

**Sustainable Happiness in an Ecovillage:
Exploring the Impacts of Sustainable Living on Individual Happiness**

by

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Abstract

While there has been substantial growth in scholarly attention to negative emotional responses to environmental issues such as climate change, limited research has been conducted on the converse, such as how environmentally sustainable lifestyles might influence and impact individual happiness. Happiness is commonly considered a subjective and situational emotion; however, research has shown that individuals who practice a number of mindful exercises are capable of improving and increasing their overall sense of well-being. Drawing on the emergent field of “sustainable happiness,” this ethnographic case study examined the lived experiences of individuals who lead environmentally sustainable lifestyles, specifically focusing on their understandings and perceptions of happiness. Twelve interviews were conducted with an environmentally focused intentional community in British Columbia, Canada. Data analysis revealed that although happiness exercises were not explicitly practiced, participants nonetheless engaged in authentic daily activities that enabled them to explore how gratitude, the pursuit of money, the influence of media and news, and sense of community impacted their health and happiness. Further, the longer participants had lived in this intentional community and increased their knowledge of sustainable living, the more able they were to recognize the negative impacts current mainstream lifestyles had on their health and happiness. Given these findings and increased awareness of the importance of attending to mental health in formal educational settings, it is recommended that curricula grounded in sustainable happiness research be developed to offer students opportunities to explicitly learn about well-being and the potential impacts different practices and lifestyles have on their happiness.

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living impacts individual happiness. This community has inspired me to keep my aspirations alive, and have encouraged me to truly make a difference in this world, no matter what challenges I may face.

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Chapter One: Introduction

When I reflect about the happiest, most lively people who have ever come into my life, I have come to realize that they are often environmental educators or people who share a deep love for nature. I have often found these people to be authentically welcoming individuals who almost always spend time on their days off work outside engaging in activities that they enjoy, and often appear to exude a *joie de vivre*. Ironically enough, and as highlighted by Elin Kelsey and Catherine O'Brien (2011), these are also often the people who educate others about some of the most depressing subjects. From global climate change, environmental degradation, species extinction, and polluted spaces, it is surprising to me that more of them do not show signs of overwhelming despair.

Although I too have felt a deep love for nature all of my life, it is only since 2010 when I began my post-secondary education that I really started to learn about the discouraging reality of humanity's negative impacts on the environment, including the role of capitalism and consumerism. My personal experiences on this learning journey have felt very different than what I have perceived others have had as I frequently feel overwhelmed or upset when thinking about current societal practices and how they will impact the future, and often struggle to see where my passions and values will fit into this world. That is not to say that I am not a person who experiences joy or feelings of happiness, but I do not feel *genuinely* happy as I habitually return to feelings of perplexity and despair. These upsetting feelings shock me and lead me to an internal struggle as I know I have so much to be grateful for, especially since in comparison to many people in this world, I do not suffer from significant personal hardships and am not living with clinical depression. Why, then, do I find genuine happiness such a struggle in my life that is privileged in so many ways?

When I contemplate why my lived experience differs from other environmental educators, the only dissimilarity that I have noticed thus far is that my lifestyle is considerably less sustainable than others. Although I too have desires to make changes in my life so that I can live more sustainably, I find it hard to regularly maintain any significant change due both to limited access to resources and mainstream society's normative expectations. These personal struggles and observations that I noted in others sparked my interest in the possible correlation between environmentally sustainable living and individual happiness. Excited by what little writing I could find on the topic, I realized that there remains much to be researched.

The intent of my thesis research was to explore how individuals who live environmentally sustainable lifestyles perceive and integrate happiness into their own lives. While the importance of living sustainably is becoming more widely known through media coverage of the topic, in my experience, people often hesitate to engage in this lifestyle due to the perception that they will need to make substantial personal sacrifices that might hinder their happiness. Indeed, to live a sustainable lifestyle *does* require considerable shifts away from common social practices (Capra, 2005; Shapiro, 1995) like rampant consumption, excessive fossil fuel use, and prevalent resource waste. In addition, although happiness is complicated, contextual, and dependent on certain individual values, there are practices and beliefs that have been documented as having a significant impact on individual happiness (Angel, 2014; Lyubomirsky, 2007), which I will discuss in detail in the literature review. My assumption, which is supported by the small but growing field of "sustainable happiness," is that environmentally friendly lifestyles embody some of the practices identified in the general happiness research literature.

I am intrigued by people who have chosen to reside in environmentally focused intentional communities such as ecovillages, and given their demonstrated commitment to sustainable living, they were an ideal site to conduct my thesis research. Since I was focusing on the lived experiences of people at one such site, I used a qualitative case study method that draws on ethnographic concepts. Through semi-structured interviews and observations recorded in field notes, I investigated how individuals who lived in one ecovillage comprehended happiness, how they perceived their lifestyle impacted their overall happiness, and how, if at all, happiness exercises were explicitly being practiced in this community. My hope is that this research will help enrich the small field of sustainable happiness given there has been a paucity of empirical research conducted thus far. In the conclusion, I identify areas ripe for future research and offer insight into how environmentally sustainable living might impact well-being.¹

Personal Background and Relational Context

In my “Introduction to Qualitative Research” class during the first semester of graduate studies, we learned about the role that a researcher plays in qualitative inquiries and the importance of reflecting on researcher positionality. The personal background of a researcher, their culture, and their past experiences can influence the type of phenomenon that is selected for study and how this phenomenon is being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers act as the key instrument for data collection and analysis, thus it is important for researchers to reflect on how their position can shape the interpretations, themes, and meanings that they ascribe to the data (Creswell, 2014). For this reason, the following section relays some of who I am and how I situate myself within this research.

¹ The terms “happiness” and “well-being” are used interchangeably in this thesis since “happiness” is understood as a state of mind that impacts all areas of one’s life, which is similar to well-being.

I identify myself as a white cis-woman and a third-generation Canadian; I grew up just outside a small town in southern Ontario called Lakefield. Although I spent all of my childhood and youth in this rural area with my parents and three brothers, I have been living in Thunder Bay for the last seven years and am starting to feel as if Northwestern Ontario is my second home. My mother works in the medical field as a nurse, and has taken on many different roles over the course of her career (e.g., emergency RN, Northern Ontario fly-in nurse, first aid instructor, Personal Support Worker instructor at the local college, volunteer health care coordinator at a local summer camp, and more), and my father was a postal worker, although his true calling is photography which he has been able to focus on more since his recent retirement. Although neither of my parents had careers in the outdoors, they both have held an affinity for nature, and early on established the natural environment as a playground for my brothers and me. When I was five years old, my mother started volunteering as a summer camp nurse at Camp Kawartha in the Kawartha Lakes region of southern Ontario. As a result of my mother's volunteer work, my brothers and I were able to attend that summer camp; had we not been given this opportunity, we would not have been able to do so as this was not financially feasible for my family.

Summers at Camp Kawartha were instrumental in my life as they not only provided many amazing outdoor and recreation opportunities that deepened my connection to nature, but also helped me develop an interest in education. At camp, I was also exposed to what I would characterize as my first authentically positive friendships. In total I spent 17 summers at Camp Kawartha, moving from camper to a variety of staff positions (i.e., day camp counselor, overnight counselor, canoe tripper, wilderness leadership program director, and trip director),

and with each new role, my engagement in environmental and sustainability education strengthened.

Although my summer camp experiences focused heavily on group dynamics, self-actualization, leadership, and skill acquisition and development, I realize upon reflection that environmentally sustainable lessons also were being taught implicitly at every stage. As a camper and a new counselor, I started to learn about various approaches to sustainable living such as reducing energy and water consumption, growing plants and vegetables, and straw bale construction. As a canoe tripper I developed a deeper, more spiritual, more respectful connection to nature because the majority of my time during those summers was spent surviving in the natural environment. As a wilderness leadership program director and trip director, I learned about the important role of education and how knowledge can influence the type of relationships we have with each other and with the rest of the world. Summer camp experiences had a monumental impact on my worldview and helped me establish a deep, positive personal connection to the environment.

It was through one of my experiences at summer camp that I was first introduced to Lakehead University and its Outdoor Recreation program. I chose to come to Thunder Bay and enroll in the Honours Bachelor of Outdoor Recreation program (HBOR) concurrently with a Bachelor of Education (BEd). While the majority of my post-secondary studies were spent outdoors enjoying the natural environment as well as developing interpersonal and skill-based proficiencies that would allow me to be an effective outdoor leader, it was also during this time that I was introduced to the realities and complexities of the world. The more I learned about how destructive human-made systems have been on the natural environment, the more distressed I became. However, experiencing these emotions with support of family, friends, and professors

helped me to maintain a generally positive outlook about the world. It was at that time that I began to understand how education occurred well beyond schooling and grew from simply being an interest into a true passion of mine. I had genuinely inspirational educators throughout my studies who exposed me to, and modeled for me, the profound impacts that education can have on individuals. Through their lessons and words I have been inspired.

In the professional year of my education degree, a student in one of my classes briefly mentioned in conversation how happiness relates to sustainability. This was the first time I had even considered a link between the two concepts. As an outdoor educator who had been working in the industry for just under 10 years at that time, I found that much of my experience, both as a learner and an educator, had mostly been focused on the scientific “facts” of sustainability. I had never really taken emotional considerations into account and my classmate’s offhand comment opened me to new ways of exploring and thinking about education and the world. It was an “aha” moment that led directly to this thesis.

Research Questions

The purpose of my study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of individuals who live environmentally sustainable lifestyles in intentional communities, specifically focusing on their understanding of happiness. In particular, I wanted to investigate:

1. What can be learned about perceptions of happiness from people who seek to live environmentally sustainable lifestyles in intentional communities?
2. How might environmentally sustainable lifestyles influence and impact individual happiness?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The concepts of “happiness” and “sustainability” are complex as is their potential relationship to one another. In the following sections, I unpack each concept, investigate how they have been researched in the past, and note how researchers posit these concepts might intersect. The final section of this chapter will explore current scholarship on the role of sustainable actions in the “pursuit of happiness.” This latter section is greatly influenced by the work of Catherine O’Brien (2008, 2012, 2013, 2016), who has both written and taught about sustainable happiness.

Happiness

In this section, I explore the concept of happiness to offer a deeper understanding of this complex phenomenon. Although happiness, in one form or another, has been researched since at least the 1990s (Dolan, Peasgood, & White, 2008), it is challenging to investigate without considering a number of variables. Happiness is broadly understood as an individual feeling or perhaps, for some, a state of mind, but it is clear that it is more complex and dependent on a wide variety of personal, economic, and social factors (Dolan et al., 2008). It is also framed as an attainable goal for any individual, particularly through specific practices (Angel, 2014; Lyubomirsky, 2007).

Why measure happiness? Beyond the simple concept of feeling good, research about happiness provides important information for individuals as well as policy makers and governments. Although economic indicators have become the most common measure of a nation’s well-being, research suggests that measuring happiness could be a better indicator (Diener & Seligman, 2004). After the industrial revolution, governments focused on measuring economic development because greater wealth was perceived to signify greater freedom of

choice for citizens. It was believed that people with a wide variety of choices had more opportunities to select courses of action that maximized their overall well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2004). While economic security can contribute to quality of life by enabling one to meet basic needs, analysis of income and life satisfaction indicate that one does not contribute to the other (Diener & Seligman, 2004). In fact, Helen Norberg-Hodge (Local Futures, 2014) strongly suggests that the emphasis on economic development has actually hindered quality of life. She argues that “distorted economic priorities” have led to the commercialization of every aspect of the world, creating intense competition and centralized power, concluding that the economic system “thrives on separation, on cutting us off from one another and from nature” and reaches “deep into the psyches of young children, perverting a universal need for love and acceptance into a need to consume” (Local Futures, 2014, p. 2). In addition, Ed Diener and Martin Seligman (2004) argue that actually measuring well-being would be a better indicator of nation’s growth: “after all, if economic and other policies are important because they will in the end increase well-being, why not assess well-being more directly?” (p. 2).

Another argument that some give for the importance of measuring happiness is in developing a better understanding of personal choice. According to Daniel Kahneman and Alan Krueger (2006), it has become clear that the choices individuals make do not always represent their actual preferences nor contribute to their overall life satisfaction. Research in the fields of behavioural economics and psychology have found that “people often make inconsistent choices, fail to learn from experiences, exhibit reluctance to trade, [and] base their own satisfaction on how their situation compares with the satisfaction of others” (p.3). That is to say, people do not always make decisions based on what they think will make them happy, and more research into

the concept of happiness could help individuals make choices that positively affect their life satisfaction.

Finally, some suggest that happiness should become an explicit goal of formal education, a notion that resonates well with my personal beliefs. The suggestion grew out of teachers' observations of an increase in student anxiety, and that many students are appearing to care little for anything - not themselves, not their studies, not their school, not their home communities, and most certainly not the environment (O'Brien, 2013b). Nel Noddings (2003), for one, argues that, "Happiness should be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness" (p. 1) as she believes that the way we feel has a direct impact on the way that we learn. More research into the notion of happiness can help offer deeper understandings of this concept, providing further opportunities for educational practices.

Positive psychology. The concept of happiness has interested researchers for a long time. In 2000, an issue of *American Psychologist* focused on the growing area of what came to be called positive psychology and it remains an active field of research (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Positive psychology is "an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and enabling institutions" (Seligman, et al., 2005, p. 410). In other words, this field examines mental health in relation to the many variables that have an impact on well-being. There are a number of different approaches within the field of positive psychology, many of which relate to the study of happiness, which I will briefly describe in the following sections.

Subjective well-being. A widely used term within the field of positive psychology is subjective well-being (SWB), which focuses on how people give value to their lives, their lived

experiences, their bodies and minds, and the circumstances in which they live (Diener, 2006). SWB is often measured through a “contemplative cognitive assessment” of: 1) life satisfaction; 2) work satisfaction, interests, and engagement; and 3) and affective reactions to life events, which can be interpreted as positive affect (i.e., pleasant moods and emotions) or negative affect (i.e., unpleasant moods and emotions) (Diener, 2006; Dolan et al., 2008). Influences on SWB include: 1) income (until basic needs are met); 2) personal characteristics (i.e., who we are and our genetic makeup); 3) socially developed characteristics (e.g., education, health, type of work/unemployment); 4) how time is spent; 5) attitudes and beliefs towards self/others/life; 6) relationships; and 7) broader economic, social, and political environments (Dolan et al., 2008, p. 97). While SWB is a widely used and accepted term within the field of positive psychology, my own research uses a concept of happiness that can be understood more as a mindset and practice of consciousness.

Authentic happiness. According to Diener (2006), due to the many different meanings of happiness – it can be used to describe a positive mood, a large-scale assessment of life satisfaction, a source of happiness, or how someone lives a “good” life – many researchers and scholars tend to avoid the term altogether. When it is carefully defined for the purposes of research, however, there is room for significant insights into the phenomenon and self-identity.

Take, for example, a study by Michaël Dambrun et al. (2012) in which the researchers examined how specific acts based on certain values impact two types of happiness: “fluctuating” and “authentic-durable.” They describe fluctuating happiness as repeated phases of pleasure and displeasure, where one is seeking gratification while avoiding disagreeable things for self-preservation. By taking this approach, feelings of joy and fulfillment become solely dependent on the arrival or loss of certain stimuli. They argue that fluctuating happiness is mostly attributed

to self-centered acts based on self-enhancement values and leads to a false sense of happiness since it is solely dependent on situations. They even go as far to say that, “fluctuating happiness, despite the experience of phases of pleasure, seems to be more linked to emotional negativity than emotional positivity” (Dambrun et al., 2012, p. 9).

Authentic-durable happiness, on the other hand, is “an optimal way of being, state of durable contentment and plenitude or inner-peace” (p. 2). That is to say that when an individual experiences authentic-durable happiness, the resulting emotional stability and harmonious state (i.e., inner peace) work together to generate a quality of consciousness that permeates through each experience, emotion, or behaviour, and allows the individual to accept and embrace both joy and pain. Dambrun et al. (2012) found that authentic-durable happiness could be achieved through selfless acts based on self-transcendence values. They also suggest that mindfulness is strongly related to the practice of authentic-durable happiness.

Happiness, then, can be understood as a resilient, positive emotional state of durable contentment and inner peace attained through a meaningful and engaged life (Dambrun et al., 2012, Diener, 2006; Dolan et al., 2008; Seligman et al., 2005). This approach to understanding happiness is the primary lens used in my thesis. First, however, as mindfulness is a key component to this understanding of happiness, I need to somewhat unpack this concept.

Mindfulness. As mentioned, Dambrun et al. (2012) found that the practice of mindfulness can contribute greatly to the ability of achieving authentic-durable happiness. Torgeir Ericson, Bjørn Gunaketu Kjørstad, and Anders Barstad (2014) define mindfulness as “being aware, taking note of what is going on within ourselves and outside in the world, without shying away from information or feelings that we do not like or do not wish to be true” (p. 74). In its very basic understanding, the practice of mindfulness, then, can be understood as attending

to thought and self-reflection. Mindfulness has also been described as “the awareness that arises from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally” (Paulson, Davidson, Jha, & Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 91), although “nonjudgmentally” is commonly misconstrued and might be better understood as suspending judgment rather than not having any (Paulson et al., 2013). To take this concept further, being nonjudgmental refers to the notion of holding onto thoughts without compartmentalizing them into cognitive bins or prescribing them with an immediate reaction, which relates to the concept of accepting all emotions found in authentic-durable happiness.

Many scholars view happiness as a skill that can be improved through practice, and the process of mindfulness allows individuals to engage in a form of mental training (e.g., Angel, 2010; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Paulson et al., 2013). For example, Amishi Jha states within a collaborative article:

If I asked how many of you think that engaging in certain kinds of physical activity will change the way the body works, most of you would agree that certain types of activity can alter the body in noticeable ways...I hope that we'll get to the point where - as a society, as a culture across the globe - we'll start to understand that the mind is really no different than the body, that engaging in very specific mental exercises can promote health and, indeed, that engaging in regular mental activity of certain kinds will promote health. (Paulson et al., 2013, p. 88)²

The growing knowledge of mind/body connections has contributed to the study of happiness, and has led to both the investigation and development of mental exercises that can help foster individual happiness.

Happiness activities. As mentioned in the previous section, there is evidence that suggests that through engagement in specific mental activities, happiness can be improved. Sonja Lyubomirsky (2007), who is a professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of

² To ease readability, particularly when it comes to sharing excerpts of interviews with participants in the Findings chapter, I have diverted from standard APA practices by single spacing block quotations.

California and who's work is evidence based, heavily discusses in detail these types of activities in her book, *The How of Happiness*. She also explores three main influences that determine and impact happiness (see Figure 1). First, she suggests that individual "set points" impact about half of everyone's happiness based on research that was conducted on twins who were separated at birth. While identical twins showed the same levels of happiness regardless of how they were raised, fraternal twins differed greatly, indicating that gene structure plays a role in happiness.

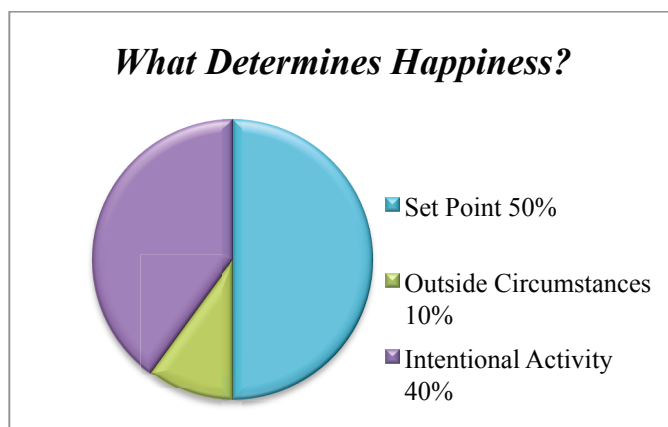


Figure 1: What determines happiness? (Lyubomirsky, 2007, p. 39)

She asserts, however, that "just because your happiness set point cannot be changed doesn't mean that your happiness level cannot be changed" (p. 57), comparing this to similar research on set points for weight and cholesterol levels, where clearly other factors are also at play. Second, Lyubomirsky states that only 10% of individual happiness is impacted by outside circumstances (i.e., relationship status, job, income, living situation, etc.). While it is often believed that outside circumstances are the core of happiness, she explains that life's situations only impact a small percentage of individual happiness due to a concept called "hedonic adaptation" (p. 48). She indicates that, "human beings are remarkably adept at becoming rapidly accustomed to sensory or physiologic changes" (p. 48) and that while both material possessions and life's events can

cause temporary increases in positive emotions, eventually individuals adapt to the circumstance (i.e., it feels “normal” in their life) and it will no longer bring heightened sensations.

Lastly, both Lyubomirsky (2007) and Jen Angel (2014) have suggested that the following intentional activities can contribute to happiness: 1) practicing gratitude and cultivating positive thinking; 2) living in the present and savouring life’s joys; 3) developing and committing to meaningful goals; 4) taking care of the body and soul through physical activity and mindfulness; 5) nurturing healthy relationships; and 6) managing stress, hardship, and trauma. While all these activities may contribute to happiness, Lyubomirsky (2007) emphasizes that it is important to determine the activity that will be most effective for each individual based on their values, goals, and needs. As will be discussed in the next chapter, I drew from the essence of these activities in constructing some of my interview questions to investigate how, if at all, my participants incorporated these strategies into their own lives.

