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# Using Social Justice and Intersectionality to Improve Stakeholder Conflict in Conservation: A Transdisciplinary Solution

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## Using Social Justice and Intersectionality to Improve Stakeholder Conflict in Conservation:

### A Transdisciplinary Solution

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Conservation conflict among stakeholders and the ways that we deal with it, have become an increasing focus point for researchers. Redpath et al. (2013) argues that conflicts are a major problem facing conservation efforts. There has been a big push for conservationists to reframe “conflict” in order to efficiently find resolutions or ways to get stakeholders to work with each other. Some researchers have incorporated methods from peacebuilding, thereby creating conservation conflict transformation to try and improve efficiency of conservation efforts by understanding the more complex social conflicts between people and groups (Madden & McQuinn 2014). Other research has found that a bigger emphasis on understanding social issues involved in conservation conflicts is needed if our management aims are to be achieved (Marshall et al. 2007). Research has also found that there is an extensive need to combine the knowledge of social sciences with environmental science and conservation (Shoreman, Ouimet, & Kopnina 2015) and even that something as simple as perceived trust between groups is important (Young et. al 2016). Some researchers have tried to come up with tools and criteria to help with dialogue or communication between groups (Davies, Bryce, & Redpath 2013). Delibes-Mateos et. al (2013) mention in their management recommendation for the European rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, that, “In the Iberian Peninsula, a first step towards reducing the rabbit management conflict would be to bring stakeholders together to find balance between potentially diverging interests”. All of this research is basically saying that conservationists must find ways to integrate and understand the social complexities that are tied to conservation, and science in general. Ultimately, I find that much of this research is correct and that it is unquestionably necessary for the natural sciences to connect to the social sciences.

One way in which the natural sciences may have separated itself from the social sciences is in its institutional attempts to be as “objective” as possible. Certainly, efforts to remain “objective” in science stem from legitimate concerns for accountability of our claims and to be sure that they can withstand empirical investigations (Stone-Mediatore 2007). However, what the natural sciences generally fail to recognize is that objectivity is like a myth in that no one can *truly* remove themselves from their position in the world and do research with absolutely no bias. This is not to say that bias is always inherently bad, as evident in the way that Emily Martin (1991) used her own bias to acknowledge our own collective, cultural bias of gender roles and how it limited research in *The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles*.

Some research does realize that our world position does indeed alter our work. Brosius & Hitchner maintain that they, “recognize that who we are has a great deal to do with what we can claim to know and with how valid others take our knowledge to be (2010)”. Our own sense of place in the world is going to affect our work, whether we want it to or not. Ultimately, conservationists will have to come to terms with accessing and using other forms of knowledge. As Peterson et. al maintains, “...policy decisions will never be based primarily on science. Science can inform a decision, but political processes that include conflicts among people with different values, power, history, and emotions will determine what policies are developed, followed, and enforced (2013)”. Science (and conservation) are not separate from social contexts and it would do conservationists well to heed that knowledge. Yet, it’s easily found that many conservationists (and those generally working in natural science fields) are not totally open to social sciences. Ives & Kendal quote a 2007 study, saying, “[e]cologists, worried that they will not be viewed as sufficiently ‘objective’ and ‘scientific’, refuse to consider the important role of

values in the development and use of ecological models”. Here especially is where we can see that disconnect between the natural and social sciences; there is a fear of not being seen as “logical”, “objective”, and to a point, emotionally-detached from our scientific work. What we have to keep in mind, and what most social sciences would easily view, is the societal context in which “scientific” or “objective” knowledge was established. We have to examine, as Brosius and Hitchner (2010) explain, “how knowledge is produced and who is empowered to produce it, how some knowledge is taken to be authoritative while other knowledge is marginalized....”. Essentially, we must look to the social sciences to understand how it is not possible to be entirely “objective” and how being conscious of that is a good thing. The sooner conservationists come to terms with their unconscious cultural biases and their place in society, the sooner we can connect more fully to the social sciences, and thus improve conservation conflict and efforts.

