

THE TIES THAT BIND? THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, FEMININITY, AND PLACE
IN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACTION

By

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ABSTRACT

THE TIES THAT BIND: THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, FEMININITY, AND PLACE IN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACTION

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In this dissertation, I explore the construction and negotiation of identity of women actors involved in environmental justice action from two separate Rocky Mountain West locales; the first a small community near Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the second, three contiguous and primarily Latino neighborhoods outside of Denver, Colorado. Using the oral histories of women (n=10) involved in these projects, and a framework of hegemonic femininity and intersectionality, I demonstrate how gender interlocks with other identities (such as femininity, citizenship subjectivities, and place) to frame environmental realities, experiences of injustice, and claims for recognition and remediation (Whyte, 2014).

This work is centered on three primary research aims. First, to examine how hegemonic conceptions of femininity and masculinity (Connell 1987; Collins, 2004; Schippers, 2007) operate within communities of residence. Second, to explore how these hegemonic constructions shape women's engagement and resistance strategies as it relates to their environmental justice work. Last, to investigate to what degree the congruence or contestation of these hegemonic femininities and masculinities by actors determines the distribution of environmental, social, political, and economic resources (power). Very simply, hegemonic cultural characteristics are normative values that are used to legitimate power over others, to maintain institutions, and construct hierarchies that determine exclusion and inclusion of socio-material benefits (Connell, 1987). By locating this work within an examination of environmental justice activism, I

contribute to the literature that problematizes the feminization of this movement, and suggest new ways to look at the frequent association between women actors and environmental justice issues. Further, I explore hegemonic femininity outside of normalized Western, white middle-class culture in my work with Latina community activists in Colorado. Empirical investigations of hegemonic femininity must include examinations that illuminate the intersections of race, class, and gender hegemonies. Which social practices empower or disempower actors in raced and classed femininities/masculinities may differ greatly from the ‘white middle class’ experience (Collins and Bilge, 2016; Yuval Davis, 1994).

My findings suggest that motivations to advocacy do not neatly fit previously observed affiliations with activist mother identities and environmental justice engagement (Bell and Braun 2010; Kurtz, 2007), and support the work of Hercus (1999) and Carli (1999) by illustrating that women who display assertiveness, or fail to use referent forms of power, are sanctioned. The women within this study described experiences of discrimination or rebuke in relationship to their community advocacy from family members, extended community networks, and/or in public political spaces. Moreover, for the Latina women in Colorado, failing to meet local or cultural expectations of hegemonic femininity, within the community and against the universal yardstick (Collins, 2004), had a direct impact on this group’s ability to access networks of resources. I argue that contextualized investigations of hegemonic femininities are needed to allow us to examine the persistence of local level gender inequalities, how these identities create or diminish space for women’s engagement, and how these varying forms of engagement support or disrupt hegemonic masculinity.

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Dedicated to Sarah L. Stover whose friendship and support made all the difference, and always has.

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INTRODUCTION

If you cannot handle my truth, then you don't belong with me.

Lisa, a promotora working in Denver, Colorado

It makes me wonder, in the man's world that we're in, if part of the reason is because, two moms and five kids—how serious can they be? You know. Whereas, if it was a man that started the group, would our group have more traction? And there's no sense in living in what-ifs, because that's not what happened. But it does. It kind of raises the question in my head: like, if we were men, would people have taken us more seriously sooner? You know, the two of us have stayed solid in the course, and I think it'll encourage more women...I want to see more women just kind of step outside of convention, and what we're supposed to do, and how we're supposed to act.

Elizabeth, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Lisa and Elizabeth¹ are the founding members of the two environmental justice organizations studied in this dissertation. I start with their words, as they frame many of the issues explored throughout the following chapters: how to get to the root of the experiences of women's lives, and how do persistent gendered inequalities shape the performances of environmental justice organizations led by women? I explore Lisa and Elizabeth's experiences, and the lives of the other women working within these organizations, to examine how intersecting identities of gender, femininity, and place have influenced their environmental justice engagement, and to what extent this impacts their communities. We cannot pretend that

¹ Names have been changed to protect confidentiality. A further description may be found in the Methods section.

operating within a ‘man’s world’ (Elizabeth) does not affect the justice and sustainability outcomes these women are seeking to accomplish for themselves and their communities.

However, we must remain careful not to essentialize women as beleaguered or vulnerable environmental justice leaders (Cameron, 2012). For example, prior research has suggested a gender-based connection to environmental activism, theorizing that the similarly subordinated position of women and the natural environment creates an affinity (Shiva, 1988); wherein women are ‘natural’ leaders and supporters of environmental justice platforms. The problematic essentialism of ecofeminist rhetoric has been noted; first that it minimizes the need for— and contributions of— men (Stearney, 1994); second, that it produces another cultural expectation for the emotional and physical labor of women (Budgeon, 2014; Kirk, 1997). Other scholarship focuses on the political opportunity that environmental justice advocacy may represent for women (Mizrahi and Lombe, 2006). Given that many of the health impacts of environmental justice are associated with the physical site of the home or in the body (e.g. illness in children, polluted drinking water, environmental cancers) women’s activism is seen as an extension of their labor in/for the home, and less of an obvious threat to the division of the private/public spheres of gender relations in the US (Kurtz, 2007). Women’s entrances into political (public) spaces to advocate against environmental injustice may be shielded from gendered criticism due to their identities as mothers (Bell and Braun, 2010). Conceptually this is closely related to the idea of activist mothering (Naples, 1992); women’s historical and contemporary caretaking of communities, and the inception of their activism contributed at least partially to their motherhood identity. Nonetheless, this idea is incomplete, given the reality of the ‘hysterical housewife’ rhetoric (Zelezny, 2000; Levine, 1982), which rejects the knowledge

of women gained at the local (private) level as irrational, subjective, and inapplicable to environmental questions at higher vertical scales.

Scholars working in environmental justice research more broadly have called for an invigoration of the field (Holifield, 2001; Sze and London, 2000), arguing that new theoretical and methodological frameworks are needed to investigate issues where complexity has grown beyond quantitative associations of race/ethnicity and place-based hazards (Mohai and Saha, 2006). Complexity may be a function of the geospatial, or ideological expansion of the environmental justice frame (Schlosberg, 2013), such that cultural continuance and environmental heritages in indigenous communities (Whyte, 2011), reproductive justice and environmental burdens (DiChiro, 2008), or food deserts and insecurity (Wekerle, 2004) are examples of contemporary research. Particular to many of these arguments is the suggestion that qualitative methods must be incorporated to better examine the sociality of environmental justice (Kurtz, 2009; Pulido, 1996); ensuring that researchers do not treat any community disenfranchised by environmental justice as homogenous, an action that may potentially compromise research findings and miss important in-group differences that could explain experience or behavior (Rivers et al., 2010).

I use these thoughts to suggest an examination of women's engagement in environmental justice practice that makes room for an analysis that engagement may simultaneously be a source of personal empowerment (Yuval-Davis, 1994) and a cultural expectation of community maintenance (Gerstel, 2000; Little, 1997)— and that which socio-material realities constitute empowerment and expectation(s) may vary across actor groups. Further, it is critical that we understand that gender is performed and expressed within/against hegemonic discursive identities depending on cultural and geographic locations (Kurtz, 2007; Schippers 2007), that

these performances may be rewarded or condemned depending on whether they are congruent with community expectations, and that ascription to a gender identity does not presuppose a universal environmental experience (Krauss, 1993; Kurtz, 2007; Stearney, 1994). Moreover, we must ask— regardless of why women may be more likely to be involved in environmental justice work than men— if and how this association may result in the feminization of environmental justice claims, and the impact on resource access/distribution this may have on their communities.

In this dissertation, I explore the construction and negotiation of identity of women actors involved in environmental justice projects at the community level to examine how gender interlocks with other identities (such as femininity) to inform experiences of injustice, claims for community recognition, and notions of empowerment (Whyte, 2014). Central to the development of this research is the theoretical framework of hegemonic and pariah femininities developed by Schippers (2007) and the acknowledgement that empirical research is needed not only to bolster this concept, but to examine the intersection of hegemonic masculinities and femininities with other subjectivities such as race, class, and citizenship. Hegemonic cultural characteristics are normative values that are used to legitimate power over others, to maintain institutions, and construct hierarchies that determine exclusion and inclusion of socio-material benefits (Connell, 1987). This builds upon Connell's (1987) conception of hegemonic masculinity, but rejects her treatment of emphasized femininity, arguing instead that there are feminine characteristics which should be understood to serve the interests of hegemony; subordinate to the 'masculine' and ascendant over other 'femininities'. Conceptually, pariah femininities describe the embodiment of hegemonic masculine practices by women actors. They are disruptive to the hegemonic masculine power, they threaten the ascendancy of men (Schippers, 2007). Importantly, within

this argument there is attention to the interlocking systems of oppression (Collins, 1989) through which power is enacted— making it possible to investigate the ways in which white supremacy and class privilege may reinforce (and be reinforced by) hierarchal gender relations. Applied to the investigation of women actors engaged in environmental justice practice, understanding local hegemonic identities can help us to problematize women’s engagement and resistance strategies, and to what degree the congruence or contestation of these hegemonic femininities and masculinities may impact the distribution of environmental, social, political, and economic resources (power).

In addition to the scholarship mentioned above, other research has examined the motivations, negotiated identities, and potential private/public contestations in women’s lives associated with their tenure in environmental justice organizations (Brown and Ferguson, 1995; Herda Rapp, 2000). However, with the exception of research by Krauss (1993), this work fails to incorporate an intersectional analysis of identity. An intersectionalist perspective suggests that the “women’s complex identity includes gender, race, class and sexuality, and how these various positions may influence perception and definition of issues,” (Mizrahi and Lombe, 2006, p. 99); further, it acknowledges the complexity and the structural significance of interactions between institutions of power and race, gender, class, and citizenship identities that inform experiences of oppression (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Thus, I argue, by applying the frameworks of intersectionality and hegemonic femininity to women’s environmental justice practice, we can examine how the performance of identities may be rejected or accepted via local hegemonic norms, how intersectional identities inform community level justice claims and experiences, how personal empowerment may be differentially constructed across identities, and the implications of this for local environmental justice action. In the case of environmental justice theory and

research, problematizing community identities rather than naturalizing them helps to acknowledge different strategies of resistance, the plurality of justice claims (Harrison, 2014) and to locate authentic opportunities for social transformation.

In this introduction chapter, I first briefly outline the framework and questions that guided this research effort. Second, I discuss my data collection activities, and share descriptions of the two environmental justice organizations I worked with. Last, I describe the aims of the three chapters contained in this dissertation, and how they are in conversation with one another.

Framework and Questions

The premise of this dissertation research is not to identify if environmental injustice is happening in communities, or moreover what issues of political economy underlay disparate environmental realities. Instead, my interest lies in examining the construction and negotiation of identity of women actors who are working in local level environmental justice organizations/efforts to understand their experiences through an intersectional lens, to investigate how hegemonic and pariah femininities influence their engagement, and the implications for the communities they represent. I argue that how *environmental justice* is operationalized is a reflection of whose voices matter, which social locations are visible, and what types of livelihoods are privileged.

Intersectionality is needed writ large in environmental justice research to strengthen its tool-kit, making room for complex community narratives (Holifield 2001; Schlosberg, 2013). My use of intersectionality here, is an explicit rejection of frameworks that reduced gender to a universal experience, failing to account for the differentiated realities of women as gender interacted with race, class, sexuality and other sites of identity (Winker and Degele, 2011). As

will be explored in more depth in the individual chapters, hegemonic and pariah femininities are constructed at the local level (Collins 2004; Schippers, 2007), illuminating the cultural expectations for women's behavior, and the ways in which discourses of masculinity and femininity shape community politics and resource provisioning. Critically, which social practices empower or disempower actors in raced and classed femininities/masculinities may differ greatly from the 'white middle class' experience; at the same time, white masculinity/femininity is the 'yardstick' to which all others are compared (Collins, 2004). Taken together, intersectional and hegemonic frameworks are both explicitly concerned with what is occurring at the local or individual level; however, in each framework there is an acknowledgement of the dialectic between individuals and structures (Winker and Degele, 2011).

It is from these interstices that this dissertation advances a partial explanation of what more needs to be understood about women engaged in environmental justice practice. In chapter one, I examine local hegemonic masculinities and femininities; how these cultural expectations shape women's environmental justice engagement strategies; and explore hegemonic femininity outside of normalized Western, white middle-class culture, instead examining the localized construction of hegemonic femininity and masculinity in one US-based Latino community organization. In chapter two, I ask how intersectional identities inform community level justice claims, and how contestation of local hegemonic identity norms may impact resource distribution to environmental justice organizations. In chapter three, I turn specifically to methodology and operationalization— intersectionality's popularity has resulted in varying quality of research efforts (Davis, 2008)— demonstrating the goodness of fit between intersectional frameworks and the oral history method. I turn now to further discussion of my data collection, and the organizations I worked with in this research.

Data Collection

My primary data collection strategy was the oral history (or oral narrative) interview, supported by participant observation, group interviews, and discourse analysis. My decision to use the oral narrative method was linked to the intersectional design of my research frame. Simply stated, oral narratives best fit my project because they give participants the flexibility to self-define and self-construct identities (Etter-Lewis, 1991) in ways that other interview formats do not. The lived realities of respondents are the primary text, and through probes, the interviewer makes space for respondents to name their experiences/feelings and simultaneously reflect on meaning (Anderson et al., 1990). Procedurally, oral narratives are longer than other qualitative interview techniques, often taking 6-12 hours (Anderson and Jack, 1991).

The use of the oral narrative method was also tightly linked to my identification as a feminist researcher. Here, I include the work of DeVault (1994; 1990) which helps to ground my own understanding of the contribution of feminist qualitative methods. She suggests that positivist epistemologies and research methods are bound within masculine discursive frames and that a primary project of feminist research should be to develop a vocabulary of women's experience. She arrives at this position through her own research of the 'care' work of women in relation to feeding their families, and performing elaborate domesticity (1994). DeVault contends that we are lacking a 'language' of the everyday caring, emotional labor, work, and sociability that inform women's assumed responsibilities for the social reproduction of families and communities. While grounded in the examination of domestic food practices, the idea of creating feminist vocabularies to capture women's real labor, and for producing narratives that allow women subjects to articulate this vocabulary is important to my scholarly position. It also suggests an area where intersectionalist approaches could inform environmental justice theory,

allowing actors across identities to name their lived realities and construct a discourse of experience.

Given the intensity of the oral history method, I began preliminarily networking with environmental justice organizations in the states of Colorado and New Mexico, in August, 2015. Ultimately, two organizations, both founded by women, whose volunteers/staff are exclusively women, and who focus on food insecurity/agri-environmental justice, were chosen. All interviews were conducted between February 2016-October 2016. To protect the confidentiality of their membership, I do not name these groups and I avoid using the exact verbiage of their mission statements. The names of all women who participated in this dissertation project have been changed, though I do use their age, and domestic relationship statuses (e.g. partnered, mother, multi-generational household) as self-reported. The first organization is located outside of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and serves rural and urban populations through the redistribution of rescued, gleaned, or donated food, and through home gardening initiatives. The organization explicitly rejects any collective identity affiliation, instead focusing on social empowerment for all (Interview notes, 2016). Founded by two women in early 2014, it has grown to a core membership of six women, and is funded through monetary donations and fundraisers. None of the women who work for this organization receive a wage, however, they are reimbursed for expenses. I conducted three complete oral histories with members of this organization. The second group is officially located in Denver, Colorado; however, they serve Latino communities throughout the state. At the time of data collection, the group was primarily working with three neighborhoods southeast of the Denver metro area, on food security initiatives with Latina women (i.e. access, availability, and culturally appropriate food ways), family based nutrition education, and exercise. While Latino men are not barred from participation, women were the

target stakeholders given the cultural expectations of women's role in food acquisition and cooking. This organization has eight women who work as 'part-time' staff; collectively, these women are called *promotoras*, a term that signifies their advocacy within and for Latino communities around issues of social and environmental justice. These women do receive an hourly wage for their work (approximately 10-15 hours/week), which is derived from grant funding (an external grant writing consultant does this work). I completed seven oral histories with this organization.

Each oral history was conducted in three parts to respect respondent's competing time demands, and to give them space to reflect on what more they wished to share. The interviews were conducted in English and/or Spanish depending on the preference of the respondent. In the first interview, we would focus on life events, and their identities. In interview two, we would focus on their engagement in their organization, community issues, notions of justice or remediation. At the conclusion of interview two, I would schedule interview three and give the women a set of reflection questions. The purpose of the third interview was to allow respondents to tell me what I had missed, to revise or add to their narrative before they were transcribed. Oral narrative interviews were digitally recorded by me, but professionally transcribed. This included hiring an outside firm that could accurately transcribe interviews partially or entirely completed in Spanish. To increase rapport with the women, I did not take notes during these sessions—focusing instead on the conversational elements of this method, and active listening (Oakley, 1998). I did write notes, and a description of the physical interview setting immediately after these sessions.

Before conducting any of the individual oral narrative sessions I held group interviews where any member could attend. The purpose of these meetings was to explain my project, the

oral history method/process, and to give members the opportunity to ask questions of me or share more about their organization. Though I was known to the membership at this point, having attended their events, I wanted to create familiarity around the method, and have the opportunity to explain that the focus of the interviews would be on their individual lives rather than detailing the work of their organization. I followed-up with each of the women privately to inquire if they would like to participate in the oral history project. At the close of the project, I held a second set of group interviews to explain the next steps of my dissertation process, and allow for questions. I have presented my findings to the women working in Denver, Colorado; the group leaders of the organization in Albuquerque, New Mexico, will be attending a conference where I discuss this work in April, 2017.

In addition to these group interviews, I attended community events such as resource fairs, food distribution outings, volunteer trainings, and childhood nutrition classes. I went on ride-alongs with members of the New Mexico organization to pick donated fruit trees, and volunteered my time at fundraising events where food was being collected. Socially, my time with both organizations included homestays, meals and family events. In Colorado, I was often paired with a promotora to facilitate my entrance into community spaces where my identity as a white woman was rightfully questioned. Last, I gathered and examined organizational documents, social media content, and press coverage to enhance my understanding of community dynamics and themes revealed in the oral history interviews.

Interviews were analyzed using open coding (Saldana, 2015), where I searched for text episodes that were demonstrative of the themes relevant to the conceptual frameworks of intersectionality and hegemonic femininity. My analytical process consisted of four steps: first to fully read each transcript to locate all emergent themes and examples of identity phrasing;

second to read each transcript and note instances where women discussed events or ideas that matched the research questions of my three planned chapters; third to compile a synopsis document of each interviewee that included the pieces of her oral history narrative that I intended to draw on in my separate papers, but being careful to still represent the integrity of her story; last to move all coded episodes into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that included demographic information, intended chapter/research question, and physical location within the tapes/transcripts. Details of these interviews may be found at Table 1, in the Appendix.

Intersectional Identities and Hegemonic Community Expectations

The following discussion is not meant to simulate abstracts; rather my intention is to present the primary aims of the three individual chapters put forth in this dissertation, and how they reflect back to my research framework and questions.