As has been illustrated in this section, the idea of happiness has been extensively researched, especially in the field of positive psychology. Nonetheless, very little research has been completed on the possible relationships between happiness and environmental sustainability. Prior to looking at these potential connections, in the following section I first set the stage by providing an overview of environmental sustainability and environmental and sustainability education (ESE) before turning to how and why research on sustainable happiness, including my own thesis research, could help enrich both happiness research and ESE research.

Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability has been a widespread public concern since at least the 1970s, although there have been people worried about environmental degradation for a very long time before that. Both the Brundtland Commission report, *Our Common Future* (1987) and

reports from the United Nations Rio World Conference on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro (1992) note the deep concern many have for all life on earth, including the lives of those not born yet. These documents explored how the globalized trajectory for development and expansion would continue to degrade life on earth through expansive resource use and destruction, soil and ocean acidification, intense greenhouse gas effect by fossil fuel burning, as well as many other concerns (UN, 1987). In response, some argued that sustainable development “that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN, 1987, paragraph 26) should be pursued; however this notion has been critiqued and contested as globalized development is itself the cause of many current environmental issues (Jickling & Wals, 2008). Thus some have chosen to talk about sustainability, which they see as a more inclusive and holistic term than sustainable development. In the next section, I discuss this further as well as how education has taken up these ideas.

Defining environmental sustainability. The term “environmental sustainability” became prominent in popular discourse as a result of the astounding knowledge that the survival of all living things on the planet is being jeopardized due to human activity. In Naomi Klein’s book, *This Changes Everything* (2015), she states that as long as detrimental human activity continues at the same intensity, the unsafe abundance of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and the persistent increase in global temperatures will lead to “extreme heat waves, declining global food stocks, loss of ecosystems and biodiversity, and life-threatening sea level rises” (p. 13). Although individual behaviours like recycling or walking instead of driving are becoming more common and can play a vital role in reducing personal impacts on the environment, these actions alone will not be able to prevent or mitigate the intense environmental crises that we are facing. Klein (2015) argues that to alleviate the impending transformation of the world due to climate

change, it is necessary that environmentally sustainable actions oppose dominant capitalist and neoliberal worldviews, extractivist undertakings, and overconsumption motivated by corporate power.

Looking through a similar lens but from a different angle, Elan Shapiro (1995) believes that environmental sustainability can be understood as the act of mimicking life-sustaining patterns that are fundamental in a place. Fritjof Capra (2005) helps to develop this notion by describing specific principals of sustainability that are directly correlated to nature's ecosystems, or more specifically, living systems. He argues that the essence of a healthy ecosystem is non-linear and is established through relationships, connectedness, and context. In order to act in accordance with this way of thinking, several substantial shifts in perception would be necessary as currently the most common Western understanding of success is that it is achieved through independent, linear pursuits (i.e. the success of one individual or institution). Capra suggests that the approaches need to shift emphasis from: 1) the parts to the whole; 2) objects to relationships; 3) objective knowledge to contextual knowledge; 4) quantity to quality; 5) structure to process; and 6) contents to patterns. Although these changes are substantial, they could act as a foundation that could promote environmentally sustainable behaviours, a healthier relationship with the earth, and an ecological consciousness.

Aldo Leopold (1948/1968) described one such practice of ecological consciousness known as the land ethic, which complements this approach to environmental sustainability. In short, this ethic considers the land to be a vital member of the community. Leopold stated that the implementation of a land ethic "changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his [sic] fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such" (p. 204). Similar to Capra's (2005)

proposition, a land ethic could alter how we view our relationship to the environment, and could promote a healthier approach to living on the earth. In the following section, one current example of authentically sustainable lifestyles removed from dominant neoliberal and capitalist ideologies, and the one wherein my thesis research was situated, is explored.

Ecovillages. Although the desire to live simply can be associated with historical figures such as Socrates or even Jesus (Krznaric, 2014), the term “ecovillage” became popular in the late 1980’s when more attention was being turned to our global ecological footprint, that is, our impact, at either the community or individual level, on the environment as illustrated by the amount of land needed to sustain current resource use (Dawson, 2006). While Socrates sought to live a simpler life because he believed that money corrupted minds and morals (Krznaric, 2014), the modern escape from dominant society was a response to weak governmental approaches to addressing environmental issues (Dawson, 2006).

Although the concept of co-housing (i.e., communal sharing of resources) was already well established, a Danish activist named Hildur Jackson and her Canadian husband Ross Jackson sought to develop more welcoming human settlements that took a more radical approach than co-housing (Dawson, 2006). At a similar time, the joint owners and editors of *In Context* magazine, Robert and Dianne Gilman were seeking opportunities to explore and write about groundbreaking and innovative experiments in sustainable communities. In 1990, Hildur Jackson convinced the Gilmans to write a feature piece about their community, the Gaia Trust, and an article, “Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities” was published (Dawson, 2006). This piece highlighted international best practices in environmentally focused intentional communities and provided recommendations on how to create communities with small impacts on the earth. In this report, an ecovillage was defined as:

Human scale full-features settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future. (Dawson, 2006, p. 15)

The intentions of ecovillages was never to return to an idealized past, but rather to create coalescence between “human expertise in treading lightly on the Earth, community-level governance and the application of modern, energy-efficient technologies” (Dawson, 2006, p.16).

Some, like Johnathan Dawson (2006), argue that the ecovillage model reflects ideas in complexity theory and systems thinking while stressing the importance of connections and relationships amongst activities, processes, and structure. Grace Walsh (2015) argues that the ideology of ecovillages helps to move away from “ego-systems” that focus on anthropocentric needs and towards ecosystems that take a more holistic approach. Kazuhiko Takeuchi, Yutaka Namiki, and Hiroyasu Tanaka (1998) explain that in the ecovillage model, ecosystems not only refer to the natural environment, but also to the interactions (e.g., sharing, co-existing, or circulation) between all elements, living or not, within a community. Richard Wilkinson, a British epidemiologist who has spent much of his career studying why certain nations are healthier than others, found that the healthiest societies wherein its members work best together, did not have more income, education, or wealth, but did have more equitable sharing (Jarvis & Wilkinson, 2014).

While ecovillages are generally founded on the premise of sharing resources, Jocelyn Burkhart (personal communication, February 11, 2016), who has lived experience in a number of these communities, highlights another important consideration that she argues contributes to the longevity and health of an ecovillage. Through discussions with ecovillage members, and based on her own observations, she states that 90% of the intentional communities of which she had experience failed because they did not possess shared ideologies. In her experience, the

communities most able to overcome adversity were the ones that had at least one of the following components: 1) family ties; 2) a very strong charismatic leader; or 3) a shared spiritual foundation or belief. Of the communities she knew, she found that a land focus alone did not enable communities to survive challenges unless community members also shared a commitment to, for example, holistic approaches or Indigenous practices.

Although ecovillages are often established by a group of individuals seeking to lessen their individual ecological footprints, the ecovillage model has also been suggested as a mitigation strategy for the harmful impacts of rapidly expanding populations. Takeuchi, Namiki, and Tanaka (1998) investigated this idea in Japan, and suggest that the establishment of ecovillages within close proximity to urban centres could help reduce problems of overconcentration of people in large cities and promote healthy settlements in rural areas. They also could help diminish overall impacts on the environment through sharing. As Roman Krznaric (2014) writes, the ecovillage model highlights the notion that “simple living is not about abandoning luxury, but discovering it in new places” (p.23).

I turn now to the educational dimensions of my work to situate my research within environmental and sustainability education (ESE). I will provide a brief history of ESE and highlight how my research could help address gaps in ESE research and practice.

Environmental and Sustainability Education

William Stapp (1969) argues that increasing urbanization from the 1920s onward was one of the primary motivators for establishing ESE. As “independent rural-oriented living” diminished as a way of life for the majority of the population so too did “intimate association and interaction with natural resources” (p. 33) and with it a consciousness of human dependency on the environment. In an effort to regain such lost knowledge, formal environmental education was

recommended as one way to educate citizens about the natural world and the important role it plays in humans' lives. While the initial intent of ESE was to explore and restore humans' relationship with the natural world, the field has expanded and developed as more complex understandings of human/nature relationships and the interconnections of social and environmental justice were recognized (Russell, Bell, & Fawcett, 2000; Fawcett, 2013; Stevenson, Brody, Dillon, & Wals, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, the Rio World Conference on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 was an important forum for conveying the importance of environmental sustainability. At this conference, a document entitled *The Treaty on Environmental Education for Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibility* was produced in four different languages by non-governmental organizations and educators; it offers a comprehensive, democratic, and inclusive definition of environmental education (Russell, Bell & Fawcett, 2000). While 16 guiding principles were established, three in particular highlight why there are multiple approaches to ESE:

Principle 4: Environmental education is not neutral but is value-based. It is an act for social transformation.

Principle 11: Environmental education values all different forms of knowledge. Knowledge is diverse, cumulative and socially produced and should not be patented or monopolized.

Principle 16: Education must help develop an ethical awareness of all forms of life with which humans share this planet, respect all life cycles and impose limits on humans' exploitation of other forms of life. (Anon, 1992)

To help understand the different approaches to ESE, Lucie Sauv  (2005) conducted an in-depth analysis that led her to identify 15 different "currents" in the field, each a "general way of envisioning and practicing environmental education" (p. 12). She makes clear that these are not monolithic categories and that many of the currents overlap in practice, but nonetheless that they can be used to illustrate the diversity within the field. The seven currents she asserts have had the

longest standing in the field are: 1) naturalist; 2) conservationist/resourceist; 3) problem-solving; 4) systemic; 5) scientific; 6) humanist/mesological; and 7) value-centered, with the remaining eight currents more recent in emergence: 8) holistic; 9) bioregionalist; 10) praxic; 11) socially critical; 12) feminist; 13) ethnographic; 14) eco-education; and 15) sustainable development/sustainability. While this diversity has provided many opportunities for contextually appropriate theories and practices to develop, Sauv   does note that the lack of coherence has deterred the development of unified goals in the field. Whether that is actually a problem is debated (Russell, Bell, & Fawcett, 2000; Russell & Fawcett, 2013).

Barriers to environmental and sustainability education. A considerable challenge in ESE is the differing opinions about what constitutes “healthy” human-environment relationships (Russell, Bell & Fawcett, 2000). While some ESE approaches appear to reinforce the anthropocentric belief that nature is inferior to humanity and the environment is simply a resource to be utilized by humankind, other approaches emphasize that humans are animals themselves who are part of ecosystems that they must relearn to exist within (Sauv  , 2005).

Personally, in my past experiences, the notion that “real” nature is pristine wilderness void of human activity, meant to be appreciated for its beauty through recreation, was dominant. Although wilderness experiences can help to create transformational and respectful connections to the natural environment, Shapiro (1995) highlights that when participants return to their “normal life,”³ they are often faced with feelings of helplessness or depression as they may not know how to apply the lessons they learned in the wild to their urban lives. A substantial challenge after one of these experiences, then, is to “move beyond raising individual awareness and towards fostering sustainable behavior” (O’Brien, 2012, p. 1198). Although individuals may

³ In this context, “normal life” refers to a way of living that is congruent with dominant societal norms.

be engaged in sustainable actions when participating in wilderness experiences, these practices are hard to maintain once people return to a sociocultural context rife with neoliberal ideologies. It is also important to note that these wilderness experiences are often only accessible to the economically privileged given their significant costs.

Turning from ESE in wilderness settings, which is the context with which I have the most personal and professional experience, to ESE in schools, there are issues and constraints present as well. For example, the top-down approach to mandatory curriculum tends to reinforce one standard, anthropocentric approach to human-nature relationships where the more-than-human world is a mere backdrop to human activity (Russell & Bell, 1996). School ESE often fosters weak connections between pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours (Breunig, Murtell, Russell, & Howard, 2014) and often is predicated on simplistic understandings of the ways in which attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour relate (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

The hidden curriculum of formal schooling can also be a large barrier to ESE. From learning primarily being conducted indoors to anti-environmental messages in textbooks (Chambers, 2008; Orr, 1996), schools have been argued to be profoundly unecological (Steen, 2003). As noted by Joan Chambers (2008), textbooks play a vital role in constructing and imposing specific views of reality that are “embedded in discourses through *what* is said or not said and *how* it is said or not said” (p.11); much of this discourse is not environmentally friendly. Further, when organizations such as the World Bank, who have been known to propagate capitalist and neoliberal agendas, and influence educational policies, and when corporations like McDonalds attempt to help “solve” educational problems such as lack of funding by donating material teaching aids that are often congested with industrial propaganda, these can encourage consumerist ideologies and environmentally destructive behaviours (Jickling & Wals 2008).

Finally, as David Hursh, Joseph Henderson, and David Greenwood (2015) state, current educational discourse in schools in the United States, and arguably to some extent in Canada, is limited to “prescribed curriculum, and learning, evaluated through standardized tests” (p. 306), which limits opportunities for praxis, that is, putting theory into practice, an important aspect of critical approaches to ESE.

Greenwood (2010) also argues that ESE, both within and beyond school settings, is currently missing opportunities to advance environmentally sustainable behaviours due to a reluctance to include critical discourse about dominant societal practices. Indeed, much of current ESE habitually disregards opportunities to address and challenge “empire” (i.e., capitalism and globalization) yet Greenwood (2010) argues “environmental education research must hold together the tension between nature and empire or risk its own irrelevance while empire grows and nature recedes” (p.16). Constance Russell, Anne Bell, and Leesa Fawcett (2000) would agree and argue that all education, and especially ESE, must “involve far more than the mere transmission of facts” (p. 205). Increasingly, scholars working in ESE are also asserting that attention to the emotional dimensions of ESE is vital (e.g., Kelsey & Armstrong, 2012; Martusewicz, 2014; O’Brien, 2012; Ojala, 2015; Russell & Bell, 1996; Russell, Cameron, Socha, & McNinch, 2013; Russell & Oakley, 2016).

Much of this critical research resonates with my own thesis research in that I am interested in not only increasing knowledge of sustainable lifestyles in ecovillages, but am interested in one emotional dimension in particular, happiness, which has not been demonstrated to be achieved through emphasis on money or independent pursuits. Indeed, at the outset of my research, I imagined that critical discussions of dominant neoliberal and capitalist ideologies would arise given participants have chosen to disrupt the “normal” by living in an ecovillage.

Connecting Psychological and Ecological Well-Being

In 1992, when George W. Bush, alluding to the findings at the Rio World Conference on the Environment, stated that “the American way of life is not up for negotiation,” he reinforced a popular belief that altering lifestyles in order to meet the needs of the planet would require personal sacrifices that would diminish individual well-being (Brown & Kasser, 2005). While it is clear that sustainable living will require substantial shifts in current societal practices, it is increasingly imperative that this focus on the potential negative impacts on well-being be challenged. In a world plagued with severe social and environmental crises (Klein, 2015), surely actions that address the needs of the earth while still providing opportunities for human happiness ought to be considered.

There has been increased scholarly attention focused on people’s emotional responses to climate change and global warming (Norgaard, 2011) as well as growing concerns expressed about how children might respond to “doom and gloom” messages (Kelsey & Armstrong, 2012). Topics such as the impending “perfect storm” of severe climate change, deforestation, desertification, species loss, and acidification of oceans (Orr, 2012) can be overwhelming and environmental educators are witnessing emotional responses ranging from anger, fear, discouragement, hopelessness, and despair (Kelsey & Armstrong, 2012; Russell *et al*, 2013). No wonder there is now the term “ecophobia” that describes fear of ecological problems and the natural world. The term was coined by David Sobel (1995) who worries educators carelessly asking children to deal with such heavy issues “will end up distancing children from, rather than connecting them with, the natural world” (p. 17). I turn now to a more positive, hopeful, response in ESE that focuses on educators enabling environmentally sustainable actions and working to foster sustainable happiness.

Sustainable happiness. In 1995, Mitchell Thomashow wrote about how happiness is associated with the lived experiences of environmentalism. He highlighted that the Dalai Lama once suggested that the development of both love and compassion in one's life fosters an inner peace that is crucial to happiness (which is comparable to some practices found in mindfulness). Thomashow further observed, "environmentalists find this happiness when they participate in nature, when they feel integrated with their environment, when they are filled with gratitude and wonder" and concluded that "if ecological identity enables people to identify with the earth, then to love the earth is to love oneself" (p. 168). He later expanded on these ideas in his discussion of ecopsychology, arguing that there is a compelling conceptual connection between those who are in tune with their psyche and those who observe ecosystems and he asserted that a lack of consideration of how local and global actions are interconnected is at the heart of both psychologically and ecologically damaging behaviours (Thomashow, 1998).

Building on these ideas, Kirk Warren Brown and Tim Kasser (2005) found in a large-scale assessment that happier people were living in more environmentally sustainable ways, attributing this to their mindful consideration of their inner state and behaviours based on intrinsic values described as broad psychological constructs aligned with personal growth, relationships, and communities that are not dependent on material goods for fulfillment. Those who focus their energy on intrinsic pursuits are more likely to have reduced consumption rates and engage in more environmentally friendly behaviours (Brown & Kasser, 2005). This brings us to the idea of "sustainable happiness."

O'Brien (2012) characterizes sustainable happiness as "happiness that contributes to individual, community, and/or global well-being without exploiting other people, the environment, or future generations" (p. 1198). To illustrate the concept, she provides an example

about a change in family relationships when environmentally friendly transportation is adopted; parents and children who commute to school by walking report positive emotions such as being “happy” and “relaxed” and state that this time improves their relationships through extended conversations and more social time together. Ultimately, these families are increasing their overall well-being while lessening their environmental footprint. This is one example of a practice that illustrates how a particular approach to the pursuit of happiness can have a positive impact on the surrounding environment.

Analyzing the social, environmental, and economic indicators of well-being can be a useful avenue to cultivating happiness that is authentic, durable, and viable into the future (Kelsey & O’Brien, 2011). In this way, sustainable happiness can be used as a guidepost to influence daily actions and individual decision-making (O’Brien, 2008). O’Brien (2012) argues that in a world where drastic changes need to be made to achieve both environmental flourishing and social justice, the combination of positive psychology and sustainability could be a boon for finding new approaches to sustainability and well-being.

While cultivating sustainable happiness seems promising, there are still limitations and barriers to its widespread implementation. As mentioned earlier, many academics and policymakers are critical of the concept of happiness and approach the subject with much skepticism (Diener, 2006). Until happiness becomes more a widely accepted topic of research and aim of policy in multiple arenas, the willingness to incorporate sustainable happiness into education likely will continue to be a struggle. Another barrier is that some communities are still limited in their ability to even make choices that are more conducive to sustainable lifestyles. For example, most areas are still very dependent on automobiles, and even when individuals would prefer to walk, cycle, or take public transit, these options may not be available. Another example

is related to the manufacture of goods overseas for substantially lower costs, making buying locally not always an option. This is where Klein's (2015) call to fight capitalism and neoliberalism on a much grander scale becomes of greater importance. Addressing such systemic issues are challenging but worth it and there are examples of these ideas being put into praxis, including in educational contexts (O'Brien, 2013b)

Sustainable happiness in education. If education were to pursue cultivating both happiness and environmental sustainability together, students and educators could begin to recognize how individual and group well-being is interdependent, and that daily choices can either contribute or detract from life satisfaction. In addition, students could develop a deeper understanding about how to live and work while respecting themselves, others, the environment, other species, and future generations (O'Brien, 2008). Such an idea is not unheard of in Canada. In 2002, influenced by the *Treaty on Environmental Education for Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibility* (Anon, 1992), the Government of Canada released a guiding framework for ESE. Although the core of this policy document is focused on different implementation strategies, a closer examination of the values touted in the document point to an interesting intersection between the pursuit of happiness and ESE. While the following statements were meant to inform ESE practices, they also represent important ideas that resonate with happiness:

- 1) Having authentic, personal experiences of "sense of place", beginning with one's own home and community is one of the many ways in which citizens can learn environmentally.
- 2) Environmental learning and sustainability can take place at all levels in our education systems and institutions. It can also take place where we live and work, where we recreate and move about our daily lives as consumers, as volunteers and through other forms of participating in society...
- 3) Learning can call on many modes of knowing that respect individual capacities, interests, abilities, and levels of engagements and commitment. (Government of Canada, 2002, p. 8)

There is room in these statements to encourage educators to include cultivating sustainable happiness as part of their mandate.

There now are also examples of educating for sustainable happiness in education in Canada. For example, in Nova Scotia, O'Brien has developed and taught a course at Cape Breton University focused on sustainable happiness and describes her students' improvement in subjective well-being after engaging in specific assignments. At the end of her course, O'Brien (2013b) assigns a final project that asks her students to examine their own lives through both a sustainability and a well-being lens. One of her students wrote about a decision to follow a "Buy Nothing Week" challenge that reunited her family in unexpected ways. Instead of going out for food, which was the common practice in her family, they decided to make dinner together, and in doing so, the student observed that her family relationships grew stronger through increased communication and spending time together again. Due to the significant impact that this decision had on her and her family's well-being, the student decided to continue this lifestyle even after the project. Not only did this action reduce the student's ecological footprint, but it also contributed positively to her family's relationships and happiness. This anecdote provides some evidence that sustainable actions can lead to a more authentically happy lifestyle, but clearly more research on the topic is needed to substantiate this, which is where my research comes in.

