Earthbound in the Anthropocene: Spirituality, Collective Identity, and Participation in the Direct Action Climate Movement

David Alan Osborn
Portland State University

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Earthbound in the Anthropocene: Spirituality, Collective Identity, and Participation in the Direct Action Climate Movement

by

David Alan Osborn

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Sociology

Dissertation Committee:
Robert Liebman, Chair
Daniel Jaffee, Co-Chair
Amy Lubitow
Jeremy Spoon

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ABSTRACT

Climate change, as part of a broader ecological crisis, is becoming an ever more potent event structuring human societies and planetary ecosystems. As the climate crisis deepens, climate change is unsettling core human identities, as well as the ontologies that define and situate concepts of “human” and “nature.” And as social movements act to challenge and mitigate the catastrophes arising in the Anthropocene era, the question of how to sustain participation is critical. This dissertation explores these dynamics through a study of spirituality, collective identity, participation, and ontology in a subset of the climate movement. The research questions were: (1a) What spiritual beliefs and identities exist among movement participants? (1b) What is the relationship between the formation of individual spiritual identities and collective movement identities? (1c) What is the relationship between spiritual identities, specifically those oriented towards ontological shifts, which I call “earthbound,” and collective identities? (2) Do spiritual beliefs and associated collective identities shape movement participation outcomes?

I interviewed participants in what I call the “direct action climate movement” in the Pacific Northwest. This movement, itself a subset of a broader climate movement, has been active over most of the last decade and has worked to oppose and obstruct significant drivers of the climate crisis. The direct action climate movement has also attempted to work within a systemic and justice-oriented analysis of the climate crisis and to promote community-based solutions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 current and former activists in this movement from 2019 to 2020 and were supplemented by participant observation of four meetings and six actions.
Respondents in this study reported strong and meaningful spiritual identities that sustained their participation and shaped collective identity. Despite this, I paradoxically found that explicit engagement with spirituality was largely absent from the movement. The absence of spirituality was mostly understood by participants as negatively impacting the movement. Additionally, most respondents articulated what I call an “earthbound” identity, following the work of Bruno Latour. This identity begins to destabilize the dominant societal ontology, which is structured by settler colonialism. These earthbound identities include a strong sense of interconnectivity beyond the self, a kinship with other more-than-human beings, a biocentric worldview, and a belief in more-than-human agency. Participants also described their experience of collective identity in explicitly spiritual terms, as fundamentally sustaining to their engagement, and, for some, as including the more-than-human world (“nature”).

This study shows that spirituality is important as well as a critical place of personal and collective identity formation that sustains activists engaging the climate crisis in the Anthropocene. It also indicates that social movements must center ontology to address a climate crisis rooted, in part, in settler colonialism. The findings suggest that ontological shifts are happening within climate movements, but that, at least among white settler and non-Indigenous movement participants, these shifts are not being explicitly developed. I recommend a framework that bypasses obstacles to engaging these dynamics and allows for an accessible engagement of ontological transformation. Additionally, I argue that collective identity necessarily includes ontology, and that the transformation of ontology must be a priority for researchers and social movements.
DEDICATION

To Naomi and Samuel

To the Sandy River and all the life in which these waters are woven

And to all those beings from which we emerge and to all those that we will become

May the words that follow make even the smallest contribution to a world in which there is less suffering, in which we awaken to our belonging, and in which life thrives and is enriched by our human living
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This has been a long project and so many thanks are called for. All that is good in what follows is due to those here and all the fault resides with me. First, I want to offer thanks to the land that has sustained me and this project. The beavers and coyotes around the lower Sandy River in Oregon, the resident harbor seals of Netarts Bay, and the elk of Cascade Head on the Oregon coast also deserve special mention. I spent significant time with these beings during the early stages of this research and writing project and those encounters shaped me and my thinking. I would also like to thank all of the people with whom I organized for many years across movements as well as all those who continue to fight for the living world. My former comrades in Portland Rising Tide and the Rising Tide North America collective were particularly impactful. Our years of organizing taught me so much and form the foundation of what emerges here in this research. I also taught continuously throughout this project and my undergraduate students always offer teachings to me as we work through related content together.

Thank you to my committee, Bob Liebman, Daniel Jaffee, Amy Lubitow, and Jeremy Spoon. I am grateful for your encouragement and support even as I pursued a project that exists at the edge of traditional sociological research. Bob and Dan – Thank you for all of your hours of readings early drafts of this dissertation and for your thoughtful and encouraging feedback! Bob – Thank you for your support in our long relationship and for pulling me into your classroom years ago which contributed to a bridging between the practical and conceptual aspects of social movements. Dan – Your excellent editing and comments have made this a much, much better product. I am also
grateful to my colleagues in University Studies at Portland State University, where I teach, who have also offered curiosity and encouragement as I pursued this project. Michael Flower deserves special mention for introducing me to the work of Bruno Latour and giving me early access to some of his works. Many long hours were spent with a napping baby on my chest engaging in these exciting ideas, and they led to discovering a world of connected and innovative literature. My neighbors Jasmine and Jared provided significant support by letting me work for extended weekends out of their house (and delivering wonderful snacks and treats to keep me going!). A little space from one’s children can focus the mind! I have so much gratitude for all my spiritual teachers, who have provided invaluable practices and views, which have been personally transformative and inform this work. I’d like to specifically mention Lama Lekshe, the community of Dekeling, Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeault, James Finley, the Center for Action and Contemplation, the Zen Community of Oregon, and my father for sharing meditation and a koan with me in my teens which has flowered over many years. Lastly, my subjects who are truly collaborators in this work, have all my appreciation. Without them, and their wonderful and insightful reflections, there would be nothing to write about. Truly, this project emerged collectively through our conversations. Thank you.

I am especially grateful to my family. My partner Ivy always provided encouragement, support, love, and an occasional stern talking to as I waffled about whether or not to pursue this project. She has been the deepest source of some of my own work and transformation, which have allowed me to develop the perspective and grounding to engage in this work as I have. My children, Naomi and Samuel, who were
as yet unborn when I started this degree, are due my deepest thanks and appreciation. They have not only taught me so much, but they have transformed my thinking and being in ways highly resonant with the reflections on interconnectivity that follow. My parents, Pat and Alan, have always been supportive and encouraging of my learning. Without their support and love neither the curiosity, nor the discipline that sustained this project would have been possible. Not to mention the time! Thanks for watching the kids all those hours!

Finally, I am grateful to the Chinookan peoples of the lower Columbia who have, for millennia, practiced a deep, living relationship with all our fellow beings. Their ways of living not only helped create the richness of the region I now call my home, and which I have come to deeply love, but also continue to be an ongoing model and inspiration for the changes so desperately needed in this world. I wish to acknowledge my ancestors as well, whose roles related to this content are complex. On one hand, many of my ancestors, as white settlers who have been in North America for hundreds of years, actively contributed to the extractive culture and ways of being that dispossessed the Chinookan peoples, and other Indigenous peoples, from much of their ancestral lands and helped bring us to the collective precipice we find ourselves on. On the other hand, much love, care, and compassion has flowed through them and the lines that have come to fruition in me at this moment in time. This includes ancestors who stretch to those times in which my people themselves lived in a deep, living relationship with the land and the beings they shared it with. It is my experience that this loving presence and its resonance
has always remained, however diminished it may have become in recent times. May what
follows give energy to and allow that presence to grow.
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This work has taken many years to produce. I have worked at a literal and figurative baby pace. When I started the PhD program at Portland State University, I did not have children. At the time of the completion of my degree I have a five year old son and a seven year old daughter. Throughout this time, I have been their primary caregiver and this period of my life has been filled with love. It has also been challenging. In addition to the rigors and sleep deprivation of being a parent there was a global pandemic, a racial justice uprising, a coup orchestrated by a sitting President, and a significant unfolding of the climate crisis in more and more communities. When I started this degree ten years ago the themes of this research project were less resonant than they are today. There is a growing collective sense of being inside of a catastrophe that is unfolding now rather than something that is awaiting us in the future. In many ways, this has simply been a catching up for more privileged communities to the reality that many communities have been experiencing for decades or even centuries.

There have been many, many times when I wanted to walk away from this project. It simply could not compete for attention amidst all that I was juggling. And yet, I could not help but notice the growing resonance this subject has had over the years. As time went on, I became more and more interested in what an increasingly past version of myself had chosen. The themes and interests of this research seemed to speak to an existential questioning that is growing about the core assumptions, worldviews, and ontology of the dominant global culture. It also seemed to be speaking to the dread, fear, and grief arising in response to drought, floods, wildfire, heat waves, and other forms of
climate disaster. And as I was able to dive deeply into what the interviewees had spoken to, they had so much to offer in relationship to the times we are transiting and must be engaged in. In the end, I am very grateful for the opportunity and privilege to work on and complete this project. It is inevitably flawed in many ways due to excessive ambitions at the start of the project, its long duration, the challenges of academic writing under the watchful eyes of very young children, my own shortcomings, and other issues. And yet, it is my sincere hope that it has something of value to offer. I know that I’ve learned through the doing of the research. All that is valuable and informative in what follows is due to those acknowledged above, among many, many others. All that is flawed arises from myself. And may all that is good in this project serve us in these times such that we may find the capacity to re-engage our belonging and relationality to this living world with equity and justice.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The research that follows explores the relationship between spirituality and collective identities in a subset of the climate movement that is oriented to direct action and climate justice. Within the robust literature of collective identity and social movements the question of how different types of identity interrelate to form collective identities is seen as both an essential and poorly understood process (Abdelal et al. 2006; Hunt et al. 2004; Polletta et al. 2001). Within this already poorly understood process, the relationship between spiritual and religious identities, beliefs, and practices in social movements is absent from the literature. The inductive research that follows aims to address these gaps and explores the spiritual and religious identities among participants in the direct action climate movement, the relationship between these and other collective identities, the impact of spirituality on participation, and the relevance of spirituality for movements in the Anthropocene more broadly. The respondents of this research speak to a destabilization of the strongly dualistic subject/object ontology\(^1\) of Western identities, itself rooted in settler colonialism\(^2\), and the emergence of the types of grounded or interconnected identities such as articulated by Taylor’s (2009) “dark green religion” and Latour’s (2017) concept of being “earthbound.”

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\(^1\) Ontology, in my usage, refers to the embedded cultural worldview or understanding about the “nature of being and existence or the nature of reality” (Oxford Bibliography 2023:n.p.). A full definition appears on pages 22-23.

\(^2\) Settler colonialism, which I understand as structuring social relations in an ongoing way, works towards “the dissolution of native societies” while erecting a “new colonial society on the expropriated land base” (Wolfe 2006:388). It is also a process that works to eliminate alternatives to a settler ontology, itself positioned as universal. A full exploration of this concept appears on pages 24-28.
In preparing for this project, a variety of literature pointed me to radical ecological movements as fertile sources of exploring themes of spirituality, collective identity, and movement participation. I also chose to study this particular movement because I have been a long-term participant. I dedicated about a decade (roughly 2009-2018) to wholeheartedly engaging in what I call the direct action climate movement (see Chapter 4 for more of this framing). I interviewed movement participants in the Pacific Northwest who participated in the Sunrise Movement, 350PDX, Portland Rising Tide, Extinction Rebellion, Forests for Climate Resilience, and Climate Direct Action. During and immediately preceding this research these groups worked to address the climate crisis in numerous ways while centering direct action and a climate justice analysis. They held large youth strikes, blockaded cargo ships, manually shut down tar sands oil pipelines, pressured elected leaders, and engaged in many, many other actions. From these movement organizations, I interviewed both individuals who were actively engaged and those who had transitioned from active organizing. This diversity of subjects allowed me to interrogate some of the participation outcomes related to the themes centered in this research. Such an orientation further grounds my research project within the collective identity literature in that the inclusion of this concept in social movement studies initially sought to explain how movements sustained themselves, rather than taking that as a given.

A Crisis of Relationship: Context for Research

We live in transformative times. My intention in doing this research was to firmly
situate it within this transformative context. This study is intended both to be relevant to these times as well as to social movements. Climate change is one aspect of this broader crisis in our (human) relationship to life, or to put even more broadly, a crisis in the ontology held by the dominant culture.\(^3\) I find it important and helpful to consider the broader context before talking about climate change, which is the central focus of the movements under investigation. Viewed through the lens of species extinction, what we are experiencing has occurred only six times in the billions of years in which life has existed on this planet. At this moment we are alive in the most recent mass extinction, the first in sixty-five million years and one that is projected to drive between 20% and 50% of all living species to extinction by the end of the century (Kolbert 2014). Climate change is widely indicated as one of the primary causes of this mass extinction event, which may not be the first mass extinction either caused by a single species or driven by climate change.\(^4\) However, it does promise to be the first one in which there is a consciousness of the consequences by the species creating the extinction event.

This extinction event is but one aspect of a destabilization in planetary boundaries within which life, at least as we know it, can safely operate. Already near or beyond critical and dangerous levels are the integrity of ecosystems (in which species extinction is included), changes to land, phosphorous and nitrogen cycles, ocean acidification, and

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\(^3\) The term “dominant culture” will be used here, and throughout this paper, to refer to those aspects of Western culture that are hegemonic and are a subject of (nearly) universal orientation. Examples relevant to this research include human/nature dualism, white supremacy, etc. I recognize the contested nature of these examples, and other aspects of the dominant culture. Indeed, contesting and transforming these hegemonic relations is firmly what social movements do, but however destabilized these social relations might be they continue to be dominant.

\(^4\) One theory of the end-Permian extinction is that it was caused by the runaway colonization of mosses across all land masses which triggered massive climate change (Kolbert 2014).
disruptions to the climate system (Rockstrom et al. 2009; Steffen et al. 2015). The social science, physical science, and social movement literature has been filled in recent decades with a recognition of the transformative times that we live in. Two framings that capture this dynamic are the “great acceleration,” which points to exponential dynamics that have arisen across social and physical systems within the last 250 years, as well as the more common term “Anthropocene” which points to the visibility of humans’ impact in geologic time (Steffen et al. 2015). Within the social sciences, Hardt et al. (2001) describe a liminal state between Empire and transformation, Melucci (1996) describes the systemic strain within the world system, Wright (2006) calls for a liberatory social science focused on alternatives to capitalism, and Mann (2010) suggests a major crisis in the world system emerging via the environment.

The aspect of this crisis in our relationships to life that is of most interest to this project is anthropogenic climate change. This concept aims to describe the warming of the planet through the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases that is well underway. By the time that climate change began to be substantively discussed in the

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5 The Anthropocene is an increasingly common, though controversial, name for the new geologic epoch in which we live. Though originally a debate within geologic academic associations about whether a transition to a new epoch has occurred, it has become broadly utilized in popular culture and other academic disciplines, with several journals bearing the name in one form or another. While I am sympathetic to debates that critique the name and offer alternatives (see for example Tsing 2015), given the primacy of the Anthropocene in popular academic usage I adopt it here.

6 Considered from a cosmic perspective, some argue that we live in a moment in which an intelligent species, in part via its creativity and dynamism, creates a crisis in the life supporting systems of its planet (e.g., Primack et al. 2007; Davies 2011; Frank et al. 2014). That intelligent species come to pose such a threat to themselves at the cusp of transitioning to inhabiting places (other planets, solar systems, galaxies) other than their planet of origin may pose one solution to Fermi’s paradox about the lack of contact with intelligent life within such an immense universe, in that such intelligent life may tend to destroy itself. Whether or not it does is unknowable as of now, but these astrobiological perspectives of the Anthropocene give a broader context from which we might view our crisis that imparts both a sense of urgency and a sense of mystery.
1980s and later institutionalized in the form of the United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, extraordinary amounts of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases had already been emitted into the atmosphere. Despite almost 25 years of negotiations, we are nowhere near a comprehensive and adequate international treaty, and the Paris negotiations of the UNFCCC generated a wishful framework of “nationally determined contributions” for the reduction of greenhouse gases without meaningful accountability mechanisms. The planet continues to experience growth and new peaks of greenhouse gas emissions each year. During the time of this research (from 2016 – 2023), the concentration of CO₂ increased by about 20 parts per million (ppm) to 422 ppm (Atmospheric CO₂ 2023). Climate change is not something that is going to happen – it is already happening. Remarkably, there has been a sea change towards this view during the brief interval of this project. Within the Pacific Northwest alone, the last five years has seen catastrophic wildfires (2020 in particular), unprecedented wildfire smoke events, and record temperatures of up to 115 degrees Fahrenheit. This has left people of this region – and elsewhere due to their own local events – with an experiential sense of the unfolding reality of climate change. Many have suggested that climate change poses an existential threat to humanity, and the idea of human extinction and social collapse is now regularly seen in major publications and heard in casual conversation.

Beginning in the early 2000s the number of groups explicitly organizing around climate change as a central issue began to grow. While non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups had campaigned on climate change and engaged in the
international negotiating process prior to this, there was little grassroots or emergent organizing focusing on climate change. If we consider social movements, as opposed to solely institutional actors, as the combination of emergent, dynamic organizing and pre-existing organizations such as Freeman (1999), among others, argues, then we cannot meaningfully speak of a climate movement until the mid-aughts. With increasing rapidity, significant grassroots and institutional action began to take shape around climate change, involving everyone from longstanding environmental NGOs like Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, and Friends of the Earth to new upstart organizations like 350.org, Rising Tide North America, the Sunrise Movement, and the Climate Justice Alliance. These relatively more organized upstart groups exist alongside a wide array of geographically organized, often fossil fuel extraction-focused networks around mountaintop removal coal mining, hydraulic fracking, tar sands, conventional fossil fuel extraction and burning, the construction of specific pipelines, and fossil fuel export terminals.

This emergent movement is characterized by a wide range of proposed solutions, ideological beliefs, and preferred forms of action. It is, like any movement, far from coherent in its approach. Yet by the time of this writing, it is commonly accepted that something that we can consider a “climate movement” exists and acts upon local, national, and global politics (for examples of literature focused on such a movement see Woodsworth 2009; Klein 2015; Nagel 2012; Dowling 2010). The movement has held globally coordinated marches and strikes with millions of people within an explicit climate-centered frame and taken disruptive action against those identified as causing climate change, such as during the Tar Sands Blockade (2012) and the Standing Rock
Camp (2016) against the Dakota Access Pipeline (e.g., Frosch 2012; Healy et al. 2017). However, despite all its action, it is my assertion that the climate movement is still failing to achieve its most coherent and central demand: preventing catastrophic climate change.

Why is this the case? What is the role of collective identity and spirituality in this context? The intent of this study is to try and explore the crisis of relationship that constitutes these times, whatever label we apply, and be informative to the transformations clearly necessary to avert catastrophe.

**Collective Identity and Relationality: A Preview of What is to Come**

Authors from diverse disciplines such as anthropology and sociology (Latour 2017), theoretical physics (Primack et al. 2007), religious studies (Taylor 2009) and theology (Berry 2015) suggest the need for a new story, ontology, or “centering cosmology” to re-ground humans in this dangerous time. Primack et al. (2007:275) emphasize the need for humans to recreate a meaningful place in the universe and recognize how rather than an abstract intellectual enterprise, cosmology “has the power to overturn the fundamental institutions of society.” They suggest that such a meaningful place may come in part from recognizing that in the dominant culture’s destructive practices there is a risk of losing that incredible and mysterious part of the universe that has come to consciousness of itself as humans. Tucker et al. (2011), following the work of Thomas Berry, make a similar argument in calling for the development of a new “universe story” as a scientific cosmological context in which humans can transform meaning and identity in relationship to the ecological crisis. My core research questions
speak to this broader context and are focused on the spiritual identities of activists, the relationship between these identities and collective identity, the extent to which these identities constitute a transformation of ontology, and the role that spiritual and collective identities have for sustaining movement participation.

My findings point to the potential for just these types of transformation as well as fundamental shifts in the ontology of the dominant culture. Taylor, in his study of emerging spiritualities in radical environmental movements suggested these types of changes may be a necessary “basis for a sustainable planetary future” (2009:199). In this way my research also answers a call in the literature (e.g., Latour 2017; Primack et al. 2007; Stengers 2015) to explore new worldviews and center transformations of identity and action in this time of enormous importance as well as speaking to how social movements might be potential mechanisms for the transmission of new ontologies. As I will discuss below, there is an emergent spiritual identity among the activists I spoke with that begins to unsettle the dominant ontology, which is itself rooted in settler colonialism. Despite the reported importance of spirituality, there is substantive confusion amongst respondents, and the groups they are drawn from, about whether or how this transformative work should be at the center of the movement. Significantly, my research contributes a compelling case study of the power and potential of spirituality in social movements operating in the Anthropocene, related novel forms of collective identity formations within movements, and an emergent identity that begins to transform the dominant ontology.
These finding are derived from an inductive study using qualitative methods comprised of in-depth, semi-structured interviews supported by participant observation. I analyzed my data using Thomas’ (2006) “general inductive approach” (the methodology is explored in full in Chapter 3). Qualitative methods in the study of collective identity have been strongly encouraged by recent scholarship (Abdelal et al. 2006). The appropriateness of these methods for understanding identity is also underscored by Hunt et al.’s (2004:445) argument that “collective identities are talked into existence,” a notion that is also supported by the work of Alberto Melucci (1996) and others. Thus, the use of semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to observe the constantly evolving, contested nature of collective identity formation and the dynamic role of identities, such as spirituality, in this process. Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviews follows successful research designs that have sought to study similar direct action environmental movements in the United Kingdom (e.g., Plows 2002; Woodsworth 2008). The 21 interviews I conducted are supplemented by participant observation and focus on individual spiritual beliefs, movement collective identity, and how movement participation is sustained. Recruitment for the sample was conducted with the intent to provide representation and relative balance across a variety of demographic variables, including specifically gender, age, active vs. transitioned status, and length of movement engagement. The decision to focus on the mostly white settler and non-Indigenous direct action climate movement of the Pacific Northwest was also an intentional and reflexive choice given my prior involvement and identity as a white settler person.
My research and the implication of the findings for understanding the orientation of political and spiritual aspects of movements in the Anthropocene speaks to debates within my specific academic area of focus, social movement studies. The subfield has been noted as having a theoretical eclecticism and multiplicity of origin stories that illustrate a debate occurring about the social movements field’s narrowness. McAdam et al. (2012) argue that the rapid growth of social movement studies has created an intellectual insularity and an excessive focus on movements, specifically successful movements or instances of successful campaigns, that bias the outcomes of analysis. In a related but different vein, Walder (2009) suggests that the field has evolved and narrowed in a way that has greatly reduced the kinds of questions being asked, with a focus largely on how movements emerge and how mobilization happens. The result of this tendency has been the development of “a subfield that aims to explain the conditions under which a movement – of any type – can grow and succeed, but we no longer have explanations to offer about variations in the substantive content – the type of politics that it represents” (Walder 2009:398). Through examining the dynamic process of collective identity formation in the direct action climate movement, my work puts the question of content, or politics, at the forefront. Even more provocatively for this field, I seek to explore the potential relevance of ontology and the politically spiritual in the Anthropocene.

Organization of Dissertation

Before diving into the findings of this research, which begin in Chapter 4, I will lay the foundation necessary to understand this study. In Chapter 2, I will first explore the
relevant literature examining social movements, spirituality, ontology, settler colonialism, and collective identity. In Chapter 3, I will present the methodological approach for this study before describing the sample. In Chapter 4, I will situate and define what I call the direct action climate movement, from which the research respondents were drawn.

Beginning in this chapter, findings from this research are presented that are richly grounded in the talk of the participants. In Chapter 4, this includes the heterogenous collective identities held by respondents about the movement they participated in as well as a few points of alignment. The findings continue in Chapter 5, where I will first explore the universe of spiritual and religious identities as it exists within my sample.

Study respondents identified spirituality as very important. Drawing from the interviews, I will argue that there is an emergent spiritual identity, which I label “earthbound,” that is held by the majority of respondents. Additionally, this earthbound identity begins to challenge the dominant ontology and includes aspects related to kinship, biocentrism, interconnection, and agency of the more-than-human.7 Despite the heterogeneity of movement collective identity discussed in Chapter 4, there are clear collective identities which are explicitly understood as spiritual by direct action climate movement participants. These include both collective identities composed of people and those that include the more-than-human world. In Chapter 6, I will dive more into how these collective identities are constructed, the sustaining impact of feeling part of a collectivity, and other movement practices that are named as sustaining respondents’ engagement.

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7 Here, and throughout this paper, I am using the phrasing, the “more-than-human,” coined by David Abram (1997). My intent in doing so is to acknowledge the instability in the Western dualistic concept of “nature” in its strong subject/object ontology. In choosing a different phrasing, my hope is to not reify this ontological orientation and to begin contributing towards a realignment in how we construct our relations.
Finally, in Chapter 7, I will address a central paradox identified in this research. Whereas the vast majority of movement participants identified spirituality as important for themselves individually and their movements collectively, they also agreed that it was almost entirely absent from formal movement meetings and gatherings. In Chapter 8, I will interpret the significance of the findings as well as address opportunities for future research and the limitations of this study. In my discussion, I will point to the emergent collective identities within the direct action climate movement that speak to the crisis identified above and which point toward a transformation in the ontologies that construct human social relations and the concept of “nature.” I will argue that white settler and non-Indigenous climate movements must grapple with these questions and discern whether or not ontological transformations are necessary, both to generally address climate change in the Anthropocene as well as to be authentic allies in transformative work with Native and Indigenous communities. As indicated here, and throughout the dissertation, I will ground my analysis in an understanding of the centrality of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism, and the dominant ontological understandings it violently spread throughout the world, is a persistent and essential theme for the questions at the center of this study. It is my sincere hope that what emerges from this work will meaningfully speak to the crisis we confront, be relevant to social movements working tirelessly to create change, and contribute clarity to understanding the pathways for societal transformation needed in these times.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I present the literature review and theoretical framework\(^8\) that provides the context for this study. I begin with the work of Karl Polanyi and offer a framework for understanding a context for climate change, capitalism, and social movements that suggests that this moment in time is a liminal one. Having established this framework, I will then discuss a body of literature emerging across a variety of disciplines that speaks to spirituality and to the ontological implications of the climate crisis and theorizes incipient transformations within climate movements. I then review the concept of settler colonialism for its relevance to these cultural dynamics as well as its role in imposing a settler ontology. This section is followed by material focused more explicitly on social movements. To begin with, I explore the relatively scant literature examining spirituality and social movements outside of a resource mobilization framework. I then discuss the field of collective identity within a social movement context and its applications to the focus of this study. Finally, I present theoretical frameworks and models that shaped my interests and intentions at the outset of this study. In Chapter 3, the methodology, research design, research process, and sample description will be presented.

\(^8\) It is worth noting here that the literature review for this study was mostly completed in 2018. Due to a variety of factors, but mostly the joys and chaos of being a primary caregiver to two babies (now young children), many years transpired before my research was completed. Undoubtedly, there are new and interesting additions to what is discussed here. However, it was the context for the research as it unfolded, however slowly, and thus I have resisted the temptation to alter it significantly. Some additions have been made.
Polanyi, Spirituality, and the Ontological Crisis of Climate Change

The work of Karl Polanyi (2001) provides an understanding of this historical moment, the struggles of social movements, and the need for the kind of analysis carried out in this research. At the core of Polanyi’s ideas is the disembedded nature of the economic system under capitalism, or the self-regulating market system, as he often refers to it. Whereas in previous human social systems the economic sphere had been subordinated to religious, political, social, or moral systems, the “self-regulating market demands nothing less than institutional separation of society into an economic and political sphere” (Polanyi 2001:71). He goes on to describe how this system creates “fictitious commodities” out of land, labor, and money. Not having the same nature or properties of commodities (principally in that they were not produced for sale in the market), the assignment of these “fictitious commodities” to the logic of the commodity form has severe negative social and environmental consequences. Against these “perils inherent in the self-regulating market system,” society protects itself via the emergence of a “countermovement” (Polanyi 2001:76). However, this countermovement is actually a “double movement” that contains both a restraining, re-regulatory impulse oriented to re-imbedding the fictitious commodities (i.e., labor and environmental movements) and one oriented towards a further decoupling of the economic system so as to run according to its own logic (i.e., neoliberalism, far-right grassroots movements, laissez faire-oriented elites) (Block 2001). It is important to note that at the time of Polanyi’s writing in the
1940s, he was not observing or writing about environmental movements per se, rather his focus was on labor movements and the creation/contestation of the welfare state.

However, climate change\(^9\) in its slowly unfolding temporal impacts poses a challenge for the timely mobilization of countermovements. Though relevant countermovements are growing substantially, increasingly even the most optimistic scenarios all involve substantive mitigation of severe climate impacts while more pessimistic scenarios take the shape of nightmares. With climate change, the regulatory impact of the countermovement to address the “perilous” impacts on the fictitious commodity of land is not able to develop in time. Using a Polanyian framework, I argue here that the countermovement has not been able to and is unlikely to create a stable arrangement that preserves the self-regulating market through regular and partial “re-embedding” of the fictitious commodities related to “land” or those aspects of ecosystems that sustain life (including the atmosphere and climate). Rather, the system is likely to spiral into some kind of terminal crisis, with opportunities for social transformation and profound impacts on identity, including spirituality. Deep transformations and instability in dominant worldviews, especially including ontology, offer the potential for a “re-embedding” of fictitious commodities such that life may be sustained.

There is an interesting current in recent interdisciplinary literature (see below) that shares Polanyi’s view that the loss of a guiding and constraining value-creating myth, 

\(^{9}\) Remember that climate change, in my understanding (see pages 2-7), is best understood as one aspect of the intersecting ecological crises that confront society, or a crisis of relationship. For the sake of simplicity and given the constraints of my research I will focus on the climate crisis, itself a kind of gateway into this broader dynamic, and we should keep in mind other overlapping ecological crises such as those outlined in the debates about creating the geologic epoch of the Anthropocene (Lewis et al. 2015) or in identifying planetary thresholds that have been crossed (Rockstrom et al. 2009).
cosmology, ontology, or spiritual belief system has been devastating and instrumental in creating the ecological crisis. From scientific disciplines there are scholars calling for a new “centering cosmology”\(^{10}\) informed by scientific findings on the nature of the universe (e.g., Tucker et al. 2011; Primack et al. 2007). From the social sciences there is an interesting and emergent focus on new ontologies necessitated, or even created by, climate change and its transformation of our identities and our understanding of who or what has agency (e.g., Latour, 2017; Stengers, 2015; Castro et al. 2016; Debaise 2017). And from a theological perspective there are authors that seek spiritually-oriented new centering stories, perhaps best represented by the work of Thomas Berry (2015) as well as Pope Francis’ (2015) recent Encyclical *Laudato Si*. Despite their insightful analysis, these authors have had little to offer on how fundamental worldviews or guiding ontologies might consciously be changed in the Anthropocene. In their focus on changing worldviews and expanding agency beyond the human they seem to overlook the ongoing agency we as humans have to alter our own realities. Related to this and missing from all of these works is a mention of, let alone a focus on, the role of social movements in bringing about such a new cosmology, worldview, or ontology. Melucci (1996:3) understands social movements as “prophetic” agents in that they are the fundamental processes by which “society maintains and changes its structure” and which alter the

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\(^{10}\) Cosmology, long an interest to anthropologists, has not often been a concept of interest to those examining the modern world. This body of literature exemplifies a potential shift in this dynamic as it becomes a central focus. However, for the purposes of my research I will mostly use the term “spiritual” to get at the set of beliefs related to origins, identity and meaning that cosmologies inherently create. Spirituality, as a concept, is more accessible and commonly used both among those I wish to study and within sociology. I will also use the concept of ontology to talk about these foundational worldviews. The distinction between spirituality and religion is important and is discussed at length on pages 96-105.
“logic and the processes that guide complex societies.” I believe that studying social movements, specifically through the lens of collective identity, can contribute to this broader discussion by analyzing the relationship between spiritual identities and collective identity formation as well as how new collective identities are forming and are reflective of shifts in worldviews and ontology.

*From Crisis to Ontological Mutation: Becoming Earthbound*

The work of Anna Tsing, Bruno Latour, and related scholars is critical to further developing the ideas presented in the Polanyian framework above and connecting their relevance to personal and collective identities. In this section, I focus largely on Tsing’s and Latour’s work while also addressing some aligned scholarship. The contributions of these theorists deepen an understanding of the immensity of the transformation that may be forthcoming. They also clarify issues related to research focused on transformations of identity specifically as well as the nature/culture dichotomy. Latour’s (2017) concept of “mutation” helps to begin to appreciate the contribution of this body of literature. Latour does not see humanity as in a crisis at all. His view of the situation captures the full implications of the Polanyian logic explored above in anticipating some of the consequences for identity in the systemic shifts suggested by the temporal unresolvability of the climate crisis. The “intrusion of Gaia” is Stengers (2015:43) phrasing for human’s newfound confrontation with an active and highly disruptive force that had previously simply been called “nature.” She argues this dynamic is here to stay and its re-
emergence\textsuperscript{11} changes humans profoundly, both at the individual and social level. Thus, climate change is not “a mere ecological crisis” within the existing frameworks within which we understand ourselves; rather it constitutes a “\textit{profound mutation in our relation to the world}” [emphasis in original] (Latour 2017:8). Such a “mutation” puts transformations of ontologies at the center of analysis and thus highlights the importance of spiritual beliefs when studying climate change and social movements.

To fully appreciate the implications of what Latour and other scholars who have begun to adopt this perspective are offering, it is necessary to unpack a few concepts of critical importance to my study – nature, Gaia, and agency. Latour goes to great lengths in one of his most recent works to deconstruct the dichotomy of nature and culture, as have many other theorists. In his take he suggests that:

the expression “belonging to nature” is almost meaningless, since nature is only one element in a complex consisting of at least three terms, the second being the one that serves as its counterpart, culture, and the third being the one that distributes features between the first two. In this sense, nature does not exist (as a domain); it exists only as one half of a pair defined by a single concept. We must thus take the Nature/Culture opposition as the topic on which to focus our attention and not at all, any longer, as the resource that would allow us to get out of our difficulties. (Latour 2017:19)

What Latour is getting at here is that the problem with the climate crisis is not about how humans “return to nature,” restructure our relations to nature, or even re-embed fictitious, nature-based commodities such as land in a different value system. Rather, his point is that the “mutation” of climate change unmasksthe nature/culture dichotomy as dualistic

\textsuperscript{11} She reminds us that for much of the existence of homo-sapiens what we refer to now as “nature,” in addition to being understood as a source of life and support for human existence, was also experienced as a disruptive, dangerous, and agency-laden force. In her theorization, the Western worldview of recent centuries is a temporary aberration that is falling apart as our illusions of control and dominance dissolve in the face of the climate crisis.
cultures\textsuperscript{12} discover the depth of the entanglement between those two concepts and the fullness of the larger domain in which we inhabit. He offers the concept of “world” to act as the distributing concept for the larger domain and suggests that it is within such new schemas that we may find resources for the identity shifts necessary to adapt to the mutation. Whatever the choice of words, what Latour is suggesting, at least for Westerners, is a fundamental shift in ontology brought about by climate change through its unsettling of some of the most fundamental organizing concepts we use to construct the social world. To engage climate change from this perspective is to center fundamental shifts in human identities, the contexts within which identities are constructed, and the other actors through which identities are shaped through interaction.

In this literature, climate change and its implications are often referred to with reference to Gaia, such as in the quote by Stengers (2015) above. Gaia is a term selected by the scientist-inventor James Lovelock (2001, 2010)\textsuperscript{13} to describe the full complexity of the Earth system in its functioning to co-create and maintain a stable, habitable atmosphere amenable to life. The name comes from Greek mythology and describes a maternal deity that gave life to all things, hence its applicability. Other scholars, in

\textsuperscript{12} I want to underscore here that cultures, including Indigenous cultures, are not monolithic. There are many human cultures and some, both historical and contemporary, do not fall into nature/culture dualism. It is important to stress that following the line of thinking here, the climate crisis and the broader ecological crisis are not anthropogenic or caused by humans per se, rather they are fundamentally the product of specific cultures.

\textsuperscript{13} Lovelock’s ideas have been widely adopted and have largely been responsible for creating the new discipline of Earth Systems Science. I choose not to focus on his work directly here as other theorists have adopted his concepts in alignment with the critical aims of my research, and as such I quote and draw on them. Interestingly, and quite opposed to my work, Lovelock (2010) in his more recent work such as \textit{The Revenge of Gaia} has become what Stengers (2015:47) calls a “prophet of disaster” in assigning essentially little chance for humanity addressing the climate crisis outside of huge population loss and geo-engineering.
adopting Lovelock’s term, have noted an additional meaning in that its historical usage arose before the development of a cult of maternal love in which Gaia was still a fearsome being whom humans knew they depended and on whom they needed to be “paying attention” to and as such not abuse their\textsuperscript{14} tolerance (Stengers 2015:45). What Lovelock was trying to do in creating his theory of Gaia was “to speak about the Earth without taking it to be an already composed whole, without adding to it a coherence that it lacks, and yet without deanimating it by representing the organisms that keep the thin film of the critical zones alive as mere inert and passive passengers on a physio-chemical system” [italics in original] (Latour 2017:86). The concept of Gaia supports an understanding of an interconnected, relational system of subjectivities inclusive of but beyond the human.\textsuperscript{15} It composes a \textit{world of subjects}, as opposed to a \textit{nature} filled with \textit{objects}. Tsing (2015:28) applies this understanding in her concept of “contamination,” which seeks to capture the distributed agency inherent in Gaia through centering an understanding of the entwined nature of human beings with the more-than-human world and the transformation that always occurs through encounters between the two. In this perspective all life is contaminated, we are not a static “I”, but rather dynamic “wes” and reflect “the multispecies entanglements that make life across the earth” (Tsing et al. 2017:M2).

\textsuperscript{14} In choosing a pronoun to represent Gaia I have opted for “they/them.” I do this to distance Gaia from human-like projections that might result from normal gendered pronouns, to capture the multiplicity of the subjectivities that constitute the Gaia concept and to allow for a greater sense of agency then the more object-oriented “it.”

\textsuperscript{15} This multiplicity of interconnected subjectivities and the transcendence of the nature/culture dualism has led Gaia to be a much misunderstood concept with critics or proponents doing everything from totally dismissing it to inappropriately suggesting the theory assigns the Earth as Gaia the agency of an individual.
In Gaia there is a new understanding of the interconnected relational system by which life is and has been sustained on this planet. Or put more directly, a new understanding of what life is and what it means to be alive. And it is climate change, as the implication of two centuries of not “paying attention,” which has caused the “intrusion of Gaia” and all the implications it brings, including an understanding of the contaminated nature of human being. The consequences of this transformation suggest a new understanding of distributed agency, which is critical for sociology broadly and identity studies specifically. The concept of Gaia dissolves the distribution of agency in the nature/culture framework in which humans act as subjects towards the objects of nature. The implications of this suggest that:

When we claim that there is, on one side, a natural world and, on the other, a human world, we are simply proposing to say, after the fact, that an arbitrary portion of the actors will be *stripped of all* action and that another portion, equally arbitrary, will be *endowed with souls* (or consciousness). But these two secondary operations leave perfectly intact the only interesting phenomenon: the exchange of forms of action through the transactions between agencies of multiple origins and forms at the core of the metamorphic zones. This may appear paradoxical, but, to gain in realism, we have to leave aside the pseudo-realism that purports to be drawing the portrait of humans parading against a background of things. [italics in original] (Latour, 2017:58)

Thus, contrary to the critiques that Gaia theory involves anthropomorphism, what it actually does is *assign agency as a fundamental property of life*. It does so by identifying how living things, from bacteria to Douglas fir trees to humans, alter their environments according to their needs. Tsing (2015:22), whose concept of contamination I introduced

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16 New, that is, at least to Western thought. There are a wide variety of cultures in which this kind of distributed agency and intersubjectivity is deeply woven into cultural worldviews and patterns of living. It is also important to remember that it is actually a re-cognition for Western cultures, which have in the past had ontologies aligned with what is described here.
above, captures this notion in her assertion that “World-making activities emerge from practical activities of making lives,” whether those lives are human or more-than-human. Furthermore, this agency dissolves cultural conceptions of human/nature separateness in that “Each agency modifies its neighbors, however slightly, so as to make its own survival slightly less improbable,” and in capturing this “the concept of Gaia captures the distributed intentionality of all the agents, each of which modifies its surroundings for its own purposes” (Latour 2017:98). Or as Stengers (2015:43-44) puts it, “the processes that constitute [Gaia] are coupled with one another in multiple and entangled manners, the variation of one having multiple repercussions that affect the others.” This provides a fundamentally enlarged concept of agency and its extension beyond the human.