In Chapter One, “Hegemonic and Pariah Femininities: Localized Norms and Women’s Negotiation of Identity,” I draw on the seven oral histories of the Latina women working in Colorado to explore the construction of hegemonic femininities in their community and how these expectations inform the daily practice of their local environmental justice work. Second, I isolate examples of what constitutes pariah femininities in this community and what the impacts to these women are based on their performance of these characteristics. Pariah femininities occur when women enact hegemonic masculinity— they transgress or contaminate masculine spaces. I link this concept to literature that examines gendered reactions to women’s agency in public spaces (Carli, 1999; Hercus, 1999) arguing that the exercise of social power and influence by women is only accepted when it does not challenge masculine expertise and leadership. Included in this, is a discussion of the possibility of patriarchal bargaining (Kandiyoti, 1989) where women consciously negotiate hegemonic expectations by cloaking their activism within socially

acceptable feminine performances. I focused on the experiences of the women working in Colorado for two reasons. First, hegemonic cultural norms are explicitly local (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), and thus this examination needed to be geographically bounded. Second, I wished to address gaps in the literature by investigating the concepts of hegemonic and pariah femininity outside of the experiences of white women (Collins, 2004). Within this chapter, an overarching goal was to contribute to larger questions of feminist theory and the empirical applications of hegemonic femininity to gender relations. Much of the previous research applying this framework has focused on women's bodies in sport and entertainment, whereas I use this theoretical construct to examine the impact on women's personal and professional lives through a lens of their community engagement work. Thus, I prepared this chapter for submission to the journal *Gender and Society*.

Chapter Two focuses on the theoretical linkages between intersectionality and environmental justice theory, arguing that the former can strengthen the latter by making space for heterogenous community experiences and by recommitting environmental justice research to praxis. In "Complicating Communities: An Intersectional Approach to Environmental Justice Narratives," I demonstrate how intersectional identities inform community level justice claims, and investigate how women's congruence with, or transgression of hegemonic femininities may impact resource distribution to their organizations. In this chapter, I return to my focus on the operationalization of environmental justice, arguing that if the stated goal of this research is community empowerment and social transformation, then we need to approach these questions with frameworks that give agency to community members, and which understand that disparate or oppressive environmental experiences may be refracted through multiple sites of identity; not necessarily as discrete race or class subjectivities. In so doing, the potential outcomes for praxis

are congruent with recognition justice (Whyte, 2014)— culturally informed claims for remediation. The linkages between hegemonic femininity and resource distribution are an important contribution, illuminating how the feminization of environmental justice, and the affiliations between women actors and environmental justice causes may result in decreased funding/socio-political networks. I framed this chapter for submission to the journal, *Environmental Sociology*. This chapter begins a conversation of how to integrate intersectional frameworks into environmental justice research, demonstrating the potential for more nuanced empirical findings and community praxis.

In the final chapter, “How Should We as Feminist Researchers Operationalize Intersectionality?”, I focus on a discussion of intersectionality as theory and method, and re-centering this framework’s original intent on praxis. As mentioned previously, the widespread appeal of intersectionality has led to its increasing application (Davis, 2008); however, unfortunately this also resulted in confusing or contradictory research, and an attenuation of the commitment to praxis. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the importance of intersectional theory in feminist research, and to problematize how to apply this framework to the production of knowledge, without falling short of its guiding principles. To contribute to the conversation of how to operationalize this framework, I first outline the major theoretical developments of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005; Winker and Degele, 2011), before moving to a discussion of how oral history as method is uniquely suited to feminist intersectional research. I argue that intersectional oral narratives can serve to create the relational space between researcher and respondent to elicit new vocabularies for women (DeVault, 1994), and discuss how this method can create space for individual empowerment. Moreover, throughout this article I reflect on my research process, and how intersectionality

(theory and praxis) was intentionally applied from beginning to end. My goal for the last chapter was to prepare a paper that was equal parts process, and feminist research reflection. My intention is to submit this paper to the journal *Qualitative Inquiry*, believing that attention to the oral history method, integrity of intersectional research frameworks, and discussion of feminist reflexivity has an appeal to the broader qualitative research community. Thus, while I examine intersectional frameworks using the sociological and gender studies literatures, my discussion of methods practice is located in language applicable to the broader fields.

Following these individual chapters, I provide a concluding section that discusses how my findings contribute to the gender and environmental justice fields, and present ideas for future research.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Interview Details

Respondent	Organization	Physical Site(s)	Age	Partner Status	Children
Victoria	Colorado	Park, children present at Int. 1-3	36	Married	3
Isabel	Colorado	Park, office, children present Int. 2 and 3	27	Married	2
Juliet	Colorado	Park, homestay, children present Int. 1	24	Single	1
Lisa	Colorado	Homestay	44	Partnered	2
Mona	Colorado	Work Shadow, Office	36	Married	2
Jasmine	Colorado	Homestay, children present Int. 1-3	28	Married	3
Marie	Colorado	Homestay, children present Int. 1-3	42	Married	3
Elizabeth	New Mexico	Homestay, children present Int. 1-3	34	Married	3
Josie	New Mexico	Homestay	36	Married	0
Therese	New Mexico	Homestay, children present Int. 1-3	34	Married	3

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CHAPTER ONE

Hegemonic and Pariah Femininities: Localized Norms and Women's Negotiation of Identity

Introduction

“As a group, women are subordinated to men, yet a pecking order among women also produces hegemonic, marginalized, and subordinated femininities.... All women engage an ideology that deems middle-class, heterosexual, White femininity as normative” (Collins 2004, p. 193).

The notion that expectations for women's behavior, appearance, and social practice exist, and that on an individual level, women may face consequences for not heeding these standards, is not new. However, the constructs of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) and femininity (Collins, 2004; Schippers, 2007) move beyond the concept of individual level gender identity and social practice to include symbolic representation in communities, cultures, and institutions. Individuals of any gender may embody masculinity or femininity, but these norms are also reified within relationships and across socio-structural levels. Critically, identifying and understanding these expectations can help us to examine the persistence of gender inequalities, and how these inequalities manifest in the distribution of socio-material resources. Moreover, empirical work is needed that demonstrates the diversity of hegemonic masculinities and femininities across communities. If we are to understand hegemonic identities as relational (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Schippers, 2007) than empirically we cannot treat them as static (Dellinger, 2004).

Hegemonic femininity as a 'yardstick' to which all women are judged is credited to the work of Collins (2004) who interrogated how the ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and

femininity reify whiteness, and therefore render the gender performances of people of color as deviant. Later, it was conceptualized as both a theoretical framework and empirical strategy by Schippers (2007), who directly engaged with Connell's (1987) treatise on hegemonic masculinity, and its subsequent revisions (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) that re-focused the discussion on the relational and locally embedded nature of gender identities and practices. Pushing back against Connell's (1987) assertion that femininity in its subservience to masculinity could not have its own ascendancy structure, Schippers (2007) argued instead that proof of *hegemonic* femininity is evidenced through hierarchal gender relations that privilege certain displays of femininity over others. Rather than treat masculinity and femininity as discrete and opposed identities, it is necessary to examine their interactions with one another, and how this produces ideal types and sanctioned performances. Unlike masculinity, where hegemonic performances are rewarded with power, the enactment of hegemonic femininity helps to maintain the gender order of women's subordination to men; hegemonic femininity is complementary to masculinity, not just a dichotomous oppositional difference (Collins, 1986).

Of interest in this paper is examining how the local ideals of hegemonic femininity may influence the identity and practices of women engaged in community-based environmental justice action. To explicate how gender inequality may disparately impact community action and actors, it is necessary to investigate which hegemonic feminine and masculine norms are produced in relation to one another, and the subsequent expectations of behavior for women that frame acceptance and rejection in socio-physical locations. Second, to understand how women's strategies of community engagement or resistance may be shaped in reaction to the performance, or non-compliance with hegemonic femininity.

Secondly, I explore hegemonic femininity outside of normalized Western, white middle-class culture, instead examining the localized construction of hegemonic femininity and masculinity in one US-based Latino community organization. Here it is critical to recognize the scalar potentiality of hegemonic masculinity and femininity. Hegemonic masculinity operates in the particular and local, and in transnational discourses (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Given this spatial permeability, images of whiteness, heteronormativity, and class privilege may be easily invoked. However, hegemonic embodiment of masculinity and femininity occurs across race, ethnicity, and class structures. That these performances and social locations may be disciplined or other-ed by the ‘dominant’ culture, must be analyzed through paradigms of race and class prejudice, not simply an assumption that they are marginalized gender identities. Empirical research is needed not only to bolster the concept of hegemonic femininity, but to examine the intersection of hegemonic masculinities and femininities with other subjectivities such as race, class, and citizenship. Importantly, within this argument there is attention to the interlocking systems of oppression (Collins, 2004; 1989) through which power is enacted—making it possible to investigate the ways in which white supremacy and class privilege may reinforce (and be reinforced by) hierarchal gender relations.

I begin with a brief discussion of the empirical possibilities of hegemonic femininity, with careful attention to the need for intersectional understanding of power relations. I refer to these as possibilities because empirical work specific to this construct is in its infancy, with most studies examining this concept within competitive sport or television, and the discrimination against women’s bodies (Krane, 2001; Marwick, 2010). Using data collected from an oral history project located outside Denver, Colorado, US, I next explore the construction and self-reflection

of hegemonic femininity through the narratives of seven Latina women currently working within a network to address food insecurity/food deserts in their communities.

Literature

To understand hegemonic femininity and how it differs from early conceptualizations of emphasized femininity which outline only the subordination of the feminine, it is necessary to begin with an articulation of hegemonic masculinity. Very simply, hegemonic cultural characteristics are normative values that are used to legitimate power over others, to maintain institutions, and construct hierarchies that determine exclusion and inclusion of socio-material benefits (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity is a ‘social location,’ and the physical and discursive enactment of identity that establishes ascendancy across scalar levels, including local relationships and global networks (Connell, 2000; Schippers, 2007). While there are certain traits that are often considered to be universal, hegemonic masculinities and femininities are context dependent. The social practices upon which acceptance and deviance are based, vary across communities, space, and time. At an individual level, those who can perform or embody these traits are rewarded. Given the cross pollination of hegemonic masculinity with whiteness, privilege, and heteronormativity, men of other races, classes, ethnicities, and sexual orientations are often *marginalized* or *subordinated* (Collins, 2004; Connell, 1987; Schippers, 2007). Thus, so too hegemonic femininity creates a corpus of desirable behavioral norms and attributes; feminine characteristics which serve the interests of hegemony, subordinate to the ‘masculine’ but also ascendant over other ‘femininities’.

Previous examinations of the implications of gender inequality on women’s environmental justice community activism have focused on how socially constructed gender

identities encouraged women, but discouraged men to engage (Bell and Braun, 2010), women's motivation to participate in advocacy (Kurtz, 2007), or the negotiation of gender identities by women as their tenure in the movement lengthens (Brown and Ferguson, 1995; Herda Rapp, 2000). For example, while Bell and Braun's (2010) work demonstrates the impact of hegemonic masculinity on men, illustrating that affiliation with breadwinner/economic identities precluded most men from participating in environmental justice based activism against the coal industry in Appalachia, it did little to grapple with the localized constraints of hegemonic femininity. Rather, in this case ideals of moral caretaking and motherhood were used to explain motivation to advocate, and I would argue, evince complementary hegemonic femininity. If women were choosing to advocate from their socially acceptable roles as mothers, their voice and actions could be tolerated. "Framing women's EJ activism as a result of mothering "instincts," instead of a conscious decision, affords women some level of cultural protection and legitimation for their protest activities" (Bell and Braun 2010, p. 806).

In Kurtz's (2007) study of environmental justice advocates in southern Louisiana, she applies the framework of performance and performativity (Butler, 1990) to identify how gender framed the experiences (negative and positive) of women as they interacted with the State and industry; concluding that most women drew on identities of activist mothering (Naples, 1992) to explain leadership engagement. Central to her examination is the discursive and ideological separation of public and private spaces—a model of hegemonic relations itself—as the idyllic feminine private sphere makes possible the masculine public realm. While Kurtz (2007) demonstrates that this binary is fictive, arguing instead that women's activism blurs this socio-spatial boundary, she fails to acknowledge the problematic, white middle class essentialism of this dichotomy, one that ignores the historical and on-going public labor of women of color

(hooks, 1984), or how the home has often been a site of political resistance for black women—a place where they mothered in opposition to stereotypes of the worth of black families.

As Bell and Braun (2010) note, the connection between motherhood and environmental justice activism has a long history (Brown and Ferguson, 1995; Mizrahi and Lombe, 2006; Naples, 1992), and most certainly it is one site of feminine identity that can be powerful. However, in privileging this response to environmental (in)justice, it diminishes alternative rhetorical and political strategies, and confers the responsibility of saving the world to reproductive feminine identities. It is not enough to only dismantle local hegemonic masculinities that keep men from engaging in community advocacy; we must also problematize the hegemonic femininities that support those ideals and restrict the political action of women. Parallel arguments of the potentiality for women's political engagement were made by ecofeminist scholars, who critically interrogated the socio-structural position of women relative to the environment, and the impact of Cartesian dualisms (e.g. nature v. culture, rational v. irrational) that subordinated the feminine and the ecological (Gaard, 2011; Merchant, 1981). Here, much of the emphasis was to theorize how the shared subordination of women and the biological environment influenced and catalyzed women's eco-activism. However, as Stearney (1994) notes, by framing feminine identities as the saviors and nurturers of the environment (Zelezny et al., 2000), the culpability and accountability of men, children and non-mothers are obfuscated. Critics of ecofeminist theory warn of this framework's potential to essentialize women as subordinated (Cuomo, 1992); central to the arguments within this paper is the scant attention of ecofeminist theory to the disparate realities of women of color or different classes, making ecofeminism and environmental justice strange bedfellows (Kirk, 1997; Taylor, 1997).

Herein lies the first empirical possibility of hegemonic femininity. Applying this framework to examinations of women's community engagement helps to problematize women's conception that their involvement in local causes "was just what needed to be done" (Naples 1991), or "if I didn't do it no one would" (Bell and Braun, 2010, p. 805). Further, that individuals may reject labels of 'activist' or 'environmentalist' given perceptions of the epistemic expertise required of these positions (Prindeville and Bretting, 1998) and that in localized contexts, technoscientific expertise may be coded as hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Harding 2004). Thus, it becomes possible to investigate whether and how women's conception of their work at the community level is subordinated by the precepts of hegemonic masculinity, such that do not describe their engagement or identity as 'activist' or 'leader'.

Moreover, which social practices empower or disempower actors in raced and classed femininities/masculinities may differ greatly from the 'white middle class' experience (Yuval Davis, 1994). Empirical investigations of hegemonic femininity must include examinations of non-white, non-middle class cultures, illuminating the intersections of race, class, and gender hegemonies. Indeed, it is problematic that Schippers' (2007) treatment of hegemonic femininity does not acknowledge Collins' (2004) seminal contribution, and her path-breaking conversations on the connectedness of white privilege and gender hegemony. While Schippers does call for diverse investigations of non-white masculinities and femininities, she supports her discussion only with the work of Pyke and Johnson (2003) and Bettie (2003). There is disagreement between Collins (2004) and Schippers (2007) as to how to classify femininities that do not conform with hegemonic expectations. Collins (2004) treats these practices and norms using the monikers from Connell (1987)—marginalized or subordinated— explaining that idealized embodied and discursive white femininity is normative, and thus women of color (and often

lower socioeconomic status white women) are inferior along the gender hierarchy in relation to this standard, and all men. Conversely, Schippers (2007) rejects the language of subordination, arguing that non-hegemonic femininities are not sanctioned because they are lesser/inferior, but rather because they are deemed volatile to the gender order. Schippers argues that it is race and class hegemonies that establish (upper) middle class whiteness gender performances as morally superior; further that hegemonic masculinities and femininities operate across race and class structures (2007). Femininity is subordinate to masculinity across race, class, and myriad other subjectivities. Investigations are needed that examine the pervasiveness of gender inequality, while also acknowledging and disrupting the social construction of race and class projects (Pulido, 1996).

The second empirical possibility relevant to this paper is examining the presence or absence, and negotiation between, hegemonic and sanctioned femininities among women engaged in community action. Within Schippers' (2007) model, the latter are conceived of as *pariah femininities*, describing the embodiment of hegemonic masculine practices by women. Women who display these characteristics, or who use these ideologies for their decision-making are not perceived as masculine, rather they are disruptive to the hegemonic masculine power—they threaten the ascendancy of men. This is one of the many important distinctions between hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity. In the former, men who fail to adhere to certain norms or who embody alternative traits, are conceived of as subordinated or inferior to the masculine archetype. In the latter, women whose discursive or embodied performances do not support the hierarchal gender order are not conceived of as masculine women; rather, because of the dependency on heteronormativity for stable gender relations they become undesirable and are sanctioned (Schippers, 2007). Understanding which pariah femininities are

in operation in a local area, how women actors perceive their participation or avoidance of those norms, and the potential repercussions of that in their personal and professional lives— and even in their engagement efficacy— is critical to addressing the manifestation of gender inequalities at the individual and community levels.

What constitutes hegemony differs by community and culture, however, it is likely that social practices which may be commonly asked of actors who are engaged in environmental justice advocacy, such as political discourse in public spaces (Ackelsberg, 1988), displays of technoscientific expertise (Harding, 2006) or assertiveness (Hercus, 1999), could be the enactment of pariah femininities. For example, Hercus (1999) suggests that *anger* is a necessary catalyzing emotion for agentic action, but that who should communicate anger is traditionally gendered within US society. She finds that when masculine anger is expressed it is agentic and powerful, when *feminist* anger expressed it is perceived as irrational ‘man-hating’. Hercus (1999) argues that the primary response to these performances of anger, especially if they are interpreted as feminist expressions, is social control through ridicule, hostility and debasement— in other words, sanctioning of pariah femininities. Complementary work by Carli (1999) draws on previous empirical findings to examine typologies of social power, demonstrating that within dominant US culture women are perceived to possess greater referent power (likeability) while men are perceived to hold greater expert knowledge. Carli (1999) suggests that the transference of this power to men is accomplished through structural inequalities that favor masculine identities, and reinforce masculine leadership styles in public settings. Conversely women are caught in a double-bind where false modesty is perceived as weakness and self-promotion of competence is ridiculed. In her own case study, results suggest that women must enact strategies of warmth (referent forms of power) while demonstrating competence or risk resistance to their

influence/decision-making; with both men and women most likely to agree with men who expressed expertise directly. The exercise of social power and influence by women is only accepted when it does not challenge masculine expertise and leadership.

The last empirical possibility of hegemonic femininity of interest in this paper, is to connect this framework to the construct of patriarchal bargaining (Kandiyoti, 1989) as women negotiate the boundary between hegemonic and pariah femininities. Patriarchal bargaining describes situations where women knowingly engage in the maintenance of traditional gender ideologies to procure benefit. In this way, some women may cloak community activism in socially acceptable gender performances to gain support for their cause, entrance into political spaces, or to maintain family/personal relationships. For example, Herda Rapp (2000), in her investigation of the self-reported expansion of women's identities as they participated in toxic waste activism found that many women have to hide their newfound empowerment, or continue with token gestures of traditional femininity to maintain peace in the home. It is critical to review these strategies to better understand how women in various social locations may utilize this concept in the short term and therefore maintain hegemonic masculinity, but are disrupting it in the long term.

To reiterate, the ideas explored above are only some of the possible empirical directions that investigations of hegemonic femininity could take, but are critical to examining the implications of gender inequality on women community leaders, their organizations, and constituents. I turn now to a discussion of methods.

Methods

This paper is based on a larger study that examined the construction and negotiation of identity of women actors within environmental justice organizations, how action, resources, and outcomes may be circumscribed by hegemonic masculinity and femininity, and the corollary implications of the feminization of environmental justice as a movement/framework. Over eight months of fieldwork in the states of Colorado and New Mexico, I collected ten oral histories of women working on community-based environmental justice issues, most specifically addressing food deserts and food insecurity. The interviewees include seven Latina women, one African American woman, and two white women, ranging in age from 24-44 years old. Self-disclosed relationship history revealed that two women had divorced male partners, and that nine of the ten women are currently in heterosexual marriages or long term partnerships; nine of the women are also mothers. Of the seven Latina women who participated in the study, only one was born in the United States, the other six having moved here as children or adults, and in various stages of the citizenship process. The names of the women, and their organizations appear as pseudonyms¹. My oral history interviews focused on their perceptions of community issues, community as a physical and social location, current social ‘activism’, family life, and personal/professional experience as a woman. These interviews were supported by discourse analysis of organizational documents and news stories, group interview sessions, direct participation in community events and trainings, and non-participant observation.