Sustainable happiness in my research. Limited empirical research in the field of sustainable happiness has been conducted. Thus far most writing on the topic is descriptive and most findings simply state that individuals who are happy may engage in environmentally sustainable lifestyles (e.g., Ericson, Kjonstad, & Barstad, 2014), but rarely is it suggested that it is *through* environmentally sustainable lifestyles that life satisfaction could be increased. In a brief article, Tim Kasser (2009) asserts, "substantially more research on basic processes involved

in supporting both well-being and ecological sustainability” (p. 179) is needed. As well, Walsh (2015) suggests that more research also needs to be conducted on ecovillages, not only because such research might inspire others to replicate such living arrangements, but also because it could allow “exploration of models, solutions, and shifts in thinking that can be applied to other communities in their contexts” (p. 132). My own research thus brings these two areas together, investigating potential connections between authentic happiness and environmentally sustainable lifestyles practiced on a well-established ecovillage.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

To reiterate, my research focused on investigating and describing the perception of happiness of individuals who live environmentally sustainable lifestyles. Specifically, I wanted to know:

1. What can be learned about perceptions of happiness from people who seek to live environmentally sustainable lifestyles in intentional communities?
2. How might environmentally sustainable lifestyles influence and impact individual happiness?

Methodology

To help me answer these questions, I chose to conduct a qualitative case study that drew on ethnographic concepts. Qualitative research seeks to uncover and explore meaning, particularly “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). Qualitative research is grounded in the belief that reality is socially constructed; as such, this interpretive form of research does not seek to “find” truths, but rather to illuminate meanings ascribed to phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative, ethnographic case study allowed me to explore the diverse understandings of how sustainable living influences individual happiness.

Case Study. Sharan Merriam and Elisabeth Tisdell (2016) define a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37). In other words, it is a pragmatic investigation of a phenomenon, examined within its real-world context. John Creswell (2013) states that a case study is:

a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (*a case*) or multiple bounded systems (*cases*) over time, through detailed, in depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual

material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes. (p. 97)

According to Merriam (2009), a case study can be defined as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Case studies possess one defining characteristic that distinguishes them from other forms of qualitative research: a focus on the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis can be understood as the intrinsically bounded system that is being studied. As suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a technique used to determine whether a case is intrinsically bounded or not is to ask whether data collection is finite, that is to say, is there a limit to the number of people who could participate in the research? In my research, the unit of analysis was the ecovillage, which was physically bound by its geographical location, and there was a limit to the number of individuals who had either chosen to live there or were staying there for a period of time to explore environmentally friendly and sustainable lifestyles.

Case studies have been described as falling into one of three main categories: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Crowe et al., 2011). An intrinsic case study explores a unique case that is distinguishable from others, an instrumental case study considers the specific bounded system as secondary to providing insight into an issue, and a collective case study examines multiple cases simultaneously or sequentially to provide insight into a particular issue (Crowe et al., 2011). In this categorization, my case study is best described as instrumental in that the ecovillage is the setting that allowed me to explore the impacts of environmentally sustainable lifestyles on individual well-being.

As is often the criticism of qualitative research, a case study approach limits the generalizability of findings due to the specificity of the study, but as Robert Yin (2014) notes, even in quantitative research, generalizations are rarely formed from a single analysis due to the inherent inability to escape limitations. When quantitative studies focus on investigating large-

scale phenomena amongst people, the emotional explanations that clarify cause-and-effect and meaning are often lacking, which is a limitation too (J. Chambers, personal communication, January 13, 2016). Yin (2014) emphasizes that the goal of case study research is to develop and advance theories (i.e., analytic generalization), not to come to conclusions (i.e., statistical generalizations). My research contributes to the growing field of sustainable happiness. While the choice to use a bounded system (i.e., an ecovillage) may limit generalizability, my research nonetheless provides what I hope is a rich and holistic glimpse into the lives of those pursuing sustainable living at odds with dominant Eurocentric society in Canada.

Ethnography. The central defining characteristic of an ethnographic investigation is the cultural analysis of human societies (Merriam, 2009). Culture can be defined as the values, attitudes, perceptions, and social interactions that form the behaviours and beliefs of a particular group of people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). The fundamental objectives of ethnographic inquiries are to provide thick descriptions, holistic insights, and interpretations into the nature of a particular social phenomenon (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). A key component to conducting an ethnographic study is that researchers physically immerse themselves in the location that the group inhabits for a significant length of time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). They also use a variety of data collection techniques to help triangulate the data (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008).

Although I did not conduct a full ethnography, as this research was for an MEd thesis with time constraints in play, I still drew from ethnographic approaches to conduct my case study. In the summer of 2016, I traveled to an ecovillage in British Columbia for a period of 2 weeks to investigate the culture of sustainable living and possible impacts on individual happiness, using multiple data collection techniques (i.e., interviews and observations recorded

in field notes) to generate thick descriptions of the lived experiences of individuals in this ecovillage.

Methods

There are many different methods that could be used in an ethnographic case study. I chose to use both interviewing and observation to gain insight into the lived experiences of individuals who live in one particular intentional community. Before turning to a description of these methods, I will first describe the case study site and participants.

Site. I sought to conduct my research at an ecovillage that had a demonstrated commitment to sustainability. I began with a simple Google search for intentional communities to see what information could be found on the Internet, and to my surprise, a worldwide directory was one of the first links that popped up. In this directory, “Fellowship of Intentional Community,”⁴ I was able to set specific desired characteristics to refine and limit the number of communities that would appear in a search. The requirements that I set were: 1) Canadian; 2) open to visitors; 3) an ecovillage; and 4) did not share/practice a single religion or spiritual belief. Regarding the latter, although I have no problem with communities that emphasize religion and/or particular spiritual beliefs, I did not want this to be the sole or primary founding principle of the community as that could have confounded my data. With these limitations, 39 communities were identified, and I began to read through each description. Very quickly, I realized that many of the listed communities were still in the planning stage or only newly created. I thus readjusted my search requirements and added “established” as a necessary condition. This limited the results to six communities in locations all over Canada. Each

⁴ Available at www.ic.org

ecovillage held different desirable features and while any number of these communities looked like promising possibilities, I needed to find a way to further narrow my search.

I chose to do so through personal communication. Jocelyn Burkhart is a local resident of Thunder Bay who owns a company that offers consulting, coaching, and spiritual guidance. She is also a PhD student in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University who conducted MEd research on an intentional community dedicated to permaculture (Burkhart, 2009). My supervisor suggested that Jocelyn would be a knowledgeable individual to consult given she had spent some time living in and working on a number of intentional communities worldwide, and could possibly provide more insight into what was an unfamiliar world to me. I met with her and spoke about her many experiences and she generously offered me insights into the communities on my list with which she was familiar, and provided me with a number of other possible communities to contact.

After some consideration, I was able to narrow the list down to three possible communities, all in British Columbia. I contacted each ecovillage by email (Appendix A). A small community located on an island off the coast of B.C. responded quickly to my inquiry and we remained in regular communication for a number of weeks as they answered my various queries. One of the other communities eventually responded to my request after a substantial period of time and the other did not respond at all. I decided that the initial community that contacted me would be an ideal site for my research not only because they responded so generously and enthusiastically, but also because of their size, isolated location, level of commitment to environmental sustainability, and the length of time they had been in existence.

The family purchased the 300-acre property in the 1990's for the purpose of farming and self-sufficiency. Although it was not the initial intention to develop a small community on the

property, the isolating and laborious nature of this lifestyle led the family to consider the idea of community living, that is, living off of the land with a small group of people who share both the work and pleasure of the farm. Slowly, as like-minded people began exploring possibilities with the family, a small community started to develop just off of the main farm site, with members living either on property they rented or by using the land through a work/trade agreement. Currently the community typically has ten full-time adults in residence, some of whom have children, as well as four part-time/temporary adults and a number of volunteers and helpers, some of whom visit under the auspices of World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF); the latter group are often referred to as WWOOFers. Although I initially had a concern about the small size of the community, it turns out that the size was in fact ideal for my research as interactions with all community members were easily had.

This ecovillage generates up to 90% of its own energy, and harvests and sells lumber as an additional source of income. Community members produce between 50 to 75% of their own food on up to 30 acres of fields dedicated to producing fruits and vegetables and supporting animals that supply their dairy, eggs, and meat. Because they regularly host visitors who contribute to life on the farm, my living experience mimicked that of a WWOOFer volunteer as I helped with daily chores and lived as a community member. In this way, I was able to act as a participant observer (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014), which deepened my understanding of the context.

Participants. At the time of my arrival, there were a total of 22 adults living on the farm either part-time or full-time, and throughout my visit, that number fluctuated often as part-time residents and volunteers left and returned. While the community as a whole gave consent to participate in this study (see the section on Ethics below), a total of 12 individual participants

were interviewed. Initially, I had anticipated only conducting 6 to 8 interviews, but as more community members became aware of the phenomenon that I was studying, more wanted to participate and I did not want to turn anyone away. To ensure some breadth, I chose to interview both participants who were living as full-time residents, as well as volunteers who had either committed to long-term stays or who had returned to the farm after some time. I interviewed both women and men of a variety of ages. The participants had each arrived at the community in various ways, although many had used the WWOOF program as a starting point. Table 1 provides demographic information for each participant, identified by their given pseudonym.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

<i>Participant's Pseudonyms</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Living Situation</i>
Bailey	37	F	Caucasian	Full-time (2 years)
Alex	26	M	Caucasian	Volunteer (3 months + 2 months)
Jasper	27	M	Caucasian (Canadian/American)	Volunteer (6 months)
Harley	25 - 35	M	Caucasian	Full-time (2 years)
Jordan	22	F	Caucasian	Volunteer (1.5 years)
Elliott	32	F	Caucasian (Polish/Scottish/Canadian)	Full-time (3 years)
Charlie	60	M	Caucasian (Dutch, born in Canada)	Full-time (Over 20 years)
Adrian	33	M	Caucasian (German/English/Canadian)	Volunteer (1.5 years) + Full-time (3 Years)
Devin	25 - 35	F	Caucasian	Full-time (Almost 2 years)
Finley	28	M	Caucasian	Full-time (2 years)
Ray	19	F	Caucasian (British, from London)	Volunteer (4 - 6 weeks)
Jamie	27	F	Caucasian (French/Spanish/Canadian)	Volunteer (2 - 4 months)

Data Collection. Creswell (2014) stresses that a natural setting for research can be advantageous; rather than bringing an individual into a contrived situation like a laboratory, participants who are interviewed or observed in natural settings are in an authentic place of which they have lived experience. Creswell (2014) also suggests that natural contexts prevent a researcher from being able to manipulate or control what is being studied and ultimately can help provide a more holistic, complex account. In such naturalistic qualitative research, data can be collected through multiple methods to provide a rich, thick description of a phenomenon. I chose to use two data collection techniques: participant observations and semi-structured interviews.

Participant observation. Qualitative observations are sometimes critiqued for being highly subjective and unreliable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although human perception is indeed contextual, Michael Patton (2015) disputes this criticism by offering the comparison of contestants in an amateur community talent show versus professional performers. He likens researchers to professional performers who have received intensive training to develop advanced skills. In contrast, although we all have lived experiences as observers, those observations are mostly conducted intuitively and often without systematically considering possible interconnections. Qualitative researchers have been taught selective attentiveness and are able to pay special attention to details that might otherwise go overlooked (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As part of the “Qualitative Research in Education” course that I took in my second semester of the MEd, I was given a small research project where I was able to practice observation skills with the support of my professor. This experience provided me with a chance to practice and gain deeper knowledge of selective attentiveness before I was fully immersed in my thesis research in the ecovillage.

Apart from the actual activities that may be occurring during an experience, a research observer should also be paying attention to the physical setting, the participants and their interactions with one another, the conversations, and the researcher's own behaviours, thoughts, and feelings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Doing so allows researchers to give detailed accounts of experiences. Creswell (2014) asserts that observations are also valuable because researchers can record information as it is occurring and are able to offer accounts of firsthand experience. According to Creswell (2014), observational protocol calls for two styles of notes when recording data in field journals: descriptive notes (i.e., what is actually occurring amongst and with the participants) and reflective notes (i.e., the researcher's personal thoughts, speculations, feelings, problems, ideas, and impressions). Detailed field notes should be taken during the actual experience, and full notes, in narrative format, are imperative and should be written as soon after the observations as possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

There are four different stances researchers typically choose from as an observer: 1) complete participant; 2) participant as observer; 3) observer as participant; 4) and complete observer. The level of involvement can range from complete involvement where participants may be unaware that they are even being studied to no involvement where the researcher does not participate at all and is often hidden or concealed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). Although interviews were my primary source of data, my observations (captured in descriptive and reflective notes) were nonetheless important as they helped me understand the context of the living situation at this ecovillage, as well as help me confirm (or not) some of what the participants said for triangulation purposes. Throughout the day, depending on the activities, I took on an observer as participant stance or a participant as observer stance. Before heading to bed, I would write about specific conversations that had occurred, as well as my observations

about how individuals were interacting with each other and the world around them. In addition, I would write about daily activities that I was experiencing alongside my thoughts on how those experiences impacted my well-being or how they differed from what occurred in my regular life.

As I took on a volunteer role to feel more part of the community and to gain a better understanding of the complexities of this lifestyle, I often assumed more of a participant as observer stance during working hours and engaged in all activities and conversations. I made an effort to ensure that throughout these conversations I did not contribute additional thoughts that might have swayed someone's position on an issue, especially when talking about topics directly related to my research. At other times, and usually during large group discussions that occurred either during down time or at meals, I simply engaged by listening rather than contributing thoughts, and adopted more of an observer as participant stance. In both situations, the group was aware that I was engaging in observations and was able to control the information that was being shared or was on display. While it could be argued that the awareness of my presence altered behaviours, establishing an honest and open relationship with participants was more important to me given the phenomenon that I was studying and considering that interviews were my main source of data collection.

Interviews. I chose to use interviews so that I could hear stories that could not be directly observed. Patton (2015) explains that:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p. 426)

Happiness can be viewed as state of mind that cannot necessarily be observed, so it was important to talk with individuals to gain access to their personal understanding of their experiences and how they interpret the world.

Unlike interviews one frequently sees in media, academic interviews are more systematic and purposeful (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There are a number of different ways to conduct interviews, such as face-to-face, by telephone, or by video, and interviews are often categorized as either highly structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Creswell, 2014). Highly structured interviews can be characterized as a verbal survey whereas an unstructured interview may feel more like an open-ended conversation. In between these two styles are semi-structured interviews that can be understood as organized conversations with flexible questioning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As this was the first time that I had met any of the participants, I purposely chose to immerse myself in the community and the lifestyle as much as possible for the first couple of days before conducting any interviews because I wanted, as much as possible, to create a strong foundation and trusting relationship first. I chose a semi-structured approach to acquire specific knowledge of participants' perception of happiness and sustainable living, and to have the freedom to respond and react to the conversation so that ideas important to the participants emerged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This format of interviewing is more casual than a structured format and proved important to use as it helped establish good relationships with participants so that they were comfortable sharing authentic, candid, and occasionally vulnerable interpretations of their experiences (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). Additionally, this structure allowed me to share some of my own relevant personal and vulnerable stories to further establish a sense of sharing and trust.

While I had a list of prepared questions to ask (see Appendix B), the interviews remained open-ended to allow me to pose impromptu questions and probe certain statements for further clarification. Because many of the interview questions required self-analysis, which is not always easily done immediately after a question is asked, I provided the participants with the option of viewing the questions prior to the interviews. Several participants simply briefly reviewed the questions immediately prior to the interview, others reviewed them a day or two prior to the interview so that they could thoroughly consider their responses. I found that the latter led to particularly rich and deeply thoughtful responses.

The interviews lasted between 30 to 75 minutes, depending on how much the participants had already contemplated the subjects and were willing to share. All interviews were audio-recorded and were conducted privately either in the participants' homes or in a comfortable location on the property. One interview was conducted in the participant's truck on the way to a delivery because, although the participant was incredibly interested in taking part in the research, they also had limited availability and could not justify setting aside time to simply be interviewed.

All interviews were carried out, transcribed, and analyzed by me. After transcribing the interviews, every participant was sent, by email, their individual transcript to review so that they could confirm that the information that they shared accurately represented their thoughts at the time. If they felt that any information needed to be clarified, they were welcomed to elaborate in a response email. Additionally, if any of their ideas had changed since the time of the interview that they felt were important to acknowledge, or if there were any additional thoughts that they wished to communicate, they were also invited to include this in their response email. All 12 participants were sent their transcripts. Ten participants returned their transcripts, most with few

or no changes required, with one participant adding some additional thoughts and two correcting my spelling and grammar mistakes. All changes were made.

Data Analysis. While I had initially intended to conduct data analysis by printing out all transcripts and either highlighting by hand or cutting out quotations to divide interviews into themes, I quickly realized that due to the overwhelming amount of data that I had acquired (i.e. 142 pages, single-spaced with 2.54 cm margins), this process would have been far too time-consuming and not efficient. In the same “Qualitative Research in Education” course where I learned about selective attentiveness, we also examined a qualitative data analysis computer program called ATLAS.ti that I decided to use instead. This software allowed me to upload a large number of separate transcription documents, easily code and comment on quotations, and organize quotations across all documents based on codes and code groups (i.e., themes) to help me determine and highlight key findings. Although I had to watch an online tutorial to remind myself of program functions since I had not used the software for a number of months, this program saved me a great deal of time and energy as it organized data into the a priori themes that I initially chose to use for analyzing and coding. Additionally, due to the aforementioned abilities of this program, I felt that I was provided with ample time to comprehensively evaluate, reflect and ruminate about the developed themes, ensuring a careful and an in-depth analysis of all of the data occurred. Prior to starting this process, I developed five potential themes based on the literature review, interview questions, and my knowledge of how the interviews had unfolded. Throughout the analysis process, and after some rearranging and eliminating, I finally settled on four main themes, each with several sub-categories, which became the basis of my Findings chapter. Despite feeling fairly organized and ready to begin writing at that point, as I went to print the data that was grouped into codes, I realized that I still had over 100 pages of

“important” quotations. At this point, I needed to re-analyze the data, and as I was re-reading, I recognized that much of what I had highlighted were simply ideas I wanted to discuss rather than important quotations. I then wrote out in a separate document the ideas I wanted to discuss in each theme, and managed to narrow the important quotations down to 12 pages. At this point, I was finally ready to begin writing the Findings chapter.

Ethics. Before the process of data collection began, formal approval for this research was acquired through the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board (REB). As noted above, I had already sent the community an exploratory email (see Appendix A) and they expressed willingness to host me. Upon approval by the REB, I sent the ecovillage an official information letter that provided further details about the study (see Appendix C) and a consent form (see Appendix D) that gave me permission to observe the community and to approach community members about potential participation. Once that had been secured and after arrival at the ecovillage, I spoke with a number of potential interviewees and gave them official information letters (see Appendix E), as well as a consent form to participate (see Appendix F). All participants were aware of my study prior to my arrival given the small size of the community and they had been part of discussions about whether to allow me to visit.

In both the information and consent forms, it was noted that participant involvement was entirely voluntary, that participants could refuse to answer any question, and were able to withdraw at any time from both the interviews and the study. All data remains confidential and my supervisor and I are the only ones who have access to the original data. Participants were all given pseudonyms and only I know their identities. Data (i.e., transcriptions and field notes) will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years, after which they will be destroyed.

There was no physical harm or risk for participants in this study, yet there was a very small amount of psychological risk if an interview question happened to trigger a painful memory. A member of the community had provided me with contact information for community support (e.g., local counselors, psychologists, or other mental health support) and this information was with me during the interviews, although it turned out not to be needed.

The participants were given the option of receiving an executive summary of the thesis or an electronic copy of the full thesis by indicating so on the consent forms. A hard copy of the full thesis will also be sent to the community upon completion.

Chapter Four: Findings

Four main themes emerged inductively from the analysis of the twelve interviews and my field notes based on my observations at the ecovillage. Given that the interview questions were informed by prior research, it came as no surprise that the four major themes resonated well with themes from the literature review. These themes come out of the participants' lived experiences, their perceptions of happiness and sustainability, their use of happiness exercises, and their sense of detachment from mainstream systems. The first theme focuses on the participants' understanding of happiness, whether they believe happiness can be increased throughout one's life, and whether it is possible for everyone to be happy. The second theme concentrates on the concept of sustainable living, including the complications that arise when striving for this type of lifestyle in contemporary times. The third theme relates to participants' thoughts on the various happiness practices that were described in chapter two and how their chosen lifestyle resonates with those practices. And finally, the fourth theme focuses on how participants perceive that their lifestyle differs from dominant Eurocentric practices in Canada, including their purposeful distancing of themselves from those systems and how that impacts their overall well-being.

Theme One: Understandings of Happiness

As noted in chapter two, the definition of happiness that I am drawing on for this research emphasizes that the concept is more of a state of mind rather than simply an emotion (i.e., authentic durable happiness vs. fluctuating happiness, Dambrun et al., 2012), and I was curious to investigate how the participants perceived happiness given their approach would likely colour the rest of our conversations.

Definitions of happiness. When asked to define happiness, many participants, especially those who had never explicitly thought about it before, admitted that it was a challenging concept

to define. All but two participants acknowledged that happiness is greater than simply a feeling, using terms such as “lasting contentment,” “life satisfaction,” and “having meaning.” For instance, Charlie defined happiness as “living in the present and being content with the present.” For him, happiness was more closely related to a feeling of contentment rather than one of total joyfulness, and he argued that to be happy was to be at peace with one’s life situations. He continued by stating that happiness comes from how one chooses to look at and react to everyday experiences and challenges.