What these authors are getting at is a fundamental shift in ontology, and it is an ontological “mutation” that Latour is referencing. Ontology is best understood as a deeply embedded cultural worldview or understanding about the “nature of being and existence or the nature of reality” (Oxford Bibliography 2023:n.p.). What these authors theorize is that the impact of the climate crisis presents a profound ontological challenge to the dominant nature/culture dichotomy that structures so much of Western thought, action, and ways of being. In general, what is being described by Latour, Tsing, Stenger, and others is a transformational shift toward relational ontologies in which the “relations between entities” is given primacy “as a constitutive element of their existence” rather than the assumption of the “independent, preexisting ontological status of an entity” favored in the dominant, Western substantive ontology (Oxford Bibliography 2023:n.p.). There is, of course, a significant literature on ontology as well as the nature/culture
dichotomy, dominant in the West, and through the authors reviewed above this research seeks to engage with these intellectual themes.

Having said all of this, the fullness of the implications of the ontological “mutation” spoken about earlier and how it is quite different from a crisis can be better understood. Additionally, it invites an understanding of how a planetary crisis might indeed be an end, but not the End, in that what it may definitively bring an end to is a way of conceptualizing and constructing the world, rather than the physical world itself. Beyond contamination, Tsing (2015) offers a theoretical framework in her ethnographic study of the supply chains of matsutake mushrooms that captures the implications of the theory in this section. She suggests that the consequences of these developments center “precarity” and “indeterminacy” as core aspects of the world in which humans live. It is precarious in that this is a state that acknowledges a fundamental vulnerability to human and non-human others (Tsing 2015:29). It is indeterminate in that it challenges notions of historical progress and replaces it with undefined, multidirectional motion (Tsing 2015:23).

While Tsing goes on to show the specific manifestation of her concepts in the work of mushroom foragers and others involved in the matsutake supply chain, I intend to utilize them in the analysis of activists’ spiritual beliefs. These concepts can be used to identify the extent to which altered constructions of reality, engendered by Gaia, are showing up in the beliefs of activists. My hope in introducing this theory is to provide a theoretical context for the impacts of climate change on human identity and why I center spiritual beliefs in my research. This theory also supports my interest in investigating the
possibility of relational, and more inclusive, collective identities movements might construct. In conclusion, the theories above, combined with the Polanyian framework, suggest a world in which identities and ontologies are changing as a result of a force (climate change) whose dynamics exist beyond the ability of dominant systems to regulate. The content here is connected below to my discussion of the work around spirituality and social movements, and particularly Taylor’s (2009) concept of “dark green religion.” This literature identifies supportive evidence of the way in which these transformations are showing up specifically within the radical environmental movements I have studied. However, first it is important to contextualize these conversations around ontology and nature/culture construction, as well as this project as a whole, within settler colonialism.

Settler Colonialism

The violent transformation of ontologies through settler colonialism is essential to understand for this research project. The dualistic human/nature divide discussed above, while posited as universal in the dominant culture, is itself an outcome, replicated in an ongoing way, by which “settler colonialism operate[s] through ontological foreclosures that obfuscate Indigenous ontologies of land” (Burow 2018:58). As my research project unfolded, the centrality of settler colonialism became more and more apparent. This will be evident in many ways in the finding that follow. In particular, settler colonialism is relevant in the way it has structured relations and ontologies for the settler and non-Indigenous movement participants studied, in how it has impacted how they hold
relationships with Indigenous allies and partners (see pages 87-91), in how settler colonialism is itself challenged in the novel spiritual identities and ontologies shared by respondents (see Chapter 5), and with regards to questions about the centrality of settler ontology in creating the climate crisis (see Chapter 8).

Patrick Wolfe provides some of the seminal literature on understanding and defining settler colonialism. Settler colonialism for Wolfe (2006:393) is an “inclusive, land-centred project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan centre to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies.” Wolfe also emphasizes that settler colonialism should be construed as a “structure” rather than an event, which emphasizes that:

When invasion is recognized as a structure rather than an event, its history does not stop—or, more to the point, become relatively trivial—when it moves on from the era of frontier homicide. Rather, narrating that history involves charting the continuities, discontinuities, adjustments, and departures whereby a logic that initially informed frontier killing transmutes into different modalities, discourses and institutional formations as it undergirds the historical development and complexification of settler society. (Wolfe 2006:402)

The impact of this ongoing structure that transforms social relations is to strive “for the dissolution of native societies” while erecting a “new colonial society on the expropriated land base” (Wolfe 2006:388). It is these dynamics that distinguish settler colonialism from other forms of colonization. Included in the creation of the “new colonial society” is an imposition of imported settler assemblages of plants and animals, as well as their embedded social relations. This imposition has been framed as a process of creating “neo-Europes” by Crosby (2004) or as “transforming the environment to suit the colonizing project” (Veracini cited in Ghosh 2021). This research fundamentally occurs
within the context of the structure of settler colonialism. This literature is of special relevance given that climate movements often engage (sometimes well, but often poorly) with Indigenous communities. Additionally, the direct action climate movement actively constructs climate change as rooted in systems, including settler colonialism for some of the respondents in this study.

With this definition in mind, I will recenter ontology given its importance to my research. Burow et al. (2018:63-64) emphasize the ontological aspect of settler colonialism in how it “operates through a reworking of not just the physical landscape but also the ontological landscape” and how this “ontological displacement of Native vision by settler vision makes possible the physical displacement.” Thus, the respondents in this study, and the broader movement in which they organize, are themselves products of this reworking of the ontological landscape. As I argue above, it is, at least in significant part, this very ontological landscape that has given rise to the climate crisis and the broader crisis of which it is a part. Federici (2004), in her essential work *Caliban and the Witch*, explores the concurrent and enabling transformation of ontology and associated restructuring of relationships in Europe. She makes the argument that the violent pre-capitalist accumulations and enclosures happening in the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) centuries, which particularly targeted women through the witch hunts, worked to complete a transformation of European relational ontologies. The outcome of this transformation was a more hegemonic substantive ontology oriented to an independent nature/culture dualism that is cited above as enabling and supporting the entire settler colonial process.
Burow et al. (2018) conclude their discussion by looking at the implications of this emphasis on ontology for decolonial praxis:

Settler colonialism entrenches itself by obfuscating Indigenous ontologies. The “original sin” that precedes the extraction of economic value is more than the alienation of workers from the means of production: it is the alienation of Indigenous ontologies by settler modes of thinking and controlling land. In confronting this legacy, decolonial praxis is premised on the ability to revitalize Indigenous ontologies through grounded practices. (Burow et al. 2018:68)

The emphasis in their writing, and much of the literature, is on the implications for Indigenous led decolonial practices, initiatives, and struggles. Given the power relations inherent in settler colonialism that is, of course, essential and deserves boundless attention and resources. That said, it is my view that the transformation of settler ontology for setters and non-Indigenous people themselves is an important and parallel body of work. In that settler colonialism is an ongoing “structure” that is manifesting particular social relations, those most responsible for replicating that structure, namely settler people, must also change. Additionally, this change cannot take the form of the type of cultural appropriation so commonly practiced by settler societies. This research, in its focus on spirituality, explores the ontologies of settler and non-Indigenous movement participants – both transformed and dominant. In Chapter 8, I will make the case that despite an emergent ontological shift articulated by respondents, the direct action climate movement, as well as the broader climate movement, is ambivalent and confused about whether ontological shifts are necessary to confront the climate crisis. Settler colonialism will provide an important context for that discussion, as well as many parts of this dissertation, and lays the groundwork to understand how ontology must be
shifted if we are to engage in the climate crisis in a way that unsettles these colonial relations.

_Spirituality and Social Movements_

I will now begin to review the literature that is most directly related to my research interests. Despite the central role of spirituality and religion in human affairs, the topic of spiritual beliefs has received relatively little attention within social movement studies (Hutchison 2012). To the extent that spirituality has been a focus in the study of social movements it has most often been utilized as a resource and network to be drawn upon within a resource mobilization framework in the form of things like culture, leadership, material resources, communications networks, and space (Hutchison 2012:113). However, research on different types of spiritual beliefs and how they inform action, identity formation (individual or collective), and meaning construction is scant in social movement literature, though present.

This section begins with the more theoretical of the works and ends with the more empirical. Of the theoretical works, Taylor’s (2009) development of the concept of “dark green religion” (DGR) is of essential use. Taylor (2009:13), a long time researcher of radical environmental movements, defines this spiritual belief system as having the following components:

Dark green religion is generally deep ecological, biocentric, or ecocentric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable, that is, valuable apart from their usefulness to human beings. This value system is generally (1) based on a felt kinship with the rest of life, often derived from a Darwinian understanding that all forms of life have evolved from a common ancestor and are therefore related; (2) accompanied by feelings of humility and a corresponding critique of
human moral superiority, often inspired or reinforced by a science-based cosmology that reveals how tiny human beings are in the universe; and (3) reinforced by metaphysics of interconnection and the idea of interdependence (mutual influence and reciprocal dependence) found in the sciences, especially in ecology and physics.

His research suggests that there are four subtypes of this emerging belief system (see Table 1) that result from different beliefs on the presence of immaterial forces or spirits (supernaturalism vs. naturalism) and whether or not an individual understands the biosphere or cosmos as a whole to be alive or conscious at in either a literal or metaphorical sense (animism vs. Gaian Earth Religion). As an example, John Seed, a direct action activist in Australia and influential movement writer, is described as exemplifying the Gaian Earth Religion current of dark green religion. Taylor (2009:80) shares the following quote from Seed: “I am part of the rainforest protecting myself...I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking.” Furthermore, Seed in his emphasis or allowance for immaterial spirit or energy would represent the Gaian Spirituality current, whereas Dave Foreman, one of the founders of Earth First!, represents Gaian Naturalism in his rejection of the supernatural. In Taylor’s (2009:80) interview with Foreman he shares how the activist clarified that he believed “we need to work on a nonsupernatural concept of the sacred; a nontheistic basis of the sacred,” which demonstrates what Taylor is getting at in his distinction between beliefs informed by supernaturalism and naturalism. In another example that draws on some of the studies I cover below, Letcher (2001) describes two different approaches to the belief in fairies in radical British environmental movements that correspond to Taylor’s distinction between supernaturalism and naturalism. For one group of activists, these fairies were real,
immaterial spirits they were in contact with and for another group fairies were metaphors for the material world they held sacred.

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**TABLE 1. Dark Green Religion Typology adapted from Taylor (2009:15)**

Taylor thus provides a theoretical concept, studied by him empirically, that is both emergent and to which he attributes a significant role to radical environmental movements in propagating, and *enacting*, these beliefs. Related to this study, there exists a small but highly relevant body of literature that looks at spirituality within direct action, radical environmental movements including the Pacific Northwest forest defense movements (Mallory 2010), anti-roads movements in the United Kingdom (Letcher 2001, 2003), and Earth First! (Taylor 2009). These studies complement some of the academic treatments of spirituality within social movements (e.g., Hutchison 2012; Finley 1991) and focus on the subject area of interest for my research. While Mallory (2010) is partly focused on addressing ecofeminism as a concept and its critiques, she also presents evidence of the ways that spirituality informs radical direct action movements that are connected, both historically and geographically, to the focus of this study. Her work
shows how spiritual beliefs both motivate and provide meaning for movement participants and how direct action itself, in her case in the form of tree sits, plays an important role as a ritual or “performative enactment of eco-social interconnectivity” (Mallory 2010:54). Taylor (2009:94-95) also cites how Julia Butterfly Hill, a forest defense activist in Northern California, had experiences through direct action, in the form of a long multi-year tree sit, that developed and affirmed her DGR spiritual beliefs. In Mallory’s (2010:69) concluding remarks, she highlights this mutually interactive relationship between DGR-like spiritual beliefs and political action in that “If one is a believer in biocentrism, in the deep, non-anthropocentric value of wild places and the more-than-human world, then both political and ritual action can express and further this belief.”

Letcher (2001, 2003) focuses his study on the anti-roads movement, which was a British movement in the 1990s, inspired by Earth First!, that challenged massive infrastructure plans by the conservative government through direct action. His principal interest is looking at how the movement was itself about a contest over the idea of “nature,” much like what I discussed above, informed by spiritual beliefs. What Letcher (2003:63) observed in his ethnographic study was protesters articulating a particular idea of nature “constructed radically different and in opposition to that which motivated the road builders.” The spiritual beliefs that Letcher identifies as being formative in this movement are what he refers to as eco-pagan beliefs. These beliefs, and in particular the role of fairies, are also part of his early work referred to above. Beyond informing the very focus of the movement, in contesting dominant notions of “nature,” Letcher also
saw these eco-pagan spiritual beliefs motivate action and inform what kinds of action were deemed strategic or possible. An example is the observed slogan “Gaia told me to do it,” in which Letcher (2003:71) saw the operation of not just a clever rhetorical device, but also a vehicle for justifying the breaking of laws in drawing on the moral guidance of spiritual beliefs.

While these authors offer findings about the importance and impact of spiritual beliefs in radical movements that inform this study, they also describe how spirituality is contested within radical movements. Mallory (2010:64) cites the highly contested and sometimes oppressive treatment of overtly spiritual activists in anti-logging movements of the Pacific Northwest by pointing to the necessity for activists to write an “entreaty for religious tolerance” in a movement publication. She also notes the ways in which subordinate gender identities, and I would presume other subordinate social positions, carry with them a pressure to suppress spiritual expression in order to appeal to the more dominant and seemingly rational male participants. In a British context, Letcher (2001:152) notes the tension between what were referred to as “fluffies,” those with an overtly expressed spirituality, and “spikies” who tended to be more materialist and often emerged from a Marxist or class-centric intellectual milieu. Lastly, while not pointing to movement tensions per se, Taylor (2009) discusses the “shadow” side of dark green religion, in which critiques of the bio-centric nature of the beliefs suggest they may harbor misanthropic or fascist tendencies.

Though relatively few, these studies provide an essential context for my research and demonstrate the attempts made by other scholars to research the role of spirituality in
social movements generally and in radical social and environmental movements specifically. Taylor’s (2009) focus on Earth First! and other radical environmentalisms provides part of the context for his dark green religion framework which I utilize below. His work, alongside Letcher (2003), also points to the potentially unique importance of radical social movements in the generation of new spiritual beliefs through their direct contestation of the concept of “nature.” Mallory (2010) along with these authors contributes an understanding of some of the potentially reciprocal aspects of direct action movements and DGR-like spiritual beliefs. Despite the contributions of these studies, little other research has been published regarding spirituality and social movements, beyond seeing spirituality as a resource or connected to networks to be utilized in one of the dominant theoretical perspectives. In her review, Hutchison (2012:123) notes the following unanswered questions in the social movement literature:

What types of spiritual beliefs systems can be found among movement participants? What connections do movement participants make between their spiritual beliefs and their activism? Do nonreligiously based systems of belief sustain progressive action as well as religiously based ones?

My work meaningfully contributes to all of these questions. Additionally, none of the studies reviewed above focus on climate change, climate movements, or the emergence of the direct action climate movement, nor do they directly employ the concept of collective identity. The authors reviewed above also do not integrate their findings with the increasingly significant theoretical literature on the spiritual and identity implications of the climate crisis. Part of the linkage with the theoretical literature, that includes Latour and Tsing, is how the climate crisis redefines what dominant human cultures think “nature” is, and in so doing has profound impacts on human identities. This explicit focus
Collective Identity

The last body of literature that I draw on is the social movement concept of collective identity. Given the centrality of the transformation of identity and its implications in my theoretical framework, reviewing and applying insights from this body of literature is important. Collective identity informs this study in essential ways and is the key concept from the literature that I center this research around. The research I conducted speaks to this literature in meaningful ways and contributes to some of the unanswered questions or fuzzy aspects of the concept. In what follows, I briefly review understandings of the concept of collective identity and summarize the current state of its development. I then introduce those parts that are specifically relevant to my study, including the process of identity construction and the relationship between personal identities and collective identity.

The concept of collective identity in social movement studies emerged largely through the work of the Italian Alberto Melucci. The focus of Melucci, like many other continental theorists post-1968, was on “new social movements” or those movements—including feminist movements, environmental movements, queer movements, and other identity-based movements—that did not arise from the class locations favored by Marxist theory. The emergence and subsequent popularity of this term should also be considered in light of the transformation of political thinking, particularly in Europe, following the
events of 1968 and the erosion of the hope for a Marxist revolution (Hunt et al. 2004). Fominaya (2010:393) suggests that the increasing utilization of the concept in the field of social movement studies speaks to the “crucial social-psychological, emotional and cultural factors” of social movements that had been left out of the dominant theoretical frameworks, among them resource mobilization and political process theory. Rather than movements being taken as a given data point, these new social movements caused Melucci (1995) to suggest that the existence of movements themselves required investigating how movements form and sustain themselves.

For Melucci, and many scholars using the concept, the emphasis is on the process of how identity is formed and how it contributes to the rise and maintenance of movements, rather than on the product or content of what those identities are (Snow 2001). Gamson (1991:40) captures this process-centric approach in his description of how “the construction of a collective identity is a negotiated process in which the ‘we’ involved in collective action is elaborated and given meaning.” While process-centric understandings of identity largely prevail, there is significant ambiguity in much of the literature about how collective identity might be considered a product to be studied as well. Saunders (2015:89) cites this process vs. product issue as one of three central “fault lines” in the study of collective identity. Following others, I adopt the frameworks provided by Abdelal et al. (2006) to try to create greater cohesion in the field and allow for both aspects in a focus on contestation (process) and content (product).

Having covered the origins of the concept, it is important to point out the widespread critiques of it before moving on to the definitions of collective identity useful
for my purposes. The concept has been widely critiqued among authors writing about it. Many scholars decry the fuzzy boundaries of the concept and its attempts to do too much, or as Polletta et al. (2001) put it, the “catholicity” of the term in trying to do everything. Others, such as Saunders (2008), note the confusion in the literature including foundational aspects such as at what levels—i.e., groups and movements—collective identities actually exist. Despite the emphasis on process, scholars such as Hunt et al. (2004:451) describe the relative paucity of research examining “the reciprocal relationships between movement collective action and collective identity construction.” Yet despite this, the term is widely hailed as indispensable for understanding social movements and collective action. My own research speaks to some of these critiques, which suggest the need to use the concept in a more focused and disciplined way, such as is proposed by the work Abdelal et al. (2006), and which I adopt here. In the content that follows I aim to articulate a narrow version of collective identity that can inform this study, and to which my research can contribute.

In Fominaya’s (2010:394) review of the literature on collective identities, she surveys the various definitions and asserts that the definition of Snow captures the more common representation of the concept in its categorization of the concept as something “generated and created between individuals”:

> discussions of the concept invariably suggest that its essence resides in a shared sense of ‘one-ness’ or ‘we-ness’ anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in relation or contrast to one more actual or imagined sets of others. Embedded within the shared sense of we is a corresponding sense of collective agency...Thus, it can be argued that collective identity is constituted by a shared and interactive sense of ‘we-ness’ and collective agency (Snow 2001 as cited in Fominaya 2010:394)
Fominaya (2010:394) further captures the process by which this “we-ness” imbued with agency emerges by drawing on Melucci’s understanding of it as “a dynamic process in which actors negotiate, understand, and construct their action through shared and repeated interaction.” Thus, collective identity emerges between and within individuals (and as my research shows, also the more-than-human) and is actively constructed through interactions, dialogue, and action. It should also be noted that scholars have documented the ways that collective identity shapes action and participation. For example, in Polletta’s (2002) study of movements practicing participatory decision-making processes, she found that in a wide variety of cases collective identity shaped strategic choices by movements. In other words, who we are impacts the forms that our movements will take. For example, radical feminists in challenging the “neutrality” of centralized bureaucracies as masking masculine norms came, over time, to see alternative, participatory forms as “an essential component of what being a feminist was” (Polletta, 2002:22). Organizational form then became part of collective identity in a way that impacted strategic choices and inhibited alternatives. A second example from Polletta comes in the form of the racial coding of the longstanding participatory practices in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) with whiteness and hierarchical forms with emerging Black power identities. Such an association had the impact of eventually transforming both the practices and racial makeup of SNCC and had potentially wider impacts, due to the potential that if “the organization is seen as a model for others, particular symbolic associations may become part of enduring repertoires,
shaping subsequent decision-making in this movement organization and in others” (Polletta, 2002:23).

This finding is interesting for thinking about both how identity and ideological transformations might impact movements, and how existing societal structures themselves may largely be products of our identities and may shift radically as they are impacted by the transformative power of the climate crisis. It also challenges the field to consider a broader theoretical ambition, contrary to those calling for the opposite, such as Jasper (2010). The challenge posed by Polletta’s work comes both in terms of structural shifts and how deeply ideology and identity may themselves shape movement emergence, forms of movements, and outcomes. Additionally, the collective identity literature points to a mechanism for social movements, though the construction of collective identities, to impact broader cultural identities and social formations (Polletta et al. 2001:284). In this context, collective identity is one means by which this research may speak to the broader literature about cultural worldviews and ontology discussed above. There is space within the concept to understand how movement identities may impact cultural identities, ontologies, and practices. Lastly, the question of identity construction within climate movements, particularly given the dire prospects cited above, invites integration of what collective identity as a concept has to offer scholars in (1) how it posits the situated emergence of interests rather than their given nature thus shedding “light on macrohistorical contexts within which movements emerge” and (2) how motivations for activism arise without reference to material incentives (Polletta et al. 2001:284).
The collective identity literature informs and provides support for the potential implications of this study. I aim to make concrete contributions related to my interest in the construction of “we-ness” that is shaped by emerging spiritual beliefs that expand agency, interconnectivity, and include non-human agents, a dynamic which as far as I can tell is not addressed in the social movement or collective identity literature. Taylor’s work (2009), discussed above, suggests that radical environmental movements are fertile sites for discovering collective identities consciously constructed in such a way. This study also contributes to dialogues about analytical approaches within the study of collective identity. Snow (2001) discusses primordialist (essentialist), structuralist, and constructionist approaches to collective identity, noting the literature’s relative emphasis on the latter approach. My analytical orientation is in line with constructionist approaches. At the same time, this study also suggests new perspectives on structural aspects, otherwise focused largely on social structures (e.g., race, gender, class), that are playing major roles in identity construction through my integration of climate change and notions of Gaia.

Finally, and most directly, this research also speaks to and draws on debates within the literature about the relationship between different types of identity, specifically personal identities and collective identities. Such a contribution also helps address a confusion in the literature about what is being referred to when “collective identity” is invoked. Is it just the movement identity? Does it include other identities held by participants? How do these things relate to one another? The literature seems consistent in acknowledging the relationship between personal and collective identities; however, it
leaves unaddressed the question of “which collective identities among a constellation correspond with which personal identities?” (Hunt et al. 2004:445). Saunders (2015) and Abdelal et al. (2006:701) both situate this aspect of collective identity as a central conceptual issue in the field, with the latter suggesting that “understanding the interaction among constituent individuals and their groups – or agents and identity structures – is a crucial part of the analysis of social identities.” I draw on these existing frameworks and seek to contribute to better understanding these gaps to address the observation that currently within the field “we have little evidence about how individuals sort out and combine different sources of identity” (Polletta et al. 2001:299).

Among writers within the field of social movement studies, Gamson (1991), Saunders (2008), and Snow (2001) all write at length about the relationship between different types of identities. I draw primarily here on some of Snow’s frameworks. Snow distinguishes between personal, social (as in social roles or types such as teacher or mother), and collective identities, with personal identities defined as “attributes and meanings attributed to oneself by the actor” (Snow 2001:n.p.). Gamson (2001:41) writes of the critical movement task of bridging these kinds of personal identities and collective identities to integrate the latter into one’s definition of self. Important in this critical task is “identity correspondence,” in which there is both a convergence of personal and collective identities and the construction of a collective identity that subsumes the personal (Snow 2001). If identity convergence is lacking, Snow (2001) then theorizes four types of “identity work” that are needed to facilitate identity alignment, including identity amplification (shifts in the saliency of personal identities), identity consolidation
(integration of an identity that blends two prior identities that existed in tension), identity extension (expansion of personal identities) and identity transformation (dramatic shifts in identity). I anticipate that the latter two dynamics are most relevant for my purposes. For example, identity extension creates the “expansion of the situational pervasiveness of [an] individual’s personal identity...as when individuals come to see themselves as representatives for a specific cause that transcends other roles” (Snow 2001:n.p.). I examine the various types of identity work that impact how activist spiritual beliefs shape collective identities. On a related note, Snow’s theory suggests that to the extent that collective identities emerge in which the self is submerged and substantively shifted, conversion-like changes in behavior and action may be observed within social movements.

The concept of collective identity informs my work in important ways. My use of it here is also an attempt to integrate contemporary understandings of the new states of social movements into my analysis. Mellucci (1995:50-51) observes that:

For recent social movements, particularly those centered on cultural issues, collective identity is becoming a product of conscious action and eloquent self reflection more than a set of given or “structural” characteristics. The collective actor tends to construct its coherence and recognize itself within the limits set by the environment and social relations.

This research looks specifically at the conscious actions and self-reflections of climate movement participants. It also explores emerging and potentially significant shifts in environmental and social relations and their consequences on collective identity. My thinking about this research has been informed by understandings of the process of
identity formation, the relationship between personal and collective identity formation, and the cultural impacts of collective identity.

Research Questions

This study explores the relationship between individual spiritual identities of movement participants and the formation of collective identity. Within the robust literature on the collective identity in social movements, the question of how different types of identity interrelate to form collective identities is seen as both essential and poorly understood (Abdelal et al. 2006; Hunt et al. 2004; Polletta et al. 2001). Additionally, there is an emerging body of literature that discusses transformations in identity and spirituality such as captured by Taylor’s (2009) “dark green religion” and Latour’s (2017) “earthbound” identity. At the outset of this research, I sought to understand whether and how this shift in spiritual beliefs and identities is manifesting in collective identity formation in the direct action climate movement. Secondarily, I was interested in how spiritual beliefs and associated collective identities shape participation outcomes (or whether they do at all). To enable my exploration of these dynamics, I looked at two types of participants in the direct action climate movement: ongoing participants and former participants who have transitioned into other political work. Collectively these interests yielded the research questions that guided the research design at the outset. The primary research questions were: (1a) What spiritual beliefs and identities exist among movement participants? (b) What is the relationship between the formation of individual spiritual identities and collective identities in the direct action
climate movement? Specifically bringing in my interests regarding identity shifts in spirituality, there was the related, more focused, question: (c) What is the relationship between spiritual identities, specifically those oriented toward the “earthbound,” and collective identities? Regarding forms of action and participation outcomes there was my core, secondary research question: (2) Do spiritual beliefs and associated collective identities shape participation outcomes through shifts in strategy and forms of action?
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH PROCESS, AND SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The research questions listed above guided the development of the methodology and research design. I start by providing an overview of my methodological approach and research design. Given the sensitive security considerations of my sample, precautionary practices are included in the design. Following this, the qualitative methods that were utilized in this research, including a semi-structured interview and participant observation, are described. Finally, a description of how the research was carried out in practice is offered. As part of this, I include a presentation of my sample before moving on to describing the coding and analytical process. Concluding this chapter is a brief section on embedding a movement-relevant and collaborative orientation in my research. The chapters that follow will present the findings from this analysis.

Overview of Methods and Research Approach

My overarching research orientation is, broadly speaking, that of an engaged and situated scholar. It is engaged in the sense that I seek to make meaningful and practical contributions to that which I study, and situated in that I chose to reflexively study the movement with which I am connected. While an engaged approach is perhaps not appropriate for every piece of scholarship, I would argue that this should at least be an explicit intention for a substantial part of the social movement literature. The necessity of avoiding the temptation to separate knowledge from action is especially important “at a
moment when the realities of eco-social crisis have never been more apparent,” as explored at the beginning of this paper (Juris et al. 2013:371).

In addition to being a situated researcher, within my specific context I am also an activist researcher. Pain (2003) notes the increasing rise of activist research, including how activism itself can become the vehicle for a research project that arises out of that experience. This is obviously the case for myself. As such, my research will follow an “insider” approach in which one within a given context researches the very context in which they are embedded (be it a movement, workplace, or community). Epstein (1991:20), in her study of ecology and peace movements of the 20th century, speaks to the potential strength of this positionality in arguing that “In order to be understood in any depth the worldview of a movement, the meaning of its actions, needs to be seen from the inside.” In further considering the implications of being an activist researcher I find it useful to look at Maxey’s (1999:201) definition of activism, in which he argues:

the social world is produced through the acts each of us engages in every day. Everything we do, every thought we have, contributes to the production of the social world. I understand activism to be the process of reflecting and acting upon this condition. We are in a sense all activists, as we are all engaged in reproducing the world. Reflexivity enables us to place ourselves actively within this process.

In this definition the author both broadens the scope of activism and centers reflexivity as an integral part of the research approach. As Routledge (2004) notes in his discussion of relations between academics and those outside the institution, we are all situated within power systems. The approach of the activist researcher, as a conscious actor working towards the reproduction of different power relations and social realities, requires one to reflexively situate oneself and the research project within these power systems. Without
such reflexivity there is a danger of simply replicating dominant power relations despite our intentions. I have already tried to model this reflexivity in the prior chapters and will continue to do so. This orientation also connects to my attempt to follow Tracy’s (2010:842) discussion of self-reflexivity, in which she suggests that the term attempts “honesty and authenticity with one’s self, one’s research, and one’s audience.” Methodologically, this level of reflection also allows researchers to “acknowledge that the methods we use to describe the world are – to some degree – constitutive of the realities they describe” (Atkinson et al. 2003:10).

A reflexive and insider approach is, of course, not without its pitfalls and methodological issues. Routledge (2004) points to how a researcher’s performance as an insider embedded in existing relationships can influence the data, their analysis, and their relationships with research subjects. In her research, Kanuha (2000) specifically highlights the difficulty of detachment from the topic and the danger of not probing vague data or statements by informants given an assumed over-familiarity with what they mean. As a park employee studying a California ghost town, Delyser (2001) indicates that the insider researcher also risks being flooded with information given their long, nuanced familiarity with the subject and the tensions inherent in the contradictory roles that one simultaneously holds as researcher and community member. I drew on these insights and reflections throughout my research process to minimize the potential negative ramifications of conducting research as an insider.

With this orientation, my research approach attempted to speak directly to the work of identity construction taking place within movements. Through this study, as an
identified and active piece of movement research itself, I have tried to make a practical contribution to those who are engaged in the urgent work of social change. My hope is that this will be particularly relevant to the climate movement. Through creating accessible connections to the exciting theoretical work surveyed in Chapter 2, it is my intention to create work that is of direct relevance to the movement I have been long involved with. This orientation will be in keeping with the reciprocity of engagement in activist research, which aligns with a similar approach in action research. Within both contexts, a wide range of outcomes are posited to satisfy this reciprocity, including everything from communicating results back to subjects to creating products of immediate and tangible utility (Woodsworth 2008). In my context, I am sympathetic to Duckett’s (2005:74) emphasis on how the process itself can reciprocally contribute to the movement in question through facilitating a dialogue or holding an intentional space (e.g., through an interview) in which an issue that has long been relegated to the sidelines can be named and engaged in full. Later in this chapter I present an additional collaborative approach for developing applications from my research.

Research Design

With that context established, I will now turn to the specifics of my research design. I conducted a single case study of what I have called the direct action climate movement (see Chapter 4 for a development of this terminology). Even more specifically, this single case was focused on the manifestation of this movement in the Pacific Northwest (defined as Oregon and Washington). Single case studies are very common
within both the social movements literature and the collective identity literature. Scholars have utilized the single case approach to derive insights from things as diverse as ACT UP (Gould 2009), to the anti-roads movement (Letcher 2001; 2007), Earth First! (Taylor 2009) and the UK direct action climate and environmental movements (Plows, 2003; Duckett, 2005 Woodsworth, 2008). Within the collective identity literature, Saunders (2015) suggests that broader research designs (including multi-case studies) have the benefit of more generalizable findings but less coherent or agreeable identities. On the other hand, single case studies offer more coherent and agreed upon collective identities with the consequence of less generalizable findings. In her review of methodological issues within collective identity Saunder (2015) affirms the utility of group, protest, and movement level analyses as well as both single and multi-case approaches.

Within this single case I identified respondents of two distinct chosen types, providing an additional dynamism to my research design. Originally, I sought to study three types: ongoing participants, former participants who have transitioned into other political work, and former participants who are no longer engaged or are burnt out. However, I found that the third type did not appear in this study and, at least for my subjects, former participants had always transitioned to another form of engagement (see pages 148-149 for further discussion). Pursuing subjects within two categories – ongoing and transitioned participants – allowed me to interrogate the interests presented above and allowed for comparisons between these two groups. Specifically, this included whether and how the collective identity formation process, including the impact of individual spiritual identities, yields diverse outcomes in terms of movement
participation. If present, this outcome was originally theorized to be mediated by the shifts in strategy and forms of action shaped by different collective identity formations. The inclusion of these two types, and the analysis it enables about movement participation, further grounds my research project within the collective identity literature in that the inclusion of this concept in social movement studies initially sought to explain how movements sustained themselves, rather than taking that as a given.

My approach adds to a small body of literature focused on spirituality in radical social movements (Taylor 1995; Letcher 2001; Letcher 2003; Mallory 2010). It adds an additional case for comparative analysis and contributes to the broader theoretical literature on collective identity. The case allows for the application and development of specific questions within the study of collective identity that can contribute to understandings of the concept. With the two participation categories, I was able to make comparisons between these types within my sample in a way that strengthened the analysis within the limitations of a single movement case. From a single case, aspects related to social movements and collective identity can be applied (with significant caution as explored in Chapter 8) and contribute to broaden understandings beyond the case in question, such as is modelled by some of the above authors in Chapter 2.

Beyond case selection and subject identification, the research methodology is comprised of semi-structured interviews supplemented by participant observation. The appropriateness of qualitative methods for understanding identity is underscored by Hunt et al.’s (2004:445) argument that “collective identities are talked into existence,” a notion that is supported by the work of Melucci and others as well. Additionally, the use of
semi-structured interviews follows successful research designs that have been used to study similar direct action environmental movements in the United Kingdom (e.g., Plows, 2002; Woodsworth 2008). As I will discuss in the sections that follow, I analyzed the data generated by these methods using a general inductive approach (Thomas 2006). Such an analytical choice was appropriate given the general inductive nature of my research. In this research I sought to understand the full domain of spiritual beliefs and collective identity formations within my movement of interest. In so doing I have been able to generate the findings, presented in Chapters 4 through 8, regarding the relationships at the center of my research questions.

Lastly, I have sought to integrate the eight elements suggested by Tracy (2010:840) that allow for the development of excellent qualitative research design. These include having a worthy topic, developing a rich rigor, creating sincerity, building credibility, demonstrating resonance of findings, producing significant contributions, engaging in ethical practices, and accomplishing a meaningful coherence of the research as a whole. Though all eight are addressed in this chapter, I would highlight the explicit attention to rigor, sincerity (through reflexivity in particular), credibility, and ethics in this section. In conducting this research, I made an attempt to address the lack of analytical rigor noted in the study of collective identity in part through integrating approaches oriented to developing conceptual cohesion (e.g., Abdelal et al. 2006). Similarly, following the reflexive approaches outlined above, I hope to stay attentive to how the “methodological approaches scholars adopt to study collective behavior may
impact how (and even if) the identities discovered are labeled” [emphasis in original] (Saunders, 2015:86).

*Data Collection and Security Considerations*

Before going over my sampling criteria and interview methodology, I must discuss special security concerns regarding the movement of interest in this study. Given the history of state repression on the movement I studied it is important that I integrated appropriate security protocols in all data collection. Researchers who work with subjects engaged in illegal activity advocate for a set of approaches that I have integrated into my research design. The practices include: maintaining anonymity for participants through pseudonyms (in notes, writing and transcripts) (Duckett 2005; Plows 2002; Woodsworth 2008), asking participants to not discuss details of any illegal action (Plows 2002; Woodsworth 2008), storing and encrypting data outside of the researcher's home (which could become the subject of a police search) (Tracy 2010; Woodsworth 2008), and destroying interviews upon completion of the project (Duckett 2005; Plows 2002; Woodsworth 2008). While I minimized the data kept at my home, following the practice cited above, any data that did come home on computers was encrypted. Conducting my research in the fullest possible accordance with these recommendations ensured that I protected myself and my subjects to the best of my ability. As of the time of this writing, there have been no attempts by any state agency to acquire or access any data collected in this study. And as of the publication of this dissertation, all the audio files have been

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17 For examples of the FBI targeting the direct action climate movement in Seattle, Portland, Idaho and elsewhere see Herz (2013), Boos (2015), and Parkin (2013).
destroyed. An additional security concern which must be raised is the role of the researcher in providing information to the state. Plows (2003), in considering her research into the UK environmental direct action movements, identifies the ambiguity inherent in research on targeted groups. On the one hand, valuable movement reflection is possible through engaged research projects, while on the other the state gains valuable information. While the relative balance between these two outcomes is difficult to know, I certainly follow previous researchers of radical movements in their belief that the former outcome is worth pursuing despite the risks. Additionally, in any actions I describe in this paper I only link groups to those actions if that was already publicly available information. I also believe that my topic provides minimal opportunities for the state in terms of identifying opportunities for repression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th># OF SUBJECTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Participants</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland Rising Tide</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Direct Action (aka the “Valve Turners”)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350 PDX</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunrise Movement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forests for Climate Resilience</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple affiliations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitioned Out of Movement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 2. Subject Distribution Across Groups and Participation Type**
Sample Description

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 movement participants and did one follow up interview. Respondents were offered a $50 payment in compensation for their participation. The distribution of respondents across groups is shown in Table 2. Of the 21 subjects, thirteen were still active in a group at the time of the interview, and eight had transitioned out of explicitly climate-movement spaces. Ongoing participants were part of either Portland Rising Tide, Climate Direct Action, 350PDX, the Sunrise Movement, Forests for Climate Resilience, or had multiple affiliations within these groups. Portland Rising Tide is part of an “all-volunteer, grassroots network of groups and individuals who organize locally, promote community-based solutions to the climate crisis and take direct action to confront the root causes of climate change” (Portland Rising Tide 2023). They have been involved in direct action work for over a decade and have focused on fossil fuel export terminals, the transportation of fossil fuels, and solidarity actions. Climate Direct Action, also known as the “valve turners,” was a group created to support the coordinated tar sands shutdown in 2016. During this action, five pipelines carrying tar sands crude from Canada to refineries in the United States were simultaneously shut down by activists, after which protracted court battles were fought over the criminal charges. The group 350PDX is part of the larger international 350.org network and describes their work as “building a diverse grassroots movement to address the causes of climate disruption through justice-based solutions by inspiring, training and mobilizing people to act” (350PDX 2023). The Portland hub of the Sunrise Movement is
part of the national organization that rose to prominence, and significant political influence, following sit-ins and strikes during 2018-2020. It is explicitly a youth-led organization. Forests for Climate Resilience was a grassroots organization based in Oregon that sought to connect direct action forest defense with climate justice. It engaged in a variety of organizing prior to the 2020 pandemic, but the group is now defunct to the best of my knowledge. Lastly, some organizers were also affiliated with the Portland Extinction Rebellion chapter, which is part of an international network, originating in the United Kingdom in 2018. Describing themselves as a “rebellion against climate, environmental and social injustice,” they have been involved in a variety of action and organizing since that time (Emerson 2023).

