participants with demographic markers throughout the findings sections because I cannot claim that I know which aspects of their identities have caused them to have certain feelings, emotions, experiences, perceptions, and beliefs or have inspired them to share or not share certain information. I have included profiles with self-identified demographic information for each participant in Appendix A in case the reader wants to learn more information about any individual mother. In addition, where I believe that it is relevant to more fully understand the findings, I have provided information regarding a mother within the text. I am aware that what I believe is relevant is not necessarily what another researcher interpreting the data would deem to be relevant and that in some ways we cannot escape from researcher bias. Thus, the findings are simply my interpretation of the data and not the only possible ones.

the world and realize that humans are not autonomous beings, but rather part of something larger. Tam conveyed her hope that people will recognize environmental issues and act on them and that another problem does not arise that may distract other people because of her viewpoint that people tend to isolate issues rather than realize how everything is connected. "Everything is connected to resources," Tam said amongst other mothers sharing the same sentiment.

Several mothers commented that humans have created so much environmental damage that they are concerned that there is nothing we can do at this point to change the course of this environmental deterioration, or that we are getting very close to reaching that point of no return. Janet, for instance, described her fear about the future of the environment saying, "I think we're going to implode. I think that in 200 years or so it will be a different world. I find that to be really scary… I try not to think about that." Similarly, Maris voiced her concern regarding whether we had reached a point where we had gone too far as a society in environmental destruction stating, "I don't know if we've gotten to a point of kind of no return in terms of what will happen to the earth over the next thirty years. I mean once a glacier melts, a glacier is gone. We can't get it back."

"It is who I am": Some participants shared that their environmental role had always been a part of their identities. A number of mothers said that they did not remember a time when they were not aware of environmental issues describing their environmental awareness as part of their identity that had always been with them and from which they could not separate themselves. For example, in describing her awareness, Bhakti conveyed that environmentalism "has always been with me right from the beginning. It is just something that I was born with. I don't think that I had this

realization at any one moment." Some of the mothers expressed that although they did not have a lifelong awareness of "environmentalism" per say, that they just could not remember a time when they were not aware of nature during the span of their lives.

Participants voiced that they make meaning of their environmentalism as not just being in one compartment of their thoughts and behavior, but rather their "lifestyle" shaping how they make meaning of all aspects of their lives. For many mothers, an environmental focus was ingrained in them and not something that they needed to think about actively because it was already part of their routine. According to Keeley, "it's to me like breathing. It is just what I do. To me, it is just my lifestyle. It is not like a conscious effort where I'm like laboring about it." In addition, mothers said that once they had an awareness of environmental issues, their thinking would always be influenced by it. Rasima described her environmental conscience as, "Just this level of awareness that you have that you can't put it back in a box once you have it." For many of the participants, there was not a decision made in their daily lives that did not involve taking into account its impact on the environment in some way. Describing how she felt that her concern for the environmental was inseparable from her, one of the research participants, Julie, said:

> *"It's something that I feel really strongly about. In fact, it's probably the thing that I feel the most strongly about in my life other than my child, is the environment. So, it's chained to…it's something that's just part of me. …it's who I am and I've always been like this as far as I can remember."*

Being informed: Another strong theme that emerged was a need shared by mothers to know and understand more by educating themselves about environmental issues. In fact, Ladonna expressed that although she did not want to be labeled or boxed in, if people felt the need to label her, that they could call her an "information seeking

mom" because information is information and it is important to her to be aware. A need to be informed arose for mothers because they were naturally curious about environmental issues always having questions, continuously felt like there was still so much about which they wanted to learn and teach others, desired to stay abreast of what was taking place environmentally, and wanted to keep track of how environmental organizations were doing in achieving their goals. Whereas some people might read an article about an environmental issue and just find it interesting, Lucile said that she would become angered and want to research the matter to inform herself more fully about its environmental impact and what she can do to make a difference. With greater knowledge and awareness of environmentalism, mothers reported that it was easier for them to make decisions in keeping with their environmental values. As they learn more, mothers shared that they are able to do more. Through doing more, mothers voiced that they learn more. It is a cycle of learning through doing and gradually changing ways. Before making decisions, mothers said that they do research to see if they are making the best choice for their families.

Some participants spoke about the importance of informing themselves of both sides of the argument regarding an environmental issue to understand fully that which was taking place. To learn about both sides of issues, mothers spoke of the need to access many kinds of information sources. Reading about only one side of a given issue would mean that she was not seeing the whole picture said several mothers. Speaking of the need to educate oneself to respond to an environmental issue effectively, one of the mothers, Leslie, explained, "You want to come at it reasonably well informed. You want to understand both sides of the issue or otherwise it's going to be seen as just a

reactionary sort of response rather than an educated, informed response." To be perceived as more credible, mothers reported that they believed that they needed to be more informed.

Being responsible: Other participants said that they tried to be "environmentally responsible." In many cases, mothers were responsible for taking care of their children on a daily basis and for making purchasing decisions for their families. Part of being responsible involved serving as role models for other individuals within their families and communities according to the respondents. Naomi voiced that although she thought that everybody should be "responsible" that other people were not doing "their part"; so, sometimes she does more than her part.

According to many mothers, citizens of the United States influenced by the culture's "rampant consumerism" were engaging in "needless spending" and not taking responsibility for their actions. Another concern expressed by mothers was the growing consumerism that they perceived existed around a new "green" market. A perception shared by mothers was that big business was looking to make a profit off of society's developing environmental awareness and concern. The concern that mothers have about the trend in environmental consumerism is that people are not making environmentally active choices for the right reasons. For instance, Rebecca shared that although she was glad that the average consumer was interested in "the green thing," that it makes her nervous because people should not be taking environmental issues lightly and only making decisions in keeping with a trend, but should take a serious look at environmental problems. Other reasons cited for concern about environmental consumerism were that it was important to keep the focus on true sustainability and that "green" products were

additional items being marketed, packaged, and sold when we need to reduce consumption.

Some participants reported that they saw government, big business, and the media taking a lack of responsibility. Mothers often linked environmental damage that they saw to corporations' motivation to make a profit. Many mothers had come to doubt that big business cared about the environment through firsthand experience working for a company. Sharing their personal experiences at work when they witnessed a lack of care for the environment, many mothers believed that companies had not paid attention to their impact on the environment as a priority. For example, one mother described how the lights are left on at her company at all hours of the day every day of the week when she works for a company that has a 9 to 5 schedule; another mother became aware during her work as a consultant for a skin care company of the types of ingredients used by companies that are not healthy for people or the environment; and another mother does not feel comfortable advocating for environmental issues as an employee of a federal environmental agency because of her perception that the dominant coalition of the agency is not environmentally friendly. Across the board in different lines of work, many mothers noted how they were surprised regarding the lack of environmental awareness existing within their places of work and in their communities. There were a few exceptions to this, however, particularly when mothers worked in environmental organizations, but some mothers even in this field of work expressed concerns about whether the organizations were actually "environmentally friendly" or "protecting the environment."

Uncertain: There was an uncertainty shared by some of the mothers regarding whether their environmental activity was making a difference for the world beyond their front door due to being in such a small minority of people who were environmentally concerned. Until the environmentally concerned became the majority and demanded that pro-environmental policies be put in place and upheld, many mothers felt that there would not be any real change made in society. Sometimes, this feeling would be discouraging. For example, doubting whether an individual can make a difference and feeling frustrated by her community's lack of care for the environment, Janet said,

> *"I don't know what else to do. …That's really born out of frustration this watershed group that if maybe we organize people, maybe we can get a whole bunch of people doing it and that will make a difference. I do it because it is the right thing to do and it doesn't matter if one can person can make a difference or not, one person has to do it."*

Trying to be optimistic: Although there were a few mothers who no longer felt optimistic that environmental issues could be solved, many mothers expressed more certainty that little steps can have an effect on the environment and that everyone needs to do their part. Participants spoke of trying to be optimistic about the current state and future of the environment. Some mothers saw the election of President Barack Obama as a possibility for our country to turn in a new direction in solving environmental problems. Mothers said that they focus on what they can personally do in their own lives to keep from becoming "depressed" or "scared" by environmental information, especially that which is presented in the news, which they felt was "excessively shocking" and "negative." One mother, Daphne described her need to remain optimistic saying, "I have to be hopeful because I'm raising children in this world. If I were too pessimistic, it would get me down and I wouldn't be able to do the things that I want to do."

"*Having good morals"*: Environmental concerns were also connected for many mothers to what they saw as social justice problems or moral issues. Nabeeha described the connection that she sees between being a person with good morals and taking care of the environment saying, "Because if you have the good morals, eventually that leads like to the other aspects of your life and usually somebody who cares about people who cares about their feelings who cares about how they affect others they'll worry about the world around them."

Many mothers shared that they are concerned about the lack of equal access to resources for all people. For example, Tam said that she is concerned about how the consumption of natural resources in the United States affects people in developing nations, whom she stated are the ones who suffer the most. In light of her own experience as a poor student with a lack of options for places to exercise because it was not safe and an inability to afford healthier food choices, Rasima imparted that she could relate to what it must be like to not have the same opportunities in life as those with more privilege, which in turn led to a lack of an ability to advocate for change because of exhaustion and oppression. According to Rasima, it is not the lack of money or education that causes certain segments of the population to remain oppressed, but rather a lack of activism due to the constraints that individuals' socioeconomic class imposes on them.

Some mothers who came from financially privileged backgrounds said that they have a commitment to give back to other people regardless of whatever else is going on in their lives. One mother who grew up in a home raised by a single mother trying to make ends meet, Tam shared that what motivates her is feeling fortunate that she is able

to have a nice home and put food on the table. Several mothers also related that they experienced guilt about not doing more. When asked what other issues concerned them, some mothers cited concerns falling under the categories of human rights and community development, which seemed to emphasize their concern for social justice with the underlying premise of having respect for and giving fundamental rights to all. As Carol puts it, "It comes down to a fundamental perspective for one another, for the world."

Health concerns: Across the board, mothers viewed environmental issues as a health concern. For some mothers, health concerns and environmental concerns were inextricably linked and just different aspects of the same issues. A topic of discussion at times was air quality and the impact of toxins in the environment on the health of mothers and their families. When asked how they felt about the environment or make meaning of the word "environment," many mothers spoke of the importance of working to ensure the health of the environment so that it can be "life-sustaining." In discussions about mothers' decision making practices, it appeared to be evident that mothers' environmental choices were made keeping in mind what would be best for the health of their families as well as environmental reasons or in keeping with environmental priorities. For instance, when buying food, Jessica's first priority is that it be healthy, which she links to being environmentally sound.

Many mothers said that they saw a connection between the state of the environment and health causing them concern and serving as motivation for environmental engagement. Raised near a quarry landfill in New Jersey, Leslie, who grew to be motivated to take action environmentally when she became aware that the health of her friends and family was affected by contaminated crop water, said,

> *"I can't help but believe that what we put in our environment comes back to us. … it has made me a bit more radical probably having grown up having seen… just lives ended, lives altered by cancers and auto-immune issues. It really personalizes it for me. It is not something that happened to them. It is my sister. I worry whether it is me."*

Paula, who is on disability, said that although she had planned to take her time gradually becoming more environmentally engaged, that she needed to act with great urgency when she found out that she was allergic to some man-made fibers that were irritating her skin and causing health problems. Similarly to Leslie, Paula said that anything that impacts her family directly, causes her to take action. A few participants expressed that they felt that they had unique health concerns based on their gender such as breast and ovarian cancer. Rasima, for example, seeing a tie to the environment with breast and ovarian cancer, said that what keeps her motivated to take environmental action is her belief that toxins in the environment are a primary cause for these diseases.

RQ2. How do "environmentally conscious mothers" make meaning of their engagement in environmental issues and activity?

"Environmentally conscious mothers" conveyed that they make meaning of environmental activity as being shaped by becoming a mother, both personal and communal, involving education, and for some may be a form of activism. Mothers' meaning making of their engagement as "environmentally conscious mothers" was connected to their "minority" status, maternal role, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, spirituality and geographical location. Race and geography were factors contributing to ways in which mothers' experiences differed and which led to experiences of privilege and discrimination.

Environmental activity shaped by becoming a mother: Mothers described their role in environmentalism to be more active once they had children and in many cases said that they did not think that they would be as active if they had not had children. One mother, Janet described the evolution of her environmental behavior by saying the following:

> *"Because I think that part of being a mother is teaching your children. And from teaching the children, I became more aware of what we could do and becoming more aware of I could do, I became more active. And, I think if I hadn't had children, I would have just been much more passive and I would live my life that way. But, so much of being a mother is what you're teaching your children. And then you have to do it. You can't just teach them and not do it."*

Mothers expressed that they first started to be concerned about their children's immediate present and future when they became pregnant and started to think about the world into which they were bringing their child. Mothers' behavior was shaped in light of a concern that they shared for the future of their children in a world in which they saw increasing environmental degradation. Carol described this concern saying, "I want my daughter to inherit a world that will be sustainable and livable and it doesn't look like we're going in that direction." Moreover, some mothers voiced that environmental issues are the only ones in which they are actually involved because without the environment, nothing else is of importance. Describing why she is more concerned about environmental issues than other social issues existing in our world, Candace, for instance, said, "…socially there are obviously a lot of problems. There're education problems and there're hunger problems and there're a lot of other kinds of problems, but if there's just no place to live, then none of the rest of that really matters."

Looking ahead to their children's future, mothers also shared that they needed to be concerned with what was taking place in the present. For example, Ladonna voiced,

> *"Basically, because you have to think about the future, you have to focus on the present and what you do now because what you do now is going to affect the future. So, that was pretty much my framework of thinking was like if I don't do something now to change or to cultivate what I want to be as a mother and how I want my child to develop, then it doesn't matter about the future because I'm not doing what I need to do now."*

Participants also articulated that they felt a greater urgency to their environmental behavior once they had children. For example, Carol said that when she had her daughter, she wanted environmental change to occur in the immediate rather than in the long term because she wanted her daughter to have a better life. For some mothers, their perception that the world was in danger motivated them to engage in environmental activity so that they could work to secure a more sustainable, livable immediate and future environment for their children. They communicated that they thought that their actions would be able to help to change things. For example, Angharad said that the reason why she is involved in environmentalism is that environmental issues are ones in which she feels that she can have some power through her own actions.

Environmental activity is both personal and communal: What started with a single mother's personal decision to be environmentally active linked her to a community of other mothers. Community, in part, was formed by mothers' knowledge that other mothers had the same principles and goals, which in turn led to similar activity and decisions. Many participants spoke of a goal that they have to try to create and maintain a home environment conducive to living an environmentally friendly life in keeping with their values in which they can pass on those ideals to their children. Some of the mothers described a feeling of being part of a larger group of mothers saying that when they

realized that other mothers shared similar interests and concerns, this led to the establishment of a "bond" or "connection." For example, one mother, Candace, said, "there are other mothers that I know that …when you find out that it is a common interest that certainly is a big bond." Other mothers also shared that most of their friends had the same environmental concerns that they did. Some mothers said that there were certain expectations that existed within the community of "environmentally conscious mothers." For instance, recycling is a basic expectation for environmentally conscious families according to some mothers.

As participants started to become more active over time, they became involved in creating and participating in both formal and informal social networks with other "environmentally conscious mothers." Through the development of a community with other mothers, "environmentally conscious mothers" reported that they had an opportunity to come together with like-minded individuals, feel more understood, support each other in environmental efforts, and learn more about environmental issues. Carol described the connection that she felt to other mothers in a simplicity discussion group based on having similar experiences and values saying,

> *"It turned out that we didn't specify mothers, but everybody happened to be mothers. And they also were mothers of daughters, which I thought was really interesting. And so, we spent some of that time talking about what it is to be a mother of a daughter in a society that … has values other than what we have."*

Sometimes, mothers shared that they would start to think more about environmental issues in the process of speaking with their friends. "We have conversations and I think oh, I should be thinking about these issues," said Rasima.

Often mothers would connect with other mothers informally either in addition to or instead of joining organized groups. For example, Ladonna explained that her community with other mothers formed naturally by seeing the same people involved in environmental activity over and over again and realizing eventually that they had similar interests and principles. Mothers voiced that environmental groups were a place where they could share their concerns and receive feedback from other mothers. Given that mothers shared that they often do not feel that their environmental concerns are heard by others within their families and communities, this appeared to be a need that mothers shared. A few of the "environmentally conscious mothers" said that they had started environmental groups as a way to connect with mothers who were not already part of the community of "environmentally conscious mothers." One mother, Julie, who had recently started an environmental group when I spoke with her, said that through the group she and the other women with whom she founded the group wanted to "try to reach out to moms that are not necessarily in the social network of environmental activities already. …reach out to these other list serves such as mom's world... Maybe, …they want to learn more, then those are the people we want to reach." Only a few mothers spoke of participation in online communities with most mothers saying that they preferred to communicate with others in person.

