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Women's Voices for the Earth:
A Discourse Analysis of Gendered, Environmental Media Advocacy¹

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ABSTRACT

Women's Voices for the Earth (WVE), a Missoula based, nationally recognized non-profit, empowers women to advocate against toxic chemicals that cause individual and community health hazards. There is little analysis of the intersection of women's and environmental subjugation and how these intersections influence women's environmental organizations. My research examines the influence of ecofeminist ideology, as framed by Karen Warren's ecofeminist and class analysis, in WVE's online discourse, primarily social media. To do so I apply a Foucaultian discourse analysis to WVE's online publications, and compare that to an analysis of the online presence of Toxics Action Center (TAC), a non-gendered activist group with a similar mission. Results show the presence of women's voices impact whether and how women specific issues are addressed. Moreover, in WVE's discourse gender issues are discussed within the context of traditional gendered roles, which ultimately empowers these roles. The presence of women's voices also connects with an increased discussion of intersectionality and social justice issues including race and class. While both WVE and TAC work within our established financial and political system, WVE also encourages activism through anti-consumption.

INTRODUCTION

Across race, class, ability, age, and nationality, women often suffer disproportionately to environmental risks and harms (Warren 2000). Moreover, human sensitivity to chemicals is strongly gender and age related, meaning women, and the children and elderly they often care for, are most sensitive (Warren 2000). These issues are compounded by increased risk to environmental issues by those living in poverty and racial minorities (Warren 2000). Yet, these voices are rarely heard in environmental discussions. Because of this lack of voice, I chose to explore a discipline that combines these oppressions: ecofeminism, and an environmental organization that emphasizes women's voices: Women's Voices for the Earth (WVE). WVE is run by women and provides a platform for women to become activists in environmental issues. Within an ecofeminist reading of WVE's discourse, I concentrated on the presence of traditional gender roles, environmental consumption, class, and race. Ultimately, my research examined the influence of ecofeminist ideology in the discourse of a gendered environmental group, and its implications for environmental and social justice.

To examine an ecofeminist voice I focused on a specifically gendered environmental group: Women's Voices for the Earth or WVE. WVE started in Missoula in 1995, recognizing that many environmental organizations at that time did not include women in leadership positions (Women's Voices for the Earth 2015e). WVE's mission is to "amplify women's voices to eliminate the toxic chemicals that harm our health and communities" (Women's Voices for the Earth 2015h).

For comparison, I chose to look at a non-gendered organization: the Toxics Action Center, or TAC. TAC started in New England in 1987 and works with communities to provide “skills and resources needed to prevent or clean up pollution at a local level,” similar goals to WVE, though without a gendered lens (Toxics Action Center 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

My readings gave me a foundation for understanding ecofeminism, specifically the ideology of Karen Warren. Ecofeminism examines the connections between the systems, practices, and policies which devalue, subvert, and make invisible both nature and women (Warren 2000). Most ecofeminist perspectives argue that women and the environment are united by oppressive frameworks, specifically androcentrism, a human, male-centered relationship of the world, which “explain, maintain, and ‘justify’” this unjust domination (Tong 2014: 255).

Western, academic, ecofeminist ideology, the focus of my research, is rooted in the environmental movement that started with Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 (Tong 2014). However, the systems and thought processes that ecofeminism criticizes originate long before, with male superiority of Judeo-Christian creation myths (Tong 2014). Ecofeminism also criticizes the view of the Earth as mechanic and lifeless, something to be controlled by humans, originating in the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions (Tong 2014). Enlightenment philosophy privileged the mind over body, and reason over nature, meaning humans viewed themselves as superior to nature (Tong 2014).

Though ecofeminism, like all feminism, begins with gender as the central category for fighting oppression, it recognizes that full liberation cannot happen until all oppressions, not those limited to humans, are ended (Warren 1997). The combined fight against oppressions means that feminism is “intrinsically a movement to end racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, anti-Semitism, and ethnocentrism” (Warren 1997: 4). The interconnections of these issues are

recognized by the concept of intersectionality, which comes from women of color feminisms (Tong 2014). Intersectionality refers to “particular forms of intersecting oppressions” (Tong 2014). Intersectionality also recognizes that individuals can be part of several subordinated groups, and as such experience very individual types of oppression (Tong 2014).