Still, other researchers, like Lute, Bump, & Gore (2014), suggest introducing social identity theory (how individuals see themselves through group membership) into conservation conflicts to help try and understand another group’s perspective. These researchers noted that, “Overcoming years of historical conflict cannot be accomplished with a single workshop or public meetings...” and that there must be ongoing communication between groups. While I agree, I find that it could take stakeholders a while to actually get down to the social problem or dispute between group members, especially if groups have an “us vs. them” mentality and refuse to see eye-to-eye. Understanding what someone thinks and why they think that way can be useful, and is close to intersectionality (which I will explain in detail later in this paper), however it doesn’t necessarily urge or motivate each stakeholder to work for the benefit of all stakeholders (which intersectionality and social justice do). Overall, there seems to be at the least, acknowledgement that science alone cannot resolve conflicts between stakeholders. We

know that conservationists need to find a way to connect to the social sciences to the natural sciences to help conservation conflicts and thus, conservation efforts.

Now, as mentioned, while social identity theory comes relatively close, I do not believe that it really encompasses all that conservationists need to learn or understand to improve the gap between the two sciences, and thus conflict resolution. Learning about the ways that individuals see themselves based on their identities does help, but by itself, is not sufficient. I find that what seems to be missing and what the researchers are attempting to do is use a social justice or intersectional lens in their work without actually using social science material. In other words, conservationists are using a multidisciplinary approach in which they are studying more than one discipline but, “without actual integration of the respective concepts or findings (Reyers et. al 2009)”. As of now, I see no evidence of a link between both social justice or intersectionality and conservation that is being jointly discussed or taught, but I believe that doing so would help to make better conservationists and thus improve conservation conflicts. Learning about social justice and intersectionality would greatly benefit conservationists and their conflict resolution abilities. We should work to move from a multidisciplinary approach to a transdisciplinary approach which, “forges linkages between scientific disciplines as well as between different knowledge spheres” and is more integrated approach “in which the boundaries between science and society become more permeable (Reyers et. al 2009)”. In an effort to shift to a more transdisciplinary approach, I will use social science terminology and concepts to explain how to improve conservationists’ ability to deal with stakeholder conflicts. To be specific, I will argue that integrating social justice and an intersectional lens into conservation classes will improve conservationists’ ability to find stakeholder conflict resolutions.

So what exactly is social justice? It is basically the idea that all people, regardless of race, sex, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, or ability, should have equal benefits and opportunities in society. I find that there are two common ways that people look at social justice: through a Liberal Feminist or Intersectional Feminist lens. Liberal Feminists, like Betty Friedan, really focus in on equal access to opportunities and argue that the only thing women need is to have the same access and opportunities as men. Friedan wrote in her famous, “Feminine Mystique”, that one of the most important things women needed was access; to get out of the private sphere and get a job/have a career (Mann 2012). Of course, Friedan’s work only applied to White, college-educated, heterosexual, middle-class women and basically essentialized all women. Plenty of lower class women and women of color already had jobs and were fighting for their right to stay home and care for their families. For all the good that they do, Liberal Feminists often continue to essentialize groups and overlook the many different ways that people are oppressed or have their voices silenced. Many people, feminists and non-feminists, continue with this mindset in many situations; the needs and realities of other groups are ignored in light of the needs and realities of the more privileged or there is little to no acknowledgement of systems of oppression that affect everyone. This is the problem that conservationists are trying to actively work against and find solutions to. Conservationists are trying to figure out how to bring stakeholders together and meet their concerns on an “equal level”. However, I find that they are also using a sort of Liberal Feminist lens by suggesting that every stakeholder deserves the exact *same* input or that each stakeholder needs to the *same* amount of negotiation or compromise. Currently, I find that conservationists are working to make sure that every stakeholder is equal and placed at similar levels to each other, but they are missing key knowledge and context.