Environmental activity involves education: Many of the participants reported that they saw their role regarding environmental issues as an educator both in a formal and informal manner. Mothers said that they were hopeful that through educating others, people might begin to change their ways through becoming more environmentally aware. Some of the mothers said that they led organized educational experiences. For example,

one mother, Janet, spoke about guided walks that she led where she informed people in her community about threats to the existence of the urban creek due to storm water run-off to hopefully increase awareness. Informal education took place through talking with others who were less informed and serving as role models through their actions. Several of the mothers said that they served as information resources in their communities regarding environmental issues. Some mothers shared that when other individuals in a community learned about their passion for and knowledge of environmental issues, they would start to contact the mothers and ask them questions. Ladonna, who is one of the few mothers engaged in environmentalism in Java Mamas, said that she loved when others asked her questions if they were confused about an environmental issue or did not want to spend time looking for resources on their own because it indicated to her that at least they had an interest.

Many participants also make meaning of their role as educators as teachers for their children expressing that they wanted to serve as role models for their children. Moreover, a few mothers said that the greatest impact that they can make environmentally is raising a child with an environmental conscience. Mothers talked of the importance of instilling a value for and awareness of environmental issues when their children were still young so that environmentalism would be second nature for them and they could educate others. To teach their children, mothers described that they included their kids in the discussion about environmental issues, explained issues on a level that their children could understand, spent time outdoors with their children providing firsthand education, and, in a few cases, sent their children to schools espousing an environmental focus.

Environmental activity as nurturing: Some participants also make meaning of their role in environmental activity as a feminine one of nurturing for or taking care of a child. In speaking about the state of the environment, some mothers used terms such as "child in danger," "dying," and "baby." Eve said that she was a caregiver and nurturer when asked about how she thought about her role as an environmentally conscious mother. This concept also emerged in interviews with other mothers. For example, Corinne elaborated upon the need to nurture the environment using terminology that showed that she conceptualized of the environment as being human in nature saying:

> *"It is drowning …feminism while well intentioned lost because… the environment is suffering because of the misguided results of feminism because …rather than the aspects of being female being raised to the same level and respect as the attributes of male, women decided to play by the males' rules and therefore nobody is balancing out that dominant gene with the nurturing gene. I think that the environment is kind of drowning in a sea of masculine dominance. …we are falling and still while we have some air the environment still has some air in its lungs, it's not going to be able to take many more breathes."*

Maris articulated how she thought it was profound that in the term "mother nature," a woman was chosen as an icon for overseeing the health and wellness of the environment. According to some mothers, women are inherently more nurturing than men and that, by stereotype or default, women will tend to have more responsibility to be nurturers than will men. Many of the participants spoke about how it was their responsibility as mothers to make environmental decisions for their families because typically they were the ones still taking care of the home and children. They also observed that women tended to be more involved in environmentalism than men. A few mothers, however, said it was just as much men's responsibility as women's to care for the environment.

Environmental activity may be a form of activism: Mothers make meaning of their environmental activity in different ways with some mothers describing their activity as a form of activism while other mothers who are involved in the same forms of environmental activity do not. Mothers shared that they often make meaning of an activist as someone who "joins a group and marches or protests," "tries to push their agenda," "leads a group of people," "signs petitions," "writes signs," "lobbies congress and testifies," "constantly talks about environmental issues," or is "confrontational," "die-hard," or "outspoken."

Mothers cited different reasons why they did not make meaning of their environmental role as activists. For one mother, she did not make meaning of her environmental role as an activist because she did not perceive that others thought of her in that way showing that perhaps her construction of identity was extrinsic in nature. Several other mothers acknowledged that others saw them as activists at times before they owned that identity themselves. They had simply not made meaning of their environmental role in that way before because it was not how they saw themselves. As an example, Janet who incorporated her concept of an activist into her perception of her identity when she started to lobby before congress for her watershed group said:

> *"I didn't really think of myself as an environmental activist until… one day, I was putting together this watershed group and I was testifying and I thought hey, I'm kind of an environmental activist too. My daughter looked at me and said yeah, mom, we know that. Yeah, we could have told you that. I never sort of thought about it. It was what I did."*

Additional reasons given by some mothers why they did not choose to identify themselves as activists were that they thought that the word had negative connotations; they did not believe that they had been out in the world changing policy; they did not

think that they could control what others did so they focused on doing their part without continuously speaking about environmentalism with other people particularly if they thought that others would not be receptive; and they did not see public activism as being the best approach to take if they wanted to engage in dialogue with others who may have different views viewing it as extreme and alienating. Those mothers who did not associate with their perception of an activist chose to use words like "participator," "guardian," "concerned citizen," "role model," "advocate," and "educator" in talking about their environmental role.

Some mothers, however, shared that while they believed that public environmental activism was needed, that they were not engaged in it due to constraints such as disability and lack of time. For example, Paula, who identified herself as being physically disabled and therefore not able to participate in public activism as much as she would like, said,

> *"I don't think that I'm a big activist… because I usually think of an activist as someone who is …getting out to rallies and getting in there and trying to push policy through. And, I'm not always able to do things like that. I usually just talk to people and try to encourage others around to me to look at what is going on in their lives and change things."*

A few mothers stated that they hoped to become involved in a public form of activism in the future.

A concept offered by mothers to make meaning of their environmental activity was *personal activism* seeing their personal actions in their daily lives as "environmentally conscious mothers" as a form of activism with which they could contribute to environmental change. As a mother who said that she does not think of herself as an activist, Melissa said that although activists are working to make a difference, that you do not have to be an activist to cause change to occur, but can

contribute to environmental transformation in your household through your own individual actions. As Monica put it, "You live what you believe." Some mothers used terms such as "personal advocate," "personal charge," and "personal responsibility" to describe their role in environmental activity. One mother, Julie, described that it is her personal charge to create environmental change in every way that she can whether it is within a context specifically recognized as being "environmental" or in any other realm. Personal activism, according to participants, involves becoming educated on environmentalism and making small improvements in their own daily routines and in the lives of their families and other people with whom they interact to create change. For example, Jessica said, "I try and affect my own change in my own world. So, I try to be the change. I wouldn't say I'm out there in the forefront affecting policy or anything, but I try to do my best." Acknowledging that it was not possible for them to be as environmentally active as they would like given constraints they had and the feeling that there was a vast amount that needed to be done to prevent further environmental damage, participants spoke of doing what they can on a personal level. The majority of environmental activity in which the mothers said that they participated centered on that which they could do in their own homes and for their own families.

Some mothers described their personal involvement in environmentalism activism in their communities. Ways in which mothers shared that they advocate for environmental change in their communities included speaking out verbally in their communities; writing letters to legislators and calling members of congress; frequenting areas that are funded by government to show that they are being used; and using their money to speak out by making environmentally conscious purchasing decisions, not

buying things that they do not need, or supporting efforts that help the environment such as organic farming or the local economy. As an example, Rasima described the ways in which she speaks out saying,

> *"I can choose to go to this Mayorga Coffee place and I have thought about it because they do sell coffee that is grown without pesticides. That's a form of activism to me. It's my money where I want to buy. Using the trail by my house because if it is under-used, then it won't be funded. I think that's a form of activism too. Going to my local grocery store and telling the managers that we really need more options for produce and organic options in the store."*

Race and Ethnicity

Race, for non-black mothers, was often an invisible phenomenon that did not factor into their meaning making about their engagement as "environmentally conscious mothers." Pulido (2000) explained that white privilege is often not acknowledged by white people because it is not frequently conceptualized of as problematic by white people who do not notice it (p. 13). Race was an identity variable that emerged in the interviews as impacting the meaning making of environmental activity for black mothers, but not for mothers of other racial backgrounds. Black "environmentally conscious mothers" were in the unique role of being "other" in white, mainstream American society both on account of their race and their environmentally concerned role. Rasima shared that her racial background enabled her to have the knowledge of what it means to be an "other" and advocate for her needs saying,

> *"I have a sense of what it means to be other to be a person who is an other and in that sense I know what it is like to have to make your place or advocate for what you need and ask questions and not just accept the first thing that comes your way."*

Although there were some white mothers who acknowledged the privilege they experience as white mothers, the only mothers who were uncertain about or did not feel

that their race influenced their environmentalism were white, Asian-American, biracial, or Hispanic. Some white mothers said that they were not aware of how or did not think that their race or ethnicity would influence their environmentalism because they are "just Americans." Other white mothers questioned the possible linkage of race or ethnicity to their environmentalism saying that it was hard to see their race because it was so dominant. When white mothers did see a connection between their race and their identities, they often made meaning of race as a form of privilege. For example, one white mother, Carol, shared:

> *"I don't know what it is to have a racial identity in this culture because whites often don't. It is so dominant and so it makes us so blind. I would imagine that it has made things a lot easier. I mean first of all I have money enough to pay more for organic food and to live in a home where I can walk to everything… And not everybody has those choices."*

Asian-American mothers explained that they did not perceive that race was a factor for them in shaping their environmentalism. Given that my sample of Asian-American mothers was mostly based in the San Francisco area, which mothers acknowledged has a rather liberal and diverse populace, it may be possible that race may be more of a factor for Asian-American mothers living in other areas. All of the black mothers identified with race as a variable shaping their experience as "environmentally conscious mothers."

Black mothers conveyed that the areas in which they have lived, which have at times been populated by individuals of lower socioeconomic brackets and ethnic groups that often fall within those brackets, may not have as much access to environmentally friendly resources as more affluent neighborhoods. Black mothers shared that sometimes even though they wanted to access resources that these resources were not available to them. For example, one African-American mother, Rasima, explained why she did not do cloth diapering saying,

> *"You know what made the decision for me there was no diapering service here. …it is frustrating because certain services are only concentrated in areas of affluence, which tend to be non-ethnic. …we just don't have access to the same services … which can be very frustrating. But, …you do what you can do. …the cloth diapering was another one of those experiences where I was like it is just across the bridge. They have these services over there, but I can't get it here. I even called them and they were like we don't go that far."*

Some black mothers also said that resources available to them differ based on geography and that they have been shocked when they have moved from one place to another about how people in their racial group accept things in one location that were not accepted in another.

Black mothers expressed that they faced a constraint regarding time that non-black mothers did not sharing that sometimes they did not have the time to focus on environmentalism and needed to focus on survival instead. Survival was a phenomenon that was influenced by both socioeconomic status and race. Having to focus on the everyday struggles of trying to have a good life, Selah asserted that environmentalism can be secondary. Similarly, Ladonnna said, "If we had a lifestyle where it was more carefree and not so much overwhelming, I think it would help us immensely with thinking about our environment because we'd be more a part of nature." Feeling like an outsider, it was harder for Ladonna to think about her connection to nature when she was just trying to get by.

Some mothers of Native American, Hispanic, and Jewish ethnicity described that their ethnicity played a role in shaping their identity as environmentally concerned individuals in that it helped them to develop a value for not wasting. A few mothers articulated that because they shared a common ethnic background, they felt more connected to individuals living with fewer resources. For example, a Hispanic mother,

Jessica explained that while working as a research assistant at a group for farm workers she felt a linkage to others of her ethnic background who were not in the same position as her economically and who were thus much more affected by environmental issues saying that these could have been her grandparents.

Black mothers and one Hispanic mother were unique among the participants in citing race and ethnicity as sources of discrimination. Mothers who spoke of experiencing discrimination based on their race or ethnicity said that other people do not think that they will have interest or knowledge in environmental issues just because of their racial or ethnic background. A coping strategy cited by mothers who experienced discrimination was to work twice as hard, but still they found that they got minimal credit for their efforts. One Hispanic mother, Jessica, expounded on this concept:

> *"A lot of people think just because I'm Hispanic that maybe I'm not that interested … one of the problems that I had even at an international nonprofit was just there was always a question of how much education I had. …I'm like I came with great credentials… I always felt like I was getting the slop work a little bit. It's like any other minority is that you have to work twice as hard to get just a miniscule amount of credit."*

Religion and Spirituality

Religious belief and teachings also appeared to interact with some mothers' meaning making of their role as "environmentally conscious mothers." The primary way in which religion intersected with environmentalism for these mothers was in mothers' conceptualization of their role as "stewards" or "protectors" having responsibility to care for the earth, which some mothers described as "what G-d[8] created" or "what G-d gave us." Both Christian and Jewish mothers explained that a lesson learned from their religious upbringing was that it is a mandate to care for the land. Similarly, Nabeeha,

[8] As a Jewish person, I choose to write the word in this manner which is based on the traditional Jewish practice of giving the name a high degree of respect.

who is very active in teaching the Islamic community about environmentalism, said that one of the teachings of the Koran is that people need to leave the earth as a better place for future generations. One Jewish mother, Janet, shared that she was influenced by the values of Tikkun Olam, the Hebrew words for healing the world, in her efforts to live an environmentally active life.

Some mothers also spoke of feeling a spiritual connection to the environment that empowered them and helped them to feel connected to the world around them. Spirituality was spoken of as an identity marker that helps mothers to be energized. As Ladonna put it, "My spirituality is like the source of it. It is where my fire is and where my energy comes from and that transfers to everything else that I do regarding the environment."

Minority

All mothers faced challenges in living an environmentally friendly lifestyle that were connected to being a minority in a society that for the most part does not share their principles or values. Overall, participants said that it was difficult to be environmentally active due to the culture of the United States in which environmentalism is not a priority. Some of the societal barriers that mothers reported facing included being a minority living in a throwaway society, lack of resources, lack of education, and the influence of popular culture on teenagers. Constraints of lack of money and lack of time and energy also appear to be linked to living in a society in which environmentalism is not a priority.

Some mothers shared difficulty that they faced in sticking to their values and making more environmentally conscious choices while being a minority in a society in which environmentalism was not often a priority. A few mothers said that they were

disgusted by the amount of garbage generated by their families. Lucile gave an example of how she felt powerless when she took home leftovers from a restaurant in a Styrofoam container in a plastic bag. Similarly, Keeley felt that her hands were tied when insurance policy dictated that any supplies not used by her daughter while she was in the hospital needed to be thrown away rather than given to someone else who could use them. Mothers living in small, conservative areas and inner city urban areas spoke of difficulties they had in trying to get the community to focus on environmental issues.

Mothers recognized that they were limited in their options to live a more environmentally active lifestyle while living in a society where things were not made to last and be reused. For example, Monica described her frustration saying, "it's hard to find paper cups at the grocery store. There's like six kinds of plastic and no paper. And, people aren't asking for [them] so the store won't carry them, and that's just a simple example." Although having a lack of resources was a barrier experienced by many of the mothers, resources appeared to be more limited for mothers living in urban areas, more conservative areas, and smaller towns. Resources also seemed to differ based on geography with mothers living in California reporting that they did not face this limitation to the same degree, but this was particularly true for mothers living in San Francisco compared to in smaller towns. Freja, however, showed the difficulty in teasing out whether differences in the availability of resources corresponded with living in California or living in a bigger area in reflecting on changes in her access to resources when she moved from a big city in California to a small town in Virginia stating, "…in California …it was …like part of the lifestyle whereas here you don't see that. … Here, your only option is no option. …But, now I realize that I don't know if was that the

exception out in California or is it just that I'm in this small town that doesn't have as many resources available."

The mothers who had teenage children uniformly felt that it was difficult to raise their children with environmental values given the strong influence of popular culture on adolescents and popular culture's focus on consumption. Acknowledging that their children were more susceptible to marketing and advertising and that marketing was focusing on children as a consumer audience in a way in which it had not before, mothers said that they felt "heartbroken" and "frustrated." Additionally, some other mothers indicated that they thought that this would be a problem for them down the road as their children become older and are more influenced by their peers to consume desiring to fit in with the crowd. Several mothers said that raising children was like "swimming against the tide" or "swimming upstream" due to consumer culture.

Again, living in a society in which environmentalism was not addressed in mainstream society in a meaningful way, mothers reported disappointment that many schools did not include environmentalism in the curriculum and that there was a lack of guidance provided to mothers on making environmental decisions. Some mothers reported needing to look for alternative schools for their children in which environmentalism was addressed. Mothers living in small towns shared their concern that the schools reflect the lack of care about environmentalism of the residents within those communities. It is a cycle in which lack of awareness and interest leads to lack of education leading back to lack of awareness and interest.

Other participants voiced that they lacked the knowledge to make environmentally friendly choices because of a lack of education on environmental issues

in our society. Mothers explained how at times they simply did not know what the environmentally friendly option would be because of a lack of guidance. Lacking knowledge of what were the best decisions to make, mothers wanted guidelines saying that if they knew what to do to make decisions more in keeping with their environmental principles that they would do it. Candace said that these guidelines could possibly include "some information about how far has this product traveled… when it was manufactured, is a byproduct of this harmful to the environment, how much energy is used to produce this thing." Daphne proposed that products could come with one more line on them showing the "environmental toll points. …the total cost to the world if I buy those." Mothers shared that having guidelines that they could trust would make it much easier to shop knowing that they were making the "right" decisions. Julie pointed out that a rating program to label for the carbon footprint has already been developed. Perhaps, one of the problems is that the guidelines did not seem to be common knowledge among the mothers. Sometimes, mothers were not aware that environmentally friendly options existed. For example, Ladonna said, "I didn't know that you had an option for cloth diapers. I didn't know because it wasn't part of my conscience until now. I wish we would've known."

