

“Revise and resubmit” response letter, first of two. Citation for final article: Perkins, Tracy. 2012. “Women’s Pathways Into Activism: Rethinking the Women’s Environmental Justice Narrative in California’s San Joaquin Valley.” *Organization & Environment*, 25(1):76-94.

Dear [REDACTED] and Reviewers,

Thank you so much for your thoughtful comments on my paper. I have incorporated many of your suggestions and the paper is stronger for it. The most important changes are: 1) I reorganized the literature review into its own section and added a sub-section on social movement scholarship, 2) I complemented the existing text on how my data contradict prior scholarship with new text on the factors that better describe women’s actual pathways into environmental justice activism in the San Joaquin Valley, and, 3) I cut text from the earlier significance and discussion sections, and moved the remainder into the literature review and a new section on future research.

Due to space constraints, I was unable to give as much space in the text as I would have liked to each of the suggestions. Therefore, I prioritized additions that most directly impact my theoretical claims and the evidence used to support them.

I grouped similar reviewer comments together (in italics) and am responding to them below. Thank you again for your time, and I look forward to hearing back from you about these changes.

Sincerely,
The author

1. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Given how entrenched the traditional women’s narrative is in environmental justice scholarship, I continue to feel that it is important to name this narrative, identify its key elements, question them through my empirical data, ask what could have contributed to the creation of this narrative, and discuss what kind of political work the narrative does. However, I also agree with this reviewer’s comments that it would greatly strengthen the paper to include more information about what *does* lead women to become environmental justice activists. Therefore, I have divided my findings section into two subsections: one summarizes ways in which my data contradicts prior scholarship, and the second adds new text expanding on the interviewees’

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actual pathways into environmental justice activism.

2.

I added a new section on social movements scholarship and its treatment of the question of entry into social movement participation. While there are an unlimited array of themes that could be included in relation to my subject matter, I have limited the literature review to: environmental justice scholarship on pathways into activism, social movement scholarship on recruitment into social movement participation, and narrative analysis. Some of the themes suggested above overlap with what I explored but were not as directly useful. For example, while environmental justice scholars often emphasize the empowerment that comes from becoming an environmental justice activist, my interviews suggest that empowerment can come before, during or after a woman becomes an environmental justice activist, or, it can continue to grow over time as she becomes more involved. This is a slightly different question than that of pathways into activism.

3.

I have taken to heart the reviewers’ comments that I overstepped the boundaries of my data in the final section of the paper, which speculated on why my findings might be different from

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those of many prior scholars, and discussed the significance of my findings. To respond, I have done two things: 1) I carefully edited the text about the overemphasis on the traditional women’s environmental justice narrative. This is now framed more clearly as a possibility rather than as a certainty. I examined my choice of words, cut text, and reformulated the remaining content into a new section on future research. That is to say, the question about why my findings differ from those of other scholars is now framed as a question for further research. I think that the reviewers will find that this addresses their concerns. 2) I moved the scholarly work that was discussed in the significance section into the literature review.


Although my original submission referred to the women’s traditional environmental justice narrative as dominant in both scholarly circles and the general public, I have removed the references to the general public in this version of the paper. Therefore, this paper now focuses exclusively on scholarly depictions of maternal concerns that trigger women’s environmental justice activism. In ideal circumstances this should be unaffected by the media’s representation of the subject. Discussing the media’s role in fostering a motherhood-oriented version of women’s role in environmental justice activism is therefore outside of the scope of this paper.

4. [REDACTED]

My response to comment # 3 discusses one way in which I have corrected for the problem described by the underlined words in the above paragraph. I have also been careful to comment only on the parts of their data gathering that the authors themselves make explicit in their articles.


5. [REDACTED]

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The reviewer leaves unclear what constitutes a “local” as compared to an “outsider.” In the Bell and Braun article, the distinction is made according to coalfield residents and non-coalfield residents. As described in my original paper’s methods and significance sections, my paper does in fact exclude all environmental justice activists who do not actually live in the region being analyzed. The majority of them, like Bell and Braun’s coalfield residents, have spent “at least half of their lives and/or the majority of their childhood in the coalfield region” (2010, pg. 801). To clarify, I have added more text to the methods section and describe the women interviewees in greater detail.