Intersectionality is a bit different. This concept was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in order to better discuss and understand the ways that racial *and* gender oppression affect Black women. Her concept has been used by many individuals within groups who felt as though their concerns and voices weren't being heard. Crenshaw has written that her concept has, “brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them (Crenshaw 2015)”. Using an intersectional lens means that we acknowledge the many intersections of identities that cross to create intersecting areas of oppression. This lens recognizes what current conservationists simultaneously fail to see and are attempting to achieve; that some stakeholders will need to have more or less input, help, or prioritization than other stakeholders. Some stakeholders will have to try harder or less to understand the other groups’ perspectives because of possible historical conflicts and privileges.

At this point, it’s important to also note the difference between “equality” and “equity”. A lot of people use these two words interchangeably, but they do not actually mean the same thing. “Equality” is more synonymous with “sameness” and “equity” is more synonymous with “fairness”. The idea of equality falls more in line with a Liberal Feminist perspective; it treats everyone as if they are all starting at the same place and again, that everyone is already the same social level so they all need the same amount of prioritization. The idea of equity, however, falls more in line with an Intersectional Feminist perspective; it acknowledges that different groups start at different places, socially speaking, and that some groups will require more or less help to be at the same level because of the societal reality that we still live in a racist, sexist, ableist, and heteronormative society. Right now, as previously mentioned, the problem that conservationists are having is that they’re coming at stakeholder conflicts with a Liberal Feminists lens; trying to make sure all groups have the same thing or that their voices are all heard equally. While trying

to make sure all groups are listened to equally isn't necessarily a bad thing, it becomes more problematic if conservationists are missing a lot of necessary context or if they're ignoring multiple systems of oppression. There could be history behind a stakeholder conflict and it's important to acknowledge that. It's with an intersectional lens that conservationists can begin to do so. Unlike with social identity theory, intersectionality and social justice are more action based. Social identity theory merely deliberated acknowledging group identity and perspectives, however intersectionality and social justice calls for us to not only take that knowledge, but also to make change with it. Intersectionality would urge conservationists then, to not only be aware of inequalities, but to also *do* something about them in our field. Conservationists (and natural sciences as a whole) should strive to change their current Liberal Feminist lens to an Intersectional Feminist lens in order to fully view the issues and problems surrounding stakeholder conflict and to improve our understanding of conflict.

Now, many researchers do try to draft the full amount of issues that surround conflict. There are copious studies about stakeholder conflict resolution or management that are focused on creating new or additional roadmaps or guides in order to lay out the conflict, and thus help conservationists steer towards a solution. For example, Madden and McQuinn (2014) outline the need for conservation conflict transformation (CCT). While CCT is important and does well in laying out the levels of conflict, it is created and presented to conservationists later in their careers; as a way to help conservationists who have met this conflict management dilemma. The problem with a lot of these studies is that they all try to educate conservationists about conflict and how to find solutions when conservationists are *already* in the field. Knowing that many conflict management plans are on the cusp of an intersectional lens, I believe that conservationists should learn about intersectionality and social justice issues alongside their

undergraduate science education so that when they do go into the field, using an intersectional lens is already second nature. Learning to look at and understand another's perspective and striving to address each perspective is the general essence of intersectionality and social justice and is what conservationists are *attempting* to use to improve stakeholder conflict. It only makes sense to learn about this lens early in their education.

Before beginning to claim that intersectional science education should be instituted immediately or that it is without a doubt the best available option, I suggest that a study be performed to determine if my claims that an intersectional science education would be beneficial for conservation students are true. For this study, I would need to have two groups of students; those who take an intersectional conservation course with direct ties to social justice or the social sciences (Group X) and those who take a science course with no direct ties to social justice or the social sciences (Group Y). Each of these groups should have the same class size and should be made up of students from the same year; I think that Freshmen would be the best group to use as they will likely come in with the same knowledge (or lack) of social justice and intersectionality, however I acknowledge that this may not be possible because of things like class level or class requirements. It would also be best for the same professor to teach both the “intersectional conservation class” and the “normal” current conservation classes in an attempt to control the way each is taught, as each professor has a variety of unique teaching styles.