Furthermore, mothers discussed how environmentally friendly choices were often more expensive than those that were not environmentally friendly. Although some mothers felt that the environmentally friendly decisions wound up costing less in the end and that it was possible to be environmentally engaged without a lot of money, most mothers cited that a lack of financial resources was their biggest constraint. Many mothers said that they would make different purchasing choices that would be more

environmentally friendly if they had more financial resources or if prices were lower for environmentally friendly alternatives. Freja said she felt that more people would be make more environmentally conscious decisions if government made environmental choices not a "luxury," but rather something that everyone could afford:

> *"Right now, there is such a price difference that people can't afford to be environmentally conscious even though they may think it is good, but they can't afford to do that. …That means buying the processed food, that means buying the products that are probably shipped from elsewhere. You know if it is cheaper, that's the bottom line. It is cheaper. There's no way to make it. It is a luxury item, but when the government changes and makes it a priority … then it won't be such a luxury item."*

Likewise, Ladonna explained that when she sees environmentally friendly options at higher prices in the stores than those that are not, that it is hard to make the right decisions while thinking about how much money she could save if she did not. Some mothers spoke of making environmentally conscious purchasing decisions sometimes even if they could not afford to do so all of the time for reasons such as making choices in line with their ideals, supporting the cause, trying to do what they could for their families, and supplying the demand to drive down prices for those not as privileged financially.

When making decisions, for the most part, mothers said that they take into account weighing the cost benefit of any choice. In deciding whether to make a purchase or investment, many mothers reported looking at the discrepancy between the expense and the returns of a given item, especially when the cost of an item is high or when mothers perceive that the impact of making a choice is significant. Many mothers said that if there was any way in which they could make the environmentally friendly choice, they would. For participants who simply could not afford the environmentally friendly choice, some mothers shared that they would make a choice that was not as

environmentally friendly if they could not afford the environmentally friendly option and a couple of other mothers said that they would go without buying any item. As an example, Keeley stated:

> *"I don't really make a choice if there's any way to do the right thing in my eyes. I'll maybe have to delay something I want …if we're going to err on the side of promoting a more progressive and healthier environmental agenda overall, we will err on the side of doing that unless it is completely out of our budget."*

Similarly, Tam expressed that she would go without if she could not afford the environmental choice saying that it is always in the back of her mind that if she did not grow up with it, she does not need it.

When making decisions, mothers considered what the long term costs would be for their families. Although some decisions may be more expensive to make in the short run, they may result in fewer costs down the road. Seeing the long term costs as outweighing the short term high costs, Rasima said that she will take cost into consideration and try to make sensible choices. Daphne felt similarly to Rasima saying that investments in environmentally friendly options were worthwhile in the long run. Long term benefits were related to health for many mothers. For example sharing that health was practically priceless for her, Freja said, "I think in some cases even if you make environmental decisions, it could be also good healthwise. And, I think there's no price on cost of health in that sense. To be alive and healthy is almost priceless." Sometimes, paying for the more expensive alternatives in the short run involved making sacrifices for the mothers in that they would not engage in other pursuits in order to make ends meet.

Some participants explained how in American society the busyness of life can be overwhelming. A lack of time and energy emerged as a reason that mothers did not

always make environmentally friendly choices. Feeling exhausted, some mothers admitted to not making environmentally conscious decisions at times and picking the fastest and easiest option at the time. Many mothers, especially those who were working and had younger children, said that they found it hard to juggle everything. Reflecting on the difficulty she experienced with juggling things for her family on a daily basis, Daphne verbalized,

> *"It is one thing to think yeah this is really important for us to do. It is another thing to try to get homework done and everybody in bed on time and phone calls returned and papers signed and just it's a bit of a struggle to take care of everything. …I think on a theoretical level, everyone's committed to it, but in practice then you have to pick and choose what you are capable of doing."*

In addition, a large majority of mothers expressed that they did not have as much time to be as active environmentally in their communities as they would like and focused more on what they could do personally for their own families to make a change. A few mothers said that a lack of time was a poor excuse explaining that you just make the time to do the "right thing."

Chapter Five – Findings: Environmental Information, Awareness, and Communication around Environmental Issues

This thematic chapter includes findings related to how "environmentally conscious mothers"' make meaning regarding their information seeking habits, sources on which they rely to learn more about environmental issues and discuss environmental concerns, and how the various identities of "environmentally conscious mothers" impact their meaning making of communication around environmental issues. Findings suggested that in order for communication to be meaningful it needs to be relevant to the individual person. Without a personal tie to information, the findings seemed to indicate that people will gloss over it and not address it. To reach "environmentally conscious mothers" who make the majority of purchasing decisions for their households, it may no longer be possible to rely as much on segmentation strategies geared towards communicating with homogeneous publics given the great amount of diversity within each group.

RQ3. What channels of communication do "environmentally conscious mothers" rely on to increase environmental awareness and discuss environmental concerns?

Many mothers described the development of their environmental awareness as a gradual process and could not attribute it to any event, thing, person, or thought that they had experienced or encountered. An accumulation of many pieces of information over many years had led to their awareness according to these mothers. Participants shared a similar level of awareness regarding environmental issues, but had become aware of

environmental issues in different ways including through firsthand experience, the media, the Internet, personal communication in the community, motherhood, education, and work. For some mothers, there was a "lifelong awareness" – they could not remember a time when they were not aware. (Information on having an awareness that "had always been there" was covered in chapter four because it is a part of how some "environmentally conscious mothers" made meaning of their environmental identity.)

The participants were similar to each other in where they sought out information about environmental issues. Surprisingly, I did not notice any strong patterns based on demographic markers regarding what sources were used by mothers to obtain information about environmental issues. Some minor patterns of source usage to learn more about environmental issues among the mothers included 1) most mothers who reported using list serves to learn information were in their 30s; 2) the few mothers who reported not using the Internet were in their 50s or 60s; 3) mothers who reported not relying on personal communication to learn about the environment were mostly older, living in conservative communities, or black. These were very minor themes and it is not possible to generalize to other mothers of these demographic groups based on the information that I obtained.

Firsthand Experience

For many mothers, firsthand experience helped them to increase their awareness of environmental issues and make issues more pressing for them. Firsthand experience was gained by mothers in a number of ways including through personal upbringing, spending time outdoors in nature, noticing environmental changes such as in temperature or habitat during the course of their lives or when they traveled from one place to

another, witnessing environmental injustices, growing up in families that needed to limit their consumption for financial reasons or seeing family members engage in a constant need to have more, having a hard time at some point in their lives meeting their basic needs, experiencing problems with their health related to the environment, and becoming mothers. Many mothers shared their thought that if there is a lack of awareness on environmental issues, people will have different views and therefore make different choices than those who are aware. According to Freja, who had a hard time finding others who were also environmentally conscious in the small town in which she lived, "If you stay in the same place all the time and you grow up there and you don't get exposed, you are very limited in your views." Leslie, a mother who had the opportunity to look at damage caused by clear cutting in Alaska, said, "To be able to see things firsthand, makes it harder to ignore. …If you haven't been able to hike, if you haven't been able to watch a bear fish in a salmon stream, it is all theory. And, the theory is much harder to really become impassioned about than firsthand experience."

Personal upbringing: Some mothers learned about a need to be careful in using resources being raised in families in which they either had to be mindful of not wasting due to limited means or became aware by seeing their family's extravagant consumption and wanted to make a change. Although many of the participants shared that they did not believe that their parents had been environmentally concerned, they had been raised with an appreciation for nature and for being thrifty. Ladonna, a mother who grew up in a working class family, explained that, "Shrinking your resources, you have to learn how to do more with less. If we throw this away, could we use it for something else or do we have to spend more money to get something else." In addition, some mothers talked

about how on the one hand perhaps they had less environmental awareness as they were growing up due to being from families with greater privilege financially where there were not as many limits to consumption, but on the other hand had more environmental awareness because of having resources such as finances to be able to travel to other countries where they gained firsthand education of global environmental problems.

Global awareness: Mothers exposed to global issues and ways in which people lived in other more resource depleted countries through living or traveling abroad often cited this as a major source for their environmental awareness. These mothers were able to develop relationships with people in other countries enabling them to care about the existence of other people. Through seeing other people as human beings with the same fundamental needs, mothers were able to recognize how their actions have an impact on people living in other countries even if they cannot see this firsthand while living in the United States. For example, Daphne credited her experience growing up spending several years living in Europe with her ability to be more aware of the world around her saying,

> *"A lot of people that aren't just as environmentally aware don't see the big picture. ... I think being aware that there is a place called Africa that has regular people trying to make it… that are struggling because of the environmental decisions that we are making here. …I think being a more global person has helped me to see the big picture of the system as a whole rather than just what's happening in my backyard."*

Living abroad in areas in which people do not have as many resources, some mothers described their experience as a "wake up call" as they became more aware of how people were using resources in a different way than we are here in the United States. Mothers reported being amazed with resource consumption in the United States after becoming aware that people do not all live in the way that we do. A few mothers who moved to the

United States after growing up in another country said that they were in shock when they moved seeing how people used resources.

Motherhood: As found in a previous study on EcoMoms (Schloss, 2008), a theme that emerged was a cultural dictate for mothers to have an intensified degree of involvement in environmentalism when they had kids knowing that their actions would impact and be seen by their children. The majority of mothers reported that they became more aware of environmentalism when they had children due to wanting to protect their children. For some mothers, the experience of becoming mothers was a time when they slowed down and started to notice the world around them including society's use of resources and dangers in the environment in which they were raising their children. As a result of increasing awareness of their place in the world and realizing that their decisions would impact their children, mothers voiced that they became more cognizant of the choices that they made. Mothers sometimes said that they should have been making more environmentally conscious decisions for their own health and not only for the health of their children, but that having children alerted them to the importance of their actions.

Community awareness: Although many mothers said that they did not feel that others with whom they interacted cared about environmentalism, it appeared to be more likely that a mother would be aware of having an environmental conscience if those living around her had similar values. In communities where there is not as much of a focus on environmentalism, individuals will not have as much awareness according to many of the participants. Some mothers attributed their environmental awareness to coming of age in a time when environmental awareness in society was greater in general

and saw this awareness continuing to grow with each new generation. "I've certainly been right in the thick of this kind of awareness campaign …and certainly it seems that all the generations coming behind me are … a lot further along than I was at their age", shared Cade, a mother in her mid-40s. Older mothers said that while they made choices for their families in mind of using fewer resources, environmentalism had not become as much of a trend when they started parenting and that fewer mothers had this priority in making decisions for their families.

Through conversations with others in their social networks including like-minded friends and occasionally their husbands, colleagues at work, and service providers, mothers also increased their consciousness regarding environmentalism and environmental resources in their communities. Mothers expressed a preference for in person communication in learning about local issues. Participants would speak with other like-minded individuals about their environmental viewpoints and how to make decisions to reflect those in their daily lives.

Expressing a general skepticism about environmental organizations, only a few mothers turned to this source with environmental concerns. Few mothers felt that they would be heard if they contacted legislators and congress to express concerns about environmental injustices that they witnessed. In addition, only a few mothers felt that the city council was a place where they would turn to raise an issue of discussion and did so infrequently. Melissa, who serves as the vice president for the civic association in her community, was one of the few mothers mentioning that she sees her county as a place where she could turn stating, "If there is something that the county could address, I know that I could definitely call them. We have a civic association so if there are concerns, we

talk about it there." Josie, a mother living in a more conservative community and not involved politically, seemed to be less confident about turning to the county with a concern stating, "you can call the city and gripe for all of the good it is going to do you … and they will come out and look at it sometimes."

Education: Many participants saw a correlation between being more educated and being more aware about environmentalism, but often also seemed reluctant to say this. Perhaps, as one mother acknowledged, it may be that the mothers felt that it was elitist to say this. Some mothers reported becoming aware that not all people had the same access to resources. Mothers spoke of the importance of education in raising their awareness of environmentalism. Josie, who mostly taught herself about environmental issues because discussion about environmentalism was just beginning when she graduated from college, championed the importance of education in gaining awareness saying, "education is the key and not radical education… just the facts, the facts, until it hits you." Some mothers spoke of an individual who had played a tremendous role in their development of an awareness of environmentalism. Josie fondly reminisced about a girl scout leader from whom she had learned about birds saying, "what I learned from watching birds with her I never, ever forgot and I can identify birds to this day. That goes back to when she was teaching me that stuff." Another mother, Naomi, spoke about how speaking with a primatologist about threats to chimpanzees in the wild during an internship in graduate school at an institute founded by this woman inspired her to develop her career focusing on the bushmeat crisis. Mothers with a background in science said that this had served as the primary way in which they learned about environmental issues. Only a few mothers said that they had no formal education on environmental issues. Many mothers also

perceived that being well-educated in general allowed them to have the ability to read more critically and better understand and recognize environmental issues. Having done their own research, many mothers could understand what the statistics in a given study could show ethically and use their personal judgment to consider whether a study had merit.

Work: A number of mothers who worked for environmental organizations shared that they learned about issues while on the job by reading information that came across their desks or talking with colleagues. Mothers said that when they were being exposed to so much information on the environment, it was hard not to absorb it and apply it to their own lives. Some mothers whose work involved informing others about environmental issues said that in the process of teaching others, the more they understood about environmental issues themselves. Those working in the environmental field spoke more about knowing others who were more knowledgeable about certain environmental issues than themselves. "Over the years of living in D.C. and traveling around the country I've developed a rolodex of people that are more knowledgeable that I can drop a line to. When I don't know something, I always try and find someone who does and learn as much as I can," said Jessica, a mother working at an environmental consulting firm and an environmental health news agency. When mothers did not have jobs pertaining to environmentalism, they were more likely to say that they did not know of others who were more informed than they were about environmental issues. Some mothers attended conferences and seminars to learn about issues affecting people more generally or for work-related matters.

Media and Internet

For becoming generally informed about environmental issues, many participants utilized the Internet and read print media. In addition to reflecting on their information seeking practices, many mothers expressed suspicion regarding much of the information that they found online and in print media and reflected on how they make meaning of a source's credibility.

Information seeking: First, mothers described that an issue in the general news would catch their attention about which they would want to learn more. Then, once they were curious about a topic, mothers would often turn to the Internet to actively search for as much information about it as they could to answer any questions that they had. Often interviewees shared that there is so much to pay attention to regarding environmental issues that they will spend their time searching for additional information on that which is most important to them. When mothers received unsolicited information in the mail or online regarding environmentalism, they said that they did not generally read it and did not know why others sending the information to them would think that they would. Even when mothers had subscribed to an online newsletter or donated to an environmental organization, they shared that although they thought that they would read more of the information provided to them, that they did not end up doing so. Reasons mothers expressed for not reading this information included that they wound up just skimming over things receiving too many email messages, not knowing if they trusted the source of the information, and not having the time to act on or interest in the issues being addressed if they did not perceive them to be personally relevant.

Only a few mothers said that more often than not they did not actively search for information, but rather read what came to them because it was easier and took less time.

These mothers expressed that they would like to put into practice information sent to them by others, but just had not spent the time to do their own research. A mother who recently moved across the country and was spending her first year trying to adjust to her new environment, Daphne shared that sometimes she uses the information provided to her because "if the resources are there in front of you, it makes it a whole lot easier than if you have to search them out because it just takes a huge amount of time to search these things out."

Media: The large majority of mothers also said that they initially gained awareness or had a heightened sense of awareness regarding environmental issues through the news or mainstream media. Some mothers cited Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* as being pivotal in alerting them to and making them more aware of environmental issues. Mothers described Al Gore's movie as "a very important thing" or "a turning point" for them. Other mothers spoke of a commercial that they had seen that had struck a chord with them causing them to not want to contribute to the damage that was taking place. Print media sources utilized by mothers included magazines, the newspaper, newsletters, books, and in a few cases scientific journals. A couple of mothers cited a specific book that they had read that had inspired them to be more environmentally active. Some mothers also mentioned watching the news from both national and international news outlets and documentaries and listening to National Public Radio for environmental information. Print media sources were not generally used by mothers when they had specific concerns because they did could not find information as easily as they could online.

Internet: When participants had a specific question based on an issue of which they had become aware, they reported that they turned to the Internet where they used search engines such as Google or Yahoo as their starting point to find credible information. While online, mothers would look at websites for news, health, and environmental organizations. Mothers shared that the advantages of using the Internet to search for information included that they already spent a majority of their time online, there was a plethora of information to be found online, and information could be accessed and double checked quickly, easily, and free of charge.

Additionally, some mothers participated in online forums and read list serves as well as product reviews posted online. Although some mothers would read communication presented in online mediums, they reported that they did not often post reviews themselves. Mothers explained that while the Internet was useful for seeking out information, they did not often discuss their personal views online.