Activists living in the San Joaquin Valley have a strong sense of place and are sensitive to the problems that can come when activists living in other parts of the state or country try to assert leadership on issues specific to the San Joaquin Valley. This is an interesting phenomenon, but not the subject of my article. Instead, my contribution is in problematizing our understanding of women’s pathways into environmental justice activism.



This comment suggests a conflation of the category of “local” and the categories of “poor” and “uneducated” not appropriate to the people I interviewed. Aside from the point that wealthy people and the middle-class also live in poor regions such as the San Joaquin Valley, some of the women I interviewed grew up poor in the San Joaquin Valley but were able to go to college and only then learned about environmental justice. This is apparent in the excerpt about the woman whose uncles were farmworkers and whose childhood playground was frequented by crop-dusters. Only after going to college and getting a new perspective did she realized how many pesticides she must have been exposed to as a child. I am considering writing a second article that uses my data to problematize the overly simple “insider” vs. “outsider” and “grassroots” vs. “professional” frames that permeate much environmental justice scholarship.

This said, it is true that there is variation within the local population of San Joaquin Valley environmental justice activists. I now address this more directly in my discussion section. However, the main thrust of the paper remains an analysis of the 25 women interviewed as a group. My contribution is to show, like many feminist scholars who analyze other topics, that women’s experiences are varied and cannot well be summed up with broad generalizations about the importance of motherhood. This is an important contribution to the environmental justice scholarship, which has tended to focus on a common experience of motherhood rather than exploring exceptions to that trend (though of course, in my data the situation is reversed -

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women reporting on the importance of motherhood to their activism are the exception, not the norm).

I also replaced “Juliana’s Story” with “Mary’s Story” as the first individual narrative of the findings section. Where Juliana moved to the San Joaquin Valley as an adolescent, Mary grew up there. This does not change my data or my interpretation of it, but does showcase the pathway into environmental justice activism of a more obviously “local” woman that nonetheless differs substantially from the traditional women’s environmental justice narrative.

6. 

As described in response to comment number five, I am not re-orienting my paper around “locals” as compared to “non-locals.” Nonetheless, this comment still seems relevant to my topic and I respond to it below.

- a. The first part of this comment perplexes me, as my original text did cover the ways in which “the activist-mother identity is used strategically by many local women activists as a legitimation for their activism.” I have moved this content more fully into the literature review section. (Earlier, much of it was in the ‘significance’ section.) In addition to the citations I already had for Epstein (1995), Krauss (1993b), and Peebles and DeLucca (2006), I have added citations to the suggested works by Bell and Braun (2010), Kaplan (1997) and Brown and Ferguson (1995). This topic is also discussed again in the ‘future research’ section.
- b. I added a reference to Krauss’s concept of motherhood as a “resource of resistance” to my literature review section. Here, there is a discussion of how environmental justice scholars depict women as using their experiences in the home – as opposed to experiences in the broader political world – to inform their activism.
- c. Most importantly, I added a small new section to my literature review that covers the scholarship on women activists who report undertaking work to protect their communities, and not just their own children, as a form of mothering (as described by Naples through the concept of activist mothering). I have also added a statement in my findings section (see pg. 23) that indicates that my interviewees generally did not describe their community work in this way. While my data does not support this interpretation of women’s activism, I think this new content strengthens the paper by anticipating and answering a question that readers might have.

7. 

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[REDACTED]

I have made these changes.

8. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I created a separate literature review section, and subdivided it according to environmental justice scholarship, social movement scholarship, and narrative analysis scholarship. I cut my original introduction and replaced it with a paragraph on the San Joaquin Valley. I did not go into the level of detail suggested by the reviewer, as it would reduce the amount of space available to delve into the theoretical details of the study.

9. [REDACTED]

I made this change.

10. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

I added some of this information to my methods section, but again did not go into as much detail as requested by the reviewer, in order to save space to present and discuss my findings.

11. [REDACTED]

I added the table as suggested, according to the limitations of my data. However, I did not include the “local” or “non-local” category because I found it to be too complex to put in the form of a table. Instead of trying to fit this information into a table, I have added descriptive text to the body of the methods section.
