


The Evergreen State College

Graduate Program on the Environment

Thesis Prospectus

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STUDENT AGREEMENT:

SIGNATURE:  **DATE** December 9, 2020

FACULTY READER APPROVAL:

SIGNATURE:  DATE December 9, 2020

MES DIRECTOR APPROVAL:

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE _____

1) Provide the working title of your thesis[1].

New for whom? A materialist ecofeminist analysis of the New Environmental/Ecological Paradigm scale

2) In 250 words or less, summarize the key background information needed to understand your research problem and question.

I. NEP scale - theoretical framework. I will need to understand the theoretical framework for the development of the original and revised NEP scale. This will be investigated as part of my thesis, in literature and through three key informant interviews, described in detail later.

II. Materialist ecofeminist framework - I will differentiate between a materialist ecofeminist framework and other ecofeminist frameworks (cultural, liberal, and others). I will also differentiate between feminism and ecofeminism, examining ways in which these perspectives differ or converge. I will also examine how materialist ecology informs materialist ecofeminism.

III. I will investigate research in which the NEP scale was used to study global South communities. I will find all relevant research that meets this criteria.

3) State your research question(s).

Is the New Environmental/Ecological Paradigm scale applicable for measuring environmental attitudes outside of imperialist global North countries? Within global North societies, the NEP scale should be applicable because it arises from the same ideological framework which predicates said societies. The scale may not be applicable outside of these nations/contexts due to a fundamental difference in worldview between the global North and global South communities.

4) Situate your research problem within the relevant literature. What is the theoretical and/or practical framework of your research problem?

When Dunlap and his research assistant Van Liere first published the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) scale in 1978, they did not know their survey method would be used to measure pro-environmental attitudes in hundreds of research projects over the ensuing decades (Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978)(Dunlap, 2008). The tool has been used to measure environmental attitudes very broadly – in the United States and internationally, in under-developed nations, among politicians, and with children, college students, and teachers.

In the wider sociological literature, it remains undetermined whether the NEP scale is generally applicable to measuring environmental attitudes in underdeveloped Global South countries or internal colonies. The scale is most widely used in the United States, although is additionally used in many countries across the world (Hawcroft & Milfont, 2010). At least one critique suggests that the scale is not applicable in a non-Western context (Chatterjee, 2008).

Materialist ecofeminism is based upon the historical context and knowledge of indigenous and Global South peoples, and is an appropriate framework for investigating this question.

Using a materialist ecofeminist understanding, the theoretical framework underlying the development of the scale will be investigated. A key informant interview with one of the original developers of the scale, Riley Dunlap (who will remain confidential unless he indicates otherwise) will aid in this assessment. The interview will provide insight as to whether the interviewee's theoretical framework aligns or converges with materialist ecofeminist framework. Then, questions within the original and revised scale will be individually scrutinized. Studies using the NEP scale in Global South or internal colonies will be assessed for themes. Two contemporary researchers who utilize the scale, to be identified after consultation with Shawn Hazboun, will be interviewed to add perspective. The researchers' rationalization for using the scale will be examined, whether due to a fundamental theoretical agreement, the scale's momentous use in social science, its convenience for policy analysis and implementation, or other as-yet-unseen reasoning.

Materialist ecofeminism, synonymously called socialist ecofeminism, provides a framework for addressing strengths and criticisms of the NEP scale. Ecofeminism (ecological feminism) examines the relationship between gender and ecology during the current historical period of ecological crisis. Materialism is based on the premise that material conditions precede and inform thought and culture. In addition to a class analysis, materialist ecofeminism adds analysis of ecology, gender, sexuality, race, and other interlocking forms of oppression (Carlassare, 1999).

5) Explain the significance of this research problem. Why is this research important? What are the potential contributions of your work? How might your work advance scholarship?