Suspicion: Many mothers voiced suspicion regarding much of the information on environmental issues provided by the media, environmental organizations, and businesses. They shared that they did not think that media was taking the opportunities presented to educate the public. Reasons articulated by many mothers for this distrust mostly were connected to mothers' perception that money was the greatest driving force in culture in the United States. Mothers who had lived or traveled abroad expressed that they had witnessed that the society in other countries was not always as governed by businesses as in the United States.

Some mothers voiced their concern about whether organizations such as the Federal Drug Administration and Environmental Protection Agency were actually

functioning as environmental protection agencies and speculated that perhaps the agencies were being paid by organizations to avoid inspection. Some mothers felt that the media, environmental agencies, and organizations were acting in concert to continue to let businesses take precedence in society. Quite a few mothers expressed cynicism regarding making financial donations to and trusting decisions made by environmental agencies. For example, Monica, who no longer gave financial donations to environmental organizations after spending time working in the environmental field, stated, "Because I worked in conservation or nonprofit organizations for a number of years, I was pretty cynical about how they were using my funds and not that interested in giving money. My primary area of support for, in terms of giving is …animal organizations." Monica related that she thought that much of what went on in the environmental agencies where she had worked was "lip service"; and so, she would rather take actions in her own life than support these organizations that may not have environmental interests high up on their agenda.

Also, although many mothers tried to purchase organic products for their families, there was some doubt shared regarding the legitimacy of the organic label arising from the notion that organizations were more motivated to make a profit than care for the health of those who consumed their goods. One mother, Agnes, asked rhetorically, "Do they really know that this is organic? Okay, they paid their money. Okay, you can use that symbol, but nobody is out there checking. So, that is where the confidence in the rating system is decreased because you know that the FDA isn't doing their job just in general." In addition, some mothers felt that organizations tried to capitalize on the trend of individuals trying to appear that they are environmentally active by using terminology

to brand things as being good for the environment and producing items that were not actually needed, but marketed to those influenced by the trend of environmentalism. Explaining why she does not buy products just because of their organic label, Ladonna said, “Even Whole Foods, I feel like they can be a little for me I call it too extra when it comes too organic organic. I call it extra because I feel like they are forcing it in your face. They want you to buy it because it is organic.” Not fully trusting environmental information, many mothers were left with doubt about the decisions that they were making in their efforts to live a life that reflected their personal values of minimizing their impact on the environment.

A perception shared by mothers was that media facilitated the efforts of politicians and big business. Too influenced by politicians or organizations motivated primarily to receive support or increase their bottom line, some mothers sensed that media were not providing people with information so that individuals would remain dependent on the consumer culture existing in our society. There was general agreement among the mothers that media were not doing a good job informing people about environmental issues or educating them on environmental choices they could make. One concern expressed by Maris was that media purposely “kept people oblivious and ignorant,” which resulted in a lack of interest or perceived lack of efficacy by people in making environmentally friendly changes. Other mothers said that media sometimes missed opportunities to inform the public about ways in which their personal behavior could be connected to the global picture. Expressing her frustration about the media’s lack of educating people, Keeley provided an example of a time when the media did not

use an opportunity to inform the public about alternatives for food choices in news about President Barack Obama's garden at the White House saying,

> *"I mean like the whole Obama's having a garden at the White House I really think that that story was under-utilitized, under-played. It became more about how, oh, they're planning a garden at the White House how sweet is that. You know Eleanor Roosevelt did that, but that was a perfect opportunity to talk about organic gardening or how we can lessen our dependence or reduce our demand on food production as a country by having our own gardens. You know that was the perfect opportunity that got wasted because it was just another fun story, but it really didn't I don't think give people tools or new suggestions. It is almost like they are trying to be unbiased about it because they are not clear that there is an environmental issue."*

Rather than addressing environmental problems as a true concern, it was noted by some mothers that the media presented environmental issues as a debate or by using "scare tactics," which served to maintain the status quo because people were too frightened and felt powerless. Describing her perception that the media was presenting the viewpoints of both environmentalists and those looking to make a profit by using our country's resources as having valid arguments, Carol stated, "the media…have well here's what the global warming critics say. Here's what the global warming others say. Like it is a balanced argument where it is nowhere near being a balanced argument." Desiring that the media would teach rather than use scare tactics or present issues as a debate, similarly, Keeley expressed:

> *"I think a lot of the mainstream media stuff is really about the big picture things and I don't even know that I think they do a really good job of helping people to see how their personal behavior is connected. I think it just kind of seems like it is a big scientific debate or a scare tactic about what's happening. I wish that they would spend more time giving small examples of little things that we can do and those little things end up increasing the quality of life anyway."*

In Keeley's statement, you can also see the importance that she believes that communication that is personally relevant would have in reaching people.

Perceiving that media were not providing enough education and having a feeling that research presented was often backed by companies trying to push their agenda of making a profit, many mothers felt that it was important for them to engage in educating themselves on environmental issues and on how to increase their environmental activity. Maris reflected many mothers' sentiment that they needed to educate themselves because of not receiving adequate education on environmental issues when she said, "You can produce any information… that's backed by this organization… They're gonna say whatever they want… So, it's not credible anymore. So, you kind of have to do your own research."

Source credibility: Participants made meaning of source credibility as consistency across sources, transparency, reputation of a source, and personal judgment. Although many mothers still did not find most information to be credible, they mentioned that they believed that information was becoming more credible over time.

Consistency across sources: Consistency across sources emerged as a major theme when the participants expressed how they determined the credibility of information. In deciding if information was credible, the mothers described how although they wished that it were possible, they could not entirely trust any one source and needed to double check information provided in one source to see if it was the same in a variety of other types of sources ranging from more mainstream sources to those that were less popular. Many mothers shared that they were skeptical of most information and found it hard to determine the credibility of a single source in isolation from other information. If enough other sources agreed with a source, mothers tended to trust that the information was credible. For example, Paula said, "I constantly always read several

different things to see if the information is consistent across the board and if most of the answers are being consistent, then you know it is more than likely that's about what it is." Janet spoke of how she used the Internet to check for the consistency of information across sources stating, "the whole world has changed now that there's Internet. And so, you can read ratings. So, if you read …100 reviews of something and they all sort of say the same thing, then that makes it credible. But if they …all go different ways, then they don't." Mothers seemed to rely on others' reviews of their experiences with an item in making decisions believing that if enough people felt a certain way that it was more likely to be credible.

Reputation of source: When information is provided by organizations that the mothers already find to be credible due to past experience or is found to be credible by someone whom the mother trusts, mothers appeared to find it to have greater veracity. Some mothers shared that they trusted in information from sources such as *Consumer Reports* and National Public Radio because they had grown up in homes where these sources were considered to be credible. As Josie puts it, "I trust public radio. It is just the way it is. My parents listened to public radio. I was just raised on it." On a similar note, even though she has not been satisfied with some suggestions made by *Consumer Reports*, Janet claimed that, "It is from my childhood. Consumer Reports has been around forever. So, to me, Consumer Reports is huge. … they have a lot of reputation that comes before them. …I bought some things from them that weren't that great that they recommended. That hasn't decreased their credibility for me." Other mothers said that they have favorite scientific reporters or news organizations like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* whom they tend to always trust and do not feel they need

to double check. Although it is their preference to get information from these reporters, mothers shared that they will use other information, but need to research what they have read before they can rely on it.

Personal judgment: Often, mothers with more of a background in environmental science valued when they were able to use their personal judgment to assess a source to have a sound scientific basis. For this reason, these mothers would look for primary sources from known scientific experts to gather their information and then use personal judgment to assess it. Valuing a sound scientific basis in establishing credibility for a source, Julie, an aquatic eco-toxicologist, explained, "I go to primary first because I want to read the actual scientific article, whatever someone wrote about it. If it was peer-reviewed, I trust it more than I do someone's blog." Other mothers appeared to be shy about admitting that their personal judgment factors into determining a source's credibility. One case of this is when Daphne shared that while she does not think that it should, her common sense about the world plays a role in whether she believes information. Others said that they weeded through information based on what seemed to make sense to them to find credible news. Some mothers deemed information to be more credible in general than others.

Transparency: Some mothers expressed that the more transparent that it was, the more a source could be more trusted. If an organization was considered to be very open by providing information easily accessible by the public such as its mission and philosophy, efficacy in achieving its mission, and/or its use of proceeds to support environmental issues; and, if mothers could therefore feel like they knew a company's agenda, the participants expressed that they would loyally trust in and support the

organization. For example, Shoshana said, "if it is a large organization that has shown themselves to be effective in their mission and hasn't misused charitable contributions…, … that would be a big benchmark." When mothers did not know who was funding research, they reflected on how they found it difficult to determine the credibility of it.

RQ4. How do the "environmentally conscious mothers"' various identities impact how they make meaning of communication around environmental issues?

Minority

Parameters for conversation: Perceiving themselves to be in the minority regarding their environmental views, some participants shared that environmental issues are not generally a huge topic of conversation for them with individuals whom they do not think share their concerns. Mothers said that discussions on environmental issues can occasionally become "tense" or "touchy" when they talk with people who are not like-minded. For example, when I asked Keeley how she feels discussing the environment with her friends and family, she responded, "I think it is a little touchy because I feel like you are quickly labeled as being sort of eccentric and maybe overly concerned about something that either a) is not as big of a deal as people like myself think it is or b) overly concerned about something that we really can't stop the pace with."

Not wanting to cause tension, the mothers sometimes did not speak about environmentalism with others whom they perceived that the topic could be one of discord. For instance, Cade shared that she does not discuss environmental issues with her mother, whom she described as not an environmentalist and very pro big business, because it can become a source of conflict for them. Another reason cited for why

mothers do not speak to others who do not share their environmental views about environmentalism is that they felt that there was not much that they could do to convince someone to be more environmentally active. "It is really hard to talk someone into being more environmentally conscientious. …because I think that they wouldn't be committed to doing it. …If they are committed, they will do it. If they're not, there's nothing I can do to change their attitude about it," Daphne articulated regarding why she does not talk to others about being more environmentally active. Especially when they do not know people very well, Candace and Keeley shared that they refrain from discussing their standpoints on environmentalism.

Many mothers said that they will mostly only discuss environmental issues if others express an interest or it happens to come up in the course of conversation. For some mothers, environmental communication is not prevalent because environmentalism is conceptualized as just the way they live and not a topic for conversation. These mothers shared that they prefer to take action than talk. When environmental issues are addressed in conversations with individuals whom they perceive to be not as interested environmentally, some mothers said that they do not tend to go into much detail. Other mothers said that they feel like they are not getting their message across at times if they do speak of the issues. Carol said that some of her friends and many of her co-workers who are not as aware or concerned environmentally look at her strangely when she voices her opinions on environmental issues. Some of the mothers, however, say that they have no problem discussing environmental issues even when others do not seem interested and informed people wherever possible. Some environmental issues are easier for mothers to discuss than others. Janet shared that it is easier for her to talk about environmental

issues of which more people are aware such as recycling or which are trendy such as solar panels than it is to talk about less popular issues such as storm water run-off, which she feels not as many people understand because it is not as visible.

Not wanting to alienate other people, participants said that they try to be sensitive regarding the manner in which they convey thoughts about the environment to them. Relating the sensitivity that she has when talking to others about environmental issues, Corinne voiced that she is open to hearing disagreement from others and does not expect anyone to think in the way that she does or share her values. Mothers described the efforts they took to try not to "preach" or be "pushy" discussing environmental issues. One strategy that mothers reported using in their efforts to be "polite" in communicating about environmentalism is to slip information into the conversation about small things that can be done. Referring to themselves as being passionate and opinionated, mothers said that they try not to be overwhelming or insult others about the choices that they choose to make. Some mothers related that when they see specific things that they believe that others can do to be make better environmental choices, they try to assist in their efforts. By assisting rather than "judging" or "preaching," mothers said that they believe that they will be more able to get across the message that they have. In addition, when mothers can find a way to make the information personally relevant for the listener, they shared that they are more successful in enabling others to receive and understand environmental messages. Julie illustrated some of the above concepts well when she said,

> *"I try not to be overwhelming because I want people to change and I don't think that overwhelming them with information… will affect any change. …doing it little by little and offering help without seeming like you're offering help and trying to make it seem like it's their idea, …and also*

> *trying to make it seem like it's more beneficial for them to do things another way. Whether it's for their personal gain or for the greater good of their kid or the world…, but not trying to change their ways by just saying that you should be doing it this way because should is different for everyone."*

Several mothers said that they express their environmentalism by talking about their actions or things that they are doing rather than sharing their personal views.

Some mothers shared that they have been surprised when others have been receptive to their communication attempts. Selah, for example, said that while she was initially hesitant because she thought that other people would be resistant, once she started to teach and provide examples to other people that they changed their ways easily being able to better understand the reasons for their actions. Other mothers, however, reported learning to be less vocal about environmental issues after not having their opinions welcomed in social interactions. For instance, Keeley described a situation in which she realized the importance of being mindful of who is present in a larger group discussion when considering whether to share information relating to environmental activity disclosing,

> *"I made a comment to somebody that I noticed that Target started selling organic cotton clothing. …And, one mom was like, I'm really not into that. I remember thinking to myself not into what like organic cotton tees, into what I'm talking about. Clearly, she was not interested in me going any further in my conversation. …So, I'm very careful to not seem like I'm pushing my agenda onto people who don't really care if I have to be in like an intimate circle with them."*

Many mothers shared the ease that they felt in discussing environmental issues and concerns with their like-minded friends and other individuals whom they believe are also concerned about the environment. Some mothers living in areas that are more progressive and environmentally conscious shared that it is an expectation that others at least will be polite if you bring up environmental issues with them. Although some

mothers shared that they engage in dialogue frequently with like-minded others, other mothers said that there is no need to "preach to the choir" when family and friends already know and share their concerns. According to the participants, environmental communication is not initiated often by other people perhaps because other individuals do not see environmentalism as an issue or are not interested. It was common for mothers to say that they thought that other people in their lives did not care.

Labeling: Another theme that emerged in their environmental communication as a minority of environmentally concerned mothers was *labeling*, which had negative connotations for many of the mothers. Thus, the mothers shared that they tend not to use labels to describe their environmentalism. Labels are conceptualized of as terms to fit people into boxes or categories when people are actually much more complicated and do not all fit into neatly packaged units.

Some mothers shared that they are labeled by other people for their environmental views. When labeled by others, mothers expressed that they feel like they are being trivialized or not being heard. For instance, Rebecca said regarding the labels that her friends who do not share her environmental concerns use to refer to her, "they like to call me 'hippie' or 'tree hugger' and those are their fun labels and boxes to put me in…those are irritating conversations because you're never listened to or taken seriously. It's more like condescending." Similarly, Maris said that when people called her a treehugger or made similar comments about how she was an idealist, she thought that others did not care about environmental issues. A few participants shared that when they are referred to by terms, they become aware that their actions symbolize things to other people when in fact the mothers do not think of themselves or their interests in this manner. Keeley

shared that she felt that other individuals in college over-generalized when they labeled her saying,

> *"In college, …when my braids came out and people realized that I didn't straighten my hair, I think you start getting put into this category of like the natural people. … I was really ignorant of that that having twists in your hair symbolizes something. And then, G-d forbid when I became an Africana studies major in college, then it was like you're definitely one of those mother earth people and listening to Erica Badu. It just all kind of sealed the deal for me. I just thought that people were over-generalizing. There were tons of people who shared my interests. All of a sudden you're a feminist, but you're not."*

When asked what they thought about the term "EcoMom," many mothers said that they do not use the term to refer to themselves, but would consider themselves to be what they think that the word symbolizes. Preferring not to use a word to label herself, Naomi explained, "I don't know that I would put a bumper sticker that said 'EcoMom' on my car, but if somebody said are you an EcoMom, I would say yeah." Interestingly, mothers made meaning of the term "EcoMom" in different ways. For example, Julie, who had recently started a group called "Eco-Mom," said had used this term for the group name because the word is "a nice, soft, friendly way of saying 'this is what I believe in; this is what I stand for.'" Agnes, however, expressed that she finds the word to be extreme and aggressive and not appropriate for all contexts. Although Agnes might use the word when with a group of other "environmentally conscious mothers," she would not use it in a general realm. Agnes also said that she thought that the term is putting an extra emphasis on mom when no reiteration is needed because mothers should be aware of the environment in which they are raising their children. Cade, who touched on issues of gender discrimination throughout my conversation with her, asserted that women are labeled much more often than are men and perhaps by using the prefix eco to modify mom, it debases environmentalism given that the conceptualization of mom is

already so devalued in our society. Explaining that terms such as "EcoMom" are not for her because they imply that her identity can fit into a neat category, Ladonna stated, "It turns me off because it is saying that that is all I am and that's not all that I am. I am more than that; however, it is a part of who I am. I don't like labels because I always feel like if you label me, I'm already that and that's it." Some mothers shared that they thought that the term "EcoMom" was a trendy term that mothers might try on for size, but not stick with over the long run. Perhaps, mothers using the term "EcoMom" might be able to rally around it and want to use it to express that they are part of a larger community of mothers shared Naomi and Paula. Most of the mothers said or implied through their questions that they had never heard of the term before. Several participants also shared that they do not need products to be labeled as "organic" and sometimes are skeptical of the organic label.