Oral histories are distinct from other interview methods primarily by their length, and focus on eliciting the everyday experience of actors, that can then be used to explore social

¹ Some of the quotations used in the Findings section mention the status of ‘undocumented’. Using the oral history method as my primary research tool, many women shared past experiences that influenced their current profession, including border crossings. All of the women in this study are in-process to become US residents, and are in the US legally

events or phenomena. When turned to the examination of women's lives, this method can provide a "deeper understanding of women's consciousness, historically and in the present" (Geiger 1986, p. 335). This method is well matched to feminist research projects, as the intent is to incorporate embodied human reality and to establish settings where individuals are able to name their experiences/feelings and simultaneously reflect on meaning (Anderson et al., 1990). Most importantly for this project, it can be argued that oral histories explicitly recognize the expertise of women, via the privilege of voice, thus helping to challenge overt and covert forms of androcentrism in research traditions. It is not uncommon for one interview to last from six to twelve hours, and given this, I scheduled all my interviews in multiple sessions, of approximately three hours. Time in between meetings was also intentionally planned to give participants time to reflect on their experiences, and what meaning they derive from them. Two of the women in my study had been interviewed about their work before by journalists, however, oral history research was somewhat unfamiliar to all ten women. To increase their comfort, and simultaneously increase the potential for interview quality, I held group sessions explaining the methodology, timing, and likely question probes they would receive as part of this process. Locations for these interviews ranged from respondent's homes, public parks, and riding in cars while performing work for the organization; many times, their children were present. All oral histories were tape recorded, and I conducted these interviews in English and/or Spanish depending on the preference of the respondent. Their interviews were translated into both languages as appropriate. Each interviewee was given a copy of their transcript for final approval before I began my analytical process, ensuring to the best of my ability that their words were captured accurately— especially in cases where I would use an English translation for inclusion in future manuscripts. Oral histories were coded to elicit episodes of hegemonic norms, and

other thematic tropes. Field notes capturing the site, and other general observations were recorded immediately after; note-taking during the interviews impeded conversational rapport.

In this paper, I examine only the oral histories of the seven Latina women who participated in the project, for two primary reasons. The first, as articulated above, is to empirically examine the construction of hegemonic and pariah femininities among non-white women. The second, in keeping with the theoretical frameworks of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, is to geographically bound my examination. Hegemonic masculinities and femininities are local and context dependent; the women whose narratives I draw upon work throughout the state of Colorado, but all reside within the Denver metropolitan area, and they share professional/personal networks. This organization is a group of eight Latina women whose constituency is mono-lingual Spanish speakers and their geographic emphasis is in three outer neighborhoods of Denver, and Colorado Springs, Colorado, United States. Collectively, these women are called *promotoras*, a term that signifies their advocacy within and for Latino communities around issues of social, economic, and environmental justice. Specifically, these *promotoras* are working on initiatives with Latina women on food security (i.e., access, availability, and culturally appropriate food ways), family based nutrition education, and exercise. While Latino men are not barred from participation in organizational activities, women are the target stakeholders given the cultural expectations of women's role in food acquisition, preparation, and household nutrition.

For the State of Colorado, the overall Hispanic/Latino population grew by 41.20% from 2000-2010 (US Census, 2017). In the metropolitan Denver area where these women work, the overall Hispanic/Latino population is approximately 31.7% (City and County of Denver, 2017), however the ethnic concentration in some neighborhoods (including those of focus with this

organization) is as high as 79.39%. In the greater Colorado Springs area— their second area of geographical focus— the population is estimated to be approximately 15.10%, with those claiming Mexican heritage to be the fastest growing group—65.50% (US Census, 2017). Many of these communities are being threatened by planned highway infrastructure projects that would physically separate them from their neighbors, important cultural centers, and in some instances, require relocation (CDOT, 2017). In addition to the food access concerns addressed by these promotoras, these are communities faced with disparate air quality, soil contamination, lack of public transportation, and continued discriminatory press coverage from major newspapers (see Colorado Springs Gazette, Dave Phillips 2011, describing new Mexican residents as ‘illegal’ <http://gazette.com/latinos-are-fastest-growing-population-in-county-census-says/article/118498>).

An on the record statement from former state senator Dave Schultheis (R, 2007-2011) is emblematic of historical regional hostility, “People just don’t know what kind of negative impact (illegal immigrants) can have. They use our welfare system, use our schools, and take jobs away from Americans” (2011). However, in Denver and Colorado Springs, Colorado, there are currently city-wide movements to create sanctuary spaces for undocumented residents, in response to the recent anti-immigration executive orders of the Trump administration (EO 13767, and 13769). This is a region with a complicated historical and contemporary record of tensions between majority (White/Anglo) and Latino minority populations.

In the sections that follow, I draw upon women’s self-construction of social norms and practices to identify localized hegemonic masculinity, and hegemonic/pariah femininity.

Findings

Drawing again on Collins' (2004) conception of hegemonic femininity as a yardstick, women in this study described culturally specific ideals for behavior, relationship, and practice that they were raised to emulate, and identified as standards for being a 'good' woman. In many cases these were expectations that they had transgressed (e.g. being a single mother) or had never been able to occupy (e.g. working outside the home); yet they remained powerful norms for individual decision-making, and within their familial relationships. As will be explored in greater detail below, in some instances the women's failure to enact hegemonic femininity was because they had chosen to embody pariah femininities; however, there were also incidents where structural constraints precluded idealized femininity. Moreover, women reported a spectrum of sanctions they associated with noncompliance, ranging from perceptions of community level ridicule, failed romantic relationships, feelings of anxiety or depression, to domestic violence.

Respect, Humility, and Dependence

Juliet, a 24 year-old single mother, described hegemonic femininity as compliant, humble, and belonging to the domestic private sphere. She constructs her behavior in opposition to these ideals, partially attributing it to her assimilation to American (white Anglo) culture, and in relationship to her male partner.

Yes, he was a really great guy, hard worker, very family oriented. And I was more the American culture, so I was like, well, I want to do whatever I want to do and I have the right to do whatever I want to do. And it clashed with that. I was extremely disrespectful. I wasn't humble. I wasn't a hard worker. I jumped jobs. I didn't care. I wasn't like about coming home and cooking and cleaning.

This finding complicates the idea of ‘white’ femininity as the hegemonic archetype (Collins, 2004), by positioning Latina (white and/or non-white) femininity against Anglo (white, non-Latina) femininity (Denner and Dunbar, 2004). Within the broader literature (Chavez, 2004; Goodman, 2003; Rubin et al., 2003; Sandoval 2009) and within these women’s narratives, Anglo is shorthand for white ethnicities, and native English speaking white/American culture. Some of the women interviewed presented white Anglo femininity as antithetical to heterosexual relationships in this community, potentially more emblematic of pariah rather than hegemonic femininity. Isabel, a 27 year-old married mother of two perceives the difference Latina hegemonic femininity and white Anglo femininity as one of emotionality versus rationality. She says:

I know, us Latinas, we – well, in my case, I’ve lived my life – so, if I fall in love, I do stupid stuff. I feel like I do stupid stuff, or I do things without thinking it completely.... Right? So, I know a lot of white women, they plan their lives and they say, oh, yes, when I’m, you know, this old, I’m going to have my babies, and I’m going to have my kids. And not us. That’s – there’s a huge difference, so – we both live different scenarios.

Indeed, traditional, and early marriage was frequently cited as a social achievement. Lisa, a 44 year-old mother of two explained “I was excited, you know, to be engaged at an early age because I didn’t want to turn 17 with no husband.” She also heavily emphasized the expectation for women to be submissive, to be a silent partner in relationships and in public; whereas masculinity was associated with behavioral freedom.

I was raised to be supposedly submissive, cook, clean, listen to the man, let the man cheat; that’s okay because, you know, it’s bad if we cheat but not if the man does it because the man is the man and with the woman we’re not of value...we were raised to ... not to ask questions

and if somebody's going to give us something, we're humble about it and we don't ask no questions.

Isabel described similar expectations for domesticity, and submissiveness, even if these were norms she did not participate in. "...girls are to be – stay home, to cook, and take care of the kids, and that's it. And that's not my personality... and sometimes I get judged because of that. Like they think that because I work, my husband is poor, and my husband doesn't make enough to support the family. And that's not true." Some women articulated this in terms of relational control—dependent women supported an ideal of the Latino male as economic provider. Jasmine, a married mother of three stated, "Latino men don't want their women to be grown-ups. They know that we have the power. They know, but they don't want us doing that things, you know. They want to see their wives in the home doing, cleaning her home, cooking, that things. They don't want his wife outside the home."

For this community, hegemonic masculinity was articulated as the 'man in front of the woman,' a physical and discursive location, supported by women residing primarily in the home, and their associated humble social behaviors. "If you have a partner and he's behind you, they don't see it as he's supporting you. They see it as he's a wimp." In other words, men in this community would be emasculated by women perceived to be assertive, or who had professional success—a point I will return to when discussing pariah femininities. Egalitarian gender relations were perceived as belonging to white culture/femininity. Juliet says:

Like for example, you know, with my mom they (local Latino community) would always say... the family looks at it like she should be at home and my stepdad should be the only one working. And so they kind of say oh, well, you know, because he's American they accept being behind

the woman. When he's not behind my mom. They're right next to each other. But they see it like that. Do you know what I mean? And so, that makes it difficult.

Some women described this hegemonic ideal as the possession of machismo, which in the local case was significantly associated with household decision-making control, even if it contradicted their breadwinner status.

Well, machismo is set up in the whole idea of that, the man is the leader of your household. As a Latino man, then you have first say, last say and all say, in all aspects of life. There is not a lot of negotiating that happens, right? So, if your husband says you're going to be a stay-at-home mom, you're a stay-at-home mom. And if your husband says you need to get a job and work, because I can't do it on my own, you get a job and work. (Mona, 36 year-old, married, mother of two).

It was recognized by these women that this standard of machismo/hegemonic masculinity was not necessarily prevalent in the majority of relationships in their community. "There's a lot of strong relationships you see in the Latino relationships, but most of them it's difficult for the man to accept if his woman is doing better than him or, like, going out there and, you know, just being her own woman. Yes, it creates conflict." (Juliet). However, whether this was present or not in the bulk of relationships, as an ideological construct it was powerful. Within this community, a very staid binary between private and public spheres is represented as foundational to hegemonic ideals of femininity and masculinity. Men are expected to provide financially for their partners and children, but have little other domestic responsibility. If a woman were to work outside the home, is locally perceived not as professional achievement, but as the failure for the male partner to economically provide, or as his inability to control his wife. As noted above, many relationships

do not operate this way— and indeed, structurally two incomes are often required—but there is significant risk for men and women to be culturally ostracized. This type of localized family and gender structure helps to explain why as an organization, these promotoras work primarily with women. Not only are women associated with the reproductive role of food preparation and family nutrition, but discussing food security outcomes with men would be perceived as an affront to their ability to provide economically. “we – as moms, as a woman, believe or not, we are the – I think, the support of the house. The father can bring the money or whatever, but we are the support.” (Victoria, 36 year-old, married, mother of three).

The normative constructions of machismo (Cuellar et al., 1995; Stevens, 1973), marianismo (Ehlers, 1991; Navarro, 2002) and hembrismo (Greer et al., 2013; Sandoval, 2009) that articulate gender relations for many Latino communities and within families, have been well documented. Machismo characteristics include financial provision, ultimate decision-making authority, keeping women and children safe, and leisure time privileges exclusively awarded to men— the findings of this paper support this normative identity construction. Marianismo and hembrismo define appropriate gender roles for women. Marianismo is strongly associated with Catholic theology (Ehlers, 1991; Stevens 1973), wherein women are encouraged to demonstrate purity, and spiritual suffering akin to cultural narratives of the Virgin Mary. Hembrismo is somewhat more complicated, traditionally positioned as the ‘feminine’ against machismo, and indicative of extreme passivity, and self-abnegation (Greer et al., 2013); it has recently been reclaimed by some Latina women to describe their feminine strength, intelligence, and tenacity (Gil and Vazquez, 2014). Unlike the excerpts shared above that included reference to machismo, these terms for feminine behavior were not used by any of the women in this study, though the tension and the in-process re-definition of hembrismo is arguably evident. The interactions

between machismo, marianismo, and the spectrum of hembrismo help to frame the experiences shared by these women and how this may fit with the theoretical model of hegemonic femininity. The distinction I wish to make here, is first, that the application of hegemonic femininity is needed to problematize the relational gendered dynamics these women face within their community and in interactions with Anglo communities; second, as discussed in more detail below, identifying locally defined pariah femininities (whether or not this fits into modernized hembrismo) is a critical piece in understanding women's engagement in environmental justice work. For example, all promotoras work outside their homes— which I argue signifies their work as the enactment of pariah femininity— they are constructed as undesirable women, and they threaten the ascendancy of the hierarchal gender order. Of course, they do so while simultaneously negotiating relationships as wives/partners/mothers, illustrating their negotiation between hegemonic expectations and pariah realities.

Aggressive, Strong-minded, Bitch

Pariah femininity occurs when women enact or perform hegemonic masculinity (Schippers, 2007). Thus, in this case, each of the seven women negotiates this identity in their community because they earn an income. Moreover, many of the women discussed their assertiveness, or control over decision-making. Assertiveness, or at times aggressiveness, was juxtaposed against the expectation of humility or humbleness dictated by hegemonic femininity. Critically, these reflections on what I am identifying as *enactment of pariah femininities* come from episodes where women are narrating why they are currently engaged in community environmental justice leadership, or the experiences they felt led them to their current role. In contrast to earlier investigations (Bell and Braun, 2010; Kurtz, 2007) activist mothering was not

the primary motivation to engage in community causes. Furthermore, given the construction of hegemonic femininity detailed above, the work of these women was not ‘tolerated’ (Bell and Braun, 2010) because they drew on mothering identities; rather they faced ridicule for their advocacy because of its potential to diminish their performance as wives and mothers. Contextually, motherhood was highly valued, but experiences of individual or collective empowerment through visible leadership were drawn upon as motivation, despite the risk of community shaming.

Isabel recounted episodes when community members (men and women) accused her of bad parenting because of her advocacy work.

Or sometimes that they say, oh, no, you can’t work this many hours, because who’s going to take care of your kids? If I want to, I’ll figure it out. Because, you know, sometimes the money or the advancement of, you know – or the progress that I want to do in my life, would be – would mean more.

Mona discussed the hegemonic expectations for Latina womanhood, the difficulty in being the socially constructed “pillar of the household”, and her desire to have an identity that was her own. She explains,

I think, as Latina women, we’re always taught – we know that we’re hard-working women, right? ...And that’s one of the most difficult things to provide and to fulfill, is that you’re going to be the woman that supports the husband as, you’re everything for the kids...do you have an identity? Is your identity always going to be connected to your husband? Is your identity always going to be connected to your kids? And I think it’s a struggle that you take on... you’ve got so many other things that are laid over this. Right? So, you’ve got the culture.

You've got Catholicism, I think, that's laid over it a lot. And then you've got women that have come before you, and have said, maybe that's not all you can be. Right?

Mona goes on to discuss how she negotiates her role as a community advocate; wrestling with guilt, but wanting to continue the work. She describes a struggle between desiring a leadership role, and her commitment to her family; a struggle she believes transcends her community and impacts women generally.

The work that you're doing as a leader or as an activist, you've got to find something that connects with whatever you're doing... Because you're going to be guilt-ridden about your kids; about your husband; about doing everything, right? And I think that, honestly, with conversations that I've had with other women, I think is not just a Latina issue. It's a woman's issue in general. Especially when you're talking about leadership roles.

For some women, the embodiment of pariah femininities was articulated as their self-progression following the end of a romantic partner relationship. For example, Isabel described the difficulty she had in her community following the birth of her first child, and living openly as a single mother.

So, that happened. And that constantly lives in my head, you know. And I guess that's where I kind of get, like, my feminist side—the woman that I was born to be, again. So, I would say, from that – at that point, I was born again, and I became a strong woman. I became a woman that didn't tolerate, you know, any more abuse. And I didn't let nobody ever hurt me like that anymore.

She returns to this idea several times throughout her oral history interview, claiming her feminist identity, which to her includes education, assertiveness or aggressiveness, being in control, and using her own voice.

And talk back. Because I also have a mouth, and I'm also able to give my opinion and share my opinion. Because that's just my nature, being that I'm being aggressive sometimes.

Again, because I'm feminist. But I read a lot. Because I was like, I'm not going to stay behind. I'm not going to let somebody correct me, and I don't want nobody to talk for me, so I want to learn it myself and be able to – you know, that it comes from my own being, from what I know.

Here again, the idea of positioning of being behind— in this context masculine expertise— comes up. For Isabel, censure for her enactment of pariah femininities came not from her current partner relationship, but from the wider community she interacted with. She spoke often of having to perform false modesty, or be overly courteous, which was in conflict with her self-identity; however, by doing so she was able to “help more women”.

This theme appeared in all seven oral histories— the desire to help more women, women they could recognize themselves in—instigated their community engagement. Jasmine explains, “I am putting myself in her shoes. Maybe they don't feel that I'm so far away to them because I was in the same place.” Lisa, discussed the gender discrimination and violence she experienced as a young woman and how that impacts her work now.

My family was underestimating who I was just because I as a woman. So, that drive's come every day because every day I'm hoping to change one woman's life, one woman at a time. If

I can change the life of one woman, I did my work. I think there's a lot of (women like me) out there that they're just waiting for the right person to come along and inform them.

Lisa detailed a life-long personality of assertiveness, one that she associated with her experiences of domestic violence. "Oh, she's rebellious. Beat her up so she doesn't say no," you know? So my mom and my husband thought that by beating me up, my character was going to go away. I always had a character, but my ex-husband used to weaken up that character." Yet she reflected that it was the performance of these practices over time that established her current professional success, even though that success made her an object of ridicule to some. "I'm a respectful, strong Latina, you know, because if you ask people about me, they're going to say, "Lisa gets the job done. And they're going to say "Ah, she's a bitch" or "She's too strong-minded" or "She has a hard character; you cannot even talk to her."

Some women spoke of their assertiveness in relationship to being a visible leader in a community where that role can be unusual for women. "I feel like being your own woman is stepping up and saying, you know, it's okay to not go 100% with what my husband is saying and still be a mom and still be a hard worker and be a leader in the community and feel good about myself." (Juliet). Lisa shared that her visibility in the community had led to censure, and a loss of connection:

And then you're a woman and you're a woman to speak up like me, you know, you go through a lot of loneliness, like I said to you. It's extremely hard for us..." to keep ourselves new and alive and people liking us.

Isabel explained this phenomenon partially as a community fear of the unknown, for both men and women.

I would say it – our culture plays a big part in our – if we want to be leaders, or we want to be out and talk to other women, and persuade women to join –it’s challenging. – we weren’t taught to be that working woman. And I don’t call it work; I call it – it’s – like I told you, it’s my passion, and I like to help, and I like to provide, and I like to – that’s just my way of – my nature of being.

