Intersectional Oral Histories: Method and Praxis in Environmental Justice Research

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Research Aims

Link frameworks of intersectionality and hegemonic femininity to women’s community-based EJ practice to examine:

1. How are hegemonic femininity and masculinity operating at the local level?
2. How do these cultural expectations shape women’s strategies?
3. How does compliance/contestations of these norms impact the distribution of resources to EJ actors and their communities?
Intersectional Identities and EJ Research

▪ Qs:
  – How do intersectional identities inform community-level EJ claims?
  – How does the congruence/contestation of local hegemonic norms impact resource access at the organizational level?

▪ Gaps addressed:
  – Heterogeneity of communities, how environment/justice is operationalized, and potential for empowerment.
  – Examining ‘if’ and ‘how’ the feminization of EJ impacts organizations.
  – Frameworks that can examine the sociality of modern EJ issues.
Oral History as Method and Praxis

- Increased length of time with respondent; opportunity to expand breadth and depth of content
- A tool for eliciting everyday experiences in socially constructed experience and meaning-making and reflection
- Congruence with feminist epistemologies, and feminist research practice
- Intersectionality: Multiple Identities: Multiple Vocabularies
  - Self-definition and self-validation
  - Addressing the mutedness of women
Case Study

Denver, Colorado

- 8 Latina women: *promotoras*
- Primary focus: new immigrant and mono-lingual Spanish communities
- Issue areas: Food security, nutrition, resource access, healthy communities.
- $N = 7$
Case Study
Albuquerque, New Mexico

- 6 women: 5 white, 1 African American
- Primary focus: Central ABQ, and rural East Mountains.
- Issue Areas: food redistribution, rural access, guerilla gardening, community gardening for low SES, taste education.
- N = 3
Findings

1. Communitarian vs. Recognition justice and empowerment claims.

2. Emergent meanings: place as exclusionary

3. Embracing hegemonic femininity in New Mexico.
   a. “If we were men, would people have taken us more seriously, sooner?” (Elizabeth)

4. Failing to meet the mark: insider/outsider dynamics in Colorado.
   a. “There was no winning the battle, no matter how we set it up.” (Mona)
Contributions to EJ Research Practice

- Operationalizing intersectionality
  “If you cannot handle my truth, then you don’t belong with me” (Lisa)

- Weaving praxis throughout
  – Dealing with the unexpected
  – Creating space for potential empowerment
  – Citizen Science engagement
Conclusion

- Intersectionalist approaches are needed in EJ and sustainability research to understand the diversity of experience and to establish locally relevant praxis.
- The feminization of EJ actors and platforms has significant repercussions in communities examining (and disrupting) hegemonic norms is of theoretical and practical consequence.
Citations