Race

Some black mothers shared that they view the commodification of environmentalism in American society as being an upper socioeconomic class, white thing, when this is not the case in other societies. For example, a Caribbean mother, Keeley stated, "I think that if people go to the Caribbean or people talk to Rastifarians, it is like so common. It is like they would never even call it green. It is just the way that they think that you are supposed to live." Some black mothers said that due to the way in which environmentalism is framed in the United States that the black community can be turned off thinking that white people are trying to change or manipulate them. Keeley and Ladonna spoke of being met with resistance when they have brought up environmental issues for discussion with other black mothers. They veer away from

using terminology associated with environmentalism as it is defined in mainstream, white culture. Although the underlying premise of not wasting resources is the same, the language with which these black mothers talk of the issues is different reflecting their meaning making. In fact, Keeley said that in Guyana, where she was raised, they do not have a word like environmentalism because it is just how everyone lives out of necessity. Conversely, Maris, Selah, and Nabeeha spoke of their use of terms such as "green," "natural," and "eco-friendly." Selah explained that she uses words like "green" because everyone can understand them whereas Maris and Nabeeha said that the first words that come to mind for them when they think about their environmentalism are "green," "solar," and "eco-friendly" with Nabeeha using the words "green queen" to describe herself.

A commonality that emerged in interviews with black mothers was that caring about the environment was nothing new and that it had been framed as a new thing by white culture, but was really going back to basics. These mothers spoke of how their families had been very environmentally conscious for generations. One African-American mother, Rasima, explained how especially African-Americans who came from the South like her family were very environmentally aware,

> *"My grandparents on both sides came from Arkansas. We're really close to the land and I think that we are some of the most environmentally aware and environmentally conscious people that I know. I mean I grew up eating organic fruits because everybody had a garden. We didn't need a fancy movement to make it like oh, you're green. To us, it is like duh. That's what you do. … I think in general this segment of our community is very rooted and very environmentally aware."*

A few black mothers expressed that they did not appear in the mainstream media on environmentalism. This is again an example of how black mothers may be invisible in environmentalism as conceived in the United States. For example, Keeley described the

frustration that she feels not seeing a single black person pictured in the marketing literature indicating that there are not any black people interested in the audience. In speaking about one commercial she had seen, Maris said, however, "I think it is targeted to people of all cultures. It has children here from all different backgrounds." Mothers appeared to be cognizant of those who were present and those who were not in the media that they viewed. A few African-American mothers reported that they felt that the media spoke to them even though it did not target them specifically and a few mothers verbalized that they felt that they could not relate as much. Selah and Maris said that environmental issues are human, not racial. Thus, although they were not pictured in environmental communication materials, Maris and Selah said that what is being discussed will impact them. Although mothers of other racial backgrounds sometimes also said that they did not relate to the media, their reasons were not based on race, but rather on a lack of trust in the media.

Based on the way in which environmentalism is framed in the United States, it may be possible that some black mothers perceive that they are an "anomaly" in terms of being more environmentally concerned than other black mothers and that they are on the forefront of the movement. These black mothers may in fact be on the forefront of black participation in environmentalism as it has been conceptualized and communicated in mainstream (white) culture when in fact there are other black mothers who are environmentally friendly, but they do not look at their actions in the same framework. For some black mothers, the experience of being more environmentally concerned than others in their families and community seemed to be heightened. Some black mothers, for example shared how they felt like the "anomaly" or the "exception to the rule."

Sharing her perception that there were not many other African-American "environmentally conscious mothers," Nabeeha said, "A lot of the stores that I'll shop at like Whole Foods or Trader Joe's, I'll see a lot of people of Caucasian or Asian descent shopping there." Black mothers voiced that they wanted to encourage other black mothers to be more environmentally concerned. At another point in the interview, Nabeeha elaborated on this hopefulness to be on the forefront of a movement in the African-American community to be more environmentally concerned saying, "I can kind of be a pioneer... It is a small group of us who are trying to do it, but not enough. …I can kind of be at the forefront of the movement and try to bring others along with me. I would like to see the African-Americans just be a little bit more involved." One African-American mother, Selah, expressed that she was surprised that there were other environmentally active African-American mothers:

> *"You never know who is an environmentalist. …you have one picture of who she looks like, but you don't know until you actually speak to someone. It's been very surprising… a pleasant surprise. …I never thought African-American mothers would be environmentalists. It is just because you know the way that we grow up and sometimes the education that we get or don't get. I always thought it was the typical like hippie bohemian or laid back or relaxed, but not all environmental moms are like that obviously."*

Selah's comment also reflects her perception that African-American mothers may not be as carefree as white mothers, which was shared by other African-American mothers as an obstacle to their environmental activity in terms of their need to focus primarily on survival.

Ladonna, Keeley, Rasima, and Selah shared that they and other black mothers make meaning of their environmental behavior as "*doing what your grandma did."* Raised by their grandmothers, Ladonna, Keeley, and Selah saw their grandmothers as

being the primary source of influence in their lives. These mothers said that if they talk to other black mothers about doing what their grandmothers did, that they are much more responsive to talking about environmental issues than if they couch their viewpoints in the language of mainstream, white culture because they are aware that their grandmas were very conscious environmentally, but did not label or "preach about" their actions. "Once you start to label things, it becomes like this is what white people do and this is what black people do. But if you don't label it, it is still the same premise. Like, if your grandmother didn't do it, then don't do it. If you say that, they are much more receptive to it," explained Ladonna. In addition, environmental behavior may be seen as part of natural family living or attachment parenting according to some mothers. For instance, Keeley shared:

> *"I think that for just the friends I know if you were to use the term natural family living that would probably resonate with them more than saying environmentalist. It is all about natural and holistic family living. A lot of the moms in Southern D.C. Mocha Moms go hiking with their children, only use organic food, a lot of them are vegan, and these are all black women. So, they are a pretty green bunch."*

Again, the premise is the same while the language is different.

Both black and white mothers noticed the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in environmental groups in which they were active saying that everyone looked the same being white in race. Naomi, a Caucasian mother working in the conservation field, said that the diversity of people in her line of work is not representative of the general population in racial diversity. Some mothers pointed to an intersection that they saw between being of a higher socioeconomic class and being white saying that they were not sure if it was socioeconomic class or race that led to the lack of diversity in environmentalism in the United States. The same white mothers who acknowledged their

racial privilege spoke of the lack of diversity that they saw in the environmental field indicating their awareness of their racial identity. A black mother, Maris, described that when she went to environmental conferences, most of the people present were white saying, "There are mostly predominantly white and just sprinkled around a few other cultures and races." I wondered in what stage of racial identity formation Maris was when she later said,

> *"I think that a lot of the white population who were interested in it for example in college… or they come from socially concerned backgrounds I think they are really dominant in a lot of the organizations or these conferences because that's the background that they come from... And so, they're a lot more vocal and they're a lot more present. I think they are just the background to the change. So, I think the change will be if we really do make a change, I think that they will probably be the ones who do most of the changes for every aspect of the environment."*

Maris was the only black mother to state that she thought that the white population would be the ones who made the most changes for the environment. Some black mothers expressed a concern that they would not fit in with other environmentally active mothers who tended to be white. For example, Keeley shared that she was worried about the diversity at her son's school because it was "like 98% white," but found that once she got to know the white mothers there that she realized that they have common concerns.

Another black mother, Ladonna, explained that the reason why she is part of Java Mamas, a group for "mothers of color" rather than a general mothers group is that when she went to a mothers group, she found that the mothers there were predominantly white and she did not feel like they connected with her experience as a black mother. In Ladonna's words,

> *"I didn't feel like they connected with me as what we go through… I go through. …It is kind of uncomfortable when you have to explain*

> *something because you feel like you're having to explain yourself and you just want to be comfortable. You don't want to have to explain yourself. You just want to talk and have the person at least meet you where you are even if they don't agree. They can at least meet you where you are. So, that's why I joined Java Mamas*[9]*."*

In Ladonna's comment, it appeared that Ladonna makes meaning both through her connection to the experience of other black mothers in her group as well as through her own personal experience. Also, here as Ladonna's speaking, she soon starts to discuss racial relations more transparently saying,

> *"You can just be yourself. You don't have to hold anything in or worry about who's saying anything wrong. …I'm talking about racial now. That's a lot of the problem with racial relations because people always feel like they have to hold back and you don't really, especially if you're saying I'm not coming from a place where I'm trying to hurt you. If I'm saying something hurtful, please tell me. Don't hold back, but it is too hard."*

For Ladonna, her identity as a black woman comes into play when she is thinking about her role as an "environmentally conscious mother." At Java Mamas, Ladonna said that she finds that she can just be herself without having to explain herself.

Geography

Likewise, mothers living in very conservative areas described the oppression that they experienced in their communities given their environmental views. Describing her transition to living in a conservative city after moving from a progressive area in California, Corinne said that she was able to meet other people feeling oppressed in the area and found that there existed a counterculture of people who had similar "lifestyle choices" to her own. Mothers living in politically conservative areas experienced being outsiders in their environmental communication at a heightened level compared to other

[9] For purposes of confidentiality, the quote has been modified to include the pseudonym for this group in the study.

mothers interviewed saying that they hesitate especially living where they do to speak about environmental issues knowing that it is likely that they will not share the same views with other people with whom they interact. As an example, Daphne, who desired to get to know other mothers in the community where she had recently moved, said that she does not want to get into conflict and thus does not talk about the issues. Daphne also shared that she has learned over the years that it is easier to first get to know people and then share her environmental views rather than the other way around because people are more likely to listen once she has relationships with them.

Mothers living in socially conservative communities or in urban, low-income communities expressed that they did not feel that there was anywhere in their communities where they could turn if they were concerned about environmental issues. Eve, who has needed to move to a new location every few years because of her husband's profession, also shared that she did not know where to turn because she did not feel like she had a community. Perceiving a lack of place to turn regarding their environmental concerns, some of these mothers shared that they would discuss things with their husbands or read online to find information. One mother started a blog to discuss concerns which she feels are more general and talk about things she has observed. For Keeley, a Caribbean-American mother, the blog is "a cathartic thing where I sit down and I write and I kind of talk about what I'm thinking about." Other mothers said that while there were places that they could turn, they had not used such resources because their environmental behavior is more personal and related only to what they could do for their families and in their own households.

Gender

Only a few white mothers shared that they felt that they were not heard because of their gender and for this reason could relate to discrimination experienced by black mothers. One white mother, Lynette, provided an example of when she related to a black man about not being heard saying,

> *"I had a young man that was an African-American come up to me one day and he said, when I'm dealing with the contractors, he said I don't know whether they think it is because I'm African-American or because I'm an architect that they really don't have to listen to me. That was the first time that a male had said something like that to me. I was like oh, welcome to the club. I don't know whether it is because I'm an architect or because I'm a woman that guys won't listen to me."*

Some white mothers also expressed their frustration that they perceive that men do not take their environmental fears seriously considering their concerns about the environment as hysterics rather than as being based in fact.

Chapter Six – Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this exploratory research was first and foremost to provide a space in which "environmentally conscious mothers" could be heard and express themselves in their own voices. I sought to give voice to a population, namely "environmentally conscious mothers," which is so often oppressed and trivialized. In this study, I examined the avowed identity markers of "environmentally conscious mothers," how "environmentally conscious mothers" self-define their own environmental roles, how "environmentally conscious mothers" make meaning of their engagement in environmental issues and activity, what channels of communication "environmentally conscious mothers" rely on to increase their environmental awareness and discuss environmental concerns, and how the "environmentally conscious mothers"' various identities impact how they make meaning of communication around environmental issues.

Guided by feminist standpoint and ecofeminist epistemologies, this study utilized qualitative methodology to explore "environmentally conscious mothers"' personal experiences. Thirty-six in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with mothers of varying races, ethnicities, religions, socioeconomic classes, educational backgrounds, geographies, ages, and marital statuses. Research conducted on publics, identity, culture and meaning making, mothers' engagement in environmental communication and activity, communication channels, and source credibility served as the theoretical framework in which the study was situated. Implications for practice involved a need for more personal relationship building to occur, a need for greater

listening to and understanding of individuals, and an attention to issues of diversity to be increased.

I will discuss the findings and their implications for research and practice in this chapter. In addition, I will outline how this study extends previous research, illustrate possible ways in which the findings can be used in practice pertaining to publics, and share ideas for future research on publics.

Self-Defined Environmental Role

"Environmentally conscious mothers" make meaning of their environmental role as being apart from and different than mainstream culture in the United States. Findings suggested that the majority of the mothers in the study were part of an active public feeling a high level of personal involvement and awareness of the issues and finding a way to work around many of the personal constraints that they faced in order to be able to be engaged in environmental activity and communication (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The participants shared that they saw themselves as being more passionate, committed, conscientious, conscious, and concerned regarding environmental issues than other people in their families and communities. Their environmental role was a part of them that they reported that they could not separate from themselves and was a lens through which they looked at all matters in their lives.

Not perceiving that the mass public was being educated by the media or by governmental institutions about the environmental choices that they had in order to maintain dependence on big businesses, the mothers voiced that they had taken it upon themselves as a responsibility to be as informed as possible about environmental issues and joined together to raise their environmental consciousness. Mothers spoke of the

importance of being well informed and on the issue as a whole, not just one side of the issue. They wanted to make well informed decisions rather than address the issues as reactionaries, were naturally inquisitive, and believed that it was part of their role as mothers to be educated so that they could share the knowledge with their children. The participants made meaning of their environmental engagement as a form of social justice and saw it as being connected to addressing their health concerns. For some mothers, there was more of a feeling of uncertainty regarding efficacy in addressing the issues, while other mothers felt that every little change added up to make a difference. Some mothers felt that we had reached or were close to a point of no return in terms of environmental degradation. Many mothers shared that they were only actively addressing environmental issues as a source of concern perceiving that without the environment, nothing else mattered.

A Need for a Focus on the Personal

Communication: There is a need in public relations scholarship and practice to focus more on communicating with the individual. Mothers cited that firsthand experience was the most relevant in making them aware of environmental issues and influencing them to take environmental action. Firsthand experience was gained through involvement in the community, witnessing an environmental problem, traveling to countries where people think of resource use differently, educational experiences, a personal realization of being privileged and desire for equity in terms of access to resources, and work in the environmental field. Some mothers spoke of mentors whom they had had who helped them to gain environmental awareness that they had never forgotten because these individuals played such a tremendous influence in their lives.

Firsthand experience translated theory into practice for mothers. Many mothers described their environmental awareness as a gradual process with some mothers not remembering when they first became aware because it seemed to them that they had been aware all of their lives. Through their personal experience, they had gained awareness. Generally, what we come to care about is that which we can see in the immediate surrounding us and which we find to be personally relevant. Mothers perceived a lack of environmental awareness in both affluent and poor communities and in both urban and small town communities, but found that the lack of awareness was due to the same premise that people will not fully understand or care about that which they cannot see.

There was a common consensus that individuals cannot be communicated with on a mass level if they are to learn anything meaningful. It was possible though to initially get participants' awareness through the media. Although participants relied on print media and the Internet for becoming generally informed about environmental issues, they turned to their own Internet searching or personal communication sources when they had a specific question. There was a preference expressed for personal communication to discuss environmental concerns, to learn about local issues, and to converse regarding how to make decisions. An interesting finding is that many mothers reported not reading information that they received to which they felt that they had no personal connection or which was sent out to a mass audience. This finding suggests that in order to reach this group, it may be necessary to engage in more personalized forms of communication. In addition, while a few mothers preferred to not have to seek out the information, they still wanted it to be personally relevant. These findings suggest that rather than approaching relationship building with or knowledge dissemination to publics through a top-down

method with an emphasis on communicating the organization's message, it is essential that approaches to communication with publics, and more importantly individuals, focus more on listening and engaging in publics-centered dialogue (Dutta, 2007, p. 322).

Personal activism: A concept offered by the participants through which they made meaning of their environmental activity was personal activism, which has not been explored much in the literature in the field of public relations. Participants appeared to distinguish their role as personal activists or advocates from activism viewing it as more personal and less public. Although some participants shared that they felt that personal activism could go hand in hand with activism, other mothers felt that these two strategies were at odds with one another, which supports Mullen's (1994) findings that although some participants were able to combine their personal activism with more public forms of activism, others saw these two forms of activism as conflicting. Additionally, some mothers voiced that they felt that what they could do in their individual lives to work for change could have a much greater impact than public forms of activism. Personal activism was defined by the participants as becoming well informed about environmental issues and translating their awareness of environmentalism into actions in their everyday lives. As Sowards and Renegar (2006) assert, it is possible for individuals to engage in activism by simply living their lives in a way that serves as social change (p. 68). Rather than trying to promote their agenda through public activism, mothers were taking control and being the change that they wanted to see in the world, which supports previous references to how other mothers working for environmental change perceived their actions (Zack, 2008). It appears that in light of not being heard and feeling dominated by

mainstream culture, many of the mothers felt a need to engage in social change to bring attention to societal problems (Sowards & Renegar, 2006, p. 59).