At the outset of this research I sought a balanced sampling distribution across gender, class, participant type, and spiritual beliefs (see Appendix C for the demographic survey and interview guide). As can be seen below in Table 3, a relatively balanced distribution was achieved within the sample. Finally, recognizing that there was likely to be a bias in attracting participants who identified as spiritual, I made an attempt to achieve representation across a variety of spiritual orientations. Table 4 presents these data and shows that subjects did have a variety of religious identities and relationships to spirituality, including some who did not identify as being “spiritual.” Beyond these descriptive categories in which I sought balance, it is useful to note that the sample was almost entirely white, with only one participant identifying as Black, Indigenous, or a person of color. This racial distribution was expected, given the overall whiteness of the
climate direct action participants in the Pacific Northwest. Additionally, the sample skewed younger and more educated. Lastly, among those still actively participating,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Active Participation</th>
<th>Transitioned</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBTOTAL</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RACE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIPOC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBTOTAL</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;High School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBTOTAL</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3. Demographic Sample Distribution
about one third of the sample (4 of 13) were new to movement work (defined as less than three years of involvement) and two thirds (9 of 13) were “veterans” with greater than three years of involvement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spiritual/Religious Orientation</th>
<th>Active Participants</th>
<th>Transitioned</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion Growing Up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pagan/Earth-Based</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion Currently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pagan/Earth-Based</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify as Spiritual?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 4. Distribution of Spiritual and Religious Orientations**

_Data Collection Content Areas_

The content of my data collection was informed primarily by my literature review and theoretical framework. Kallio et al. (2016) in their review of the relatively scant literature on the design of semi-structured interview guides, note that for this method pre-existing knowledge of the research area is an essential prerequisite. I drew heavily on the work of Abdelal et al. (2006) in their insightful critique of the lack of methodological
rigor in the study of collective identity. They provide a framework for increasing rigor as well as for greater cohesion within the field. They also suggest that we can understand collective identity as fundamentally about both content and contestation. Such a framework transcends through inclusion the “product vs. process” debate surveyed in Chapter 2. In this framework content is the product – what the identities are about – while contestation is the process of identity formation itself. My interview guide (see Appendix C) included thematic areas of questions focused on both content and contestation.

That said, content was much more of a focus for my research questions. Abdelal (2006:696) present four content areas for their framework; constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons, and cognitive models. The last of these, cognitive models, is the focus of my study and is defined as:

In the broadest sense, a cognitive model may be thought of as a worldview, or a framework that allows members of a group to make sense of social, political, and economic conditions. The cognitive content of a collective identity describes how group membership is associated with explanation of how the world works as well as descriptions of the social reality of the group - a group’s ontology and epistemology. (Abdelal 2006:699, italics in original)

This last content area, in its focus on the group’s ontology, is one place where one would expect to find the dynamic interaction of individual spiritual beliefs with the formation of collective identity. Within the content area of cognitive models, the topics I asked participants about were further informed by the dark green religion research by Taylor (2009), Latour’s (2017) framework on examining worldviews, and Tsing’s (2015) theory on contaminated identities. These three bodies of research allowed me to formulate questions that promised to get at the relative presence (or absence) of spiritual beliefs, including the types of beliefs and identities found in the theoretical literature. I also drew
on Snow’s (1991) theory regarding the processes by which “identity work” dynamically links personal and collective identities in his framework of identity amplification, identity consolidation, identity extension, and identity transformation. This body of literature allowed me to generate questions that aimed to understand the relationship between individual and collective identities. Lastly, my questions are informed by Polletta’s (2002) work on identifying links between strategy and forms of action and collective identity. Integrating this last body of content allowed me to gather the data necessary to explore my secondary research question.

For the construction of the guide, included in Appendix C, I followed the recommended steps in the methodological review by Kallio et al. (2016), including utilizing previous knowledge to create a draft guide. The final step, a field pilot of the guide and a revision based on any deficiencies observed in the pilot, was conducted in 2018 with two movement participants (who are not subjects).

*Interview Methodology*

My use of interviews to study the direct action climate movement is in alignment with research focused on similar movements. More specifically, I conducted semi-structured interviews that allowed for a combination of structure (allowing similar thematic areas to be prepared and engaged for each participant) and flexibility (allowing for spontaneous interaction, diverse follow up questions, etc.) (Kallio et al. 2016). My use of interviews as a method, alongside participant observation, is influenced by constructivist perspectives on the method. Silverman (2006) contrasts a strictly positivist
orientation to the data in interviews, in which subjects provide facts related to the research objectives, to more constructivist orientations, in which the interview is a dynamic interaction between subjects. A variety of methodological literature develops this idea and in so doing suggests that the dialogic process of the interview is performative and actively collaborative, to be understood as “talk-as-action.”

When the interview is viewed as interactional and performative, the potential for rich material emerging from the method increases significantly. From the performative perspective, interviews, rather than being “poor surrogates or proxies for unobserved actions,” become fields of action in which their narrative structures and other functions can become rich subjects of inquiry in addition to the direct content of a given response (Atkinson et al. 2003:16-17). Magnusson et al. (2015) similarly focus on the “talk-as-action” contained within the interview and point to how this perspective allows us to see the ways in which interviewees intentionally share information based on the context and seek to present themselves in a particular way. Gubrium et al. (2003:n.p.) build on this by stressing the active role of both researcher and interviewee in constructing knowledge:

Both parties to the interview are necessarily and unavoidably active. Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge—treasuries of information awaiting excavation—as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers.

This collaborative perspective also supports my assertion that the research process itself can be of value to movements, in line with my discussion of activist research approaches. Indeed, during and after interviews, respondents frequently commented on the value of, or new thoughts that arose from, the experience of the interview itself. Furthermore,
seeing interviews as active in this way allowed for them to be much more meaningful in getting at my research questions, which as previously discussed may be relatively unconscious or at least implicit for participants in the direct action climate movement. As such, conducting interviews as an active process allows them to incite “narrative production [in which] the interviewer may provoke interpretive developments that might emerge too rarely to be effectively captured ‘in their natural habitat,’ so to speak” (Gubrium et al. 2003:n.p.).

Using this approach, and as described above, I conducted interviews with members of the direct action climate movement in the Pacific Northwest. To find respondents, I drew on my extensive relationships within this movement, based on my own involvement, to gain access and identify potential interviewees. Additionally, I aimed to summarize the broader context and movement-relevant aspect of my research in such a way as to encourage participation. I conducted enough interviews so as to achieve theoretical saturation regarding the themes that emerged. At the outset of the research, I anticipated this as being at or around twenty interviews, which is indeed where the research collection process concluded.

Research Journal and Supplemental Participant Observation

The qualitative interviews with movement participants were the core of my research methodology. However, there are two supplemental practices that I utilized to complement the data from my interviews. First, following best practices for qualitative methods and interviews as defined by Magnusson et al. (2015), I kept a research journal
in which I documented experiences, reflections, and otherwise made notes about the research process. Such a practice was intended to bolster the practice of reflexivity described above.

Second, in order to further ground my interviews and analysis, I conducted limited, supplemental participant observation. Such participant observation flowed naturally from my previous standing and ongoing involvement in this movement. However, it required a shift in perspective in order to be analytically useful for my study. Ervin (2004) emphasizes the need to broaden observations, and one’s conscious awareness, of what is occurring beyond what is common in regular participation. Such a shift enables the participant observer to see those aspects that might be taken as given in the context of participation (and thus remain invisible), particularly for an insider such as myself. Additionally, basic recommended practices include field notes written immediately or shortly after observation, the use of diverse writing formats (short and long notations) and the clear delineation of dialogue, direct observation, impressions, and theoretical reflections in field notes (Ervin 2004:146-148). Over the course of the research process all of these elements were incorporated. Methodologically, the inclusion of some degree of participant observation allowed me to ground into events as they are happening and explore my themes of interest as they are embedded in the actions, behaviors, and discussions of movement participants. In total, I engaged in participant observation in four meetings and at six actions (see Table 12 in Appendix B). These included meetings of Extinction Rebellion, the Sunrise Movement Portland hub, and 350PDX. With one exception the actions occurred in 2019. They included protests
organized against the arrival of material for the Transmountain Pipeline expansion on the Columbia River, the September 20th, 2019 Global Climate Strike in downtown Portland, an Extinction Rebellion protest at Portland City Hall, a sit-in and rally at the Oregon State Capitol against the Jordan Cove Liquefied Natural Gas Export Facility, and the December 2019 Youth Climate Strike. The sole 2020 action was a follow-up to the Transmountain Pipeline protest at the Port of Vancouver (Washington) administrative offices.

Data Analysis and Coding

Upon completion of data collection in March 2020, I transcribed the interviews using Way With Words, a professional transcription service. After reviewing a variety of possibilities, I selected this company for their labor practices, compensation model, and data security protocols, as well as their experience with academic research. Transcriptions were completed in July of 2020. I completed coding and initial analysis during the winter of 2020-2021. The code book is available in Appendix D. My analytical approach and code development was guided by Thomas’ (2006) “general inductive approach” (GIA). In this approach the analysis is guided by “evaluation objectives” that provide a “focus or domain of relevance for conducting analysis” (Thomas 2006:39). My discussion of the research questions and the application of the literature to the development of the interview guide speak to the relevant “evaluation” objectives in my research. To further clarify these objectives, I applied Magnusson et al.’s (2015) method.

18 The end of data collection was not influenced by the Coronavirus pandemic. Luckily, data collection was concluding naturally at this time.
of elaborating objectives by creating sub-objectives (which can also be thought of as sub-questions or themes). This process clarified my objectives and provided for greater specificity when beginning the coding process. With my set of objectives in hand, I analyzed raw data from the interviews and field notes using the general inductive approach (reproduced in Figure 1). This process included the broad generation of categories, narrowing categories, and then generating a model that incorporates the reduced set of categories. Here again, Magnusson et al. (2015) provide some useful additional detail in their aligned method of populating objectives with excerpts and annotations (corresponding to the second stage in Figure 1 below) and then writing “integrative summaries” of these clusters as a way to draw out potential categories. Furthermore, I utilized the techniques of Ryan et al. (2003:88-94) which include attentiveness to repetitions, indigenous typologies, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connections, and missing data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Coding Process in Inductive Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial reading of text data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify specific text segments related to objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label the segments of text to create categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a model incorporating most important categories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many pages of text  Many segments of text  30 to 40 categories  15 to 20 categories  3 to 8 categories


19 Magnusson and Marecek (2015) do not use the language of “evaluation objectives” but their approach is compatible with and complementary to the general inductive approach. For consistency I have used the objectives language of Thomas (2006) here.
All of the coding was done using the qualitative data analysis software Dedoose (version 9.0.85) informed by the process described above. To begin, I went through all the data in an open, generative, and immersive manner with the identified objectives in mind. This first step allowed me to generate a list of themes and categories that were present in the data. I then worked to combine and organize thematic categories and reduce redundancy in what was originally identified. Out of this process I created the code book (see Appendix D) in December 2020. With the codebook in hand, I then worked through all the data again and coded the content accordingly. Through this second stage there was some minor refinement, reduction, and re-categorization that occurred and is reflected in the revised codebook attached in the appendix. A summary of the principal codes and descriptions is also presented in Table 5 below. Finally, in the analytical component of my process I examined the coded data with an eye towards identifying patterns and relationships connected to my research questions as well as demographic descriptors. What is presented in Chapter 4 through 8 constitute the most clear and salient patterns found in the data that speak to the research questions and framing theoretical context presented in Chapter 2.

In the subsequent analysis of the data, shared below, I utilized the functions of Dedoose to compare descriptor variables with code occurrence and frequency. I also created some variables out of the coding. An example of this is the “earthbound score” discussed in Chapter 5, which captures the frequency with which different subjects spoke about a set of spiritual themes. The ability to make comparisons between descriptor variables and code occurrence allowed me to explore the data and look the patterns which
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>CODE GROUP</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION AND SUB-CODES (IF APPLICABLE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Materialistic</td>
<td>Spiritualities grounded in scientific materialism and a denial of the spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sacred as Other(^{20})</td>
<td>Spiritualities grounded in dualism, including especially between the sacred or spiritual and the material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Earthbound(^{21})</td>
<td>Spiritualities that included views or experiences of kinship, biocentrism, interconnection, and/or the agency of the more-than-human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indigenous/Settler Dynamics</td>
<td>Discussion of the ways in which Indigenous people and non-Indigenous and white settler people show up in movement spaces, particularly around spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Identity</td>
<td>Movement Collective Identity</td>
<td>Perceived collective identity of the movement including climate-centric, system-centric (including capitalism, race, and non-hierarchical), questioning if there is a movement, and describing movement “we-ness”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forms of Action</td>
<td>Different forms of action highlighted as important or observed including institutional, community-building, education and awareness, direct action, and lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual Experiences(^{22})</td>
<td>Descriptions of spiritual experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining Dynamics</td>
<td>(Re-)Weaving</td>
<td>Connecting with one another, the more-than-human, or the movement and creating collective identities as well as grounding in values, visions, beliefs, or ways of beings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustaining</td>
<td>Experiences of being sustained in movement work through being motivated as well as participating in or creating dynamics that support sustained engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allowing and Moving Intense Experiences</td>
<td>Shifting intense experiences in general and specifically related to ego-centrism, grief, risk, and fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Absence of Spirituality in the Movement</td>
<td>Why that Happens</td>
<td>Accounts of why this occurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As Positive, Neutral, or Mixed</td>
<td>Comments about the absence of spirituality shared in a positive, neutral, or mixed context in which the absence is positive, good for the movement, and/or complicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As Negative</td>
<td>Discussion about the absence of spirituality shared in a negative context in which the absence is a bad thing or hurts movements and/or individuals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 5. Select Themes, Codes, and Descriptions from Interviews**

\(^{20}\) In the code book (see Appendix D) this appears as “dualistic.” I later refined my terminology as the concepts continued to be developed.

\(^{21}\) For similar reasons this appears as “intersubjective spirituality” in the code book.

\(^{22}\) Some of these codes were relevant for multiple themes. For example, spiritual experiences also relate to the spirituality theme. Similarly, the codes within the spiritual theme also often relate to collective identity. They are represented here in a simplified way to give a general orientation to the principal themes and codes.
are presented in the chapters that follow. Overall, the analytical process I undertook allowed me to “communicate and connect with the data to facilitate the comprehension of the emerging phenomenon and to generate theory grounded in the data,” which is the essence of the practice of analytical coding as described by Basit (2003:152). While developing the coding process and while engaged in it, I sought to keep in mind Magnusson et al.’s (2015:13) recommendations of keeping the talk of participants at the center of the analysis and directing attention to repeated ideas. In the content that follows this chapter, I have continued to keep this orientation at the center of my approach.

Collaboration, Analysis and Application in Activist Research

The final component of my methodology involved grounding the research in the activist community. As Routledge (2004:87) suggests regarding the relational ethics of activist research, the approach must be the subject of “negotiation and discussion between academic and activist collaborators within the context, and given the contingencies, of particular struggles.” This collaborative methodological approach was intended to remain grounded in the activist methodological orientation explored at the beginning of this section and ensure reciprocity of my research practice with the movements I participate in and study. To fulfill this commitment, I convened a gathering of activists drawn from the direct action climate movement at the outset of this research project in February of 2018. During this gathering I shared my research approach, interests, and security protocols, and received feedback which was incorporated into this project. At the outset of this research, I also intended to conduct biannual check-ins with
the activist community but did not end up carrying out this part of the process. The Coronavirus pandemic, which began just after data collection was completed, impeded this aspect of the collaborative approach. Were I to have completed this component of the research design, I anticipate that it would have allowed me to be engaged in a more deeply iterative and collaborative process with activist communities about how to make sense of and analyze the data I had gathered.

An additional aspect I engaged in was inspired by Spoon’s (2012:494) “Nuwuvi Knowledge-to-Action Project,” in which the researcher engaged research participants in developing a “government-to-government consultation method and collaborative resource stewardship plans among Nuwuvi” and various state and federal agencies. Similarly, I sought to engage research participants, as well as broader movement participants, in assessing the findings of the research with an eye towards developing a collaborative plan for applying the findings in support of the direct action climate movement as well as the broader climate movement. As of the time of submission of this dissertation, gatherings are being planned in which I will present my findings and facilitate an inter-movement dialogue. Additionally, I plan to offer a similar engagement specifically to the groups with which the respondents were connected. The outcomes of these conversations will inform the development of a future “movement-relevant” publication, a link to which is provided in the appendixes. The publication (Appendix F) will be a condensed and accessible overview of the core insights that arose from this research and through dialogue with movement participants. It will include sections both for general activists within the movement as well as facilitators of group work, meetings,
and movement gatherings. It is also possible that a continued and more deeply collaborative approach may emerge as that work comes together.
CHAPTER 4
THE DIRECT ACTION CLIMATE MOVEMENT

Early during the morning of July 10th, 2006 an activist stopped a coal truck heading over the bridge at the Clinch River coal-fired power plant in Carbo, Virginia. While the truck was stopped, a rope was quickly tied across the road and a climber suspended themselves below the bridge. Another individual slipped under the truck and locked themselves to the axle. Others let the air out of the tires of the truck. At that point the only entrance to the power plant was completely blocked, and one of the first actions of the direct action climate movement in the United States was underway (see Figure 2).

In their communications the activists demanded that American Electric Power, which operated the facility:

1. Shut down the Clinch River facility and all aging, dirty coal burning power plants.
2. An immediate halt to mountaintop removal and other destructive forms of strip mining.
3. A nationwide response to the reality of global climate change marked by a move away from fossil fuels, transition towards cleaner sources of energy and vigorous promotion of electricity conservation. (EF! 2023)

In 2006 it was difficult to speak of there being a “climate movement” in existence, per se. However, by 2010 and 2011, authors in early movement publications confidently began talking about the existence of a climate movement, framed in their writing around climate justice (Building Bridges Collective 2010; Moore et al. 2011). In their book, Tokar et al. write that the climate justice movement emerged internationally in 2007 at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bali and then even more so at the 2009 summit in Copenhagen; domestically they situate the movement's
emergence during 2008-2009 (Tokar et al. 2010). Certainly, in 2006 the combination of direct action and a climate change frame was quite novel in the United States. In this chapter, I will trace the emergence of what can be reasonably argued to be a “direct action climate movement,” as I have framed it in this research. This will provide the context for the movement I studied during the period of data collection during 2019 and 2020. I will share how the respondents I spoke with have a strong, if heterogenous, systemic framing for understanding the causes and solutions to the climate crisis. One of the principal interventions of this movement has been the attempt to shift the political analysis of mainstream environmental and climate groups towards a systemic praxis. I will explore a second intervention this movement sought to make, which involved the mainstreaming of disruptive and contentious forms of action. I will also argue that many actions that are now labeled “climate” action have long been practiced, especially by Indigenous and frontline communities, and that these communities helped push a deeper, more systemic transformation into mainstream, often carbon-oriented, climate politics. I will draw on discussions from participants about how they are constructing the collective identity of the movement they are part of, as well as about emergent dynamics.

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23 The concept of frontline communities is generally used to reference those communities most directly impacted. In this context, we can think of Anishinaabe Indigenous communities impacted by the construction of Enbridge’s Line 3 tar sands pipeline in what is now northern Minnesota (nearby towns, upstream in watershed, or on treated or traditional territories), mostly BIPOC communities around Chevron’s Richmond Refinery in the San Francisco Bay Area, or white working class communities in rural Appalachia near mountaintop removal coal mining sites.
related to Indigeneity, spirituality, and settler and non-Native social movements, in order to set up the exploration of movement spirituality that follows.

FIGURE 2. Blockade at the Clinch River Coal Plant, July, 2006 (EF! 2023)

My Involvement

The history and evolution that I will describe in this chapter is very much a product of my participation in it. From approximately 2007 until 2018, when my second

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24 I will be using the terms Native and Indigenous interchangeably, following what I observe as the preferred framing among those communities in the United States.

25 Going forward, I will use the term movement to refer to the direct action climate movement as it is the movement in question for this research. When I refer to broader aspects of social movements in which it is embedded, such as the climate movement, I will make that explicit.
child was born, I dedicated my life to participation in a variety of social movements. Early on, I was involved in movements against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as US imperialism in general. Beginning in 2009 that work began to shift directly towards climate change, as I worked to organize against freeway expansions in Portland, Oregon. In 2010 I became involved in the Rising Tide network, an early protagonist and connector of the climate direct action movement. I later took on a prominent role in the Portland manifestation of the Occupy Wall Street movement during 2011-2012, and then joined the international Rising Tide North America (RTNA) collective in early 2012. It is impossible to fully separate my own involvement and participation in the evolution of this movement from my analysis of it, which is why I begin with this acknowledgement of my experience and inevitable biases. My intentions for how I recognize and work with these biases were covered in Chapter 3. That said, I believe the depth of my experience and observations also affords me the capacity for unique insights, as is indicated for insider approaches to research.

The Rising Tide Network as an Exemplar

I will give particular emphasis to the Rising Tide network given its role in the Pacific Northwest, the site of my data collection, as well as its influence nationally in mainstreaming direct action and intersectional, systemic analyses of climate change. That said, I want to be clear that the Rising Tide network was only one of a variety of aligned interventions happening in the mid- to late-aughts. Of critical importance were the interventions by many of the environmental justice groups that eventually came together
under the banner of the Climate Justice Alliance in 2013 and the longstanding resistance and organizing of Indigenous communities. The reasons for focusing on Rising Tide here are its formative impact on the experience of groups and participants in this study and its role as an example of interventions that occurred in the early formation of the climate movement. Of the 21 people interviewed in this study, eleven individuals either had been or continued (at the time of the interview) to organize within the Rising Tide network regionally, and an additional four people had significant relationships or experiences with Rising Tide actions, organizing, and members. The story of Rising Tide also provides a window into developments within climate movements related to direct action and systemic political analyses, as well as the development of a movement consciously identifying within the climate frame.

Origins, International Connections, and Initial Growth

The origins of what I call here the **direct action climate movement** requires, first and foremost, an interrogation of that chosen framing. Indeed, this question of framing was present for activists as well. In many ways, the origins of the direct action climate movement revolve around a shifting of environmental direct action towards including justice- and system-oriented political analyses and climate-related targets and demands in addition to purely environmental or bio-centric analyses and demands. One important arc of this story, and the one focused on here, began with the formation of the Earth First! Climate Caucus in 2005. One of my subjects, Zach\(^{26}\), a respondent who had transitioned

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\(^{26}\) As discussed above (pages 51), the names of all subjects have been changed and given pseudonyms to protect their identity and address identified security concerns.
from the movement but was involved in this early work, described being part of a “cadre of people within the Earth First! movement who were involved in starting Rising Tide as an effort to bring a climate activist, climate justice” framing to environmental movement work. Rachel, a respondent who had transitioned from the direct action climate movement, and also present in this early work, reflected on how “we really wanted to do more organizing around climate from an ecosystem defense, social justice and racial justice perspective and felt like that was a thing that wasn’t really happening much or at all nationally at the time.” At that time climate justice as a concept was essentially absent in domestic movement and political discourse, though present internationally. Earth First! had, at that point, been around for decades, and was a leader in innovating and spreading direct action within environmental movements. As we see above, organizers who had been long involved in those networks began to ask questions about the strategic need to center climate change as a framing for action and strategic campaigning as well as the need for a climate justice and systemic analysis. The result of those conversations was the Clinch River action described above and eventually the intentional decision by the members of the Earth First! Climate Caucus to organize outside of the Earth First! umbrella given the problematic history and relationships of that prominent network, particularly around issues of race and social justice. International connections with the emergent and aligned climate movement in the United Kingdom, at

27 Each respondent will have their participation status (active or transitioned), group affiliation (if applicable), and religious typology introduced the first time they are mentioned in the text. This information is also presented in Table 11 in Appendix A. Individuals, such as Zach, who are introduced before the religious typology is presented in Chapter 5 (pages 102-110) will have their typology included in footnotes so as not to confuse the reader. In this case, Zach fits the split religious typology.

28 She also fits the moderately earthbound religious typology introduced in Chapter 5.
that point organizing the direct action-focused “Camps for Climate Action” and connections at the UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP) 6 in The Hague, resulted in the choice to begin organizing as Rising Tide North America in 2006.

What do I mean by direct action in this context? Graeber, in his seminal work *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (2009), distinguishes between a classical understanding of direct action emerging out of the anarchist tradition and how in contemporary practice the term has a “looser sense” in that “‘Direct action’ becomes any form of political resistance that is overt, militant, and confrontational, but that falls short of outright military insurrection” (Graeber 2009:204). The distinction between this and the classical definition of direct action concerns the relationship of political action to the state and speaks to the nuances that separate civil disobedience and direct action. A poignant example comes from the group Climate Direct Action, sometimes known as the “Valve Turners,” who in 2016 simultaneously shut off the five main tar sands pipelines entering the United States, cutting off as much as 15% of US crude imports (Williams 2016). At the pipeline sites many of the activists waited (for some time) until they were arrested and then continued to pursue their political fight through the legal process. A more traditional anarchist approach to direct action – seeing no legitimacy in the state, working to create alternative forms of power, and drawing from other sources of moral authority – could be to simply turn the valves, walk away, and publicize the action as desired.

Another framing of direct action, important to my discussions around spirituality, comes from Kara Moses, who was involved in the UK direct action climate movement, including opposing the Heathrow Airport expansion through the group Plane Stupid. She
describes direct action as an “embodied practice of physical resistance” (Radical Nature Connection 2022). In practice, and for the purposes of the writing here, a synthesis of Graeber’s assessment of contemporary practice and Moses’ articulation capture what I, and many of my respondents, experienced in direct action climate movements. The way in which the practice of civil disobedience relates to direct action is very blurry and theoretically ambiguous. In my observations, direct action in climate movement spaces has meant overt, confrontational, and physical resistance that risks arrest. Zach talked about how in the founding of RTNA there was a concern that, somewhat like Earth First!, the form of action itself would come to be central, rather than the systemic political analysis: “We talked about that specifically…there is a danger in Rising Tide becoming the most direct action-y climate group as opposed to [an] anti-capitalist direct action group…and I think that did happen, to some extent.” In this context, the intervention of RTNA and the action in Virginia, described above, began to shift a very established environmental direct action movement towards a climate justice framework such that, as Zach shared, they were “a little bit more focused on issues of humanity in addition to the biocentric issues.”

Rachel, who was also part of the founding of Rising Tide North America, reflected on the complexity in the framing of the movement. She offered an important distinction for non-frontline groups, about being aligned with a climate justice movement rather than being a climate justice group themselves:

Well, it gets sticky because I don’t think it’s appropriate for a majority of white groups to claim to be environmental justice groups, perhaps with the exception of certain really poor communities like Appalachia. For example, when we were working with Coal River Mountain Watch in West Virginia, they identified as an
environmental justice community. And I don’t argue with that. I think they might be an exception to the rule. And that seems to be a sense that is shared among other environmental justice organizations nationally. But Rising Tide, for example, never claimed to be an EJ group because we have too much privilege for that to be true about ourselves. We might be engaged in environmental justice work. It’s semantics but it does really matter to a lot of people so I try to be careful with language…[And] I think there’s a difference between being part of a movement for climate justice and being a climate justice group, perhaps. The term climate justice came about a bit later than environmental justice and maybe has a bit less of that sense about it. I’m just sensitive to the fact of how easily cooptation happens and how much of an issue that has been in the environmental movement with regard to the EJ movement. And I think the onus is on white folks to pay attention to that and not replicate those dynamics. So yes…Rising Tide’s tagline was chosen very intentionally: “Taking action around the root causes of climate change.” That’s exactly what we were talking about, right, but we weren’t saying, Rising Tide, environmental justice, because we didn’t think that was appropriate.

These issues have not gone away and continue to be present in non-frontline groups working to address the climate crisis. They are also of special relevance to my research, and I will return to their intersection with spirituality and Native communities later.

First, I will move on to map the initial growth of this movement. After the action in 2006 that this chapter began with, Rising Tide North America toured around the continent (though mostly in the United States) promoting the systemic analysis and direct action approach advocated by their organization. Regionally, the single group founded in Portland in 2006 was later joined by groups in Vancouver, B.C., Seattle, southern Oregon, Moscow, Idaho, Corvallis, Olympia, Bellingham, Eugene, and Spokane. These groups have come into and out of existence over the last ten years. At the time of this writing the regional network has waned, with energy shifting elsewhere, and many local groups no longer exist. One member of the RTNA collective kept track of actions that were undertaken in whole or in part by network groups or those connected with the
developing network. Table 6 shows the general growth of these actions over time, showing a clear upward trend line.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NUMBER OF ACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These actions included everything from blockades related to the Palomar natural gas pipeline proposed (and later defeated) in Oregon in 2008, attempts to shut down the Chicago Carbon Exchange in 2009, the Tar Sands Blockade in 2012 where activists engaged in a sustained direct action campaign against construction, to the arrests and street action at Flood Wall Street in 2014 following the People’s Climate March.

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29 Personal communication 2016, used with permission.
Blockades featured heavily on the list, many resulting in arrests, and they primarily targeted sites of fossil fuel extraction, burning, or transportation (e.g., pipelines, barges, roads, rail lines). Banks and other economic facilitators as well as politicians were also frequent targets of these actions.

**Mainstreaming of Direct Action**

In 2005 it was unlikely that one would find many people identifying with being part of a direct action climate movement, a climate justice movement, or any combination of the two. By 2011, however, there very much was such a movement, within which a diversity of groups were associated and with which many activists identified. It is noteworthy that between 2009 and 2010, the high-profile organization 350.org emerged and began to develop prominence. Notably for the some of the discussion that follows, at least initially 350.org took an explicit carbon-centric framing in focusing on the parts per million of CO₂ (350) deemed to be suitable for human civilization. However, not only was there a movement in 2011 which activists consciously identified as being climate-oriented, the interventions of the direct action climate movement – the integration of direct action and the deepening of a systemic and justice-oriented analysis of the climate crisis – had been mainstreamed to a significant extent. One action that exemplifies the breakthrough into the mainstream of direct action, though in its most tame, symbolic form, was the Tar Sands Action in 2011 at the White House. A large coalition of groups organized a series of sit-down actions in which 1,253 individuals sat down near the White House gates and refused to move to protest the Obama Administration's inaction on
stopping the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline (McKibben 2011). An example of the shifting terrain of movement tactics was the Sierra Club’s board of directors voting to authorize participation in civil disobedience as part of this action for the first time in the organization's history. This example illustrates the legitimization of disruptive, confrontational action under an explicit climate frame that had occurred in the previous five years. It is worth noting that this development also illustrates the increasing desperation climate activists and leaders felt as the climate crisis worsened while large fossil fuel projects continued to be proposed and approved. Among my respondents, this mainstreaming of disruptive action provided the context within which organizations less inclined to direct action, such as 350PDX and the Sunrise Movement, would nonetheless include these forms of actions within their repertoire of tactics that they utilized, such as in blockades, strikes, and sit-ins. Whereas in 2006 no organizations outside of the Earth First! and Rising Tide nexus were engaging in explicitly climate-framed, disruptive direct action, by 2011 many organizations were doing so, even if these actions tended towards the more performative and symbolic.

*Climate Justice: Frontlines and Indigenous Communities Leading the Way*

It is essential to recognize the extent to which those communities most impacted by the climate crisis, and the industrial activity causing it, have consistently led the way in bringing in a systemic analysis to the broader climate movement. In many ways, the only thing that shifted was the inclusion of long-term resistance and organizing in frontline and Indigenous communities within a climate frame. These communities have
long fought for systemic and justice-oriented changes to industrial pollution, mineral and fossil fuel extraction, and the transportation of dangerous materials, which is to say the prime causes of climate change. That said, these communities have often had to fight for inclusion within an emergent and sometimes carbon-centric climate frame. In the race to reduce carbon emissions and increase sequestration, these carbon-centric frames can ignore the differential impacts of climate change that are aligned with dominant power structures such as race, class, and North/South divides. Additionally, without an explicit integration of systemic power structures, the so-called “solutions” to the climate crisis can deepen inequities and injustices in these very communities. A poignant case includes the conflict over the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD or REDD+) protocols in the United Nations process. This program, ostensibly oriented to conserving forests and sequestering carbon, has exacerbated the exclusion or removal of Indigenous peoples from these forests in a clear continuance of centuries of colonization (Global Alliance Against REDD 2023). The continued commercialization and commodification of nature also reifies a nature/culture split that is relevant to the conversations around spirituality and ontology to come in the chapters below. As an organizing project, the Climate Justice Alliance was an explicit intervention by the most impacted communities to fold in the long standing struggles of frontline and environmental justice communities, to place them in leadership in political conversations around climate change, and to emphasize the concept of a just transition, as opposed to a carbon-centric one. In essence, the just transition framing posits that the transformation of injustice and unequal power relations are non-negotiable and must be centered in political
debates about climate change and in climate solutions, if not then these injustices and inequities will be deepened in the race to reduce CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere. Without this intervention and the de-centering of carbon as the primary focus, it becomes very easy for climate change to be “addressed,” as seen in falling CO₂ emissions, even while domestic and global inequities deepen. The resistance by global political leaders to any acknowledgement of justice and accountability for those most impacted and least responsible for the climate crisis is illustrated by the recent COP 27 meetings in 2022, in which a “loss and damage” fund was finally and very reluctantly established by the UNFCCC after 30 years of attempts (Prater 2022). Whether or not the funds will actually be provided by wealthy countries in the Global North is yet to be seen. Unsurprisingly, given the United States’ long resistance to climate action, it was one of the last holdouts on creating the loss and damage fund.

I will return to this conversation following a short overview of the movement collective identity observed in my respondents. These data give us a snapshot of the relative success of the interventions to center these types of systemic and justice-oriented framings on movement participants.

Movement Collective Identity

How do the interventions and movement evolution described above manifest within this small sample of movement participants? As can be seen in Table 7 below, the initial goals associated with the initiation of the Rising Tide network and the interventions by frontline and Indigenous communities have, in some ways, been met. At
least among this group of participants there is a very high understanding that the movement they are part of is oriented toward systemic change, with 90 percent of participants speaking about the systemic roots of climate change in some way. In other words, these activists did not see climate change as something that can be separated from capitalism or white supremacy. To address the climate crisis these systems, which are at the root of the crisis, must be transformed. On the contrary, some participants spoke about their sense of the movement in a climate-centric way. In this perspective, addressing climate change is framed largely in the context of carbon and greenhouse gases, while dominant systems, such as capitalism or white supremacy, are de-emphasized or absent as root causes. However, while participants sometimes did speak about their movement in a climate-centric way, only one participant did so exclusively. Thus most participants saw climate change as firmly rooted in capitalism, white supremacy, or the structures of hierarchy and domination in society. However, the focus of respondents’ systemic analyses varied widely, particularly with regards to which of these systems were emphasized and thus the focus of their movement’s transformative work. Additionally, the respondents indicated some significant instability in the existence of a climate movement collective identity. Roughly one-third of the sample questioned the utility of a climate frame at all, and almost 15 percent of participants questioned whether the movement was actually a movement. Joshua, an activist with Climate Direct Action, offered that while they did not see a movement that had:

> coherent beliefs or goals [or] that has somewhat unifying tendencies, I think there’s a direct-action movement that intuitively shares an understanding about

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30 He also fit the moderately earthbound religious typology introduced in Chapter 5.
the value of disruption and the logic of it. And if you actually asked them for a coherent set, I don’t think you could get a coherent set of statements out of more than…than a few people…I really do have a radically pluralistic sense of these things and I don’t feel like people actually need the same understanding of what they’re doing to work in a unified way that actually has a shared purpose. So, I’m not bothered by the fact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of Subjects</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Justice and/or</td>
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<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Justice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>System-Centric</strong></td>
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<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalism</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hierarchical</td>
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<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
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<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Both Climate and System Centric</strong></td>
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<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questioning the Climate Frame</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questioning if Movement Exists</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 7. Movement Collective Identities Discussed by Participants**

Related to these questions, and connected to collective identity in the literature as well as to my theoretical orientation, are the forms of action that participants connect to their movement activity. Table 8 illustrates the count of how many participants discussed each of the coded forms of action: community building, direct action, education and awareness, institutional approaches (e.g., policy/formal politics), and lifestyle. The talk of the participants revealed both heterogeneities as well as one clear point of alignment for most participants: direct action. This is unsurprising but serves as a useful indication that there was something tying together the people interviewed, which was their expected
orientation toward direct action. It is also worth noting, in ways I will revisit in my later
discussions of the implications of this research, that many respondents saw direct action
not only as a tactic, but also as a strategy of transformation. Of the 17 individuals who
spoke about direct action, a total of eight also spoke about it as having a special
transformative power. For example, Morgan, an activist with Forests for Climate
Resilience\textsuperscript{31}, discussed how direct action changes the “locus of agency” and can
transform a participant’s sense of who they are, where power resides, and how they relate
to the world:

\begin{quote}
I think direct action gives the participants the taste of a different reality...One is
participating with a different way of practicing life in which what we do as human
living beings, like what we literally do, the movements we make with our arms
and our mouths, our motion and then our direct participation with others, like
immediately around us, becomes world historical. Literally it becomes the place
in which, at least in a small way, in a fragmented way, it becomes the place in
which change is either happening or not happening. It becomes important. It
becomes part of the life of the world.
\end{quote}

This quote is illustrative of the special power that some respondents see in direct action,
where it becomes itself a mode of transformation for participants, in ways not envisaged
by other forms of action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community Building</th>
<th>Direct Action</th>
<th>Education and Awareness</th>
<th>Institutional Approaches</th>
<th>Lifestyle</th>
</tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 8. Forms of Actions Discussed by Participants**

\textsuperscript{31} They also fit the strongly earthbound typology presented in Chapter 5.
In summary, the participants in this study have a relatively diffuse sense of movement identity. While in many ways I would like to be framing this as a “climate justice direct action movement,” as discussed by some of the founders of the Rising Tide network, the data do not support this frame. In general, participants did vocalize a strong systemic and justice-oriented analysis regarding the roots of the climate crisis. Given this, the interventions by RTNA, frontline groups, and Indigenous communities to transform structures of power as an essential part of addressing the climate crisis have achieved some measure of success. However, climate justice is not the predominant systemic framing, nor is there necessarily consistency among respondents on whether the root causes of the climate crisis, and thus the orientation of the movement, lie in white supremacy, capitalism, settler colonialism, or the structure of social hierarchy in general. That said, I believe it is accurate to apply the label “direct action” to these participants and to the movement they understand they are connected with, however loosely. If anything, what is evident from the interview data is respondents’ fairly heterogeneous understanding of movement collective identity and the forms of action that the movement focuses on, with points of alignment around general systemic change and direct action. Interestingly, I could not find linkages between spiritual identities and the types of movement collective identity discussed here. In part, I understand this to be an outcome of the latent or undeveloped nature of spirituality in the movement. As I will describe in the chapters that follow, a paradox emerged in the data, in which respondents highlighted the importance of spirituality but also the virtual absence of formal spiritual engagement in meetings or gatherings. Without this dialogic identity work, it is my belief that there
has not yet been a broad translation of emergent spiritual identities identified in this research to movement collective identities. This follows Hunt et al.’s (2004:445) argument that “collective identities are talked into existence.” Without opportunities to do that talking, it is challenging for there to be a full development of a synthesis of spiritual identities with these types of movement identities. That said, there are collective identities that appear in the data, discussed in Chapter 6. It is helpful to remember that collective identity is constituted by a shared sense of “we-ness” and collective agency (Snow 2001 as cited in Fominaya 2010:394). Those identities related to spirituality in the data are more about who or what makes up the movement, which is to say the “we-ness,” rather than collective agency it has. An interesting question I will explore in Chapter 8 is what it would look like to develop that latter aspect or the shared agency that is necessarily part of the full concept of collective identity.