It is of note that Isabel did not wish to label her paid advocacy position as ‘work’ choosing instead to define this as ‘passion’ and her ‘nature of being’. This could be attributed to the hardship other women spoke of as they tried to increase their professional abilities, “Why are you working all the time; why are you going there. You don’t need to, you know, build yourself higher. You don’t need to get another degree. You don’t need to do this and do that, you know.” (Juliet)

Bargaining with the Ideal

Where women’s strategies of action and engagement are tightly circumscribed by hegemonic practices of masculinity and femininity, there may also be evidence of patriarchal bargaining. For example, some of the women in this study spoke of the pressure they felt to maintain local standards of feminine attractiveness— described as fit bodies, hair and makeup, and/or form-fitting clothing. The practice of these characteristics, however, was subjectively associated with greater recognition from both men and women in their communities; a recognition the women felt signified their authority to speak on matters related to food and nutrition. However, some women questioned how their information was received, based on the tension between being perceived as physically attractive and intelligent.

Victoria, reflected on the visual preoccupation with members of her community. “I don’t know if it’s because I was a woman or whatever, but I feel in our community, we are so visual. That’s – so, if I’m going to talk about food and health, they – right away, they’re going to look at you.” Mona described self-doubt about her intelligence, and questioned how her physical attractiveness changed the perception of her professional acumen.

And that’s a balance, as women, that we negotiate all of the time. I think being a Latina woman, I know that I even think about how tight my skirt is, when I’m going into meetings, right?... I don’t mean for you to think I’m trying to be sexy; but as a Latina woman, that’s automatically, I think, brought into the conversation. And it’s difficult for me, because sometimes I – it’s not that I take it personally, but I’m like, should I be offended? Like, the tension there is, am I offended? Am I not offended? Are you complimenting me that you think I’m pretty, or that you think...I can’t be smart because I am pretty...

She later explained that this negotiation felt as if there were always a set of competing standards for her, “I also know that I’ve got – the bar is set either lower or higher, and I’ve got to find a way to beat it. If I went in strong, I was going to lose. If I went in docile and submissive or subservient, or pulled back on my personalities, I was going to lose.”

Isabel directly connected her fit and youthful appearance with greater community acceptance. “It has to do a lot of, with our appearance. I think it has – it relies a lot on our appearance. Because if I’m somebody that reflects perfection, I get a lot of attention. And when I have that attention, I feel like I can talk about, you know, my point.” Later, she acknowledged that though the majority of the community members she connects with are women, she felt that even men were willing to listen about a ‘women’s issue’ based on her appearance. “And even for

men, you know. If you're attractive and you're, you know, nice, and, you know, you get that attention from other people, and – or you – yes, you light up in a crowd.” This tension helps to illustrate how these women consciously battle with the hegemonic stereotype of physical attractiveness while trying to promote messages of food security.

Discussion

Taken together, the oral histories of these seven women revealed motivations to advocacy that did not neatly fit previously observed affiliations with activist mother identities (Bell and Braun 2010; Kurtz, 2007). Identifying which hegemonic masculinities and femininities (and thus pariah femininities) existed in the local context, helped to demonstrate that far from protecting women's advocacy, their status as mothers was one of the primary criticisms they faced in their leadership roles. It has been argued that motherhood creates a political 'backdoor' for women to enter into public discourse blurring the constructed binary of private/public spheres (Kurtz, 2007), and the findings here do not directly contradict this. However, these results do complicate the idea of activist mothering. First by suggesting that though all seven women were mothers, other experiences and identities were their primary motivators, such as individual empowerment or wanting to help women who were struggling, because they themselves had struggled. Second, the findings demonstrate that women's motherhood status did not shield them from criticism, or confer special benefit; instead they had to negotiate individual feelings of guilt, community shame, and attacks on their character while they continued their activist roles. Contextualized investigations of hegemonic masculinities and femininities allow us to problematize local level gender inequality and discrimination. From a praxis perspective, this creates an opportunity to suggest culturally appropriate responses to discrimination; further

demonstrating the need for investigations of hegemonic gender relations outside white middle class culture.

Moreover, these findings support the work of Hercus (1999) and Carli (1999) illustrating that women who display assertiveness, or fail to use referent forms of power, are sanctioned. In the present case, assertiveness, lack of humility, working outside the home in visible leadership roles, and appearing ‘in front or beside’ a man were local embodiments of pariah femininities. Using Schippers’ (2007) theoretical framework, we can understand women’s engagement in community level environmental justice work to be part of a set of social practices that were threatening the hierarchal gender order. The practical implications of this are many. Women who speak up for their community risk censure, but in the immediate case it is unlikely that men will begin advocating for food security concerns because food is a women’s issue. This creates one more ‘double-bind’ for women. It is also possible to link the disciplining of women leaders in the immediate, to continued experiences of environmental injustice— what happens to this community when these women retire. Who will take the lead?

Conclusion

Applying the theoretical framework of hegemonic and pariah femininity to an examination of women’s local engagement helps to expose the relational gendered dynamics that influence individual behaviors and community-level interactions. Understanding these cultural norms can suggest targeted praxis actions in the near term, and directions for future research that problematize hierarchal gender relations. The findings within this paper contested some popular notions of women’s political positioning as mothers, more research is needed to understand how the particular dimensions of women’s engagement threaten hegemonic masculinity— e.g., work

outside the home/focus away from family/professional assertive identities— and how this is differentially constructed outside of normative white culture. Further, more work is needed to understand the physical, social, and psychological implications for women who embody local pariah femininities.

Disrupting the hegemonic norms that demand women's silence is critical to creating physical and discursive space where women's leadership can be accepted. It may be that a discursive lag exists between the emergence of empowered alternative (those that do not depend on complementary binary of dominance and subordination) femininities and the continued social discipline of women through hegemonic/pariah femininities. However, part of the power of hegemonic norms is the way they guide decision-making and social practices. Thus, while there is the physical reality of these women engaging in community leadership, recognition and acceptance that could help to dismantle socio-material gender inequalities is lacking.

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CHAPTER TWO

Complicating Communities: An Intersectional Approach to Environmental Justice Narratives

Introduction

Recent calls to revise, invigorate, and extend (Holifield, 2001; Schlosberg, 2013) environmental justice research frameworks suggest that integrations are needed to craft the wherewithal to answer contemporary socio-environmental questions. Foremost among many scholars is the recognition that new theoretical orientations and qualitative investigative methods are needed to address the emerging spatial and contextual heterogeneity of environmental justice research (Schlosberg, 2013; Szasz and Meuser, 1997). Intersectionality has a unique appeal because it acknowledges the complexity and the structural significance of interactions between institutions of power and race, gender, class, and citizenship identities that inform experiences of environmental injustice in local contexts (Collins and Bilge, 2016; Harrison, 2006). As a framework, intersectionality is not without critique (Davis, 2008; Winker and Degele, 2011), however, when rigorously applied, this schematic allows for investigation across and between individual and community scales, which is critical to ensuring that researchers do not treat any community disenfranchised by environmental justice as homogenous, an action that may potentially compromise research findings and miss important in-group differences that could explain experience or behavior (Rivers et al., 2010).

Negotiation and contestation in the environmental justice field is not novel; indeed, many have noted that the literature has long been characterized by continuous efforts of definition and signification (Holifield, 2001; Sze and London, 2008) wherein academic stakeholders have debated the rhetorical strategies of environmental ‘inequality,’ ‘racism’ and ‘justice.’ Regardless,

the field has progressed across socio-spatial and geopolitical levels (Schlosberg, 2013), bringing researchers to question how to invigorate the field while holding fast to the critical tenets of the environmental justice frame. As scholars, we must acknowledge the implications of boundary projects that may continue to lurk in our work. The appeals for innovative and comprehensive environmental justice research frames should focus on the creation of scholarship with communities that facilitates the deconstruction of socio-environmental inequalities and makes room for contextual empowerment. Theoretical complexity and methodological rigor should not come at the expense of praxis. To this point, Clarke (2010) urges scholars working in justice issues more broadly to engage in reflexive reconsideration lest we advance theory while abandoning praxis—thereby reproducing power inequities in written form and adding a “means of measuring its significance” (p. 310).

Of interest in this paper is demonstrating the distinct ways in which an intersectional lens can strengthen environmental justice research and practical outcomes—specifically, by examining how intersectional identities inform community level justice claims, and by investigating how contestation of local hegemonic identity norms may impact resource distribution to environmental justice organizations. How *environmental justice* is operationalized reflects whose voices matter, which social locations are visible, and what types of livelihoods are privileged. Intersectionality’s ability to examine the refraction of power as experienced at individual, symbolic, and representational nodes makes this type of analysis possible (Winker and Degele, 2011). In relationship to diversifying the methodological spectrum of environmental justice research projects, I make these arguments by drawing on an oral history project that explored the construction and negotiation of identity of women actors who are involved in environmental and food justice projects from two separate Rocky Mountain West communities;

the first a small community near Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the second, three contiguous and primarily Latino neighborhoods outside of Denver, Colorado. My intent in including a discussion of this method, is to demonstrate how intersectionalist environmental justice research can be enriched by methods that incorporate embodied human reality and establish settings where individuals are able to name their experiences/feelings and simultaneously reflect on meaning (Anderson and Jack, 1991).

Why intersectionality is important— to many fields, and as I will argue, to environmental justice research and scholars— is clear. People are not monoliths, nor are their communities. How disruption, oppression, inequality, and the whole host of ‘-isms’ are made manifest at the individual and community level cannot be understood, or progress made to dismantle these structures, with frameworks that assume uniformity. It is possible for collective identity to be a means of cultural empowerment (Yuval-Davis, 1994), or for strategic essentialism to be used for political mobilization (Collins and Bilge, 2016), however, these maxims must be self-defined by the communities themselves.

In the case of environmental justice theory and research, problematizing community identities rather than naturalizing them helps to acknowledge different strategies of resistance, the plurality of justice claims (Harrison, 2014) and to locate authentic opportunities for social transformation. As we move from quantitative investigations seeking to prove statistically significant associations between marginalized communities and the geographic proximity of environmental hazards, to more theoretically diverse and complex questions of cultural continuance and environmental heritages in indigenous communities (Whyte, 2011), reproductive justice and environmental burdens (DiChiro, 2008), or food deserts and insecurity (Wekerle, 2004), our analytical tool-kit must shift from a defined tract of residential zip codes, to

include an examination of injustice as it is mediated through intersected identities of race, class, gender, place, and citizenship— to name but a few. As Taylor (1997) argues, the failure to recognize the ways in which race, gender and class shape environmental experiences has “deprived us of a deeper understanding” of environmental activism and concern in this country (p. 16). However, if intersectionality is to be applied to environmental justice research, authorial space must be made for this type of work, and we cannot divorce theoretical possibilities from their activist origins.

In the sections that follow, I begin with a discussion of the potential for synergism between intersectionality and environmental justice research, before outlining the framework for the cases mentioned above. Next, I demonstrate how gender interlocks with other identities (such as femininity and ideas of citizenship) to mediate environmental realities, experiences of injustice, and claims for recognition and remediation (Whyte, 2014) of women environmental justice actors and the communities in which they engage.

Literature

Arguing for the synthesis of environmental justice and intersectional frameworks may seem simple at first. Intersectionalist approaches recognize that oppressions may “be tightly or loosely coupled,” (Collins, 2000) and thus experiences of injustice and motivations to activism will be diversely expressed. Attention to environmental injustices has become a global discourse (Schlosberg, 2013), and therefore the repertoire of scholars in this field must be broadened to include strategies for more complex investigation. However, the success of this convergence depends on the thorough application of intersectionality to environmental justice questions, and the continued expansion of environmental justice frames to consider the heterogeneity of actors

and their communities (Rivers et al., 2010; Schlosberg 2013). Complicating this partnership is that intersectionality is an often invoked, but some would assert (Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005) difficult to operationalize lens; thus, the increasing dispersion of this frame has resulted in uneven scholarship. In a parallel vein, scholars have warned that the appeal and flexibility of environmental justice theoretical frameworks can lead to their cooptation, and that we must not confuse the diffusion of jargon with adherence to principles (Benford, 2005). A brief examination of this tension is needed before asserting how intersectionality can strengthen the environmental justice field.

Environmental justice research— distinct though complementary to the environmental justice movement (Cole and Foster, 2001; Schlosberg, 2013; UCC, 1987)—began as a reactive and diagnostic science, stemming from the need to provide statistical evidence of geographic disparity in the siting of environmental hazards (Bullard, 1990). Somewhat endemic to this early work was the interpretation that the correlation demonstrated between hazard location and a marginalized population was evidence of causation (Bryant & Mohai, 1992; Bullard, 1983; Gelobter, 1987). Contemporary studies continue to find correlation between race/class and the presence of environmental hazards (Mohai and Saha, 2006), yet they often do not empirically examine the social construction of environmental injustices (Kurtz, 2009). Scholars discuss how the technocratic and quantitative concentration of environmental justice research has obfuscated its sociality, failed to engage with the historicity and multiplicity of racist ideologies and in so doing continue to participate in a regulatory discourse that maintained unequal environmental realities as problems with a technical fix (Kurtz, 2009; Pulido 2000, 1996; Taylor, 2000).

It is important to note that the original preoccupation with questions of disproportionate exposure were not a reflection of the diminished curiosity of early scholars (Bryant & Mohai,

1992; Gelobter, 1987; Goldman, 1990) or simplistic research aims, but rather a direct response to the racist machinations of the political system. The thrust of these first efforts produced statistical artifacts that were ‘legitimate’ and thus harder (though not impossible) for political and regulatory actors to ignore (Harding, 2004). Decades later it is possible to critique these initial investigations for how they reduced race to an inference of statistical probability and to argue for more sophisticated approaches, while simultaneously acknowledging that they also helped to spark a broader discussion of the environment that recognized the lived realities of low income communities and communities of color who often felt isolated and ignored by the popular wilderness, pragmatic conservationist, and recreational framings of the environmental movement heretofore (Schlosberg, 2013; Taylor, 2000). This is precisely why intersectional approaches to environmental justice are needed, to move beyond investigations that appear reductionist, to form new critical theoretical engagements, and to rearticulate discursive frameworks of vulnerability that are often applied in investigations of justice (Cameron, 2012) that can naturalize environmental victimhood and suggest an absence of agentic communities.

Credited to the legal theory work of Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality began as way to discuss the lived realities of black women, critically interrogating the multiplicity of discriminations women of color face in the US legal and other state systems. Crenshaw (1989) argued that oppressive practices and discourses connect and contest with subjective identities to produce distinct experiences of injustice, bringing to the foreground concomitant issues of race and class.

Intersectional research has proliferated especially among feminist and gender studies scholars who have sought a means to empirically account for the complexity and partiality of identity, and to incorporate explanations of the institutionality of power dynamics (Winker and

Degele, 2011). However, the diffusion of this model, its expansion beyond the original tripartite of race, gender, and class (Cho et al., 2013), and dissension between structuralist and post-structuralist approaches (McCall, 2005) has resulted in some degree of operational uncertainty. As Davis (2008) articulates, the synergism of intersectionality's appeal, and its somewhat broad and ambiguous schematic, has resulted in a muddled field. It is unsettled whether intersectionality is fully a theory (Prins, 2006), or rather an analytical framework (McCall, 2005). The difficulty of how to demonstrate the fluidity and crossover of identities is of primacy. Collins (2000; 1989) has referred to this phenomenon as intersectionality's ampersand problem, wherein identities are reduced to discrete rather than interwoven subjectivities. Thus, instead of problematizing multiplex identities and experiences, and how these interact with power— race, gender, and class are reduced to simplistic quantitative variables. Contestation over how to investigate and present the dialogic between individual/collective identities and the institutionality of oppressive systems (e.g. racism, classism, etc.) is common (Winker and Degele, 2011).

Intersectionality's lack of a disciplinary home has invited criticisms of rigor (Davis, 2008; Denis, 2008) which stand alongside appreciation of its disruptive trajectory (Olmedo, 1997). As the breadth of intersectional research expands, there is considerable concern as to how to acknowledge the situational particularity of actors, while avoiding the convolution of intersectional frameworks that could occur as the categories of identity become an endless list (Butler, 1990). The existence of some of these theoretical arguments themselves draw rancor, suggesting that the poststructuralist preoccupation by feminist theorists working in the Global North has coopted this frame, resulting in an attenuation of critical work (Collins and Bilge, 2016).

Turning to the potential for integration of environmental justice and intersectional approaches, many credit Krauss' (1993) study of the construction of environmental discourse of working class women engaged in community centered grassroots protests from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds, as a seminal example. Using the concept of subjective experience as sociocultural knowledge, Krauss (1993) examined how different social locations— in this case class, gender, race and ethnicity— led to and inform current perceptions of environmental injustice/political oppression; illustrating how the heteronormative conservative ideology of family and home is disrupted in working class communities. Moreover, despite a shared economic class and gender, these women differentially framed their experiences of toxic hazards through lenses of state failure, institutional racism or the continuation of colonialist oppressions, explaining that these experiences inform their political consciousness and their assertions of directed injustice. The extension of this to praxis is how these differing assertions of injustice parlay into strategies for collective action and calls for social transformation.

Despite these critical findings, some ten years later, others working in environmental justice theory building continued to argue that while environmental justice research should contemporize issue areas (e.g., technology shifts, the implications of climate change), these endeavors should remain bounded to an examination of “poor communities...communities of color... or tribal communities,” (Getches and Pellow, 2002, p. 26; Pellow and Brulle, 2005). Admitting this tack establishes a problematic litmus test of which communities count as vulnerable, and moreover, who should decide the ambit of this standard, they nevertheless concluded that this criterion is necessary to prevent the weakening or dilution of environmental justice scholarship. Dilution in this case is predicated on a fear that opening the umbrella of environmental justice (Taylor, 2000) too wide would risk including claims from individuals or

communities whose access to resources are not restricted to the measure of the classes mentioned above (Getches and Pellow, 2002).

This concern is not without merit; however, cementing certain types of communities as perennially disenfranchised (Cameron, 2012) and failing to examine the nebulous webs of disempowerment faced by these communities based on various social locations, is reductionist—a different type of dilution. Conversely, anticipating this argumentation can help those advocating for intersectional approaches to better make their case— explicating how acknowledging community heterogeneity and agency prevents the devolution of environmental justice scholarship, rather than causing it.

Applying Intersectionality to Women’s Environmental Justice Work in the Rocky Mountain West

In the discussion that follows, I draw upon the framework and data of a larger study that examined the construction and negotiation of identity of women actors within environmental justice organizations; how action, resources, and outcomes may be circumscribed by hegemonic masculinity and femininity at the individual and community level; and the corollary implications of the feminization of environmental justice as a movement. Specific to my argument that intersectionalist approaches strengthen environmental justice praxis through more accurately informing opportunities for empowerment, I use my findings to demonstrate that how *justice* is operationalized is a reflection of whose voices matter and which social locations are visible, and that which socio-material realities constitute empowerment and expectation(s) may vary across actor groups. Like Krauss (1993) I was interested in examining the experiences of women who engage in environmental justice advocacy, critically acknowledging that gender is performed and expressed within or against hegemonic discursive identities depending on cultural and

geographic locations (Kurtz, 2007; Schippers 2007), and that ascription to a gender identity does not presuppose a universal environmental experience (Stearney, 1994). The women who participated in this project were all founders and members of organizations that focused on food justice, insecurity, and place based health; neither organization had male members. Men were not barred from participation; however localized gender constructs partially explain their absence—a more thorough discussion of organizational formation is discussed later. Akin to many of the arguments already reviewed (Cho et al., 2013; Collins and Bilge, 2016; McCall, 2005), I invoked intersectionality as theory and analytical tool, and thus in this work, intersectionality informed the research design, method selection, and analytical framework.