Ecofeminist philosopher Karen Warren examines the intersection of ecofeminist oppressions socioeconomically, linguistically, and politically. Socioeconomic interconnections focus on the similar exploitation of women’s labor and bodies with that of nature (Warren 2000). For example, within our society women’s work is traditionally nurturing and caregiving, especially in the home. This work is often devalued because this “private” life is not considered to be a financial or social contribution (Carrigan 2006).

Linguistic interconnections originate in the understanding that “the language one uses mirrors and reflects one’s concept of oneself and one’s world” and can be mutually reinforcing (Warren 2000: 27). This language can be seen in the use of “pejorative animal terms”, like chick, pet, cow, whale, used to describe women in a way that puts women in the inferior position of animals (Warren 2000:27). Similarly, feminizing nature means that “Mother Nature” is “virgin,” or “fertile” and when “she” is controlled, she is “raped” or “mastered” (Warren 2000:27). Because this language reflects how we understand ourselves and the world we live in, understanding linguistic connections is crucial in understanding and re-enforcing inequalities (Warren 2000).

Political interconnections examine ecofeminism in the context of political power structures and the possibility present in grassroots and social movements (Warren 2000). Ecofeminism is tied to grassroots movements because it questions the hierarchical structures of

our political systems (Warren 2000). It is a social movement in that ecofeminism demands action and the direct application of theory (Warren 2000).

Along with these interconnections, ecofeminism focuses on the daily lived-experience of women rather than abstract, systemic, theoretical worldviews (Warren 2000). This daily lived-experience often centers around women as mothers and the primary homemakers (Carrigan 2006). As homemakers, women form an interesting relationship with consumption. Carrigan argues that consumption helps create narratives of the self, and can be an empowering process because it allows women to define the role of mother they want to fulfill (2006).

In the 1970s, academics began focusing on consumption in studying social interactions leading to an interest in environmentally-related consumption (Dobscha 1993). The consumption studies focused on the impacts of environmental knowledge and attitudes in consumption patterns, and the influences of practices that tried to encourage environmentally friendly consumption (Dobscha 1993). While some ecofeminists approved of the focus on environmental actions, they critiqued the rational, dualistic, and reactive ideologies of this environmental action that still ignored the interdependence of humans and nature (Dobscha 1993). The strongest critique is the tendency for environmentally related consumption to ignore the central environmental problem: overconsumption (Dobscha 1993). Moreover, environmentally related consumption puts pressure on women to make environmentally correct choices, thus giving the impression that women have “full responsibility for a crisis created primarily by the structure she is so oppressed by” (Dobscha 1993: 39). This pressure and responsibility is both disempowering and potentially dangerous to women stuck in this system.

Another form of disempowerment relates to discourse and its ties to power relationships. Discourse analyst Michael Foucault theorizes that power exists everywhere and is ubiquitous in

all relationships (1977). This ubiquitous power in turn produces knowledge, or discourse, in any form of communication (Foucault 1980). Discourse is significant because it has material consequences (Foucault 1977). Foucault feels consequences are not specifically bad (Foucault 1977). However, van Dijk, a critical discourse analyst, argues that these consequences are dangerous when one group controls knowledge, excluding others from discourse and therefore a means of power (van Dijk 1993).

Warren also examines this exclusion from power, pointing to the exclusion of women's voices from the discourse as the "invisibility of women," especially surrounding issues of women's livelihoods and environmental problems (Warren 1997). The absence of women's voices is methodologically problematic because it ignores the realities of a significant proportion of the population (Warren 1997). The absence is conceptually significant because it keeps these voices out of mainstream discussion (Warren 1997). It is politically significant in understanding the need for women in grassroots movements, and ethically significant because it leads to the subjugation of "women, people of color, children, and nature" (Warren 1997: 14). This absence is significant because exclusion from discourse leads to a lack of power (Foucault 1980).

While the research discussed connections between discourse and gender relations, and ecofeminism and environmentally related consumption, my literature review found no examination of the discourse around women advocating in issues of environmentally related consumption. Moreover, there is little examination of the power of discourse to impact other marginalized groups. Therefore, my research examines the influence of ecofeminist ideology in the discourse of a gendered environmental group, and its implications for environmental and social justice.

METHODS

In my examination of the discourse of Women's Voices for the Earth and Toxics Action Center, I focus on the power relationships: who controls knowledge, who is excluded from the creation of knowledge, and the impacts control of discourse has on the issues both organizations address and the audiences they reach out to. My research focuses on text and online images produced by these two organizations.