*Settler and Indigenous Identities: Emergent Dynamics Around Spirituality*

The final theme I will discuss in this chapter is movement participants’ relative understanding of Indigenous communities, settler colonialism, and non-Native identities. A focus on Indigenous resistance related to climate change is a rich field of inquiry as it relates to spirituality. However, I intentionally did not choose to study Indigenous communities and movements, for two related reasons. First, I am a person of mixed European white settler\(^{32}\) ancestry who has been involved in white-dominant direct action movements in the Pacific Northwest. Second, it has struck me as critical that white settler

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\(^{32}\) The term white settler is used, following conventions in social movements and some academic literature, to draw attention to the ways in which white supremacy and settler colonialism are intwined.
and non-Native communities appropriately transform and develop their own spiritualities and practices with regards to how we identify and relate to life. Given these two reasons, my positionality pointed to the focus of this research, both its content and the interview sample. It is my view that a deep desire for these transformations is part of the resonance that the Standing Rock movement had for non-Native and white movement participants. I will discuss this first, before exploring the tendency in non-Native movements to rely on Indigenous voices to articulate alternative spiritualities, before integrating all of this into the final analysis of my research.

In total, twelve participants explicitly discussed issues related to relations with Indigenous communities and seven talked about Standing Rock in particular, even though it was not a question in the interview guide. This line of inquiry also arose out of my participant observation. In four of the six actions I participated in, I saw the same dynamic arise, wherein Indigenous people were given space to offer and ground those gathered in some kind of Earth-based spirituality or sense of interconnectedness with life. In contrast, the settler and non-Indigenous participants almost never engaged in this way, despite the extent to which the offerings by Indigenous people seemed to deeply resonate with them. The first action I observed as part of my research was the Global Climate Strike on September 9th, 2019, during which thousands gathered and marched in downtown Portland as part of global actions involving millions. At the event, Indigenous speakers led the rally in which they invoked the “sacred relationship Native people have with the land” and which I later noted had the “impact of bringing in different relationships to nature [and] spirituality through the inclusion of Indigenous voices”
At the time, and early on in my research process, I noted how there was a “need for white/settler organizers to also integrate this aspect into their presentation and not solely lean on Indigenous voices to carry this part of the message,” as well as how this was a “secondary way in which movements are moving with the kind of transformative relational/spiritual work” at the center of this research (Observation, September 20th, 2019). I went on to watch this happen again a week later at the September 27th, 2019 Extinction Rebellion action at Portland City Hall as part of the climate strike week of actions, at the rally and sit-in at the November 2019 Oregon State Capitol against the Jordan Cove LNG terminal, and at the February 2020 Rising Tide action against Transmountain Pipeline delivery at the Port of Vancouver (Washington) administrative offices. At the February Rising Tide action, I noted how “Indigenous speakers are centered and bring spirituality, which seems genuinely received by the audience (if awkwardly at times)” (Observation, February 7th, 2020). Later I asked in my notes, “What does it look like for settler people to also bring this in the spirit of ‘becoming true humans’ again as was invoked by the speaker?” (Observation, February 7th, 2020). And at the rally against the Jordan Cove pipeline, after again observing this dynamic, I noted the presence of an “interesting tension between holding lots of space for Indigenous speakers to invoke spirituality, but having the settler participants not do it at all” (Observation, November 20th, 2019).

I recognize that it is important for non-Indigenous and settler movements to create space for Indigenous people to have opportunities to offer whatever they wish at the outset of gatherings like these as well as to guide or set the container for the actions
needed, and I do not critique this intention. A second reason for the intentional centering of Indigenous people in such settings is that it is clearly moving to non-Indigenous people who operate outside of the cultural context from which the offering is made.\textsuperscript{33} For example, Lauren, an active organizer with multiple affiliations\textsuperscript{34}, expressed how the mostly non-Indigenous audiences at rallies or actions such as these “eats that up.” Emily, an active organizer in Sunrise PDX\textsuperscript{35}, offered her view that it was the “prayer” and “spiritual sustenance” that caused people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, to be “so willing to resist to such an intense degree.” Nick, an activist with Sunrise PDX\textsuperscript{36}, recounted how during an action in British Columbia, upon hearing First Nations people offer the Women Warrior song, he felt there was “so much magic and power there” and how he experienced an “inter-generational aspect to it [and] the feeling of being in a long, long, long struggle.” Here, among non-Indigenous participants of diverse gender and racial identities, the moving and sustaining impacts of centering these Indigenous worldviews is apparent. At Standing Rock in particular, Joshua described feeling a “hunger” in himself for the kinds of experiences he had, and how he received “a spiritual framework that says it’s existentially necessary to fight” and which was lacking elsewhere.

\textsuperscript{33} I am assuming here that it is moving and resonant \textit{within} the cultural context in which it is made, which is to say for Indigenous community members. Of interest here is the resonance outside of or beyond Indigenous cultural contexts of a spiritually-imbedded worldview that clashes with the kind of Western scientific materialism that is dominant, and which will be explored in the following chapter. Also, important to keep in mind here is that Indigenous communities are not monolithic and represent a diversity of cultures.

\textsuperscript{34} She also fits the sacred as other religious typology which is introduced in Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{35} She also fits the moderately earthbound typology which is introduced in Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{36} He also fits the moderately earthbound typology which is introduced in Chapter 5.
However, it is the third and least conscious reason for this inclusion that interests me most and is, in many ways, the subject of the analysis that follows. My view is that an inclusionary space is also intentionally created at these actions by non-Indigenous organizers because of an implicit and underdeveloped understanding that the climate crisis requires an ontological transformation in how dominant human cultures identify with and relate to the world. In other words, this would be invoking the domain of religion and spirituality which sets the containers and contours for the world, our place in it, and the inherent flow of relations, obligations, and agencies. Emily remarked how, while not wanting to appropriate Indigenous traditions, she also believed that “Indigenous spirituality teaches us so much about how to truly connect with the Earth that we’re fighting for and to find power in her [as well as how] to find real reverence and respect.” Echoing what I described above, centuries-long resistance to colonial violence and oppression that upholds Indigenous ways of being has always been about the very transformational work that has now been given a climate frame. To paraphrase a central message of the Standing Rock resistance, water has always been life, and the actions by Indigenous communities to uphold this relationship has only recently been acknowledged by white settlers as relevant to climate change and movements. And there have, of course, been many previous struggles analogous to Standing Rock; what was different and noteworthy about the resistance in the Dakotas was its breakthrough resonance with a large, non-Indigenous public.

While I believe it is essential for non-Native activists in climate movements to take guidance from Indigenous communities in these regards and to offer Indigenous
people a central and grounding place in movements, actions, and rallies, I also believe that transformations in our relationship to life have to also come from non-Indigenous and settler communities themselves. Without this kind of parallel work, it seems all too likely that radical and climate movements will continue to engage in the types of problematic cultural appropriation and temporary allyship that have all too often been practiced. Indeed, many of the comments above warrant suspicion about the intentionality and impact of the views held by respondents. If non-Indigenous and white settler communities explicitly take on their own identity-specific work of transforming their ontological inheritances, which themselves facilitate domination and separateness, they can be held accountable to as well as guided by these frameworks in their relationships and allyship with Indigenous communities. In coming to find themselves engaged in parallel projects of social transformation, these different communities will greatly lessen the likelihood of being part of temporary communities of circumstance, which inevitably result in the discarding of the marginalized (in this case Indigenous) partner. From this view, centering the ontological transformation intuited by non-Indigenous and settler movements as necessary for addressing the climate crisis becomes an essential practice for maintaining accountable and just relationships with Indigenous partners, allies, and communities. Again, it was for these reasons, and given my positionality, that I chose the subject of my study.

I believe the data in this study show that the potential for non-Indigenous and settler communities to articulate alternative ways of being is present, though very much latent and undeveloped. One outlier from my pool of respondents, Morgan, gives a sense
of how one movement participant who is a white settler has actively integrated and developed this transformation in worldview and relationships not only as an explicit aspect of their movement practice, but also as a general orientation to life:

We are descendants of people who were part of the land and many of us have many European ancestors, even those that became disconnected from the land and became colonizers and sometimes agents of disenfranchising others from the land. Nonetheless we do have this root in ourselves of being Indigenous and so attempting to consciously reawaken and remobilize that memory and to cultivate new listening to the land where we currently are, which is maybe different from where our ancestors came from. And to find a responsible way to be humans as part of the land now with our ancestors, transforming the stories that they went through by being colonized and being colonizers, and also an alliance and a tangible partnership with other people who are more directly and more recently a more long-term part of this land. And so I am now part of consciously crafting ceremonial practices on this land with my family, with people that I have known and loved for decades, bits and pieces that hopefully sync up with the social being that I talked about that is needing to emerge, that is a social being that is really profoundly rooted and is interweaving with the rest of life. What I feel called to is being part of the emergence of the religious practices and the spiritual orientations that are [integral to] that emergent being.

This study aims to examine the questions that arise from the content reviewed in this section. What is the role of spirituality in direct action climate movements? How does spirituality impact movement participants? Are non-Indigenous and settler individuals and movements attempting to construct new identities, ontologies, and relations to life? Are such ontological transformations necessary for effectively addressing the climate crisis? Given how rarely spirituality consciously entered the movement spaces I was a part of and how little the social movement literature engages this subject, I embarked on this research to address those questions.

37 In choosing pronouns for the writing, I have followed the gender identities articulated by respondents. I will be using the pronouns they/them for those who identified as gender queer or non-binary, as well as traditional masculine and feminine pronouns.

38 At least, outside of a resource mobilization framework.
CHAPTER 5

SPIRITUALITY IN THE DIRECT ACTION CLIMATE MOVEMENT

Within the direct action climate movement, spirituality was identified by most of the respondents as being important to their activism. There is much to unpack in terms of what that actually means in relation to the questions guiding this research, as well as what respondents mean when they talk about spirituality. This is all the more important given the depth of its importance, such as described by Jessica, an organizer with multiple affiliations, when she discussed movement work as inherently “spiritual” in that it involved people “transforming themselves” through the felt interconnection that is taking action together, especially the contentious action frequently employed by the direct action climate movement. What do respondents mean by spiritual? From and to what do they seek transformation? And with what do they experience interconnection? These and many other questions, including those raised by Hutchison (2012) above (see pages 33-34), will be examined in the pages that follow.

In the exploration below, I will revisit some of the guiding literature from Chapter 2 to contextualize the research. Particularly useful will be the work of Taylor and Latour. Taylor’s (2009) development of “dark green religion” provides a rare comparative framework developed, in part, from research on the related Earth First! radical direct action environmental milieu, from which the movement at the center of this research partially arose. Also important will be Latour’s (2017) work on the implications of climate change and the emergence of a new “earthbound” identity and worldview. The

39 She also fits the strongly earthbound religious typology introduced later in this chapter.
quotes from the participants reveal an interesting divergence from Taylor’s findings that point towards Latour’s conception of the “earthbound.” That said, there was also definable diversity in the types of spirituality discussed by participants and what it meant to them. In this chapter, I will describe the findings of my research, beginning with the development of a respondent-driven definition of spirituality. Alongside this, I will develop a definition of religion and parse out when subjects were talking about religion while using the language of spirituality, as was common in my sample. Having done this, I will then discuss the types of spiritual and religious tendencies found within my sample, which, broadly speaking, are divided into dualistic religious tendencies and, following Bruno Latour’s (2017) work, “earthbound” religious tendencies. As I make these connections, I will be using the phrase “more-than-human” to describe what is usually called nature. This term originates with David Abram (1997) and is used, as described in Chapter 1, to avoid reifying the prevalent human/culture dualism.

Having explored these aspects, I will then begin to link the findings of this study with the collective identity literature and discuss how these identities are constructed through the ways in which spirituality creates and combines subjectivities. This will include the three ways in which respondents articulated interconnection as the “we-ness” of collective identity: (1) the construction of a collective of people in struggle, (2) the construction of a collective of people together with the more-than-human world, and (3) the construction of a collective emptied of any fixed sense of identity at all. I will illustrate these different constructions of collective identity found within my research sample by exploring specific spiritual experiences that respondents described in
interviews. Lastly, I will discuss these findings, develop a few models suggested by the data, and bridge this content with that of Chapter 6. In all that follows, I will develop an initial framework for understanding the role of spirituality for participants in the direct action climate movement and its relevance in the Anthropocene.

**Spirituality and Religion**

To begin, it is necessary to first develop a better understanding of what is meant by “spiritual” or “spirituality.” I will draw out the patterns present in the definitions of spirituality offered by respondents. I approach this task in this way so as to stay grounded with my methodology and Magnusson et al.’s (2015:13) recommendation to keep the talk of participants at the center of the analysis. To begin, Morgan provides a valuable and overarching understanding of religion and spirituality. In our discussions, they shared their understanding of the interrelated concepts of religion and spirituality. For Morgan, “religion is a word for one of the practices that mobilize people as people, in other words, groups, particular kinds of people, of which there have been many throughout history and of which there remain many profoundly different categories of human.” This definition resonates with the theoretical framework for this project and in particular the ideas explored by the cluster of scholars discussed in the literature review focusing on new modes of being in the Anthropocene. It also specifically connects with Latour’s (2017) work exploring the constructions of human/culture, climate change, and religion. Morgan goes on to say that “Religion is one of the ways that people are different in those ways and I think religious practices, rituals, ceremonies, mythologies and the telling of
those mythologies and then inhabiting mythologies, and science is one of those, are ways of enacting humanity, a particular mode of humanity.” I will adopt this framing of religion for my analysis and will now contrast it with spirituality.

Spirituality, according to Morgan, is “a word to describe the texture and the strength of certain sorts of connection one has through religious practices.” From this understanding, it follows that “different people are more or less spiritual even if they're part of the same religion for example, and a more spiritual person is a person that maybe is a person who has either inherited or born with or cultivated a particularly strong attunement to whole being ways, modes of connecting with other beings.” Morgan’s analysis of both spirituality and religion, as well as the differences between them, is precise, consistent with the literature, and provides a broad conceptual framework for me to work with. It allows a clear understanding of spirituality and religion, as two essential concepts in this investigation. Notably, very few other participants spoke of religion by invoking the word “religion”; rather, it was invoked through the concept of “spirituality.” In other words, almost all respondents used the word spirituality to refer to both religion and spirituality as defined above. In my view, this is unsurprising given the decline of religious institutions in American society, the traumatic experiences that many people have with dominant forms of Christianity, especially queer and gender queer people (who are highly represented in my sample), and the general association of religion with more conservative worldviews.  

However, in a topic I will return to later, it does leave 

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40 One could argue I fell into this trap myself at times. While I also asked about religion and religious themes, I also muddled questions about religion, as defined here, with the concept of spirituality. That said, given my years of movement participation I think this was intentional and constructive in meeting
movement participants lacking a vocabulary that might otherwise allow them to develop aspects important to transformative social change in the Anthropocene.

Of the 21 participants interviewed, 20 talked about definitions or understandings of spirituality. Additionally, almost all of the subjects also spoke about spirituality in ways that invoked its religious aspect. In the previous chapter I utilized the language of “spirituality” as used by the vast majority of participants and as an umbrella for both aspects. And in the chapters that follow I will continue with this convention while keeping in mind the conceptual framework developed above. When possible, I will try to delineate when spirituality is referencing the stories and practices identified in the quote above from Morgan and when spirituality is referencing the experience of resonance or connectivity. However, in this chapter, I will try to be especially specific in my use of the words *spiritual* and *religious*. I begin with discussing spirituality.

*Spirituality and Connection*

Of the 20 subjects who were coded for discussing definitions of spirituality, a total of 17 discussed spirituality in terms of connectedness that resonate with Morgan’s overarching definition. What I heard respondents talking about by referencing “connectedness” was the experiential aspect of their religious worldviews. This often involved an expansion of identity to include human individuals beyond the self, the more-than-human world, or even a collapse of a sense of a separate self altogether. And while three of the respondents also spoke about spirituality in non-connectedness terms, 14 participants with the language that is more accessible. If spirituality is a difficult concept to raise in movement spaces, religion is much, much more so (hence the coding of spirituality as religion).
exclusively described spirituality as being directly related to experiences or capacities for connectedness such as articulated here. It appears that, at least within this dataset, respondents had a strong orientation to understanding spirituality as speaking about the experience of connectedness, or the capacity for connectedness. I will now turn to discuss the details of these understandings as well as those of the three outliers.

The participants who spoke of spirituality as relating to a felt sense, experience, or state of being connected did so in general and specific ways. Some participants simply spoke of it in broad terms. For example, Sarah, an organizer active in Sunrise PDX\(^{41}\), said, “it’s definitely a pattern that I keep coming back to and a feeling…[of this] sense of wholeness and connectivity.” Rachel spoke generally of spirituality being about “interconnection.” Respondents articulated a general framing of spirituality that refers to the capacity that allows one to notice, be present, and act according to a reality of “wholeness” or interconnectedness that often fails to break through or be recognized at the conscious level. More specifically, some respondents, like Jessica, spoke of a “feeling of connectedness with other people and things,” whereas Zach spoke of the “intimacy and connection” of “feelings of being connected to the Earth and having a love for them” as defining what he understood spirituality to mean. Nick talked about spirituality as “feeling a deeper connectedness to others in the world” and “trying to experience a kind of kinship with other people, but also with plants and animals.” Finally, Ashley, an activist who hadtransitioned away from the direct action climate movement\(^{42}\), shared that,

\(^{41}\) She also fits the strongly earthbound religious typology presented later in this chapter.

\(^{42}\) She also fits the strongly earthbound religious typology presented later in this chapter.
I think that spirit is a word for the dynamic force that animates all living beings, and some might say the universe as whole. It may be sometimes described as the invisible spider web that binds all things together. I think that to be spiritual is to have opened in oneself or to tend to that part of existence, and I think that to be human there are many different parts of ourselves. We have an emotional body. We have a physical body. We have these whole mental processes. We have all these different capabilities and aspects of being. And to me this spiritual relationship with, and in some ways a connection to, that force in one’s life, and allowing it to be one of the forces that you’re in a relationship with. And in any given relationship when you’re in a relationship with something you give of yourself to it, and it gives of itself to you, and it changes you. And so to be spiritual to me is to allow that relationship. It’s to cultivate that in your life, and to allow it to have a seat at the table.

This example also clearly illustrates a reference by Ashley to both religion and spirituality through solely the language of spirituality. Additionally, in the above quote I would like to draw out what I see as Ashley’s strong understanding of spirituality as a felt relationality with all of life, in which the participant clearly articulates a sense of co-being or a mutuality of change that occurs as a fundamental aspect of existence. Ashley’s understanding can be contrasted with weaker senses of spiritual connectedness that place the emphasis on the connection between two beings (see Figures 4 to 5 below), rather than the nature of co-emergence that constitutes the beings themselves (see Figure 6 below). This strong sense is echoed by Morgan, who described the idea that spiritual connection and practice reflect an awareness of “a being that we’re making together.” As I will explore later, this strong sense of spirituality may be connected to a greater sense of perceived agency, such as again articulated by Morgan when they described being “called to [be] part of the emergence of the religious practices and the spiritual orientations that are [integral to] that emergent being.”
In addition to the explicit use of frameworks of connectivity, respondents also used metaphors of connecting to something “bigger” and the feeling of “love” to articulate this understanding of connectedness. Matthew, an activist with Climate Direct Action\textsuperscript{43}, commented that he thinks “of spirituality as being the efforts to, or the process of trying to connect to something other than yourself, something larger [and] I’m willing to call that God, but not everybody does.” Kate, who had transitioned away from the direct action climate movement\textsuperscript{44}, also spoke of the spiritual nature of her feelings of movement participation in “feeling a part of a big movement that’s making a change.” A second metaphor respondents used was that of the feeling of love. Sarah shared that “It’s a feeling of love [...] I’m referring to and that’s why it feels so hard to articulate [and] I try to understand God through this way.” Elizabeth, who had transitioned from active work with the direct action climate movement\textsuperscript{45}, also directly offers that spirituality is “basically love as a verb and so that pretty much sums it up succinctly.”

In contrast to the above, three of the respondents were outliers on this issue and tended to construct spirituality as related to morality, “faith” that good things would happen, or as describing those things beyond rational comprehension. Three subjects spoke about spirituality exclusively in one of these three ways, and three others spoke about spirituality both as connectedness and in these ways. Tyler, an activist with Portland Rising Tide\textsuperscript{46}, offered that “It’s more just like what ethical framework do I think about the physical universe as taking place within.” Speaking to a sense of spirituality as

\textsuperscript{43} He also fits the moderately earthbound typology which is introduced later in this chapter.
\textsuperscript{44} She also fits the split religious typology which is introduced later in this chapter.
\textsuperscript{45} She also fits the strongly earthbound typology which is introduced later in this chapter.
\textsuperscript{46} He also fits the strongly earthbound typology which is introduced in later in this chapter.
referring to that beyond human capacity for comprehension, Jacob, an activist with Portland Rising Tide[^47], said, “I think spirituality for most humans […] encompasses the aspects of life that they cannot comprehend.” And building on this, Joshua understood spirituality as a “subset of experienced phenomenon that I don’t have as good of an explanation for or can’t put in as scientific of terms as everything else is part of it [or] a set of subjective states that I have no interpretation of whatsoever.”

In the chapters that follow I will draw on the conception of spirituality as primarily about connectedness. I will also identify when respondents are using spirituality to refer to the beliefs and practices that constitute religion. I do this to stay rooted in the data and also in keeping with my participatory methodologies. This approach will also clarify key questions that are at the center of my inquiry. What types of spiritual connectivity do participants describe? To what extent are these spiritualities important to participants, both in general, and more specifically for their movement involvement and sustainability? How is spirituality connected to ideas of collective identity? Does the direct action climate movement engage or reference spirituality and are they explicit about what the identities they have constructed are inclusive of? For now, I will develop a typology of religion that is present in the talk of the respondents.

**Emergent Religions in the Direct Action Climate Movement**

First, it is important to note that, following the discussion above, I will use the terminology chosen by participants, which will almost always be “spirituality.” That said,

[^47]: He also fits the split religious typology presented later in this chapter.
I will indicate when this language points to the domain of religion, such as in this section where participants speak about and define what beliefs construct the field in which the *connectedness*, as otherwise indicated by the use of the word “spirituality,” occurs.

However, spirituality and religion are often mixed up together when subjects speak both to spiritual experiences of connection, attunement, or resonance at the same time as they speak about what they are connected to, which is to say the religious content.

![Diagram](image)

**FIGURE 3. Types of Religious Tendencies and Earthbound Score**
There were clear patterns in the religious orientations vocalized by the movement participants I interviewed. What emerged is best represented by the diagram in Figure 3. I heard subjects articulating three basic types of religious beliefs. The most common, interestingly and in confirmation of previous research, were beliefs I have labeled *earthbound* following Latour (2017), though I will emphasize repeatedly that this is very much an emergent set of beliefs. This type overlaps, albeit with significant divergences, with aspects of Taylor’s (2010) “dark green religion.” Participants spoke of a felt sense of interconnectedness with the rest of existence or as a kinship. Some even described a feeling of a kind of non-dual identity or a sense of *interbeing*, to use a word from the late Zen teacher Thich Nhat Han. In clarifying this concept and the worldview of non-separateness, as well as the idea that we are always co-emergent with other phenomena, Hanh writes, “You cannot just be yourself alone; you have to inter-be with every other thing” [italics in original] (Hanh 2017:28). In contrast, respondents spoke of their beliefs in dualistic ways, of which there were two types: (1) *materialistic* articulations that lacked a concept or belief in the “sacred” or “spiritual” and which conform to a kind of Western materialistic and scientific rationalism, and (2) articulations that firmly posited the “sacred” or “spiritual” as beyond outside or other than oneself. Importantly, while a few respondents firmly fell within the “materialist” or “sacred as other” types, there were several who spoke of spirituality in both ways (see Table 9). It is for this reason that I

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48 The earthbound score represents the total number of times respondents were coded for discussing spirituality across a variety of codes up to a total of 27. In this sample, those respondents that talked most about spirituality also tended to fit the strongly earthbound religious typology. However, this score is not meant to be predictive, rather it is useful in conceptualizing these identities as existing on a continuum and indicating a “tendency towards” earthbound religious identities as discussed in the text.
have represented this typology as two converging spectrums in Figure 3 that point to a tendency towards an emergent earthbound set of beliefs referred to as spirituality by participants but understood here as referring to the religious aspect of spirituality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Materialistic</th>
<th>Sacred as Other</th>
<th>Split</th>
<th>Moderately Earthbound</th>
<th>Strongly Earthbound</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 9. Distribution of Religious Typologies in Respondent Sample**

*Types of Dualistic Religious Tendencies*

There were two observed sub-types of dualistic religion among respondents. A materialistic type denies or minimizes spirituality as a domain. A sacred as other type positions spirituality as present but “other” than or separate from the material. I coded three participants for talking about both a dualistic type as well as an earthbound type. In this section, I discuss how participants articulated these beliefs and provide a context and contrast for the next, more in-depth section, on the articulations of religious earthbound tendencies by respondents.

Notably, very few comments were coded as exclusively dualistic in the sense of identifying the sacred or spiritual as firmly other (see Table 9). Talking about spirituality as “other” involves making a clear distinction between what are often material objects, including the human body, and what is sacred or spiritual. In discussing this with Kate, I asked whether she thought the frame of reference for connection in their beliefs, God,
was present in a wooden table we were sitting at, she replied, “I don’t think that God is in
this table… I can say that with certainty.” Their spiritual orientation in this sense firmly
creates an exclusive framework and places many objects of spiritual connection out of
bounds. However, she was also a bit muddled in this thinking, as she also said, “I
definitely think that God is in the glory of nature, and I do think that God can be in the air
and is around…I don’t really think of God as a dude with a white beard sitting on a
cloud.” Again, this kind of comment points to the emergent, complex, and at times
contradictory nature of participants’ formulations of spirituality. That said, Kate’s first
quote provides a clear example of a type of spirituality very common in dominant
constructions of Christianity in the West. What is interesting here is the relative absence
of this spiritual type within my sample.

The second type of dualistic spirituality articulated by respondents was more
common, and I have labeled it “materialistic.” Given that this type conforms to aspects of
dominant Western scientific rationalism, I expected this to be more prevalent in the
sample. To understand this worldview let us return for a moment to the respondent-
generated definitions explored above. Morgan shared their view that “Religion is one of
the ways that people are different…and I think religious practices, rituals, ceremonies,
mythologies and the telling of those mythologies and then habitng mythologies, and
science is one of those, are ways of enacting humanity, a particular mode of humanity”
(italics mine). In this sense, the materialistic type denies its religious aspect, in that it
posits its worldview as universal, and it denies the particularity in which it enacts a form
of humanity. In so doing, the value of an individual’s spirituality as cultivating or tending
to this dynamic and ongoing aspect of *enacting* is unnecessary, as the world is ontologically static, closed, or separated.\(^{49}\)

Following this view are the kinds of understandings that I explored briefly above, such as Tyler’s view of spirituality as an “ethical framework.” Complementing this view, Jacob shares that “my spiritual thoughts are limited to just thinking about how other humans would respond and how I wish that other humans would behave.” Some respondents also vocalized more explicitly scientific understandings of spirituality. In response to a discussion about how we should think about origins or ontological concepts, Austin, who had transitioned from the direct action climate movement and fit the materialistic typology, answered, “I think we're here because in the process of natural selection and the interactions of molecules” and went on to say, “I believe in the scientific method for finding facts about the universe.” In a similar vein, Zach was reluctant to ascribe anything beyond “medico-scientific and psychological benefits” to the practice of forest bathing. This practice, which originates in Japan and which has become popular in the West, involves facilitated experiences of intentional and mutual interaction with forest environments. It is my sense that Zach is limiting the positive benefits of this experience to evolutionarily-derived benefits of being in open, natural spaces. As I will explore now, those individuals of earthbound spiritual orientations would approach this practice very differently.

\(^{49}\) It is important to note the presence and possibility within Western scientific disciplines of an ontology that is much more dynamic, open, and interconnected especially at the edges of the fields of physics and biology. However, it is my observation that most popular conceptions still conform to materialistic ways of being. It is unclear whether the “modes of humanity” *enacted* by scientists holding these unorthodox views are different; this would be an interesting subject of study.
Earthbound Religious Tendencies

We will now turn to look at what I am calling earthbound religious tendencies. First, I want to return to the work of Taylor and his concept of “dark green religion.” His assessment, reviewed above, makes for an interesting jumping off point and allows for creating contrasts between his findings and those presented here. Taylor (2010:13) defines dark green religion as a value system that is:

1. based on a felt kinship with the rest of life, often derived from a Darwinian understanding that all forms of life have evolved from a common ancestor and are therefore related;
2. accompanied by feelings of humility and a corresponding critique of human moral superiority, often inspired or reinforced by a science-based cosmology that reveals how tiny human beings are in the universe; and
3. reinforced by metaphysics of interconnection and the idea of interdependence (mutual influence and reciprocal dependence) found in sciences, especially ecology and physics.

As described above, Taylor explores examples from what he calls the “environmentalist milieu,” including radical environmental movements such as Earth First! that are connected to this study, to develop his case of the emergence of this “dark green” system of beliefs. Among the respondents for this study, I found both confirmation of Taylor’s research and also significant divergence. To understand the divergence, I will bring Latour and his work back into the picture. Latour invites the reader to consider a contrast between what he calls “natural religions” and religions of “territorialization” (Latour 2017:181). His essential point is that natural religions, including those guided by science and the notion of “nature” as the ultimate authority or “That-of-Which-We-Are-All-Born”

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50 I am using the word “tendency” to emphasize the emergent and weakly constructed nature of these spiritualities as observed in my sample.
(italics in original) posit nature as fundamentally external, relations as given, and universal (Latour 2017:182). Despite the countercultural aspects of Taylor’s “dark green religion” this is very much present in his concept. Latour contrasts this with his worldviews of “territorialization,” or the “earthbound” as he later names the hypothetical or future beings that inhabit a religion of territorialization. The contrast here is a perspective of being “in the middle of relations that they have to compose one by one,” which is to say “nature” as an external concept makes no sense and cannot be an authority, relations are only understood from our positionality and negotiated within them, and everything is situated rather than universal (Latour 2017:182). This is the fundamental difference of viewpoints grounded in interconnection versus those grounded in interbeing.

In my view, Taylor’s formulation clearly leans towards what Latour would call the natural religions. What then of the spiritualities of the activists I interviewed? In the data, I see some ambiguity in what is happening among movement participants. While they certainly correspond to Taylor’s formulation of “dark green religion” in many ways, there are also points of divergence as well as significant diversity. Below, I present the themes that I developed from the data. While Taylor’s three aspects are found in the data,

51 It is worth noting that Latour also positions dominant forms of monotheistic religions alongside the “natural religion” guided by science and ideologies of nature. He clearly sees a strong affinity between them, ironically denied with the utmost fervor between the two. In a similar way dominant constructs of God simply replace “nature” with “God” as the ultimate authority or “That-of-Which-We-Are-All-Born” (italics in original) and similarly posit God as fundamentally external in which relations are universal and given (Latour 2017:182). While beyond the scope of the discussion here, it is worth noting that there are various mystical tendencies and lineages within the monotheistic traditions, as well as other wisdom traditions such as Buddhism, that would be better understood as grounded in a sense of interbeing or even at times earthbound, something Latour, at least here, either does not see or otherwise declines to comment on.
which I will use as a framework, I will also point to the divergences from this framework as I do so. Overall, I found that the data reflected more of what Latour is referencing and as such have adopted his term, “earthbound.” Table 10 provides an overview of the components, which are now explored in depth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Type</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kinship</td>
<td>View of shared nature and the constant co-creation of our beingness by human and more-than-human entities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthbound</td>
<td>Biocentrism</td>
<td>An orientation to relationality, value, and significance that is not human-centric or hierarchical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interconnection</td>
<td>Experiences and beliefs of being interconnected, or bound together, with people as well as between people and the more-than-human world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agency of the More-Than-Human</td>
<td>Understandings and experiences that afford conscious and intentional action, or agency, beyond the human and, at times, beyond what is normally considered “living”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 10. Overview of Earthbound Religious Type and Components**

*Kinship*

The first of Taylor’s aspects of dark green religion regards kinship, specifically “a felt kinship with the rest of life, often derived from a Darwinian understanding that all forms of life have evolved from a common ancestor and are therefore related” (Taylor
2010:13). Nearly all the participants in my study (17 out of 21) spoke of kinship with “nature,” but often indirectly, and never really in a Darwinian sense. Evolution only came up in one interview (Austin) and was referenced in the context of talking about a type of spirituality not rooted in relations of kinship. That said, other participants talked about ideas of kinship through interconnection and about the shared nature that humans have with other beings (both animate and inanimate). One general articulation of this sense was offered by Ari, a strongly earthbound activist who had transitioned away from the direct action climate movement, in describing how they saw “our body like a microcosm of the planet.”

More specifically, respondents vocalized notions of kinship through a focus on shared agency and souls. With regards to agency, Tyler discussed not only animals, which even science grants some agency too, but also how “plants and mountains…have a degree of agency.” In this, Tyler described noticing human’s shared sense of agency with these other beings. Similarly, Ari talked about how “things are relating and interacting with each other on levels that we’re not aware of all the time,” thus positioning humans within what Morgan goes on to call a “dance” of shared interaction. This metaphor draws out the most radical sense of kinship found in the data which imagined through this interactive process, a constant composition of beingness, or negotiation as Latour would call it, that human enact together through all relations as “the practice that we dance together” which results in “a being that we’re making together,” as Morgan phrased it. These viewpoints nicely mirror a recognizing of the “contaminated” nature of life that Anna Tsing offers in conceptualizing the fundamental reality of “multispecies
entanglements that make life across the earth,” in which agency is assigned as a fundamental property of all life (Tsing et al., 2017:M2). Finally, from a different perspective, Tyler talked about a shared soul framework in which all “consciousness-bearing organisms [including] inanimate organisms” have a spirit or soul that can “learn and grow.”

These examples point to a kind of kinship between humans and the more-than-human world imagined not so much through scientific understandings and notions of shared evolution, but rather through sharing a similar way of being. While these quotes certainly point to the importance of a type of kinship, it is one quite different than what Taylor finds in his research. Additionally, several subjects wrestled with what it means to enact these notions of kinship. Ashley reflected that “in theory, yes, [I believe] in kinship with all living beings [but] in reality I barely have a connection with this land base.” This comment reveals the limits of the value-based or intellectual orientation of Taylor’s framework. These values and ideas beg the question of how they transform human ways of living, and to Latour’s point, what kinds of beings humans want to become. Or put another way, this comment raises important questions about the experiential aspects of kinship with the more-than-human world versus more limited and conceptual beliefs.

Ashley also discussed a variety of ceremonies and rituals that she practiced to attempt to connect with the spirits of the land they lived on and build relationships, but also wrestled deeply with their settler identity: “my ancestral memory is of the fucking rolling hills of Ireland and mountains of Italy; will I ever be able to actually feel what is connection with this land base?” As discussed in Chapter 4, the dynamics related to identity and
Indigeneity are important to consider. These data suggest that such beliefs are as much aspirational, in the sense that they are largely conceptual, as they are experiential reflections of new ways of being. Chapters 6 and 8 will build further on what these beliefs may be building towards as well as their relevance for the Anthropocene and Chapter 7 will look at what is impeding movement spaces working explicitly in that development.

**Biocentrism**

The second aspect of Taylor’s framework includes the notion of biocentrism, which he describes as “accompanied by feelings of humility and a corresponding critique of human moral superiority, often inspired or reinforced by a science-based cosmology that reveals how tiny human beings are in the universe” (Taylor 2010:13). I found a similar pattern of overlap and divergence in the interviews as for the previous theme. While participants did speak of a critique of human moral superiority and generally placed all beings on a level playing field, sometimes explicitly by invoking the philosophical stance of biocentrism, they did not do so through referencing a science-based cosmology, nor was the “tinyness” of humans ever invoked. Subjects also did this less frequently, with only seven participants coded for discussing biocentrism. In their discussions of biocentrism, subjects shared their understanding of the concept as well as speaking about empathy and relationality.

Two subjects offered fairly classical definitions of biocentrism with Ari sharing, “I’m a biocentrist, I believe everything has its own value that’s not related to how we utilize it,” and Kate saying that “all things in the world have value and significance
unrelated to me.” Taking a bit of a different angle into this theme, Jessica spoke of “radically expanding the circle of empathy,” and how she has “expanded that empathy towards [oceans]” and “rocks and plants.” Implicit in this formulation is that all beings, animate and inanimate, are deserving of empathy and thus operate on a similar moral plane. Finally, participants spoke about biocentrism in relational ways, with Elizabeth speaking about a fundamental “non-separateness” and Tyler invoking the shared soul framework shared above, both of which make human moral superiority nonsensical. Lastly, Morgan spoke of how they are “cultivating a way of doing it that's not purely about taking abstractions and imposing them on a blanked out flat ground, a bit of dirt, but instead in a dynamic process in which the richness of my life is part and parcel, is co-dependent with the richness of the relations around me.” Again, such a relational orientation neutralizes notions of moral hierarchies, but interestingly, it does so in a way that has nothing to do with the “tinyness” of humans in the context of Taylor’s framework. I would argue that such richly situated and relational understandings of identity and place negate the tendency to view some aspects of the universe as “big” while others as “small” or “tiny.” When we are *woven* in this deep, relational way, such a Latour points to, humans are as much part of any “bigness” as they are “small” in relation to the scale and scope of the universe.

*Interconnection*

Interconnectedness was the part of Taylor’s framework most discussed by the respondents; a total of 18 subjects spoke to this aspect. In Taylor’s formulation he talks about how kinship and biocentrism are “reinforced by metaphysics of interconnection
and the idea of interdependence (mutual influence and reciprocal dependence) found in sciences, especially ecology and physics” (Taylor 2010:13). Again, I found this richly represented in the data, though not in the way Taylor finds in his research. Respondents rarely mentioned the sciences as they spoke repeatedly and in various ways about felt senses of interconnection. Undoubtedly, they are in the background for most participants at some level, but they are not invoked as the cause or source of their beliefs. Participants spoke of interconnection as a general belief, a felt sense of intimacy or love, and as a sense of connecting to something bigger than oneself such as represented in the quotes below. Additionally, respondents used the term to refer to both interconnection between people as well as between people and the Earth, or the more-than-human world.

Many subjects spoke about interconnectedness as a core belief. They used framing such as “non-separateness,” “interconnectedness,” “interdependence,” or “web that binds all things together.” Many respondents utilized a framing of connectedness that was explicitly spiritual and they put a high degree of emphasis or centrality on interconnectedness in our conversations. Some participants spoke about their felt sense, or the intimacy they experienced, with interconnection, such as Zach who shared how they “enjoy the feelings of being connected to the Earth” including experiences of “love” and “intimacy.” Sarah spoke about the bigness of “feeling entirely connected to people and entirely connected to nature” and how this feeling was “slightly different than just feeling, oh, wow, I really love this one person in this moment, it feels bigger than that.” Explicitly noting the felt sense of interconnectedness, Matthew shared that “it’s not just some intellectual construct…I feel like I am part of, or we’re all part of, the fabric of
things.” Connecting this experience of interconnectedness to politics and climate change, Megan, a moderately earthbound organizer active with 350 PDX, described, through a framework of love, how “in a really deep way, like deeper than capitalism being the root of the problem, it’s that people lacking love are [the] roots [of the problem] below that in the deepest sense…I think about a greater universe being something about being grounded and rooted in love and how that has the power to change the situation that we’re in.”