Examinations into women's involvement in environmental and community justice organizations have been made before; ranging from investigations into ecofeminism (Stearney, 1994), as an extension of motherhood identities (Naples, 1992) and as a site for political intervention that was not occupied by men (Ackelsberg, 1988). For instance, Brown and Ferguson (1995) note that women who are involved in toxic waste activism are less likely to attribute their work to an ethic of care/motherhood role, and more likely to challenge masculine power only after spending several years engaged in movements. Herda Rapp (2000), investigates the self-reported expansion of women's identities, wherein they may have to hide their newfound empowerment, or continue with token gestures of traditional femininity to maintain peace in the home. Problematizing grassroots activism, Rainey and Johnson (2009) explore how the 'voice' and practices of women of color have often been marginalized in environmental action. They find that African American women organize around environmental and social justice issues in a women-centered model, and that these women felt their needs were not being met by either the

women's or mainstream environmental movement— both of which were perceived to serve the interests of the white middle class (Rainey and Johnson, 2009).

However, what is missing from these studies is an intersectionalist examination of the multiple subjectivities through which power is exercised or withheld, and how this occurs at individual, and institutional levels (Winker and Degele, 2011). The earlier work of Krauss (1993) is critical to the field, and more research of this kind is needed. In the current case, the point of departure is using an intersectional framework coupled with an analysis of localized hegemonic conceptions of masculinity and femininity to understand the environmental injustice experiences of women actors at the individual level, and to examine 'if' and 'how' associations between environmental justice and hegemonic femininity at the community level determined the distribution of resources or strategies of these organizations.

Hegemonic cultural characteristics are normative values that are used to legitimate power over others, to maintain institutions, and construct hierarchies that determine exclusion and inclusion of socio-material benefits (Connell, 2000; 1987). Hegemonic masculinities and femininities are both 'social locations,' and the physical and discursive enactment of identities (Connell, 2000; Schippers, 2007); the latter complements, supports, and maintains the dominance of the former. Masculinities and femininities are also context dependent, locally and relationally defined, and intersect with other subjectivities such as race, class, and citizenship. However, these local identities are also in conversation with transnational hegemonies, which suggest certain features of hegemonic masculinity (whiteness, privilege, heteronormativity) are omnipresent (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), though they will need to be complicated at the regional or community level. At an individual level, those who can perform or embody these traits are rewarded; those who cannot are rebuked (Schippers, 2007). Hegemonic femininity as

‘yardstick’ to which all women are judged is credited to the work of Collins (2004) who interrogated how the ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and femininity reify whiteness, and therefore render the gender performances of people of color as deviant. This same convention applies to the enactment of practices and decision-making at the organizational level— we need to not only focus on identifying behaviors on the individual level through the lens of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, ‘but the power relations and distribution of resources among women, men, and others and how masculinity and femininity as networks of meaning legitimate and ensure that structure.’ (Schippers, 2007, p. 101). Identifying these expectations can help us to examine the persistence of certain gender inequalities, the individual and collective consequences of embodying, maintaining, or resisting hegemonic or marginalized identities, and how the manifestation of these inequalities may impact distribution of socio-material resources of organizations. If issues of environmental justice are associated with the transgression of hegemonic femininity, then they may be subordinated or censured, and less likely to receive political attention or resources.

To reiterate, examining the operation of hegemonic masculinity and femininity at the community level is just one way to explore the manifestation of discrimination based on gender and femininity, and specific to this article— how the concurrent feminization of environmental justice in these places could impact resource distribution. Furthermore, an intersectional lens is needed to investigate how gender interacts with other subjectivities to mediate environmental realities, experiences of injustice, and claims for recognition and remediation (Whyte, 2014). From this project’s outset, gender and femininity were included as likely sites of identity to be explored; any other subjectivities would be emergent and self-defined or constructed by the women themselves in their narrative explorations. I turn now to a discussion of methods.

Methods

Over eight months of fieldwork in the states of Colorado and New Mexico, I collected ten oral histories of women working on community-based environmental justice issues. In comparison to other interview methods, oral histories are distinct primarily by their length, and their focus on eliciting the everyday experience of actors. Researchers vary on whether to use question guides or to leave these sessions more unstructured (Gluck and Patai, 2013); in the present case I held group sessions prior to individual oral history interviews, explaining the methodology, timing, and likely question probes they would receive as part of this process. The overall methodological intent is to incorporate the lived realities of respondents and to establish settings where they are able to name their experiences/feelings and simultaneously reflect on meaning (Anderson and Jack, 1991). As part of an intersectional study, using oral history as method provides a platform wherein participants have the flexibility to self-define identities, and construct experiential meanings and knowledges from their lives.

As completed texts, collections of oral histories may also be thought of as narratives, socially constructed recordings of experiences. The production and dissemination of narratives can privilege one account of history and socio-material relations over another (Gubrium, 2005). Which socio-environmental narratives are heard and how plans for remediation are shaped, is tied to the power of local hegemonic norms; it is likely that alternative narratives are subordinated. Thus, constructing a record of alternative and marginalized socio-environmental narratives from other actor groups, can help to make these claims visible, and challenge the ‘status quo’ discursive record. Oral histories may also move beyond the individual to examine a specific event, or topic; in recent cases these compilations have been labeled as ‘circumstantial activism’ (Ballard and Banks, 2003) because their content has been used in policy decisions.

Interviews ranged in length from 6-15 hours, and were supported by participant observation at workplaces, community events, and in their homes. I conducted these interviews in English and/or Spanish depending on the preference of the respondent. Their interviews were translated into both languages as appropriate. Transcripts were provided to participants for their reflection and clarification; final transcripts were then analyzed for emergent themes using an open coding process. Critically, attention must be given to issues of representation and interpretation, such that oral histories give authorial voice to the respondent (Gluck and Patai, 2013) but the researcher may probe these reflections for understanding of the topic at hand.

Group Profiles

The interviewees include seven Latina women, one African American woman, and two white women, ranging in age from 24-44 years old. Self-disclosed relationship history revealed that two women had divorced male partners, and that nine of the ten women were currently in heterosexual marriages or long term partnerships; nine of the women are also mothers. Of the seven Latina women who participated in the study, only one was born in the United States, the other six having moved here as children or adults, and in various stages of the citizenship and/or naturalization process. Pseudonyms are used to protect organizational and individual identity.

New Mexico

Founded by two women in 2014, the group in New Mexico has since grown to six board members (all women); three of their oral histories are included in this study. Geographically, this organization serves the metropolitan Albuquerque, New Mexico region, including the rural communities of the East Mountains. The stated purpose of this group is to redistribute food—

primarily fresh produce and dairy— to community residents who “may fall through the cracks.” In so doing, they feel they are specifically challenging the traditional food pantry model found in their community that requires proof that an individual’s or family’s income level falls within federal poverty guidelines for welfare assistance. Primary activities included gleaning, food rescue from local farms and small grocery stores, guerilla gardening in abandoned spaces, and more recently educational efforts for growing food in residential spaces. This organization relies on grant funding and donations, there are no paid staff members. At the time the narratives with this group were completed (April-October, 2016) none of the six women worked in paid employment outside the home. Five of the six women identified as ‘stay at home mothers’, those with school aged children educated their children at home.

Colorado

The second organization is a group of eight women whose primary constituency is Latino families living in three urban neighborhoods of Denver, Colorado. The oral histories of seven of the eight women appear herein, one woman chose not to participate. Since the time of data collection, these women have begun organizing in other southern and western Colorado communities. Also originally started by two women, this organization is now fully grant supported, and all eight women earn some wages from their community engagement. Collectively, these women are called *promotoras*, a term that signifies their advocacy within and for Latino communities around issues of social and environmental justice. Specifically, these *promotoras* are working on initiatives with Latina women on food security (i.e., access, availability, and culturally appropriate food ways), family based nutrition education, and exercise. While Latino men are not barred from participation, women were the target

stakeholders given the cultural expectations of women's role in food acquisition, preparation, and family health. All eight women in this organization were mothers who worked outside of the home in one or more jobs; when interviewed, all children were attending public or private school.

Findings

Despite a shared gender and food justice/food desert foci of their organizations, the women in this study reported markedly different motivations for engaging in community-based activism; these motivations were also constructed and negotiated within the locally defined hegemonic relationships between masculinity and femininity. In addition to the expected articulations of experiences through gender and femininity, foremost across the ten oral histories was the emergent construction of citizenship subjectivities and how these informed notions of empowerment for their communities. As mentioned previously, the Latina women who participated in this work had moved to the United States as children or adults—in their narrative discussions of resource accessibility, procedural equity, and discriminatory experiences based on perceived undocumented immigration status feature prominently. This information was revealed during the oral history process, not as a probe, but in explaining motivations for involvement, and community needs. Ability to access healthy food, to frequent food pantries, and to travel to food distribution locations was constrained for these communities; the reason most frequently cited by the promotoras was the difficulty in obtaining an appointment for a driver's license for persons going through the immigration process, the fear of repercussion for driving without one to food locations, and the lack of public transportation options in these neighborhoods. As a result, many of their programs focus on food and grocery distribution in sanctuary spaces within neighborhood walking distance, group carpooling, or even delivery. It is impossible to separate

the lived citizenship experiences of these women from their identification as Latinas living in the US; moreover, it would also be antithetical to the precepts of intersectionality to do so. However, in keeping with the standards of representation in oral history research, the episodes below were self-defined by respondents in relationship to their experiences with questions of resident status.

For example, Victoria, a married mother of three discussed that justice for her community would mean having a centralized location for information and dissemination of resources, reflecting that some community members are unaware of services, or fear discrimination if they apply for assistance. Central to her experience was a continued perception of being the outsider, and unwelcomed in this region. She spoke of the surprise of visiting a food ‘bank’ operated in the community by the promotora group that did not require identification (no name, phone number) just a zip code and the number of dependents in her home.

I know we’re going to be – I don’t know if the word is “behind,” but I feel like there is still feeling that we are not part of this country. Oh, my dream to be {laughter} is, have a group, or have a place, and also bring people, and exactly show them what we have to do.... I would like to have that information and give it to them. And that way, they can – like, I didn’t know about food banks. I didn’t know. And when – I was, like, really? They give you food?

Her colleague Isabel, a married mother of two had a similar reflection. She drew on her own experiences of discrimination during her naturalization process, navigating how to access food assistance resources, trying to raise a young family, and feeling that confusion over resident status precluded many families from increasing their intake of healthy foods.

Just being able to be completely transparent, and not having a status or a document separate us, or kind of – yes, separate us. Because we (community) are – like, do I fall into the category of

immigrant, and non – not legal – or alien? I really hate that...we need easy access. Making food accessible. Because I know it's hard, we need to support more moms in the way that they get this.

Juliet, a single mother of one, linked the food justice advocacy she was performing in her community specifically to issues of immigration, speaking directly to the choice many families must make between legal expenses related to immigration processes and food access.

Like, the food deserts, there's a lot of places here in Colorado where they don't have easy access to healthy food. And if they have access to healthy food, it's really expensive. And it's a really big deal and it's something that I would never have thought was a big deal until I actually got into it. Like, our health does affect everything else because if I'm not healthy, how am I going to fight my immigration status?

Lisa, one of the groups' co-founders, expressed frustration that organizational attempts by her group are faced with constant questions of legal status, and that community empowerment would be connected with more immigrant women leading across the state.

You know what, guys? I serve everyone; I'm not immigration. We don't ask those type of questions when you (non-Latino community members) come for free services... the model that we have here in Colorado, I want to make this a national movement... I want to see more immigrant women in leadership. I would love to, you know, see more women being empowered and saying, "Enough of this (lack of access).

In comparison, the women working in the greater Albuquerque, New Mexico area framed community empowerment and justice outcomes as stemming from the reassertion of local

control, moving community members outside of food pantry systems, and being free from resource need through systems of self-sustainability. Elizabeth, a married mother of three, and a co-founder of the New Mexico organization spoke explicitly about ending dependencies, and returning to a community ethic of care.

I want to encourage them that they don't have to depend on anybody to do this. We are capable as a community, as a whole. And just like with the relationships not being 50/50, it's okay if, you know, somebody needs more help, and we, you know, help bring them up. But then when they get to a point, they can help another person, and another; so on.

In New Mexico, justice and empowerment were realized relationally, by moving away from established sources of state assistance. It was the focus of their group to collapse categories, rather than seek recognition or draw upon any collective identities. "We want to continue to just focus on the human element, and just bringing the community together as a whole, we are not focusing demographically." As a group stance, this was of note given that many of the women used their identities as mothers to explain environmental justice engagement, and felt that their work in the community was circumscribed by their gender. However, like the organization working in Colorado, they recognized that the requirement of identification (state ID, proof of income, etc.) at many of the food distribution centers in their community was denying access; they worked outside this system to bring fresh food into communities, and later to begin gardening programs.

Elizabeth continued with the idea that instead of being a desirable access point for resources, state regulated assistance programs were part of the problem.

I want them to be held accountable for this, that the idea that we're not growing enough food, that there isn't enough, is just – how anybody believes that, and why they – why the government even keeps trying to, like, sell us that story. It starts with food, in my opinion. That's where it starts, is with the food. So, we can encourage people in that, they don't have to be dependent, you know.

Josie, married with no children, also emphasized the group's focus on helping people to “empower themselves and their communities through growing and sharing their own food,” Therese, a married mother of two, drew too on the education aspects of their organization, rather resource distribution, “And I love that about our group because it can be anybody and it's not about giving out the food: it's about the education.” Educational programs for this were primarily focused on property owners who could grow food for themselves or to donate for distribution.

The construction of justice and empowerment outcomes in the New Mexico organization bear the most resemblance to libertarian and communitarian frames where the emphasis is on localization, and deregulation (Harrison, 2014). Public systems of food assistance, including food banks or pantries that worked with grocery stores, were perceived as failures; accumulation of food through private networks and growing your own were favored. This type of approach could exclude community members who do not have access to property, and in some ways, continue dependency— dependent on neighbor donations instead of public food banks. In a theoretical sense this platform is somewhat inconsistent with environmental justice frameworks, as there is a lack of participatory inclusion. However, movement actors are not bound by academic literature, and may reflect environmental justice and mainstream environmental paradigms. For example, recent work by Macias (2008) details the surprise and frustration on the

part of academics and activists working in indigenous New Mexico communities, when these actors sided with timber extraction companies rather than environmental protection organizations in resource management debates. Prindeville and Bretting (1998) find in other New Mexico based scholarship, that some Hispanic and Native American activists working in environmental justice organizations may express values belonging to mainstream environmental paradigms, but firmly reject labels of ‘environmentalist,’ instead constructing their environmental identity as one that protects cultural livelihoods.

Conversely, the experiences and claims of the women working in the Denver area display notions of recognition justice (Whyte, 2014) and distributive-egalitarian rights (Harrison, 2014; Schlosberg, 2009) that push against neoliberalism or strict communitarian frames. These constructions advocate instead for regulatory protections, participatory inclusion, access to state-sponsored resources, and legal status; and are more consistent with typologies of environmental justice (Taylor, 2000). Moreover, perceptions of environmental injustice, pathways to community empowerment, and organizational goals were all linked not just to the gender identities of the promotoras and their female constituents, but negotiated within the intersection of their experiences as women and as real/perceived immigrants to the United States.

Hegemonic Femininity and Resource Distribution

All ten women described experiences of discrimination or rebuke in relationship to their community advocacy from family members, extended community networks, and/or in public political spaces; at an individual level this ranged from feelings of not being taken seriously, having to feminize their language in public meetings, being removed from community coalitions

in favor of a male representative, and personal anxiety over dress, speech, and mannerisms.

Elizabeth, of the New Mexico group reflects:

It kind of raises the question in my head, like, if we were men, would people have taken us more seriously sooner? —it's something to consider, because, as a woman, people don't always listen to you. I'm sure you know that. Like, you can know everything about a topic, and sometimes it doesn't matter. You know. "Frivolous. Continue." So, I don't know.

Mona, one of the co-founders of the Colorado organization discusses tension she felt as a woman, and the expectations for her behavior when attending community meetings:

And I think that that was an occasion where our hands were tied. If we went in strong, we were going to lose. If we went in docile and submissive or subservient, or pulled back on our personalities, we were going to lose. So, we were backed into a corner where, at the time, there was no winning that battle, no matter how we set it up.

However, as an organization, the New Mexico group appeared to support and embrace some norms of local hegemonic femininity— even as a means to an end— whereas the group in Colorado openly transgressed them. Moreover, in the New Mexico case, the explicit practice of disassociating from any identity markers, helps to lessen the threat against hegemonic masculinity; there is no perceived challenge to race or class.

Most illustrative of this is the association of the New Mexico organization with their identities of 'stay at home' motherhood, and using referent forms of speech and behavior when interacting in the community. This is not to suggest that motherhood identities are not a source of empowerment; however, in this case it would appear that promotion of the group as a volunteer

group explicitly for mothers, may have reduced barriers into political spaces (Bell and Braun, 2010). Therese explains how her organization interacts primarily with women, how she sees her position as a woman to be an advantage, and the affinity with other stay-at-home mothers.

I think being a woman has got us into a lot of doors; I feel like if it had been {laughter} two men approaching—it is interesting because I have noticed that we speak a lot easier with women. Well, and then they approach us a lot more versus men. So being able to connect with those other moms who have those kids. And I feel like it's a pretty cool outlet for stay-at-home moms as well. God, I don't know why I'm emotional; I'm sorry. {Laughter}

However, Josie, was more emphatic in feeling that certain types of gendered behavior are expected of them, and that by 'towing this line', or performing hegemonic femininity they are more able to access resources.

I feel more limited that we have to be tentative and apologetic in asking for things sometimes. I know that many people have been more open to having strange women knock on their door and ask to collect their excess fruit, than if a strange man did the same. My guess is that this is because of women are seen as non-threatening in our society.

The women working in Colorado spoke openly about objections from their larger community, family and friends, regarding their work outside the home. This was primarily constructed as failing to meet expectations of being a good wife and/or mother because their time spent as promotoras took them away from their homes. Isabel explained, "The man is supposed to provide everything...and sometimes I get judged because of that. Like – or, they think that because I work, my husband is poor, and my husband doesn't make enough to support the

family. And that's not true. For this community, hegemonic masculinity was articulated as the 'man in front of the woman,' a physical and discursive location, supported by women residing primarily in the home, and their associated humble social behaviors. "If you have a partner and he's behind you, they don't see it as he's supporting you. They see it as he's a wimp." (Juliet). Moreover, they reflected on pushback from both their community, and 'Anglos' for their position as assertive, knowledgeable professionals. This ranged from questioning of why these women needed to pursue professional training opportunities, being removed from larger community committee positions in favor of men, and disparate treatment in public spaces perceived as discrimination based on sex,

Lisa reflected on having to reframe needs— in essence whitewash— when speaking about her organization to white political or business leaders. Instead of invoking rights or justice based language, or emphasizing the unique realities faced by the Latino families with whom she worked, she emphasized the money savings aspects of food justice programming.

So, you know, it's extremely hard sometimes to get into the white conservative professional environment to convince them that this is a need. And I have to put it in a way that it's a benefit to them and not to us. For me, I can feel you. It would be easy to talk to you about my community, how I feel about my community and everything. But then I turn around and somebody else who is a very conservative Republican, I'm not going to go and talk about my community the way – what we go through and everything else. I'm likely more about research and studies and something else in my interest.

Failing to meet local or cultural expectations of hegemonic femininity in the Colorado case, within the community and against the universal yardstick (Collins, 2004), had a direct

impact on this group's ability to access networks of resources. Whereas congruence with hegemonic femininity in New Mexico gave those women more purchase in their community, and especially access to sources of revenue and food donations, the women in Colorado transgressed these norms.

Conclusion

Intersectionalist approaches are needed to understand not just how injustice is differentially experienced, but to examine and advocate for locally relevant praxis. As demonstrated in the narratives above, empowerment outcomes are significantly shaped by intersectional identities such that it is not a matter of just increasing food security, but the method in which this remediation is sought. Levine (1982) in her study of the women who fought against the environmental injustices at Love Canal, NY, explained that who defines the problem, also gets to define the scope of the solution. Thirty-five years later, this adage is still relevant. We need to acknowledge how environmental injustice is heterogeneously constructed in communities, how this could inform prognostic demands (Benford, 2005), and further to identify and address how hegemonic constructions may impact resource distribution. Moreover, this type of approach can help to critique the essentialism of vulnerability or victimhood in environmental justice research (Cameron, 2012) which can render communities as objects, subjugating any notion of their agency.