Two participants, Harley and Adrian, described happiness as having one’s needs met, with Harley specifying the importance of differentiating between what are perceived needs and what are actual needs. When prompted to define what he meant by actual needs, he described physical needs such as shelter and food and emotional needs such as love and belonging. Both participants highlighted the importance of having support to meet actual needs, and asserted that connection to people is significant for happiness as it contributes to meaning in one’s life.

Finley described happiness as more of a feeling that can be experienced by “having done something or achieved something” and he felt that happiness is different for everyone:

Happiness is subjective so that’s the thing, right? The happiest you’ve ever been might be not as happy as someone else has ever been, but it is still your benchmark for super happy. And maybe that’s all that matters to an individual, is whether you are happier or sadder than you were.

Both he and Charlie argued that based on their own lived experiences and observations, happiness comes easier for some than it does for others. Further, Jasper, who had spent the previous few months exploring the idea of happiness in his own life, echoed this characteristic by stating that, “it’s a place inside yourself; it’s completely subjective.” Elliot suggested that such explorations were important, and argued that to even begin to delve into understandings of happiness within ourselves, having the time to contemplate is vital:

I think that everyone's lives ... are so varied, but if we have time and space to explore ourselves and how we are in the world, there is room to grow and see other ways of being, or doing things. This space allows us to actually be able to check in with [ourselves] and our feelings.

Jasper concurred that creating this intrapersonal space to explore one's values encourages well-being because in his experiences, happiness is a process that rids oneself of "ego" and "desire", and takes considerable energy and focus. Charlie, who had similarly spent time in self-reflection after experiencing a number of hardships, also believed that happiness and engaging in personal development are interconnected, and stressed the difficulty of this process. To illustrate the challenges that can occur when trying to shift personal behaviours and perspectives, he discussed an idea that his mental health worker once shared with him:

She was explaining neural pathways, and she explained that they are like trails in the woods, and you walk down the same trail because it's the easiest to stay on. It takes a lot of work to make a new trail, but you can make new trails in your brain, it just takes energy. And it is so easy to get back on the same trail again.

After asking Charlie a few questions about the hardships that he had faced, I then stated that I was going to change the subject to discuss something happier at which point he was quick to assert that, "happiness is not to see pain as something bad" and that he was "glad to have been unhappy" as these hardships had pushed him to engage in self-exploration and brought him to a point where he could be happy.

Many other participants also shared similar ideas about how adversity and happiness can be interrelated. For example, Jasper, who was diagnosed at a young age with a chronic illness, stated, "What would sweetness be if you'd never known what bitterness was? ...you can't have shadows without sunlight." He asserted that his hardship motivated him to explore happiness in his own life and stated that he is now at a place where he feels "lucky" to be sick, although he admitted that this outlook had taken a lot of mental work. Like Jasper, Jordan stated that, while

she does not feel like she has experienced a great deal of happiness in her own life, in her explicit pursuit of a happier life, she has come to feel grateful for her struggles:

In a way, I'm kind of grateful that happiness doesn't come easy for me because sometimes I feel like because I can go deeper, I can also go higher. And I definitely didn't always feel that way. I've had seasons of my life in the last little while where I have felt really happy; it's made me grateful for the range and depth of emotions that I am able to feel.

Elliot felt that such fluctuations in emotions was part of being human, asserting that although people can have an underlying stable feelings of happiness, humans must respond to whatever is happening in their surroundings, which causes fluctuations.

Is it possible to increase happiness? As another way of probing their understandings of happiness, I asked the participants if they thought that people could become happier over time; 10 of the 12 participants stated confidently that this was possible based on their own experiences. Harley, Jasper, Charlie, Elliot, and Finley all stated that once they had had the time and space to explore their values and analyze what gave meaning in their lives, they had been able to increase their own happiness once they purposely lived in accordance with their values. For example, Harley stated that:

I've been able to look at certain things inside of myself, or my own work, to feel more authentic and more able to just be who I am, and to pursue the creative things, or the things that give me satisfaction.

Adrian, whose definition of happiness revolved around meeting needs rather than wants, likewise believed that it is possible to increase well-being. For him, happiness is "within our control" and can evolve, but he also stated that, "we need to be motivated to work on it." While Jordan believed that happiness could be increased, she also suggested that for many people, the exact details in one's life that could be altered to increase happiness is not always obvious. For example, when asked if increasing happiness took a conscious effort, she responded,

I think it definitely plays a huge part. Like some things can come into your life, and make you feel better without you having to really actively put yourself out there, but there's also subtle ways that you can bring those things into your life; and maybe you don't necessarily feel that you are making an effort, but it happens because of the decisions that you make.

While Jamie believed that one could become happier throughout life, she also felt that it is possible to become sadder. Devin affirmed this idea when she discussed friends who had struggled with depression as well as her own battle. She argued that for some people who have lived with depression all of their lives, "it just doesn't seem possible for them to get better" as there are "uncontrollable" forces working against them. She noted that in her own life, she had become less happy as she had grown older because of struggles with depression; however, when asked if she thought that this would ever change, she stated that it probably would. She was working on healing and had sought out support, and believed that happiness is something that "you can work on and practice and change." While she attributed some of her struggles to depression, she also stated that she does not really know why she has become less happy as she has aged and wondered if it also had to do with having an increase in responsibilities and therefore worries.

Alex, who is a social worker working with youth at risk, shared a similar idea to this latter thought of Devin's, candidly stating that he did not believe that adults could ever be as happy as children. He related this idea to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and described adults as always striving for self-actualization (i.e., the top need of the pyramid), which comes with the pressure of expectations that adults will eventually find happiness even as life becomes more complicated. In contrast, he found that children are just simply happy. Based on her own experiences, Bailey also expressed how this striving for happiness does not always lead to happiness. She advised that continually saying things such as, "When I do 'blank,' I'll be happy"

becomes a trap by always anticipating the future and hoping for happiness, instead of living in the present. She recognized that in her own life, she was constantly searching for “the perfect lifestyle,” and had come to realize that nowhere is flawless, so figuring out how to find happiness in what appears to not be ideal can open up opportunities to increase well-being in the present.

Despite their comprehensive interpretations of well-being and their belief in the ability to increase happiness, many participants still did not see happiness as attainable for everyone, given the challenging situations in which people live. For example, Alex returned to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, stating that because of some people’s living situations, they may be simply striving to meet physiological needs and had little room to devote to seeking self-actualization. On a related note, Harley made the point that his ability to pursue happiness is grounded in his privilege as a white, able-bodied male:

I think that people are in all sorts of situations in this world that systematically oppress them and [that] prevents them from being truly happy, and not having the resources or the support to change those things... [M]e as a white, able-bodied, young male, I have a lot of things, I pretty well have everything working for me. So sometimes I think that it is easier for me to have my needs met, and to feel safety.

Harley expanded on this idea by stressing that although he recognized happiness comes from within, it is tough for him to say that everyone can just be calm within themselves and “cultivate happiness” in whatever scenario they are in because “some people just don’t have that luxury.” Bailey spoke along similar lines, noting that some people might be simply struggling for survival rather than having the space to seek happiness. She also noted that others may be faced with “mental states” that are stopping them from being happy.

While Elliot shared that she has known people who have never felt happy throughout their lives, she still thinks that it is something everyone should try to cultivate as it is “such a beautiful human experience.” Complementing this thought, Ray even speculated that maybe for

those who have never found happiness, it was not necessarily because they were not capable of happiness, but maybe they had never been inspired to seek it.

Jasper and Adrian, who both believed well-being comes from within, suspected that improved happiness is indeed within everyone's ability. Adrian recognized that it "is a lot harder for some people, [as] there are a lot of external forces impacting happiness" yet he also believed that, given enough support and freedom, it is possible for everyone to work towards it. Jasper suggested that if people could come to understand that happiness does not come from "things" and were able to implement this belief in their lives, everyone would be more capable of discovering happiness.

As has been established in this previous section, the participants' understandings of happiness were quite varied, but at least half had already thought extensively about this concept. Given their depth of reflection and their choice to live this lifestyle, I was also interested in examining how members of this community perceived "sustainability" to seek a deeper, more authentic interpretation of how they understood this style of living.

Theme Two: Understandings of Sustainability and Sustainable Living

As discussed in chapter two, the ability to live an environmentally sustainable lifestyle would require major shifts from common Eurocentric practices, so in the interviews I explored participants' thoughts on sustainability generally, and sustainable living practices in particular. Many spoke to the complexities of the idea and some wondered if sustainability was even possible in contemporary society.

Defining sustainability and sustainable living. When asked to define sustainability, participants responded in a variety of ways, some noting how complicated the word has become and others providing fairly straightforward responses, or at least suggesting that a more

“common” or “rigid” definitions be used. For example Adrian suggested that a simple definition of sustainability could be understood as “living in a way that we could all live indefinitely on this planet without degrading the ecosystems, [but] maybe at this point in humans’ existence, it would have to make space for restoring ecosystems as well.” Ray’s simple explanation connected sustainable living to “basically not speeding up environmental issues” and listening to what scientists recommend are healthy methods of living on the planet.

Charlie viewed living sustainably as existing in a way that “the same operation could continue in perpetuity without ruining the planet or human inhabitation of the planet” and both he and Harley suggested that true sustainable living occurred in traditional villages. Charlie illustrated what that might look like:

My thought of a sustainable, happy lifestyle would be a village of 1,000 people, 500 people, 200 people living without fossil fuels, and having bakers and blacksmiths, and just various tradespeople. And I think that if you lived in peace, probably half the people would be growing food and the other half would be providing for them. But you wouldn’t need insurance agents, and bankers, and all the other things.

He also recognized, however, that this example would not be possible due to the massive human population so instead suggested that a more realistic approach would be “the closer we are back to a more natural balance, the better.” Likewise, Jordan suggested that living sustainably is “having systems that are in harmony with what’s around it” although she also recognized that this would be “complicated and challenging” given the complexities of the world.

Jasper observed that because sustainability has become a marketing tool, he often questions whether an individual who is using the term actually knows what the word means and whether what they are discussing refers to “true” sustainability. Harley shared a similar thought about how the term was overused and had lost much of its meaning:

It is plastered onto everything, and I think that for me, that definition is pretty rigid, and is pretty extreme... I don't think there is any way that industrial civilization is at all sustainable or can be... I see sustainability as what can be done in place forever, which means relationships where humans are giving back.

He argued that when sustainability is not clearly defined, there is room for interpretation, leading to possible misinterpretations. Elliot also felt that the concept of sustainability had become quite complex and suggested that maybe it simply cannot be the same thing for everyone: "Maybe everyone just isn't going to be able to do the same thing to make human life on this planet sustainable." This thought resonated with others, especially once Devin explained that in her experience of the permaculture movement, the term "resilience" is used more than "sustainability." She explained that resiliency refers to both sustaining life as well as "creating more life, more energy, and more beauty through restoring and encouraging diversity and the resilience of life." In this way, for her, sustainability is more closely linked to surviving whereas resilience is more closely connected to the idea of thriving.

While some participants provided clear definitions of what they believed sustainable living was, some indicated that they did not actually think that it was possible on a global scale. For example, Adrian even stated that his definition of sustainability would require fewer people on the earth, and for this reason, he did not believe it to be possible. Finley suggested that while many people believe that a farming lifestyle is sustainable, he thought that the only true way to live sustainably would be through a hunter/gatherer lifestyle. He explained that as soon as nutrients are removed from the ground, they need to be replaced, and this is not what is generally occurring in farming. In a similar vein, Harley asserted that while a very small number of people "deep in the Amazon somewhere" are proving that this lifestyle is still possible, sustainable living will not occur globally in the way that people are led to believe, as this would require massive and drastic changes to systems that have become well-established.

Although at least five participants did not believe that living sustainably was possible, some still expressed reasons to fight for the integrity of the term. Adrian stated:

I think the way that a lot of people use it; it doesn't have any meaning left. It sort of replaced the word "green." So the definition isn't very rigorous, or the definition of that word isn't ever thought of for a lot of institutions that use it. So the goals that are set in using that word, or sustainability goals, are often not really getting towards sustainability. I guess, I'm not that into the word, but I am also okay with holding onto its definition, or defending its definition, instead of just letting go and using something else.

Ray made a similar point in saying that while she believed that sustainability is complex, she also thought it would be useful to have a clear definition to aid others' understandings and ability to pursue a more sustainable lifestyles.

Is their lifestyle sustainable? With these diverse ideas about sustainability and sustainable living in mind, I was curious to investigate how the participants viewed their own lifestyle. Like the definitions of sustainability, there were mixed responses; half of the participants believed that their lifestyle on the farm was sustainable while at least four participants had strong opinions about why it was not. Harley, for example, felt that due to the use of fossil fuels in the community, he could not view their lifestyle as sustainable:

No, I don't, because the way that we live here at the farm, if fossil fuels weren't around, it would change drastically. To have fossil fuels, there is destruction all along the way from all points; from the extraction, to the burning, to what it enables you to do. So the more of those things [items dependent on fossil fuels] that we use, the more we are screwing up. No, I don't think this is sustainable because it still has all the elements of industrial culture supporting it.

He asserted that any style of living that made use of industrial infrastructures could not be considered sustainable because he felt it simply maintained a destructive lifestyle that harms the environment. Likewise, Bailey highlighted that the community members still frequently need to drive due to their more isolated location, contributing to their ecological footprint.

Other participants also struggled to categorically state that their lifestyle was sustainable due to the many resources that were being brought onto the community, such as cooking oils, flour, sugar, and vinegars. Jordan suggested though that it would be challenging to not bring resources in due to the number of volunteers they were trying to feed. While she stated that she often felt guilty about this, she also stressed that, for her, sustainability is not about being perfect but is instead about making the effort. Similarly, Alex believed that this lifestyle was sustainable to “a certain point” although he also believed that it was not completely sustainable because they relied on other people to buy new products that this community could then later reuse. Jasper also recognized that the community does import some items onto the property, which could be viewed as not sustainable, but he also suggested that they do not necessarily require all those items and could “do without and still live quite well.”

Despite these various concerns, community members generally believed that their lifestyle was more sustainable than people living in mainstream culture. Finley, for example, stated:

I think that I live more sustainably than some people. I think more than anything..., you can't. I don't think that I live sustainably but I think that I think about it a lot, and I am always thinking about how I could do something in a way that is more efficient, or uses fewer resources than I have.

He felt that being conscious of one's actions and lessening individual impacts on the surrounding environment goes some way towards sustainable living. With a similar mindset, Bailey argued that the act of living sustainably in this lifestyle was a direct result of being more connected to their surroundings. For example, she mentioned that when using the washing machine, she had to be very conscious of the sun as the machine uses solar energy and would only function if enough power was being produced. Although, like Finley, she believed that farming can have negative impacts on the environment due to the nutrients that are being drawn out of the soil, she also

thought that farming serves as a constant reminder to replace those nutrients to maintain a “closed loop”:

...just being able to grow our own food, and grow organically, and have the manure from the cows to feed our land, and having that loop somewhat closed seems quite sustainable and pretty awesome. We do bring in a few inputs from off the farm, like different minerals... but, at the end of the day, farming is taking stuff out of the soil and constantly trying to put more back in, so you are always trying to be sustainable to the earth so that it can grow you more vegetables.

While Ray was fairly new to the community, she stated that she had a hard time believing that this community was not living sustainably given they were so connected to their energy and food sources. She pointed out that they are able to provide for up to 14 people by simply using their mini-energy setup that exclusively uses solar and micro-hydro power. Jasper likewise believed that their lifestyle was sustainable as they were able to live “on this land, in this space, doing relatively the same thing” for extended periods. He noted how the owner of the land has children, one of whom is continuing to live a similar lifestyle on the same land rather than follow a mainstream lifestyle in what some members call the “other” world.

Although generally the participants believed that this lifestyle was more sustainable than the current dominant Eurocentric systems that are in-place globally, a few participants highlighted why this lifestyle still could not be the one solution to environmental issues. For example, while Elliot felt that the community was not only beneficial to her but also “probably for the broader world” sustainably speaking, she also did not believe that every person on the planet could live this way since this would require people to be willing to detach themselves from the comforts and conveniences common in Western lifestyles. This point was reinforced by Jamie, who admitted that she could not see herself living this type of lifestyle permanently because she was born into a world with more luxuries, such as electricity, and she believed that giving them up forever would be too challenging.

After determining the participants' understandings of both happiness and sustainability, I was intrigued to see how, if at all, the community members cultivated happiness in their own lives in the eco-village. The next section, then, examines participants' reflections on ideas that are the basis of many happiness exercises.

Theme Three: Happiness Practices at the Ecovillage

As discussed in the literature review, happiness can be viewed as a skill that can be improved through the use of different mental training or happiness activities (see page 14). Building on that research (Angel, 2010; Lyubomirsky, 2007), I designed some interview questions to investigate how, if at all, the participants were, in their lives on the farm, explicitly engaging in practices that form the foundation of the various exercises recommended by Angel (2010) and Lyubomirsky (2007). It became clear, through analysis of the data, that some aspects of their sustainable lifestyle supports and encourages such practices while other aspects provide challenges. The interview questions touched on most of the ideas that underlay the happiness activities found in Lyubomirsky (2007) and Angel (2010), however the following section only highlights those ideas that emerged as most prominent in the analysis of data.

Money and happiness. While neither Lyubomirsky (2007) nor Angel (2010) offers a specific happiness exercise to help cultivate an understanding that money has limited impacts on well-being, in her work Lyubomirsky (2007) emphasizes the idea of hedonic adaptation (as discussed in Chapter Two) to help readers understand why money only affects well-being until basic needs are met. I thus designed one of my interview questions to specifically explore the participants' relationships to money and what value they placed on financial wealth in their own lives. While reflecting on one's relationship with money and its impact on happiness may not have been classified as a specific happiness exercise, based on the complexity of participant

responses during the interviews, changing one's relationship to money can take considerable conscious effort, similar to other happiness exercises and can impact personal understandings of happiness within us.

As noted in the methodology chapter, the participants had a range of different living circumstances; as such, their dependency on and relationship to money differed. While some participants were only volunteering for an extended period and otherwise partook in the more common Western lifestyle, those who lived full-time on the farm either: a) owned the property; b) rented a piece of the property, which required them to work off site to generate income to afford rent; or c) had established a work-trade agreement with the owner of the property (i.e. they exchanged their labour for rent) which meant little to no money was ever being exchanged. These latter individuals were then able to focus mostly on homesteading rather than working off site to make money. Given these varying living circumstances, I was expecting a range of responses when I asked participants if they thought money provided freedom. Interestingly, not a single participant completely agreed with this statement and instead suggested that the relationship between money, happiness, and freedom is more complicated.

Devin stated that money could be viewed as a tool:

I think that money is a tool and I think that it is a useful tool. Just like fossil fuels are a tool and often are over-consumed and over-used in wasteful ways, money is the same; too much of a good thing is maybe not good.

She also suggested, however, that the ways in which someone acquires money and how they spend it might also impact whether they "feel good" about both. Bailey suggested that while money is not the "be all, end all," she also admitted that she had never been in a position where she was living penny to penny, and thus could only imagine the stress doing so would cause. She also recognized that although she was living in a situation where the need for money was

minimal, to even access this type of lifestyle, she needed to be without debt. This was an idea that both she and Harley recognized as a privilege that many do not have in contemporary Western culture. Additionally, although living on the farm does not require her to need to buy much, she expressed that there are still times in her life that she does require money and highlighted the importance of having a small pocket to draw from when needed. Amongst the community members, Bailey's approach was not unusual; other participants reported that although they do not make money for most of the year, they would leave the farm for up to a couple of months at a time to work elsewhere to generate a small amount of income for savings. Additionally, Alex also suggested that even the owner of the property needed to have a set amount of money to draw upon to run the whole operation. He suggested that given the number of people who were living and depending on the farm, if something was to go seriously wrong with either the animals or the major crops, the overall happiness levels on site could be heavily impacted if the property owner did not have money to draw upon if needed.

Amongst participants, there was a shared belief that more money does not necessarily mean more freedom but could sometimes be necessary, and Harley highlighted how this idea is not a common view in mainstream Canadian culture. He asserted that in a society heavily invested in the concept of capital wealth, money does in fact provide a form of freedom because people with money are often rewarded and those without are often rejected or shamed. He also believed this was one example of the many "glaring pitfalls" of capitalism. He explained how it is often hard to see beyond money because of the presumed freedom that it provides, highlighting a personal experience. When he was younger, he received a large sum of money from an insurance settlement following an accident, and described his reaction to receiving the money:

The feeling I had inside when all of a sudden I saw a cheque for \$50,000 gave me this high. There was this literal, or physical, or physiological thing that I think brought a hit of happiness, ... likewise having money and not being in debt in a culture arranged around debt. I just remember the feeling of having it... and it is a line between not having enough and being stressed about it, and the more you have, the more your life focuses around it, and the more it just takes over.

Holding a similar mindset, Charlie stated that although he personally held issue with how mainstream society is heavily structured around the concept of money, and how he is aware that dependence on money is a social construct, he still finds himself striving for it and recognized that this as a hard desire to remove.

For some participants, living on the farm provided an opportunity to rely less on money, which helped them personally challenge the common belief that more money coincides with more freedom. Jordan, who had been volunteering at the community for about a year and a half, emphasized that she had felt “much lighter” since living a more sustainable lifestyle less reliant on money, but also recognized that she is in a situation where she finds it easier to be able to live with only a bit of pocket money (i.e., she is young, no expenses, no debt, living on someone else’s land). Though she communicated that early on her mother had helped her establish a mindset about money not being the most important in life, she also stated that living on the farm has solidified that idea for her.