Participants also described a felt sense of spiritual connectedness with regards to something bigger than oneself, including activism, such as Chris, a moderately earthbound activist who had transitioned away from the direct action climate movement, who stated that “it connects you to an idea that you are fighting for or connects you to a struggle that you may not even believe you'll see achieved in your lifetime.” Tyler described a feeling that “when you’re interconnected with everything else, you certainly are connected to something larger than yourself.” In a final example involving a felt sense of wovenness with everything, Ari shared that they “feel and believe that myself and everyone else is interconnected with not just all of life, but with everything around us,” including inanimate objects, and that we “cannot separate our experiences from the experiences around us regardless of how hard we try.” In this last example, as well as in aspects of the previous quotes, “interconnectedness” is sometimes articulated as a sense of “interbeing” and sometimes it remains more rooted in a subject-to-object connection.
The agency of the more-than-human

Eight participants talked about their beliefs and understandings about the possibility of agency beyond the human. This category moves beyond Taylor’s concept of dark green religion entirely but could be included within aspects of his religious typology (see Table 1). What I heard subjects talking about here went beyond the agency that might typically be offered to the non-human world within dominant cultural frameworks. Some subjects spoke of a conscious, intentional interaction of various beings (both animate and inanimate) with humans and other beings. An illustrative and powerful example is when Rachel shared a story of being at an Earth First! organizers gathering in the desert in a place associated with the Apache leader Cochise’s resistance to the intrusions and abuses of white settlers. She shared that:

I was just aware of this history and aware that we’re a bunch of white punks sitting around the campfire. It was the end of the day so everyone was just chilling. And I just silently checked in with the land and the ancestors of that place, just to ask permission to be there and to say like, hey, we’re here, this is why we’re here, this is what we’re doing and just, yes, try to check in. And it started pouring down rain immediately, very…just like a deluge. And it’s the desert so it doesn’t really rain there usually. And it stopped after a few seconds. But it just felt like a really strong response to my question. Yes. And…those are just examples of confirming that there are more ways of connecting and communicating than our standard Western brain would have us believe.

Tyler also shares his belief that “plants and mountains…have a degree of agency,” which Ari adds to in asserting their beliefs that life is “relating and interacting with each other on levels that we're not aware of all the time” in a way that I understand as infused with a deep sense of agency.

Connected to this conversation is an example Morgan offers of a kind of agency beyond what we might normally consider beings such as animals or, at a stretch, plants.
Morgan describes how in “offering to the land, I'm cultivating the soil but I'm doing that by listening to the land and what it needs and we're giving and taking to each other.” In other words, fundamental to Morgan’s offerings to the land is a reciprocity of engagement that shapes, and is shaped by, the very nature of that offering. This formulation not only offers agency to the more-than-human world, but it fundamentally posits agency as an emergent property of the interactional nature of being, rather than as an attribute that some might have but which others lack. A final example illustrates how some subjects offered agency to the more-than-human by ascribing to it the very capacities that dominant human cultures posit as underlying solely human agency. Sarah offered that she see trees as “beings” with an “extraordinary amount of intelligence” and even “wisdom.”

Constructing Collective Identities

Before moving further, it is important to dwell on the construction of collective identities. As we explored above, the concept of spirituality is firmly rooted in a sense of interconnectedness by participants. In that collective identity is about the construction of identities of shared connectedness or belonging, spirituality is very much about collective identity. In Fominaya’s (2010:394) review of the collective identity literature, she shares an exemplar from Snow of the more common representation of the concept in its categorization as something “generated and created between individuals” and that:

discussions of the concept invariably suggest that its essence resides in a shared sense of “one-ness” or “we-ness” anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in relation or contrast to one more actual or imagined sets of others. Embedded within the
shared sense of we is a corresponding sense of collective agency...Thus, it can be argued that collective identity is constituted by a shared and interactive sense of “we-ness” and collective agency (Snow, 2001 as cited in Fominaya, 2010:394)

Spiritual identities in this context are very much a particular composition of ”we-ness.” They situate the individual as being interconnected or woven with other beings or aspects of perceived reality. In emphasizing construction, I am pointing to the specific nature of the collectivity, or the “we-ness” being composed. Additionally, spiritual identities do some of the heavy lifting of collective identity in positing the situated emergence of interests rather than their given nature and helping us understand how motivations arise without reference to material incentives (Polletta et al. 2001:284). It is easy to imagine how some of the ideas discussed thus far, such as kinship, would provide a deep motivation to activists for engaging and sustaining their work. In that spirituality and religion are universally present frameworks for the development of the ontological worldviews that shape the possibilities of collective identities, it is again striking how absent they are from the social movements literature.

A few questions arise here: What do respondents feel they are interconnected with? In other words, how is interconnection, as a collective identity, constructed? In the following section I will explore participants’ responses regarding their spiritual experiences. Within the context of what I have assembled thus far, these are the data that best speak to both which type of interconnection participants are experiencing as well as the primary focus of those experiences of interconnection. There are three themes of experiences that I will detail: those focused on constructions of people, those focused on constructions of people with the more-than-human world, and those which illustrate a
disolution of any notion that might distinguish between people or a more-than-human world and focus on collectivity itself as the ground of reality.

Spirituality is a rich, and understudied, arena in which collective identity formation is occurring. What is interesting about the respondents’ interviews is the extent to which the *collectivity* of their spiritual identities is simultaneously active and latent. In the sense that they are active, respondents are actively constructing spiritual identities that create collectives of various sorts with profound meaning for their movement participation and engagement, such as I will explore in Chapter 6. In the sense that spiritual identities are latent, they are paradoxically not discussed or engaged between movement participants or explicitly within movement spaces, explored in detail in Chapter 7. For now, I will turn to the spiritual experiences described by subjects, which will help illustrate the different types of collective identities being constructed by climate movement participants.

*Spiritual Experiences*

It is now possible to explore the ways in which a spirituality of connectedness, which contributes to the construction of collective identities, arises in relation to the religious beliefs explored above. The spiritual experiences shared by participants give us a sense of how these beliefs play out in practice, both generally and specifically in a movement context. In my analysis of the data, I noticed three ways in which interconnection constructs collective identities through experiences, listed here from most common to least common: (1) a collective of people together in struggle, (2) a collective
of people together with the more-than-human world, and (3) a collective emptied\textsuperscript{52} of any fixed or separate sense of identity at all. Within these three identities I noticed all four beliefs discussed above. However, they never explicitly mention kinship and biocentrism. They are, at best, considered implicit and a subtype of felt experiences of interconnection. It does seem that spiritual experiences of interconnection and reciprocal interactions with more-than-human agents (both animate and inanimate) were the predominant type of experience among participants.

The primary type of spiritual experience respondents shared with me involved experiences of individuals in movement spaces viscerally feeling part of an interconnected collective. I will focus on three examples: singing, actions, and connecting to lineages of struggles across time. Six participants flagged the practice of singing in meetings and at actions as being both spiritual and essential in the experience of feeling interconnected not just with a given group of people, but with people as a movement with power to change reality. It is worth noting that all six of these participants were in some way connected to the youth organization the Sunrise Movement, where singing was a cultural practice that was brought into larger movement spaces (e.g., The Jordan Cove rally at the Oregon State Capitol on November 2nd, 2019).\textsuperscript{53} I also observed singing at several meetings and actions, including as facilitated by subjects I interviewed. Sarah described singing as transforming her ego and facilitating the construction of a collective

\textsuperscript{52} At the time of this writing, I happen to be engaged in a deeper personal study and practice of Buddhism and as such Buddhist concepts, which I draw on here in invoking the conceptual framework of sunyata or emptiness, are both accessible and resonant to me.

\textsuperscript{53} In a significant victory for climate movements, the Jordan Cove LNG terminal was defeated and canceled in 2021 after prolonged movement pressure (Anchondo et al. 2021).
within a group: “I’ve transformed a bit from being and feeling more individualistic [to]
being more collective.” Emily talked about singing as transcendence and allowing
participants to move past their individual drama, identity, and conflicts and have an
embodied experience together that connects them. Related to this, Megan talked about the
inherent vulnerability of singing and how it opens up individuals and allows for a deeper,
more heartfelt connection: “singing I think opens up us to be more vulnerable and more
human with each other.” She described the power of singing at the rally against the
Jordan Cove Natural Gas Terminal in the fall of 2019, which I observed. After many
speeches the crowd went inside and a small group started a sit-in to demand an audience
with Kate Brown, the then-Governor of Oregon. As the group was beginning their act of
civil disobedience the halls of the Capitol filled with singing, “We have got the power,
it’s in the hands of us all.” I noted at the time the visceral sense and energy this created in
bringing people together, but also imbuing the crowd with a felt sense of collective
agency and power. This became especially potent as the larger crowd came to understand
that a sit-in was happening in the anteroom of the Governor’s office. While less salient
for Amanda, a moderately earthbound organizer active with Sunrise PDX, she described
the importance of singing at large actions as well and how it “feels like the mass is
moving as one” and how singing both honors individuality while also allowing
individuals to join together.

I also observed singing during meetings I facilitated for several groups and noted
the way in which it helped weave the group together and create the kind of “we-ness” that
is one aspect of collective identity. Another type of “we-ness” was experienced in actions
and in the constructions of a collective identity as a movement. Chris discussed how in his activism he had come to have spiritual experiences that reified his “belief in the power of people as a collective to transform the social world.” Additionally, Sarah describes the way in which coming together in movement spaces for “as selfless reasons as we can get while also having egos, feels like this harnessing of power, of people power that I’ve never experienced in any other way.” She goes on to talk about the youth climate strike on September 20th, 2019, which I observed, and how the experience of the crowd gathered gave her a sense of collective power and “invincibility that’s connected to this energy or this larger pattern that is connecting us all.” Following these action examples, Matthew discussed how in direct action work he felt “an intense love and community” that was unlike anything he felt before and profoundly spiritual for him. Tyler adds to this in describing how participating in direct action wakes us up to our power to collectively transform reality in that it “feels much more like you’re proactively shaping the world, and doing that with friends and fellow activists, sort of immediately strengthens the connection between you.” Finally, Rachel recounts how at the protests in Seattle against the World Trade Organization in 1999 there was a sense of “shared power [of being] on the right side of history” and a felt sense of winning against the “monolith.”

What has been described thus far illustrates respondents experiencing a collective identity in clear ways; however, the framing of it as spiritual by participants is something that is new for the collective identity literature. I will return to this in Chapter 8 in my discussion of the overall findings of this research. The last example within this type involved constructing identities across time and connecting to historical lineages of
struggle. Nick shared an experience from college in which he was present at a gathering of First Nations water protectors near Vancouver, BC in which an elder, along with her daughter, sang the “Women Warrior’s Song” as part of calling attention to their opposition to a proposed liquefied natural gas terminal. There in the midst of the valley, looking out upon the Salish Sea, he had an experience of connecting to the “inter-generational aspect to it, the feeling of being in a long, long, long struggle” in a powerful and spiritual way. Joshua described a series of powerful encounters with his ancestors as part of preparing to directly impede the flow of fossil fuels and thus confronting the prospect of long prison time. While he was exercising, his ancestors began to appear to him and offered a message of “integration and belonging” and that “whatever happened in your life and however far your family wandered away from the truth and the light, you are somebody and you do come from somewhere and there’s power in where you come from.” He described becoming experientially connected to his own ancestral experience of Earth-based resistance and feeling seen by his ancestors for his own participation in it. He described the impact of this experience as “hugely meaningful” and completely changing his identity and how he saw himself as well as directly supporting his preparation for his actions.

These last two examples begin to get towards the edge of the traditional literature on collective identity and its sense of what a collective identity means in a movement context. Beyond the framing of spirituality, these experiences point to a sense of interconnection across time and to both blood and non-blood ancestral lineages of struggle, in which participants come to experience themselves as part of and as a
continuation of those lineages. Further pushing the boundaries of this literature is the way in which participants described how their spiritual experiences not only left them with a deep sense of interconnection with people but also constructed their identities with the more-than-human world. An example that helps bridge between the previous content and this one involves a conversion story told by Jessica. She described being up on the scaffolding blockading the rail lines at the Break Free action at the Anacortes Refinery in Washington in 2016:

So people were sitting up on scaffolding that we had built that day. People were singing together. People were sharing their food. And the people were embracing newcomers, including myself. I felt really invited into a new community. And it was clear to me that just everyone was invited there…And it was just a gorgeous landscape. There were hundreds of us as far as your eyes could see there were tents. And it felt for once like something that I had known as an anxiety, but probably since from that moment I didn’t know how big of an anxiety it was; it was physical, and we’re all there doing something about it…So we were looking out at this marshland and the train tracks led to an oil refinery. And earlier that day we had walked to an Indigenous community who have always been stewards. And then in short we sang with them, we all got headaches from the fumes, but out there on the tracks the air was clean and bright and beautiful. And just being able to sleep outside made me feel so much a part of that in a way that you don’t always feel in a house.

The culmination of this experience for her, for which she were later arrested along with 51 other people, and in which they felt aligned with “purpose” and “nature,” was a sense of it being a marker in her life and the moment when they became an “activist.” The second example comes from my observations of an action against the Transmountain Pipeline expansion (now under construction) in February of 2020 at the Port of Vancouver, Washington. A Native man was invited to speak and he had the group, perhaps a hundred or so people, clap their hands in the Salish way with the back of the hand into an open palm and sing as a message and a prayer from here to the waters up
north. He then sang the Change Maker, which is a Chinookan song that had been given back to the Chinookan people by Coast Salish people, and which I have observed sung elsewhere. Critical here was the impact of drawing the crowd together as a collective, but also in constructing that collective with the waters and land around the Transmountain pipeline. I observed a sense of meaning and connectivity between myself, the participants, and the land itself.

A final bridging example involved the observation of an exercise led by a movement participant at a meeting I facilitated. In that exercise, she led a guided meditation\(^{54}\) in which, after a breath together, participants were invited to imagine roots growing out of their feet, through the floor of the building and into the soil and the very Earth, connecting us and creating a conduit for a flow of energy. It was my sense that this exercise grounded the group, created an experience of connectivity between them, and included the Earth in the identity being constructed and experienced. In a later interview, Nick, who was present during this meeting, without prompting, shared how this experience had been “beautiful.” The remaining examples involve groups that have already constructed a collective identity in some way integrating the more-than-human world. One is the previously shared story about the communication between Rachel and the rain at the Earth First! gathering (see page 117). This respondent also described an experience at an action in Chicago in which she was in a blockade locked together with other activists against carbon trading in which she experienced a felt “connection with the sky.” Joshua talks about the palpable power he experienced at Standing Rock and how it

\(^{54}\) To be transparent, I had no prior knowledge of this exercise, nor did I give any direction.
felt like “something was waking up in the land, in the people [and that] there was just something that felt undeniably more than the sum of its parts.”

From a more individualistic standpoint, or that of an individual constructing their identity with the more-than-human world, Ari described a sense of being “viscerally connected” and experiencing “interspecies communication” between forests they were protecting and themselves. They described this as manifesting in a sensation of “billions of little lines of subtle tingling everywhere radiating outward in.” And finally, two participants, who were part of the group Forests for Climate Resilience, independently shared a story about hearing the song of a wolf. This occurred at the end of a tiring action camp, held in a forested area targeted for logging in the Mt. Hood National Forest near Portland, Oregon. At the time, wolves had just been seen for the first time in 100 years in the Mt. Hood National Forest. Morgan describes how after the group, who were assembled at a campfire, heard the sound, they all quieted and listened for some 6 or 7 minutes to the wolf song and that there was this sense that “right now, in this moment in which you are singing and we're paying attention, right now we're woven.” Alex, a moderately earthbound organizer active in Forests for Climate Resilience, shared how the group’s experience of the wolf call was experienced as “affirming” their actions and work, and of being seen by the wolf in what they were doing. Both participants expressed a sense of experiencing the wolves singing as communication with them and as both an invitation and a deepening of a connection between the activists and the wolves, or more broadly the more-than-human world. They were, in the framework I have been using,
becoming constructed together in their beingness; the subjects shared that this story remained alive and salient in their group far beyond the action camp.

The final category involves those experiences that compose a collectivity that is empty of individuality. This example goes firmly outside of the bounds of the collective identity and social movement literature, though very much within the bounds of spiritual literature. These ideas and experiences are very common in the Buddhist and mystical Christian traditions with which I am familiar. In our interview, Joshua shared two powerful stories of his experiences with animals as a child. First, he described how when he was eight years old, he saw a rattlesnake eat a rodent in the desert and how “it felt like everything in the world was completely redefined and I felt exactly that subjective thing where I felt simultaneously the snake, myself and the thing getting eaten.” Then later, after becoming fascinated by ravens, he described following a raven around in the woods until “[I] looked a raven in the eye while it was looking at me, and I had this real sense of everything I had considered the world up to that point, the whole environmentalist thing was actually this very small subset of things that humans had made and the world itself was this vast thing that we were [a part of].” Here we see profound exchanges between the individual and animals in which, moving beyond a subject-subject construction, they do not experience separateness from that which is perceived and as such prior, confined notions, of individuality are shattered.

Finally, Ari shared an experience with taking psychedelics, in which they found themselves in a small creek about thigh deep, and suddenly “I was having this experience where I was having the sensation of what felt like I could feel all of myself…And I felt
like I could feel all those cells interacting with the water and that experience left me really questioning how I defined my own sense of identity.” Similarly, Tyler, also in an experience with psychedelics, shared how he watched the layers of his consciousness get “peeled off until I got down to the center, which was actually a ‘void’” which left him feeling that “our concept that we’re separate identities is kind of an illusion that we all buy into.” He remarked that it was this experience that left them feeling compelled to restart his activism after a long hiatus having previously being involved in forest defense work. He also remarked about how this, and related experiences, provided the experiential basis for his related religious beliefs. And while Ari and Joshua were less explicit about the activist implications of these experiences, it was my sense that they were among the most meaningful experiences of their lives and clearly provided not only a foundation for their religious beliefs, but also their motivation to engage in activism on behalf of life. Over the years, and especially as I have conducted this research, I am struck by the striking absence of the spiritual and social movement literatures speaking to each other. There is so much individual, behavioral, and collective change that occurs when human identities and ontologies are deeply shifted. In many ways, facilitating contact with an experience of belonging to, or arising from, a collective identity beyond the self is the very goal of wisdom traditions. These last examples mirror the experience of emptiness or sunyata in the Buddhist tradition or kenosis in a mystical Christian framework. In my view, wisdom traditions and religions, at least in their mystical forms, are profoundly oriented to radical social change and deserve deeper engagement by social movement scholars and participants.
Discussion

Previously I established a framework for understanding the concepts of religion and spirituality. The respondents shared their religious beliefs and their spiritual experiences, which were a felt sense of connectedness or resonance with these beliefs. These examples connect to a variety of literatures relevant to this research. Regarding Taylor’s (2009) work we see both affirmation of his conception of dark green religion amongst these climate movement participants as well as data that pushes at the edges of and well beyond his ideas. Latour’s (2017) concept of territorial or earthbound and natural religions help to contextualize what one is looking at and see where it might be going. But which direction are these beliefs going? Are they a reification, valuable though that might be, of natural religions? Or do they point toward fundamental changes in ontology and ways of being within a Western context, such as envisioned in the concept of the earthbound? And what agency, awareness, and intentionality do movement participants have of these shifts in identity? As shared in the grounding context for this research, it is my sense that the Anthropocene invites reflection on the potentially fatal consequences of dominant ways of being, which are themselves products of settler colonial ontology, and makes an urgent appeal for the exploration of alternatives.

In my interpretation of the data, I see the respondents offering a substantive challenge to dominant beliefs. However, this challenge is underdeveloped and is not universally shared across respondents, or presumably among participants in the movement they are connected to. As an example, interconnection arose frequently both in
the definitions and as an essential aspect of religious belief and spirituality identified by participants. What is the nature of the interconnection they describe? In my view, it is variable. Figures 4 through 6 illustrate three ways of conceptualizing the type of interconnection articulated by the movement participants interviewed in this study.

FIGURE 4. A Model of Weak Interconnection

First is what I will call a sense of “weak interconnection” in which the individual sees their interconnection, as a subject, with a great many objects (see Figure 4). Thus, one might feel like they are connected to others, and substantively shift away from a hyperindividualistic stance, but do so without conferring onto the more-than-human that which Western thinking tends to reserve for humans alone. A second type that I identified from the data, and which I see mostly commonly articulated among respondents, is what I will call “strong interconnection” (see Figure 5). In this framework, not only does an individual see themselves within a field of connections, but they also see the agency or
subjectivity of the other nodes in those connections that are shaped by them and, crucially, *always shaping them as well*. An example of this framework comes in the experiences shared above related to singing, the story of the wolf song, and being connected to ancestral lineages of struggle, among others. This model of interconnection corresponds to the two constructions of collective identity explored through spiritual experiences involving collectives of people and collectives of people together with the more-than-human world. Finally, the third type is what I will call, drawing on a concept from the late Zen teacher Thicht Nhat Hahn, “interbeing” (see Figure 6). In this framework, not only does the individual in question recognize that they exist interconnected with many other subjects, they also recognize that there is no individuality to speak of. Rather, they have come to appreciate the sense that what they experience as individuality can only be understood as an emergent property within a field of subjectivities and as such is always situated, conditional, and relational. This model corresponds to the third type of collective identity explored above which involves a collective emptied of any fixed sense of identity at all. This is exemplified by Morgan’s quotes that have been shared as well as by the final spiritual experiences shared in the prior section. The experience of “strong interconnection” is quite the shift in perspective and worldview relative to the dominant culture and certainly moves towards an earthbound religious orientation. However, in my view the fullest expression of Latour’s concept describes a people who share a collective identity and ontology that is something more like the notion of interbeing, and specifically the situational, contextualized
interbeing that manifests in people’s unique relations to the land, or territory as he calls it, that is consciously inhabited.

FIGURE 5. A Model of Strong Interconnection

Is this happening in the direct action climate movement? In my view, this is a very consequential question. In this context, Melucci (1995:50-51) emphasizes the conscious nature of collective identity construction in his observation that:

For recent social movements, particularly those centered on cultural issues, collective identity is becoming a product of conscious action and eloquent self reflection more than a set of given or “structural” characteristics. The collective actor tends to construct its coherence and recognize itself within the limits set by the environment and social relations.

I want to return to Morgan, whom I think exemplifies this conscious construction of collective identity in the prayer they opened our interview with:
And to the spirits of this land, this particular land, this place right here, the trees here and the birds and the salamanders and the microbes in the soil and the air. This is the place that grows me and I want to just, as we begin this discussion, just to bring myself fully present to being an expression of this land. (italics added)

Later in the interview they went on to talk explicitly about composing humans together as part of the more-than-human world as movement work:

Human practice over many centuries, and amplified recently, has been a great severing, a great making of as much of a distance as we can, and it's been functional. We've created this divide between the ways of almost all of the rest of life and what animates us. But it's very strange, this thing...So the foundation of my spiritual and religious practice is to notice that this has happened, to refuse it, in other words to consciously live out of the ways of reproduction that makes that and that makes us in that, and to live into a different mode of reproduction which is a different form of being alive. And this other form of being alive is much more... Different parts of it are interwoven with each other, the distinctions between things are not hard and fast, and therefore there's a cultivation of indeterminacy. Indeterminacy is not something of weakness but of actual amplification and power.

Here the respondent provides a clear articulation of a kind of earthbound collective identity oriented towards the sort of interbeing as I have discussed it in this section. It seems that some movement participants clearly have this woven as a foundation for everything that they do. However, a critical question remains: When and to what extent does this transformational collective identity work explicitly show up in movement spaces? Clearly this is happening, at least in an emergent way, among a significant portion of the activists I spoke to. However, I only rarely heard from interviewees that this was an explicit and formal conversation and identified body of work. The rarity of intentionally integrating spiritual and collective identity transformations into movement work is a paradox. The spiritual experiences shared by respondents clearly point to the importance of spirituality and novel forms of collective identity in the direct action
climate movement. Jessica, in a rare example of bringing explicit about this, talked about the inherently “spiritual” aspect of people “transforming themselves” through the felt interconnection that is taking action together, especially contentious action, and about how she worked with fellow organizers to ask, “How can we make people feel that, because that’s the life of the thing, and that’s

![Field of Entangled Subjectivities](image)

FIGURE 6. A Model of Interbeing

what keeps people coming back?” As we will see in Chapter 7, respondents cite spirituality as being very important to them, yet it is paradoxically almost universally recognized as being largely absent from movement spaces.
While experiences and practices of collective identity construction are present for respondents, it is also clear that they are struggling to translate their beliefs or ideas into experience. Presumably this includes translating them into movement practice. For example, Nick, in talking about the Potawatomi scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer’s ability to see intelligence in rocks and other so-called inanimate beings (at least within dominant cultural conceptualizations), shares his desire to believe that, but also his inability to grasp that idea fully. Another example comes from Sarah, in describing how she struggles with integrating the visual patterns of interconnection she observes, as an artist, throughout the more-than-human world: “I’m in that process of being like, how do we learn, what is this pattern?” In both comments, I see a recognition of new worldviews and possibilities of how to construct collective identities as humans, but simultaneously a struggle to fully integrate these new ideas at the practical level, including within movement work.

In conclusion, most respondents I interviewed were explicit that spirituality is very important. They were also remarkably consistent in their understandings of spirituality. As I explored above, spirituality fundamentally referred to a sense of interconnection that involved constructing oneself with other objects, other subjectivities, or in recognizing the intrinsically woven nature of subjectivity itself. And, although they rarely used this language themselves, their responses suggested certain religious orientations. While dualistic and materialistic orientations were present, those trending toward the “earthbound” were more common and included beliefs around kinship, biocentrism, interconnection, and the agency of the more-than-human. These beliefs
confirmed in some ways what Taylor (2009) developed in his work on “dark green religion,” but they also pointed to important tensions and places where they went beyond his framework. It is my sense that the work of Latour (2017) in his conception of a religious orientation of the “earthbound” provides a good sense of the emergent nature of much of the religious orientations and spiritualities of these activists. And while Latour is the focus here, I want to acknowledge the resonance I see in his theorization with what is being developed by Anna Tsing, Isabelle Stengers, Donna Haraway, and others as covered in the literature review above.

For now, I will turn to fully exploring how and why spirituality is important for movement practice and participation. This will include a discussion of how spirituality is relevant and supportive to movements addressing climate change in the Anthropocene. Following this, in Chapter 7 the paradox introduced in this chapter will be unpacked: Why, if spirituality is identified by participants as so important, is it not more present in the movement spaces my subjects inhabited? And what insight do they have into why it is absent? Before we get to these questions, it is helpful to understand how respondents viewed and experienced the sustaining quality of being constructed within collective identities as well as the role of spiritual practices in supporting their activism.
CHAPTER 6
SPIRITUALITY AND SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

When we talked about experiences of being fully connected to a larger group
Jessica described it as being “the life of the thing, and that’s what keeps people coming
back…creating that moment, that feeling full of potential.” What she is talking about here
is the moment when an individual becomes part of a collective identity and the power of
it, in the moment, and in sustaining their engagement over time. She also discussed how,
“that experience can only be described as spiritual because it’s bigger than themselves
and it’s transforming themselves.” Clearly, she understood this in explicitly spiritual
terms and went on to say, “It’s like an act of devotion, an act of prayer in a sense.” In
what follows, I will draw out the experiences, shared with me by respondents, of feeling
connected to, or a part of, collective identities in this movement. I will share and define
the concept of “attunement” to help understand the process by which respondents
experienced being part of a given “we-ness.” Both collective identities involving people
together in struggle and those that include the more-than-human world will be explored.
In either case, being subsumed in these larger identities was described as supportive and
sustaining for continued participation. Interestingly, I could find no differences between
those still active and those that had transitioned, a finding that will be explored further.
Finally, I will present several themes that share specific movement practices that helped
to ground, integrate, or process some of the intense emotional dynamics that arise from
the activism of the participants I spoke with.
Identity Attunement

In discussing the sustaining impact, both actual and potential, of spiritual experiences of being part of collective identities I will utilize a term used by several respondents: “attunement.” Several respondents independently utilized this word to describe the process of becoming part of these identities and the role of spirituality in developing, deepening, or creating that experience. This linguistic decision continues to keep my analysis close to the talk of the respondents. Morgan described the role of this process in discussing the importance of cultivating “an ongoing attunement and awareness of the ways in which we are being affected by the places that we’re inside, as well as that we care about and are fighting with” (italics added). In a similar sentiment, Chris discussed how they thought of this process as a kind of “re-grounding, attunement, and as I like to think of it, [a] remolding of our outlook on ourselves and the world [that] I think is a crucial element when it comes to all of us [giving] all that it takes” (italics added). This talk of attunement illustrates that at least some respondents were consciously aware of the process of collective identity formation and were reflective about the “negotiated process in which the ‘we’ involved in collective action is elaborated and given meaning” (Gamson 1991:40). At the level of agency, notice the explicit reference in the process of attunement to “fighting” or giving “all that it takes.”

The themes discussed in this section appeared 63 times across 17 respondent interviews, as well as two meetings and three of the actions for which I was a participant.
observer.\textsuperscript{55} Having established the collective identity constructions in Chapter 5, I can now provide details of how participants described being attuned to these identities before then discussing how these dynamics sustained respondents’ participation in the climate direct action movement. With regard to the collective identity literature, my concept of attunement also captures Snow’s (2001) latter two types of needed “identity work,” identity extension (expansion of personal identities), and identity transformation (dramatic shifts in identity). At the end of this chapter, I will return to the relationship between my findings and the collective identity literature.

\textit{Constructing People Together in Movements}

Participants described numerous ways in which they experienced being part of a collective identity of people, and specifically as the climate movement or as people in struggle. They also explicitly identified this as spiritual. I want to flag here that, following my conversation in Chapter 5, I will use “spiritual” as a kind of catch-all term for both its religious and spiritual dimensions, following its usage by participants. Most of the time this term accurately references the latter (spiritual) dimension, but the reader should be aware that participants are also, sometimes, speaking of religion. Additionally, the idea of movement participants attuned to a collective identity of people in struggle is, of course, the bread and butter of collective identity studies in social movements. What is

\textsuperscript{55} In the code book, the codes referenced here are “sustaining,” “allowing and moving,” and “transforming.” I changed the wording to reference the content in these codes through the writing process in order to make it more clear and accessible to the reader.
additive in what I am discussing here is participants’ explicit framing of this process as spiritual and the expansion of collective identities beyond people.

How did participants come to feel attuned to collective identities of people in struggle? I noted a variety of instances across my interviews and field work in which I heard about or observed practices that sought to create this very kind of attunement. An illustrative example came from Jessica, whose quotations started this chapter. She talked about this felt experience of attunement in the context of an idealized movement action:

So people march down together…and I march down [and] we’re in front of a bank or a municipal building, or something. And they are all having an experience of doing something really big together. And it makes their heart beat faster. And it makes them like each other more. And it makes them wonder why they’re doing this. And then therefore remember why they’re doing it, which is children and animals and love. And that experience can only be described as spiritual because it’s bigger than themselves and it’s transforming themselves. It’s like an act of devotion, an act of prayer in a sense.

Related to this, Chris stated that, “spirituality [is] this reminder that we are part of a shared story of oppression and therefore a part of a shared story of fighting it,” as well as how “my experiences are connected to lots of people's experiences and through the shared oppression that we can feel.” In my participant observation, I witnessed a variety of examples of this in practice. During the action against the Jordan Cove Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) terminal at the Oregon Capitol in 2019, one of the speakers invited everyone to notice one another, break into pairs, share the answers to questions about why they were here and what they were grateful for. I observed that it was a moment in which “there is a chance to see one another, build relationships and a sense of togetherness” (Observation November 20th, 2019). At the same action (described in Chapter 5), there was a powerful energy created when a sit-in began in the Governor’s
office as the large crowd from the rally streamed into the rotunda singing, “We have got the power, it’s in the hands of us all.” I noted that the “song created a felt sense of connectivity between the two groups that wrapped the smaller group risking arrest in the energy of the larger” (Observation November 20th, 2019). Singing was an oft cited example for attunement of this sort, particularly by folks connected to the youth-oriented Sunrise Movement, and appeared 17 times across six participants and five of the actions and meetings I observed. At the February 7th, 2020 action at the Port of Portland protesting the delivery of pipe for the tar sands Transmountain Pipeline there was also a similar, powerful use of song, which I noted helped weave people together. An Indigenous speaker during that event started their talk by “having the crowd recognize themselves” and invited the crowd to “acknowledge each other and the power of being together” (Observation February 7th, 2020). They also used a Salish word that expressed the idea that “we are one,” and in using this word I noted that the speaker was inviting the group gathered to “consider that is what we are recognizing [and] manifesting in being together” (Observation February 7th, 2020). Interestingly, and in accordance with my discussion in Chapter 4, I noted during this action that there was a “contrast between Indigenous and settler voices [and a] lack of intentional creation of collective identity by settler speakers in contrast to what Indigenous people” offered; I also noted the same was true for spirituality (Observation February 7th, 2020). As discussed in Chapter 4, this pattern was present elsewhere, and I will return to this theme in the final discussions of my research.
An additional aspect of constructing an identity of people together as a movement included the construction of people in shared struggle across time. I introduced this idea in discussing the spiritual experience described by Joshua in Chapter 5, but I also observed it in a variety of actions and in the talk of other participants. Speakers at both of the actions referenced above attempted to invite this attunement, or connection, to a shared identity of people in struggle across time. At the action against the Transmountain Pipeline, the speakers invited those gathered to “call upon your ancestors for guidance and love” (Observation February 7th, 2020). In my notes following the Jordan Cove rally and action, where similar invocations were made, again made by people I identified as Indigenous, I asked, “Might there be something really important here especially for climate change, in that it is a time based issue, not only for ancestors but also future generations? How do climate movements see themselves in relationship to time, in terms of identity?” (Observation November 20th, 2019). One settler person who invoked this multi-generational aspect did so at the Transmountain Pipeline action by offering something akin to a guided meditation and invited participants to visualize standing shoulder to shoulder with the people who came before and will come after in the “multigenerational fight” they are part of (Observation February 7th, 2020). I noted at the time that, in contrast to what was offered by the Indigenous speakers, this was “a very light touch and could have been much more, wasn’t very heartfelt, and after starting in a promising direction, really was rather shallow [or] superficial” (Observation February 7th, 2020). Despite the sustaining impact for respondents of being identified within collective identities, which is described below, it is worth noting that I am left with some question
as to the impact of these experiences of attunement on collective identities or people in struggle as part of a climate movement. Respondents’ framing of the collective identity of the direct action climate movement varied significantly, with weak alignment as discussed in Chapter 4. Clearly, individual experiences of feeling part of these collective identities were meaningful, but the lack of shared understandings about what they refer to leaves me wondering whether their experience of attunement to collective identities explored here is weakened significantly by the heterogeneity of understandings about what movement participants are even part of.

*Constructing Movements Within the More-Than-Human World*

In this section I will explore how the collective identities respondents expressed being attuned to went beyond what is typically studied in the collective identity literature. These identities began to construct people in shared struggle *with* the more-than-human world. It is helpful here to return to Morgan’s quote about the importance of cultivating “an ongoing attunement and awareness of the ways in which we are being affected by *the places that we’re inside*, as well as that we care about and are fighting *with*” (italics added). Note here the different emphasis added, which I believe strikes at the heart of what linking collective identities of people in struggle within the more-than-human world means. Here movements and movement participants not only see themselves as being together with other humans, but also being together *within* a larger web of beings, who are very much a part of all that they are and are doing.
One potent example is the experience of two participants involved in Forests for Climate Resilience and first introduced in Chapter 5. It involves a moment at the end of an action camp that was preparing participants to opposed upcoming timber sales. Alex describes how around the campfire after the camp they began to hear a wolf call:

then it happened again and my friend shushed everybody and we got to listen to wolves howl on Mt. Hood really not that far from us. I’m feeling emotional. For at least five minutes, periodically picking up and they were definitely multiple and that was really profound. That knowing that they had been gone for so long and are very recently back\(^{56}\) and that we’ve spent all of this energy and time and dedication and put all of ourselves into this first public action camp to fight for this forest and then have them be…very potentially within the [timber] sale and hear them call and really like… I don’t know. I think as a child my dad’s always been really in love with wolves, that’s like his animal and he would wolf call. I don’t think it ever crossed my mind that I would actually get to hear a wolf call someday. To have that happen on the last night when the energy was really good and we had just really completed this thing that took a lot of energy, that was literally fighting for them to be there and to hear them, it was a gift certainly. That’s pretty affirming.

Morgan adds to this their sense of how both for themself and the group “this moment in which you are singing and we're paying attention, right now we're woven” and how “for me, and I think for many of us, it was a feeling of being in cahoots.” In this example, there is an emotional resonance with the wolf pack, as well as a sense of being connected, or in “kahoots” with the wolves and gathered together in a shared identity of being in struggle against the extractive destruction of the forest. In this story the respondents describe an exchange of energy that is aligned with, and feeds, the movement work in relationship to the climate crisis.

\(^{56}\) Wolves took up residence in the Mt. Hood National Forest in 2018 after an earlier transient wolf passed through some years before. It was the first time resident wolves had returned to the area in more than a half century after having been relentlessly hunted and poisoned, resulting in their extirpation from the area.
Jessica described how in movement work “we’re seeking not only connectedness to the whole, but we’re seeking partners to find that connectedness to whole with.” Wolves, in the example above, become a node through which individuals in movements find a pathway to weave themselves, and the very nature of their political struggles, into and with the more-than-human world. I also heard a participant talk about this through a water ritual that was part of a group’s regular practice for a time. Rachel described how for a time in her climate group, the meeting started with folks bringing water from where they had come from and then pouring it into a bowl while sharing a story of where the water came from. This brought everyone together and provided “some sort of meta-experience” in connecting the individuals through and with the combined water to the movement struggles they had gathered to further and which were connected to the water they had carried with them. The meeting discussed in Chapter 5 provides another example in how one of the youth activists “led a guided meditation in which, after a breath together, participants were invited to imagine roots growing out of their feet, through the floor of the building and into the soil and the very Earth, connecting us and creating a conduit for a flow of energy” (Observation November 2nd, 2019). At the previously discussed protest against the Transmountain Pipeline at the Port of Portland, an Indigenous speaker sang a Chinookan song while inviting the crowd to interpret what they were doing together as a “message and prayer from this land to the waters up north” (Observation February 7th 2020). In this act we see the intentional construction of a collective identity of the people gathered in movement as well as with the waters and land of the places threatened by the pipeline that people had gathered to protest. The
unloading of the pipeline would later be impeded by Portland Rising Tide and other
groups when five individuals hung from the loading dock, preventing the ship from
docking for a time (Samayoa 2019).

In all of these examples, there are collective identities that include the more-than-
human world. Jessica linked this directly to sustaining the participation of people in the
movement in sharing how in conversations with other organizers, she:

used to talk about that kind of thing constantly like how can we make that
happen? How can we make people feel that, because that’s the life of the thing,
and that’s what keeps people coming back...by creating that moment, that feeling
full of potential.

Linking these emergent aspects of movement identity composition to the success of
climate movements, Tyler discussed the necessity of creating an identity “more
connected to each other and the planet if we’re hoping for this to work long-term.” He
also noted the more limited dominant constructions of collective identity in that “we still
think of ourselves as a collection of individuals who all just happen to be doing the same
thing as each other all the time.” While collective identities including movements within
the more-than-human world were very much evident, if only emergently so, I did not
observe the third construction of collective identity discussed in Chapter 5, wherein
notions of separateness dissolve in a field of subjectivities outside of perhaps one outlier
(see page 135 and Figure 6). Morgan got the closest to this in their interview, which is
illustrated in their discussion about how “it’s like me and the thing I’m interacting with
and the practice that we dance together, that’s a being that we’re making together”
(italics added). Sometimes organizers got to the cusp of articulating this type of identity,
such as the visualization described above during a meeting with the youth climate
movement, but left the exercise oriented towards connectivity between discrete entities. In Chapter 8, I will dive into the implications of this absence and the relevance for both movements and the climate crisis.