Group Y would take their conservation class as normal; with no deeper discussion or learning about social justice or intersectionality. Should any social justice issues be brought up however, there should be minimal discussion and no evident or profound take-away. Group X, however, would need a newly structured conservation class; one that links all conservation topics with social justice issues. Intersectional conservation classes are going to be quite a bit different

from current conservation classes. Looking at a current conservation syllabus (Koontz 2015), we can see what learning outcomes students should achieve in a normal conservation class:

- “1. Students will connect and link conservation biology to the educational, co-curricular, and/or extra-curricular paths through class discussions and reflecting on conservation biology and their roles as biology students and citizens.
2. Students will demonstrate their ability to ask meaningful questions regarding conservation biology.
3. Students will demonstrate information literacy in conservation biology by performing literature searches, and by reading, interpreting, and evaluating the literature of conservation biology.
4. Students will demonstrate proficiency in formal presentation skills as they present their work in written and oral contexts.
5. Students will demonstrate their ability to apply what they have learned about conservation biology through class discussions, book groups, and the development of a ‘TED talk.’”

These learning outcomes show what conservation students would generally expect to learn from a general multidisciplinary conservation class with minimal to no direct ties or emphasis on social justice or intersectionality. The first learning outcome comes close to social justice in regards to the objective that students reflect on their roles as biology students and citizens, but doesn't directly tie or name social justice or intersectionality in relationship to being ethical

citizens. In order to create an intersectional conservation class or show what one might look like, I referenced Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives in order to create learning outcomes that will place an emphasis on social justice within a conservation class. University of Illinois (Tips 2015) defines learning outcomes as, "statements of what students will learn in a class or in a class session". These learning outcomes will attempt to not only describe what students should learn about in conservation biology, but how conservation biology and social justice or intersectionality can intersect. Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (1996) describes six levels of objectives under the cognitive domain. These six levels of objectives are:

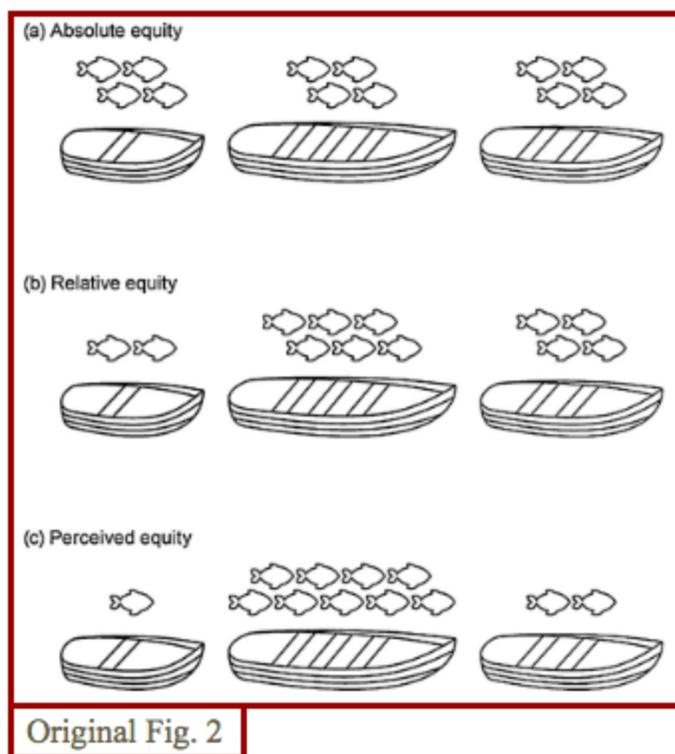
"1. knowledge: the recall of specific items, 2. comprehension: can recall, but can do a little more (e.g. paraphrase, define, discuss to some extent), 3. application: all of the above, but can take information of an abstract nature and use it in concrete situations, 4. analysis: can break down a communication into its constituent parts, revealing the relationships among them, 5. synthesis: can pull together many disorganized elements or parts so as to form a whole, 6. evaluation: makes judgements about the value of materials or methods".