Finley, who acknowledged that he often takes a “perverse delight” in figuring out how to solve problems without money, also had a hard time believing that money actually provides freedom:

Money gives you money, and I don’t know what it gives you freedom from. I guess it gives you freedom from having to do things because you can pay other people to do them...but then you still have a choice to make of what you are going to do with your time, and you could still make a bad choice that is not really going to make you happy. You could sit in front of the TV for however many hours you save by paying someone to fix your whatever, but it’s up to whoever to decide if that makes them happy.

He suggested that when you pay someone for work, you might also be missing out on an opportunity to learn and acquire new knowledge about the world.

Elliot, who leaves the community for a couple months every year to generate some income, compared her freedom at the farm versus mainstream society by stating the following:

I feel like most of the time, when I am working for money, ...it doesn't really feel like I have a sense of freedom. It feels like my life all of a sudden shrinks and that is the only thing that I really have time and space for. I mean there is a reason that I still need money to function in this world. I feel like it is harder to do without, but I feel much more free than most people I know, and it definitely has to do with not spending very much money, and not acquiring very much money.

Similarly, Adrian indicated that he had been working hard over many years to separate himself from a reliance on money (i.e., homesteading on the farm) and that in the process he too has felt freer. While he acknowledged that he works well over the typical 40-hour workweek through homesteading, he can directly experience the impact that his work has on his life, which he felt transforms the working experience.

Health. Lyubormirsky (2008) and Angel (2010) both suggest that individual happiness is inextricably linked to nourishing the body and soul, and as such, I was curious to investigate how my participants thought about health, particularly how they felt their lifestyle impacted it. Overall, every participant asserted that balancing mental, emotional, and physical health was fundamental to healthy living and believed that health and happiness are interconnected.

For example, Jasper suggested that health and happiness are one in the same, stating that “health is what you express or what you gain from happiness” because it is a sign that mentally and physically your body is happy. Harley defined health in almost the identical way as he defined happiness, explaining that to be healthy required one’s physical, psychological, and spiritual needs be met, noting that, for him, spiritual needs referred to a connection to something that is beyond oneself. A phrase that I heard often in the community during discussions about

health was “a lack of dis-ease” and both Charlie and Devin specifically used this phrase in their interviews to define health. Devin described this as being free of pain, emotionally stable, and resilient.

After they shared their definitions of health, I asked participants to describe how they thought their lifestyle either contributed or detracted from healthy living. For the most part, all participants stated positive correlations. The general consensus was that the work on the farm is physically demanding, the food is fresh and free of additives or other artificial substances, and therefore physical health is “naturally” maintained through daily life. Moreover, participants suggested that their minds were kept active as there is always work to be done on the farm, while at the same time the surrounding natural area provides a peaceful atmosphere that helps one to relax, thus staying psychologically balanced.

For example, Alex suggested that their lifestyle provides opportunities to maintain health without even knowing it, and other participants stated that they felt the healthiest that they had ever been as a result of being more connected to their health. For Jasper, living this lifestyle on the farm resonated amazingly well with his needs and values, and he felt a noteworthy difference in his health since living at the community for six months. In that time, he had already experienced a turnaround in his health and he reported that “living so close to [his] food, close to nature and close to [his] living sources” had really settled down his immune system. He shared that stress often caused knots in his stomach when living in the city, but since moving to the farm, he had not felt stressed; for him, this lifestyle fixed his “psyche” as his values were being met. Jordan mentioned that the farm lifestyle allows her to make direct connections to how the environment supports her basic needs (i.e., water, food, shelter, energy), and this opened her eyes to the interconnectedness of people and their ecosystems.

While overall the participants generally stated that living a sustainable lifestyle contributed to and supported good health, for some there were nonetheless aspects that challenged it. For example, Devin shared that she felt physically healthier on the farm, but that there were aspects that contributed to her struggles with depression. Although she viewed the beauty of the surrounding environment as a form of nature therapy and felt supported by the other individuals who were living in the community, she also found that the lifestyle could be isolating; she reported that homesteading requires a lot of work and, as such, there is not much time to socialize. She thus was having an internal debate about remaining in this community, which caused her distress because even though she was currently struggling with her mental well-being, she worried that a mainstream lifestyle might be even worse for her health and happiness. Likewise, Finley considered life on the farm to be a lot healthier than other environments, but also believed that it may not be “optimally healthy” and there was room for improvement. He said, “we’re still just humans trying to figure it out, and making mistakes, but I think that we are trying to do the right thing for our health.”

Ray, who regularly lived in a large city, stated that it is common for people to feel lonely in cities and that the individualistic approach in urban environments can be damaging to mental health. Still, as someone who has spent most of her life in large cities, she also found the busy nature of an urban lifestyle comforting. When I asked how she thought her health would change when she returned to the city after completing her volunteer work, she stated:

I definitely will not be doing as much physical work, and my diet will definitely not be half as good as it is here... I think the city aspect and university aspect can be quite not good for mental health... I think the working environment at university is about your own skills and capabilities, and everyone is doing an individual thing... whereas here, you are all collectively doing the same job, and it's not about your abilities as such, but it's about contributing to the farm.

Ray's prediction resonated with Elliot's recent experience. She had just returned to the community after a month of working off site and came back sick with a cold. When she was away working, she felt like there was not much time or space for her to "honour [her] body or let it know that [she] really cared about it." She reported that over the last month she had not slept enough or had the opportunity for a regular practice of yoga or stretching, both of which she believed are integral to her own well-being. She thus felt that her lifestyle on the farm allowed her to care for her health, emphasizing that she notices the differences between the farm and the "other" world most when she visits her family. While seeking advice for different ails in their bodies, she will often suggest to family members a number of daily half hour stretching practices that could help alleviate the pain; however she has come to understand, through "pretend playing their lives over the last month" that these stretching practices could be hard to regularly maintain:

...you are either going to break into breakfast time or sleep time to look after your body, and I understand that in that regular kind of normal world, you don't really have time to do those things unless you are taking time away from something else...like family connection time. You could go to the gym instead of going to have dinner with your family, so it is hard to pick and choose. But here, you can find time to do those things if you want to.

For her, the time constraints associated with busy lifestyles in the "normal" world often impedes the ability to fully take care of one's whole health.

Community living. Humans are social beings and as such, relationships can have a profound impact on happiness, good or bad (Lyubomirsky, 2008). In the interviews, I was curious to explore whether this sustainable lifestyle helped foster or hinder relationships and how these interactions impacted the participants' happiness. Although I had one question specifically dedicated to probing the impact of important relationships in participants' lives, many of the following ideas actually emerged when other concepts were being discussed.

From my personal experience, while visiting the farm I found that everyone in the community was welcoming and always willing to offer me support, especially when my lack of knowledge or experience led me astray. Many participants had a similar experience. For example, Jordan stated that in a community like this one, individuals have opportunities to really get to know each other on a personal level as many of them spend daily time together. When she first arrived at the community, she had taken on an organizational role and consequently had been working very closely with the owner of the property. She identified that the two of them quickly reached a point in their relationship that even when words were not exchanged, they could deduce each other's state of mind. In a similar vein, Elliot stated that everyone in the community was incredibly considerate of each other and she found that there was a lot of respect for when individuals were tired and needed time apart. She stated that everyone understood that this lifestyle required a lot of work, both mentally and physically, and when "breaks" were needed, no one took it personally.

Furthermore, the individuals living full-time on the farm inspired and motivated other participants. For example, Ray, who was much younger than many individuals on site, shared that while she was only volunteering for a short amount of time, they had given her inspiration for her own life. Charlie, who had seen many people come and go from the community, expressed that those who had chosen and were able to live this lifestyle full-time kept him grounded and often opened his mind to new ideas. He highlighted how they inspired him, saying, "They don't work to acquire wealth or acquire property, they just live!"

For some participants, the individuals in this community had made such an impact on them that they were the reason why people would either stay or return to the community. The first time that Alex chose to volunteer on the farm, he had only intended on working for two

weeks before moving elsewhere, but ended up staying for three months because of the people. Similarly, Ray, who had organized a number of different volunteer opportunities for herself for the summer, decided to leave another site to return to this farm for the rest of the summer because of the relationships that she had established with the people on site. She reported that while she does not “do well” in large social situations, this community provided a variety of opportunities for one-on-one interactions as people are always coming and going.

Elliot, who lives full-time on site, stated that the community members are a major reason why she and her partner have chosen to stay. Jamie, one of the volunteers who had been working on the farm for about three months, even made the statement that she felt like she was part of a family in this community. For Charlie, beyond establishing and maintaining profound relationships with people he now considered friends, life on the farm also fostered deeper relationships with his own nuclear family. He and his wife chose to homeschool their children and as such they were able to spend almost every day with each other. While the children would leave the farm occasionally to take part in activities occurring at the local school, most of their time was spent together, which he believed fostered healthy family relationships.

As in all families, however, not all interactions amongst members can always be positive. One aspect of this lifestyle that was a challenge for some participants was living on property that was not entirely their own and thus not having full control over the decisions that were being made. Although the full-time participants were given a great deal of freedom to personalize their living spaces, there were some bigger decisions that were out of their control. This proved to be challenging for some, especially considering the many different perspectives about sustainable living practices. One participant even observed how this dynamic was also onerous for the owner of the land as he does not love being the one person that everyone has to come to. Elliot reported

how this situation had made it difficult for some people to fit into the community in the past and had led to some individuals leaving. She was very clear to point out that although there are many different perspectives about sustainable lifestyles, none are better or worse, just different, and sometimes different perspectives do not fit well together.

Another social challenge that was mentioned by some of the participants was how far their location was from loved ones. For example, Bailey mentioned that one of the biggest impacts on her happiness is having people in her life that bring her joy and living far away from some of those people can be hard. Indeed, she, Elliot, and Harley all said that it can be challenging when their lifestyles keeps them at a distance from family and really good friends. For Elliot, not being close to family is particularly hard because she does not feel like she is able to share the joys of her lifestyle with them:

I feel like when I am living this lifestyle for a while, I find it more challenging to go to the city, or go to the broader world and not feel like everything is really messed up and that I'm not doing anything about it. And that these people that I really care about are still wrapped up in it. [I find myself] just wishing a lot of the time that I could have them closer, so that I could stay more connected to them, and then also nurture them. I don't mean nurture them into this or steer them into this world, but be like, "Okay guys, you are doing good work out there, but maybe we could just hang out more." Just so that [they] could have this other voice instead of [hearing] all of those other voices all the time. And I could also nourish them with food or that kind of thing. I sometimes wish that that could be different, but I have not figured out how to do that yet, and I'm not ready to move.

Closely associated with the challenge of not having family or really close friends nearby, Bailey, Devin, and Harley all stated that everyone on site is not at a stage where they are all "best friends" and can just hang out. For example, while Bailey said that she felt like she currently was missing strong female companionship, she also insisted that people in this community are never disrespectful to one another, no one explicitly dislikes anyone else, and that there is still time to develop deeper relationships; she felt that as a community this is something that they need to

work on. Devin highlighted, however, that it can be complicated to develop these types of deep friendships due to the busy and time-sensitive nature of their life on the farm, providing an example: “If you don’t plant your winter cabbages at a certain point, then you are not going to have winter cabbages.” Bailey worried that this mindset of busyness can easily become a trap that prevents deeper socialization, and felt that if the community could figure out how to do more together, like sharing meals, they could benefit from taking better care of each other. Bailey described another challenge to developing deeply rooted friendships in the community: the fact that many members were couples and sometimes stuck to themselves. Jamie, who did not have a significant other at the time, also identified this as a challenge.

Even with these concerns, however, Elliot stated that while everyone might not be best friends, they are nonetheless supportive and caring with one another and try to help each other out whenever possible. Finley asserted that such an approach was necessary for success in this sort of lifestyle:

To be able to give each other help and work together to grow the food that we eat, and take care of the land where we live, and give each other support when we can, for the things that are going on in our lives. And, if my family was just homesteading by ourselves, I just don’t know how we would do it; there is just too much to do. I don’t know if I would be able to enjoy life because I would literally just be working all the time with no break.

While he recognized that they may not have perfectly figured out the dynamics of the community, he acknowledged the importance of having a caring group in a supportive environment. Additionally, he highlighted that deep relationships can come from working towards a common goal:

I think that probably the most important for long-lasting relationships is to have the same or similar outlook and goal, as to what you are trying to do, or what you believe. And you don’t have to believe the same things, but if you are working for the same purposes, that can make up for a lot... Everybody who is here is caring for the land, and I think that that

is something. As different as all of those people are, we all care about the land where we live, in different ways.

While there were definitely some challenges to establishing really close friendships due to the intense nature of work on the farm, bonds on the farm were still formed, especially given that members are working towards a common goal.

Gratitude versus envy. As noted in the literature, the practice of gratitude can be an important aspect of happiness so I was curious to determine its role in this lifestyle. When I asked the participants what they were grateful for, none of them hesitated long before listing a number of things. Some described the people in their lives, the beauty of the natural setting in which they lived, and the food that they consumed, while others highlighted grander ideas such as being alive and healthy, not being trapped in a living situation that was beyond their control, and having a sense of place.

About half of the participants already understood how the practice of gratitude impacted their well-being and worked hard to incorporate this into their lives. For example, Jasper asserted that the practice of gratitude has the power to change entire outlooks about life, stating that when someone is able to feel gratitude for even the challenges in their life, they can feel gratitude for everything. His response to my inquiry about what he felt grateful for exemplified his approach:

In the best of times, I feel grateful for everything, literally everything. And basically, almost every day of my life is trying to get to that state because I should be grateful for everything. There is just so much beauty, and it is astounding. And like I've said, I've even gotten to the point where, you know, really shitty times where you can look back and be glad about it. It was a learning experience, and that is basically what we are here for. Yeah, everything, hopefully, is what I am grateful for.

In contrast, as noted in the literature review, making comparisons with others and feeling jealousy can negatively impact happiness thus I asked my participants how often they felt envy and, if and when they did, what they felt envious of. Not surprisingly, those who did not hesitate

to list all the things for which they were grateful were also the individuals who struggled to name anything that they were envious of. For example, Bailey and Finley mentioned that they did not feel envy often, especially of other's lifestyles, and attributed their lack of envy as coming from a place of contentment in their lives. Indeed, they and Elliot all had a hard time coming up with an answer to the question and Elliot even said that when she first looked at the question, she could not remember what envy felt like. She did note, however, that she recognized that emotions can fluctuate, so once the seasons change and there is less work to be done, perhaps envy might become present again in her life. On a different note, Harley stated that he has been working on trying to "catch himself" when he feels envy because he realizes that it does not benefit his mood or life.

As discussed in the health section above, not having full control of the land caused some disagreements amongst community members and this also initiated some envy. For Harley, he stated that he was sometimes envious of those who owned land and had full control over decisions being made. He also noted, however, that he felt conflict in even making this statement as he also feels that the land is not anyone's to own, citing an Aboriginal perspective. Other participants reported that due to the laborious nature of the work on the farm, they sometimes felt frustrated by their limited ability to leave and experience different opportunities, such as travel. Adrian stated that these emotions are "minor and infrequent" but that he sometimes feels envious not because such opportunities would necessarily be better than what he has in his current situation, but because he fears missing out on other life experiences. Finley also suggested that while he would appreciate time off to enjoy life, he chose this lifestyle and would never trade places with anyone simply to have less work.

When asked if this communal farming lifestyle had changed their perceptions of gratitude, many suggested that it had allowed them to develop a sense of gratitude for things that they had not thought about previously. For example, Finley stated:

There were probably a lot of things that I wasn't aware of that I should have been grateful for because I didn't know about them or their significance... I don't know what I was grateful for before I was grateful for those things. Maybe I wasn't grateful... I would have taken them for granted before, but now I have a real realization that they are not to be taken for granted. They are endangered and it's a miracle that we have them at all anymore, and that there are forces that work against a lot of those things, like clean water and seeds that you can sow and save for next year. So I was ignorant of those things and therefore didn't know that I had to be grateful for what I have.

Finley felt that in the common mainstream lifestyle, people are often disconnected from much of their surroundings, and as such, it can be challenging to express gratitude for certain fundamental things. Jordan said something similar: "I feel so much more grateful for the little things like running water and electricity. They are conveniences that we don't really need, but that are really nice."

Another common aspect of their lifestyle that many participants expressed gratitude for was food. Alex stated that when he first came to the community he developed a sense of gratitude for food because he established an understanding of how much work goes into making it from scratch. Bailey and Elliot both also expressed gratitude for their food, feeling fortunate to have the freedom and space to grow their own and be directly connected to where it comes from.

Charlie expressed how even consuming food in this lifestyle feels different to him:

I think the closer you are to the land, the more connected you are. It is mother earth and the closer you are to the bosom of the earth, the more comfort you get... So going out and picking a blueberry off the bush is very different than just working for someone, selling your soul, going to the grocery store and buying your box of blueberries, and eating them. It is quite a different feeling.

This example resonated well with my own experience on the farm as I spent four full days in the blueberry patch picking, and unquestionably felt a whole new appreciation for the

time and energy that is involved in growing and harvesting blueberries. Jasper, as noted earlier in this section, was profoundly aware of the benefits of gratitude and he too discussed how this lifestyle provided greater avenues to express gratefulness, including for food. He stated that it is much easier to express gratitude for the healthy, fresh food that they consume on the farm than it is for some “six dollar espresso drink that isn’t healthy for you or for the environment.”

The ideas in this section showed that while there are some aspects of this lifestyle that encourage happiness practices (e.g., the work involved with food production leading to increased gratitude), unless there is knowledge of the importance of these practices, the impacts to the individual may not be felt. Throughout the exploration of these concepts, comparisons to a more common lifestyle were made, leading to the concluding theme.

Theme Four: Connections to the “Other” World and the Bigger Picture

This final theme emerged from participants’ reflections on the similarities and differences between their lifestyle on the farm and the more common Canadian one based on a Eurocentric, capitalist system. The ideas found in this section highlight the participants’ beliefs about the future of the world, the effects of news and social media on well-being, the participants involvement with environmental activism, and the direct connections they make between living sustainably and increased happiness. Additionally, this section explores and discusses some emotional dimensions involved with purposely choosing a more sustainable lifestyle.

Thinking about the future. I asked participants, “When you think about the future of the world, how do you feel?” and while there were a variety of responses to this question, the general outlook of the participants was not overly positive. Three participants were like Jordan who suggested that she “makes a point” not to think about it as she often becomes overwhelmed with sadness. Elliot shared that she does not spend much time thinking about the future as she

does not believe that humans can live in any sort of sustainable or positive way, and, for her, spending time contemplating that only contributed to increased negative feelings. She also stated, however, that she often felt selfish when choosing not to think about the future, but she took a fatalistic approach saying, “it is going to be what it is going to be” and she does not have hope that much is going to change.

Harley also did not hold a positive outlook and explained his stance based on what he reported observing about people generally not willing to let go of mainstream culture to adopt more sustainable practices. While he explicitly acknowledged that he may not “hold the entire truth,” he said that he had engaged in many conversations in which others were unwilling to engage with his ideas, yet he still felt that these conversations were important to have. He likened it to finding out that one has cancer, stating that while no one wants to face harsh realities, “it is good to know because you could do something differently to alter the course.” Based on these experiences, he believed that necessary change would only occur if a “calamitous event” transpired such as drastic evidence of climate change or mass depletion of resources; until then, he feels that we are just “rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.” For him, the lifestyle on the farm has allowed him to cope with grieving the loss of the planet.

Devin also felt scared for the future, especially when she thought about what life will be like for her child. Despite believing that the permaculture movement is strong and “not going away,” she thinks that the only way the earth could return to a healthy state so that it would be possible to live off the land is if there was a smaller human population, and she worried about how that transition might occur: “Where is the main source of conflict going to happen? Is it going to be war? Is it going to be disease? You know, it’s pretty terrifying!”

Given the worries participants expressed, it would be easy to assume that there was little hope present in the community. Harley, however, emphasized the importance of defining hope in a particular way:

I like a definition that says that hope is longing for a future condition over which you have no agency, like you hope for things that you can't really change... And so hope took on a different definition for me, and I do have hope for the moment. It still feels worth it to work with youth and help them feel better, or give them a bit more power. But I don't have hope based on the trajectory of the culture that we are all living in. So I have hope for the moment, and that feels worth it.

In this way, Harley expressed mixed emotions about the future, which was not uncommon amongst participants. While Bailey had a melancholic outlook on the future, she also held onto an idea that she found comforting:

I don't know how many years in the future that our species will die off, but something else will take over, and that's okay. Like maybe there is a grander plan here that we are not looking at, and that does cross my mind sometimes.

Finely suggested that humans may survive in one way or another, but it may not be in the way that it is now. While he knows such thoughts would likely be received negatively by others, he said that he is simply "happy that [he has] a nice corner of the world to go down in."

Bailey shared that her worries about the future did not prevent her from having a child, and concluded that this meant she had to have some positive outlook. Charlie, who also has children, held faith that earth will be strong enough to bounce back from human's destruction:

I don't feel hopeless, I feel sad, and somewhat angry at humanity for our inability to care enough about the planet. And not just about the planet, but about the future generations, like not to care enough to leave some oil in the ground, or leave trees standing for our children and our grandchildren. There is sadness for the loss of diversity, and of the animals and the plants. On the other hand, I do see the incredible strength of mother earth. I am also quite afraid that humanity will pay the price of doing what we are doing, and that that price is going to be something like a plague or a famine. As a farmer, either a plague or famine seems quite real because just last year, there wasn't any hay made on the island. We needed to import hay from far away ... or otherwise the cows would have died.