**The Sustaining Impact of Being Attuned to Collective Identities**

I now turn directly to examining the relationship between the collective identities explored above and the way in which respondents found attunement within these identities with participants’ sustained engagement in movement spaces. The ability to sustain activism for individuals experiencing a “we-ness” or collective identity with other people together as a movement is well covered in the collective identity literature. The data from this study confirms this within the direct action climate movement. It also adds an emphasis on understanding this process as spiritual, as identified by respondents. The two participation categories will be explored before expanding on how participants experienced the sustaining impacts of feeling a part of, or being attuned within, a collective identity.

Two categories of participation were recruited for and represented within my sample, those active and those that had transitioned. Initially, I had planned to include a third category of those activists who were totally inactive or burnt out (see page 48). Interestingly, I could not find participants of this type. Everyone I talked with had remained grounded in their commitment to social change and always had transitioned in a way in which this work continued in some form, although outside of the original movement context. This included working on different issues in the non-profit sector,
providing free professional services to movement organizations, moving laterally to different social movements, and engaging in institutional politics. When analyzing the data, I looked for patterns that would differentiate between the two participation categories related to collective identity, spirituality, and other themes. However, I could not find anything meaningful in the data to distinguish the two groups. This non-finding is interesting in and of itself, in that it invites questions about the long-term impact of movement involvement and the ongoing resonance or effects of collective identity experiences. I also sought to determine if there were meaningful differences among the themes explored in Chapters 5 through 7 among different demographic variables and also could not find patterns.

Thus, the respondents, across demographic and participation categories, spoke about the sustaining impact of being attuned together with other people as a movement, and as a movement in struggle. Chris shared that “as long as I am really remembering and feeling that this is more than just me, the fact that I'm just one part of this wider picture and wider human experience and practice of liberation, that's what gets me up every day.” He went on to add how his spiritual understanding of being part of this collective identity “gives me energy to keep being on the ground with people to build a movement and to keep waging fights,” but in such a way that requires a reciprocal “feedback loop” in that “the only way that you can benefit from it, the only way that you can actually feel fulfilled, is if you keep using it and you keep exerting that energy to understand people better and to see yourself and the forms of oppression and liberation through the eyes of other people.”
Adding to this, Amanda stated that “I think it does really keep me sustained” and specifically called out the practice of singing and the energy that was still felt from this practice at the Oregon State Capitol action: “I still feel really rejuvenated from the action when we were singing in November.” Emily shared her perspective which directly connected to spirituality:

if I didn’t have spiritual beliefs it’d be very easy for me to just give up and say everything’s too late and doesn’t matter. And I’ll just do what I can to get through. But I believe that the world is worth fighting for and I believe that human lives are precious and every fraction of a degree of warming that we prevent can save thousands [or] millions of lives. And it’s important to try, just for your own spiritual health.

In the context of the discussion here, I understand the idea of “spiritual health” as affirming or being true to the collective identity that is defined by one’s beliefs. In other words, if one has developed a deeply interconnected collective identity then action becomes valuable, even essential, so as to sustain this identity regardless of the prospects of success. Not doing so would deny the deeply held interconnectivity with all beings shaped by religious beliefs and experienced spiritually. This idea is related to Polletta’s (2002) ideas about how collective identity comes to shape action or the form of engagement. From Amanda’s perspective, she shared that:

Win or lose, I feel like what is so actually palpable lacking in modern life, like what makes a given day confusing is just like a spiritual framework that says it’s existentially necessary to fight. …and this is why Standing Rock really is the only time that I felt that. I didn’t feel clear that we were intervening in the climate trajectory any more or less than any other time, but it felt like the evolutionarily inherited psychological template that says this is [a] war you’re actually supposed to fight right now…And I think that’s inherently spiritual, the stuff that I tried to do, and the stuff that I did, and the stuff that I still think needs to be done, none of that can be contemplated without at least contemplating giving up your life in terms of incarceration. And I think that those are inherently spiritual questions and I think that people can use a lot of different systems to grapple with them.
Again, note that this participant’s framing of “existentially necessary to fight” can be positioned in relationship to acting out of an identity, which in this case references the identity of people and movements that begins to also include the more-than-human world. It is important to note, as discussed in Chapter 4, that this was a central framing of the Standing Rock movement and was certainly an important aspect in its attractiveness to settler and non-Native participants. Joshua spoke to this directly in identifying the “hunger” and electric engagement he felt at Standing Rock:

I’m hungry for those kinds of experiences that I had at Standing Rock, I’m hungry for the kind of experiments I had when I was contemplating some prison forever shit. And I felt like my ancestors were giving me a pat on the back. And I think that other people are too. The thing that’s happened when I organized direct action where I knew I did something good even if we didn’t win was when people said I’m more alive, I’ll never be the same, I had been waiting my whole life for something that felt that intense and meaningful or whatever. And all of that stuff is just as a good of a reason to fight as winning as far as I’m concerned. Or it’s probably not but it’s definitely a good enough reason to do it. And it’s really spiritual, I want people to reconnect with a version, like you said, like with a version of themselves and what they are fundamentally and what would constitute a good life and something that honored everything that happened before them to bring them into this world. And I think conflict, not all conflict, not inevitably but I think conflict is really a solid path to self-realization.

Rather than a conceptual understanding of identifying as a people in struggle, this excerpt provides a clear example of the power of experiencing, and being attuned to, that identity in the notions of “never being the same” or “waiting my whole life.” Additionally, with those collective identities that trend towards an inclusion within the more-than-human world, I am struck by the extent to which the framing for engagement by respondents becomes centered around life, being “more alive,” and being alive with the other beings of the world, rather than on more narrow instrumental movement goals of winning
specific demands. This point is connected to my discussion of Standing Rock in Chapter 4 where I dwelled on the guiding frame of that movement, “water is life.” There is a tendency for those socialized in a Western dualistic worldview to read this as a metaphor, saying that water is necessary for life. However, I think that this statement offers a sense of how, even for white settler and non-Indigenous people, this should be understood quite literally. And in this literal view that again centers “life” and “aliveness,” one takes up the defense of the water because one feels that the attack on water is actually an attack on themselves and all one’s kin.

In my view, these expanded collective identities begins to reframe what movements and movement goals are even about from shifting policies, systems, or structures, to changing the very grounding identities in which our beings are situated. They also begin to destabilize the settler ontology discussed in Chapter 2. Tyler used this kind of framing in sharing that “I feel like how alive we are is determined by how much we participate in the rest of the world and if I didn’t feel like I was participating in shaping the world’s future, I would just feel more dead.” I will return to these thoughts, and critiques of them, in the discussion at the end of this chapter. A final observation comes from a meeting of the Portland chapter of Extinction Rebellion during which, unprompted, all the participants shared how their very participation in movement work was a source of healing that allowed them to stay present and whole in a world in which they clearly struggled to do so (Observation June 2nd, 2019). I was struck by the heartfelt and universally shared nature of these comments. It is worth noting that for some of these activists, their participation and the collective identities that come with it, not only sustain
them in the movement, but also in life itself. At least one participant explicitly stated that
were it not for feeling attuned to a collective identity with others struggling for a different
world they might have taken their own life.

_Sustaining Spiritual Practices within Movements_

Respondents discussed the experience of being attuned and feeling part of a
collective identity – be it oriented to people in struggle or the more-than-human world –
as sustaining their activism. Beyond the experience of being part of a “we-ness,”
participants also identified specific thematic bodies of spiritual practice within
movements that helped sustain their engagement. Seventeen participants in this study
spoke 55 times about practices that sustained them and I observed these during two
meetings and one action. A challenge for analysis and integration of these findings into
the literature is the ineffable nature of some of what was shared. Participants often simply
shared that a certain practice helped them, but did not necessarily articulate the why,
how, or the mechanics of this impact, nor did they necessarily understand it consciously
themselves. The content which I will explore next includes the ways in which movement
spirituality helps ground or integrate experiences for participants, removes the illusion of
control, allows the processing of grief, and facilitates a generative relationship to fear.

_Grounding and integrating experiences_

An example from my field notes provides a valuable place to begin this thematic
section for it illustrates an aspect of what I mean by grounding and integrating
experiences. At the end of a planning meeting, the activists shared how their
involvement, and thus their shared identity, helped to keep them alive and out of depression. Additionally, they talked about how being together with others in responding to the climate crisis greatly accelerated their process of integrating pessimistic climate science. In particular, I noted how they talked about shortening depressions “that would have otherwise lasted months in response to climate science, now only took days, and otherwise was healing in their processing and being with the times we live in” (Observation June 2nd, 2019). A concrete example of the related, grounding aspect sustaining movement practices comes from Sarah in her discussion of forests, with which she shared having a strong spiritual connection and sense of co-identification. She offered that amidst the “marathon” of youth climate activism:

I feel centered in a way that I don’t anywhere else, maybe. So, maybe I think that it’s like recharging, that's how it feels. Again, that doesn’t feel uncommon. That feels really common for a bunch of folks in our movement to be like, we do check ins or go arounds, it’s like, I went on a walk in the forest and it made feel really whole.

In this context, the experiential encounter with the forest generates the grounding for feeling “whole.” This participant also went on to discuss how when she is with the forest she experiences a very supportive slowing down of the fast, analytical way of thinking down to a “whisper.” One of the ways she worked to manifest this was through sitting in presence to their very being, growing slowly as trees, then trying “to mirror that within myself.” For the climate direct action movement in particular, Matthew noted that spirituality and his previous training (he had been to divinity school) helped with direct action in that he looked to his “spiritual training and beliefs to help shape how I do it” but had never thought of the “spiritual implications of lobbying,” for example. Finally, there
was a moment in the youth climate meeting I facilitated in October of 2019 in which singing was used to integrate the experience of the meeting, feel connected to one another through merging voice, and transition out of that activity. I noted how the exercises the activists facilitated at the very end of the meeting “moved some tense energy at the end of the meeting arising from all the to-dos that were created and the lack of clarity about…how it would all resolve” towards a sense of togetherness and generative momentum (Observation October 19th, 2019).

*Letting go of the illusion of control*

I heard subjects articulate a common theme within various spiritual traditions related to letting go of the illusion of control and allowing or accepting the more ambiguous space that emerges in its wake. After becoming more spiritually grounded through Christian traditions, Kate offered that:

> I don’t feel pressure to have all the answers or do everything or push myself beyond what I’m capable of doing. And I think that is the most significant thing for me about my faith and the work I do…Is that it’s not my job to do everything, it is not my job to accomplish everything, and push myself to [a] limit where I can’t sustain rest of my life in order to accomplish a short-term political gain. And I think my faith helps me to do that.

In a similar vein, Chris shared the moment in which he let go of the attempt to control things – in this case his body as they confronted arrest – at the Anacortes Break Free Action during an action blocking the rail tracks leading to the refinery in which 52 people were arrested (Le 201). He shared that this experience reverberated spiritually in all of his activism afterward:

> feeling the ball was in my court and that I was choosing to do that and actually therefore give control of my body over to someone else, I think that was another big moment of spiritual development. Because in that moment where I no longer
had control of my body, in my mind I had to come to terms with what I did have control over and what we, as a group of people who decided to do that together, could have control over in that moment. And usually that meant we had control over how we were feeling about it and we had control over how we were going to help each other get through that. I think that feeling I would later understand as a microcosm of what so many communities have to find collective control over in their day to day lives. Communities that actually live on the line of the pipeline or communities that are living there in Palestine under daily threat of militarization, we don't have control over this but in this situation we have control over our collective response to this. The first time I really felt that was when I chose to let myself get arrested at a direct action.

In this instance, the experience of getting arrested is understood at a deeper, spiritual level as specifically a letting go of individual control and a recentering in a collective agency. Finally, Morgan articulated a worldview, grounded by their spiritual beliefs and identity, that unsettled the very constructs required for a notion of control to operate, offering that:

> There is profoundly no end. There’s not an end. We feel like we’re at the end of the world and we are from one perspective of framing of what the world is. And the other perspective of life on earth where…this is not an end, this is change. And maybe that change articulates into some really beautiful way that humans through all this disaster can be part of the dance of life in a meaningful and generative and generous way… Maybe this a step along a dead-end path or something else. But if I’m part of the whole of life, I’m part of that process…in which the stakes are much greater and also, in which I am less helpless. I’m both much smaller and less helpless. And that’s been very important for me. And I feel ways in which even just going into the forest and doing our action camp in the forest and feeling in all the different ways that we humans feel, that I’ve heard people say, in the group, I feel really different here. You know? I feel like different sorts of things are possible here than I do when I’m in the city. You know?

In this example, the traditional, individual-oriented notions of control evaporate in the relational worldview presented here. And in a way contradictory to dominant thinking, this makes the individual feel “less helpless.” For respondents, letting go of control and linear understandings of cause and effect through their spiritualities, including their sense
of impacting the climate crisis, actually helped free them to continue engagement and thus supported their sustained participation. As long as they remained within a meaningful collective identity it appears they were able and willing to confront both the impacts of the climate crisis as well as state repression even without knowing if their actions would have an outcome they desired.

*Allowing and processing grief*

Another aspect of spiritual practices in movements involved grief, and specifically providing pathways for grief to be allowed or brought forward and then processed. Much as the previous examples, this is a core focus of the spiritual wisdom traditions that I am familiar with. Rachel discussed her integration of the “Work that Reconnects” into her activism, which for her was part of the evolution of her involvement. This body of practices was initiated by Joanna Macy, herself a student of Buddhism (among other things), and then carried forward and developed by a wide range of practitioners across mostly North America and Europe. Rachel talked about the cultural context of grief in Western culture, its relative absence in dominant culture and its role in social change:

*We live in a grief-phobic society. It’s something that’s pathologized…We don’t honor that grieving as a really important process and part of what makes us human and part of what honors the person or the animal or the place or whatever it is that we lost…And in The Work That Reconnects, we talk a lot about systems theory and how grief as well as anger and sadness and all of these emotions that are the less desirable emotions, less enjoyable maybe when you’re experiencing them, those are all really important feedback loops within this living system that we’re all a part of that tell us something is wrong. If we live in a place that’s being decimated by logging or there’s a lot of pollution or what have you, our natural response as humans is to feel sadness around that. And if you’re expected to just suck it up, go to work, yes, life sucks but what are you going to do, just put on a happy face and get on with it, that grief has to go somewhere. And so it gets*
stuffed. And a lot of us have this accumulated grief and other emotions that don’t have an outlet. And when that happens, our natural response to these crises that we’re living in gets blocked. And in a systems sense, that leads to, well, runaway climate change, for example, because we collectively are not having the scale of response that’s needed to respond to this threat. And so how do we unblock that feedback loop? We create spaces where people can actually feel things and where it’s okay to feel things and creating safe spaces where people can cry and know that you’re okay, there’s nothing wrong with you for having strong feelings. And the more that we can do that in community, we start to change our culture and break those things down. So that’s probably why I do it.

Members of Forests for Climate Resilience talked about grief as well in the context of their group work. Alex shared how their group had experimented with a particular mode of facilitation, the ZEGG Form, which originates in Germany and offers “a ritualized form of transparent communication for larger groups” (Zegg Forum 2023:n.p.). They talked about how their activist peers “are holding so much for the devastation and that’s a road to burnout if you’re not actually able to grieve” and that this forum was used to “build connection and also allows people to process” as well as how spirituality was helpful in how to “honor” and “move” these types of feelings.

From within the same group, Morgan described how the organization had practiced a traditional Jewish seder during an action camp and ritually used a dead stump for laying things out. They offered, in a metaphor for the processing of grief, how “there’s this way in which doing that ceremony in that way, at that time, with those people, with that life, which is a dead stump that is also becoming the soil for new things to grow.” This example also likely connected to the powerful Jewish symbol of the tree of life and the liberation narratives at the center of the seder ritual. However, a question arises here regarding when emotional processing is spiritual or what the relationship of spirituality is to emotional processing. I believe that Morgan provides a hint here. In their
further discussion they talk about the grief, hopelessness, and burnout prevalent within activist communities and how that can make it “very hard to know what to do” and challenging “to feel like it makes a difference.” But from there they immediately pivot to sharing how a fundamental shift in their sense of identity, which arises from their spiritual orientation and is covered in full in their quotations above (page 134) reframes things in important ways for them.

In this instance, not only are forums provided for spiritual processing or the ritual holding of grief, but they are then accompanied by a spiritual view and identity which allows that experience to transform into an expansive place of possibility that sustains the capacity for engagement in movement work. A final example arose in my participant observation at a meeting of 350 PDX. At the end of a traditional, heady, content-driven meeting there came a moment when a staff member, and a respondent in this study, offered a song that dramatically shifted the energy and also worked with the grief connected to doing climate work. I noted how a “staff member led a song that released energy, created levity, invited laughter and was the closest that the meeting came to engaging in spiritual” work (Observation July 21st, 2019). The song’s lyrics were “Loosen, loosen baby / You don’t have to carry / The weight of the world in your muscles and bones / Let go, let go, let go.” In the song notes I reviewed after the meeting it offers that this is a “song/prayer/meditation to heal personal and societal grief” and that it is “For ordinary grief, extraordinary grief, the unbearable kind and the unseen kind and the enduring kind, in service of exhales and letting go of what is ours and not ours, of
compassion, lightness, and becoming who we are after and through it all” (Observation July 21st, 2019).

**Being in relationship to fear**

I identified the relationship to fear as the fourth category present in respondents’ interviews. Subjects discussed this dynamic in a variety of ways, some practical, some aspirational, and some regarding the special role of their relationship to fear for high-risk activism, such as that engaged in by many participants in this study. To begin with, Sarah discussed how, in the context of the Sunrise Movement, a connective, emotional space existed that helped with “holding” what participants were bringing, including fear. These group practices seemed to, through their intentional construction of people being together in struggle, allow members of Sunrise to be in a generative, action-oriented, rather than paralyzing, relationship to the fear that arose in relation to climate change. Building on this, and also emerging out of the youth climate movement, Emily discussed how the kind of “spiritual love” she found present in their group culture was the very antidote to “fear” and prevents folks in movement from when they are through “fear, [being] so terrible to each other and to ourselves.”

Respondents brought up the role of spirituality as being particularly relevant to high-risk activism in which violence, arrest, and significant jail time were possible. Matthew described leveraging his past spiritual practice, and training in divinity school, in the context of his direct action work in ways that never came up in his previous, more institutional prior political action. He noted how before he was “never in a position of that much fear or confrontation” while with direct action, working with the question
“how do you function with fear?” became essential and was uniquely supported by his spirituality. Joshua also spoke to this theme and used stories of Norse mythology and spirituality to highlight the potential to paradoxically engage with overwhelming fear and still take action. In Norse mythology, despite knowing that he will fight and lose in the great, final battle of Ragnarök, Odin “doesn’t not go do the battle,” he takes action regardless. Joshua described the generative nature of this paradoxical framework for his work and shared how “there’s an infinitude of ways that you can get there but I think that we need a spiritual psychological framework to get to a place of risk resilience that people do need to be in to fight the fossil fuel industry or just to be whole people, just to be actually people.” Another example, as previously described in Chapter 5, is how Joshua’s spiritual experience of being contacted by and connected to their ancestors engaged in struggle helped him be in relationship to fear arising from an upcoming action that carried great legal risk and the possibility of significant prison time. This experience transformed the fear that arose and allowed him to continue with even greater resolve and energy to prepare for the actions he was planning.

I also want to emphasize the limitations of current movement practices for holding or processing fear in a generative, or less paralyzing, way. Ashley described her aspirational desire for their spirituality in relationship to fear:

I have a lot of fear and apprehension about the future. Sometimes when I feel very afraid I want to know how to…use spirit to feel better, but I want to feel like that connection is so strong that the outside temporary forces of the world can’t shake me. And I don’t feel that way. I feel very malleable. I feel very much like this set of scary things could happen and I would feel devastated. And so maybe I just feel vulnerable, or that I wished that I existed in an environment that was really, really supporting my spiritual health as a real imperative for doing this work. If you’re going to be going up against the forces of global domination and evil, then
you have to be coming from a really grounded, centered, strongly connected, clear mind, clear heart, open channel place. And then [we spend] time on email and drink too much and…talk behind each other’s back, they’re not very spiritually resilient communities.

In this example, someone is recognizing the need to process or hold the arising of fear in ways that do not paralyze or result in counterproductive reactions. She saw the potential in spirituality and spiritual practice to meet this need, but then lamented the absence of these “spiritually resilient communities” in the direct action climate movement. This is a tangible need identified by movement participants that is particularly salient for the existential nature of climate change and the planetary crisis. Additionally, this example illustrates that as much as movements do, sometimes, utilize spirituality to change their relationship to fear, such spirituality is not systemic in movement spaces and there exists an extraordinary unmet need. Furthermore, Joshua discussed the widespread use of fear to attempt to motivate political action around climate change which they viewed as ineffective and noted that “it will be both practically and existentially favorable to just be less afraid of it…as much as I want people to understand how dire it is, I also really, really actually don’t want people to be afraid of climate change, I think it’s super not useful.”

Discussion

In this section I will return to the research question regarding the sustaining impact of spirituality and address the pre-existing literature that contextualizes this project: Do spiritual beliefs and associated collective identities shape participation outcomes through shifts in strategy and forms of action? I will discuss some of the
limitations of the findings here, their special relevance for the climate crisis as well as the Anthropocene, and begin to speculate on their potential meaning as a precursor to the full development of this analysis in Chapter 8. In preparing to conduct this research I theorized the pathways for this association as occurring in line with Polletta’s (2002) understanding about the relationship between collective identity and participation outcomes (see page 37-38). The data do suggest that holding collective identities, understood by respondents as inherently spiritual, helps sustain their participation in the direct action climate movement. However, the mechanism for the sustaining impact did not follow the pathway theorized by Polletta (2002) and identified in my original theoretical model (reproduced here as Figure 7). Above, I discuss the limited area of overlap in relation to how collective identities created a need to act to confirm the identity, rather than the form of action (see pages 149-151). Before developing an alternative theoretical model, I will first review the patterns I see in my analysis of the data.

The vast majority of participants saw the “connectedness,” or the way in which they were attuned to and woven into collective identities, as spiritual. In the talk of the respondents, we can see how being constructed in a “we-ness” or collective identity, be it with other people in struggle or with the more-than-human world, gave a sense of agency and possibility to the activists I spoke with. A sustained experience of agency is very important for continuing participation in social movements. Indeed, in the collective identity literature it is this sense of composing and charging a “we-ness” with “collective agency” that is one of the core functions of collective identity formation in movements
(Fominaya, 2010:394). Additionally, participants talked about how being in and feeling part of a collectivity gave them energy to continue their struggle. For example, respondents talked about being “rejuvenated” after singing or the “feedback loop” of being involved in liberatory struggles. This is all the more important given the intense and draining workload of activists, whether they are doing it for pay or adding it as a volunteer onto other work they take on to meet their financial needs.

FIGURE 7. Original Theoretical Model for Secondary Research Question

Within the specific context of the more-than-human collective identities there is a wider scope both for the possibilities of change, as well as the sources that can be drawn from sustained participation and motivation. Bridging between more-than-human identities and those only involving people together in struggle was the experience of Joshua, recounted in Chapter 5, wherein they become connected to their vast ancestral lineage of fighting for and with the Earth. More firmly within the more-than-human compositions was the experience of Rachel at an Earth First! gathering feeling the land respond to her question and affirm her presence as well as her actions on behalf of life. And then there is the example of the collective experience of activists at the action camp
in relation to the wolf call in which they experienced being in “cahoots” with the wolves, thus widening the scope of who was involved in their transformative work. All these examples led to the types of deep feelings articulated as being “more alive,” being “whole people,” or “participating in shaping the world’s future.”

Lastly, the spiritual orientations of participants and being woven into these identities gave rise to the non-material incentives for participation that are identified as necessary in the literature (Jasper and Polletta 2001). Participants talked very clearly about their spiritual beliefs and how those gave rise to collective identities as providing some of the fundamental motivation for their engagement. For example, respondents talked about “the hunger” for the experiences arising from their activism when together with others and also gave examples of how spirituality provides a framework to work within an existential and a potentially unwinnable\(^{57}\) dynamic such as the climate crisis.

I will now return to a theoretical model before discussing the limitations of what I have just described. As discussed in Chapter 4, besides an orientation to direct action I did not see clear patterns in which participants talked about strategies or forms of actions in general and especially in any way that was linked to spirituality or spiritual identities. It is my sense, given the relative absence of spirituality formally within movement spaces, that participants are not consciously connecting their spirituality and associated spiritual experience being part of a “we-ness” to more traditional senses of movement collective identity, strategy, and action. The model of the pathways that I see in the

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\(^{57}\) Unwinnable at least in the sense that climate change cannot be “stopped,” and the extent of possible mitigation movements might win is very uncertain. This includes the high uncertainty about feedback loops and what is has already been set in motion by historical emissions.
responses of participants is presented in Figure 8. In the data there is a mediated pathway for sustained participation that transforms challenging experiences arising from movement participation or from holding the magnitude of the climate crisis. This includes grounding and integrating experiences, letting go of feelings of control, being in relationship to fear, and allowing grief. The adverse potential of these experiences for participants, when mediated through the synergized individual or collective identities, or “converged” identities to use Snow’s (2001) words, is mitigated or even transformed such that it can increase the capacity to sustain engagement.

Figure 8. Revised Model for Collective Identity and Sustaining Participation

The findings here are limited in a number of ways. Some of the broader limitations, and their implications for future research, will be explored in Chapter 8. These include factors like the small sample size and the implicit bias in participants
responding to a study framed about spirituality, among others. For now, I will focus on the ambiguity of the mechanisms for these sustaining impacts, the potential for instrumentalizing spirituality, and the problems with my categorization of sustained participation. Regarding the ambiguity of the mechanisms behind these impacts, spirituality and collective identities here function as black boxes of a sort. There are hints in the data as to the mechanisms by which potential sustaining impacts might be occurring. However, what was most present were respondents talking about the sustaining experience of their spiritualities, without a lot of sense of the how or the specific practices that facilitate greater or lesser outcomes. Thus, the prescriptive potential for recommending practices from the data gathered here is quite limited and generic, valuable though that might be, as I will explore in Chapter 8. A second limitation, and a risk, in the framing above is of falling into a trap of instrumentalizing spirituality as a mechanism for sustaining participation, as described by Morgan:

perhaps the most familiar way that I’ve seen spirituality legitimized within political ideology, which has been that people have feelings and feelings are important, and feelings affect people’s capacity to be in it for the long haul, affect people’s skill at welcoming other and affect motivations. Affect people’s liability to turn. And spirituality is, you know, among those who value it, perceived as a very effective way to root an individual’s long-term participation in revolutionary, radical activity. And also, can be a really powerful group’s practice and its coherence, its collective, its sense of being woven. So, that’s a bit instrumentalized…

They go on to point to the deeper, ontological challenge of spirituality for social movements and systemic change:

I think the root place is we’ve gotten pretty darn distracted by the boxes we draw around things and that’s a distraction that…at one level it confuses us but on the

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58 Being sympathetic to the viewpoint shared here, I have tried to stay out of this trap in my own discussion of the overall research findings in Chapter 8.
other hand the problem is that it's very powerful so it's given us great power. And so this confusion is not a confusion that is purely epistemological, but it's a confusion that has ontologically changed the world and changed us. So we now live in a world in which the boxiness of things is the most amplified reality that we experience day to day. To me this is one of the key things that I now see as the nature of empire, of capitalism, of industrialism and the scientific technical apparatus that maybe we once considered a tool of ours but now we've become a tool of reproducing [where] we're basically the servitors...Human practice over many centuries, and amplified recently, has been a great severing, a great making of as much of a distance as we can, and it's been functional. We've created this divide between the ways of almost all of the rest of life and what animates us...If you look around, actually very little of the world is linear, is able to be separated from other parts of the world but there are parts of it that more or less can, and we've just gone the whole hog into those things and by doing that we've thrown this grid of power over the rest of life and the world and have been slowly sucking it into this net of abstraction and of reproducibility.

In these two quotations, Morgan cautions against instrumental perspectives that view spirituality as a mechanism to sustain movement practice, given that they can, without recognizing the ontological implications of certain spiritual views, actually reify the “separated” and “boxed” ontology of dominant Western, settler views. I share Morgan’s concern here, which is fundamentally about the politics and implications of movements and spirituality in movement. I believe that Morgan’s quote, with its focus on ontology, resonates with Burow et al.’s (2018:68) assertion that:

Decolonization is constitutive of a resistant and ameliorative politics that unravels land’s singularity. This kind of politics is both anti-capitalist and anticolonial, as it challenges the flattening of land that is fundamental to such relations.

It is for these reasons that I am particularly interested in exploring the earthbound tendencies within these movement spaces in Chapter 8. It is striking that these are present even in the underdeveloped way that they are, given the extent to which they challenge Western ontologies. In their presence they give rise to the potential for a spirituality in this movement that, rather than being instrumental as a mechanism for sustaining
engagement, transforms the very ontology of movement participants and culture. Transforming identity in this way strikes at a deeper level of social change, begins to destabilize settler colonialism, and attacks the root causes of the climate crisis, which is only a subset of a much greater crisis of life on this planet (see the in-depth discussion of these ideas in Chapter 2). This perspective centers the extent to which spirituality begins to give rise to a wholly alternative inhabiting of all one’s relations.

Connected to this is a surprising discovery with my categorization schema. Originally, I attempted to talk to people who were active participants, who had transitioned to other work, and those who had burned out and were not engaged. In connecting with subjects, I found that I could not find anyone who was truly burned out and disconnected. The one respondent who most fit this description I later incidentally saw show up at an Extinction Rebellion meeting after we had spoken. Thus, I was left with only two categories of respondents. But what does “transitioning” even mean in this context? The implication of my argument above is that beginning to fully inhabit a kind of earthbound spirituality begins to change activists’ practices in fundamental ways. Thus engaging deeply in the climate crisis may begin to not look like what one thought it should be within the lens of “being part of the direct action climate movement.”

Rachel exemplifies this in her discussion of spiritual grief work above. She had “exited” the movement in one sense, but in another she had gone deeper in addressing the root causes of the crisis as she saw them. Before diving into these ideas more fully in the concluding chapter of this study, I will first review a paradox that was identified by movement participants regarding spirituality. While almost all of the respondents were
able to articulate the personal and collective value of spirituality, they also almost universally acknowledged that it was rarely, if ever, present in formal movement spaces such as meetings and gatherings. I will now explore their thoughts about this paradox before moving to the conclusion.
CHAPTER 7

THE PARADOX OF SPIRITUALITY: IMPORTANT BUT ABSENT

We can now turn to a paradox identified in this research: Why, given the importance assigned to spirituality by participants, is it also identified as being so absent from movements? The respondents in this study described numerous ways in which spirituality was important to them individually, for their movement participation, and for the goals of their work. In total, 18 of the 21 participants talked about the importance of spirituality for climate movements. However, all but one of the participants also spoke of the absence of spirituality in climate movements. And herein lies the paradox: whereas participants talked about the importance of spirituality, the specificity of which is discussed in prior chapters, they also noted that at least in formal spaces it is absent. It is interesting to observe that a variety of respondents, including Tyler, Megan, Emily, and Joshua, shared that spirituality did appear sometimes informally and at the edges of movement spaces or in small groups. And of the eighteen participants who talked about its importance, fourteen talked about the absence of the spiritual as being negative, whereas seven discussed it as being mixed, neutral, or positive in some way. Three participants talked about it in both ways. Finally, thirteen participants shared their speculations on why this was the case. In what follows I will share the talk of the interviewees and the themes that emerged as it speaks to this paradox.
The Absence of Spirituality as Negative

A clear majority of the sample, fourteen participants, spoke of the absence of spirituality in movement spaces as negative. In this section, I will discuss their articulations of why they held this view. Some of their perspectives were quite strong and even rose to existential levels, in that they felt that without the integration of spirituality climate movements could not be successful. For example, Emily stated that the absence was “very problematic” and that “I think it’s a very unpopular opinion that I have, that social movements will fail without spirituality.” Complementing this perspective, Matthew stated that talking “about climate change as merely this big threat that needs to be dealt with, is insufficient” and that climate change should be framed as “the final expression of living our life wrong, and [that] what our life should look like isn’t this.” In Matthew’s comment there is an ontological dimension to the critique that directly engages the implications of religion and spirituality within the movement. These respondents were not alone in emphasizing the urgent and essential need for movements to grapple with the core worldviews of the dominant culture, which are embedded within movements as well. Before returning to these bigger questions in the concluding chapter, I will now share three themes that I identified in the participants’ talk. In many ways, these constitute further articulations of themes described in earlier chapters, including how the absence of spirituality deprives participants of energy that amplifies and supports motivation, prevents meaningful constructions of participants as collectivities, and leaves complex emotional dynamics untended. In what follows, I will present examples that add to what has been discussed thus far.
A poignant example of the motivation spirituality adds to movements comes from Jessica. She shared the experience that:

I think that there are movement moments that feel spiritually real, like an action sometimes feels real, and it sometimes feels spiritually dead. And my good friends and I would often talk about if it had real political tension. Then it was spiritually aligned with the goal of connecting us to nature and other things. And living in line with the truth of the situation we’re in which is that we are defending, and are in a sense dying, and knowing that there’s something spiritual about that. And then there are moments that feel like they aren’t working and that people are just spinning wheels, which I think often for me [are] moments when I felt quite spiritually dead and unconnected to movement. And I think that those were the ones that scared me the most because I felt like it’s like trying to pray and not getting anything back…[And those] felt dishonest. People would act as if they were taking big risks when they really weren’t, or people just weren’t connecting, like people weren’t singing, or if they were it felt quite performative. People had not invested enough to make the moment, or the ritual, click. And the aesthetics just wasn’t beautiful. The time spent was not really reaching the target. So we were neither having the impacts we wanted nor were we creating a moment of truth and love for each other.

In this example Jessica is talking about a synergistic effect in which motivational energy and the experience of taking action are brought together through a deeply felt spiritual component and ritual container. What they are expressing here is that often the gravity of the climate crisis, in the way it represents a crisis in our very relationship to life, often does not feel present in actions which are described in this context as being “dead.” And when this happens, even engagement in action can actually drain the activist of a continued interest in participation as it feels “spiritually dead and unconnected to movement.” Thus, the absence of spirituality, which is to say connectivity and resonance between beings in transformative action, in actions and movement, can prevent ongoing participation. These comments build upon the sustaining dynamics described in the previous chapter.
One central and shared aspect I have identified, principally in Chapter 5, is the idea that spirituality is fundamentally about connectivity and the experience of being connected through collective identities with other people and the more-than-human. In that sense, when respondents are talking about the lack of spirituality in movements, they are often speaking about the ways in which there are not explicit work, action, practices, and rituals that work to weave participants together, including, for some, with the more-than-human world. In Chapter 6, I briefly described the water ritual that existed for a time in the Rising Tide North America collective (see page 146). Half jokingly, but half seriously, Rachel described how the loss of that ritual, which occurred as the membership of the collective changed, contributed to her decision to leave the group. In this context, I understand her to be talking about how the lack of explicitly tending to constructing the people in the group together with the more-than-human world, here present in the water brought by each participant, caused something vital to become missing. In our interview, she also discussed the centrality of wholeness and relationships in her understanding of why spirituality in the movement was important:

The climate organizing I was doing, that was a different set of intersections. And [the new work] is a different set of intersections. It’s more…it’s touching on movement work but it’s also recognizing our whole selves within that work and honoring the fact that we are whole beings and we have spirits and emotions and relationships. Our lives are made of relationships, with each other, with the land, with the city we live in. And I think that real, lasting change, both on a personal level and on a community level, broader level, by necessity has to take all of those relationships into account. And I don’t think a lot of movement work honors that fulness and our culture as a whole doesn’t honor it either.

The new work she referenced here was a body of group facilitation work she has been leading called the Work That Reconnects, which was initiated by Joanna Macy. This is a
reaction to the absence of this kind of wholeness and relationality experienced in climate movements by seeking that elsewhere and in this case attempting to bring it back to climate movements. Tyler also spoke to this absence, and through the experience of our interview was left with similar reflections, sharing that “if you don’t necessarily have the language to articulate it, it can be hard to turn it into anything other than a fleeting feeling” of being connected during direct actions. He was left feeling that “now that we’re talking about this, it makes me realize that we should maybe do a better job of being very overt about that and talking to people about it.” Megan added to this and described how she felt that movements were “missing an opportunity to go deeper with ourselves and with other people that we work with, missing an opportunity to connect with each other I think, in a deeper way, and thus be more powerful because we’re more emotionally connected.” In the context of the previous chapters, all of these comments describe the loss that climate movements may experience when they do not intentionally tend to the spiritual dynamics presented in this research.

Finally, participants echoed the kinds of potential discussed in Chapter 6 for spirituality and spiritual work to ground participants and integrate experiences that are deeply felt in climate work. Joshua remarked on the intensity and heaviness of climate change and how they observed that “actually the emotional weight of the subject is sufficient that people just find it easier to talk about it through proxies [rather] than directly talk about it.” In my own personal experience and observations from my movement practice I witnessed how, without direct engagement, this avoidance eventually eats away at people’s ability to sustain their participation. It can also lead to
dangerous levels of overextension, self-harm, and burnout, which I have personally experienced (see the conclusion to Chapter 8). On the contrary, with direct engagement it can actually buoy participants, such as previously described (see pages 149-151) in my participant observation about the extent to which through being able to be together in struggle and sharing the intensity of their feelings folks came to feel well in a world in which they deeply struggled. Ashley talked about the deeply felt absence of spiritual and ceremonial containers for settler participants:

I had a friend who was out at Standing Rock who said the difference between all the settlers who were there and the Indigenous people who were there is that the Indigenous people have ceremonies for when they go into warriorship. So they have their normal life. They have their normal context. And then they have a transition that puts them in a subliminal space that means that they’re more willing or ready to sacrifice themselves and give things up. And then they come back and then they have a way of integrating back into full selfhood. And I feel like as a white settler we’ve got nothing like that. There’s no hearth to return home to. There’s no ceremony for when you transition. People can rest individually. We never rest as a movement…The wholeness of what it means to be whole and have a whole life, and then suspend that temporarily to fight the evil, and then come back and have that again, that is just not a framework that we have. And so yes sometimes the spiritual stuff feels like it helps me keep fighting, but sometimes it makes me feel like I want to put the fighting down, so I can actually just go focus on what it means to be whole and well. And I don’t know that we get to be whole and well. And so they said yes, you could stop organizing for a while…If you’ve got these really intense symptoms, I think you can work on making those better. But I don’t think living in capitalism and colonialism, and the way that we live, that we get to be whole people and heal those parts of ourselves, and then come back and fight. But yes, I think we’re always fighting only with half of ourselves because we don’t get to be full. So part of me is like yes, it helps me to keep going, and then part of me is like sometimes it just shows me everything I don’t have.

This poigniant quote further illuminates the need to focus on the topics of this research within non-Native and settler communities, in that experience-specific needs arise, such as articulated here. The “wholeness” that Ashley speaks of has everything to do with the
sense of connection and belonging, or being composed collectively, that fits firmly within the domains of religion and spirituality. One of the emergent themes of my own conclusions, shared in depth in Chapter 8, is that the ontological alienation of Western materialism is at the root of the climate crisis, which is itself a broader crisis of life. In this example from Emily there is a reflection that this sense of alienation and separateness and the lack of rituals to support movement transitions also contribute to a severe crisis in the possibilities of sustained participation.