Using these six objective levels as a point of reference, I created six learning outcomes that would be used for an intersectional conservation class; much like I would expect Group X to take.

The first learning outcome will deal with the students' ability to recall information; students will be able to name and define terms and concepts relating to conservation and intersectionality such as restoration, anthropogenic, biodiversity, habitat fragmentation, Other, intersectionality, institutional/systematic powers of oppression, privilege, and categories of identities. This means that at the most basic level, students can recognize and understand basic

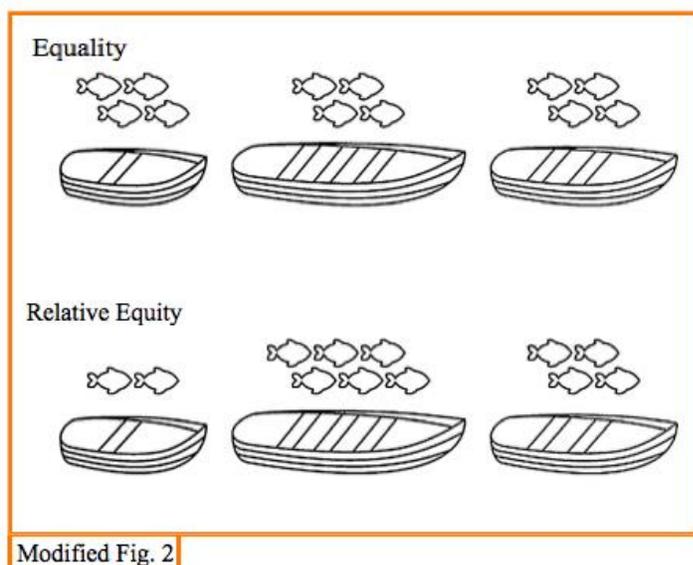
terms or concepts relating to conservation biology and the social sciences. The second learning outcome will deal with the students' comprehension abilities; students will be able to recognize and discuss effects of conservation and intersectional concepts and terms and how they each connect to each other and other issues. For example, students will be able to recognize and discuss the effects of anthropogenic climate change and how human-orientated views not only affect climate, but also the ways our culture tends to define "human" in a largely androcentric lens and how patriarchal, racist, and classist views combine to also contribute to the degradation of the environment (Plumwood 1993). The third learning outcome will deal with the student's application abilities; students will be able to inspect and apply the knowledge mentioned in the two previous learning outcomes and use it to inform their understandings of a conflict and each stakeholder's perspective. The fourth learning outcome will deal with the students' analysis abilities; students will be able to analyze and distinguish the underlying social justice issues that are present in conservation topics (and conflicts), both globally and locally. The fifth learning outcome will deal with the students' synthesis abilities; students will be able to construct and propose a stakeholder conflict management plan detailing both the social justice and conservation issues or concerns for each stakeholder. This learning outcome generally reflects the objective of the entire class and is what the assessment will work to evaluate. The sixth and last learning outcome will deal with the students' evaluation abilities; students will evaluate how intersectionality and conservation relate and reflect on the value of learning each perspective. As can be seen, an intersectional conservation class would fully integrate and merge conservation biology and social science. Basically, an intersectional conservation class is just like any other conservation class, but ultimately strives to acknowledge the social science connections.