Sharing Charlie's frustrations with humanity, Alex discussed what he saw was a generational divide. He felt that there is a younger generation of people who are more connected to their surroundings and who believe in science and desire change, but they are unable to make changes because older generations, who do not share similar ideals, are still in power making terrible decisions.

For Adrian, all of these ideas lead to drastically different emotional responses when thinking about the future of the world:

I feel ... the apocalypse has already happened and we are so fucked up, we can't even see it [and I feel] we are getting somewhere and there is some kind of meaning in all of this madness, and that there is going to be some kind of lotus flowering out of the muck situation. And also maybe we do actually have time to make wiser, practical decisions on how we operate our civilization. For the most part, if 1 is "apocalypse" and 10 is "everything is going to be fine," I dance around quite a bit. I reach both ends of that spectrum probably within a month, but I spend more time on the lower end of the spectrum.

Additionally, Adrian believed that exposure to media led him more to apocalyptic thoughts, "especially when people like Trump are in power." In the interviews, many participants shared similar opinions about the impact of news and social media, so much so that it warranted its own section.

News and social media. Many participants felt that being constantly connected to media can have negative impacts. Jordan found news and social media discouraging and overwhelming because of the constant emphasis on negativity, which often leaves her feeling that "things are too far gone." Jasper stated that while he would love to be an individual who could watch sad news and "have it roll off of him," this is not his personality, and he speculated that this might be true for others as well. Bailey also described how the news negatively affected her happiness:

I listen to the news [CBC] quite a bit actually... and definitely keep track of what is going on, because I feel that it is important... I do question now whether it is good for my mental well-being, whether it is feeding into anything positive in my life, and whether it

is engaging my brain or if it is just like, ‘KAABOOSH’ and overwhelming it. And as he [her son] grows older and starts understanding the radio, I might listen to it less because I don’t know if that is something that he needs in his headspace at such a young age.

While Charlie also recognized the negative impacts news could have on individual well-being, he shared the following anecdote to illustrate an observation that he made:

I used to be a bit of a news junkie, and when we moved [to this location], we didn’t have electricity, so I couldn’t have my clock radio. I think after about a year, we got electricity, and I plugged in my clock radio, and it came on at 7:00 on CBC radio, and I woke up to the news. I was sort of in the half dreamy state still and I realized that nothing has changed. It was the same news that it had been a year ago, and names have changed, and the places have changed, but not much else really changed. That is what made me realize how bad it was for me, so I try not to listen to the news very much. And ultimately, anything that is really important still ends up out here.

Charlie stated that he now chooses to listen to the news “fairly irregularly”; sometimes he will go a week or two without being connected, other times he will listen to the radio every day. He also shared that although he and other community members heard about the September 11th terrorist attacks on the day they occurred, he has never seen pictures of the attacks and probably never will. He stated that “there seems to be something [awful] about that” and he does not know why he does not want to see pictures, but that he was really glad that he had not.

Elliot said that not only can staying connected to news impact the emotions of people, it can also affect their understanding of money. She discussed how when the media focuses on celebrities or people with an abundance of money who are able to do whatever they want or acquire whatever they want, it can be hard to understand the whole picture of that lifestyle. Harley had a similar thought, stating that media is often the way societies are informed about reality, but that that particular reality is not necessarily truthful in the way that they portray it. He stated that for both he and his partner, being disconnected from news and social media, have been healthier as they are not being bombarded with images of “fake shit” and have more authenticity in their lives while living more in the moment:

TV culture is vicious in terms of subconsciousness, shaming, self-loathing, and fear in general. And I think that populations in fear respond to consumerism, and respond to all things that benefit that [capitalist] society. I definitely find that I am more creative when I am not passively consuming things.

He shared how he had been making music and the lyrics stressed ideas such as “we are all rats in a maze, and the more you can step out of that, [the more] you can have access to all of these feelings that we are prevented from.”

Jasper found that being disconnected has allowed the feeling of gratitude to flourish. He mentioned how helpful it was to detach from “relentless” advertisements that inform individuals that “you are not good enough, so you have to buy this.” Jamie spoke of a similar idea when stressing how being disconnected opens up more opportunities to reflect on the immediate environment:

I like that I am more aware of my surroundings, and [even still] I don’t have enough time in my days to do whatever I want to do. But I am never just wasting time on the internet, or my phone. I am just fully living my day.

She noted how life on the farm meant the working days are always full, but it rarely felt like time was ever being wasted on activities that are destructive to well-being.

Although Elliot recognized that constant attachment to news and social media could have negative impacts on individual well-being, as noted above, she also offered another perspective worth considering. She explained that while it is easier to “feel okay” when not connected, she reported that it also “feels pretty bad” when she lacks awareness of major events, and she thinks it is unfair when she is “doing great” and others are suffering. Nonetheless, she also recognized that for her, in that moment, she needed to concentrate on her emotional well-being and stated that this was part of the reason she is living this lifestyle: “[I] wasn’t coping well in the other world.” Similarly balancing pros and cons, Ray stated:

You're not learning about anything that's getting worse, but you're also not learning about what people might be doing to improve things, and you can't necessarily participate in bigger schemes while you are here because you are in a closed community.... So in a way, the closed-offness doesn't help with hope for the future because I don't know what is going on.

To expand on this idea, she also stated that when she lives in the city, certain people and protests give her hope for the future because she sees that there are people in this world who also desire change. This desire for change connects well to ideas in the next section on what participants thought about the potential that their lifestyle could be seen as a form of activism that benefits the wider world.

A sustainable lifestyle as environmental activism? Some participants were struggling to see how their lives contributed to the greater sustainability movement, leading to feelings of self-reproach. For example, Harley shared the following:

I think often it is more shame that I feel. I've kind of realized certain things and I see these things, but I am just chilling out in the woods and not doing as much as I could. Then there are people who are on the frontlines, who are giving their lives and sacrificing elements of their privilege for the things that they care about, which I found that I am not totally up for doing. So there is shame and guilt around that... It is hard for me when people tell me that I am living sustainably and that that is saving the world. This is good, and it is good for us, yet it is a bunch of white folks out here who can do this. You don't see First Nations people having access to all of this stuff.

Adrian too stated that he was struggling with these thoughts. He could see how this lifestyle contributed to his own life, but he could not grasp how he was contributing to the lives of others in meaningful ways. Adrian and Harley shared similar ideas about being involved with social change movements, and Harley stated that while he used to be involved with "supporting resistance movements, and directly dismantling infrastructure," he stopped because he believed that the world would not make it. In a similar vein, Elliot said that she had a hard time believing that "a giant tidal wave of alternative ideas of well-being, happiness, and sustainable living could wash over popular culture" and that that was one of reasons why she chose to live on the farm.

She felt it was important to take care of her well-being and that of her loved ones because she felt like that was all she was capable of doing. She, Harley, and Adrian all admitted that they do not feel like they have the spark or energy to be out on the forefront doing the “right work.”

While the lack of engagement in the wider movement contributed to feelings of guilt or shame for some participants, for others it provided peace of mind. Bailey, who recently had a child, discussed how her ideas about activism had changed because she had become more “focused personally and less outwardly in the world.” She emphasized that while someday she might have more energy for external activism again, her current focus was “making sure [her son’s] little world [was] happy first.” For Jordan, choosing to pursue a sustainable lifestyle was her preferred form of activism; for her, being part of a smaller system and having less of a harmful impact on the world does make a difference, including putting less money into the pockets of people “who don’t deserve it.” Additionally, she felt that due to the number of volunteers who come through this community, she has a chance to inspire others to take actions in their own lives: “I think that this small drop in the bucket is enough for me, to live this lifestyle with little impact and radiate out in ways that I can.”

As has been explored, the emotional responses to environmental activism were complex. For some, this lifestyle was a source of guilt, for others a source of peace, and for others, a legitimate form of activism. To delve deeper into the impacts of this lifestyle on happiness, I chose to explore what led them to this lifestyle in the first place and how, upon reflection, they felt it impacted their happiness, which I will address in the final section

The journey to a sustainable lifestyle can impact happiness. For some participants, they were led to this lifestyle simply out of curiosity or other interests rather than seeking to live a life with a smaller environmental impact. Bailey shared that she came to this lifestyle because

of her love of cooking. For her, it started with learning to cook, which eventually led to a desire to make food from scratch, which ultimately inspired her to grow as many of her own ingredients as possible. Based on this growing interest in gardening, she completed a Masters thesis focused on community garden projects, which then led to a desire to live more self-sufficiently.

Throughout her learning journey, she engaged with literature that focused on topics such as critical self-analysis, non-violent communication, and meditation, which encouraged her to think more about the impacts of her own life.

Conversely, Elliot happened upon this lifestyle because of a lack of fulfillment in the “other” world, and she shared that she found herself always searching for “the next thing.” When she first arrived on this island, which in itself encourages sustainable practices for the most part, she did not know anyone, and this provided her with an opportunity to “take a breath” to self-analyze and evaluate. Once she started engaging in a variety of self-reflection practices, she realized that a change in lifestyle contributed to her “feeling good” so she continued to delve deeper into a more simple lifestyle, eventually moving to the farm. Adrian and Finley also talked about how the lifestyle on the farm made them feel good and they each suggested possible reasons for this:

I think mostly, it was wanting to be more responsible for my own existence, so taking as many decisions out of the hands of other people far away, who are proud of doing terrible things. Trying to bring as many decisions into my own hands as possible, which, at the same time, also meant not wanting to wreck anything for anybody else, or be responsible for atrocities. Maybe also to free myself from guilt and feeling mad about all of those terrible things that are happening. [Adrian]

It was a desire to be able to take control of our own farming, and be able to make our own choices, do things in a way that we wanted, to get certain results, and be able to take responsibility, whether or not it worked out, rather than doing the best to your ability and then because of factors that weren't in our control, not having good results. [Finley]

For both, a sense of control over one's life was important.

Like Bailey's experience with reading literature before and during her Masters, Harley came to this lifestyle after reading "radical" literature about "Western living, and dominant Western culture." This knowledge changed his beliefs dramatically; he had been told from a young age to get a higher education to make more money, have a family, own assets, and contribute to the economy, but he came to realize that this common "story" was not positively serving his or others' well-being. Even those who think they are benefiting from the current system are only receiving material rewards rather than holistic benefits, according to Harley. This was a turning point for him, when he chose to no longer put time and energy into a system he no longer viewed as beneficial.

Elliot also shared how she also felt that the stories that are commonly told limit the ability of people to explore individual meaning:

Everyone is being told to do the same things for the same reason... And if you just continue down that path where you are being directed, you might not have time or space to look at things, or allow yourself to recognize other feelings, or ideas that may come up because they are just not part of the end picture goal. I think that, for myself, I've not necessarily made a point to diverge from that standard path, but it has happened in my life. I feel like as the years have gone on, I know myself better, and I know more, or feel more comfortable and confident in the world with how I am. I think that there is a greater feeling of happiness with that, and being able to connect with a community, family and everything in a more meaningful way. I think that that gives me a lot more happiness, and also just really liking what I am doing in my life right now.

She felt that their lifestyle on the farm supported "space for you, yourself to be a person" and provided ample time to sit with oneself or tend to personal needs. In contrast, she described how in the "other" world, she found that there is rarely time to self-reflect as everyone is being told how to think.

Charlie also felt that living a rural farm life tending to animals meant that people are given greater opportunities to connect to their emotions because "you are more exposed to death, to life, and to birth." He felt that the more opportunities there are to experience emotional

fluctuation, and provided that the right support and coping strategies are available, the more comfortable people are with embracing and accepting all emotions. That support, however, can be hard to come by whether one is in the “other” world or living in an eco-village, as Devin’s experience illuminated.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Devin struggled with depression and often found aspects of life on the farm challenging, such as the alone time and feeling isolated from loved ones. She thus often debated whether this lifestyle was in fact suitable for her needs, but she also was not sure she wanted to leave either because of a fear of how challenging it can also be to live in the “outside” world:

Every time I go into a city, I am just like, “Man, this is so messed up.” And it is so easy to slip back into that way of life. It is just the ease of everything at your fingertips, any hour of the day, from anywhere in the world.

On the farm, they are removed from much of that and she feared that if she were to go back to the “other” world, she then would not have access to land and clean water. Further, she felt that the farm was a healthier place for her child to grow up in.

Adrian asserted that sustainable living could be beneficial for many people due to the “increase in simplicity, and direct interactions with the source of our sustenance, and with the living world.” For him, he felt like there were fewer things that he needed to do that did not feel good or that he did not actually want to do. Finley also described the benefits of a slower pace, but he also presented an interesting paradox he had encountered in this lifestyle. He stated that his “job” in this community was very clear cut (i.e., to grow food and take care of the land to nourish himself and his family), yet at times he admitted that it could also feel “big and stressful,” especially when decisions have to be made about how to use finite resources. This

stress sometimes contributed to feelings of unhappiness, but on the whole, for him, he felt very happy.

Adrian also shared that there is always something new to learn in this lifestyle. Bailey and Jamie said something similar and described the lifestyle as always keeping their minds engaged. Jordan concluded that this lifestyle was “fulfilling in a way that [she] did not think [she] could find elsewhere” as living in this community allowed her to take control of many aspects of her life such as where she spends time, with whom she spends time, and how she wants to nourish herself. For her, this lifestyle has contributed greatly to her happiness because she believed “that it makes sense to take care of yourself and to not be so reliant on other people and systems.” In the end, she stated this lifestyle reminded her of everything wonderful in this world that she wants to save.

Summing Up

Throughout the interviews, it became clear to me that many of the participants had already contemplated a number of these topics prior to this research. The individuals living full-time in this community made a conscious choice to live separate from mainstream culture, and in some cases, this choice was motivated by a re-evaluation of their lives. Given the participants’ depth of understanding on many of these subjects, a number of new ideas that I had not previously considered emerged through the interviews. For example, Charlie and Harley highlighted that beyond becoming attached to the ability to buy “things,” money can also promote a form of addiction and that news and social media could be connected to why people hold onto the idea that money provides happiness. Another surprising discovery for me was that health benefits were a large reason why individuals felt good about their lifestyle rather than that they were living a more sustainable lifestyle. While it was clear that the ecological footprint of

this community was smaller than others living in mainstream culture due to the ecologically friendly practices, which was undoubtedly a source of satisfaction for some, all participants discussed that their connection to nature substantially contributed to their positive feelings and ultimately their mental health and was a large reason why many of them remained in this lifestyle. Finally, it was incredible to witness the participants' immense sense of gratitude even though many of them did not possess a great number of "things." This sense of gratitude clearly contributed greatly to their life satisfaction and it amazed me that every participant had a long list of things that they were grateful for, which I see as very promising, and will be addressed in the next chapter as I connect the findings back to the literature and discuss their implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Following the same format as the previous chapter, my discussion is organized by the four main themes that came out of the data: 1) understandings of happiness; 2) understandings of sustainability and sustainable living; 3) happiness practices at the ecovillage; and 4) connection to the “other” world and the bigger picture. One variation from this chapter to the previous is that I have combined the subheadings of “understandings of happiness” and “understandings of sustainability and sustainable living” themes since these concepts are best discussed and understood through holistic interpretation. Additionally, I have changed the title of the sustainability section to focus more on hope. In this final chapter, I discuss the findings analytically while making connections to the literature I covered in the second chapter as well as new literature that helped me grapple with specific topics that emerged in the interviews. The concluding section of this chapter relays my recommendations for future educational practices, specifically focused on environmental education. I close with an anecdote that reveals my own personal learning journey throughout the thesis process.

Theme One: Perceptions and Understandings of Happiness

As I have discussed throughout this thesis, although happiness is often popularly perceived to be simply an emotion, a number of academics have speculated that when it is viewed as a skill that can be practiced and improved, it becomes an achievable state of contentment that permeates through one’s life (Angel, 2014; Dambrun *et al*, 2012; Lybomirsky, 2007; Paulson et al. 2013, Seligman et al., 2005; Ericson et al., 2014; Brown & Kasser, 2005.) The participants too suggested that it was more than simply a feeling, with some finding that self-reflection was a vital practice towards cultivating happiness as it provided opportunities to

evaluate a number of variables in their lives and decipher whether these contributed towards or detracted from their well-being.

The participants believed that many aspects of their farm lifestyle provided them opportunities for increasing their self-awareness since daily work offered time for introspection. They suggested that mainstream Western society can limit the ability to engage in these types of reflective practices due to the busy pace and expectations of personal “progress” (i.e., pursuing higher education, finding a well paying job, starting a family, increasing income to buy a house and other high status items). While the participants may not have been fully engaged in the typical mindfulness processes recommended in the literature (e.g., Paulson et al., 2013), their lifestyle provided time to do so if they chose. For example, Jasper, who had already been reading literature on happiness, stated that their environmentally sustainable lifestyle had given him a chance to immerse himself in practices that had contributed greatly to his happiness and Charlie echoed mindfulness exercises when he described happiness as living at peace and in the moment and making conscious choices about how to react to different situations (Paulson et al., 2013).

For the few participants who mentioned struggling with despair or pessimism, however, this opportunity to spend time in self-reflection sometimes meant dwelling on negative emotions, which became overwhelming and adversely impacted their well-being. Lyubomirsky (2007) believes that “overthinking” can impede feelings of contentment and she suggests specific exercises in response. Thus while the farm lifestyle provided opportunities for participants to engage in self-reflection, having knowledge of specific mindfulness practices may have contributed to greater well-being for some participants.

Being removed from consumer culture also figured in some participants’ understandings of happiness. Brown and Kasser (2005) suggest that, “mindfulness may provide an antidote to

consumerism, as this quality of consciousness encourages reflection on the ecological impact of one's behavior and facilitates choicefulness in the face of consumerist messages designed to encourage materialistic pursuits" (p. 351). Ericson et al. (2014) suggests that it is often hard to understand that self-reflection and mental training contribute to well-being given prevailing societal norms that link wealth and extravagant lifestyles to happiness. Bailey, for example, talked about the problems of always striving for the "next best thing" whether in lifestyle or tangible stuff, which reflects suggestions in the literature:

There are many, many healthy ways to go about discovering happiness in your life, but there are also some very unfortunate ways to go about it, such as simply grabbing for something you think you want, with the hope that it will make you happy. Instead, it might be wiser to recognize that happiness and well-being may actually already be part of you, already here, in the same way that your breath is, but perhaps you haven't recognized it, never given it any attention. (Paulson *et al*, 2013, p. 99)

Living at the farm allowed participants to spend significant time away from mainstream culture, providing them with opportunities to decide for themselves what contributed to or detracted from their happiness.

Some participants emphasized that the path to happiness is gradual and can require considerable effort especially in the face of hardships. Lyubomirsky (2007), who acknowledges hardship as part of living, suggests that developing either problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies are necessary for increasing authentic happiness during those challenging times. As was highlighted in the previous chapter, some participants suggested that a farm life with animals encourages the development of coping strategies as individuals are continually being faced with the births and deaths of animals with which a connection has been possibly made. Kabat-Zinn (in Paulson et al., 2013) too suggests that finding meaning during challenging times can help to cope with those moments:

Too often, we get so busy or intoxicated with trying to get what we most want and escape from what we most don't want, that we may ignore or don't pay close enough attention to aspects of our own affective life experience that actually offer us profoundly meaningful, deep connections to ourselves and to others, the sense of interconnectedness and belonging that truly lies at the heart of well-being and happiness in the very moment in which we are alive, which is always *this* one. (p. 99)

While participants acknowledged that happiness could be improved throughout an individual's life, generally they did not believe that it was an attainable goal for everyone. In particular, they asserted that it would be hard to focus on emotional needs, as well as larger environmental and social justice issues, if basic survival needs could not be met. This resonates with Ericson et al. (2014)'s position who state that, "If basic needs are not fulfilled, caring for the environment will probably be seen more as a 'luxury problem'" (p. 75). While life on the farm allows participants to fulfill their basic needs and proved to be more environmentally friendly than common Westernized lifestyles, as was recognized by a number of participants, participating in this type of lifestyle is not necessarily accessible to everyone.

Theme Two: Hope and the Concept of Sustainability

The participants' approaches to environmental sustainability were complex and a significant number of challenges confronting the sustainability movement were highlighted in the interviews. Keen to live on the planet in ways that would support all life, some participants suggested that environmental sustainability would also require restoration work to bring natural areas back to health. Some participants did not believe that sustainability was, in fact, possible given the substantial human population and current dominant ideologies (i.e., capitalism and neoliberalism). Orr (1996) argues that "good ecological designs promote human competence instead of consumer dependence" (p. 9) and he too identifies the overwhelming task facing the future generations:

They must learn how to use energy and materials with great efficiency... they must rebuild economies in order to eliminate waste and pollution. They must learn how to manage renewable resources for long term. They must begin the great work of repairing, as much as possible, the damage done to the Earth in the past 150 years of industrialization. And they must do all of this while they reduce worsening social, ethnic, and racial inequalities. No generation has ever been faced a more daunting agenda. (p. 7)

While Orr's (1996) arguments were made over 20 years ago, many of these urgings still remain relevant, suggesting that progress in this regard still require major shifts and may now be even more pressing. With that in mind, it was understandable why several participants held very little hope for the future. Still, as Jamie suggested, whether living environmentally sustainably was possible or not, "it is worth the try."