One way in which "environmentally conscious mothers" made meaning of their environmental role was as educators increasing awareness of environmental issues in their communities through which they hoped to create change. This educator role is congruent with women's need to nurture and provide suggestions and advice to each other (Hunt, 2006). According to Hunt (2006), women listen to each other. Through education, mothers perceived that they could gain more ability to make a difference. Some mothers said that the education that they had received enabled them to think critically about environmental issues and gain more awareness, others felt that their education and class level had resulted in their feeling of being removed from environmental problems and less connected, and others felt that it was elitist to indicate that their education had made a difference. Education took place both formally through workshops and lectures and informally by helping out other mothers within the community and serving as information resources within the community. Education of their children about environmental issues appeared to be considered to be a part of mothering, a mother's responsibility and natural inclination. For some mothers, teaching their children was seen as the greatest influence that they could have.

Some mothers perceived that their actions were a form of activism whereas other mothers did not want to associate with the term "activist" for various reasons such as associating the term with negative connotations or political activism, not feeling that others perceived them in that way, not perceiving themselves to have this identity because it was not in their framework through which they looked at themselves, feeling

low efficacy in changing other people's behavior and viewing their environmentalism as being personal which was not congruent with their perception of activism as being more public in nature, and not feeling that activism was the best approach to take to create dialogue around environmental issues. Perhaps, the conceptualization of an activist for some mothers was also not seen as fitting with their socially constructed feminine role in which they have been taught to not speak up and assert themselves or be pushy or domineering. Those mothers who did think that activism was a worthy avenue for engagement, but had not participated in what they perceived to be activism shared that it was because of constraints such as lack of time and disability.

Labeling: In making meaning of their environmental activity and communication, mothers focused on the personal. They did not want to be categorized with other mothers and labeled. Thus, they did not use terms such as "EcoMom" or "activist" to describe their environmentalism. Participants' resistance to the use of labels may actually be another form of their activism. According to Sowards and Renegar (2006), although rhetorical activism has traditionally been defined as involving public protests and argumentation, another form may be found in the resistance to labels and stereotypes (p. 58). Labels were perceived by the mothers as ways to fit people into boxes or categories when individuals were actually much more complex than a label would imply. Moreover, a number of mothers perceived labeling to be a form of discrimination in that it trivialized their concerns and made it so that they did not feel that they were being heard as individuals, but rather lumped together with a group of people from whom they felt unique in different ways even though they may share similar concerns. Already feeling discriminated against as a woman, one participant said that labels such as

"EcoMom" serve to further discriminate and not only debase women, but environmentalism as well. It is through the process of labeling that actions come to symbolize things for outsiders that they do not mean to individuals in the group being categorized and that stereotypes are formed.

Labels serve to simplify, which perhaps is not the best idea when we are becoming more and more diverse as a society. Furthermore, who is in the position to define whether something belongs to a socially constructed category or not? Individuals within the same "grouping" may make meaning of their identities in ways that are dissimilar and may not all fit into the stereotypes related to that "grouping" (Munshi & Edwards, 2011). If the hope is to reach out to individuals rather than to turn them away, it is important to not ascribe identities to them that they would not avow for themselves (Sha, 2006). It is possible that members of a group will want to associate with the label at times to unite around it or feel connection to others who share the label, but may not want it branded on them in a general context. It is a right that people have to choose what to be called and when. In addition, labels imply who is in the in-group and who is in the out-group when perhaps these divisions should not be made because all individuals fall somewhere on a spectrum rather than being in or out and identities can continuously change.

In the study, black mothers, for example, felt that labeling environmentalism caused it to be seen as a thing that was divisive in terms of distinguishing what behavior was "white" and what behavior was "black," which played out in who showed up for environmental conferences and meetings and who was portrayed in marketing about environmentalism. Although the discourse at the meetings covered concerns shared by

mothers of all racial groups according to the participants, the environmental movement continues to be painted as "lily white." If the only individuals though in an environmental group are white, one black mother shared that she is concerned that the other mothers will not be able to relate to what she goes through as a black mother causing this mother to seek out a community with other black mothers. Once mothers got to know each other on a more personal level, they found that they shared a connection with other mothers having the same concerns beyond those dictated by race.

Influence of personal identities: Findings indicated that the manner in which the participants make meaning of their environmental activity and communication is linked to their identities of being a minority in their environmental views and practices, maternal role, race, ethnicity, gender, spirituality, education, and geographies. I acknowledge here that identity is intersectional in nature, in flux, and fragmented; so, it is not possible to fully relate how identities influenced the meaning making process. I have outlined here the findings that were most evident in this study. Factors contributing to ways in which the participants shared that they experience difference or their comments led me to perceive that they experienced difference, which I questioned and clarified with the participants, were by and large race and geographical location. Of course, given that individuals cannot be labeled or categorized if we hope to keep from discriminating further, I realize that each individual's experience is not exactly the same as any other individual's. When people make meaning according to stereotypes and impose these beliefs onto others with whom they interact, these identities in turn lead to experiences of oppression and privilege. Although all mothers appeared to be in a minority based on

their environmental views, black mothers and mothers living in small, conservative areas seem to have experienced this to a heightened degree.

Race was a phenomenon of which many non-black mothers were not aware in their meaning making about their environmental activity and communication. Black and Hispanic mothers often felt that they were discriminated against not only because of their environmental role, but in conjunction with their race. In a society in which environmentalism is often socially constructed as belonging to white culture, these mothers felt that they needed to work twice as hard to be acknowledged as knowledgeable about environmental issues, even when they came to the field with the same qualifications. In a few instances, white mothers equated the discrimination that they feel on account of their gender with discrimination due to racial differences. Those white mothers who did speak of the influence of race on their meaning making of their role in environmentalism mostly spoke of the privilege and difference that they felt. Other white mothers either did not feel that race influenced their environmentalism or said that it was hard to see their race in a society in which the white race is so overpowering. Asian-American mothers in the study who were predominantly from the liberal and diverse communities in the San Francisco area acknowledged that living where they do, race has not been a factor in shaping their environmentalism or the way in which they view themselves, but that this could be the case if they lived in a different locale. Although all of the black mothers associated with race as an identity variable influencing their experience, the degree and manner in which race did influence their behavior and communication was likely to have varied based on individual meaning making. In addition, black mothers shared the unique obstacle that they had of needing

to focus on survival sometimes to the degree where their attention could not always be directed towards environmentalism. Mothers living in conservative areas also experienced discrimination and oppression not only due to their environmental views compared to those of mainstream society, but also due to living in a conservative area in which they were in the out-group further preventing them from engaging in dialogue regarding environmental issues.

Religion also appeared to be an identity variable influencing the manner in which some mothers made meaning of their environmentalism causing these mothers to feel a sense of responsibility to take care of the earth. For a few mothers, spirituality played an influence enabling these mothers to feel more connected to the world around them.

Motherhood

Increasingly, research is pointing to a cultural dictate that exists for mothers to experience an intensified awareness and engagement in environmental issues when they have children realizing that their actions will matter and be visible in the lives of their children (Gomez, Shafiei, & Johnson, 2011; Hutner, 2011; Miller-Schroeder, 2011; Ray, 2011; Schloss, 2008; Shaw, 2011). According to Stephenson, co-founder of an online environmental newsletter, “Having a baby is by far the most common entry point into the green lifestyle. People are by nature reluctant to make significant lifestyle changes, even when they know it is in the best interest of the environment – that is, until they bring a new life into the world, and then we find they’re open to change” (as cited in Zack, 2008, p. 2). Many women made meaning of environmentalism as part of their maternal role, one of nurturing, educating, and taking care of their children and their environment. This finding gives support to the assertion of Bell and Braun (2010) that the role of mothers in

environmentalism is as nurturers and protectors (p. 804). This theme emerged again strongly in this study with mothers often attributing their environmental activity to their maternal role. Becoming mothers, also made environmental activity more urgent for the participants because they wanted change to take place in the immediate rather than possibly somewhere down the road.

Presentation of Environmentalism

The manner in which environmentalism is portrayed in the media in the United States frames it as an upper class, white phenomenon according to black mothers in the study. Not only are some perspectives on environmentalism not included in the mainstream media in terms of the manner in which issues are addressed, but a few black mothers also spoke of their lack of presence in mainstream marketing and media about environmentalism. Although a few black mothers felt that they could still relate to the issues presented, other mothers had a hard time feeling a personal connection to the material. Those black mothers who felt that marketing and media spoke to them perceived environmental issues as being human rather than racial, but some mothers felt silenced and not addressed. This finding supports the ongoing work of scholars who have found problematic the discourses on environmentalism that have been for the most part representative of and supportive of the ways in which white, well-off publics have made meaning of this concept (Bullard, 2001; Milstein, Anguiano, Sandoval, Chen, & Dickinson, 2011; Pulido, 2000). The way in which environmentalism is communicated in mainstream culture in the United States does not resonate well with some members of the black community who do not want to be infiltrated by what they perceive to be white culture according to some black mothers in the study.

Increasingly, it is becoming evident in academic discourse that environmental behavior in African-American and Latino communities needs to be understood through a lens not in keeping with the way in which environmentalism has been traditionally framed in mainstream (white) culture (Novotny, 2000), which is especially true if we want to understand how people from all backgrounds and identities make meaning. An understanding of alternate ways of conceptualizing about environmentalism is crucial for our understanding of the role of non-white mothers in environmentalism. In addition, when we do not invite or when we even work as a society to silence alternative ways of making meaning compared to those of mainstream, white culture in the United States, this may result in misunderstandings and use of these misapprehensions to promote agendas that are not in the best interests of marginalized individuals. For example, Milstein et al. (2011) highlight in a study on the meaning making practices of Hispanic people living in the U.S. Southwest that politicians financed by industry characterized Hispanic people as being indifferent and even opposed to working to alleviate environmental problems and in turn justified their anti-environmental political stances reporting that they were in the best interests of the Hispanic populace which they represented, when in fact they were just not aware of the different ways in which Hispanic people conceptualized and practiced environmentalism (p. 487).

Although the premise of environmental activity is the same for black mothers in the study as for non-black mothers, the framework in which they look at environmentalism is different between these two groups of mothers, which is reflected in the language that they choose to use to speak about the subject. Again, this is not true for all black or non-black mothers and is influenced by how integrated mothers are into

mainstream culture in which white people tend to dictate the cultural norms surrounding environmentalism. Just as all people within a culture do not all share the same identities, no conceptualization of environmentalism will be the same for all individuals within a cultural group (Milstein et al., 2011, p. 490).

It is critical for producers of media, including public relations practitioners, to be mindful that the white lens is not the only way of seeing the world and that white people are not the only members of a public. According to Pompper (2004), as long as the unspoken norm is in essence white in our comprehension and engagement in public relations, other races will be pushed aside, not considered, and marked as "other" or "different." We need to stop looking at the white frame of reference as a general one.

Conceptualization of environmentalism within the black community appears to incorporate the role that grandmothers play in the lives of the youth. The findings of this study support Hunter's (1997) finding that grandmothers were often thought of in the black community as providing parental guidance and assistance with child care. Perceiving their grandmothers to be the primary source of influence in their lives, black mothers in the study reported using words such as "*doing what your grandma did*" or natural family living in discussing their environmental activity with other black mothers. O'Mara (2005) describes natural family living saying that it is:

> *"discovering what is natural for each individual. …I don't want parents to think that they must follow rules in order to be good at parenting. …natural family living is not a movement, a fad, or a custom. It is about getting back to our roots as humans and rediscovering the parenting skills that have sustained humans throughout history and prehistory" (p. 8).*

This definition sums up the findings as well in this study regarding how mothers made meaning of natural family living. Once again, parenting practices adopted by the mothers as the participants themselves reported were not the same for all mothers and did not

need to fit into a prescribed behavior set to be considered as parenting in a natural manner. Mothers made meaning of their behavior and engaged in behavior on a personal level.

Although some black mothers expressed that they were on the forefront of environmentalism in black communities, other black mothers perceived caring for the earth to be nothing new for black people. According to Mohai (2003), it is a myth that many people have that African-American people are not as environmentally concerned as white people. In fact, researchers have discovered that there is a similar level of concern expressed by African Americans and Latinos as whites regarding environmental issues other than issues that affect people in their local communities where they found that there was greater concern among African Americans and Latinos, who resided in communities where there were more likely to be environmental problems (Mohai & Bryant, 1998; Whittaker, Segura, & Bowler, 2005). Again, this lends support to the concept that people will not care about what they do not find to be personally relevant or cannot see. The finding that environmentalism is not a new phenomenon is in keeping with studies that have taken place all around the world (Ghimire & Mohai, 2005) leading to the possibility that the manner in which environmentalism is commoditized in the United States may be unique.

Communication Practices

A common theme that emerged in the data was a feeling of being an outsider regarding personal views on environmentalism, which influenced mothers' communication and behavioral practices and served as a challenge for these mothers. Mother reported that environmentalism was not often brought up as a topic for discussion

by other individuals whom they perceived lacked interest or concern about environmental issues.

Communication practices were shaped by mothers' identity as being a minority in their environmental concerns and activity. As a result, mothers did not engage in much discussion about environmental issues with those whom they perceived to be different in their viewpoints; and, when they did converse about environmentalism, were strategic in their communication practices. Strategies for communication included not going into much detail, only discussing environmental issues if they happen to come up in conversation or are addressed by the other individuals involved in the conversation, slipping environmental information into dialogue discretely, discussing those issues that are more part of common knowledge or environmental activity rather than their personal views, making information personally relevant for the other, and trying to assist in other individuals' environmental efforts. It was through personal experience that mothers learned to engage in these communication practices. Veering away from confrontation and towards collaboration, the participants were possibly enacting a traditional gender role. A lack of communication about environmental issues for some participants was also the result of low feelings of efficacy in convincing others to be more environmentally minded and for other participants was based on their viewpoint that actions speak louder than words. Ease of dialogue most often occurred when participants were under the impression that other individuals were of like-minds; however, some participants did not see a need for communication about environmentalism if they were "preaching to the choir."

Being a minority in a society in which environmentalism is not a priority serves as a challenge for mothers in a number of ways including their need to function in a society and interact with others who do not share their priorities, a lack of education and resources to be able to make choices in keeping with their principles, a lack of time and energy trying to juggle all of the other demands of the culture of our society and the expectations for mothers in our society, the influence of popular culture on their children which stressed gross consumption, and not enough of a demand for certain more environmentally friendly options keeping the cost at a prohibitive level to making the choices that they felt would be best environmentally. These constraints varied in degree based on the community in which the mother resided. Some mothers reported that being able to afford more expensive environmentally conscious choices, they increased the demand for these options to drive down the prices for others in society.

Community Formation and Social Ties

It appeared from the findings that environmentally conscious mothers made meaning of environmental engagement on both an individual level by running their homes in an eco-conscious manner and as a group by serving as educators in the community and organizing to work on environmental issues together. That which began with a mother's decision to become more environmentally active connected her to a community of mothers making the same personal decisions. The organization of groups to work together to do something about the problem was consistent with Dewey's (1927) definition of publics (as cited in Botan & Taylor, 2004). As mothers became more involved, community formation occurred both naturally and informally through realizing after awhile that other mothers whom they encountered in their daily lives shared similar

interests and principles and formally through special interest groups and classes. "Environmentally conscious mothers" formed a culture in that they had certain expectations and practices for mothers within that culture (Pearson, 2005).

Similarly to Aldoory and Van Dyke's (2006) finding that participants in their study felt a sense of comfort in knowing that others within their social networks were facing similar risks, formation of a community assisted mothers in feeling more understood, supported, and knowledgeable. It was through social interaction that mothers came to share common understandings (Dewey, 1916, p. 36). In essence, "environmentally conscious mothers" were forming consciousness-raising groups that served to mobilize their principles and beliefs into taking action, a form of feminism (Sowards & Renegar, 2004). Many mothers shared that they became more environmentally aware because of living in a community in which people were at least aware of environmental issues. Mothers shared a common concern regarding human's impact on the global community, which motivated them to take action.

Through a community with other mothers, participants also found an outlet where they could be heard rather than silenced or ignored. Mothers shared that there were unofficial leaders and opinion makers of the groups to which they belonged, but that all mothers expressed their opinions and provided support to one another during these meetings. One possible interpretation is that by organizing in this way, mothers were joining in a long line of women who had come together in consciousness-raising groups in which organizers facilitated by encouraging the contribution of each woman in the group (Sowards & Renegar, 2004, p. 535).

Unlike in a previous study where I found that community formation occurred online (Schloss, 2008), there was a preference in this study expressed by the participants for personal connection through community, which they shared that they thought was limited and artificial in an online world. Hannan (2010) explained that although online social networking is useful in laying the foundations for a relationship, interpersonal communication is needed to develop a true sense of connection in which we can form the trust needed for deeper, more meaningful friendships (p. 48).