The Absence of Spirituality as Mixed, Neutral, or Positive

Even with this general trend, participants also recognized the complexity of integrating spirituality into movements. Four respondents talked only about spirituality in this way and three talked about its absence both as negative and as mixed. One of the primary themes identified involved the perceived need of movements to make a broad appeal with their actions and demands. Zach discussed how “I tend to find that a lot of group spiritual experiences tend to bring some people together a lot more closely while alienating other people, and that, to me, feels like a definitively mixed bag.” Echoing this theme, Kate talked about how internally the inclusion of spiritual dynamics is generative, but as far as external or public-facing practices or messaging goes there is “a belief that if you’re explicit about that, that will turn people off [and that it is] strategically not helpful messaging.” She added that there is also a contextual piece to this and that:

I think in a place like Portland, I don’t necessarily think talking about realigning humans’ relationship to the earth is a negative thing. But I do think that using that same messaging somewhere like Texas would have been a negative, because whether or not people are right …they’re interpreting that as being antithetical to
faith in Jesus, which it’s not at all. But depending on the language you use, you’re alienating people.

Finally, connected to this, Sarah talked about the way prior associations influenced the chosen framing of Sunrise Movement nationally when they created the organization’s aesthetic and messaging choices in how it represents itself: “I think that there is a tension or a negative understanding of spirituality very much associated with hippies, very much associated with white environmentalism and…that Sunrise national is very strictly [saying] we are not this thing.”

A second theme is articulated by Jessica and involves the lack of a shared point of reference that makes invoking or practicing spirituality in movement spaces challenging. They offered that:

Often if it’s a group that’s a frontline community that holds a lot of respect, and there’s a number of people, that can really take hold. So if it’s an Indigenous group or a group of elders, in some ways I think that if there’s a group of people with authority setting the tone or setting the space [it can work]. But I’ve seen it happen with mixed results when it’s just one person trying to make a policy conference opening with a moment of meditation. And I see it get hit or miss because we don’t all have the same terms of reference.

I will return to this question about points of reference shortly in the following chapter. For now, I think it is useful to clarify that there are several potential sources of reference that may or may not be aligned or shared: (1) a set of beliefs, (2) language, signs, and symbols that reference these beliefs, and (3) practices that actualize or give resonance to the beliefs. In this framework, Jessica’s quote primarily references the second and third categories. She is also observing that when there is a powerful enough presence with enough authority and respect that it then becomes possible to facilitate something spiritual in movement spaces, and that somehow barriers around a shared reference can
be overcome and that a resonance can still be found. Alternatively, echoing my discussion of settler-Indigenous dynamics earlier, it could be that this example, through referencing Indigenous communities, points to how those communities are able to articulate something that settler communities have lost resonant language and symbols for, namely an interconnected relationship with life. Lacking a shared point of reference, Jessica pointed to how the very framing of spirituality may not be effective in sharing their view that “When you get together with an action group I think it might be honestly quite weird if everyone was ‘all right, let’s tap into the spiritual’, [and] I’m thinking of a range of people, some people are like ‘okay let’s have a prayer before this,’ and some people try to enthuse their spirituality or their terms into a situation and I think that gets met with mixed results.”

Further Reflections on Why Spirituality is Absent

Whatever respondents’ views were on the relative impact of spirituality's absence in movements, they agreed that it was largely absent and were willing to speculate about why that is the case. Beyond the examples above, they also offered a variety of other reflections on this theme. These observations contribute to previous scholarship that has identified barriers to spirituality in similar direct action movements (Mallory 2010). These included reflections on the traumatic experiences that many people have had with dominant religious institutions, leftist taboos against spirituality, and dynamics related to vulnerability and the perceived privateness of spirituality. In terms of trauma, the participants, who we should remember skewed highly towards queer and gender queer
identities, were mainly referencing dominant forms of Christianity. Emily talked about this explicitly: “I think so many people are acting out of the trauma they have experienced when people have taken spirituality and really abused it against them.” She went on to say that the impact of this dynamic colors spirituality and creates barriers to its later engagement in that “a lot of people feel that way about their church experiences when they were younger [with] just so much shame and [that is] the opposite, I think, of what spirituality is and should be.” Beyond their prior spiritual experiences, subjects also discussed the intersection of trauma, harm, and rifts created by patriarchy and white supremacy. In relation to gender, Jessica reflected that “we’re almost afraid to create our own stories, it’s almost like we need people to boldly come out and do that, but no one wants to be like a prophet…Everyone’s so traumatized by the white male prophet, but I actually really want someone who could come out and [spiritually lead], and it just takes very special people.” Finally, Rachel talked about “the deep rifts and divides created by racism and the intergenerational trauma of racism…I think that is a major, major obstacle to movement building right now that is related with spirituality.”

The second theme identified relates to taboos against spirituality in secular aspects of dominant culture, internalized in leftist movements, as well as the perceived need to appeal to dominant cultural beliefs and frames. Rachel talked about the broader taboos of our materialist culture and how spirituality “just never comes up in normal culture, and then, especially in leftist circles, there’s so much atheism and so much fear of religion that I think people are just not used to it.” Joshua picked up on the theme discussed in the prior section by Zach and Kate and discussed how:
[what] is intended to make things more accessible and less alienating, just makes things uninteresting…it’s probably a decision to take away something that would give direct action a lot of meaning and a lot of specific significance because who knows, maybe somebody will think it’s weird or incongruous with their belief system [and] … I think because on some pretty huge ontological level that’s just not…where people are coming with it. They’re coming from a sense of moral dialectic with it. And so, there’s always going to be this pressure, not only to appear to putative participants as reasonable and appealing but to whatever the power structure that’s ostensibly being influenced by the action is [and] probably also people decided it was bad messaging.

Here Joshua provided a different view and clearly critiques the tendency by movement participants to attempt to make messaging appeal to dominant power structures. Here he pointed to how in attempting to “appeal” or not “alienate” the broader public, the materialist and alienated relations of dominant Western society are left unchallenged.

Even when there is tension with dominant beliefs, other social movements do not let those tensions prevent them from articulating the transformation in social relations their movement is advocating for. The question that arises here is whether addressing the climate crisis requires a transformation in how dominant human cultures construct our fundamental relations with each other and the more-than-human world. Evident in these data is a sense that movement participants and the larger movement they participate in do not have clarity or alignment on this question. Whatever the outcome, it does seem essential that the direct action climate movement, as well as broader climate movements, answer this question for themselves and then act accordingly. That said, it is worthwhile to reflectively observe my own confusion around this question. After one of the meetings at which I was both a participant observer and in the role of facilitator, I wrote that:

It is interesting to note that I was more in the agenda design role here and that there was less connective, spiritual(ish), and grounding dynamics. It is worth reflecting on my hesitancy to not bring this more directly and whether or not I
should be. It is my sense that I don’t given that it is somewhat counter-cultural and I don’t want to impose, that being said it clearly resonated in the second session. (Observation October 29th, 2019)

Ari picked up on this theme in reflecting that for Rising Tide, the goal was “never to get people to feel more interconnected to life and change their identity at that level, but if that is actually what’s required, why isn’t that more of an explicit thing that we talk about or try and do or have as a stated aim of our work?” In their reflections, they shared how it was actually this very sense of interconnection articulated in biocentrism more explicitly by Earth First! that had first resonated and drew them into movement work: “I thought, holy shit, someone put words to what I thought, felt my whole life.” They also articulated an “insecurity” by movement participants in sharing such feelings more broadly and a worry, echoing some of the thoughts above about alienating people, that there is a “fear of being written off as just crazy wing nuts.”

A third theme identified in this study is the perception of spirituality as private and the lack of spaces with sufficient trust and vulnerability to allow engagement. On the theme of spirituality as private, Ashley shared:

I think for other people it was a very strong force in their lives that was hyper-private, and that they weren’t comfortable sharing with other people and places. Or that they didn’t want to verbalize, or that the way they would share was in a non-conceptual way. And I think for other people maybe the things that I or you would call or consider spiritual, they wouldn’t even put that framework on it.

Adding to this, Amanda talked about how trust and vulnerability were necessary to allow those conversations to be had:

I think it’s that connection to one another that lets us have those conversations that I think are more spiritual, because if we weren’t creating a culture of connection to one another, where we cared about each other as people outside of
the movement, and outside of organizing for an action, we wouldn’t be having those conversations about facing things like climate grief. It’s inherent.

And while some places of movement dialogue have that level of connectivity, this observation raises important questions about the conditions in which engagement with these deeply felt beliefs, practices, and worldviews is appropriate and possible.

Finally, echoing the theme of settler-Indigenous dynamics that is threaded throughout this dissertation, there were specific themes identified by respondents as they related to settler colonialism and the dominance of Western ontology. Megan reflected on the resistance among white settlers to articulate more connective or spiritual frames for their organizing, and how “we’ve been indoctrinated not to [and] colonized to not do that” and that it’s “easier to talk about the numbers of the climate crisis and emissions and targets and the IPCC.” She went to share her thoughts about how it is:

a lot harder to go deeper because we’ve intellectualized everything, including this problem. That you have to know everything about X, Y, Z in order to be able to fight this, everything about science and about transforming the grid and alternatives to the ways we live our lives. And maybe it’s about something way more human and that we’re all born with that we’ve lost a sense of.

Rachel built on this theme and talked about how:

climate specifically has really leaned on that pretty heavily and science as a knowledge system has been very privileged over more Indigenous ways of knowing and has been actually a really damaging, colonizing force. And I think that makes it a little interesting to then try to reintroduce spirituality into spaces that are like, rah-rah science. Culturally, it’s a little wonky. I think the same could probably be said for other issues that are not climate focused.

In relation to what I have written above, these comments articulate that settler colonialism itself, including as internalized by white settler and non-Indigenous people, is a reason for why spirituality does not show up in climate movement spaces.
These materialist and dualistic (strong subject/object ontology) worldviews within Western culture are part of the project of settler colonialism, both in the Americas and in the preceding intra-European phase, and have been posited as the universal way in which we should experience and construct relationships (see pages 24-28). A primary mechanism for conversion within this project, as clearly articulated by Amitav Ghosh among many others, has been violence. In an interview describing his thesis in *The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* in which he synthesizes a wide body of scholarly work, Ghosh argues that:

> it was really this violence that Europeans unleashed upon other peoples that ultimately became a violence unleashed upon the Earth. It was when they began to treat people as resources that the idea came to them that everything was a resource meant for the mastery of a very few. Because let’s not forget, the colonialists, the conquistadores, and so on, they were a tiny minority even within their own countries. They were elites really often. And they also unleashed the same kind of violence against farmers and the peasantry in their countries. Most of all, they unleashed it against women. This entire witchcraft craze in Europe is completely coterminous with this period of settler colonialism. And in effect, the violence that they unleashed upon really poor peasant women in Europe was modeled upon the violence that they had unleashed upon Native Americans. (Vaughn-Lee 2022:n.p.)

He goes on to develop the argument that this violence was carried out because the people and the worldviews encountered throughout the world that gave agency and vitality to the more-than-human world were viewed as threatening the very project of colonization and the structure of relations at the center of Western thought (Ghosh 2021). Yet, despite the long, violent indoctrination into materialist and dualistic worldviews and the strong tendency to center science in climate movements, the white settler and non-Indigenous

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participants in this study overwhelmingly articulate the need for alternative ontologies, ways of being, and conceptions of relationships that undermine this colonial project. They have shared, as articulated in Chapters 5 and 6, that a spirituality of connectivity which composes them together as humans and with the more-than-human world is important for their personal participation and the movement. That said, there is clearly confusion within these movements about how or in what ways to integrate this into their goals, strategies, and practices. Additionally, there are numerous barriers and obstacles, such as explored in this chapter. The outcome of this situation is the paradoxical absence of something respondents have identified as important and essential. There are numerous possible ways to resolve this confusion, including working to address the climate crisis from within dominant Western worldviews. My experience and my analysis of these data lead me to the view that the latter would be a fundamentally flawed approach. In the final, concluding chapter I will discuss the findings and develop my argument that a fundamental and explicit confrontation with these worldviews as well as explicitly engaging in transformational identity work is essential. I will also explore the limitations of this study and opportunities for future research.
CHAPTER 8
BECOMING EARTHBOUND IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Are transformations of identity implied or required by the Anthropocene? Do dominant human cultures need to become something different to avert the potential catastrophes of this era? If so, what changes are necessary? In many ways, these are central questions that emerge from this research, and I explore them in this final chapter. What Latour’s (2017) concept of the “earthbound” offers this study is a description of a people intentionally mobilizing themselves within a collective identity that is situated within and contextualized by their unique relations to their land base, or territory as he calls it. As I detailed in Chapter 5, respondents articulated an emergent identity that points towards and is connected to Latour’s theorization. Morgan, an outlier, who presented a much more developed version of what their fellow activists spoke of, expressed their desire to work towards creating a “social being that is really profoundly rooted and is interweaving with the rest of life.” In this final chapter, I begin by reviewing the contributions of this research to the relevant bodies of academic literature. I then discuss the findings through a movement-relevant framework, which while building on academic contributions also tries to tease out some implications for those practicing social change as part of climate movements. Finally, I discuss settler colonialism, positionality, the limitations of this project, and future opportunities for research before concluding.
Spirituality and Collective Identity

In this research, respondents described significant and personally meaningful spiritual identities. Amongst research participants there were a few outliers who articulated identities correlated to the more normative dualistic and materialistic spiritual identities found in the dominant culture. Surprisingly, 16 of the 21 participants articulated some degree of what I have been calling an “earthbound” identity, following Latour’s (2017) phrasing. These identities and their associated beliefs are best understood as emergent with a moderate level of alignment (see Chapter 5 for the fullest presentation of these data). Respondents’ identities, which appeared in their interviews in various strengths, included a strong sense of interconnectivity beyond the self, a kinship with other more-than-human beings, a biocentric worldview, and a belief in more-than-human agency. These findings add to a small body of literature focused on spirituality in radical social movements (Taylor 2009; Letcher 2001; Letcher 2003; Mallory 2010).

In the case of Taylor’s (2009) work on “dark green religion,” my findings, while affirming Taylor’s in some ways, also diverge significantly from his and point to potential shifts and changes in the last 15 to 20 years within radical movements, and potentially to structural or external shifts that are altering beliefs (e.g., a much deeper experience of ecological collapse and climate change happening). My study also contributes to the scant research, outside of the social movement subfield, that looks into similar themes. For example, Poonamallee (2011:244) describes how the “reclamation of sacredness can be a source of generative capacities for radical change” in a transformative community initiative in Rajasthan, India. While she does not utilize the
concept of collective identity, her findings are highly relevant in that the “sense of the sacred lies in a sense of interconnectedness with not only people but also with the universe at large” (Poonamallee 2011:247). In my framing, she is talking about the active construction of explicitly spiritual collective identities with both human and more-than-human beings and the “generative capacities” this offers to movements for social change.

My research also provides a real world case study of some of the theoretical content exploring ideas of identity and ontological shifts in the Anthropocene (e.g., Tsing 2015; Stengers 2015; Latour 2017; Haraway 2016). Novel for the collective identity literature is the framing of collective identity formation as explicitly spiritual as well as the findings that show constructions of identities that fuse movements and the more-than-human (see pages 149-151 in Chapter 6). Additionally, these findings suggest that the spiritual, or ontological, aspect of identity is essential for understanding collective identity. Below, I discuss this further (pages 198-202) and suggest that the inclusion of ontological levels of collective identity also help to address a gap in the literature about how different identities relate to the process of collective identity formation (Saunders 2008). Similarly, my research contributes to this body of literature in developing understandings of how different levels of identity interact or “converge” in the construction of collective identities, including, in particular, the spiritual or ontological aspects of one’s identity (Snow 2001).

Paradoxically, given what has been discussed thus far, respondents described the explicit engagement of spirituality as being largely absent from climate movement spaces. Twenty of the twenty-one respondents discussed this absence. Their reflections
included examples of how traumatic experiences with organized religion, taboos in leftist movements against spiritual content, and the perception of spirituality as private or requiring a level of vulnerability not common in movement spaces all contributed to the absence of the spiritual. This absence is quite consequential given the dialogic understanding of collective identity as constructed through “a negotiated process in which the ‘we’ involved in collective action is elaborated and given meaning” (Gamson 1991:40).

In that collective identities are described as being “talked into existence,” climate movements suffer from the lack of opportunities to develop them, and they remain relatively underdeveloped and emergent for most respondents (Hunt et al. 2004:445). This paradox underscores the contribution this study makes to providing a compelling case study that merits further investigation of spirituality in social movements. Respondents repeatedly discussed spirituality as important as well as sharing dynamics that are suppressing or otherwise obstructing direct, collective engagement. Throughout this dissertation, I have made the case that an important aspect to this dynamic, especially for the mostly white settler movement participants I interviewed, is settler colonialism. This includes a tension between spirituality and Western scientific ideologies and epistemologies as discussed in Chapter 6, especially given the centrality of science in climate debates and mobilizations. The respondents I interviewed seemed to be engaged in an urgent attempt to transform the destructive dualistic and materialistic Western paradigms, both in themselves and in the world. And while there was a clear practice of integrating Indigenous voices into actions to address this dynamic (among other reasons),
there was also an almost tragic inability to center that process of transformation and authentically engage it in movement practice from their own positionality vis a vis white supremacy and settler colonialism. I will return to this theme below in my more movement-oriented discussions of the implications of this research.

*Identity, Participation, and Social Movement Scholarship*

Not only were spiritual identities important for the respondents, but as I explored in Chapter 6, they discussed these identities as being supportive, and even essential, to their movement participation, as well as fundamentally sustaining to their ongoing engagement. Whereas previously in social movement studies, spirituality and religion have primarily been studied as networks that support mobilization, this case study offers an example of the sustaining aspects of spiritual identities and practices. Respondents discussed how their spirituality helped them change their feelings of fear, let go of the illusion of control, process grief, and otherwise ground and integrate intense experiences arising from their activism (see Figure 8 on page 166). The participants’ responses also confirmed one of the core claims of the collective identity literature in that they emphasized the fundamentally sustaining and supporting impact of being part of both movement collective identities and more-than-human collective identities. Again, part of what this study contributes to the literature is the explicit framing of this experience and collective identity as being spiritual, as well as the inclusion of more-than-human collective identity constructions.
In ways related to the work of Polletta (2002), discussed in Chapters 2 and 6, there seem to be clear ways in which there is a fusion of identity, strategy, and forms of action. However, respondents’ interviews point more to the importance of action as opposed to the talk or dialogic process emphasized by Polletta and other collective identity scholars. In my data there were clear indications that experience and action, and especially direct action, was transformative for participants’ identity. Two poignant examples are the conversion stories told about the rail blockade at the Anacortes Refinery in 2016 in which 51 people were arrested. Jessica described her experience participating in the blockade as offering an alignment with “purpose” and “nature” as well as culminating in an experience of becoming an “activist” (see page 125). Connected to this same action, Chris shared how the experience led to a fundamental shift away from individuality and towards collective identities of people in struggle through his experience of being arrested (see page 155-156). Additionally, Amanda offers an example of the fusion of collective identity and action in that “win or lose…it’s existentially necessary to fight” (see page 150). Based on my data, I cannot make a definitive claim that the directional relationship of collective identity and action flows from action to identity in way contrary to Polletta’s (2002) theorization (see Figure 9 below as contrasted with Figure 7 on page 164). However, my data do invite scholars and movement participants to consider this possibility and center the role of action, in addition to the more common focus on talk, in transformational processes in social movements. It may be that direct action, in its shifting of the locus of agency to the collectivity taking action as well as its emotional intensity, more effectively offers this
pathway in contrast to more institutional forms of action (e.g., signing a petition, holding a symbolic protest, meeting with legislators). I find strong indications in the data that collective action, and specifically direct action, can reframe collective identity in terms of perceived agency, awareness of alternative ways of being, and intentionality with regards to reifying new identities.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 9. Alternative Model of Action-Identity Relationship**

Morgan’s reflections on direct action underscore the possibility of this form of action to offer something particularly powerful:

I think direct action gives the participants the taste of a different reality...One is participating with a different way of practicing life in which what we do as human living beings, like what we literally do, the movements we make with our arms and our mouths, our motion and then our direct participation with others, like immediately around us, becomes world historical. Literally it becomes the place in which, at least in a small way, in a fragmented way, it becomes the place in which change is either happening or not happening. It becomes important. It becomes part of the life of the world.

The respondents indicate the transformative impact of direct action as a possible causal factor through the experiences they describe. Given that demographic differences did not
yield patterns in the data, there are other, more powerful, processes at play. Another interesting aspect is that I failed to find the originally planned category of “burned out” or completely disengaged former movement participants (see pages 148-149). It is possible that this was a network effect given that these types of individuals would, by definition, have exited movement networks. It could also be they did not want to talk about former movement work. However, given my prior involvement in the movement, I had access to lists of former activists, including many who, based on my experience, I assumed had “burned out.” However, whenever I talked with them I always found that there was some form of continuing or “transitioned” participation. This finding could point to the power of the fusion that occurs between identity and action through movement participation and the inability of former activists to completely exit or disengage. Further research would be necessary to make a definitive claim as to what is occurring, but it is worth noting here.

This study also contributes to the understanding of how interests are situated and emerge from collective identities, and in this case, spiritual identities. Polletta et al. (2001:284) note how collective identity posits the situated emergence of interests rather than their given nature as well as how motivations arise without reference to material incentives. Clear interests emerged out of the transformed identities that were shared by respondents in this study. In some cases, such as in experiences shared by Jessica, Chris, Morgan, and Tyler, this led to a fusion of identity and action as well as an obligation to take action in defense and on behalf of life. For example, after the transformative identity experience described in Chapter 5, Tyler felt compelled to restart his activism. That said,
the structural dynamics of climate change and the ecological crisis are important to keep in mind and in balance with the idea of a “situated” emergence of identity. Namely, the climate crisis itself is unfolding with an increasingly disruptive nature that demands one’s attention and transforms one’s experiences.

This is what Stengers (2015) referred to as the “intrusion of Gaia.” Latour (2017) also argues that the climate crisis heralds the possibility of a re-sensitization to place, or territory as he sometimes refers to it, in which individuals’ interests arise in relation to the particular realities of the places they consciously and intentionally inhabit. And Tsing emphasizes our “contamination,” or inherent transformation through encounter, in our participation in the “multispecies entanglements that make life across the earth” (Tsing 2015:28; Tsing et al. 2017:28). Or as the acclaimed science fiction author Octavia Butler imagines as the fundamental tenet of the religion “Earthseed” in Parable of the Sower: “All that you touch, you Change. / All that you Change Changes you” (Butler 2019:3).

These last points suggest a re-evaluation of collective identity as being primarily “a product of conscious action” as Melucci argues (1995:50-51), and suggests the potential importance of structural dynamics, including climate change and ecological collapse, that may be returning to prominence in the Anthropocene, particularly for activists and those directly impacted. It may be that such a sensitization to the structural realities, and limitations, of the specific places human communities inhabit is a necessary counterbalance to the enormous impact the dominant human culture as articulated in the concept of the Anthropocene.
Lastly, the research presented here helps build the case for addressing the stark absence of spirituality observed in social movement studies, as well as in other disciplines (Poonamallee 2011; Hutchison 2012). This case study contributes to and supports calls for addressing this absence and engaging in further study about the role of spirituality in social movements, as well as in other disciplines. Furthermore, it is my conclusion that social movement studies would do well to look at, understand, and attempt an integration of spiritual and religious literature, both contemporary and historical. In many ways, at least at their roots, most religious traditions have a radical program of social change at the core of their teachings and practices. Often at the core of this social change program was a fundamental shift in personal and collective identities, including the dissolution of the distinction between the two. At least, this is apparent in the early traditions of Buddhism and Christianity, the two traditions I know best. The firewall that seems to have existed between the social movement literature and the spiritual and religious literatures would do well to come down. In these religious traditions and literatures there is something of relevance for those disciplines, including social movement studies, that seek to understand transformation in identity and social structure and their relationship to one another.

Towards Movement Relevance

Beyond these academic contributions, I believe that this research is of importance

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60 Institutionalization, in many ways, has been a tool to blunt the revolutionary critique of these movements. Emperor Constantine’s conversion to Christianity in the fourth century of the common era and this religion’s institutionalization in the Roman empire is a poignant example in the West.
to direct action and climate justice movements themselves. Centering this application of my analysis follows my commitment to generating movement-relevant research and is also captured in the specific movement-oriented publication linked in Appendix F (Bevington et al. 2005). In so doing, I continue to build on and develop some of the academic contributions reviewed above. My intent in this analysis will be to stay true to the guiding context outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 and firmly make this project responsive to the crisis we find ourselves in. In so doing, I discuss how alternative language and framing may allow movements to engage with spiritual themes while avoiding some of the obstacles outlined in Chapter 7. Developing these alternatives will provide for additional understandings of how identities relate and are generated in collective identity formations. I make a case for the necessity of transformative identity work for addressing the climate crisis in the Anthropocene. Relative to this research, I discuss the ideas of becoming “earthbound” in greater depth as a valuable existing current to develop.

Moving Beyond Spiritual Framing: New Frameworks for Movements

For the respondents in this study, spirituality was a term that captured both grounding beliefs about how relations are structured and experiences of connectivity to different collectives (e.g., a movement, the more-than-human world). And while this was clearly important to participants, they identified numerous barriers that limited content framed as spiritual or religious from being directly engaged in meetings, gatherings, or actions (see above for a review of some of the specific reasons). At the same time, some instances described in the previous chapters showed that shared events and rituals were
meaningful and experienced as spiritual (e.g., the wolf song, singing in the Oregon State Capital rotunda and elsewhere, the stump seder, the Anacortes blockade). There is an opportunity for movements to intentionally engage with spirituality without activating many of the obstacles that comes with it, as articulated in Chapter 7. Should the formation of these collective identities be important for ontological shifts in relation to the climate crisis and settler colonialism, it will be essential that movements have the ability to talk about them. As Hunt et al. (2004:445) remind us, “collective identities are talked into existence” and as such movements need ways to do that talking. The data in this study clearly indicate that this “talking” is severely constrained by a variety of factors and thus the further development of the collective identities presented here is limited.

And while I argued above that actions and experiences have their own power in experientially bringing collective identities into existence alongside talk, the opportunity for dialogue to create shared meanings has the potential to reify and deepen these impacts.

It is my assessment of the data, as well as my own experience, that a shift in language and framing is the most strategic move to allow the discursive development of what might be called spirituality and its related collective identities. Simply put, there are too many preconceived notions and other stumbling blocks to try to explicitly integrate spirituality, framed as such, within climate movements, at least for many settler and non-Native participants. Other language can simply bypass these obstacles while still getting at the same religious and spiritual work. In Chapter 5, I discussed and then integrated Morgan’s definition of religion as “a word for one of the practices that mobilize people as
people, in other words, groups, particular kinds of people,” involving “practices, rituals, ceremonies, mythologies, and the telling of those mythologies.” Morgan then talked about spirituality as “a word to describe the texture and the strength of certain sorts of connection one has through religious practices.” We should understand the “people” referenced here as a collective identity that includes an ontological orientation to the more-than-human world. In other words, these definitions require us to look at how a human culture conceives of itself and situates itself in relation to all other aspects of this world (both living and non-living). Those relationships might be ones of domination and separateness, reciprocity and inclusion, or many other orientations.

What kind of people do we want to become? What kind of people are movements mobilizing through their practices and stories? These are the questions that movements should be centering and aim to be clear in their answers to. This framing implicitly engages all of the content that religion and spirituality give rise to, but without using that language. This is also the orientation that scholars such as Latour (2017), as well as others I referenced earlier in this dissertation (see pages 17-24), take in thinking through the possibility and necessity of ontological shifts within the climate crisis as well as settler colonialism. Critical here is whether the people who social movements are trying to mobilize are aligned with the people as constructed by the dominant culture.

What I am referencing by “people” here is collective identity. I would like to return, for a moment, more explicitly to the implications of this study for social scientists. Principally, this concerns the narrowness of the concept of collective identity as used
within non-anthropological social science literature. The collective identity literature fails to situate or expand the context of collective identity beyond the group, movement, or societal level. In my discussion earlier, I pointed out that scholars recognize that “understanding the interaction among constituent individuals and their groups – or agents and identity structures – is a crucial part of the analysis of social identities” (Abdelal et al. 2006:701). Despite the identified importance here, it is also acknowledged that there is “little evidence about how individuals sort out and combine different sources of identity” (Polletta et al., 2001:299). As discussed, Snow (2001) does attempt, at least on a theoretical level, to speak to these interactions. Tellingly, his analytical framework only distinguishes between personal, social (as in social roles or types like teacher or mother), and collective identities, with personal identities being defined as “attributes and meanings attributed to oneself by the actor” (Snow, 2001:n.p.). In other words, the deeper sense of which kind of people are being mobilized, such as I am discussing here, is essentially taken as a given and is missing from the analytical framework. What I am pointing to here is the necessity of holding a wider view of collective identity and keeping in mind the relationships between multiple collective identities, including those deeper identities, as well as being explicit about the mobilization projects they are a part of. By deeper, I am referencing the ontological framework and identity that has significant implications for how other personal and collective identities are oriented. For

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61 As an outsider to this discipline, though one who does read within anthropology, it seems to me that the discipline very much integrates the deeper understanding of collective identity I share here. In many ways, anthropology in its study of the diversity of human culture is attuned to look for and try to understand differences in religion, ontology, and cosmology. I find it curious that these insights seem to have not penetrated the collective identity literature in sociology and some other disciplines.
example, if one’s identity, at the ontological level, is connected to a story of God giving humans dominion over an Earth that is separate from themselves, that will inform social, movement, group, and individual identities. A different orienting impact will be had if one’s identity is connected to a story about the beginning of time when humans came to the Earth, through a being called Skywoman, that recounts her survival through the bounty of the material world that are offered as gifts from the animals (Kimmerer 2015:3-7).

Figure 10. A Nested and Expanded Model of Collective Identity
The inclusion of the ontological aspect in a nested model of collective identity appears in Figure 10. The ontological level of the model is the collective identity that I am referring to as “people” above and it is exactly this level that is missing from the standard social movement literature (hence, I have marked it in green). This is the underlying ontological relations of a culture that are embedded in our worldviews, behavior, and relationships, especially as they relate to the construction of what we call “nature.” Again, the collective identity literature, whether intentionally or unintentionally, has largely taken this level as a given. The essence of what I am expressing here is that this is not a tenable assumption or orientation when that very level becomes the source of contention and is indicated by theorists in Chapter 2 as giving rise to things like the climate crisis, creating a legitimating foundation for settler colonialism, or driving the mass extinction event we are experiencing. I would also stress that the model above is not meant to imply anything universal about an ontology. There can, and should in my view, be many ontologies within which a model like this could be used for analysis of identity. In many ways, settler colonialism is a case study in the dangers and devastation wrought by the imposition and assertion of a singular, “universal” settler ontology (see pages 24-28). Additionally, the kind of deeply situated, relational, and place-based earthbound identities theorized by Latour (2007) and others fundamentally imply a multiplicity of ontologies.

Admittedly, this theoretical model risks contributing to Polletta’s (2001) critique of the “catholicity” of collective identity as a concept trying to do everything. However, it is my view that the inclusion of ontology contributes to addressing important gaps such
as the confusion about the level at which collective identity formation occurs as well as what levels exist (Saunders 2008). My framework also points to the importance of ontology when considering identity correspondence in which there is the convergence of personal and collective identities and the construction of a collective identity that subsumes the personal (Snow 2001). In the following section, I will share my assessment of what transforming that level of collective identity might look like with reference to the data in this project. For now, I will return to drawing out the language that may help movements, and potentially scholars as well, be able to intentionally make these changes.

Drawing from the definitions and frameworks about religion and spirituality developed from the talk of the participants, I have generated a framework that centers the idea of “becoming a people.” I believe this framework resonates with pre-existing movements, particularly those (such as the direct action climate movement) that seek to radically change social relations as they relate to class, sexuality, gender, and race. There is already a strong precedent for and praxis of trying to become something different, as people, in many movements. In the collective identity model above, one can think of these as existing at the societal level. What is being added here is an expansion of the relations engaged in this transformative work to include the ontological, which is to say how relations are understood and structured with the non-human or more-than-human world, what the West knows as “nature.” To do this, or any transformative collective identity work, there is a need for stories (the mythologies spoken of above) and practices (the rituals, ceremonies, and telling of those mythologies). Connecting to what I described above (see pages 178-179), these stories contain a set of religious beliefs as
well as the language, signs, and symbols that reference these beliefs. The *practices* then actualize and create an experience of inhabiting those beliefs. These are all different words to talk about religious dynamics. Lastly, there is the strength of the *connectivity* individuals experience with the stories and practices as well as with the people which one is becoming. This is a different word to talk about spiritual dynamics.

This framework, visualized in Figure 11 below, could be employed for any conceivable collective identity formation. It is important to underscore that this process is operational for *all* cultures. The dominant culture is constantly tending to the stories, practices, and felt connectivity that stabilize the dominant way people are mobilized in Western society. This includes the alienated, dualistic, extractive, and dominating ways of being that undergird the widespread destruction of life currently underway. As such, unless movements explicitly work to cultivate alternatives to that which is posited by the dominant culture, they will inevitably reify and reinforce the dominant culture’s mobilization of ourselves as this particular kind of people. If the direct action climate movement, and social movements broadly, wish to cultivate a mobilization of people as something other than atomized individuals in a dualistic and objectified relationship with “nature,” they will have to be very intentional as it will go against so many of the stories and practices that are hegemonic within the dominant culture. The fundamental questions for climate movement participants are: Do they want to do this? Is it necessary?
In closing, exactly which terms are used or whether the terminology is shared across movement spaces seems less important as long as the terms are clear, well defined, and thus translatable from context to context. My intent is simply to identify the containers within which movements, or even sub-groupings within movements, will want to articulate and tend to in whatever way is appropriate if they wish to change how they are mobilized as a people. And that last clause is essential, as this may or may not be the goal of any given movement group, or even a movement itself. From my perspective, climate movements need new stories and practices that point towards new collective identities at these religious levels. In the data presented above, I believe that we see many strong starts among respondents with regard to both stories and practices. One interesting

Figure 11. Emergent Theoretical Framework for Collective Identity Formation
question for social scientists is whether or not emergent collective identities that challenge dominant ontologies, such as described by the respondents in this study, are replicable in the general public or are unique to this particular movement or environmental movements generally.

Collective Identity in the Anthropocene: Becoming Earthbound

A re-grounding in the crisis of the Anthropocene is important for this section (see pages 2-7). First, for climate change, it is my view that the climate crisis is but an aspect of a broader crisis that is fundamentally about our relationship to life. This crisis of life is part of the unbalanced impact of humans as captured by the concept of the Anthropocene. For example, were I to snap my fingers and solve the climate crisis at the level of greenhouse gas emissions and future climate trajectories, it would do very little to address the mass extinction event we are in the midst of, which is the sixth largest in the 3.7 billion years there is believed to have been life on this planet. Of course, this collapse of ecosystems also imperils the human communities that rely on them.62 Would this really constitute success in any meaningful sense of the word? Second, were that snapping of the fingers only to resolve the climate crisis within a framework of carbon and other greenhouse gases, it would greatly exacerbate inequality and oppression for humans as it plays out across gender, race, and class (to name but a few). Would this really constitute success in any meaningful sense of the word? This latter point is, of course, a central

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62 While I think we can take it as a given here, the “of course” in this sentence is hardly an assumption of the dominant culture and the stories it tells in its mobilization of us as a people. In those stories, we are viewed largely as independent from and in control of nature, rather than the opposite as is implied here.
aspect of the critique that the direct action climate movement alongside frontline
communities made of mainstream climate and environmental movements as discussed in
Chapter 4. It is also another aspect of how we relate to life, in this case, human life.

With this view in mind, it becomes essential to seek alternatives to these
outcomes. In so doing, addressing the climate crisis may be part, and perhaps even a
pivotal part, of a transition away from the hegemonic cultural identity cultivated over
thousands of years in Western Europe and then exported throughout the world. In North
America (and elsewhere) settler colonialism was essential in this process. It is important
to then view the climate crisis as cultural in nature. It is my view that intentionally
mobilizing ourselves as a different kind of people, and thus how we relate to other
beings, must be a part of what movements are doing (recognizing that there are many
casual factors in these kinds of deep changes). With regards to settler-Indigenous
dynamics, this will also allow white settler and non-Indigenous groups to act in greater
alignment with Indigenous communities and organizations. Within the frameworks
offered here, it is useful to note that Indigenous resistance has often been about
defending, recovering, and cultivating mobilizations of being a people that are counter to
that of dominant American settler culture. As I have stated previously, and as was most
evident at Standing Rock, these forms of resistance can be extraordinarily attractive to
white settlers and non-Indigenous people. In the context of our discussion here, this may
be precisely because they present a deeper, broader, and clearer critique of what we are
fighting against and fighting for. In other words, the Indigenous people leading the
mobilizations at Standing Rock were very clear and very explicit that their resistance was
part of becoming (or remaining) a different type of people for which, to use one poignant example, water *is* life. However, unless non-Indigenous movements more explicitly cultivate their own project of becoming different peoples, they risk participating in the very cultural appropriation and extraction of Indigenous traditions that has been an essential part of the colonial project.

Following the experience of conducting this research, it is my belief that the direct action climate movement and the broader climate movement should work towards intentionally cultivating and developing identities and ontologies that we might call *earthbound*. In Chapter 5, I described the components of this emergent identity as expressed by respondents (see Table 10 for a summary). Tending to the development of the types of kinship, biocentrism, interconnection, and distributed agency discussed in Chapter 5 in stories and practices would be a generative place to start. With the above framework in mind, we might think about how the direct action climate movement could:

- Develop stories about human kinship with other species as well as rocks, water, and what is currently framed as “non-living,” and which situate humans as neither greater or lesser than the rest of the more-than-human world.
- Develop stories about our interconnection with other beings and the idea that agency is distributed throughout the more-than-human world, rather than being held solely by humans. One climate-related example involves viewing the breathable and life-giving atmosphere as a co-creation of all beings, living and non-living, that share this world.
• Develop practices that bring these stories into meetings, actions, or gatherings in small or large but consistent, and culturally appropriate, ways. Over time, more significant rituals, or ceremonies (though these labels need not be used) could be developed that allow individuals to experience a greater connectivity to these stories.

At the level of practices, it is worth reviewing a few practices that were observed as part of this research, and were identified as impactful by respondents, as examples of what it looks like for practices to inhabit stories:

• Facilitating a guided meditation at a youth climate meeting created a sense of grounded interconnectivity with the Earth through the invitation to imagine roots extending from the bodies of those gathered down into the soil (see page 126-127).

• Invoking the waters at the site of pipeline construction in British Columbia, an Indigenous speaker wove those gathered in resistance with the land and more-than-human world at the actions against the Transmountain pipeline at the Port of Vancouver, WA offices (see page 126 and 146-147).

• Using song to connect those gathered in a low-risk demonstration with those beginning a sit-in in the Governor’s office at the Oregon State Capital powerfully wove both groups together as a collectivity taking action together, rather than as two different groups (see page 122-123).

• At the same action, inviting those gathered for the rally to take a moment to pause and greet someone next to them allowed participants to recognize the
embodied and specific nature of those who have come together in resistance in an otherwise large and abstract crowd (see page 141).

- Pouring the waters brought from the different places individuals had arrived from connected their local ecosystems, the individual activists, and their collectivity in struggle together at meetings of the Rising Tide North America collective (see page 146).

It is possible within these examples and the framework shared above to avoid the use of the words “spirituality” and “religion.” If alternative words can be found, it is my opinion that movements would do best to avoid them, given the baggage and barriers presented in Chapter 7. It is also important that movements create stories, and practices that embody those stories, in ways that are intentional and appropriate to their identities and experiences.