The findings here indicated that experiences of injustice and notions of community empowerment were differentially framed by social constructions of gender, citizenship subjectivities, and performances (congruent and transgressive) of hegemonic femininity. These experiences were also coupled with place attachment, political ideologies, ethnicity and language. The richness of this data suggests the possibility for further examination, as well as the

inherent suitability of oral history methods to investigations of this type. Instead of structuring narrative exploration, the oral history method used in this investigation provided respondents the opportunity to reflect and simultaneously construct experiential knowledges from which their intersectional identities could be amplified.

As an empirical tool, the construct of hegemonic femininity can help to problematize local power dynamics by examining the practices of male dominance, and how femininities support or contest these (Schippers, 2007). It is critical to understand that it is not just individuals who embody or transgress these standards, but that these expectations operate as institutionally powerful discursive and decision-making tools. If issues of environmental justice are associated with hegemonic femininity, then they are likely to be subordinated or merely tolerated (Bell and Braun, 2010). Transgression of hegemonic expectations may be even more problematic, and tied to ‘if’ and under what ‘conditions’ resources are distributed. More research is needed to examine how these transgressions influence power relations over time, such that they may have the potential to disrupt hegemonic norms and institutionalized social inequalities in communities.

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CHAPTER THREE

How Should We as Feminist Researchers, Operationalize Intersectionality?

Introduction

Intersectionality is an often invoked, but somewhat incongruous lens, especially common to feminist and gender studies. Credited to the critical legal theory work of Crenshaw (1989), it began as way to discuss the lived realities of black women, interrogating the multiplicity of discriminations women of color face in the US legal system. Suggesting that oppressive practices and discourses connect and contest with subjective identities to produce distinct experiences of (in)justice, intersectionality brought to the foreground issues of race and class. As a theoretical frame, it quickly converged with the work of other prominent black womanist scholars (Collins, 1989) who argued that mainstream gender scholarship neglected the standpoints of women of color, and differentiated social classes. The entrenched status quo of white middle class women as authors and subjects, obscured the ways in which power is simultaneously exerted and refracted through multiple sites of identity.

In the intervening decades, intersectional research has burgeoned. However, as Davis (2008) articulates, the synergism of intersectionality's appeal, and its somewhat broad and ambiguous schematic, has resulted in a muddled field. This leaves many feminist researchers with the question of how to operationalize intersectionality in their scholarship? For example, those who advocate for intersectionality's potential to examine the relational nature of power, recommend a broader application of the model to questions of epistemology and the neoliberal academy (Mohanty, 2004); and increasingly the traditional tripartite of race, gender, and class is being joined by the body (Weber and Medina, 2005), sexual orientation (Taylor, Hines, and Casey, 2010) and ability (Shaw, Chan, and McMahon, 2012). As the breadth of intersectional

research expands, there is considerable concern as to how to acknowledge the situational particularity of actors, while avoiding the convolution and dilution of the framework that could occur as the categories of identity become an endless list (Butler, 1990). And I as will argue, the attention to intersectionality's activist origins and its connection to social praxis have waned.

Intersectional frameworks are needed to address the problematic position of white middle class women as the universal subject in feminist and gender studies research, that neglected to examine how gender inequality interacts with other identities (e.g. race, class, sexuality) often marginalized by dominant social institutions. While progress has been made, the absence of intersectional scholarship heretofore impacted both the totality of knowledge produced, and the career trajectory of those (particularly women of color) within academe who looked to include diverse standpoints in their work (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Intersectional approaches should not necessarily be applied to all feminist and gender research; in fact, I agree with Davis (2008) that in some cases intersectionality has become a jargonistic 'buzzword,' a convenient catchall. At the same time, the points of tension I noted above are indicative of important work to be done. How to do this work, how to avoid positivistic pitfalls, and produce knowledge that is congruent with feminist epistemology and intersectionality, is the conversation to which I now turn.

There are two primary aims of this paper. The first aim is to contribute to the discussion of operationalization by drawing on an oral history project informed by intersectionality from conception to completion. I put forth an argument of the complementarity of oral narratives to intersectional research, and how this methodology can help scholars to answer the call from DeVault (1990) that we listen 'around' and 'beyond' words to gain a full accounting of women's experiences. I locate myself as a feminist researcher, grounded in feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding, 2004), and it is from this site that I critique and advocate for

intersectionality. Standpoint epistemology is characterized as overtly and explicitly politically engaged, interested in examinations of hegemonic power structures which have oppressed other identities and knowledges, and whose methodological entrance point is at the site of lived experience. The second aim is to draw attention to the issue of social praxis in intersectional scholarship. Intersectionality's adoption by the academy, and its diffusion into multiple disciplines has resulted in more recent attention to theoretical robustness. Theory argumentation is critical, however, contribution to praxis is a foundational principle of intersectionality—whose importance was recently reasserted by Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013). To ignore this precept, is antithetical to the framework itself.

I begin with a brief review of some of the current contestations of intersectionality as theory and framework, connecting to this to a discussion of how the use of oral narratives (histories) may be used to accomplish intersectional research. Using examples from oral histories of women environmental justice activists I demonstrate analytical possibilities. I then turn to a discussion of how attention to praxis has been woven throughout this process.

Intersectionality: Who Counts?

Scholars who engage with intersectionality as a theoretical model have debated whether identities should be treated as systemic, or constructive categories. The systemic approach to intersectionality places a more significant focus on the impact of social structure on identity formation (Collins, 1998; Collins and Bilge, 2016). This is positioned against the constructionist frame, where agency is elevated, and individuals are perceived as “actors and co-authors in their lives” (p.281), and emphasis is placed on performativity (Prins, 2006). Critics of the systemic approach suggest that if researchers are not careful, this work can project the idea that oppression

is additive; and thus, it is not the intersections of social-physical identities, but the number of marginalized groups actors belong to, that is investigated.

Given the co-constitution and institutionality of gender, race, and class it is not surprising that there is confusion over scale, and how to best explicate the dialectic between structures and individual social locations. Collins (2000; 1989) has referred to this phenomenon as intersectionality's ampersand problem, wherein identities are reduced to discrete rather than woven subjectivities. Thus, instead of problematizing multiplex identities and experiences, and how these interact with power— race, gender, and class are reduced to simplistic quantitative variables, in which the researcher's goal is to accurately measure. The failure to acknowledge the dynamic and fluid nature of identities creates a situation where actors may be segmented and essentialized (e.g. women or black women), and can further serve to stratify sources of oppression. However, while theoretically speaking the constructionist approach is more sensitive to the agency of actors, its potential failure to examine hegemonic power, and how this shapes social and material realities is problematic. Without this recognition, it is less likely that the constructionist approach can help us to move beyond an examination of individual realities to how power is negotiated at structural levels.

Furthermore, as was expertly outlined by McCall (2005), we must attend to if, and how we treat social identities as categories for analysis, and manage this complexity in our work. She suggests that there are three main approaches— anticategorical, intracategorical, and intercategorical— that direct method choice. Anticategorical, which McCall (2005) outlines as the preference of most feminist poststructuralists, locates diversity at the site of the individual, coding any social group demarcation as problematic. The treatment of individual performativity closely aligns anticategorical work with constructionist theoretical approaches, though they are

not mutually exclusive. Intra and inter-categorical approaches both make use of identifiable group belonging, however, intercategorical work is the thrust of McCall's analysis as her focus is to reinvigorate the field with quantitative methods. In the latter, social identities become the analytical units to describe complexity and are layered upon one another simulating a factorial array. However, it is the middle approach in the continuum that will be familiar to most readers, wherein work is done at the boundaries of identity belonging, problematizing the (in)visibility of these intersections. This type of approach harkens back to the origination of intersectionality — a way to discuss the lived realities of black women, acknowledging that mainstream gender theory continued to project white women as the universal subject, and that anti-racist paradigms did not consider the impact of gender.

Despite the excellent scholarly discussions noted above, scant guidance exists in the literature that suggests a clear methodological or analytical tool-kit for this framework. Clearly, McCall's (2005) argument is method choice follows the epistemological decision of categorization, yet echoing Davis (2008) and Denis (2008), the field has divergent applications, resulting in varying quality. Lacking a clear methodological roadmap is not new territory for feminist researchers, who for decades have grappled with demonstrating that any method can be *feminist*, assuming its application and execution follows precepts of feminist epistemology (Oakley, 1998). However, it does point to an area where more contributions are needed considering the overwhelming popularity, and importance of intersectionality. Can any method belong to the intersectional corpus? If categorical indicators are to be used— are these co-constructed by researcher and respondent? Moreover, what does 'good' intersectional research look like? Intersectional research should not become bounded; McCall's (2005) argument for reinvigoration is sound, however, attention should be given to its practice. Without this there is

the risk that intersectionality becomes a figurehead in feminist research, or worse, that poorly executed research could do harm to the communities we work alongside. This is an especially critical consideration as this framework is increasingly adopted by more scholars.

One of the foremost recommendations among feminist scholars (primarily those working from the systemic point of view) is to explicitly acknowledge the dialogic between the experiential and structural formations of identity, at the individual and collective level. In so doing, the production and reproduction of institutionality may be revealed (Martin, 2004). However, it is critical that scalar differences not be collapsed. While related, intersectionality is manifested and differentially experienced at individual, structural, and representational nodes. The individual level helps us to understand lived realities; structural examinations encompass cultural/political systems which include people and their decisions, and the historicity and systematicity of relations of racism, sexism, and classism; and finally, representations may include public discourse, text, and other social imagery (Winker and Degele, 2011). Few studies that examine these differentiated levels exist, despite the recognition of their importance in the literature.

Winker and Degele (2011) lament this shortcoming, as well as discussing the nebulous nature of intersectional methodology. They outline an eight-step analytical process, that specifically aims to deal first with identity construction and the ‘doing of difference’ before moving on to an analysis of socio-structural and representational categories. This an excellent reference point on how to engage with intersectionality to produce empirical results, however, less clear is the connection between their approach and praxis. Indeed, Winker and Degele’s (2011) argument for empiricism is to offer greater theoretical contributions from intersectional work. This is not leveled as a critique of their process; it remains one of the strongest records in

the literature of how to integrate intersectionality in feminist scholarship. Yet, if an impetus from the academy for reinvigorating and making clear ‘how to’ conduct intersectional research exists, we cannot divorce the theoretical possibilities for intersectionality from its activist origins.

In the next section, I discuss the goodness of fit between intersectional research aims, and the use of oral narratives as method. The thrust of this argument is how to carry out research grounded in the principles of intersectionality, not to make claims that this qualitative approach is superior to other research methods. Rather, my intent is to illustrate a process of critical reflection within my own operationalization of intersectionality.

Oral History as Method

Oral histories as a method are well suited to intersectional research frames as they allow actors across identities to name their lived realities and construct a discourse of experience. These realities can be extrapolated across the analytical levels discussed in the preceding section—moving beyond the individual to socio-structural considerations. Furthermore, the use of oral histories can create the discursive space/time between researcher and respondent to elicit new vocabularies (DeVault, 1994) and accomplish DeVault’s call to be researchers who can listen ‘around’ and ‘beyond’ words (1990). The absence of women’s experiences and knowledges, she argued, was partially attributed to the practice of research, even in feminist-based projects, because of the limitation of contemporary language to portray women’s lives. Exploratory and conversational methods, like oral histories, make it possible for respondents to knit together known terminology, and still reflect that there is more to the story; the interviewer must be attuned to these silences or partial utterings, and not rush to fill them with suggested, incomplete verbiage. As Minister (1991, p. 32) notes, “We will not be able to hear and to

interpret what women value if we do not know how to watch and how to listen and how to speak with women as women.” These are critical considerations for researchers generally, and especially for those of us seeking to authentically engage in intersectional research and represent the complexity of actors in our work.

Generally, oral history interviews are distinct from other interview methods primarily by their length and focus on eliciting the everyday experience of actors, that can then be used to explore social events or phenomena. It is common for one interview to last from six to twelve hours, and given this, some researchers choose to schedule several sessions with each participant (Gluck and Patai, 2013). Within feminist research projects, the oral history method has gained popularity because it incorporates embodied human reality and establish settings where individuals may name their experiences/feelings and simultaneously reflect on meaning (Anderson et al., 1990). The focus on embodied realities, the constructions of knowledge from individual experiences (and thus, the implicit recognition of knowledges) are some of the reasons why this method is used by scholars who identify as post-positivist (Cary, 1999) and poststructuralist (Prins, 2006). When turned to the examination of women’s lives, this method can provide a “deeper understanding of women’s consciousness, historically and in the present” (Geiger, 1986, p. 335). Most importantly, it can be argued that oral histories explicitly recognize the expertise of women, via the privilege of voice, thus helping to challenge overt and covert forms of androcentrism in other research methods.

However, the issue of voice, and how it is interpreted and framed in research can be problematic. As feminist researchers engaging in this method we must reflect on issues of authorial representation, and the potential of essentializing these histories as simple ‘victory’ narratives (Cary, 1999). In this instance, narrative texts are mined for emancipatory declarations,

or revelations about oppressions that fit theoretical schematics—the ‘aha’ moment. This type of framing gives credence to tropes of victimhood or the prototypical third world woman (Haraway, 1989), an insidious form of neocolonialism (Mohanty, 2004). So too, we must recognize that our interpretations carry with them our own feminist political agendas; these are not commissioned autobiographies. The excerpts we choose to present in text resonate with our research foci, or political goals. Further, it is too easy to assume empowerment as an artifact of participation. Empowerment is highly contextual, and must be problematized as a nuanced form of power (Wright and Annes, 2016). Critical reflection on empowerment, and the use of engagement principles wherein communities help to determine dissemination strategies of their ‘voices’ may be part of a praxis extension of oral narrative research methods.

Problematizing voice also requires examining what was left unsaid, what was subverted or diluted to be congruent with hegemonic social norms (Schippers, 2007). Jacobs, Munro, and Adams (1995) discuss this as the phenomenon of double-voicedness, explaining that women’s discourse tends to follow two patterns. In the first, women authoritatively construct sequences of meaning or reflect on experiences, from their daily lives. In the second, they may frame their experiences within ideas or vocabulary that supports dominant socio-material relations between men and women. However, these are not parallel lines of voice, rather they intersect or contest with one another. As women grapple with experiences they may move between authoritative representations, and more muted or submissive explanatory frameworks— gendered performances of code-switching (Jacobs et al., 1995).

Elsewhere these interpretive dilemmas in women’s oral histories have been considered a way to investigate the presence and absence of gendered identities (Anderson and Jack, 1991) or to delve into the mutedness of women (DeVault, 1994). Much like double-voicedness, the

underlying suggestion is that how women speak about their lives is conditioned by concepts of hegemonic femininity (Schippers, 2007), accessible vocabulary and discursive imagery (DeVault, 1994). Together, these approaches establish a continuum where researchers must assess at least four facets of narrative episodes: what was said, what was said but possibly framed with masculinist language, what was muted or erased because our androcentric vocabularies do not possess appropriate verbiage, what was left unsaid because social norms of femininity label it inappropriate? There are likely many more stops along this continuum than those I have mentioned.

Examining and acknowledging these troubled spaces should occur during the interview, not only the analysis. Here is one area where feminist oral history has the potential to contribute to ideas of feminist methodology writ large— by explicit practice of opening and encouraging new, disruptive, and unsettled vocabularies. Unlike some other qualitative methods, oral history practice does not depend on the presentation of a series of pre-formulated questions that may contain language influenced by our own biases, or other hegemonic cultural verbiage. Instead, while probes are used, and clarification statements, the focus is on the elicitation of the individual's story; a dynamic, constructive, and fluid exercise. This establishes congruency with DeVault's appeal for feminist researchers to open new pathways of dialogue (1990). DeVault (1994) suggests that positivist epistemologies and research methods are bound within masculine discursive frames and that a primary project of feminist research should be to develop a vocabulary of experience. From her research examining the 'care' work of women in relation to feeding their families, she contends that we are lacking a 'language' of the everyday caring, emotional labor, work, and sociability that inform women's assumed responsibilities for the social reproduction of families and communities.

DeVault's push for methodological commitment to new discourses and dialogues, provides a direct link to Collins' (2000; 1998) discussion of why intersectional theoretical perspectives are needed in feminist research. Collins articulates one goal of interjecting black feminist thought, rather than the assumption of universal gender experience, is making visible the voice of the self-defined black women's standpoint. This reflects two empowerment strategies endemic to this framework: that of self-definition and self-valuation (Collins, 2000). The first is the act of rejecting externally defined controlling images of black womanhood that construct this identity as sexualized, obedient, and economically dependent on white men and replacing these stereotypes with new discursive imagery. The second is the process of creating the content of these new definitions within culturally specific and empowering narratives. Both are strategies of resistance, and challenge the 'Eurocentric masculinist knowledge validation process' (p.751). The call for new discursive imagery, and context specific, empowering narratives, helps to make the argument for the use of the oral history method in new intersectional research. The development and visibility of new standpoints is needed both within the academy and in more 'popular' publics. Furthermore, in the rejection of positivist paradigms Collins urges 'concrete experience as the criterion of meaning' privileging experiential realities over abstract theoretical positions (2000). This too, meshes with oral history methodological practice, wherein it is the richness of everyday experience that is sought. Last, though it may complicate analytical and interpretive work, the concepts of self-definition and self-valuation expose opportunities for contextualized empowerment (Yuval-Davis, 1994).

Moving beyond the collection of individual histories, as completed texts, collections of oral histories may also be thought of as narratives, socially constructed recordings of experiences that operate on varying scalar and temporal levels. The production and dissemination of

narratives can privilege one account of history and material relations over another (Gubrium, 2005), and their existence often may serve only the contemporary sociopolitical paradigm (Truillot, 1995). Thus, the possible production and recording of narratives from communities or identities who have been previously marginalized, could act as a counterhegemonic discourse, allowing for an examination by activists and academics into the systematicity of oppressions. Truillot (1995) contends that researchers must look deeper into the production of narratives, for those who may be silenced in this process, and thus reveal structures of power inequities. To reiterate, the collection of narratives (oral histories) can help to disrupt hegemonic discourse, and be used as a tool to address the absence of marginalized voices. For feminist researchers, this is the potential to ‘challenge the truth of official accounts,’ (Anderson et al., 1990, p. 95) and continue to ‘democratize the historical record’ (Shopes, 2011).

Indeed, the potential for oral history research to move beyond the individual and to systematically investigate collective issues has been a focus of some scholars for decades (Brunner, 1989; Jensen-Ryan, 2014). Scholars, such as Jensen-Ryan (2014), have successfully used oral histories to compile *project histories*, work aimed at understanding specific events or cultural tropes. This methodological development is important as it allows researchers interested in examining the structural and representational levels of intersectionality, greater flexibility to do so. However, whether at the individual, or collective level, the power of this method is the ability to document and disseminate the voices of people, communities, or identities who have been previously neglected— always paying attention to issues of representation, interpretation, and the problematics of voice.

I weave the arguments of DeVault (1994; 1990), Collins (2000; 1998) and others (Cho et al., 2013) together here to demonstrate the synergistic connections between my

operationalization of intersectionality as theory, and research practice. Intersectional frameworks include the standpoints of women and men of color, different classes, orientations, and variable social locations, as both investigative tool and social praxis to overcome the problematic past of reductionist gender and feminist research, and positivist traditions as a whole. To authentically and empirically examine these interlocked subjective identities without returning to fictive, separatist analytical categories, requires methods aimed at comprehensive identity examination. As I have outlined, oral histories can be used to purposefully allow actors across and within identities to construct discourses of their experience. They are also malleable to the creation of new vocabularies, and have empowerment potential.