Skepticism Regarding Mainstream Media, Government, Environmental Agencies, and Corporations

Many of the mothers in the study expressed skepticism regarding mainstream media, government, environmental agencies, and big business. Few mothers felt that they would be heard if they turned to these resources regarding environmental concerns and felt that much of the information being provided through the mainstream media was influenced by the government and businesses who were more invested in their own self-interests such as making a profit than in caring for the environment and the health of its inhabitants. Mothers living in urban areas and very conservative areas were more likely to express that they could not turn to their local governments regarding their environmental concerns. Mothers witnessed neglect for the environment when traveling overseas and seeing how government functions differently in other countries, firsthand in the workplace, and in their daily lives. Scare tactics used by mainstream media were not appreciated by the participants who felt that these tactics only served to intimidate the public into not thinking that they were capable of taking action and did not inform the public about actions that they could do to be more environmentally engaged in their

everyday lives. Some participants felt that the media backed by government and big business purposely kept the public uneducated to keep people dependent on consumer culture in the United States rather than questioning and challenging policies and practices of our society. In addition, mothers felt that sometimes the media purposely missed educational opportunities in news stories attempting to entertain rather than educate. However, even when they attempted to educate themselves, mothers were left in doubt about the decisions that they made not having clear guidelines.

Source Credibility

The general perception among the mothers in the study was that most information is not credible. Some mothers, though, felt that information is becoming more credible over time as it becomes harder to deny environmental degradation. Living in a world in which they did not feel that they could trust most sources of information, mothers shared that perceptions of credibility could be established only when there was consistency across sources of information, transparency in the sources providing the information, or the sources had a historic reputation of being credible. The Internet facilitated mothers' search for information across sources. Transparency was established when a company provided information such as its mission statement and philosophy, how successful it was in meetings its goals, and/or how the company used its proceeds to support the environment allowing participants to have the sense that they clearly understood an organization's mission. Not truly knowing what was credible, mothers also reported that their personal judgment came into play. For a few mothers, source credibility was established when there was a mass audience judging the source to be credible. Mothers in the study also stressed the importance of not just looking at one kind of source, but

looking across different types of information sources from the more mainstream to the less popular. In attributing greater credibility to messages that appeared in a greater variety of sources, participants in this study were similar to those in Cozma's (2006) study on readers' perceived sense of credibility relating to news stories regarding health and the environment. There was a preference expressed by especially those mothers working in the environmental field for looking at primary sources of information rather than secondary to see what was originally written rather than how someone interpreted the information. This finding did not seem to correspond with Anthony, Knuth, and Lauber's (2004) results that showed that women deemphasized scientific information in making decisions.

Future Research

More research is needed on the individuals who comprise publics through approaches such as ethnographic studies to understand more about how identities and cultures shape behavior. There are many ways that this research could be done including participant journaling through words or photos, field studies, participant observation, interviews, focus groups, and textual analysis. What matters more than the methodology chosen is the purpose of listening to individuals' voices and providing spaces in which they can be heard. Rather than continuing to do research on publics in which individuals are grouped together and categorized and in doing so lose their individuality, it is important to find out how individuals make meaning. No two individuals will make meaning in the same way or will be reached in the same way. The personal is what matters in learning about the nuances of how people see the world around them and in turn take action. Although many mothers in this study indicated that they had a gradual

awareness of environmentalism and could not attribute it to any one source or experience, perhaps additional research can be done on mothers' individual experiences and events that have shaped their environmentalism to flesh out more personal, unique reasons for environmental engagement and communication.

Additional research needs to be done to look more in depth at the role that each identity marker plays alone and in intersection with other aspects of identity to shape meaning making regarding behavior such as environmentalism. For example, although the role of religion and socioeconomic status were touched upon within this thesis, not much data emerged relating to these factors of identity. In future research, more attention can be paid to these markers, possibly even in studies devoted to exploring the role of one facet of identity to a greater extent than was afforded in this study. Additionally, exploration can be done on how best to reduce stigma faced by "environmentally conscious mothers" who identify themselves as a "minority" in a society in which their environmental engagement and communication may be trivialized and oppressed.

Greater diversity in terms of participants' ethnic and racial backgrounds is needed in future research on "environmentally conscious mothers." Although there were interesting findings in this study associated with the ways in which mothers from different ethnic and racial backgrounds made meaning of their environmental engagement and communication, these themes could have been stronger and richer if there had been more mothers in the study of non-white backgrounds. A study could be done to gain greater understanding of the ways in which black mothers make meaning of their environmental engagement and communication to see if what was found for a few mothers in this study is representative of more of the community of black

"environmentally conscious mothers." Researchers might want to know if other black mothers who are engaged in environmental activity and communication also make meaning of their environmentalism as "*doing what your grandma did*" or as part of natural family living. Given that a large proportion of society in the United States is now Hispanic and that the Hispanic population is increasing, additional research needs to be done including more Hispanic "environmentally conscious mothers" in the sample.

More studies are needed to give voice to marginalized communities. Although this study was unique in that I asked the participants to define their own identities, roles, and experiences, a study that is conceptualized from the very beginning with the publics themselves would provide even more space for the voices of individuals to be heard. In this way, a framework would not already be imposed on the study by the researcher. By coming into the field with an agenda of my own in the form of an interview protocol grounded in previous scholarship, I may have inadvertently missed out on additional opportunities for knowledge to be gained and social change to be made. Therefore, a suggestion for future research would be to engage in community-based participatory action research with members of a marginalized and oppressed public such as "environmentally conscious mothers." Using community-based participatory action research, one idea would be to go into a community that has experienced an environmental crisis to see what members of the community find relevant for research and how they make meaning of the crisis and their engagement and communication around the problem.

Policy-oriented studies are needed to create, shape, and renegotiate policies so that they are more conducive to instilling a greater focus on environmentalism in our

society. Research can be done to explore with "environmentally conscious mothers" how these mothers can come together to play a role in addressing environmental inequalities and concerns that they have regarding the role of politics, corporations, and media in often promoting a society more focused on consumerism than environmental sustainability and betterment. Again, this research will need to be conducted from the ground-up with the mothers to make sure that their voices are heard. Scholars and practitioners can also work with the management of corporations and policy makers to better understand environmentalism, changes that they can incorporate to promote an environmental ethic, and decisions that they can make that are pro-environmental. More research needs to be done on the role of environmental change agents within organizations and how they can be more successful in achieving their missions. Perhaps, researchers can serve as facilitators between "environmentally conscious mothers" and organizations to find ways in which an environmentally focused economy can become a more practical reality for more of the population and develop more co-existence between our society's need to generate a profit and also care for the environment.

Given the nature of identities in that they are continuously shifting and environmental problems in they that they are endlessly evolving, it would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study in which "environmentally conscious mothers" are followed to see how their meaning making may change or stay the same across time. Attention would be paid in this type of study to the individual voices of the participants to further learn how they conceptualize about their environmental roles, engagement and communication.

As personal activism has not been frequently addressed in public relations scholarship, future research should attempt to explore more about how publics may be involved in alternative forms of activism than are currently addressed in public relations literature as well as what will motivate a greater number of mothers to take steps to create environmental change within their own lives becoming part of the active public of "environmentally conscious mothers." A rhetorical analysis may help to further understand this concept of personal activism and redefine the ways in which we make meaning of activism.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this study sought to investigate how a public, in this case "environmentally conscious mothers," personally and socially constructed, co-constructed, and reconstructed their individual environmental roles, experiences, concerns, motivations, engagement, and communication through the voices of the public. Using feminist standpoint theory and ecofeminist research as my guiding epistemologies, I conducted a qualitative study to explore how "environmentally conscious mothers" from different cultural backgrounds including, but not limited to racial, ethnic, religious, and geographical have made meaning of their environmental roles, engagement, and communication practices. Previous research on culture and meaning making, identity, publics, women's and mothers' environmental awareness, engagement, and communication, channels of communication, and source credibility served as the framework in which this study was situated and helped me to make meaning of the findings.

Findings of this study helped to fill in gaps in previous research and provided support as well as critique for the findings presented in the literature review. Perceiving a need for more publics-oriented research, I sought to learn from the participants by listening to their voices and trying to understand their personal experiences (Khamis, 2009). Although there has been research on avowed and ascribed identity markers within the field of public relations as introduced to the field by Sha (2006), this study was one of the first to ask participants to self-define their own identities and roles. Through the narrative process emerging within semi-structured interviews, the participants were able to make meaning of their identities and realities (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000) and both join together with other "environmentally conscious mothers" as well as individuate themselves revealing and highlighting their positionality in society. Therefore, this research helps to answer the call by public relations scholars to examine diversity within publics (Pompper, 2004, 2005b; Sha & Ford, 2007; Tindall & Vardeman-Winter, 2011).

This study gave further support for the existence of a cultural dictate that influences "environmentally conscious mothers" to grow more concerned about environmental issues than baseline publics, which has been illustrated in previous literature (e.g., Belger, 2008; Hutner, 2011; Schloss, 2008; Shaw, 2011); and, additionally, provided evidence to indicate that this cultural dictate appears to be consistent for mothers of diverse identities and backgrounds. Findings of this study indicated that although demographic markers played a role in terms of shaping mothers' environmental engagement and conversational practices, they did not seem to impact significantly the channels of communication used by the mothers to discuss environmental concerns and learn about environmental issues. Similarly to findings in

previous studies, interpersonal communication channels were heavily relied on by the participants to learn more about environmental issues possibly due to participants' greater sense of trust in interpersonal sources than in mass media (Griffin & Dunwoody, 2000; Lee & Rodriguez, 2008).

In addition, the findings of this study supported scholarship (e.g., Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010; Stansberry, 2011; Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2011; Vasquez & Taylor, 2001) questioning the very notion of a public as conceptualized by the situational theory of publics (J. E. Grunig, 1997). Where there is such great variation within a public and identities are continuously shifting and fragmented, how is it possible to define who is within a public? Without over-generalizing, stereotyping, and labeling, is it possible to communicate meaningfully with a "given" public or must communication be developed on an individual level?

This is not a policy-oriented study, but rather one in which I hope that I have shown the importance of listening to the voices of individuals within our society who may not be recognized by those in positions of privilege and power. There has been a gap in the public relations literature on research that attempts to bring individual voices to the forefront. Thus, this study hopes to meet that gap. When individual voices go unheard, we are not opening ourselves up to learn from those who have been traditionally marginalized and oppressed who often have a great deal to share. Public relations practitioners and scholars need to find a way to connect with and hear these individuals in the creases of the dominant systems of understanding, who are frequently in the position to provide insight into the ways of the world, which those who are in positions of greater power and privilege may not see (Dutta, 2007; Hartsock, 1983).

In public relations scholarship, this study was one of the first to shed light on the concept of personal activism, which was a phenomenon proposed by the participants themselves. If as a field in public relations, we desire to keep up with a society in which things are becoming more and more personalized, then it might behoove us to take a closer look at the role of personal activism in shaping publics. If we want to understand how identities play a role in publics' meaning making and how a situation is understood from the viewpoint of individuals engaged in a behavior, we might want to look more closely at actions taken by individuals as part of a community. Coming together "environmentally conscious mothers" became part of a community through their individual actions and principles.

In conclusion, I tried to give "voice" to my research participants by allowing them to narrate their own personal perspectives, opinions, understandings, and experiences which they articulated in their own words and within their own conversational frameworks. In other words, I did provide room for the participants in this study to be heard. Although I provide interpretation of the findings, this is only one possible interpretation – what is more important are the actual words of the mothers themselves. I invite public relations practitioners and scholars to continue to find ways to listen to the voices of marginalized and invisible publics. Doing so, in my opinion, is the only way to move forward toward greater understanding of different publics, both in academic research and environmental practice.

Appendix A- Demographic Profiles of Research Participants

Addison – 41 years old, Addison identified herself as white in race and ethnicity and Christian in religion. Raised in Tennessee, Addison is a "full time mother" and lives with her husband and two children in Montgomery County, Maryland. Addison is involved in the creation stewardship group in her church and started a group to advocate for sustainable energy practices.

Agnes (35) – Agnes grew up in Michigan. Her father is African-American and her mother is Swedish-American. The age difference between Agnes's parents is 29 years; so, there were three generations living under one roof when Agnes was growing up. Agnes now lives with her husband and two children (a five and a half year old daughter and a one year old son). Her family identifies as Christian. As primarily a stay at home mom, Agnes focuses on the environmental activity that she can do in her own home.

Angharad (30s) – Angharad, who identified herself as Chinese-American in race and ethnicity and as not having a religion, lives in California with her husband and two children (6 and 2 years old) and works as a research scientist in the pharmaceutical industry. Angharad focuses on making environmental choices in her daily life such as not buying new stuff, conserving energy and water, and reusing rather than disposing things.

Ariel (41) – Having grown up in New York City, Ariel now lives in Northern Virginia with her male partner and daughter. Ariel identified herself as being Hispanic in race and

ethnicity and as not religious, but very spiritual. She works as a hypnotist and mind-body coach, which she attributes to having some influence on her environmental views. Ariel's focus on environmental activity revolves around what she does in her personal life including shopping at thrift stores, using freecycle, and purchasing locally grown foods.

Bhakti (62) – After living the first 27 years of her life in India, Bhakti moved to the United States where she now lives in Virginia with her husband. Identifying both her race and her ethnicity as Indian and her religion as Hinduism, Bhakti is a stay at home mom with two children who have grown up and moved out of the house. According to Bhakti, she learned to value simplicity when attending a missionary school convent as a child. Bhakti is involved in a group to advocate for sustainable energy practices and involved in a campaign to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Cade (46) –After growing up on a small farm near Annapolis, Maryland, Cade lived in London for nine years where she received her master's degree from the London School of Economics. Cade, who now lives with her partner and two teenage daughters, identified herself as white in race, English and German in ethnicity, and as not having a religion. She is the chief financial officer of her own consulting firm and involved on a personal level in environmentalism "trying to change everything" that she does at home and making better purchasing decisions.

Candace (30s) – Growing up in San Francisco where she still lives today with her husband and two children (8 and 5 years old), Candace identified as being Japanese in race and ethnicity and Christian in religion. Currently, a service architect and project manager, one day Candace would like to work in the environmental field. She reported that her environmentalism for now revolves around what she does at home and in her children's school.

Carol (45) – Having spent most of her life living in Maryland near Washington, D.C., Carol loves traveling and spent one and a half years living in France and Spain. She currently lives in Maryland with her husband and five year old daughter. Carol identified herself as white in race and Jewish in ethnicity and religion. A staff development teacher, Carol describes herself as being politically active and received a grant for environmentalism in the schools, which she uses to fund environmental programming. Carol is a member of a forum that gets together on one Sunday each month to talk about environmental issues.

Corinne (34) – Corinne, who grew up in California and spent time living in Washington, now lives in Jacktown[10], Virginia, where she is a member of a group of volunteer stewards helping to conserve and manage natural resources and educate others about environmental issues. She lives with her husband and five year old son. Choosing to home-school her son, she has done stream studies with him and taught him about composting, recycling, gardening, and land stewardship. Before having a child, Corinne used to participate in public protests regarding environmental issues. Corinne identified

[10] This is a pseudonym used for the city to protect the identity of the participants from this area.

herself as white in race, Peruvian and white-Hispanic in ethnicity, and Pagan in religion. Other cultural aspects that Corinne wanted to share are that she is anti-mainstream and earthy.

Daphne (41) – Having lived in New Jersey, Germany, France, North Carolina, Virginia, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, Daphne now resides with her husband and two daughters (11 and 6 years old) in Jacktown, Virginia. She attributes her environmental awareness to her time spent abroad growing up. Working as a clinical psychologist, Daphne identified herself as Caucasian in race, Hungarian-American in ethnicity, and fallen Catholic in religion. Her environmental activity is mainly home-based and involves conservation of resources.

Eve (36) – Eve moved to the United States from France when she was 23 and reports that she has lived "everywhere," but that living in California had the most influence on her development of an environmental role. Currently living with her husband and children, Eve is part of a military family that has moved every two to three years. She identified as being white Caucasian in race, French/American in ethnicity, and Christian in religion. Eve is particularly concerned about toxins in the environment and related health problems.

Freja (37) – Raised in San Diego, California, Freja currently lives in Virginia with her husband and daughter and works as an applications developer for a university. Prior to moving to Virginia a few years before I met with her, Freja worked in the biotechnology

industry. Environmental activity for Freja focuses mostly on what goes on at home and trying to change the food provided at her daughter's daycare to be healthier and more environmentally friendly. Freja identified her race as Filipino and black, ethnicity as American, and her religious beliefs as non-existent or atheist.

Gemma (51) – Gemma, who has lived in California, Ohio, Maryland, and Virginia, is a graphic designer and substitute teacher. She resides with her husband and daughter and identified as white in race, Danish in ethnicity, and not religious. Gemma is one of the key members of the gardening club in her community and still enjoys reading the newspaper.