To continue with the study, both the X and Y groups would take an assessment before starting and after taking their given class, relating to their understanding of conservation biology and its connections to social justice issues. This assessment would have a number of questions, each pertaining to different stakeholder conflict situations and would ultimately aim to evaluate the students' ability to find resolution for a given stakeholder conflict. There are a number of ways that the questions on this assessment could be given and I think it would be beneficial to include a variety of forms of questions in the assessment. The first variety of question would be formed as a few scenarios of different stakeholder conflicts where the students would then be required to evaluate each scenario and suggest their idea of a resolution plan. Students would also be required to justify their resolution plans and explain their reasoning. The second variety of question would be to give students past stakeholder conflicts that were not able to find compromise. Students would then be required to analyze the failed resolution and attempt to



explain why it failed or why the stakeholders couldn't come to a compromise. Students would be required to explore both the biological and socio-economic barriers that made the resolution plan unsuccessful. Now, for the next form of questioning, I find it's important to note one of the limitations of Young et al.'s (2016) own study. These researchers found that each stakeholder's own view of conflict and

conflict resolution may have altered their results. To avoid their limitation, I would have each student define what equity meant to them in each of their assessments. To do this I would include a modified version of Klein et al.'s (2015) Figure 2. This figure was used to illustrate absolute



Modified Fig. 2

equity as when each group benefitted equally, relative equity as when each group benefitted proportionally to their needs, and perceived equity as how each group had either a negative or positive perception of the fairness. Their original figure uses natural science terminology (“absolute equity”

and “relative equity”) and is shown above. In an effort to shift to a more transdisciplinary approach however, I would alter their illustration to use both social science and natural science terminology, namely “equality” in place of “absolute equity” as they both seem to mean the same thing. Now, I would include the modified figure in the assessment, without option (c) however, and would require students to pick which option, either the first figure (equality) or the second figure (relative equity), seemed most fair to them. I will note, however, that this modified figure 2 is still lacking a full representation of societal equity. Relative equity is useful in allocating resources and as Young et al. explained, is proportional to each stakeholder's needs. For instance, this means that a fisherman with a bigger boat would be allowed to catch more fish than other fishermen with smaller boats. This is different from a societal view of equity which would say that those with less require or deserve more than those who are already ahead so as to place each person at the same level. So, in Young et al.'s fishermen example, those with smaller boats

would perhaps be allowed more fishing time than those with bigger boats so as to allow both to get the same amount of fish. These two “equities” seem to contradict another and it would be prudent to provide either an additional illustration in the modified figure 2 or to be sure to cover the differences while in the intersectional conservation class (or both). Now, each students’ idea of what is most “fair” is going to affect the next set of questions. With this final set of questions, students would be given a number of example resolutions for a number of different conflicts. Students would then be required to assess and rate each resolution on a scale of “fairness”. This fairness scale would be a simple 1-5 scale with 1 being low fairness and 5 being high fairness, similar to Young et al.’s trust scale.

Once both groups have taken their class and both their first and final assessments, I would analyze and code their responses in order to determine if my hypothesis is true; are students who take a transdisciplinary, intersectional conservation class better at finding conflict resolutions between stakeholders than those who don’t? To determine this, I would like to continue referencing Young et al. and follow their use of NVivo qualitative data analysis software. This software would allow me to code each students’ assessment responses as it supports both qualitative and mixed methods research (QSR International). In their 2016 study, Young et al. used the NVivo software to better understand the responses given by stakeholders during each of their interviews. While my information wouldn’t necessarily be considered interviews, it is still qualitative information; most of the assessment would be. I can also use path analysis in order to analyze students’ equity ratings. The path analysis would allow me to look at the causal connections between each student’s view of “fairness”, their equity ratings, and their resolution skills. My input path diagram (Figure 1) illustrates how students’ overall resolution skills are affected primarily by what students believe to be fair. Here I will note another possible