In this entire research process I considered three main questions: How is gender explicitly and implicitly present in or lacking from WVE's compared to TAC's discourse?; How do WVE's and TAC's discourse discuss the environment and natural world?; How does WVE's discourse discuss class and race as compared to TAC's discourse?

The discourse analysis done in this project is a qualitative sociological research method that examines a small sample of discourse to gain an intimate understanding of the groups being studied (Neuman 2007). Because my literature review revealed a lack of previous research and theory on my topic, qualitative research allows me to discover themes from the ground up, starting where the public interacts with this discourse (Neuman 2007). The flexibility in a qualitative, in-depth method allows me to examine the complex intricacies and narrative of the work WVE and TAC publish (Neuman 2007).

My data came from the public online websites and Facebook pages of TAC and WVE. Some of the collected discourse is written by the organizations themselves, especially that on their websites. I collected the "Mission", "Vision", "Core Values", and "History" statements on

both websites. These statements explain the reasons for the organizations to form as well as the guiding principles upon which they operate and therefore provide a strong example of underlying theories.

Because both groups actively use social media to reach their audience, I focused on their Facebook pages. I started by examining the “General Overview” information on both pages. On the Facebook Wall of both organizations, I examined posts by the groups themselves, and links they shared to discourse written by other groups and individuals. I limited the data gathered from these Facebook wall posts from January 1 to April 15 of 2015. With all posts that linked to another site I followed the link and analyzed that discourse as well. Ultimately I collected a total of 52 discourse items.

Within this selection I chose posts discussing mothering and reproduction, class and race, and the greater environment. I chose to focus on mothering and reproduction because toxins, the focus of these two groups, pass from mother to child in uterus; children, often cared for by mothers, are especially prone to environmental toxins; and mothers are often the consumers of household products (Warren 2000; Carrigan 2006). The posts regarding the world, earth, and environment as a whole allowed me to examine how groups connected small individual actions to the larger environment as a whole. I focused on class and race to examine the discourse around marginalized groups, exploring the role of intersectionality in these issues. This intersectionality is directly connected to Warren’s framework of socioeconomic interconnections (Warren 2000).

I began with open coding, reading all of my data from both organizations and noting reoccurring themes (Neuman 2007). I followed this with axial coding, focusing on the themes and how they interacted both within each organization’s discourse, and between the discourses

(Neuman 2007). I applied selective coding and found examples from within my data that accurately reflected the themes and relationships I discovered (Neuman 2007). These selective examples are discussed in my “Results” section as a reflection of the themes in my data.

RESULTS

Gender

To examine gender I looked at a common framework that subordinates women: the association of men with culture, reason, business, and politics, the “public” life, compared to the association of women with the lesser-valued home, family, and personal relationships, the “private” life. WVE places a significant emphasis on the private life, targeting women as homemakers, mothers, and consumers, a very gendered approach. As an example, the WVE Facebook post on Jan. 8 features “Inspirational Woman of the Month Leah Segedie.” Her blog, entitled Mamavation, encourages “teaching moms to be healthy because moms will in turn teach families to be healthy” (Women’s Voices for the Earth 2015g).

A woman’s right to healthy reproduction, and therefore motherhood is also frequently used in many of WVE’s campaigns. A post on April 13th shows an infographic of the “Secret Toxic Chemicals in Tampons” with “exposure concerns” including “reproductive harm” (Women’s Voices for the Earth Facebook 2015f). This demonstrates WVE’s focus on women based on reproductive health.

WVE targets and empowers women as consumers. They bring women’s personal purchasing patterns, for example feminine hygiene and beauty products, into the public eye. WVE focuses on female consumers in targeting specific products, including their January 30th post about Always brand tampons. They inform their audience of the dangers of these products through infographics and link to chances for direct action in a form email sent to the director of Proctor & Gamble (Women’s Voices for the Earth Facebook 2015b). WVE also highlights the

work of Leah Segedie, who along with starting the Mamavation blog also founded the “ShiftCon Social Media Conference” which brought together many different groups to “shift how we eat, raise our families, and [impact] our environment” (Women’s Voices for the Earth 2015g). In reaching consumers WVE aims to impact the \$3 billion dollar industry of feminine care products (Women’s Voices for the Earth 2015d).