John Bellamy Foster, a leading materialist environmental sociologist, posits that in the field of sociology, we must return to the historical roots of social theory development and question the theory through dialectical thinking - examining what is contradictory, what was left out, and what needs to change. Without this further analysis, he states:

there is a tendency to turn endlessly in circles, so that the analysis stops where it started, no more equipped at the end than at the outset to deal with the real problems of environment and society. Numerous studies have been written on anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism...the dualistic perspective perpetuated here tends to block any genuine development of knowledge or meaningful practice (Foster, 2000, p. 18).

It is my intention to more thoroughly explore the particular roots of the theory of NEP scale, examining how generational assumptions in environmental sociology have informed the advent and proliferation of the tool. I also intend to illustrate where the theoretical assumptions converge with and diverge from a materialist ecofeminist framework.

Because the NEP scale has been used so widely within the scholarship of environmental sociology, a thorough examination of the tool's origin and application is warranted. Especially because feminism and women's studies usually is regarded as a field outside of environmental work, I will synthesize feminist thought into this research. An ecofeminist material analysis can help to identify which studies the NEP scale may or may not be an appropriate sociological tool. As the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s to 1980s asserted in their common slogan, "the personal is political," so the materialist ecofeminist would purport that science is personal is political.

6) Summarize your study design[2]. If applicable, identify the key variables in your study. What is their relationship to each other? For example, which variables are you considering as independent (explanatory) and dependent (response)?

I will specifically choose works that focus on populations within the Global South or internal colonies, as they pertain to my thesis question. I will find these studies by conducting term searches in scholarly databases and following citations forward and backward. I will look to existing comprehensive analysis of the NEP, such as Hawcroft and Milfont's meta-analysis (2010) for especially pertinent works. Using a materialist ecofeminist framework of understanding, I will analyze the historical use of the NEP scale, noting themes, trends and evolution of the tool's use.

I will be interviewing three researchers, as previously mentioned - one of whom is an original developer of the tool and two of whom are contemporary researchers using the NEP scale. These interviews will be considered key informant interviews and will support the content analysis. The interviews will be semi-structured with specific questions and will be recorded over video and/or telephone.

Materialism is a framework of thought which posits that material conditions precede and inform thought and culture. In other words, economic conditions precede consciousness. John Bellamy Foster explains: "In its most general sense materialism claims that the origins and development of whatever exists is dependent on nature and 'matter,' that is, a level of physical reality that is independent of and prior to thought" (Foster, 2000, p. 2). The materialist ecofeminist accepts this premise when examining a question.

Thus, the problem will be examined from the perspective that a) material conditions are the **independent variable** that inform b) worldview as the **dependent variable**. In other words, I will assume that economic conditions fundamentally influence the worldview.

7) Describe the data that will be the foundation of your thesis. Will you use existing data, or gather new data (or both)? Describe the process of acquiring or collecting data[3].

I will use existing data by studying completed research projects that have used the NEP scale. To find these sources, I will use a variety of scholarly databases, follow reference lists backward and forward in time, and study existing meta-analyses. I will examine the research for themes, juxtaposing themes with Dunlap et al.'s description of the historical use and evolution of the NEP scale (Dunlap et al., 2000)(Dunlap, 2008).

I will gather new data through key informant interviews. First, I will complete a Human Subjects Review for approval through TESC. Then, I will reach out to researchers with support from MES faculty Shawn Hazboun, with whom I have prior arrangements for this support. I will conduct semi-structured interviews with specific questions, approximately 30 minutes in length. The appointment will be made at a mutually convenient time for myself and the interviewee. Interviews will be conducted over video and/or phone and will be recorded using two programs, one as backup. I will require a membership to Zoom that allows for extended interviews.

8) Summarize your methods of data analysis. If applicable, discuss specific techniques that you will use to understand the relationships between variables (e.g., interview coding, cost-benefit analysis, specific statistical analyses, spatial analysis) and the steps and tools (e.g., lab equipment, software) that you will take to complete your analyses.