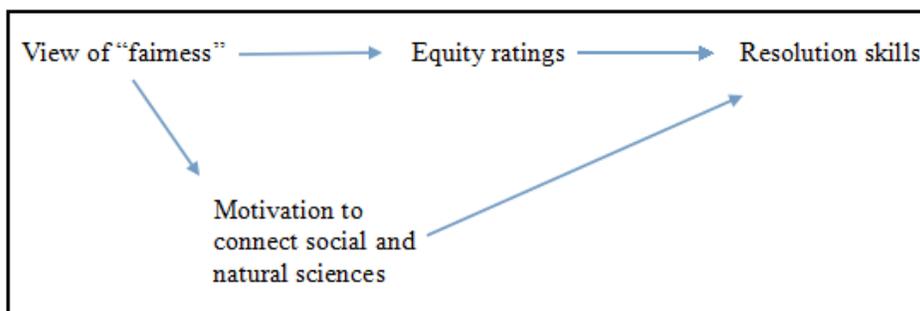


Fig. 1: Input path diagram. Students' idea of "fairness" will ultimately affect equity ratings which would then affect their resolution skills. Motivation for transdisciplinary learning included as another variable that could affect resolution skills.

limitation or  
variable, namely  
that individual  
students'  
motivation to  
learn about the  
social sciences in

science class could hinder my study results. From my own research for a previous Senior Inquiry, I know that many science students have difficulty acknowledging how these two fields connect and often don't see any value or worth in connecting the two. Students who happen to take the intersectional conservation class might not put as much effort into the class if they feel the information is not worthwhile or useful. At the same time, only taking students into the intersectional conservation class on a volunteer type basis could also hinder my results because students who are most likely to be interested in an intersectional conservation class would be those few who are already interested in the social sciences, and thus might already have some sort of social science knowledge. Because of this, I find that this is a variable that is outside of my control. I do acknowledge University of Exeter's (Path) note that while path analysis is popular and very useful, correlational data is still going to be, of course, correlational. University of Exeter maintains, "Within a given path diagram, path analysis can tell us which are the more important (and significant) paths. . . . But path analysis cannot tell us which of two distinct path diagrams is to be preferred, nor can it tell us whether the correlation between A and B represents a causal effect of A on B, a causal effect of B on A, mutual dependence on other variables C, D etc, or some mixture of these." Clearly, path analysis has its own limitations that should be

acknowledged. Overall though, I find that both NVivo software and the path analysis will be the best methods to analyze my results.

As a Women & Gender Studies major, I do have my own biases (naturally) for what the results will show. Based on my own knowledge and research of intersectionality and social justice, I have made the following five hypotheses:

1. On the first assessment, most students in Group X and in Group Y will view the Liberal Feminist idea of “equality” or “sameness” as the fairest.
2. There will be a change in Group Xs definition of fairness.
3. There will be an increase in Group Xs conflict resolution skills.
4. There will be little to no change in Group Ys definition of fairness.
5. There will be little to no change in Group Ys conflict resolution skills.

I am convinced that integrating social science knowledge into conservation biology classes will help students to understand each stakeholder's perspective. I'd argue that a hallmark of intersectionality and learning about social justice issues is learning to empathize with people that are different than you and to feel the need to address their concerns. I do trust that this is what will help conservation students with conflict resolution skills, and in turn, conservation efforts.

Obviously, conservation conflict has many complex, intersecting variables that make it difficult to address. I find that the leading complication is linked to the fact that the natural sciences and social sciences aren't exactly connected and that we are currently attempting to get conservationists to connect them at a later time in their work. This is most likely due to societal biases which tend to devalue knowledge that is not seen as “objective” and thus, keeps conservationists from wanting to merge the two kinds of knowledge. My proposed study hopes to begin mending these issues. By shifting from a multidisciplinary to a transdisciplinary

approach in conservation classes, conservation biology students would learn about conservation and social justice issues simultaneously. By the time they are actively working for conservation efforts, learning about and seeing other people's perspectives will be second nature to them as will their ability to extract useful knowledge from various other disciplines. Of course, there will be plenty of room for future research. My study merely proposes integration of social science knowledge into conservation classes, but perhaps it would benefit other science classes as well. It would also do well to further research when integrating social science knowledge is most beneficial; is it better to incorporate at an undergraduate or graduate level? All in all, this proposed study aims to make a change in the way we view what kinds of knowledge are useful or valuable to help conservation efforts. It only makes sense that if conservation conflict itself is complex and contains issues related to various disciplines, that our own solutions be rooted in various forms of knowledge.

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