However, WVE not only works with women as consumers but as anti-consumers. Their website and social media provide free, cheap, and easy Non-Toxic DIY Green Cleaning, and Green Mama recipes on both their website and Facebook page. Most of these recipes use common household ingredients like olive oil, aloe vera, vinegar and baking soda (Women’s Voices for the Earth 2015i). This provides an alternative to toxic products that are not exclusive like many expensive “green” products.

Another interesting gendered approach is using reproductive women’s experiences as a form of activism. On February 6th, WVE linked to an article titled “Breast-Feeding Women Descend on Walmart after Store Shames Nursing Mom” (TakePart 2015). This story highlights a group of women who walked through Walmart nursing and handing out information about the rights of nursing women in protest of a store employee that told a mother to stop feeding her baby and cover up (TakePart 2015). It was rare in my data, but striking that women used motherhood to claim their rights as mothers.

In contrast to WVE’s focus on gender, TAC is non-gendered and sees everyone as activists, striving to influence public policy. They argue that “everyone has the right to clean air and clean water, that our communities should be sustainable and that our government should operate responsively and democratically” (Toxics Action Center 2015). This focus on “everyone,” and “our,” is explicitly non-gendered.

Compared to WVE's intense focus on individual women and groups of women, the only woman focused on as content in TAC's discourse is Jacqueline Patterson who is the keynote speaker for the Local Environmental Action event TAC advertises (Local Environmental Action 2015). However, many of the pictures and write-ups of events TAC puts on Facebook feature a significant number of women. A March 16th post includes a photo with the caption "Toxics Action Center's Sylvia Broude and MCAN's Carol Oldham address the 28th annual Local Environmental Action conference attendees" (Toxics Action Center Facebook 2015d). These types of posts indicate women are actively involved in TAC's actions, but TAC doesn't draw attention to their gender.

The one direct reference to mothers in all of TAC's Facebook discourse is a photo on March 7th captioned: "Maine mothers, health professionals, firefighters and state representatives gathered in Augusta today to introduce legislation to require toxic chemical disclose in consumer products!" (Toxics Action Center Facebook 2015c). In this caption, the mothers are the only group that is specifically gendered, and are separated from the others. This separation implies that the "health professionals, firefighters, and state representatives" are not framed as parents (Toxics Action Center Facebook 2015c).

TAC does focus on women's reproduction indirectly by concentrating on families and children. Their Facebook post on March 20th includes an action link to "Help Keep the Toxic Free Families Act Strong!" (Toxics Action Center Facebook 2015e). This act aims to "protect Vermont's kids from toxic chemicals" (Toxics Action Center Facebook 2015e). This focus on children in their online discourse reflects their "About Us" statement that "our children should be able to grow up free of exposure to dangerous chemicals, and with every opportunity to thrive" (Toxics Action Center 2015). While this focus on families and children is important, the absence

of women in this sort of discourse downplays their role in reproduction and family care, and the impact toxins have in those populations.

Class and Race

WVE has a considerable amount of discourse focused on class and race. Both are explicitly mentioned in WVE's "History": "Seeing that many environmental organizations at the time failed to include women in leadership positions and did not fully recognize the systemic connections between health, class, race, and the environment, WVE sought to create a new environmental organization led by women" (Women's Voices for the Earth 2015e). This demonstrated a focus on advocating for often unheard voices.

WVE's online and Facebook discourse reflects the relationship between the impacts of toxins and class and race. Their Facebook page includes a post on February 15th that links to an article about toxins in dollar stores affecting lower income shoppers (Women's Voices for the Earth Facebook 2015d). Another post on January 21st critiques adds for (toxic) household cleaners that "make your home smell like you're rich" (Women's Voices for the Earth Facebook 2015a). WVE directly acknowledges that the "approach of shopping your way out of the problem just isn't a reality for many people" (Women's Voices for the Earth 2015a) and they provide a solution in their Non-Toxic DIY Green Cleaning, and Green Mama recipes. The introduction to WVE's "Chem Fatale" report on toxic chemicals in feminine care products addresses increased exposure to chemicals in "douches, sprays, washes, and wipes" that are used more often by African American, Latina, and low-income women (Women's Voices for the Earth 2015d).