As previously specified, I will conduct a historical content analysis as well as qualitative analysis of key informant interviews.

The main framework for data analysis will utilize a feminist framework adapted from Mies (2014), which builds upon the following principles:

1. *Conscious partiality* is to replace value-free research.

2. A *view from below* replaces a view from above. That is to say, the researcher accepts that the researched is the expert while the researcher is a recipient and interpreter, rather than the arbiter, of knowledge. Through praxis, a researcher will view those they work alongside as “sister-or-brother sociologists” (2014, p. 40)
3. Gendered praxis (theory and practice) will supersede a spectator knowledge.
4. Changing the status quo is a part of the scientific process. From a historical materialist perspective, Mao Zedong says “if you want to know the taste of a pear, you must change the pear by eating it yourself” (Tse-Tung, 1937). From an ecofeminist perspective, the researcher will understand by participating in the scientific process; in Tse-Tung’s case he refers to the scientific process of socialist revolution. Crisis and change breed social consciousness and “the creativity of science depends on [research] being rooted in social processes” (Mies, 2014, p. 41).
5. Research is treated as a process of conscientization, or consciousness-raising for all parties involved. Populations who experience oppression are the knowledge experts regarding their conditions. A researcher may learn from a population and may provide a framework through which they themselves may come to understandings and active solutions that are particular to their conditions. Researchers must provide their tools to the people of study for their critique, use, and transformation.
6. Conscientization must include the study of (women’s) individual and social history. As noted in principle 3, ecofeminism is firmly rooted in a commitment to understanding gendered struggle. Research without this perspective is incomplete. Additionally, conscientization applies to the researcher, who will allow their consciousness to be

shaped through their integration of principle 2, an acceptance that they are the recipient rather than the arbiter of knowledge.

7. Collectivization of the experiences of women, trans men, and gender non-conforming peoples. Mies (2014) originally presents this principle as a collectivization of *women's* experiences. Scholars of ecofeminism and reproductive justice suggest moving toward an understand of gendered struggle that disrupts the standard binary analysis of sex (Gaard, 1997) (Ross & Solinger, 2017). This requires a collectivization of the experiences of oppression, survival, and liberation based on gender. Rather than building an individualistic analyses common in liberal ideology, we can develop a collective framework of understanding.

Additionally, I will apply a materialist critique to the work, focusing on *practical materialism*. Practical materialism asserts that “the constitutive role of human transformative agency in the reproduction and transformation of social forms” (Bhaskar, 1991, p. 369). I will build a critique through the premise that cultural and ideological positions are created by and through material conditions.

9) Address the ethical issues raised by your thesis work. Include issues such as risks to anyone involved in the research, as well as specific people or groups that might benefit from or be harmed by your thesis work, perhaps depending on your results. List any specific reviews you must complete first (e.g., Human Subjects Review or Animal Use Protocol Form).

Risks

Regarding the content analysis of published research projects, the risk to any specific people or groups is low and may include a possible misinterpretation of an author's work. I will do my best to research diligently in order to avoid this outcome.

Regarding key informant interviews, I cannot guarantee anonymity for the interviewees. The interviews can be made confidential in that I will not provide names if this preference is so indicated by the interviewees, but there are a limited number of researchers who use the scale. This is especially pertinent in regard to the original developers of the scale. There are two in total, so an identity is easily extracted. The risks of this easy identification are low but include possible embarrassment, or a researcher may feel they have not been accurately represented. I will do my best to report their positions in an unbiased and respectful manner.

Another low risk could be feelings of discontent by researchers due to criticisms posed. Critique is fundamental to academia and I don't believe potential disagreement poses a substantial threat.

Benefits

Groups that could benefit may involve those historically excluded from the development and analysis of environmental sociological research. This includes indigenous and POC, Global South, women, LGBTQ+, and additional marginalized groups who are the initial creators of the environmental paradigm and whose ideas preceded capitalist imperialist development.