In the following section, I outline a research project that utilizes oral history collection as the primary method. I reflect on my research process, and use excerpts from my findings to discuss how this method is helpful in operationalizing intersectionality as I have outlined above.

Sample Case

My work in two US locations, the first the metropolitan Albuquerque, New Mexico region, and the second, three contiguous and primarily Latino neighborhoods outside of Denver, Colorado, was focused on exploring the construction and negotiation of identity of women actors involved in environmental justice projects at the community level. Specifically, I examined how the hegemonic conceptions of femininity and masculinity (Schippers, 2007; Connell, 1987) operated within their community of residence, and further, how these hegemonic constructions shaped women's engagement strategies as it related to their work. Much like Krauss (1993) who investigated the interactions of gender, race, and class in informing women's perceptions of environmental (in)justice, I was interested in complicating women's identities as community

caretakers. Succinctly, it is important to examine the ways in which women's engagement may simultaneously be a source of personal empowerment (Wright and Annes, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 1994) and a cultural expectation of community maintenance (Gerstel, 2000; Little, 1997) Since which socio-material realities constitute empowerment and expectation(s) may vary across actor groups, this work is critical as scholars and activists problematize the feminization of environmental justice and community work.

In total, I collected ten oral histories from women participating in two separate organizations spread over a period of eight months. For both organizations that joined in this project with me—described in greater detail below—I first met with their leader or president to introduce myself. This meeting served as a two-way assessment: did the organization fit my research framework (actively engaged in community-based environmental justice work), and did the organization's leadership see enough value in this project to commit to several months of involvement? Moreover, in what ways could their participation lead to outcomes that improved their stance in the community, or some other measurable goal. Having this conversation before research started, and returning to it throughout data collection was one way I committed to social praxis. What resources could I bring to the table, what artifacts could be meaningfully used by these women individually or as a collective? A discussion of these outcomes follows later.

Group meetings with the entire organization were scheduled before beginning individual narratives, to discuss the project, what an 'oral history' is, and to allow them to ask questions of me. Fifty percent of the women from the New Mexico group ($n=3$) agreed to participate in the project; in Colorado, approximately ninety percent of the women participated ($n=7$). Somewhat surprisingly in one session, the majority of questions directed to me concerned my family of origin and relationship status. While at first I was taken aback, this conversation helped to reduce

social barriers between us, and collapse the binary of researcher and researched. The concept of building rapport with respondents is of critical importance to qualitative research practice generally, but within feminist research practice, the standard is higher. Given the intimacy of oral history collection, these meetings were integral part of creating comfort for the participants. Further, by having time to explain how oral histories are different than interviews, participants had a greater understanding of the research process, and their important role as experts. But these meetings were also a time for mutual self-disclosure (Minister, 1991) about personal and professional lives.

Individual interviews were conducted in two to three sessions each, given the length of the interviews and the focused intensity of oral history practice. I conducted these interviews in English and/or Spanish depending on the preference of the respondent. Their interviews were translated into both languages as appropriate. Each interviewee was given a copy of their transcript for final approval before I began my analytical process, ensuring to the best of my ability that their words were captured accurately— especially in cases where I would use an English translation for inclusion in future manuscripts. With eight of the women I shadowed them in their work, distinct from other episodes of participant observation. Instead during these sessions, I directly interacted with their constituents and learned about their engagement strategies with community members. For all but one participant, I spent time with their families, and in their homes. Community engagement ‘shadowing’ and home visits were critical to my research process for two reasons. First, it provided context for the information my respondents were sharing in our sessions. Second, like the group meeting question and answer session, it helped to create relational space between myself and the women working with me on this project. Additional methods included participant observation (meetings, social events, food

collection and distribution community gatherings, health clinic outreach, tabling fairs) and content analysis.

As first conceived, the intersectional identities I planned to examine were gender, femininity, and place, within an intracategorical analytical framework. However, as community connections were made, and women indicated interest in participation, it was clear that race/ethnicity and citizenship were also salient identities to this project. That additional identities come to the forefront can be part of an intersectional approach; the aim is self-definition. However, in the case of citizenship it was also due in part to my method choice—women leaders who are new immigrants, and in some instances, undocumented, were given the space to reflect on their experience, and chose to share these intersectional identities within their histories.

Group Profiles

The group in New Mexico, founded in 2014 by two women, has since grown to six board members (all women). The stated purpose of this organization is to distribute food—primarily fresh produce and dairy—to community residents who “may fall through the cracks.” In so doing, they feel they are specifically challenging the traditional food pantry model found in their community that requires proof that an individual’s or family’s income level falls within federal poverty guidelines for welfare assistance. Food is garnered from three sources: harvested from yards/gardens of community members, donations from grocery chains of food that cannot be sold, and surplus or degraded products that cannot be retailed from local farmers. Secondly, the group constructs ‘seed bombs’ for the use of the organization, and to distribute at events. Molded soil, organic materials, and seeds, the ‘seed bombs’ are suited for the greater Albuquerque climate, and are thrown into open spaces within the community, with specific emphasis on city

park land that is irrigated. Generally speaking, this region experiences extreme water shortages. The terminology the organization has adopted for this tactic is *guerrilla gardening*. Group members have described these efforts as a way of elevating awareness of food insecurity in the region, “daring the City to remove food growing in public spaces,” (Interview notes, 2016). For the first time, in the summer harvest season of 2016, they are beginning to train volunteers, to meet the scale of the food available, and nutritional demands of residents.

The second organization, is a group of eight Latina women whose constituency is monolingual Spanish speakers throughout the state of Colorado. Founded in 2005, this group began with two women volunteering their time, and has since grown to ten paid staff members. Their geographic emphasis is in three outer neighborhoods of Denver, Colorado, and in the last calendar year they have begun to expand their territory to Colorado Springs, a distance of approximately sixty-five miles. Collectively, these women are called *promotoras*, a term that signifies their advocacy within and for Latino communities, around issues of social and environmental justice. These promotoras are working on initiatives with Latina women on food security (access, availability, and culturally appropriate food ways), family based nutrition education, social determinants of health, and physical fitness. Latino men are not barred from participation; however, women are the target stakeholders given the cultural expectations of women’s role in food acquisition and cooking.

Findings

Relational Space and Identity Construction

I chose to collect oral narratives because of their potential to create epistemological space; because this method can communicate to participants the importance of their stories,

selves, and experiences. Through this information sharing process narrators can self-define, and self-validate (Collins, 2000; 1989), and have the opportunity to construct vocabularies, rather than being framed by androcentric and patriarchal linguistic conventions. Given my interest in examining how hegemonic concepts of masculinity and femininity have informed women's advocacy work, I conceived of these narratives as project histories (Jensen-Ryan, 2014). Project histories move beyond the individual to examine a specific event, or topic; in recent cases these compilations have been labeled as 'circumstantial activism' (Ballard and Banks, 2003) because their content has been used in policy decisions. Thus, in addition to probes that establish a chronology of life events, and daily time expenditures, I drafted topical probes on: geographic and community place-based characteristics, local political processes, community issue awareness/engagement, insider/outsider dynamics, public and private spaces, and the respondent's perception of sex and gender based expectations. The women who participated in this project are all still active members of their organizations, and their oral histories contain the series of life events that culminated in their current residency and engagement in community work.

It is important to understand that having topical probes, is not the same as an interview guide—oral histories are a dialogue. When you commit to oral history as method, some of the control over the direction of the interview, its cadence and content is given away to the participant (Minister, 1991; Riley, 2010). This is often an unspoken conundrum for feminist researchers, wanting to remove relational barriers between interviewer and participants, but maintain empirical control. However, to apply this method rigorously, to employ an intersectional analysis, requires that the subject (the knower) be the narrator (Minister, 1991). Feminist oral historians critique bounded interview guides as belonging to positivist traditions, a

framework grounded in masculine, Western discourse. Instead, a dialogic focus allows for “emergent meanings and opportunities to draw out narrators’ experiences,” (Minister, 1991: p. 37). This relates both to the formation of voice discussed previously, and more specifically how respondents frame and/or self-define subjectivities.

In this project, one example of emerging meanings being constructed occurred as women self-defined place based, race/ethnicity, and gender identities, and how these intersected in their lives. Some women framed place-based identity as *exclusionary* in their communities, because of their experiences of race/ethnicity discrimination, and how this sense of ‘not belonging’ shaped their engagement strategies. Elsewhere in the environmental justice literature (Brown and Ferguson, 1995; Burley et al., 2007; Devine-Wright, 2009; Krauss, 1993; Kurtz 2007), women’s engagement in community action is partially attributed to place based attachment or community affinities. Operationalizing intersectionality in this study led to a discussion of how exclusion based on place and race/ethnicity may inform women’s involvement in community-based environmental justice groups. In the excerpts that follow, I share from the narratives of women working in Colorado, US where they discuss insider/outsider dynamics in their geographic communities, and how it has impacted their engagement on behalf of their organization.

Lisa, forty-four years old, and one of the group founders discusses her frustration that the American (or Anglo) community does not think Latina women capable of leadership. She articulates her strength, and that of many of the women she works with, through shared experiences of leaving Mexico, feelings of isolation, and lack of ‘new’ community support.

When my husband left me here, it was like being born again. I did not want to come to the United States; I was really happy in my country. I didn’t know the language, I didn’t know how to drive. I knew no one. I was unhealthy, the food was no good. I prayed to God to let

me live, to be successful, and I would help my community. Now, I tell other women, *if you can run across the border, you can survive anything here*. But it is hard, new immigrants are neglected, and we are good at hiding. So, I know who I am: I'm a strong Latina woman and I don't need people to, you know, label me just because I'm a strong Mexican woman and Americans, unfortunately, haven't seen that. And so, everyone is like, "Where are you from? What do you do again?" because I lead. You know, they don't understand that part of me.

In contrast, Juliet, twenty-four years old, speaks of being pushed to the margins in both the Hispanic/Latino and American cultures; something she attributes to having been born in America, though she lived in Mexico for over eight years. While she self-identifies as Mexican, members of her community consider her to be Chicana, which she perceives as an insult. Doubly an outsider, in the excerpt below, Juliet discusses the difficulties she faces when interacting with the constituents of her organization, and with Anglo-Americans in professional settings.

Yes, so in the Hispanic community it's difficult because I consider myself a lot more Mexican than American. I relate more towards the Mexican culture than I ever could to American, just because of – just my lifestyle; just the environment that I'm around. I like it a lot more in the Mexican culture. But it's sad because they don't consider me Mexican because I was born here. So they will always say Chicana. But to me, Chicana is not a very good word, because I've seen what Chicanos are kind of like. First of all, they don't like to speak the language. They don't like to be considered Mexicans. They don't relate to that culture. And so I'm like, no, what do you mean? Like, we're the same. But they don't consider me the same. So it's curious because in the Hispanic community I have to defend myself as a Mexican. And in the American community, I still have to defend myself as a Mexican, but then I also have to say, you know

what, I understand everything you're – like where you come from, because at the end of the day I grew up here as well, so I have both. And so it's difficult because you do defend yourself in both areas.

Jasmine, twenty-seven years old, shares similar experiences to Lisa— feelings of isolation, fear—and despite her commitment to this community—place as exclusionary.

Every time I was using my four walls. I never know that I have a world close to me. You know, I was, like, in a little room and I never get out. Because I was really afraid... Everybody look at me like what she's doing here. And I say, okay, just breathe. Nothing's going to happen. I try to stand up really... I really want the people see me that I am strong. They think that because I'm Hispanic or Latino, that I'm nothing. The women I work with, I don't want them to feel that if you get out somebody's going to arrest them and take them back to Mexico. Things like that, yes. That's what I want. I want to be – I want to see in the future healthy and strong women.

Victoria, thirty-six years old, described a sense of security and belonging in her Denver, Colorado neighborhood, however, she also notes she has never lived elsewhere since immigrating from Mexico at sixteen. She recognizes feelings of fear and exclusion when working with members of her community regarding food insecurity and nutrition.

Well, I'm safe, because I live in a Hispanic community. And if I go to the store, I'm always going to see a Mexican or whatever. You know. I never been in other – I haven't ever been in another – like, another neighborhood. There's a lot of families...they still have a lot needs. They don't know –why is free? Because nothing is free. Are you guys going to charge later, or how this work? Because I think we never have something really free {laughter}. They are

still afraid. Like me in the beginning— I think they still afraid, for many reasons. But I think it's working on it. We're still working on it. Yes.

I share these excerpts not to draw theoretical connections to literatures outside the scope of this article, but to demonstrate why as feminist researchers we need to pay attention to how we practice intersectionality. The women above share a race/ethnicity and gender identity, but have very different experiences of belonging to the Latino community that intersects with geographic place. This suggests that gender, and race/ethnicity is not a clear determinant of their experiences. For Juliet, insider/outsider dynamics are at play within the ethnic community she identifies with, as well with her engagement with the 'American' community. She speaks of relating more to the Mexican culture, but her birthplace excludes her from full acceptance. Lisa, on the other hand only feels like her authentic self when she is engaging with the Latino community, personally or professionally. American culture is something to be survived. Interestingly, both women speak of needing to defend and/or prove themselves. Jasmine feels physically and socially isolated, but is working to overcome it to be a strong leader for her community. Victoria's sense of belonging is strongly tied to her residency in her ethnic neighborhood. Fixed monolithic categories would have treated these women as Latina females, failing to acknowledge how they've differentially experienced place, and the ways in which they interact with constituents and other communities. This differentiation is not tied to gender or ethnicity/race, but instead closely tied to experience.

Intersectionality and Praxis

Appealing to the need for a recommitment to social praxis is not unique to feminists writing on intersectionality, these calls are occurring throughout feminist literatures, and from

various methodologies. Johnston (2010; 2001) has written persuasively on the contributions to environmental justice research that can and should be made from a returning to commitment to social praxis, outlining a structure of participatory action anthropology that can work to deconstruct power inequities in research. Others write on the implications of a critical and engaged ethnographic approach and the possibility of this method to connect “explanatory power to praxis” (Clarke, 2010, p. 301). Clarke suggests that the abandonment of praxis, for theoretical purity has reduced the applicability and relevance of the field to social justice issues (p. 305). To recoup this relevance, she argues for explicit engaged ethnographies that “take seriously the insight of social criticism and that also examines the complexities by which seemingly ‘local people’ are on opposing sides of many issues.” (p. 310). Moreover, Merry (2005) suggests that when scholars begin to work on questions of social justice or human rights, the borderland between science and activism is breached; and that by studying these issues, our work becomes part of an external activist narrative.

Within the intersectionality literature, the conversation is similar. Emphasis on theory, and rigor, has displaced attention to advocacy and praxis. Social praxis is not a footnote to intersectionality, Crenshaw’s (1989) manifestation of this framework was to address egregious inequalities in the US legal system faced by African American women. Debates over constructionist versus systemic approaches (Ludvig, 2006; Prins, 2006), and anticategorical poststructuralism (Yuval Davis, 2006), have merit and enrich the field. However, it is necessary to interject a real critique into the literature for the return to praxis, lest intersectionality become a farcical ‘buzzword’. Collins and Bilge (2016) remind us as feminists working in intersectionality, we must catalyze social justice, inform policy, and commit to praxis.

To not treat social praxis as an afterthought requires intentionality from the very conception of research design. In my own case, an examination of community-based environmental justice action makes some praxis opportunities self-evident. Reports on projects, and other media ready artifacts are of immediate use. However, I would argue that feminist intersectional praxis requires attention to empowerment. To start, there must be focus on reciprocity (Olmedo, 1999). What value may come to the respondent, to the organization or community from participating? By conducting group meetings, and encouraging self-disclosure, I took one step toward reciprocity. I acknowledged who I was, my social location, my interest in this project. I invited their questions, and answered them honestly, ranging from time commitment, my personal life, their confidentiality, and why they were being invited to participate in something so ‘important.’ In this manner, these women were able to determine for themselves any individual tradeoffs. During these group meetings, we also discussed that as a part of the process they would be given their completed transcript and asked to reflect on it for missing or misleading information. These were their experiences, and once approved, each woman received a bound copy. We discussed the difference between a completed transcript, and how I would use themes which emerged from the collective narratives to write about women’s engagement in community-based environmental justice.

Initially we also shared ideas regarding how the completed oral histories might be used by the organizations to procure resources or further their mission. I shared my research timeline with both organizations, and scheduled tentative dates to discuss research outcomes. During these later meetings, we strategized about how to bring attention to the advocacy work performed by the collective, anonymizing testimonies that could be used in grant proposals or donor meetings, and sharing professional networks that could increase organizational impact.

These examples cost me little but my time, and were consistent with my training as a feminist researcher. However, understanding and contextualizing empowerment as social praxis, also meant negotiating what to do in situations when traumatic or troublesome information was shared. A central idea to the practice of feminist oral history is that the researcher is displaced as the center of the authority; instead, the narrator/knower through the process of sharing her constructed story may through active reflection gain some sense of transformation, individual empowerment, or therapeutic release (Benmayor, 2002). In my case, creating space and freedom for women to self-disclose about their lives, and construct meaning around their participation in community-based advocacy through an intersectional lens, meant receiving information about more than just successful events. It meant shared experiences of domestic abuse, sexual violence, fear of deportation, discrimination, troubled relationships with male family members who didn't approve of their roles, and poverty. Some of these events were in the past, and some were ongoing.

Anderson and Jack (1991) reflected on this dilemma in their feminist oral history work to discover women's roles in Washington farming communities. They discuss being somewhat unprepared for displays of emotion, and feeling bound by cultural norms of not 'prying' (p. 19), and therefore did not make room for women to dig deeper into these experiences, fearing that, given no training as a counselor, they would respond inappropriately. I wrestled with many of the same feelings. No amount of preliminary fieldwork could have prepared me for some women choosing to share episodes of extreme violence, or the continuous trauma connected to citizenship issues. I made every effort to gain these women's trust, and explain that the collecting their oral history means they are the experts—it is their story. I was committed to encouraging their authorial agency. But I did not presume this level of intimacy, and I was left with questions

of how to weave these traumatic episodes into my work. More importantly, to what degree should, or could I intervene in these cases?

Ultimately, I made two decisions. Indebted to the scholars like Anderson and Jack (1991) who came before me, though I could not have guessed the content of the traumatic information that would be shared, I knew disclosure was possible. Therefore, when these episodes occurred, I had the ability to let the dialogue continue, rather than try to maneuver around it or try to shift toward a topical probe. I am not a counselor, but training in feminist qualitative practice helped me to listen and encourage (Oakley, 1998). And perhaps, given this opportunity, some women did experience a degree of empowerment (Benmayor, 2002). Second, I offered resources where I had them, or researched opportunities where I did not; connections to victim's advocates, clinics, job fairs, resources for applying to school under the Development for the Relief of Alien Minors (DREAM) Act.

Conclusion

Operationalizing intersectionality requires intention throughout the research process—linking theory not just to method, but theory to useful praxis outcomes. In this paper, I have argued that the use of the oral history method within an intersectional research project has distinct contributions to make to feminist methodology; specifically, through making room for emergent vocabularies. Secondly, oral histories give respondents the opportunity to self-validate and self-define (Collins, 2000); thus, as part of a feminist methodological tool-kit there is potential to address the mutedness (DeVault, 1994) and double-voicedness (Jacobs et al., 1995) of women, as well as complicate the intersections of identity.