When considering race as its own factor, WVE's discourse also focuses on racial and ethnic diversity. In the data I collected from WVE, almost half of the images of people on the

Facebook wall showed people of color. Some of WVE's faces of color include a post on January 19th with Martin Luther King Jr. and a link to an article discussing chemical "vulnerability zones" and how they are much more likely to affect African Americans and Latinos (Coming Clean 2015). On February 12th WVE also spotlights Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to Congress, first black person to run for president on a major party ticket leader, and implicit feminist: "I want to be remembered as a black woman who lived in the 20th century, who dared to be herself" (Women's Voices for the Earth Facebook 2015c). Other minorities are also represented. For instance, in the post on February 22nd of "February's Inspirational Woman" features Chanh Hang, Vietnamese American Salon Owner, who they celebrate as a leader of the movement in rights for salon care workers (Women's Voices for the Earth 2015c). A Vietnamese immigrant, Hang worked her way through salons to become a salon owner, who now advocates for the rights of her employees and others in the industry (Women's Voices for the Earth 2015c).

WVE not only spotlights leaders of these groups, but also caters to diverse, and potentially vulnerable audiences, by translating some of their materials. Their "Beauty and Its Beast" report on toxins in salons, highlighted in a post on January 11th, is available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese (Women's Voices for the Earth 2015b). The Vietnamese translation is especially significant because many salon workers are originally from Vietnam and may have limited English speaking and reading skills.

Interestingly, WVE's images of race are definitely intentional. Unlike TAC's photos, which document the events TAC is involved in, WVE's are created or selected with specific intention, created into infographs and highlighting important individuals of color.

In comparison to WVE's diversity, TAC's wall photos had a significant majority of white faces. While TAC's discourse only contained two discussions on class or race, these discussions

were strong points about intersectionality. One was an article posted on January 5th about sociology professor Daniel Faber's research on environmental justice (Toxics Action Center Facebook 2015a). The second was a link on February 2nd to a speech by Jacqueline Patterson's, the keynote speaker for TAC's Local Environmental Action Conference (Good Jobs Green Jobs 2013). Patterson is the Director of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program and co-founder of Women of Color United (Toxics Action Center Facebook 2015b). Her speech, and the outline for her workshop in the conference on "Environmental Justice and When #BlackLivesMatter" are great examples of working to combine experiences of discrimination with the environmental movement (Local Environmental Action 2015). Both of these posts examined the relationships between class, race, and gender in considering environmental justice.

One key component missing in the discourse of both WVE and TAC is any indigenous perspectives. Both groups address, to varying degrees, people of color and Latinos/as. WVE even directly targets immigrants to the United States when reaching out to salon workers. The absence of indigenous perspective, though, marginalizes a significant minority population.

Environment

Both organizations deal directly with toxins as a component of environmental issues. They break their work on environmental issues into a local focus, the "workplace, home, and communities" (Women's Voices for the Earth 2015h) and "residents [and] neighborhoods" (Toxics Action Center 2015). WVE expands to discuss a "healthy environment" (Women's Voices for the Earth 2015h) as a broader mission.

The logo for WVE is an image of the Earth, oceans as negative space, and landmasses in a mossy green (Women's Voices for the Earth 2015f). Supporting this globe is the silhouette of a woman from the shoulders up, long hair, and arms reaching around the southern hemisphere

(Women's Voices for the Earth 2015f). This image shows a striking physical connection between women and the planet, or the environment. However, other than this visible discourse, neither group had many direct linguistic ties between women and the environment. The only example I found was in a video listed by TAC of a speech by Jacqueline Patterson (Good Jobs Green Jobs 2013). Her address to the Good Jobs, Green Jobs conference discusses "fertile lands now barren" which discusses environmental issues using terms commonly used for women's reproductive topics (Good Jobs Green Jobs 2013).

DISCUSSION

I discovered several broad themes in how WVE and TAC connect gender and other social justice issues in their discourse: intersectionality, home as the environment, gender roles, and challenging social and political structures.

The intersectionality of gender with race and class is an integral part of WVE's discourse. In several articles WVE recognizes that Asian American salon workers have different needs than white middle-class stay-at-home mothers. Not only do they recognize this, they provide different resources and means of activism, from links to contacting politicians and company executives to DIY recipes. Another example is the advertisement encouraging consumers to try to "smell like you are rich," which targets the lower class and provides a "solution" to appear to be upper class, something that WVE addresses as being problematic. By recognizing intersectionality, WVE provides empowers the unheard voices of minorities and the lower-class.