This notion of "finding hope in a world of environmental catastrophe" (Kelsey & Armstrong, 2012, p. 187) is an important component of sustainable happiness given its focus on cultivating emotional well-being in conjunction with the health of the planet. Shapiro (1995), who has been doing environmental restoration work with communities and groups for years, shares in his writing the incredible personality changes that he has witnessed among the individuals with whom he works. He observes that beyond the benefits that come from working in a team which can encourage a greater sense of community, when damaged areas begin to show signs of improvement, a sense of pride can develop in individuals which can improve self-efficacy. Kelsey and Armstrong (2012) additionally argue that it is especially important for children to feel that they are part of a community that is "addressing important issues and achieving success in regards to climate change through direct participation" (p. 193) so that they do not feel as if the world's problems rest on their shoulders. It is not just children who need to feel this way, however, as these participants' experiences show, demonstrating once again the importance of considering the emotional dimensions of climate change and environmental

education (Kelsey & Armstrong, 2012; Russell & Oakley, 2016). In this study, the people living on the farm were all working toward similar goals (i.e., living off the land and minimizing their ecological footprint) and clearly were deriving meaning from doing so. Still, some of them doubted how much they really were contributing to the environmental sustainability movement, which I will be come to in the final section.

Theme Three: Happiness Practices at the Ecovillage

Life on the farm provided opportunities for participants to experience firsthand the benefits of particular activities that are known to contribute to happiness. This was particularly evident when considering how the pursuit of material wealth can limit happiness. That being said, some individuals nonetheless struggled with happiness because they were dealing with additional challenges such as depression, which, as discussed by Lyubomirsky (2007), happiness activities alone cannot fully address.

Money and happiness. The participants' interactions with money varied given that some lived and worked full-time on site, while others only lived this lifestyle part-time. Still, none agreed that money contributed greatly to feelings of freedom or happiness and at least two participants were contemptuous of systems that endorsed money as a form of freedom. Elliot, for one, even highlighted that she felt more liberated and more connected to her core values living a lifestyle free of any great dependency on money. As Adrian suggested, their "jobs" as homesteaders, although time consuming and frequently challenging, provided them with the ability to experience the direct results of their labour rather than earning money to buy something produced through someone else's labour. That being said, the full-time participants also recognized that the relationship between money and happiness is complex.

While all of the full-time participants did have some savings to draw on in times of need, this money was rarely being spent on typical consumer “stuff” but was instead more often allocated to items that contributed to meeting basic needs on the farm. This non-materialistic approach resonates well with O’Brien’s work (2016) as she suggests that authentic happiness that provides individuals with life-long satisfaction is found in intrinsic pursuits such as meaningful work, authentic relationships, and a greater sense of purpose. She, like other scholars (e.g., Diener & Seligman, 2004; Kasser, 2006), note that the minimal connection between money and happiness is often hard to recognize in Western cultures given mainstream media portrays wealth and status as linked to increased well-being. As Kasser (2006) highlights, the common belief is that “the goods life” is the “path to the ‘good life’” (p. 200), which research indicates is a profound misunderstanding.

For some of the participants who were passing through and thus not full-time residents, time on the farm was their first opportunity to live with less dependency on money. For some, this was an eye-opening opportunity to personally experience the benefits of doing so. Even though the landowner gave them specific tasks during the workdays, which could be perceived as limiting their freedom given they did not have much choice in the work they did as volunteers, their basic needs such as food, water, and shelter were being met in exchange for their labour, allowing them to live with little to no money. Additionally, this labour was directly contributing to their basic needs (e.g., picking blueberries to eat, tending to animals that provided food, improving shelter) therefore they were intrinsically motivated to complete this work. As Paul Dolan et al. (2008) found in their research, gaining money only benefits well-being until the point of basic needs being met. Similarly, Diener and Seligman (2004) found that, “the effects of

wealth are not large, and they are dwarfed by other influences, such as those of personality and social relationships” (p. 10).

Health. When asked to define health, most participants broke down the concept into a number of distinct realms (i.e., physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual), highlighting how all of these realms need to be sustained in order to live a healthy lifestyle. Although one participant viewed the amount of dairy consumed in this community to be unhealthy, generally the rest of the participants agreed that life on the farm contributed greatly to healthy living. Many emphasized that their daily labour kept their bodies both active and strong. Eva Selhub and Alan Logan (2012) found that exercising in a natural environment leads to “less fatigue, diminished anxious thoughts, less hostility, more positive mental thoughts, and overall feelings of invigoration” (p. 124). Additionally, compared to exercising indoors, the benefits of being active outdoors increases due to the different degrees of challenges (e.g., uneven ground, wind), making muscles come alive in a variety of ways. Beyond some participants engaging in yoga, stretching, swimming, and mountain biking, I never observed anyone engaged in “exercise” per se, perhaps since this lifestyle required activity such as heavy lifting and cardio. Furthermore, life on the farm also required, almost daily, hours spent gardening, and as Selhub and Logan (2012) suggest, thirty minutes of gardening is as metabolically stimulating as a pick up game of basketball of the same duration, and is “one-part relaxant and one-part energizer [that] promotes health and happiness” (p. 164).

The participants also shared benefits of their lifestyle to their mental health as they were not only constantly being stimulated by learning new skills, they were also able to relax in a beautiful location that provided a sense of serenity. For example, Devin called living on the farm a form of “nature therapy,” which resonates with the writing of Selhub and Logan (2012) who

suggest that nature therapy is a healing treatment that draws on the positive physiological impacts of spending time in nature. For example, exposure to natural environments increases alpha brain wave activity, which is associated with serotonin production, a chemical in the brain known as the “happy chemical” (p. 20). Additionally, they report that negative ions (charged molecules that cannot be felt, seen, smelled, or tasted) are found in abundance in both forests and near bodies of moving water, and have been shown to improve defense systems, cognitive performance, aerobic metabolism by enhancing blood flow, and reduce stress, depression, and anxiety (Selhub & Logan, 2012).

Turning to spiritual health, many participants spoke of the ways in which their lifestyle helped them experience deeper connections to their surrounding environment. Harley, for example, remarked on the “meaningful connection to something beyond yourself.” Selhub and Logan (2012) argue that nature has the ability to provide transcendent experiences, which they describe as “unforgettable moments of extreme happiness, of attunement to that outside the self, and moments that are ultimately perceived as very important to the individual” (p. 23). This relates well to the idea of biophilia, which can be understood as “the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms” (Wilson, 1993, p. 31). Additionally, Netta Weinstein, Andrew Przybylski, and Richard Ryan (2009) suggest that the natural world can connect people with their authentic selves in recognizing how dependency on nature is vital for survival.

Even those participants who were struggling with depression felt that living in mainstream society could be more challenging than what they were experiencing on the farm. One area of health, however, that many of the participants, not just those who were struggling with mental health issues, felt could be improved on the farm was attention to the development

of meaningful relationships, an issue that could be categorized under emotional health. The following section explores this issue further.

Community living. Many full-time participants stated that not everyone in this community had deep meaningful relationships with each other, and they sometimes found life on the farm to be isolating from family and cherished friends. The participants did emphasize, however, that everyone at the community was respectful of and caring with one another and would provide support when they could. Furthermore, the volunteer participants new to the community and passing through found everyone to be welcoming and considerate and stated that the personalities in this community were inspirational. Charlie, for one, believed that this lifestyle has the potential to encourage personal connections. While the interpersonal challenges amongst the full-time participants cannot be overlooked, it is important to be clear that, overall, positive interactions were the norm on the farm.

The physical location of the community may have something to do with that since studies have determined that people experience more social feelings, and place more value on community development and close relationships when they are surrounded by nature (Weinstein et al., 2009). As noted earlier, participants found that this lifestyle provided greater opportunities to engage in self-reflection, which contributes to the potential for relationships to flourish (Weinstein et al., 2009). Further, natural environments can encourage introspection while also promoting a focus on intrinsic aspirations (i.e., personal growth, intimacy, community) over extrinsic aspirations (i.e. money, image, fame), empowering individuals to remove societal artifices that often lead to alienation from one another (Weinstein et al., 2009). Therefore, while many of the participants highlighted that community members were not “best friends,” they still cared for and respected each other. As Bailey suggested, perhaps deeper relationships may

develop with more time spent together. Still, for some, not having deep, meaningful relationships on the farm was a struggle, even leading some people in the past to leave, and is something community members may need to work on.

Gratitude versus envy. The expression of gratitude is noted as a form of mental training that can significantly improve happiness as it encourages individuals to focus on the positive components in their life rather than concentrate on the negatives (Lyubomirsky, 2007). During the interviews, most participants highlighted numerous components of their lifestyle for which they were grateful, including the beauty of the natural surroundings and the food that they consumed. Elliot highlighted that she felt grateful for the ability to simply wander out to the garden and pick her own food and Jasper reinforced this idea by discussing food challenges in the “other” world such as packaging waste, sugar content, and healthy food being expensive. Further, the labour associated with food deepened many members’ sense of gratitude, especially the volunteers who shared how they were unaware of the intense effort needed to grow and produce food. Finley, for one, stated that prior to living this lifestyle, there were probably many things that he did not realize he needed to be grateful for such as soil organisms and healthy manure.

As highlighted in the health section above, life on the farm offered connections to the environment and participants were better able to express gratitude for those connections as they began to realize their importance. James Wandersee and Elizabeth Schussler (2001) describe how the significance of plants often goes overlooked because anthropocentric interpretations rank them as inferior to animals and unworthy of human consideration. Such “plant blindness,” that is, “the inability to see or notice plants in one’s own environment” (Wandersee & Schussler, 2001, p. 3) may be another potential reason why gratitude is often not expressed for plant life.

When individuals are provided with opportunities, such as these participants have with growing food on the farm, they are better able to understand the significant role that flora plays in human existence.

In general, life on the farm had a variety of benefits associated with a number of practices identified as important in the happiness literature. From extricating themselves from a consumption-driven society, to attending to their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health, to living in a supportive community, to practicing gratitude for various aspects of life on the farm, it appears that happiness has many opportunities to flourish in this eco-village.

Theme Four: Connection to the “Other” World and the Bigger Picture

As noted, participants regularly contrasted their lifestyle on the farm with the “other” world. In doing so, they highlighted that the impacts of sustainable living on individual happiness is not at all straightforward given the emotional impacts of being both connected as well as isolated from mainstream Western society.

Thinking about the future. When asked about the future of the world, many participants displayed little optimism for humanity. Several of them did not believe that it would be possible for the current human population to live on this planet in harmony with the rest of the natural world or they believe that some humans might survive, but not in the way that we are currently living. As individuals greatly connected to their natural surroundings, the pain of the losses associated with climate change and environmental degradation can hit hard. Kristine Kevorkian (2004) writes about “environmental grief” and explains how challenging it can be to mourn the degradation of the planet when human/environment relationships are not recognized as important. There is little social support for dealing with this grief. Joanna Macy (1995) discusses how, when faced with environmental despair, people often suppress their emotions. Yet

validating feelings of despair, hopelessness, and anger can provide opportunities and space to begin a healing process (Kevorkian, 2004). As noted earlier in this chapter, life on the farm provides ample time for self-reflection, but without adequate support, there is a possibility that negative thoughts can become overpowering.

News and social media. Living on the farm simulated a “technology fast” as there was limited connection to the Internet and no cellphone service. Many full-time participants had radios to listen to the news, and while there was a television in the main farmhouse, it was only irregularly used to watch movies on videotape. Beyond one participant who admitted to streaming the television series, “Game of Thrones,” there was limited connection to mainstream media. Consequently, it was not common practice to simply “surf the web” and whatever leisure time was available when I was there, which was very little since it was a summer month, was spent either reading books or exploring the surrounding environment. Participants regularly talked about how this disconnection had a generally positive impact on their well-being.

One way that the technological disconnect might be emotionally helpful is related to recent research that connects online surfing of social media platforms to social comparison, which as Lyubomirsky (2007) suggests, contributes negatively to happiness. Charlotte Blease (2015), for example, found that surfing Facebook leads to heightened social comparison in that individuals are observing what they perceive to be “evidence of successes, busy social lives, and activities of other members” (p. 10) without knowing the whole (messy) picture of others’ lives. Living in the eco-village, largely separated from social media, diminished opportunities for such social comparison, encouraging individuals to focus inward and on their immediate surroundings and community.

Another way that a disconnect from technology could be helpful is related to news. Because news stories typically covered by mainstream media outlets are negative, many of the participants found it helpful emotionally to simply not be connected. In an article examining the framing effects of media on emotions, Robin Nabi (2003) suggests that “the way in which information is presented, or the perspectives taken in a message, influences the responses individuals will have to the issue at hand” (p. 225). Mary McNaughton-Cassil and Tom Smith (2002) similarly suggests that people largely derive their worldviews from what they see in the media, and because of the emphasis on negative stories, there is often a belief that, “social issues such as crime, substance abuse, education, racial, and lifestyle issues are far more problematic in the nation in general than they are in their own communities” (p. 31). These beliefs could impact how an individual feels when thinking about the future of the world. However, as Ray highlighted, being disconnected from mainstream media also meant that participants were not necessarily hearing “good news” stories either, including stories about positive actions worldwide that address climate change, environmental degradation, or social injustices. The disconnect seemed to have an impact on some community members who reported feeling overwhelmed when returning to the “other” world and believed that their personal actions were not contributing enough to the greater environmental and social justice movements.

A sustainable lifestyle as environmental activism? Several participants could not see how their lives on the farm contributed much to the larger sustainability movement and some felt ashamed that they were not, to use Harley’s words, “on the front lines sacrificing elements of their privilege.” Historically, activist behaviours and actions have been portrayed as dramatic, iconic, or idealized, and are often oriented around key events (Horton & Kraftl, 2009), which may contribute to some participants not viewing their lifestyle as “real” activism. John Horton

and Peter Kraftl (2009) argue, however, that the notion of activism should be broadened because many small actions, too often considered insignificant, can also promote and create progressive changes.

Naomi Abrahams (1992) suggests that, “political action is defined as a form of human behavior that involves the negotiation, alteration, or entrenchment of social values and resources” (pp. 329-330). She explains that resources include money, time, space, and status, and values can be understood as a set of expectations and beliefs that guide individual behaviours, emotions, and thoughts. Building on this definition, Martin, Hanson, and Fontaine (2007) suggests that activism can then be examined in terms of geographic scale: “Some person or group recognizes a problem (at what scale?), and takes some action(s) to address it (at what scale?) in order to create change (at what scale?)” (p. 78) and that activism “must be visible beyond the individual but can remain invisible to those outside the network” (p. 91). Given everyday activism can transform social relations and holds potential to foster social change, everyday activism like living in an environmentally sustainable way should “count” by Martin et al.’s reckoning then. I would argue that in this ecovillage, the participants were reconceptualizing power relations by becoming less dependent on mainstream systems and were also reshaping social networks by encouraging deeper understandings of environmentally sustainable lifestyles amongst themselves as well as with the part-time volunteers passing through. They offer a real example of an alternative lifestyle, allowing volunteers and visitors to see theory put into practice. While the impacts on others may not have been immediately visible, in my personal experience, time spent in this ecovillage encourages self-reflection and likely has had a much bigger impact on others than many participants realized. Indeed, many of the short-term volunteers I interviewed highlighted how experiencing life on the farm, even for a brief period,

had inspired them to bring elements of what they had learned in this community into their regular lives.

Paul Hawken (2007) argues in his book, *Blessed Unrest* that the greater sustainability movement is already occurring worldwide and it is neither founded in one ideological belief nor does it have a singular voice or leader. He says:

It has been said that we cannot save our planet unless humankind undergoes a widespread spiritual and religious awakening. In other words, fixes won't fix unless we fix our souls as well. So let's ask ourselves this question: Would we recognize a worldwide spiritual awakening if we saw one? Or let me put the question the other way: What if there is already in place a large-scale spiritual awakening and we are simply not recognizing it? p.184

Hawken goes on to discuss the complexities and potentials of the current sustainability movement by describing diverse organizations and practices worldwide that focus on environmental and social justice issues, including Indigenous rights, and are contributing to this larger global movement through principles of innovation and resilience.

The journey to a sustainable lifestyle can impact happiness. This final section came as a surprise to me as I was not anticipating the path to environmental sustainability to be so interconnected with certain aspects of happiness. Many of the participants highlighted that once they were provided with an opportunity to step away from mainstream practices and systems (i.e., capitalism and a focus on economic gain), they were better able to assess the lack of contentment that they had been feeling in the “other” world. Additionally, some participants stated that the longer they spent on the farm living this alternative lifestyle, the “better” they started to feel. This resonates well with research on holistic approaches to wellness. Johanna Ferreira and Elizabeth Venter (2016), for example, argue that wellness requires paying attention to a number of areas in one's life: 1) physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health; 2) lifestyle choices; and 3) relationships to oneself, others, and the environment. They emphasize that, “the

sense of individuality in the western world often separates people from the broader world around them” (p. 292), which leads to feeling disconnected from the natural environment, and ultimately impacts feelings of wellness.

Likewise, Kasser (2009) suggests that in order to thrive psychologically, humans have four psychological needs that must be satisfied. First, happiness requires individuals to feel safe and secure, highlighting that basic needs must be met. Second, people need to feel competent and efficacious because unhappiness frequently occurs when people feel unworthy or when they cannot accomplish something that they care about. Third, people need a sense of relatedness and connection to others because humans are social beings who desire love and intimacy and struggle when feeling lonely. Finally, people need to feel free, autonomous, and to be neither controlled nor pressured by internal or external influences. On the farm, these psychological needs may not have always been met perfectly, but they were at least being addressed thus most participants were able to connect the benefits of their lifestyle to their well-being. Their basic needs were cultivated through daily labour and participants were provided with a variety of opportunities to feel competent in at least one realm given the diverse set of proficiencies needed on the farm. While the interpersonal interactions in this specific community may not have always been ideal, nonetheless, a group of like-minded individuals were living together and thus were provided some opportunities to form deep relationships. Finally, many participants reported feeling freer in this ecovillage; they chose this lifestyle and to mostly separate themselves from the “other” world. They were making decisions based on their needs and values, not because they were being told to. Kasser (2009) suggests that the fulfillment of psychological needs depends greatly on the environments in which people live and the behaviours in which they engage; based on the

data I have, I believe that many components of the lifestyle in this eco-village were addressing these needs.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have explored the experiences of individuals living an environmentally sustainable lifestyle in an intentional community, focusing on happiness. While the relationship between sustainable living and happiness is complex, I have found that even the simple act of engaging in conversations about these topics can transform relationships with ourselves, others, and the environment. Many participants reported how participating in my research was an opportunity for them to reflect more deeply on the topic and was a source of learning for them, just as it was for me. Still, there is so much more to learn. As I wrap up the thesis, I want to point to the implications my study has for environmental education and ideas I have for further research that could be conducted to further enrich this new field of “sustainable happiness.” I close with a reflection on my own personal learning journey through this thesis.

Implications for environmental education. The world is facing a noteworthy paradox wherein life expectancies and expectations are rising yet the natural environment, on which humans depend for survival, is depleting rapidly (Ferreira & Venter, 2016; Klein, 2015; Orr, 1996, 2012). UNESCO (2013) too acknowledges this broader context and also emphasizes that the world is becoming increasingly interdependent, concluding that “good quality education and learning are becoming even more determinants of the well-being of individuals, the progress of countries and the quality of humanity’s future” (p. 9). While it is often considered the responsibility of environmental education to meet these needs, as described in the second chapter, environmental education programs in public education are often few and far between

and face many challenges. One of the reasons we may struggle to cultivate change as environmental educators is the “doom and gloom” messaging (Kelsey & Armstrong, 2012).

O’Brien (2016) states that thus far environmental education has mainly focused on increasing environmental awareness with a slight shift towards cultivating sustainable lifestyles, and she argues that “the time is ripe for transition from a *problem focus* to a *solution focus* that stimulates creative and compassionate responses that are hopeful rather than instilling fear of impending disasters” (p. 17, emphasis in original). Kasser (2009) found that programs that encourage people to pursue environmentally friendly behaviours through more meaningful pursuits seem to be more effective than those that focus on guilt, anxiety, or rewards and punishment. My research helps to demonstrate that environmentally sustainable pursuits can indeed be seen as interconnected with the pursuit of happiness, which presumably would make it more attractive to a far wider range of people.

O’Brien (2016) has wondered how people generally learn about happiness and well-being. In conversations with her students on the east coast of Canada, she was able to establish that when young, this knowledge mainly comes through parents, but as individuals grow older, peers and media more heavily influence understandings of happiness. Given popular culture connects materialistic pursuits and happiness, which does not in fact resonate with the research on well-being, it is possible that much of what most people think they know about happiness is not accurate, unless they have engaged in critical self-reflection or therapy, or sought out literature on the topic. Further, beyond imparting a false understanding of happiness, mainstream media also heavily encourages mass consumption, which has obvious negative consequences for the natural environment. Recognizing this problem, O’Brien (2016) now offers courses at Cape Breton University, in Nova Scotia, Canada, that focus on sustainable happiness. O’Brien (2008,

2013a, 2016) has also written a number of books and articles sharing lessons and activities related to the cultivation of sustainable happiness. In much of her writing, she is targeting teachers, but clearly her ideas have wider application.

