

research snapshot

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Environmental Justice Is not Possible Without Women's Voices

What is this research about?

The process of creating environmental justice is complex. Across the world, environmental injustices exist in the form of structural and spatial inequities. Much of this is fuelled by the global economic system and the impact of activities by those who are the wealthiest. However, people who are oppressed as a result of their race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, ability or other characteristics are the most vulnerable in this system. Environmental justice cannot occur without a space where their voices are an equal part of the movement for change. This includes women of colour, who continue to be active leaders in their own communities but remain invisible in mainstream politics.

What did the researcher do?

The researcher looked at different ideas on a just and sustainable environment. She also noted important differences between the United States, where racism and segregation are more visible, and Canada. The researcher highlighted Canada's few incidences of historical segregation, but also referred to data on income disparity and the spatial concentration of ethnic communities today. These data showed that the

What you need to know:

Environmental justice cannot occur without engaging those who are the most affected. This includes women, who act as leaders in the community to support change.

severity of poverty has increased, making the oppression more visible. Finally, the researcher looked at the ways that women are undermined so that their actions are not seen as credible. She suggested methods to support all women's voices for environmental justice.

What did the researcher find?

The researcher found that women in the environmental justice movement were unfairly judged, sometimes unconsciously, through:

- Backgrounding: Seeing the work of women as less valuable even though society depends on it, much like housework.
- Radical exclusion: Emphasizing women's differences rather than the qualities they share with others.

- Incorporation: Measuring women using the standards assumed for men, such as valuing rationality over other ways of knowing.
- Instrumentalism: Seeing women as having no purpose other than to serve others.
- Homogenization: Seeing women as all the same.

In order to support environmental justice, the researcher found that action is needed both at the community-level and globally. A number of strategies were noted, including:

- Feminist participation methods: Women's voices must be a part of the movement for social change.
- Resistance to ideologies: To promote gender equity, challenge ideas that discredit women.
- Cross-cultural collaborations: Environmental justice should be built across cultural differences and across borders.
- Re-invest in community infrastructure: Support and funding should be designated for women's social planning groups to deal with issues like poverty, racism and gender inequity.
- Include cultural production: Use the creative arts to encourage political action.

How can you use this research?

This research may be used by community organizations seeking to deal with local environmental problems. It offers insight on ways to engage the public with social change in an equitable fashion. It also may be useful for policy

makers to support the creation and funding of community partners.

About the Researcher

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