Irine (27) – Irine, who identified her race and ethnicity as Caucasian and her religion as Christian lives with her daughter and a couple of roommates. She is the president of a human resources company that she started for women. Her environmentalism centers on what she does at home.

Janet (52) – A white, Jewish mother, Janet has lived almost all of her life in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and raised four children as a stay at home mom. Although Janet reported that she is upper class, she pointed out that she is "vegetarian though." Janet has a bachelor's degree in Biology and Art and a graduate degree in Art Education. She recently formed a stewardship group for a local watershed, has done a stream monitoring program for fourteen years in the local elementary school where she takes students to monitor the stream, and has lobbied before congress on behalf of the

watershed among other environmental efforts. Janet has utilized faith-based environmentalism in some of her efforts to encourage people to be more environmentally active.

Jessica (32) – Jessica, who is originally from Texas, now resides in Arlington, Virginia with her husband and three children. Currently working at a consulting firm dealing with water utilities and climate change and at an environmental health news agency in addition to being a full-time mom, Jessica has a master's degree in public health specializing in environmental and occupational health. Jessica identified her race as white, her ethnicity as Hispanic, and her religion as Catholic.

Josie (69) – Having lived in California, Wisconsin, Maryland, Virginia, and Idaho as part of a Navy family, Josie currently resides with her husband in Jacktown, Virginia. She raised five children and worked in the school system before retiring. Josie described herself as a "Mother-Naturalist" and identified her race as white, her ethnicity as a mix of German, French, and English, and her religion as non-existent. She is a volunteer steward in her community helping to conserve and manage natural resources, educating others about environmental issues, and taking as many classes as she can about environmentalism.

Julie (33) – Raised in Baltimore, Maryland, Julie currently lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband and daughter. Julie identified herself as white (race), Croatian, Irish, and German with a strong Turkish influence from her husband (ethnicity), and atheist

(religion). After graduate school, Julie ran a nonprofit group for environmental education for a couple of years and then became a science policy fellow. She now works as an aquatic ecologist and eco-toxicologist for an environmental agency and is a lecturer in environmental science at a local university. Julie has worked at science fairs and has tried to do outreach as well as served as a board member for a couple of environmental nonprofit agencies.

Keeley (32) – Born and raised in Guyana until the age of seven, Keeley lives with her family in a nuclear-free, politically and socially active suburb of Washington, D.C., and works as a graduate student and researcher. Keeley identified herself as black, Caribbean, and Unitarian Universalist. She has started a blog in which she talks about using the time and resources that we have soundly and maintaining simplicity and sanity.

Ladonna (30) – Ladonna is a full-time stay at home mom residing with her husband, son, and father-in-law in Maryland. As a co-president of Java Mamas, she has informed other members of the group about how to make their own household cleaners. As a full time mom, Ladonna looks for ways in which she can involve her son in activities with her in which they can enjoy the natural world. Ladonna identified herself as an urban, black woman who is Christian.

Leslie (51) – Leslie, who identified herself as Caucasian, Irish, and Quaker, grew up in New Jersey within a mile of a quarry landfill that at the time was the biggest super fund clean-up site in America. In her late 20s, Leslie worked at an environmental organization

through which she was able to go on a cruise to Southeast Alaska where she saw the effects of clear cutting first hand. These days, partially retired, Leslie supports environmental causes financially and lives her life according to her principles of taking care of the environment. She lives with her husband in Virginia and has a son who is in college.

Lucile (35) – Growing up on four acres in California's Central Valley, Lucile was raised by parents who farmed their own vegetables and meat. Now living about 10 miles south of San Francisco with her husband, daughter, and son, Lucile works as a health care consultant. She tries to recycle, buy foods in season, conserve water and other resources, and not use products that are harmful to the environment. Lucile identified herself as Korean in race and ethnicity and Christian in religion.

Lynette (56) – Born in Arkansas, Lynette grew up in New Hampshire, where her family moved when she was one and a half years old; however, she still identified herself as an Arkansan as well as Polish. Since living in Guatemala for six months during college where Lynette saw people making do with very little, she reported that she has always had the mindset that the less she could consume, the more she could help other individuals. She now resides with her son and sometimes her daughter having divorced their father partially because she did not think that he was practicing an environmental way of living. As an architect, Lynette raises environmental issues at staff meetings and on an environmental outreach committee. She identified herself as Caucasian and Roman Catholic.

Maris (39) – Raised in Washington, D.C., Maris is well-traveled having lived overseas for nine years in locations including Greece, Kuwait, Germany, England, France, and Italy. A single, non-religious, black, American mother, Maris now dwells with her two toddler-aged children and their nanny in Maryland. She owns several small businesses including a supervised independent living program, a property management company, and a solar panel installation business. Maris enjoys gardening, focuses on making environmental decisions in her own home, attends environmental conferences, and provides consulting on environmental issues to the government and educational institutions.

Melissa (37) – Melissa sees herself as environmentally involved based on what she does at home and with her own family as well as in her office where she encourages people to recycle and leads by example. Married with two children, Melissa had recently returned to work outside of the home when I met with her having been a stay at home mom. Melissa identified herself as white, European, and Christian. She is the vice president of the civic association in her community.

Monica (50) – Born in Washington, D.C., Monica lived all of her life in Maryland other than six years in California. Married for more than 20 years when I interviewed her, Monica resides with her husband and two children. She identified herself racially as white, ethnically as Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Scotch, and German, and religiously as Jewish, Lutheran, and non-practicing. Currently working part-time as a community

planner for her city, Monica used to be employed by environmental organizations in the 1980s. Among other environmental activity in which she is involved, Monica participates in trash cleanups, maintains the gardening at her local traffic circle, volunteers in an environmental group at her daughter's school, and makes personal decisions in keeping with her pro-environmental principles.

Nabeeha (26) – Nabeeha is an aspiring writer, artist, and designer as well as volunteer teacher. Coming from an African-American, Muslim family, Nabeeha is active in the Islamic community and a devoted mother with a passion for living a "green," "healthy" lifestyle. She started an environmental campaign and recycling program at the Islamic school where she teaches and has spoken at national Islamic conferences on how Muslims in the inner-city can become environmentally active. At the time of the interview, Nabeeha lived with her 3 year old son in a historically African-American, inner city area of Maryland with plans to relocate.

Naomi (34) – Raised in Georgia, Naomi spent four months living abroad in Tanzania and has resided in the area surrounding Washington, D.C., for more than a decade. Naomi, who identified herself as Caucasian in race and ethnicity, Presbyterian (USA) in religion, southern, and conservation-minded, lives with her husband and baby boy. She holds a master's degree in Sustainable Development and Conservation Biology and is the assistant director of a collaborative, environmental project working to address the bushmeat crisis.

Paula (33) – Originally from Louisiana and having lived in Chicago, Illinois, Paula dwells in Maryland with her husband and young daughter. Paula identified herself as white in race, American Indian, Irish, German, as well as others unknown in ethnicity, and physically disabled for the year and a half before the interview took place. She described that she prefers not to affiliate with any religion although she grew up Baptist and believes in the Bible. Paula spends much of her time online as the owner of an online media store and as an active participant on freecycle. Most of Paula's environmental activity takes place in her home through the use of environmentally friendly products, reuse of resources, and maintenance of a healthy environment free from toxic chemicals and man-made materials.

Rasima (31) – After growing up in a hard-working, blue collar, mid-Western, African-American, Christian family in Indiana, Rasima is now married with two young children living far away from her extended, support system in an urban suburb of Washington, D.C., which is very different from the rural countryside where she was raised. Rasima is a co-founder of an international development nonprofit organization and stay at home mother. Rasima described her environmental activism as a personal activism taking place in every sphere of her life and based on common sense.

Rebecca (30) – Raised in Massachusetts and Ohio, currently Rebecca resides in Maryland with her husband and toddler-aged daughter. Rebecca first started to become involved in environmental issues when she wrote petitions for campaigns such as Save the Seals in the 1980s. A white, Jewish of Russian descent mother, Rebecca spent two

years living in Israel where she experienced a “wakeup call” regarding the importance of conserving resources. With an educational background focused on sustainability, Rebecca works as a research analyst studying the environmental impact of businesses for institutional investors. For Rebecca, environmental activity has both a local and a global orientation.

Selah (29) – An African-American, Muslim, stay at home mother currently living with her husband and two young daughters in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, Selah comes from a large, extended family that grew up on the waterfront in Maryland. Being outdoors on her grandparents’ waterfront property, Selah shared got her interested in environmental activity because she wanted to preserve nature and a feeling of being one on one with G-d. Selah described herself as an advocate and educator for the environment. Having done graduate work in medicine and science, Selah is particularly interested in the connection between human and environmental health.

Shoshana (32) – Born and raised outside of Detroit, Michigan, Shoshana dwells with her husband and an infant son in Washington, D.C. Shoshana, who identified herself as a white, Ashkenazi Jew, lived in Israel for more than a year and now works part-time as a communications director for a synagogue where she started a green committee with her husband. She encourages people not to give gifts to her family and make donations instead, has been taking steps to make her home more energy efficient, and hangs her laundry up to dry.

Tam (36) – Tam has a background in political and nonprofit development and oversees the leadership, day-to-day operations, and financial management of a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting women as agents of environmental change. Raised in California, Tam now resides with her husband and child in the Washington, D.C., area. At home, Tam is motivated to make environmental decisions due to a feeling of responsibility to give back to others. Raised by a single mother who had a hard time making ends meet, Tam shared that she feels fortunate to be able to live a lifestyle these days in which she is able to make choices such as buying organic foods and live in a nice home. She identified herself as Asian-American in race, Vietnamese in ethnicity, and as a non-practicing Catholic.

Victoria (56) – A white, American, Christian mother who has lived in the same general vicinity in central Virginia all of her life, Victoria is married with a young adult daughter. As an education reading specialist, Victoria works with students who are deficient in reading development. In her personal life, Victoria is very conscious about trying not to be abusive to the environment and having respect for all living life. Throughout the years, Victoria and her husband have tried to be involved in personal specific issues in their community. For example, they are publically active trying to bring awareness to the potential harm to the environment of a move close to their locality to begin mining of uranium. Victoria also volunteers as an environmental steward educating others about environmental issues and working to contribute to a healthy, sustainable environment.

Zhen (54) – Born in Hong Kong, Zhen, who identified herself as Chinese, Chinese-American, and a lapsed Catholic, moved to New York City when she was 8 years old. Since that time, Zhen has moved around the world living in California, Japan, Germany, Maryland, and Massachusetts. After marrying her husband, Zhen started her family in Japan and Germany and now has children in their late teenage years. She is positioning herself to go back to work as a pediatric nurse practitioner after taking off time from working outside of the home while raising her children to be a stay at home mom. For Zhen, environmental activity is about the little things that she does in her personal life and educating others about decisions they can make in their own lives to live more sustainably.

Appendix B-Interview Protocol

Name of Participant:
Date of Interview:
Time Started:
Time Ended:

Introduction:

Hello! Thank you for meeting with me today. As part of the master's in public relations degree that I am pursuing at the University of Maryland, I am conducting my thesis research project to explore how "environmentally conscious mothers" from different backgrounds make meaning of their engagement in environmental activity and communication and increase their awareness about environmental issues. Before we begin, I would like to go over the confidentiality agreement with you. May I have your consent to proceed with this interview? Before we get started, would you be able to please complete this demographic form so that I can better understand how you identify yourself? Would it be alright with you if I record our session?

1. Why don't you start by telling me something about your family (how many children, ages, schools, etc)?

2. Where are you from?

3. What do you do on a daily basis?

4. What does the word "environment" mean to you?
    a. *Probe:* What are the first things that come to mind when you think about the environment?
    b. *Probe:* How do you feel about the environment?
    c. *Probe:* What words do you use when you are talking to others about your environmental efforts?

5. What does the word "EcoMom" mean to you?
    a. *Probe:* Would you use this term to describe yourself?

6. How do you feel discussing the environment with your friends and family?

7. How do you feel discussing the environment with other people in your community?

Transition: Now, I would like to ask you some questions about when you started to become more environmentally conscious and active in environmentalism.

8. Have you become more active as an environmentally conscious mother over time?
    a. *If yes***:** What has contributed to this?
    b. *If no*: Why not?

9. Have you developed your involvement in making your home more environmentally friendly over time?

a. *If yes***:** How?
b. *If no*: Why not?

10. Are you involved in a community with other "environmentally conscious mothers"?
    a. *If yes***:** How have you been able to come together with other environmentally active mothers?
    b. *If no*: Why not?

11. When did you start to become more environmentally conscious?
    a. *Probe:* To what would you attribute your interest in environmental activity?
    b. *Probe:* What is an experience that you have had when you realized that you were concerned about the environment?

Transition: At this point, the next questions may sound a little bit repetitive, but I would like to know about how you see different aspects of your identity influencing your environmentalism.

12. Do you think your gender has influenced your environmentalism?
    a. *If yes***:** How?
    b. *If no*: Why not?

13. Do you think being a mother has influenced your environmentalism?
    a. *If yes*: How?
    b. *If no*: Why not?

14. Do you think your age has influenced your environmentalism?
    a. *If yes*: How?
    b. *If no*: Why not?

15. Do you think your race has influenced your environmentalism?
    a. *If yes*: How?
    b. *If no*: Why not?

16. Do you think your ethnicity has influenced your environmentalism?
    a. *If yes*: How?
    b. *If no*: Why not?

17. Do you think your religion or spirituality has influenced your environmentalism?
    a. *If yes*: How?
    b. *If no*: Why not?

18. Do you think your educational background has influenced your environmentalism?
    a. *If yes*: How?
    b. *If no*: Why not?

19. Do you think your geographical background has influenced your environmentalism?
    a. *If yes*: How?
    b. *If no*: Why not?

20. Are there any other aspects of your identity that you feel influence your environmentalism?
    a. *If yes:* What aspects? How?

Transition: Now, I am going to ask you some questions about what motivates you to participate in environmental activity and how you are involved in environmental activity.

21. What motivates you to focus your time and energy on environmental issues?

22. How would you describe your role as an environmentally conscious mother?

23. Would you consider yourself to be an activist regarding the environment?
    a. *If yes*: Why?
    b. *If no*: Why not?

24. Besides environmental issues, are there other causes that you feel strongly about and have taken action regarding?

25. What types of obstacles do you face in your efforts to live an environmentally conscious life?

26. What problems do you see, if any, in attempting to make your family more environmentally conscious and engaged in environmental activity?

Transition: Before we wrap up, I would like to ask you about what sources you use to learn more about the environment and discuss your concerns and what makes a source credible for you.

27. How do you improve your knowledge about environmental issues and how to make your home more eco-friendly?

28. Where would you turn for information about the environment?
    a. *Probe:* Which media do you use for information?
    b. *Probe:* What resources do you have to discuss concerns like the environment?

29. Are there places in your community where can you turn when you are concerned about the environment?
    a. *If yes:* Where?
    b. *If no:* Why not?

30. How credible do you find the information that you turn to for news about the environment?

Conclusion:
Is there any other information that you would like to share with me or do you have any questions for me? Would you be willing to be contacted again in the future if I have any additional questions or need clarification on something we discussed today? Thank you for your time and participation!

Initials _____ Date _____

Appendix C – Consent Form

Project Title	***Mothers' Engagement in Environmental Activity***
Why is this research being done?	*This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Linda Aldoory and Renata Schloss at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a mother over the age of 18 who is concerned about the environment. The purpose of this research project is to examine the knowledge, attitudes, and motivations of "environmentally conscious mothers" from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. This research will advance understanding of how mothers function as a public around the issue of concern for the environment and engage in environmental activity as mothers.*
What will I be asked to do?	The procedures involve one interview of approximately one hour in length. The interview will take place either on the phone or in person. This will be an informal interview with questions aimed at better understanding how mothers think about environmental issues and engage in environmental activity. Questions may explore your motivations, expectations, difficulties, challenges, surprises, learnings, rewards, and reflections on engaging in environmental activity as mothers. For example, you may answer question such as "when you think about the environment, what comes to mind?" ___ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study. ___ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

Initials _____ Date _____

Project Title	***Mothers' Engagement in Environmental Activity***	
What are the risks of this research?	*The subject may feel frustrated or uncomfortable discussing some environmental issues. If there are any questions you feel uncomfortable answering, you may choose not to respond and there will be no penalty involved. You may terminate the interview at any time.*	
What are the benefits of this research?	*This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about how environmentally engaged mothers function as a public. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the concept of publics.*	
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.*	
What if I have questions?	*This research is being conducted by* ***Dr. Linda Aldoory of the Communications Department*** *at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Linda Aldoory at:* Department of Communication, 2130 Skinner Building University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742-7635 Phone: 301-405-8077 Fax: 301-314-9471 Email: laldoory@umd.edu *If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* **Institutional Review Board Office,** **University of Maryland,** **College Park, Maryland, 20742;** **(e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678**	
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	*Your signature indicates that:* *you are at least 18 years of age;,* *the research has been explained to you;* *your questions have been fully answered; and* *you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.*	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF SUBJECT**	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

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