Respondents in this study described shifting their identities, even if in the most rudimentary manner, and talked about the positive impacts of that experience. If alignment grows between stories, practices, and an explicit project of becoming, these impacts will likely grow. Chapter 6 detailed the positive transformation of experiences of grief, fear, and the loss of control when supported by the views and practices identified under the broad umbrella of spirituality. Amanda noted the already coded nature of spirituality in movement spaces and shared that “based on my understanding of spirituality I think it does come up, but it just is not given that name,” and noted how she saw it in her group’s “talk…about climate grief, and those feelings of hopelessness, or how do you keep moving, and even things like, how do you address burnout in a
movement space.” While there are pathways to resolve these specific examples within the dominant and dualistic cultural views, there are also limitations. How does one fully allow oneself to grieve for other beings whom we largely relegate to objects for instrumental human use? Where is hope to be found when we see our movements be reluctant to confront the core motivations of profit, extraction, and domination? If we actively engage in attempts to create new relational, situated, and rooted ways of being a people these kinds of questions will have better answers. In so doing, the intensity that comes up in fighting for climate justice will have better avenues for resolution and transformation. Thus, I believe these data indicate that the attempt at mobilizing ourselves as different peoples has the potential to provide motivation, energy, and a sense of wholeness that will fuel movements. The plurality of the word “people” is essential in the previous sentence. This type of “project” will inevitably be projects in that any relational, place-based, or situated development of new collective identities will generate a multitude of different kinds of people. And mirroring the long development of the current dominant mobilization of people, attempts to generate alternatives will also inherently be long, inter-generational processes.

Movements are grasping at the need to shift the basis of our relations, especially as they invite and center Indigenous voices, as discussed in Chapter 4. At the Port of Vancouver actions against the Transmountain Pipeline, I wrote in my research notes about how Indigenous speakers were centered and offered explicitly spiritual content about the need to “become true humans” again (Observation February 7th, 2020). This clearly resonated with those assembled, who were mostly non-Indigenous. It was also a
way of talking about becoming a different kind of people, and clearly the speaker saw that different kinds of people were possible, and necessary, to mobilize. I also wrote about how there was a stark contrast between Indigenous and non-Indigenous speakers, with the latter failing to intentionally cultivate any sense of collective identity or point towards the need for connecting the action with a bigger project of mobilizing ourselves as a people or changing our relationship to life (Observation February 7th, 2020). There is an underlying tension in this dynamic that showed up again and again in this research. In the following section, I explore this dynamic one final time. In my view, movements would do well to explicitly begin to mobilize themselves as a different kind of people in and through the disruptive organizing they currently engage in.

Settler Colonialism and Positionality

One of the dynamic findings that emerges from this research is the essential importance of situating conversations around religion and spirituality within the context of settler colonialism, identity, and Indigeneity. I will share a few final reflections and make the case for the importance of centering one’s positionality related to settler colonialism in any future studies that seek to understand the intersection of social movements, religion and spirituality, transforming ontologies, and earthbound ways of being a people. As I have discussed, settler colonialism and the alienation and ungroundedness felt by white-settler and non-Indigenous participants looms large. I have described how there is an implicit attempt to counter this dynamic by bringing in Indigenous voices to center spirituality, Earth-based worldviews, and different ways of
being a people. In Chapter 4, I identified this as both essential and problematic. It is problematic in that it prevents groups and movements that are coming from a dominant settler or non-Indigenous makeup and orientation from developing their own transformative identity work oriented to becoming a different type of people. As discussed in Chapter 4, this limits the extent to which these movements can be held accountable by Indigenous communities or guided by frameworks provided by their identity and ontological work. Without this guidance and transparency there is a risk that collaboration will take the form of a temporary community of circumstance, which inevitably results in the discarding of the marginalized (in this case Indigenous) partner. From this perspective, centering transformative and identity-specific work that is focused on ontology also becomes an essential practice for maintaining accountable and just relationships.

Additionally, when limited in this way the potential impacts on movement participants are also lessened. The respondents in this study express a deep desire to not be observers, but to be participants in ways of being that are generative and embody an explicit and felt relationship with land and life. The absence of this seems to be a source of despair for participants, such as when Ashley laments, “Will I ever be able to actually feel what is connection with [a] land base…What does that mean to cultivate a spiritual connection with where you live?” This absence also creates the “hunger” for experiences, such as those at Standing Rock, which were detailed previously by Joshua (see page 151). In our interview, he went on to discuss how:

I don’t really know how to articulate it, but I do very uncynically believe in some version of decolonization really intensely…I really do believe people do have a
genetic memory of living on land for a long time and there’s something... I just
don’t know how to articulate it, I have almost nothing meaningful or coherent to
say about it but there’s been times when I’ve fought with Indigenous people
against the fossil fuel industry where I felt really clearly like, this cultural
knowledge and the spiritual connection that comes from having a sense of
continuity to it, like a way of being here before. It’s just actually totally
fundamental.

With a social science audience in mind there are specific bodies of research that are
implicated by this point. Research that would greatly contribute to what is discussed here
includes situated and culturally-specific studies of:

a) when and how different communities have lived as people who had generative
   ways of being with the rest of life,

b) when and how that was disrupted, destroyed, and replaced, including through
   violence,

c) how they then came to participate in a project of colonization,

d) the unique transformative process that is situated in this historical collective
   experience, and

e) analogous social movements that are related to the above dynamics.

These kinds of culturally-specific studies are all the more important given the
complexities around race and identity in the broader culture. If the type of transformative
identity work identified here is to be possible in movement contexts, movement
participants will have to be grounded in the similarities and differences of their lived
experience and the relevance of these for any practical work they are collectively
engaged in across identities. This will include the redistributive implications of these
understandings as they relate to power and resources and will be especially important for individuals who identify as white.

In closing, I will share again the quote from Morgan, whom I presented as an outlier on this topic in Chapter 4. Their quote reflects a personal project, as a white settler, to understand and integrate the implications of the type of research outlined above. I can imagine movements, in a great diversity of ways, moving towards places like this. They shared their view that:

we are descendants of people who were part of the land and many of us have many European ancestors, even those that became disconnected from the land and became colonizers and sometimes agents of disenfranchising others from the land. Nonetheless we do have this root in ourselves of being Indigenous and so attempting to consciously reawaken and remobilize that memory and to cultivate new listening to the land where we currently are, which is maybe different from where our ancestors came from. And to find a responsible way to be humans as part of the land now with our ancestors, transforming the stories that they went through by being colonized and being colonizers, and also an alliance and a tangible partnership with other people who are more directly and more recently a more long-term part of this land. And so I am now part of consciously crafting ceremonial practices on this land with my family, with people that I have known and loved for decades, bits and pieces that hopefully sync up with the social being that I talked about that is needing to emerge, that is a social being that is really profoundly rooted and is interweaving with the rest of life. What I feel called to is being part of the emergence of the religious practices and the spiritual orientations that are the [integral to] that emergent being.

Situated, place-based projects of becoming a people will be, by their very nature contrary to the universal assertion and imposition of settler colonialism. Engaging in transformative identity work, with an explicit engagement of one’s positionality and

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63 In what is now called North America it is worth noting that this also took the form of actually imposing another place, namely Europe, on different ecosystems through the introduction of specific agricultural ways of being in relation to land and assemblages of plants and animals brought be settlers. Settler colonialism, in this context, has been framed as a process of creating “neo-Europes” by Crosby (2004) or as “transforming the environment to suit the colonizing project” (Veracini cited in Ghosh 2021).
settler colonialism, must be part of any project that aims to unsettle the dominant ways of being. And future research on topics related to what I have discussed here should be intentional in how it relates to and integrates these dynamics.

Research Limitations and Caution in Extrapolation

This research is limited in a number of ways and significant caution is warranted in extrapolating the findings. To begin, it is worth remembering that I collected data in late 2019 and early 2020. The global Coronavirus pandemic that began in March of 2020 and the racial justice uprisings that erupted in response to the police murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020 were two major events with far reaching impacts. I observed social movements undergo significant shifts during the summer of 2020 during the long, militant mobilizations, which were particularly intense in Portland, Oregon where hundreds were arrested and at least two people were killed. Additionally, in the Pacific Northwest the summers of 2020 and 2021 saw some of the most significant climate change influenced events in the region to date. The catastrophic Labor Day fires of 2020 burned 1.2 million acres, killed eleven people, and destroyed over 3,000 structures (Lecroy 2021). The heat dome event of 2021 killed dozens as temperatures reached 115 degrees in the Willamette Valley (Ehrlich 2022). It is likely that these events have significantly influenced the participants and the themes of this study. Connected to this is the limitation of my research being a point-in-time study. This research design prevents valuable analysis about how change occurs among respondents over time and
into the processes that lead to the different types of transformation and collective identity formations I have discussed.

Another major limitation of this research, in many ways intentionally so, is the highly skewed nature of the sample, in which 20 of the 21 participants identified as white. This was expected given the demographics of the movement studied (at least in the Pacific Northwest) and also makes the findings of this study most relevant for white settler, and to a lesser extent non-Indigenous individuals, groups, and movements. It is important to note the possibility of a respondent bias. It is likely that those with spiritual views were more inclined to respond despite my attempts to encourage broad participation by explicitly inviting participation by people who did and did not identify spirituality as important. It is possible that some aspects of the findings, such as the surprisingly small presence in the sample of what I called dualistic spiritual views above, were products of this bias. And while my insider approach to this research provided many benefits and insights, it is worthwhile to remember that one’s position as an insider, embedded within existing relationships, can limit and influence the data and analysis (Routledge 2004). Related to the research design it is also important to keep in mind that while the single case approach provided a greater likelihood for finding coherence in collective identities within the data, it also came with the consequence of less generalizable findings (Saunders 2015). This is even more so, given the small sample size.

With these limitations in mind, one must be cautious in extrapolating these findings, especially regarding whether the patterns or themes are replicated outside of a
climate movement context, or even more specifically the direct action climate movement. The analysis that I make in this chapter is made tentatively and with an honest appraisal of its limitations. However, given my orientation to research in the context of ecological crisis (explored in Chapters 1 and 2) and my commitment to generating “movement-relevant research” it is important to attempt to extrapolate what might be relevant in these times and for those movements that seek transformative relations to them (Bevington et al. 2005). One final word of caution on extrapolating these findings concerns the role of social movements in changing the deep ontological frameworks I discussed. The extent of the agency of social movements to transform ontologies is unclear to me and the absence of social movements, and their role, in some of the theoretical literature speaks to the uncertainty held by theorists as well (e.g., Tsing 2015; Stengers 2015; Latour 2017; Haraway 2016). Clearly, the evolution and transformation of ontologies is complex and historically shifts in material conditions, technology, climate, changes in social structures, and violent disruption have played pivotal roles in driving change. I want to be careful not to overstate the agency of social movements and to be inclusive of the multiplicity of ways in which we, in our human cultures, experience fundamental shifts in our construction of and relation to the world. What I will say, is that social movements can and should have a role as one of the self-conscious collective agents of change within our modern society. Social movements are, as Melucci (1996:3) notes, “prophetic” agents in that they are important in transformation the “logic and the processes that guide complex societies.” Even amidst uncertainty and limitations we must try to identify, act on, and live into the transformation so clearly indicated by the climate crisis.
Possible Directions for Future Research

Given the findings of this study, further research is needed on the significance of spirituality in climate movements and the paradox of its absence. Future research should be oriented towards community-level, organization-level, and practice-level studies. I will move through them from the more macro to the more micro. The first fertile area indicated by this research would be culturally-specific and cross-cultural case studies of communities working to transform collective identities in the ways introduced earlier in this chapter. For example, what might we learn from more in-depth studies about Indigenous, Black, Latinx, white settler and other culturally specific attempts to create transformative collective identities from their positionalities? How are collective identities being constructed? How can these understandings identify the unique needs and experiences of different communities? How might this research also identify where there might be tension or friction in multi-racial spaces? Following from this, it would also be generative to pair this research with studies of multiracial communities, organizing initiatives, and movements that are doing aligned identity work. Where has conflict and tension arisen? How has that conflict been resolved? What are the components of generative and constructive action? Is social change work, of this kind, spilling out beyond the confines of what we identify as a “social movement?” Given the historical and contemporary impacts of settler colonialism and white supremacy as well as the multiracial composition of the United States (and, of course, other places), these
understandings will be important to developing informed pathways for the kinds of transformative identity work identified as important in this research. As Rachel noted, there are “deep rifts and divides created by racism and the intergenerational trauma of racism” that create major obstacles to the kind of spiritually-oriented work identified here and that must be confronted head on. Additionally, such future research could also help identify ways in which any transformative identity work remains grounded in dismantling these very systems of domination and exclusion, such as white supremacy, and avoids the risk of unintentionally reinforcing these systems. And among the individuals making up these groups, biographical research approaches would provide for an interesting synthesis for how individuals within organizations come to shift their construction of collective identity.

A second body of fruitful research would be specific case studies related to the findings of this study. For example, it would be promising to look at movement oriented interventions that have attempted to do much of what is discussed here. Three examples include the Work That Reconnects, Generative Somatics, and the Good Grief Network. The Work that Reconnects is a body of facilitation work initiated by Joanna Macy that “helps people discover and experience their innate connections with each other and the self-healing powers of the web of life, transforming despair and overwhelm into inspired, collaborative action” (Work That Reconnects 2023). Generative Somatics is “an approach to transformation for movements [that] engages a mind/body methodology that builds embodied leadership to align our personal and collective practices with our principles and to heal from trauma and internalized oppression” (Generative Somatics
And the Good Grief Network is a network of facilitators that work to help “individuals and communities build resilience by creating spaces where people can lean into their painful feelings about the state of the world and reorient their lives toward meaningful action” (Good Grief 2023). These are three examples I am familiar with, and which have been attempting to make strategic interventions in social movements, including climate movements, in ways that resonate with this research. There are certainly many other good candidates out there. These case studies would help to explore: Where and how have these interventions succeeded? Where and how did they fail? What were the characteristics that made interventions successful? What were the characteristics that made them fail? What have been the impact of these interventions for individuals, movements, and how collective identity is constructed? How have they worked with race, settler colonialism, and white supremacy? These and other questions would helpfully build on the work completed here. Additionally, the use of focus groups may be generative methodologically to both to observe how individuals within groups grapple with these themes as a collective and to observe the impact of having conversations about spirituality, which my respondents described as being absent from formal movement spaces, in a group.

Finally, the third and most micro-oriented of future studies would focus on the specificity of the stories and practices as well as the felt connectivity to them (see Figure 11 above and the associated discussion on these concepts). The focus here would be on specific organizations, groups, or communities. Depending on where and how these stories and practices are happening, these may or may not be what we traditionally
theorize as being part of “social movements.” What stories are being told that connect to transformative collective identity projects? How are those stories integrated into practices, rituals, ceremonies, and action? Where and how are there specific practices that work to move, process, or integrate experiences and intense emotions that allows for sustained participation? These transformative practices might focus on hopelessness, fear, burnout, loss of control, grief, and other themes discussed in Chapter 6. And what level of connectivity do these stories and practices have for participants? What makes a given practice have greater or lesser connectivity? What challenges, tensions, and issues arise as specific groups of people attempt this transformative identity work when connected to movements? Engaging with any of these identified research questions would build on the work begun here. Additionally, there is certainly a cross-disciplinary project of discovering and integrating any research that already exists as it speaks to some parts of the research possibilities identified in this section.

**Conclusion**

When I first planned to undertake this research project, I was interested to understand whether and how spirituality was present for comrades in the movement I had participated in for many years. In my own engagement, I had experienced burnout and harmed myself through overexertion. During 2013, Portland Rising Tide, one of the groups I was part of, tried to impede the transportation of the so-called tar sands “megaloads” to Alberta, Canada. These shipments were of giant evaporators, manufactured in South Korea, for processing the bitumen tar sand into oil. This was also
the first year of my PhD program. In collaboration with members of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, we had individuals lock themselves to, blockade, and otherwise impede the gigantic trucks carrying this imported equipment, which could only travel at night since they took up the entire road (Read 2013). The result was a significant slowing of a convoy that ended up requiring a large security presence and it is possible we deterred future shipments through this overland route. During this organizing I pushed myself through an illness as I tried to support and bail out dozens of people that were arrested (successfully, I am happy to say). For over a year, I ended up with a chronic infection that took me out of the movement and prevented me from facilitating or teaching, two of my principal activities and activist contributions. Among other things, this forced a re-assessment of my involvement and coincided with the deepening of my own exploration of spirituality which I experienced fostering a healthier, more generative relationship to the climate crisis. It was also during this time that through the Indigenous allies we were working with I came to experience, and resonate with, the offering of prayer in meetings and actions by Native participants. Finally, after years of organizing it had become clear by the early 2010s that we were not going to “stop” climate change in any meaningful way, and that something terrible was unfolding. At this time, it began to appear to me that the roots of the crisis may be deeper and more entrenched than I had previously thought.

In many ways, these were three important seeds for the decision to engage in this research. These experiences generated a curiosity about what other movement participants’ relationships were with spirituality and how that influenced how they held
the intensity of the climate crisis. I shared a similar experience as that recounted in
Chapter 7 in that spirituality and identity transformation had been absent from my
movement experience and as such further exploration was necessary. Throughout the
course of this research, the content and relevance of this inquiry have become more and
more resonant. For that I am grateful, were it not the case I would have almost certainly
walked away from this project given the rigors of parenting young children, my
ambiguous relationship to academia, and the general unraveling of the world around me.
During the decade I have been in this program the climate crisis has become so much
worse. This research, and all the time that it took, had to matter in that context. From my
perspective, it had to have something to offer, or I should just quit and organize actions. I
sincerely hope that it does, both for my own children as well as for all beings, and
especially those most impacted by the catastrophe unfolding in and around us, which
goes far beyond the climate crisis. Speaking for myself, I can say that the process of
doing the research and being in dialogue with all the participants has been very valuable
for me. Whatever the impact on others might be, it has clarified my thinking and
supported my development as a researcher and as an activist. May this development be of
service to others.

Throughout the research, which by its nature was exploratory, I heard respondents
repeatedly articulate an importance of spirituality for themselves and their movement
participation. The findings here confirm that additional attention is needed in this area
given the paucity of engagement around this topic in the literature and the growing
existential nature of the climate crisis. In their articulation of what spirituality meant to
them, clear themes emerged that pointed to a substantive, if emergent, shift away from the beliefs and collective identities that underpin dominant Western culture and ontologies, which is to say what it means to be human and relate to “nature.” Following the work of other scholars who theorize that the cultural destabilization of climate change heralds an ontological “mutation” in our relation to the world, I labeled this emergent pattern “earthbound” (Latour 2017). Respondents articulated numerous ways in which spirituality, the collective identities in which they felt connected, and sustaining spiritual practices supported their movement participation. And yet, they seemed to me to be holding back on fully leaning into an explicit engagement with the spiritual as part of their movement work. With a few notable exceptions, their own understandings were underdeveloped, patchy, and unlinked to existing traditions. They were aware of this and paradoxically identified the almost complete absence of spirituality in their movements outside of the spaces provided for Indigenous people to bring this content mostly during large rallies or other actions. This last dynamic, while intended well and important in its own way, also allowed the mostly white movements respondents to punt on the question of whether fundamentally different relations to the world were necessary to address the issue they were dedicated to. It also prevented them from collectively, as part of their movement engagement, interrogating these dynamics in relation to their white settler and non-Indigenous identities, experiences, and cultural inheritances.

In this final chapter, I have shared my own assessment, developed in relation to the respondents’ dialogue, of why and how it is essential to not neglect this question. It is my view, that both for social movements as well as social science researchers we should
become more reflexively aware of how we are constantly engaged in the ontological process of *becoming a people*. This is very much in line with the social constructivist turn in the social sciences. It is in keeping with the idea that “everything we do, every thought we have, contributes to the production of the social world” (Maxey’s 1999:201). This focus also reveals the agency we have in the choice, if consciously realized, to reify how we are culturally mobilizing ourselves as a people, or to transform it. Whatever position one takes, this perspective meaningfully contributes to broadening the theoretical view of the collective identity and social movement literature. For my own involvement, both as an activist and as a researcher, I am committed to being transparent and intentional about what kind of people the energy and actions of my living contributes to, even as I fail to fully embody them. As I have shared here, my experience and analysis leave me compelled to participate in transformative collective identity work such that I might contribute to becoming a different kind of people. In this work, being situated and relational is essential. This applies both to the place I inhabit as well as to the web of social relations in which I am positioned, particularly settler colonialism and white supremacy. May what is offered here serve me, and others, in this complex work. May it be generative for others who do not share these views. May it contribute to transforming the human living of my culture so that it enriches and supports the life of this precious world. And in so doing may the catastrophe of climate change, and our relationship to it, help to *call us home*. 
REFERENCES


“Activists Disrupt Key Canada-U.S. Oil Pipelines.” Reuters, October 11.


Frosch, Dan. 2012. “Last-Ditch Bid in Texas to Try to Stop Oil Pipeline.” The New York Times, October 12.


“Global Alliance Against REDD | An Indigenous Environmental Network Campaign.” Retrieved February 3, 2023 (http://no-redd.com/).


### APPENDIX A: SUPPORTING RESPONDENT INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>PARTICIPATION STATUS</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>RELIGIOUS TYPOLOGY$^{64}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Sunrise Movement PDX</td>
<td>Moderately Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Climate Direct Action</td>
<td>Moderately Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ari</td>
<td>Transitioned</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Strongly Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Multiple Affiliations</td>
<td>Strongly Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Transitioned</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Strongly Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Climate Direct Action</td>
<td>Moderately Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Forests for Climate Resilience</td>
<td>Moderately Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Sunrise Movement PDX</td>
<td>Strongly Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Transitioned</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Moderately Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Forests for Climate Resilience</td>
<td>Strongly Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Sunrise Movement PDX</td>
<td>Moderately Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Sunrise Movement PDX</td>
<td>Moderately Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Multiple Affiliations</td>
<td>Sacred as Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>350 PDX</td>
<td>Moderately Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Portland Rising Tide</td>
<td>Strongly Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Transitioned</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Moderately Earthbound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Portland Rising Tide</td>
<td>Split</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>Transitioned</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Materialistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Transitioned</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Split</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zach</td>
<td>Transitioned</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Split</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Transitioned</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Strongly Earthbound</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11. Supporting Respondent Information

$^{64}$ This column cross references with Table 9 on page 105. Those identified as split were coded for both earthbound spirituality as well as either materialistic or sacred as other. Those identified as strongly earthbound were coded for discussing earthbound spiritualities 4+ times. Those identified as moderately earthbound were coded for discussing earthbound spiritualities 1-3 times, or in one case (Joshua) describing numerous spiritual experiences connected to earthbound spirituality. In both earthbound typologies the label was only applied if they did not speak of spirituality in either dualistic or sacred as other terms.
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION DETAILS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEETINGS</th>
<th>DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extinction Rebellion Meeting</td>
<td>June 2nd, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350 PDX Meeting</td>
<td>July 21st, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunrise Movement PDX Meeting</td>
<td>October 19th, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunrise Movement PDX Meeting</td>
<td>November 2nd, 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly Point Park on Columbia River (Oregon) across from the Port of Vancouver (Washington) – Water Action and Training with Kayak Protest Against Transmountain Pipeline</td>
<td>September 2nd, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Climate Strike, Downtown Portland, Oregon</td>
<td>September 20th, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Climate Strike Week of Action, Portland City Hall</td>
<td>September 27th, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rally and Sit-in at the Oregon State Capital – Opposing the Jordan Cove Liquified Natural Gas Facility</td>
<td>November 20th, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Climate Strike, Downtown Portland, Oregon</td>
<td>December 6th, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port of Vancouver (Washington) Administrative Offices - Opposing Transmountain Tar Sands Pipeline Delivery</td>
<td>February 7th, 2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12. Participant Observation Details
APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Written section (to be completed pre-interview and given to me at the interview)

What is your age? (short answer)

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have obtained? (less than high school, high school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED), some college but no degree, associate degree, bachelor degree, graduate degree)

For the following please share how you identify: (short answer)

- Race
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Religion/spirituality
- Class (when growing up)
- Class (now)

What is your approximate annual income? (0-$9,999, $10,000-$19,999, $20,000-$29,999, $30,000-$39,999, $40,000-$49,999, $50,000-$59,999, $60,000-$69,999, $70,000-$79,999, $80,000-$89,999, $90,000-$99,999)

Are you currently involved in the direct action climate movement (i.e. with a Rising Tide affiliated group)? (yes/no)

If yes, how long have you been involved? (short answer)

If no, how long were you involved? (short answer)

If no, have you transitioned to other related movement work? (yes/no)

If yes, what is that work? (short answer)

Interview Protocol and Questions

Introductions, context for research and informed consent (5 minutes)

Participation status and reflections on participation (20 minutes)
● (All participants) How long were/have you been involved with the direct action climate movement?

● (All participants) What has been your experience being involved in direct action climate work?

● (All participants) How did you get involved in [relevant group]?
  ○ How did you learn about [relevant group]?
  ○ Did someone bring you into the group?
  ○ How did you know you were part of the group?

● (All participants) To what extent do you feel like you can make an impact on the issue of climate change?

● Active participants
  ○ How much time do you spend doing climate work?
  ○ How would you evaluate your willingness to make sacrifices as part of your climate activism?
  ○ Do you consider your lifestyle to be part of your activism? If so, how?
  ○ What do you think is the most effective strategy or approach for your group?

● Former participants that have transitioned into other political work
  ○ What political/movement work are you currently doing?
  ○ Why did you transition away from work with [relevant group]?
  ○ How do you understand the relationship between this new work and what you did with [relevant group]?
  ○ How would you evaluate your willingness to make sacrifices as part of your climate activism?
  ○ Do you consider your lifestyle to be part of your activism? If so, how?
  ○ What do you think is the most effective strategy or approach for addressing climate change?

● Former participants that are no longer engaged (also known as being burnt out)
  ○ When did you stop engagement in movement work?
  ○ Why did you make this change?
  ○ How has it felt to no longer be engaged in movement work?
  ○ Is your lifestyle in anyway an aspect of political work you still do? If so, how?
  ○ What do you think is the most effective strategy or approach for addressing climate change?

Perception of climate movement collective identity (20 minutes)
When you got involved in the direct action climate movement what was it that attracted you? What was it that you thought you were joining?

How do you understand the movement that you are/were part of?
  ○ What were the things that people held in common?
  ○ What were central beliefs that were shared among other participants?
  ○ What is the movement trying to accomplish?
  ○ In what ways are particular types of action associated with the movement?

Do you believe that there are competing visions of what the movement is within the group/network you are a part of?
  ○ What are some of the things that were in conflict?

Has your understanding of the what movement you are a part of shifted over the time of your involvement?
  ○ If so, how and when did these shifts occur?
  ○ What caused them to shift?
  ○ Did they occur multiple times?

What role has actions by the group played in how you think about what the group is?
  ○ Is direct action as a specific form related to your identity of the group?

What role has discussions or other engagements with people in the group had on how you think about what the group is?

What is a movement that you think is an ideal or to which you would aspire your involvement to mirror?

*Individual spiritual beliefs (30 minutes)*

Do you have a religious or spiritual identity?

How would you describe your spiritual beliefs?
  ○ How do you understand how the universe began?
    ■ Is this belief important to you?
    ■ Does the concept of “Gaia” mean anything to you?
  ○ Potential prompt – Some talk about environmental movements or environmental actions in spiritual terms…

What were some experiences that impacted your current beliefs?

How have your spiritual beliefs changed over time?
  ○ If so, how and when did these shifts occur?
  ○ What caused them to shift?
  ○ Were they different when you started your involvement in climate activism? If so, how?
○ What was the role of other people in the movement for any shifts that occurred?
○ What was the role of any movement experiences for any shifts that occurred?
  ■ Have you had any experiences with direct action that made spiritual connections?
● What are the implications of your spiritual beliefs for how you think about land and other life?
● What are the implications of your spiritual beliefs for how you relate to land and other life?
  ○ How would you describe (or how do you think about) your relationship to other life on this planet?
● Who else holds similar beliefs as you? Are your beliefs restrictive in anyway?
● What kinds of action or practices are associated with your beliefs? How do these show up in the context of your movement involvement?

*Break as needed (5 minutes)*

*Relationships and connections between spiritual beliefs and movement collective identity (20 minutes)*

● Do your spiritual beliefs impact how you think about the movement you are a part of?
● Do you feel that your spiritual beliefs and the movement you are a part of are aligned?
  ○ If so, in what way?
  ○ If so, do you see your movement work as in some way also facilitating the spread of the kind of spiritual beliefs you hold?
  ○ If not, why not?
● Has this shifted over time as either your spiritual beliefs or perspective on what the movement is have shifted?
  ○ If so, how and when did these shifts occur?
  ○ What caused them to shift?
● Has movement participation influenced or changed your identity and spiritual beliefs?
  ○ If so, can you describe what that process was like?
  ○ Are you the same person you were when you started being involved in this movement?
    ■ If not, how have you changed and how did those changes occur?
Do you ever have conversations with other movement participants about these kinds of themes or ideas?
  ○ Does anything else come up for you given that we’ve broached these topics?
Do you consider there to be any rituals in your movement work related to spirituality?

Exploring potential impacts of collective identity on orientation to climate change (25 minutes)

What is climate change to you?
  ○ How do you feel about climate change?
  ○ Does it have positive aspects you can identify?
  ○ How would you describe your relationship to climate change? (i.e. What does it feel like? Do you have a sense of your energetic orientation to it? Etc.)

How has climate change, changed you?

More generally, how would you describe the times in which we are living?

Does climate change and the times in which we are living have a particular meaning to you?
  ○ Does addressing climate change in some way require engagement with the spiritual?

Do the non-human (plants and animals but also forces like the weather) have the capacity to act with intention?
  ○ Do you ever perceive non-humans as being participants or connected to the movement you are a part of?

What is the relationship between climate change and the climate movement you are part of?
  ○ As a force how does climate change exist in relationship to the goals of your movement? Is it supportive? Is it oppositional?

Closing, gratitude, next steps (invitation to collaborative process), any questions for me (5 minutes)
APPENDIX D: CODEBOOK

Developed 12.20.20 and revised 2.17.21. The number of child codes are in parentheses. Double sets of parentheses indicate a second-level child code.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>(CHILD CODE)</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SPIRITUALITY (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality – Definitions (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Participant understandings and definitions of spirituality as a concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Interconnectedness)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Articulation of spirituality as being about connection, interconnection, or &quot;being woven&quot;, with things/beings beyond the self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Intersubjective Spirituality (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritualities that are either materialist or dualistic – these are personally held spiritual collective identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Materialist)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritualities that are grounded in a scientific materialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Dualistic)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritualities that are grounded in a separation between the human and non-human (ex. dominant form of Judeo-Christian tradition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersubjective Spirituality (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritualities that contain at least several of the dynamics captured in the corresponding child codes – these are personally held spiritual collective identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kinship)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptions of “a felt kinship with the rest of life”, potentially including “a Darwinian understanding that all forms of life have evolved from a common ancestor and are therefore related” (Taylor 2009) – 1st component of Taylor’s “Dark Green Religion”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

65 In some cases, the writing and analytical process caused me to change the terminology from that which was present in the codebook. For example, this section refers to dominant or non-earthbound religious types in the text.

66 In the text above this is referred to as “sacred as other.”

67 Intersubjective became “earthbound” as I sought more accessible terminology.
| (Bio-centrism) | Descriptions of how human and non-human life exist on an equal plane, or in other words human needs do not take dominance over the needs of other life / the orientation of humans to non-humans is not one of domination – 2nd component of Taylor’s “Dark Green Religion” |
| (Interconnectedness) | Descriptions of the “metaphysics of interconnection and the idea of interdependence” (Taylor 2009) and/or the idea that our identities are actually composed of multi-species entanglements (Tsing 2017) – 3rd component of Taylor’s “Dark Green Religion” |
| (Agency of the Non-Human) | Descriptions of the non-human having a definable agency in co-creating the world |
| **Spiritual experiences (7)** | Participant descriptions of spiritual experiences |
| **(Moments of Change/Transformation)** | Stories of being changed or transformed by a spiritual experience |
| **(Felt Interconnectedness)** | Descriptions of a felt or experiential interconnectedness with humans, the non-human, or other external elements |
| **(The Wolf Call)** | Stories of hearing a wolf at an action camp |
| **(Psychedelics)** | Stories of psychedelics linked to spiritual experiences |
| **(Singing)** | Stories of singing as a spiritual experience |
| **(Direct Action)** | Stories of direct action as a spiritual experience |
| **(Other)** | Catch all for any other themes that emerge – to be re-categorized later as needed |

**THE CLIMATE MOVEMENT, PARTICIPATION, AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY (8)**

| Movement Collective Identity (7) | Descriptions of the perceived collective identity of the movement they participate or participated in |
| **(Climate-centric)** | Framings that privilege climate change as the central frame or component that cohesively weaves people together |
| **((Climate Justice and/or Environmental Justice))** | Framings that further specify either climate justice or environmental justice as the central frame or
<p>| (System-centric) | Framings that specify transforming systems as the central frame or component that cohesively weaves people and the movement together |
| ((Capitalism)) | Framings that further specify anti-capitalism as the central frame or component that cohesively weaves people and the movement together |
| ((Race)) | Framings that further specify anti-racism as the central frame or component that cohesively weaves people and the movement together |
| ((Non-Hierarchical)) | Descriptions of horizontalism or non-hierarchical organizing forms being an important aspect of the movement they identify with. |
| ((Questioning the Climate Frame)) | Challenges or critiques of a climate frame |
| (Questioning if Movement) | Comments that question whether or not there is even anything as cohesive as a &quot;climate movement&quot; that exists. |
| (Movement “We-ness”) | Descriptions of a felt sense of “we-ness” or being part of something (experiential collective identity) |
| No Impact (1) | Articulations that the movement is not making an impact on the climate crisis |
| (Can’t win) | Articulations that climate change cannot, at this point, be stopped or meaningfully mitigated |
| Time Limitations (0) | Discussion of the limitations of time that are intrinsic to the climate crisis |
| Forms of Action (6) | Descriptions of different forms of action highlighted as important or observed |
| (Institutional Approached) | Lobbying, engaging in the regulatory process, electoral politics, etc. |
| (Community-Building) | Cultivating community within movements, building affinity, relationships, connections, trust, etc. |
| (Education and Awareness) | Educational efforts aimed at increasing awareness of issues related to climate change |
| (Direct Action) | Action that concretely and specifically interrupt or manifest an alternative reality |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>((Transformative Power))</strong></th>
<th>Descriptions of the transformative power of participating in direct actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Lifestyle)</strong></td>
<td>Lifestyle and consumer choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences of Change (1)</strong></td>
<td>Stories about how participants were changed by their movement involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Explicitly Spiritual)</strong></td>
<td>Stories that include explicit reference to how they were changed spiritually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place-Based</strong></td>
<td>Discussions of the difference that place-based organizing makes vs. organizing that is more abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reasons for Transition (4)</strong></td>
<td>Reasons that folks who identified as transitioning shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Burnout)</strong></td>
<td>Overwork or excessive exertion leading to need to decouple or step back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Personal Circumstance)</strong></td>
<td>Shifts in personal circumstance (lack of time, capacity, job, family, new opportunity, etc.) that required a shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Changes in beliefs)</strong></td>
<td>Changes in beliefs (politics, spirituality, strategy, etc.) that forced a shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Hopelessness)</strong></td>
<td>Hopelessness and/or despair that anything can be done, including views around Near Term Human Extinction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THE RELEVANCE OF THE POLITICALLY SPIRITUAL IN THE ANTHROPOCENE (4)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Understandings of Our Times (2)</strong></th>
<th>Descriptions of how participants are understanding the nature of the times we are living in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Intensity Being Held)</strong></td>
<td>Articulations of intense realities and dynamics that participants are holding relating to climate change, ecosystem collapse, resulting social impacts, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Being Changed)</strong></td>
<td>Stories of being changed by the climate crisis itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indigenous/Settler Dynamics (1)</strong></td>
<td>Discussion of the ways in which Native people and non-Native (or settler) people show up in movement spaces, particularly around spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Standing Rock)</strong></td>
<td>Discussion of Standing Rock, including involvement, personal impact, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absence of Explicit Spirituality (3)</strong></td>
<td>Talk of the absence of any explicit spiritual discussions or spiritual work in movement spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Why that Happens)</td>
<td>Descriptions of why this occurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Positive/neutral/mixed context)</td>
<td>Comments about absence shared in a positive, neutral, or mixed context (the absence is positive / good for the movement and/or complicated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Negative context)</td>
<td>Comments about absence shared in a negative context (the absence is a bad thing / hurts movements or individuals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Importance of the Spiritual (4)</strong></td>
<td>Discussion of how spirituality is important for participants and/or movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>((Re)Weaving)</td>
<td>Connecting (with one another, the more-than-human, the movement), Grounding (ethics/morals, visions, beliefs, ways of being, presence, right and necessary action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sustaining)</td>
<td>Motivation (initiating and continuing engagement), Receiving Energy (as in capacity to sustain engagement, not become drained, burnt out), Creating Energy (as in actions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Allowing and Moving)</td>
<td>Ego / Fear / Grief / Risk / The Intensity / Into Warrior Mode.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Transforming)</td>
<td>Into new ways of being, new values, new relational frameworks, etc…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OTHER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Good Quotes</strong></th>
<th>Exceptional participant quotes that really capture key themes/ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Articulations</strong></td>
<td>Key articulations of some of the questions, themes, or emergent understandings from the researcher’s questions/comments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT

This study involves research on the relationship between personal and spiritual beliefs and collective identity (movement identity) in the direct action climate movement. It seeks to clarify the relationship between spiritual beliefs and collective identity formation for movement participants. Furthermore, it attempts to understand the relationship between different collective identity formations and participation outcomes.

Participation in this study requires the completion of an interview. Included as part of this interview is a demographic questionnaire. Interviews are intended to run 90 minutes but will be no longer than two hours. This interview will be recorded and coded such that no personally identifying information is visible on the recording or contained within them. The recordings will be heard only by the researcher for research purposes and they will be destroyed after completion of the study. Interviews conducted in this study are being supplemented by participant observation by the researcher.

In an effort to minimize any risk to participants you may waive signing this form and give oral consent for your participation. Doing so will eliminate a record attaching your identity to this research study. Additionally, the audio recordings and any key that connects your identity to the coded audio recording will be kept on an encrypted external (non-network connected) drive in a secure location at Portland State University. In an abundance of caution the following additional security measures will be practiced: anonymity will be maintained for participants through pseudonyms (in notes, writing and transcripts), during the interview you will be asked not to discuss details of any illegal action or mention names of other participants and data will be securely stored and encrypted (particularly the key and audio recordings).

For individuals, benefits to participation may include insights and reflection on the role of spirituality in movement identity formation and greater awareness of movement identities held by participants. Societally and at the movement level, this research may support climate movements in addressing the significant threat climate changes poses locally and globally. It may do so by clarifying the process of movement identity formation, identifying different movement identities which may be in tension (thus providing clarity around the source of movement conflicts or identifying possible reconciliation) and informing dynamics related to the retention of participants.

If funding exists monetary compensation may be provided for participation in this study. You will be responsible for any taxes assessed on the compensation. Any compensation will be provided upon your completion or withdrawal from the interview.
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research you may contact the doctoral researcher, David Osborn, at dosborn@pdx.edu. Or you may contact the doctoral student’s advisor, Dr. Robert Liebman, at liebmanr@pdx.edu. If you wish to contact someone independent from the research team you may contact the Portland State University Institutional Review Board at 503.725.2227 or hsrc@pdx.edu.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there is no penalty or loss of benefits for withdrawal or refusal to participate. You may withdraw or discontinue your participation at any point. Choosing not to participate or withdrawing from the study will not affect the relationship between yourself and the researchers or Portland State University.

Printed: _________________________________

Signature: _______________________________ Date:
APPENDIX F: RESOURCE FOR MOVEMENTS AND FACILITATORS

This resource is being created collaboratively through dialogues with movement participants about the findings of this study. As such, the final product was created beyond the submission deadline for this dissertation. It is intended to be an accessible and relevant translation of the findings of this research for participants in social movement, particularly climate movements, and facilitators of transformative group work in movements.

The resource is available at: www.davidosborn.org/dissertation-movement-resource