When I think about sustainable happiness in relation to the experiences of the participants in this study, a number of thoughts come to mind. First, it became evident during the interviews that knowledge of mindfulness practices and the impacts of different happiness exercises could be helpful in enhancing the happiness benefits in this lifestyle. For example, time for self-reflection seemed to be a double edged sword; either, because they had sought out knowledge related to happiness or seemed to intuitively be engaged in practices that resonated with the happiness literature (Angel, 2010, Lyubomirsky, 2007), some found the opportunity for sustained self-reflection helpful whereas others found that time more challenging. Second, I noted that some participants shared that they were envious of others in the community who appeared to have an easier time socializing yet not a single participant actually reported that they did so. This thus was an interesting example of participants making social comparison, which the literature indicates can negatively impact happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2007). From a practice point of view, then, learning about sustainable happiness could benefit even those already engaged in environmentally friendly lifestyles. Topics such as interpersonal communication, coping strategies, embracing the range of emotions, and conflict resolution could all be helpful, for example.

If learning more about sustainable happiness could benefit the participants living in an eco-village, imagine how helpful it might be for those who are more embedded in mainstream society and caught up in practices that do not contribute to happiness. O'Brien (2016) notes that while these ideas might be gaining traction amongst academics, "the general public is unaware of

these connections and none of these topics are well integrated into formal education” (p. 13). I would recommend, then, that we expand our understanding of environmental education and begin to delve deeper into the emotional dimensions of this work. As Orr (1996) suggested over twenty years ago, “the goal of education is not the mastery of knowledge, but the mastery of self through knowledge” (p. 9).

This study has helped bring to light that the relationship between sustainable living and individual happiness is complex and I feel that I have only just skimmed the surface. While there are some areas in which the correlations between the two concepts are clear, such as feeling gratitude for being engaged with producing or collecting one’s own food, there is much space for additional research to be conducted to help grow and popularize this small field of sustainable happiness (O’Brien, 2008, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, & 2016, Kelsey & O’Brien, 2011). For example a study comparing specific happiness exercises (e.g., practicing gratitude and positive thinking, avoiding overthinking, or managing stress, hardship, and trauma) in conjunction with specific sustainable living practices (e.g., renewable energies, reducing fossil fuel consumption, or waste reduction) could help provide more concrete information about how these two concepts might relate to each other. Furthermore, research delving more deeply into some of the specific findings of this study, such as the double-edged sword of self-reflection, the challenges of community-building even when values are shared, or the potential and pitfalls of complete technological disconnection, could possibly yield new information about what authentic happiness looks like in this modern day era.

Another area of research that could be investigated to develop a fuller understanding of sustainable happiness relates to privilege. All of the participants in this study were white, minimizing the effects of systemic racial oppression, and they were able to access this type of

lifestyle because they were not living with excessive debt. Additionally, this approach to sustainable living was made possible by the owners having had sufficient wealth to purchase the land in the first place. More research investigating how privilege impacts sustainable happiness would provide a more complex understanding of the phenomenon and perhaps also could help illuminate how this style of living could become more accessible.

Lastly, research on other eco-villages in different contexts could investigate how representative the findings in this study might be. Given these potential ideas and the growing attention to the emotional dimensions of environmental education generally (e.g., see Russell & Oakley's (2016) editorial for the most recent volume of the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, which is devoted to the topic), there is much potential range for these ideas to be considered more broadly, including in elementary and secondary schools. This past year, I had the pleasure of being part of an innovative experiential education program in a local elementary school that approached the curriculum through the lenses of well-being, social justice, and environmental education. Through this program, I was able to witness the potential of integrating topics such as goal-setting, value-building, self-reflection, and the practice of gratitude into a public school setting. The potential of this field is ever expanding!

Personal learning journey. O'Brien (2016) states, "our natural desire for happiness becomes the entry point for discovering that our well-being is inextricably associated with the well-being of others and the natural environment" (p. 14). This quotation nicely sums up my own experience with doing this thesis research. From the very first days when I started talking about my emerging thesis idea, I have found that people have been drawn to my study, which I think reflects that all of us appear to be intrinsically interested in the idea of happiness at some level. Since completing data collection, I have been invited to give numerous guest lectures and public

presentations and I am regularly asked if I believe that the participants in my study are more happy than most people; I always reply with the same answer: “It is not that simple!” As I have come to understand through my research, happiness does not have some magical end point nor is it something that can be given to others; just like we cannot actually empower anyone else and can only work to create conditions to help others empower themselves, the happiness journey is deeply personal yet connected to wider systemic issues.

In my thesis research, it became clear that the alternative lifestyle practiced on the farm did provide opportunities for participants to reflect on what contributed to their happiness and a number of important factors were at play, including direct connections to their food and the natural environment, and the opportunity to live with less dependency on money. These are interesting for me to ponder as these findings contradict the common misconception that environmental sustainability requires individuals to sacrifice their well-being (O’Brien, 2016), something I have been wondering about for some time.

Having the opportunity to experience life in this community firsthand was personally beneficial to me, as it has opened my eyes to the potential of an alternative way of interacting with the natural world. I was able to see how theories about sustainable living that I have been studying throughout my post-secondary education played out in practice, and while not perfect, I could see how this lifestyle limited negative impacts on the natural environment. This research also has inspired me to ensure that I make decisions in my life that will benefit both my health and happiness and limit my impact on the earth at the same time. For example, during my short time living in this community, I experienced a number of different positive emotions such as generally feeling more positive about my health and feeling more at ease due to less attachment to media. I want to apply these lessons to my life wherever I live, whether through appreciating

the natural environment even more than I already have been to becoming more involved in cultivating or gathering my own food. One big challenge that I have noted since leaving the community has been figuring out how to manage the role of media and news in my own life. I have found that the bombardment of devastating news, from the election of Trump, to continual reports of hate crimes, to persistent environmental disasters potentially connected to climate change, has impacted my overall well-being and even delayed the completion of this research as I still sometimes feel overwhelmed with the world and struggle to find hope.

Even with my knowledge of the happiness literature and having been inspired by the participants in the eco-village, I am not impermeable to negative emotions and still struggle to navigate my way through challenging times. Yet this new knowledge has helped me confront such challenges and approach my responses to life's ebbs and flows differently than I had prior. To finish this research, I want to share something that one of my participants, Finley, suggested:

Knowledge is exponential and the more you learn, the more you realize that you don't know. Every time I learn something new, it exposes me to a whole bunch of things that I didn't even know that I didn't know, that I now have to learn about. It's never ending, and it's exciting and it is also hard, because there is only so much life, and there is only so much one-person can ever know, and understand. I just try to figure out what I can.

Upon reflection, Finley's words made me wonder what the world could look like if our early learning included a focus on sustainable happiness. Happiness is a skill that can be practiced daily as every day we are faced with multiple decisions that either contribute to or detract from our well-being. Without accurate knowledge of happiness, how could we determine if the decisions we are making actually contribute to our happiness? How often do we unwittingly make decisions that not only impair our own well-being but also that of other creatures and the planet? Attending to sustainable happiness forces us to be more self-reflective, which I believe is the first step to working towards authentic happiness. This thesis research has opened my eyes to

a world of knowledge that I did not even know existed and it has helped me to feel better about my own interactions and impacts on the world and has given me a sense of hope, for which I am grateful.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Introductory E-mail to Intentional Community

Dear [community contact person],

I am contacting you today because I am interested in the possibility of coming to [your community] this summer for research I am conducting for my Masters thesis in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The title of my thesis is *Sustainable Happiness: Exploring the Impacts of Sustainable Living on Individual Happiness*. In this research, I want to explore how aspects and practices of environmentally sustainable lifestyles might impact a person's overall happiness. I selected your community as the place I would like to conduct my research because of your demonstrated commitment to sustainability and the many years you have been in existence. I feel that the knowledge that your community members possess could provide exceptional insight into this phenomenon.

To provide a little bit of background on me, I completed an honours degree in Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Tourism in 2014 and a Bachelors of Education degree with a focus in Outdoor Ecological Experiential Education and French last year. I have years of experience attending and then working at summer camps as well as other professional and volunteer experience in environmental and sustainability education. Although I desire to live a more environmentally friendly lifestyle, I find that the challenges living in mainstream society often puts up barriers and this is partially the reason why I first became interested in my research topic.

To complete my research, my request would be to stay with your community for at least 2 weeks and observe and take part in daily activities that the community deemed appropriate. During my stay, I would also want to interview 8-10 community members for 30-60 minutes each to ask them about their insights into sustainable happiness.

As a qualitative researcher, my role is to listen to the stories of individuals and describe in detail their understanding of their own lived experience. I feel a strong responsibility to all who kindly agree to participate in in my study and will take steps to assure that they are accurately being represented in my research. Prior to beginning my research, my research will be approved by Lakehead University's Research Ethics Board, following strict ethical guidelines to ensure the confidentiality, anonymity and safety of all participants and your community. If your community agrees to participate, I will provide you with more detailed information on ethical standards and research procedures.

If being part of this study is something that might be of interest to you and your community, I am more than willing to provide more details about myself, my research, and my intentions. We could do this by email, telephone, or Skype. You are also welcome to contact my MEd thesis supervisor, Dr. Connie Russell by email crussell@lakeheadu.ca or telephone at 807-343-8049.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Warmest regards,

Gemma Romano

Email: gromano@lakeheadu.ca

Phone: (807) 355-4394

Appendix B Interview Guide

Questions about Happiness and Happiness Activities:

1. What does happiness mean to you?
 - a. Probes: How would you define happiness? How often do you feel happiness when defined this way? Does it fluctuate or does it feel lasting?
2. Do you think that it is possible to become happier throughout one's life? Why or why not?
 - a. Probe: If you believe that happiness can be acquired, what advice would you give to others on how to be happy?
3. Do you think that happiness is an attainable goal for everyone? Why or why not?
4. Some people say that money is important because it gives you freedom? What do you think of that statement?
 - a. Probe: How important is money to you?
5. In your life, what do you feel grateful for?
 - a. Probe: How do you normally express gratitude?
6. How often do you feel envy?
 - a. Probes: Is there a person or persons of whom you are particularly envious? If so, what is it about them triggers your envy?
7. Please think of the most important relationships in your life. Who are they with? What are the most important qualities of these relationships in your life?
 - a. Probe: What contributes to a healthy relationship?
8. What does health mean to you? What steps do you take to contribute to your own health?
 - a. Probe: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual
9. When you have experienced difficult times in the past, what have you done to cope with those moments?
 - a. Probe: How do you deal with trauma or hardship?
10. Can you tell me about one experience in the past that you have particularly cherished? What was it about that moment that made it so special to you? How often do you experience moments like this?

Questions about Sustainability and Happiness

1. What does sustainability mean to you?
 - a. Probes: What does living a sustainable lifestyle mean to you? How would you define sustainability? What are the important elements of sustainability?
2. In what ways have you tried to incorporate sustainability into your lifestyle?
3. Why did you first start engaging in sustainable living? What was your motivation?
4. Do you think that you live sustainably?
5. How do you think your lifestyle contributes to your happiness?
6. What role do you think sustainability plays in happiness?
7. When you think about the future of the world, how do you feel?
 - a. Probe: Do you feel optimistic or do you feel pessimistic and why?



Appendix C Information Letter (Community)

Date

Dear [community contact],

The purpose of this letter is to follow up on our email conversations. I thank you for indicating your willingness to allow me to conduct research and would like to formally invite Blue Jay Lake Farm to participate in this project. I am providing you with this official documentation of the research that I will be conducting there for my Master's thesis in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario to ensure that we are indeed on the same page and that you agree that I can proceed to visit your community and approach adults in your community about possible participation in my research.

The title of my thesis is *Sustainable Happiness: Exploring the Impacts of Sustainable Living on Individual Happiness* and I want to explore how aspects and practices of environmentally sustainable lifestyles might impact a person's overall happiness. I feel that the knowledge that your community members possess could provide exceptional insight into this phenomenon.

For this qualitative ethnographic case study, I will be living in your community in a World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) volunteer arrangement for two weeks to observe and take part in daily activities that your community deems appropriate. In addition, and as my main source of data collection, I will be interviewing between eight to ten community members during my stay for 30-60 minutes each to seek their insights on sustainable happiness. All interviews will be audio-recorded and conducted and transcribed by myself. The community members at Blue Jay Lake Farm will not be paid to participate in this research, but they may find it beneficial to reflect on their sustainable living choices and its impacts on their emotional well-being.

There is no foreseeable physical harm or risk for participants of this study, but there is a small amount of psychological risk if an interview question triggers a painful memory. To minimize the possibility of this risk, all participants will be given the opportunity to read the interview questions prior to our meeting and will have the right to refuse to answer any question. Further, I will have contact information for community support that you have provided to me (e.g., local counselors, psychologists, or other mental health support) that I can give to any participant if they feel they need to talk to a professional.

I feel strongly about my responsibility to all who kindly agree to participate in in my study and I will take steps to assure that they are accurately being represented in my research. All participants will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts, if desired, to ensure that these accurately reflect their perspectives.

To ensure anonymity, all data gathered through this research will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in my thesis and any associated writing or presentations. Both Blue Jay Lake Farm and its community members will not be identifiable in my thesis and any associated writing or presentations, unless otherwise indicated on the following consent forms. Blue Jay Lake Farm, as a community, will only be identified if all participants agree and indicate that they would also like to be named. In addition, interviews will be conducted in private locations away from all other community members to ensure that all is being done to protect the confidentiality of participants. Only my supervisor, Dr. Connie Russell, and I will have access to the raw data. At the end of my research, data will be submitted to my supervisor, who will securely store the information on an external hard drive in the Faculty of Education's data storage area for 5 years after which it will be destroyed as per Lakehead University's policy.

Your community's participation in my research is entirely voluntary. If you are interested in being interviewed yourself, I will provide you with an additional information letter that makes clear that your rights include: the right to not participate; to withdraw at any time during the data collection phase and to have any collected data related to you not included in the study; to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality; and to having safeguards in place to ensure security of data.

The results of this research will be used in my thesis and in presentations and written articles. Participants may request an executive summary of the thesis or an electronic copy of the full thesis by indicating so on the consent form. Either a hard copy or an electronic copy of the full thesis will also be sent to you for the community upon completion.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Lakehead University. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, you may contact Susan Wright at the REB at (807) 343-8283.

If at any time, you have any questions or concerns regarding the research please feel free to contact me by email, gromano@lakeheadu.ca, or by telephone, (807) 355-4394. You also may contact my supervisor, Dr. Connie Russell by email, crussell@lakeheadu.ca, or by telephone, (807)-343-8049.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to work with your community. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gemma Romano
Master's of Education student
Faculty of Education
Lakehead University



Appendix D Consent Form (Community)

Study title: Sustainable Happiness: Exploring the Impacts of Sustainable Living on Individual Happiness

I, _____, on behalf of _____ (community name), have read and understood the information about the research project, including the potential risks and benefits of the study. I hereby consent to you visiting our community to observe and to you approaching adult community members to ask if they would be willing to be interviewed.

I understand:

- The potential risks and benefits of the study;
- The community may withdraw from the research at any point during the data collection period;
- Participants may choose not to answer any questions;
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially;
- Following the completion of research, all data will be submitted to Dr. Connie Russell, who will securely store the data on an external hard drive in the Faculty of Education's data storage area for 5 years before being destroyed, as per Lakehead University's policy
- Participants will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts
- Participants may also request an executive summary of the thesis or an electronic copy of the full thesis by indicating so on this form
- The community and its members will not be identifiable in the thesis or any publications or public presentations resulting from this research, unless otherwise indicated on this form that confidentiality is waived and the use of real names is preferred and if all participants also agree to waive confidentiality.

I also understand that the results of this research will be used only in the following:

- My thesis, which will be available in the Lakehead University library
- Presentations at conferences or in teaching
- Written articles for scholars or professional educators

(Print Name)

(Signature)

(Date)

On behalf of: _____
(Community Name)

I, _____, on behalf of _____ (community name),
waive confidentiality, and want "Blue Jay Lake Farm" to be used in the transcripts, field notes,
thesis, publications, and presentations: Yes: _____ No: _____

I will send to you, on behalf of the community an electronic executive summary of the thesis. I
will also send you a full copy of the thesis once it is complete. Please indicate here if you would
prefer an electronic and/or hard copy of the full thesis: Electronic: ___ Hard Copy: ___

Please provide an email address to receive an executive summary and electronic copy of the full
thesis and a mailing address if you would like a hard copy of the full thesis:

Please sign and return this form to Gemma Romano. A copy of this consent form will also be
provided to Dr. Connie Russell. For further information concerning the completion of this form,
please contact:

Gemma Romano
Master's of Education Student
Lakehead University
Phone: (807) 355-4394
Email: gromano@lakeheadu.ca

And/or
Dr. Connie Russell (supervisor)
Professor, Lakehead University
Phone: (807) 343-8049/ Email: crussell@lakeheadu.ca

Appendix E

Information Letter (Participant)

Date

Dear [potential participant],

I would like to formally invite you to participate in the research that I am conducting in your community for my Master's thesis in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The title of my thesis is *Sustainable Happiness: Exploring the Impacts of Sustainable Living on Individual Happiness* and I want to explore how aspects and practices of environmentally sustainable lifestyles might impact a person's overall happiness. I feel that the knowledge that you possess could provide exceptional insight into this phenomenon.

For this qualitative ethnographic case study, I will be living in your community in a World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) volunteer arrangement for two weeks to observe and take part in daily activities. In addition, and as my main source of data collection, I will be interviewing between eight to ten community members during my stay for 30-60 minutes each to seek their insights on sustainable happiness. All interviews will be audio-recorded and conducted and transcribed by myself. You will not be paid to participate in this research, however you may find it beneficial to reflect on your sustainable living choices and its impacts on your emotional well-being.

There is no foreseeable physical harm or risk for participants of this study, but there is a small amount of psychological risk if an interview question triggers a painful memory. To minimize the possibility of this risk, you will be given the opportunity to read the interview questions prior to our meeting and will have the right to refuse to answer any question. Further, I will have contact information for community support (e.g., local counselors, psychologists, or other mental health support) that I can give you if you feel you need to talk to a professional.

I feel strongly about my responsibility to all who kindly agree to participate in my study and I will take steps to assure that you are accurately being represented in my research. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts, if desired, to ensure that these accurately reflect your perspectives.

To ensure anonymity, all data gathered through this research will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in my thesis and any associated writing or presentations. Both Blue Jay Lake Farm and its community members will not be identifiable in my thesis and any associated writing or presentations, unless otherwise indicated on the following consent forms. Blue Jay Lake Farm, as a community, will only be identified if all participants agree and indicate that they would also like to be named. In addition, this interview will be conducted in a private location away from all other community members to ensure that all is being done to protect the confidentiality of you, the participant. Only my supervisor, Dr. Connie Russell, and I will have access to the raw data. At the end of my research, data will be submitted to my supervisor, who

will securely store the information on an external hard drive in the Faculty of Education's data storage area for 5 years after which it will be destroyed as per Lakehead University's policy.

Your participation in my research is entirely voluntary. As a participant, your rights include: the right to not participate; to withdraw at any time during the data collection phase and to have any collected data related to you not included in the study; to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality; and to having safeguards in place to ensure security of data.

The results of this research will be used in my thesis and in presentations and written articles. You may request an executive summary of the thesis or an electronic copy of the full thesis by indicating so on the consent form. Either a hard copy or an electronic copy of the full thesis will also be sent to community upon completion.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Lakehead University. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, you may contact Susan Wright at the REB at (807) 343-8283.

If at any time, you have any questions or concerns regarding the research please feel free to contact me by email, gromano@lakeheadu.ca, or by telephone, (807) 355-4394. You also may contact my supervisor, Dr. Connie Russell by email, crussell@lakeheadu.ca, or by telephone, (807)-343-8049.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to work with you and your community. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gemma Romano
Master's of Education student
Faculty of Education
Lakehead University



Appendix F Consent Form (Participant)

Study title: Sustainable Happiness: Exploring the Impacts of Sustainable Living on Individual Happiness

I, _____, have read and understood the information about the research project, including the potential risks and benefits of the study. I hereby consent to my participation in the research.

I understand:

- The potential risks and benefits of the study;
- I may withdraw from the research at any point during the data collection period;
- I may choose not to answer any questions;
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially;
- Following the completion of research, all data will be submitted to Dr. Connie Russell, who will securely store the data on an external hard drive in the Faculty of Education's data storage area for 5 years before being destroyed, as per Lakehead University's policy
- I will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts
- I may request an executive summary of the thesis or an electronic copy of the full thesis by indicating so on this form
- I will not be identifiable in the thesis or any publications or public presentations resulting from this research, unless otherwise indicated on this form that confidentiality is waived and the use of my real name is preferred

I also understand that the results of this research will be used only in the following:

- My thesis, which will be available in the Lakehead University library
- Presentations at conferences or in teaching
- Written articles for scholars or professional educators

(Print Name)

(Signature)

(Date)

I, _____, (full name) waive confidentiality, and want my real name to be used in the transcripts, field notes, thesis, publications, and presentations: Yes: ___ No: ___

I would like to receive an executive summary of the thesis: Yes: ___ No: ___

I would like to receive an electronic copy of the full thesis: Yes: ___ No: ___

Please provide an email or mailing address to receive an executive summary of the thesis or an electronic copy of the full thesis:

Please sign and return this form to Gemma Romano. A copy of this consent form will also be provided to Dr. Connie Russell. For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact:

Gemma Romano
Master's of Education Student
Lakehead University
Phone: (807) 355-4394
Email: gromano@lakeheadu.ca

And/or
Dr. Connie Russell (supervisor)
Professor, Lakehead University
Phone: (807) 343-8049/ Email: crussell@lakeheadu.ca