The use of the oral history method may also yield unexpected, and at times deeply traumatic, information as it did in my project. We can never be wholly prepared for the content of these admissions; however, as feminist researchers we must train ourselves not to rush these episodes by jumping to the next question in our interview guide to alleviate our own discomfort. In this paper, I also reflected on the issues of voice, and authorial representation. It is critical to remember that as researchers we do not create ‘empowerment’, but we can create space or encourage empowerment to happen through our method choice, and our engagement with communities. Furthermore, we need to consider social praxis not just as how our academic work might inform policy, but praxis on an individual level. This could include as it did in my work, finding community-based resources when they are requested, or alerting local agencies to unmet needs.

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CONCLUSION

Across these three chapters, I have demonstrated how intersectional frameworks can strengthen environmental justice research, and the examination into women's identity negotiation and construction. Throughout, my central argument has been that intersectionalist approaches are needed to understand not just how injustice is differentially experienced, but to examine and advocate for locally relevant praxis. Further, as we problematize women's engagement in environmental justice within their communities, the theoretical framework of hegemonic femininity can be used to examine impacts to individual actors and local level decision-making. Moreover, I have sought to contribute to the broader literatures on feminist methodology and operationalization by discussing my research process; outlining how intersectionality informed this dissertation from conception to conclusion. Within this final chapter, my aim is to synthesize these chapters into a cogent approach to questions of environmental justice, and to suggest directions for future research. I begin by first summarizing my key findings.

In chapter one, I was interested in the construction and maintenance of local hegemonic femininity as described by the experiences of the promotoras who were living and working in the Denver, Colorado metro area. Using episodes from their collected oral histories, I explored how these expectations and norms shaped their daily lives, and involvement in their environmental justice work. Secondly, I applied Schippers' (2007) conception of pariah femininity, which explores how women's performances of attributes that are locally masculine are viewed as a contamination threat to the hierarchal gender order. I drew on the arguments from Hercus (1999) and Carli (1999) that women who display assertiveness, or fail to use referent forms of power, are often sanctioned, to support my ideas that the work of these women in Denver may be perceived as pariah femininity.

This chapter accomplished two things. First, it contributed empirical results to the conversation of hegemonic femininity outside of the experiences of Western, white women. In so doing, it demonstrated the complexity of the ‘yardstick’ discussed by Collins (2004); wherein women of color face hegemonic norms of femininity within their own culture, and against the universal standard of white women. These women shared stories of being framed as outsiders within their own local Latino community for their public work outside the home (e.g. being masculine therefore pariah femininity), while at the same time negotiating engagement with the Anglo community where they perceived discrimination based on their feminine physical appearances.

Second, the findings in this chapter helped to problematize the concept of activist mothering (Naples, 1992) and the idea that women who engage in environmental justice advocacy, do so as an extension of their motherhood identity—a site that is relatively safe in the public, political realm (Bell and Braun, 2010). Instead, I found that the local construction of hegemonic femininity strongly enforced the historical gendered divide between the private and public spheres, such that even though these women were working on behalf of their community, it transgressed hegemonic norms and was somewhat censured. Moreover, when these women spoke about their motivation to be engaged in community action, though all seven women were mothers, other experiences and identities were their primary motivators, such as individual empowerment or wanting to help women who were struggling, because they themselves had struggled.

Chapter Two examined the theoretical complementarity of environmental justice and intersectional frames. I discussed the need for intersectionality within environmental scholarship to better examine the heterogeneity of communities (Rivers et al., 2010); second as an intentional

strategy for amplifying the agency of community actors (Cameron, 2012). Here, I drew on the oral histories of women from both organizations to demonstrate how intersectional identities inform notions of justice, individual and community empowerment, and calls for remediation. Weaving in the framework of hegemonic femininity, I explored how these norms can shape not only the strategies of individual actors, but so too, the distribution of resources to local organizations. I suggested where women are congruent with norms of hegemonic femininity, they are more likely to have access to resources/networks to support their organizations. Conversely, where women transgress standards of hegemonic femininity, access may be circumscribed.

The key contributions of this chapter were first, its illumination of how the complexity of identities informs prognostic demands (Benford, 2005), and local action; second, the examination of how the feminization of environmental justice causes may impact communities. In addition to experiences of gender and femininity, across both organizations women articulated notions of what empowerment or justice would look like for their communities through a lens of what I termed citizenship subjectivities. The women in New Mexico were much more focused on ideations of localization and deregulation; the women in Denver, Colorado sought access and participation in governance structures and public resources. Aside from demonstrating that intersectional frames can enrich praxis efforts, these findings support the call for integrative theoretical approaches that broaden environmental justice research to new communities and identities (Schlosberg, 2013). While some scholars have argued the incorporation of new communities beyond investigations of race and class may serve to dilute this framework (Getches and Pellow, 2002), I agree with Taylor (2000, 1997) that the failure to recognize how

intersectional identities shape environmental experiences has “deprived us of a deeper understanding” of activism and concern in this country (p. 16).

Secondly, chapter two began a conversation of the potential impacts of the feminization of environmental justice to communities. While the potential for women to be empowered through environmental justice advocacy exists (Ackelsberg, 1988; Kurtz, 2009), we must also ask what implications there could be from environmental justice platforms being allocated to women, and the idea that these issues are associated with women’s constructed role of domestic caretaker. If environmental justice practice is coded as feminine, then we must question the consequences of hegemonic and pariah performances. Hegemonic femininity would tell us that environmental justice practice supports the ascendancy of men; in my study the women of the New Mexico organization self-identified as stay at home mothers, and rejected any collective/strategic identity associations that could threaten the masculine archetype. In contrast the women of Denver, Colorado, were more closely associated with pariah femininity, such that their work threatened hegemonic masculinity in their community, and in what they termed the Anglo or American community. Thus, in both cases, it can be argued these organizations and their communities may be stunted by continued gender inequalities.

Taken together the findings of these two chapters demonstrate that there is much more we need to understand about women actors and their role in environmental justice practice, and that this understanding is unquestionably enriched by the application of intersectional frameworks and the theory of hegemonic femininity. Crenshaw’s (1989) original supposition was that a framework that could examine the unique lived experiences of African American women in the United States—one that made room for the interactions of race, gender, and class—was lacking. And if we do not understand the distinct manifestation of oppression through these intersected

identities, strategies of disruption will be ineffective. Intersectionality provides theoretical wherewithal, and a nuanced view of empowerment (Wright and Annes, 2016) and praxis (Cho et al., 2013). Within this dissertation, intersectionality made it possible to examine the differential operationalization of environmental justice claims in these two communities, and how greatly the motivations, strategies of engagement, and overall experiences of these women varied, despite shared foci of their organizations. I have argued throughout these chapters that the aims of intersectional and environmental justice scholarship share a focus of social transformation and empowerment. However, I agree with other scholars (Krauss, 1993; Kurtz 2009; Pulido, 1996) that environmental justice research must attend to the social construction of environmental inequalities through integration with theoretical frameworks that examine the institutionality (and intersectionality) of racism, sexism, classism, and the whole host of –isms.

Further, using Schippers' (2007) framework and the arguments of Collins' (2004), we can investigate women's engagement in community level environmental justice work to be part of a set of social practices that may support or threaten the hierarchical gender order. As an empirical tool, the construct of hegemonic femininity can help to problematize local power dynamics by examining the practices of male dominance, and how femininities support or contest these (Schippers, 2007). Moreover, as this dissertation explored, this has implications at the individual and organizational level. It is critical to understand that it is not just individuals who embody or transgress these standards, but that these expectations operate as powerful discursive and decision-making tools within communities. The framework of hegemonic femininity may not always be an appropriate lens to examine environmental justice practice. However, it is essential to a tool-kit that investigates women's participation or engagement as political acts that blur the dichotomy between private and public spheres (Kurtz, 2007) as

expected community labor (Little, 1997), or within concepts of activist mothering (Bell and Braun, 2010; Naples, 1992).

Chapter Three of this dissertation was a contribution of a different sort. Here I was interested in addressing the critique of intersectionality's muddled application in feminist scholarship (Davis, 2008), through sharing my own research process. Foremost my attention was on connecting intersectional theory to oral history method, and reasserting praxis as a central tenet of intersectional scholarship. As argumentation over theory has increased, the focus on praxis has attenuated (Cho et al., 2013; Collins and Bilge, 2016); further few examples of the practice of method and analysis exist in the literature (Winker and Degele, 2011). Theoretical debates may allude to increasing sophistication and new directions in scholarship; however, they also draw rancor, as an example of the poststructuralist preoccupation by feminist theorists working in the Global North who have coopted the frame, and are less concerned in critical work (Collins and Bilge, 2016).

I argued in this chapter that the oral history method is uniquely suited to feminist intersectional research, and that the collection and dissemination of alternative narratives has the potential to disrupt hegemonic discursive records, and therefore contribute to community empowerment (praxis). I also drew attention to how the method of feminist oral histories can create space for women to self-define and self-validate their own experiences (Collins, 2000), which could lead to individual empowerment. I linked this to a discussion of DeVault's (1994) work that suggests that positivist epistemologies and research methods are often bound within masculine discursive frames, and thus a primary project of feminist research should be to develop a vocabulary of experience. Further, I explored the argument that as a feminist researcher engaging in this method I must reflect on issues of authorial representation, and the

potential of essentializing histories as simple ‘victory’ narratives (Cary, 1999). In this instance, narrative texts are mined for emancipatory declarations, or revelations about oppressions that fit theoretical schematics—the ‘aha’ moment.

The findings of this chapter supported the idea that intersectionalist oral histories as method have the potential to make room for new vocabularies, and allow actors to name realities that complicate race, gender, class, and other identity binaries. In this chapter, women who shared gender and race/ethnicity identities still communicated very different experiences of belonging to the Latino community, as framed by their sense of geographic place. Linking back to the other two chapters in this dissertation, this supports the use of oral histories in environmental justice research, where methodological invigoration is needed to support the widening scope of this frame, socially and geographically. A second key contribution of this chapter, was my reflection on how the method of oral history may give forth information that you as a researcher were not prepared for. In my case this included revelations of domestic violence and sexual assault. I shared how I used my feminist training to encourage this dialogue once it started, rather than maneuver around it, lest the women perceive that it was somehow inappropriate. Further, where I could, I shared resources and networks that could be of assistance. In this example, this has led to a community effort to train more bilingual advocates to accompany women when they wish to report incidents of violence, as the local police department currently has no paid translators on staff.

Future Research

Empowerment for Whom?

I have suggested throughout this dissertation that empowerment for individuals and communities is complex. We must examine the ways in which women's engagement may simultaneously be a source of personal empowerment (Yuval-Davis, 1994) and a cultural expectation of community maintenance (Gerstel, 2000; Little, 1997). Further, intersectional frameworks are critical to understanding that which socio-material realities constitute empowerment (Wright and Annes, 2016) and expectation(s) will vary across actor groups (Collins and Bilge, 2016). The findings in the above chapters support these statements, but I wish to explicitly point to the need for more intersectional empirical investigations of the connections between hegemonic femininity and women's community engagement, whether and how this engagement may trouble the divide between the private and public spheres, and the notion of activist mothering (Bell and Braun, 2010; Naples, 1992).

A focus on activist mothering that does not include an application of hegemonic (and pariah femininity) may confer the responsibility of saving the world to feminine identities. Further, it obfuscates alternative rhetorical and political strategies for women, and fails to disrupt hegemonic masculinity by keeping intact aspects of the hierarchal gender order. Moreover, there may be communities wherein being a mother does not equate to some level of community political access. As I demonstrated, some women drew on their motherhood identities as a source of motivation for advocacy, while others were censured by their communities for being mothers who worked outside the home. In the latter case, these women were paid for their environmental justice engagement, and perhaps this contributed to community response, as hegemonic and

pariah femininities were tightly coupled with socio-spatial distinction of the private and the public.

An interesting, but unexplored finding from this research was the intersection of age with the other identities of the women involved in these organizations. In Colorado, women ranged in age from 24-44 years old; in New Mexico, the age cohort was tighter, with women ranging in age between 34-36 years old. In the latter case, it may be that the organization's collective identity as a place for stay-at-home mothers clustered women in similar life stages. In Colorado, participant observation and oral history data suggest that the economic dependency of older women on their families may have precluded community-based environmental justice action—embodying pariah femininity may be too great a risk. Returning to this intersection for future research is important to better understand how certain gender inequalities may be associated with age. Moreover, from my interview transcripts it is possible to locate at which life stage each woman began to do community-based advocacy work— with their current organizations, or previous efforts— making it possible to examine earlier age cohorts and life events (e.g. motherhood, educational attainment, etc.), and community intergenerational effects.

Contextualized investigations of hegemonic femininities are needed to allow us to examine the persistence of local level gender inequalities, how these identities create or diminish space for women's engagement, and how these varying forms of engagement support or disrupt hegemonic masculinity. For example, if women who speak up for their community risk censure, but in the immediate case it is unlikely that men will begin advocating for food security concerns because food acquisition and preparation is considered a women's issue— who will take the lead? This creates one more 'double-bind' for women. We also must ask the implications to communities of the social disciplining of women actors who perform characteristics of pariah

femininity— what happens to these communities when these women retire? Second, in the immediate, how does the feminization of environmental justice (and the feminization of these actors) impede environmental justice and sustainability outcomes?

Based on the content of their oral narratives, it is likely that the women working in Albuquerque, New Mexico and Denver, Colorado, will continue to engage in their community endeavors for the foreseeable future despite their reported fatigue. However, these actors are unique, and we cannot guarantee that the women who would come after them, will persevere in environmental justice engagement if faced with a similar suite of gender inequalities (nor should they). We cannot assume women will continue to ‘do what needs to be done’ (Naples, 1991), just as we cannot assume that the gendered discrimination currently facing these advocates will become a historical artifact in a more equitable culture to come. This suggests that we need to better understand the relationship between persistent gender inequalities and community-level sustainability, in the immediate and long term. As O’Byrne et al., (2015, p. 55) argue, the field of sustainability must integrate an understanding of the “social patterns and change that will be essential to overcome problems of unsustainability.” By this I mean not only the critical work that examines the disparate impact of environmental injustice (Schlosberg, 2013) or climate change (MacGregor, 2009), on women and children, but the discursive production and reproduction of gendered inequalities that circumscribe the potential success of sustainability/justice actors and issues.

As I demonstrated in these chapters, the feminization of environmental justice (and other sustainability) issues is likely. Regardless if this feminization is coded as ‘hegemonic’ or ‘pariah’ (Schippers, 2007), it impacts the distribution of socioeconomic and political resources to these platforms and their constituents— it precludes empowerment for actors, and environmental

justice is attenuated. Therefore, part of achieving community-level environmental justice and sustainability rests in disrupting the local hegemonic masculinity that subordinates men, women, and our environment.

APPENDIX

Oral History Probes: These ‘questions’ represent a partial list of pieces of dialogue that appeared in conversation with respondents. The self-description and warm-up was shared with participants as a tool to build their comfort.

Thematic Areas:

Self-Description and Warm up

- a. How long have you lived in this community?
- b. How would you describe your typical day? Work? Family? Friends?
- c. When you have free time, how do you like to spend it?
- d. What is your educational background?
- e. Part of an oral history is understanding an event, or timeline, from the perspective of someone who lived through it. To do that, it would be helpful for you to describe yourself—using your own words: Things like:
 - i. Where you grew up
 - ii. Your family
 - iii. Major personal or professional events
 - iv. Milestones
 - v. Things that interest you
 - vi. How you would describe yourself
 - vii. What motivates you

Issue Awareness

- a. When did you first become aware of the food issues/mining activities in your community?
- b. Can you remember where you found the information? What was your first impression?
- c. What about this is important to you? How would you describe your motivation for being involved? Has this changed at all over the years? If so, how?
- d. How would you describe this issue to a newcomer? What do I need to know? Who are the stakeholders? Main concerns?
- e. What roles or activities are open to community members about this issue?
- f. Does this differ at all by men or women? How so?
- g. Have you ever attended any regional meetings about this topic? Was anything new or different there?

Geographic Place

Lifelong residents:

- a. Describe to me what it was like growing up here.
- b. To you, what are the defining characteristics of this place?

- c. What do you appreciate about living here? What do you wish could change?
- d. Do you feel that this is a very connected community? Disconnected? How so?
- e. What are some of the traditions of this place?
- f. Have any of these traditions changed?
- g. What is new? How do you feel about this? Do you think others agree/disagree?
- h. Do you think there are expectations for how people should act/dress/behave as community members here?
- i. Are there times you can think of when you felt particularly included or excluded from this place? Or examples of friends/family.
- j. Have you ever wished to lived somewhere else (if a job etc, was not an issue)? Why or why not?
- k. In what ways has living in this community impacted how you think about food/mining?
- l. How does this carry-over to your work in your organization?
- a. **Newer Residents**
 - a. What drew you to this community?
 - b. How would you describe your experience when you first moved here?
 - c. How is this community alike or different from the last place you lived?
 - d. To you, what are the defining characteristics of this place?
 - e. What do you appreciate about living here? What do you wish could change?
 - f. Do you feel that this is a very connected community? Disconnected? How so?
 - g. What are some of the traditions of this place?
 - h. Have any of these traditions changed?
 - i. What is new? How do you feel about this? Do you think others agree/disagree?
 - j. Do you think there are expectations for how people should act/dress/behave as community members here?
 - k. Are there times you can think of when you felt particularly included or excluded from this place? Or examples of friends/family.
 - l. Have you ever wished to lived somewhere else (if a job etc, was not an issue)? Why or why not?
 - m. In what ways has living in this community impacted how you think about food/mining?
 - n. How does this carry-over to your work in your organization?
 - o. Do you think your approach/actions would be different if you still lived in _____?

Community Issue Involvement

- a. What is your current role in the community/organization regarding food/mining?
- b. Have you ever been involved in other organizations or causes? What did that look like?
- c. How would you describe the current agenda of your group? Goals, concerns, how you would measure success, etc.
- d. What are the strategies you are using right now to gain attention?

- e. Do you have any funding sources?
- f. What is the membership of your group like? Constituents?
- g. What are the current resources your group has?
- h. What are the current needs?

Political Process

- a. How would you describe the attention/acceptance of your issue in this community?
- b. Do you have support from political leaders? Have you always? What has this looked like?
- c. How are decisions made in this community? Officially and unofficially?
- d. What do you think is the cause, or causes of this situation?
- e. What would be the remedy, or solution? Is there one?

Perceptions and Expectations

Prompt: In this section, I am really interested in learning how you feel your experiences or involvement in food/mining have been impacted by being a woman. Also how being a woman in this community/place feels. :

- a. Generally, how do you feel your life experiences have been shaped by your gender? Examples, advantage, disadvantage.
- b. What about specifically in this community? Expectations for men versus women? Opportunities? Repercussions?
- c. Do you think being a woman impacts the way you think about food/mining? Why or why not?
- d. What about your involvement or motivation in the current organization?
- e. How would you describe your work on this issue? What would be the implications if you stopped giving your time/resources?
- f. If you think about times you have acted on behalf of this issue, or group, did you feel that there were certain actions that were expected of you? Or appropriate/inappropriate because you are a woman?
- g. Thinking along those same lines, what about times that being a woman working on this issue was an advantage? Disadvantage?
- h. How has working on this issue made you feel? Has this changed over time? In what ways?
- i. If you could change how you approached this problem, or any specific strategies, would you? Why or why not?
- j. Describe to me a particular accomplishment of this group. How did it happen? What was your role?
- k. How about a time when something did not go as planned, or was unsuccessful?

1. Is it possible to compare your organization to any others in this community? Or are there others groups working on a similar issue? Do you think there are differences in how those organizations are received?

Reflection

- a. What have I missed?
- b. What do I need to understand better about the challenges and opportunities your issue faces in this community?
- c. What do I need to understand better about your experiences as a woman in this place, and as a woman working on food/mining?
- d. What else do I need to know about your work, and your role(s) in this community?
- e. Is there more you would like to tell me about how you think decisions are made, or strategies that are useful to you?

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