Intersectionality was also visible in the workshop listed by TAC which looks at the #BlackLivesMatter movement and how it relates to environmental action. While TAC's discourse did include intersectionality, it was mostly through the often repeated announcements of the same event: Jacqueline Patterson's speech. Patterson's inclusion as the only woman of color both on the Facebook wall and in the plan for the event itself seemed to position Patterson as a token figure to demonstrate a connection between race and TAC's environmental work.

Acknowledging the intersections of oppression is key to ecofeminism, and is essential in working toward environmental and social justice so that all injustices are addressed. With this in mind, the absence of indigenous voices in both organizations means that both ignore indigenous

perspectives. The silence on the Native American populations illustrates the relationship between an absence in discourse and a lack of power. Warren would see this as hugely problematic, because for her true ecofeminism lies in the overlap of feminism, the natural environment, and importantly, the local and indigenous perspective (Warren 2000).

Neither WVE nor TAC had much ecofeminist linguistic interconnection between women and the environment. I expected to find this connection in WVE's discourse especially considering how its name seems to speak directly to ecofeminism. The only example of linguistic connections between women and the natural world came from TAC's link to Jacqueline Patterson's speech at the Good Jobs, Green Jobs conference where she spoke of the earth in terms related to women's reproduction including "fertile".

Yet, while neither organization spoke specifically to the connection between women and the environment as a whole, there is still an indirect discourse connecting the two. As ecofeminist Cynthia Hamilton states, women are "responding not to 'nature' in the abstract but to their homes and the health of their children" (Hamilton 1990). WVE speaks directly to women relating to and acting based on this notion of home. TAC in contrast places little focus on homes and children, with a broader view of the environment as a whole with non gendered connection.

Using gender roles as a tool to approach and engage the audience was another major theme. In targeting women as mothers and homemakers, WVE reinforces these roles. However, as second wave feminists have taught us, the personal is political. WVE exemplifies this by bringing the private lives of women, feminine hygiene, childcare, and beauty products into the public eye. WVE uses these gender specific affairs as an avenue for women to advocate for their own lives. Educating women about consumption presents women with the possibility to "manage their situation in ways that empower them to bring about change," allowing for women to access

power (Carrigan 2006: 1128). While limited, encouraging activism through reproduction and mothering topics places value on traditional gender roles emphasizing their importance and the power women can have within them.

Warren argues that we need to dismantle current systems of oppression to create a truly just reality, but also recognizes that “sometimes the present-day socioeconomic realities of patriarchal domination are such that a decision one makes to ensure the survival of women (which has ecofeminist support) may also keep intact patriarchal structures (which, in principle, does not have ecofeminist support)” (Warren 2000: 45). For example, supporting women in the domestic economy helps women live comfortably, but within the context of a domestic economy which is patriarchal and exploitative. WVE’s work seems to follow this recognition, supporting women where they are at currently.

TAC does little to challenge the patriarchal or hierarchical structure in our society. They take a traditionally political approach to reach their goals, working within the political system, organizing workshops on how to be better citizens, and focusing on government level changes. WVE also works within the political and financial system by lobbying for government change and approaching companies directly. However, WVE’s approach regularly empowers marginalized voices. Moreover, by providing DIY alternatives WVE challenges both a sole focus on government intervention and the need for consumerism itself. In doing so, WVE works both within the system and challenges its structure from the outside.

CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately, neither of these organizations represents ecofeminism perfectly. However, as Warren points out it is impossible to make “ecologically perfect decisions” within our current unjust social structures (Warren 2000). Therefore, small movements toward change are necessary. These are visible in WVE’s discourse. It may seem obvious, but the presence or absence of women’s voices impacts the way women’s issues are discussed, or avoided. WVE uses women’s voices to empower women to be actively involved by starting within traditional gender roles rather than breaking through gender conformity. Also, both groups do work within our established political, economic, and social structures, but WVE goes beyond that by providing chances for environmental activism outside of our traditional economy.

Activism outside the traditional structures is important because as feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether warned in 1975, women should be suspicious of having a symbolic role in environmental movements framed around the “dominant culture’s perspective” (Dobsha 1993: 36). Rather, for environmentally just action, we need to listen to oppressed voices and work with them both within and in challenging our traditional social, political, and economic systems.

Challenging the traditional structure is important for both gender and environmental movements. As Warren argues, the solutions to gender and environmental problems lie in understanding the interconnections between the two (2000). Neither gender issues nor environmental problems will be solved without addressing both.

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