10) List specific research permits or permissions you need to obtain before you begin collecting data (e.g. landowner permissions, agency permits).

I must complete and seek approval for a Human Subjects Review for the interviews. This process includes (copied verbatim from <https://www.evergreen.edu/humansubjectsreview/irb-application>) :

1. Project abstract
 2. Bibliography of literature review
 3. Risks and benefits
 - a. Specific level of risk to the subjects
 - b. Benefits of the research
 4. Purpose and research design
 5. Problem statement
 6. Research questions
 7. Selection and recruitment of participant
 8. Data collection process and protocols
 9. Debriefing procedures
 10. Confidentiality and anonymity
 11. Data management and storage
 12. Informed consent process and form
- 11) Reflect on how your positionality as a researcher could affect your results and how you will account for this in the research process[6].

Ecofeminists recognize that positionality is an important aspect of the research process, to be acknowledged and integrated into a scientific work. Rather than detracting from a work's integrity, acknowledging one's positionality as a researcher provides context and boundary for the work (Jafar, 2018). In this spirit, I will be frank and say I am conducting analysis through a

materialist ecofeminist framework because I consider this framework to be the most correct way through which to view this particular research. As Angela Davis, an African American communist, scholar, professor, activist, and former associate of the Black Panther Party says, “radical simply means ‘grasping things at the root’” (Davis, 2009). It is through a socialist ecofeminist analysis that I grasp this project.

12) Provide at least a rough estimate of the costs associated with conducting your research.

Provide details about each budget item so that the breakdown of the final cost is clear.

A professional Zoom subscription should be paid for by Evergreen so there is not a time limit to Zoom interviews. I would like to secure at least \$500 of grant funding to pay for the expert consultation of Lawrence Jenkins, described further in question 15.

13) Provide a detailed working outline of your thesis.

I. Introduction

A. Environmental movement in 1960s

1. NEP scale - creation, context, and history
2. Materialist ecofeminism - brief description why it is chosen as a framework

B. Research Question

C. Position Statement

II. Literature Review

A. NEP scale

- a. History of development and revision by authors
 - i. Original and revised scale
- b. Use of whole/partial/scale revisions over time
- c. Use for different populations: Global North, children, teachers, college students, Global South, etc.

B. Materialist ecofeminist framework

- a. Framework itself
- b. Different branches of ecofeminism
 - i. Define materialism
 - ii. Liberal feminism
 - 1. Reform-based
 - 2. Global north, child-free, white, privileged women, etc.
 - iii. Eco-socialism
 - 1. Lack of gender analysis
 - 2. Sexist and eco-fascist talking points by (mostly male) eco-socialists
- c. Foundational theory; original thinkers
- d. Conference and convergence
- e. Evolution over time - includes intersectional analysis of oppression
- f. Post-colonial perspective
 - i. Global south
 - ii. Internal colonies
 - 1. Maria Mies
- g. Critiques and responses
 - i. Biological essentialism
 - ii. Social ecology better equipped to respond to ecological issues.

III. Methodology

- 1. Theoretical framework of original NEP scale
 - a. **Content analysis** - via literature
 - i. Analyze the questions themselves
 - b. **Qualitative analysis** - via key informant interview
 - i. Original developer of NEP scale
- 2. **Content analysis**
 - a. Focus on works that investigate the perspectives of Global South or internal colonies.
- 3. **Key informant interviews**

- a. Additional insight into theoretical reasoning for contemporary researchers
 - i. Do they use the scale because they fundamentally agree with its theoretical origin, because of its momentum in research, or other reasons?

IV. Results

- 1. Theoretical framework of original scale
 - a. Informed by interview with Dunlap
- 2. Analysis of original scale; question by question
- 3. Analysis of revised scale; question by question
- 4. Trends in research
 - i. Types of study, populations, geography
 - ii. whole/partial scale use
 - iii. consistency/inconsistency

V. Key informant interviews

- 1. Description of process
- 2. Refer to prior insight and elaborate based on qualitative support.

VI. Implications for future research

- 1. Is the scale appropriate for Global North?
 - a. If yes, why?
- 2. Is the scale appropriate for Global South?
 - a. If no, what is? New scale? Different measurement?
- 3. Is the scale appropriate for internal colonies?
 - a. If no, what is? New scale? Different measurement?

VII. Summary and Conclusion

14) Provide a specific work plan and a timeline for each of the major tasks in the work plan. Be as realistic as you can, even though you will probably need to alter this schedule as you complete the tasks. Remember that faculty readers take time to return your drafts and that the final polishing and formatting of your thesis for binding will take longer than you ever imagined.

December 2020

All Month:

- Continue to draft visual outline of studies on MindNode
- Complete human subjects review and associated paperwork
- Research global South studies

Week 1: November 29-December 5

- December 3 - final poster due
- December 3 - final thesis prospectus due

Week 2: December 6-12

- continue writing “literature review”

Week 3: December 13-19

- draft interview questions; version for Dunlap
- Ask Chris to review

Week 4: December 20-26 [Off Work December 24-28]

- complete rough draft of literature review

January 2021

All Month:

- reach out to prospective interviewees
- research original theoretical frameworks: Limits to Growth, Erlich, Commoner, etc.
- write section on foundational frameworks, to be edited after interviews

Week 1: December 27-January 2 [Off Work January 1]

- contact Shawn about interviewees

Week 2: January 3-January 9

- draft interview questions for 2 additional interviewees

Week 3: January 10-January 16

- Monday - HSR paperwork due
- write analysis of 12-item questions

Week 4: January 17-January 23 [Off Work January 18]

- continue analysis of 12-item questions

Week 5: January 24-January 30

- write analysis of 15-item questions.

February 2021

All Month:

- Conduct interviews
- Transcribe interviews
- Analyze interviews

Week 1: January 31-February 6

Week 2: February 7-February 13

Week 3: February 14-February 20 [Off Work February 15]

Week 4: February 21-February 27

- Draft of implications for future research
- Send thesis work to Lawrence for review and feedback

March 2021

All Month:

- Conduct interviews
- Transcribe interviews
- Analyze Interviews

Week 1: February 28-March 6

Week 2: March 7-March 13

Week 3: March 14-March 20

- Write summary and conclusion

Week 4: March 21-March 27

April 2021

All Month:

- Revise, revise, revise
- Create and practice presentation

Week 1: March 28-April 3

Week 2: April 4-April 10

- Create presentation slides

Week 3: April 11-April 17

- Practice presentations

Week 4: April 18-April 24

- April 18 - thesis complete draft

May 2021

All Month:

- Revise, revise, revise
- Revise and practice presentation

Week 1: April 25-May 1

Week 2: May 2-May 8

Week 3: May 9-May 15

Week 4: May 16-May 22

Week 5: May 23-May 29

June 2021

- Graduate!

15) Who, beyond your MES faculty reader, will support your thesis? Indicate support both within and outside of Evergreen. Be specific about who they are and in what capacity they will support your thesis. If you are working with an outside agency or expert, be specific about their expectations for your data analysis or publication of results.

1. Shawn Hazboun, MES faculty, has agreed to be available for consultation regarding specific questions on environmental sociological methods. She has also agreed to connect this writer with prominent researchers in order to arrange key informant interviews.

2. Lawrence Jenkins, a food justice advocate, a master gardener and farmer, a wildlife artist, and an ongoing student of historical materialist and ecofeminist thought, will review my work and provide ongoing feedback. We learn from Salleh (2017) that ecofeminism is neither gender essentialist nor identity politic, and that anyone engaged in life-affirming subsistence practice can be considered an ecofeminist. Lawrence, along with fellow organic gardeners, has donated over 10,000 pounds of produce to community

in need. He incorporates organic, sustainable practices and traditional Afrikan knowledge into his work. Lawrence provides a valuable insight rooted in ecofeminist praxis.

3. Christopher Swart, my fiancée and confidante, and a degreed scholar of history and philosophy, will examine and critique the application of a historical materialist analysis in my thesis work.

16) List the 3-5 most important references you have used to identify the specific questions and context of your topic, help with issues of research design and analysis, and/or provide a basis for interpretation. For each annotated reference, explain how your project specifically connects to the source by extending, challenging, or responding to the conclusions, methods, or implications. For any other sources cited in this document provide a complete bibliographic citation.

Dunlap, Riley E., and Kent D. Van Liere. "The 'New Environmental Paradigm.'" *The Journal of Environmental Education* 9, no. 4 (1978): 10–19.

The original publication of the NEP scale is expectedly important to this research project. The authors describe what they term the Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) which they see as characterized by:

1. Belief in abundance and progress
2. Devotion to growth and prosperity
3. Faith in science and technology
4. Commitment to laissez-faire economy, limited governmental planning, and private property rights (p. 10).

Alternatively, the NEP, which the authors define as growing in popularity in the late 1970s, is characterized by:

1. Limits to growth
2. Balance of nature
3. Anti-anthropomorphism
4. Steady state economy
5. “Spaceship earth” (p. 13)

I expect to read this work again and again, analyzing the development and content as well as the underlying research assumptions.

Mies, M., and Shiva, V. (2014). *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books.

Mies and Shiva explore an ecofeminist perspective from their respective positions in the global North and south, Mies being from Germany and Shiva from India. This collection of writings explores topics such as capitalist imperialist economic development of the global south, white patriarchy and ecological destruction, indigenous women’s knowledge, reproductive politics, decolonization, and the subsistence perspective. This work provides a foundational perspective of ecofeminism upon which I will shape my critique.

Salleh, A. (2017). *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern*. (2nd ed.). Zed Books.

In *Ecofeminism as politics: Nature, Marx, and the postmodern*, Salleh set out to provide a new framework of ecofeminism that combines environmentalist, socialist, feminist, and postcolonial methods of thinking and acting in the world. In her view, ecofeminism combines aspects of all

four and provides the foundation for a global ecological revolution that will take us beyond capitalism. Salleh explains why analyzing global social and ecological crises through the lens of ecofeminism is critical to understanding and changing the forces that cause them. She explores how global knowledge systems of women and indigenous peoples are crucial to moving beyond the current binary men-women-nature relationships. Salleh explains why ecofeminism can unify and inform the postcolonial, ecological, feminist, and socialist struggles.

Salleh is a socialist ecofeminist and espouses a specific way of understanding ecofeminism by which I am choosing to conduct my research.

[1] You are not locked into this title; its purpose is to help you identify the main point or topic of your thesis at an early stage.

[2] You might discuss selection of case studies, sampling methods, experimental design, and/or specific hypotheses you will test. You should also address any specialized knowledge or skills that are necessary to complete the research.

[3] If you are planning to use existing data, explain the specific source, contact information, arrangement with collaborating agencies, and expectations about use of data and final products of your research. If you are planning to gather new data, describe specific methods, time, place, and equipment that will be required.

[4] If you're not sure where to start, consult a 'Code of Ethics' or other similar document from an academic society in an applicable field of study.

[5] If you are collecting ANY samples or data, even observational data, on public lands (city, county, state and/or federal) it is your responsibility to find out the permit requirements

BEFORE you collect data. Conducting research with tribal members/on tribal lands will have different and additional requirements.

[6] Your *positionality as a researcher* refers to the fact that one's "...beliefs, values systems, and moral stances are as fundamentally present and inseparable from the research process as [one]'s physical, virtual, or metaphorical presence when facilitating, participating and/or leading the research project..." (The Weingarten Blog 2017).

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