

Institutionalizing a Racialized and Gendered Environmentalism in State Agencies

The environmental history of the United States is nuanced with lasting ideologies of dispossession, exclusion, and intolerance. Although environmental state agencies have been commissioned to conserve and protect the natural environment, it is enmeshed with this history and formed a particular environmental ideology. As the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was established, environmental regulatory agencies (ERAs) were given the responsibility and authority to enforce and implement environmental policies. Considering these aspects of ERAs and the discourses that inform them, it is necessary to investigate how an environmentalism that is both racialized and gendered was constructed. Further, the natural environment became a tool of power and is used as political leverage that functions to perpetuate American ideals soliciting acculturation of U.S. citizens. However, there is some contention as these same agencies have developed towards maintaining a diverse employee population within ERAs itself. This leads to question how a racialized and gendered environmentalism in ERAs have been institutionalized and navigated while simultaneously creating goals to recruit diverse employees in the midst of conflicting ideologies.

Environmental state agencies are mandated to ensure the environment is sustainably managed. Those employed in these environmental state agencies are given the role of environmental enforcers and regulators. A gendered and racialized history plays a role in how a certain environmentalism emerges and is institutionalized in ERAs. In this paper, I give a brief sociohistorical overview of main concepts embedded in the environmentalism that informs environmental institutions. Then, I analyze how environmental agencies have gone about improving diversity in their environmental workforce using a feminist political ecology

framework; I also analyze a case study to assess how women of color (WOC) experience and perceive these discourses. I conclude with a discussion of the study overall and briefly give a normative assessment for ERAs to better facilitate the workplace to increase and retain people of color (POC) in their organization.

Establishing A Gendered and Racialized Environmentalism in The U.S.

Environmental Ideologies

The theory of ideology posits ideologies lead to a false consciousness, a mystification of complex systems, and fetishism (Rehmann, 2007). In regards to environmentalism and its foundational ideology, it produces these same ideological characteristics. The environmental ideology has been constructed to reproduce class, race, and gender divisions. Concepts like eugenics and neo-Malthusianism continue to undergird discussions of carrying capacity and the necessity of population control. Pseudoscience, like phrenology, developed to perpetuate racial inequality and subjugation. There were many narratives that created an orthodoxy around forms of difference, resulting in horizontal and vertical stratifications of class, race, gender, and sexuality. In this paper I aim to critically analyze how women of color have been subjected to this ideology and how they navigate the roles created for them to fill in the environmental workforce. Specifically, I am looking at the structure of environmental regulatory agencies (ERAs) and how this ideology manifests. For the purposes of this paper, I will define ideology as “the integrated assertions, theories and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program” (Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary, n.d.).

Women as Subjects

Moore et al. (2007), Germic (2001), and Sturgeon (2009) present American ideals to be founded on notions of nature and the natural. Although nature was an exterior experience it was internalized culturally, forming American culture and identity (Peterson, 2001). According to Sturgeon (2009), the United States has used nature as a tool of power and is used as political leverage. An example of this is the argument that the health of nature is threatened by the presence of immigrants and overpopulation, and this becomes the justification of exclusionary political action (Hultgran, 2014). Also, concepts of nature have been used to establish physical barriers (i.e., national parks, public parks, and actual walls) that perpetuate social hierarchies and exclusion (Germic, 2001). Hultgran (2014) claims nature is a social construction influenced by American ideologies of “nationhood, gender, race, sexuality, and class.” These scholars advocate thorough investigation of ideologies of nature throughout American history to understand how the environment became the means to frame and justify exclusion.

Society today reflects lasting consequences of colonialism. Settler Colonialism is the invisible hand that guides and determines societal dynamics. Marx’s primitive accumulation, through a feminist political ecology lens, expands on how women have been made into subjects and subsequently subject to identity, a process of proletarianization (Federichi, 2004; Glassman, 2006). There have been many events that have led to the proletarianization and subjugation of women. The witch hunts, for example, often go unmentioned in analyses. It fully encompasses and demonstrates the paradoxical nature of strategies purposed to reduce women to property and their bodies as natural resources (Federichi, 2004; McKittrick, 2006; Glassman 2006).

Federici (2014) retells the unfolding of the Age of Reason and its lasting effects. Instigated by white male bourgeois, it introduced mechanical philosophy which developed a discourse around the capitalist goal of creating a subject that is controllable, the world proletariat. Mechanical

theories chimed on the dichotomy of the mind and body (Cartesian dualism), opposing long held beliefs of magic and the supernatural in favor of rationalization. This attack on magic through intellectualism was deliberate considering women were viewed as repertoires of magical practices (most notably healing); mechanical philosophy was a springboard for the witch-hunts. Further, this process assessed what was “normal” and prescribed that the body was a machine that needed to be managed through a combination of selves (i.e., self-discipline, self-management, self-regulation). This progressed the alienation of women from society and subsequently established the “machine” as a model of social behavior.

The most salient comment Federici (2014) makes is that the witch-hunts are necessary to “understand the misogyny that still characterizes institutional practice and male-female relations” (164). It models how elite dominate classes functioned to delegitimize women’s agency, render them powerless, and prescribe an ideal for women to become. In sum, natural science developed to restructure power relations, centralizing the needs and interests of white male elites. Institutions were designed to facilitate their success and consequently created a peripheral space for those who did not belong to this minor interest group. It was white male elites that defined the role of women and POC in society.

Defining Ideal Femininity

These ideas formed roles for people to fill. In regards to women, they were given characteristics that further defined their role as environmental subjects. In the United States, white women were privileged to wonder about the wonder communicated by white male naturalists (Taylor, 2016). Although they were given this freedom to theorize masculinity, it contributed to placing women subordinate to men; it reified that women were simply insignificant in relation to their male counterparts. Women embodied knowledge but were often discouraged from

intellectual pursuits, being seen as frail and unable to have the capacity to deeply investigate scientific matters (Taylor, 2016). Women's destiny was thus tethered to childcare and other domestic work; gendered labor was unaccounted for and rarely thought of as a type of commodified labor (Taylor, 2016; Federici, 2004; McKittrick, 2006; Glassman, 2006; Ahmed, 2012).

In tandem to the natural environment, women's bodies and humanity were minimized while the purpose of the natural environment was to serve as a resource. Both women and the natural environment were hyper feminized and mystified when convenient (Taylor, 2016). There are shifting baselines of characterizations and standards of femininity and masculinity superimposed onto both women and the natural environment. During the 1800s, by necessity, women in the frontier took on tasks that were considered men's labor; there are spaces where the line of gender division is blurred, an example of acceptable gender fluidity as a convenience (Taylor, 2016).

Effects of Masculinity

Men and masculinity continue to structure interactions and valuation of the natural environment. Thomas Aquinas evoked a divine synecdoche that created a gendered hierarchy of the natural and supernatural (Keller, 2010). I mention Aquinas because his philosophy combined concepts of masculinity, superiority, and divinity that justified a stratified society. Analyses of what it means to be human continued to grow in this direction. Francis Bacon, René Descartes, John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and more contributors developed an ideology that positioned "human and non-human nature" in relation to the philosophies of white male elite thought (Keller, 2010; Taylor, 2016; Pulido, 2000). It was an intellectual industrialization purposed to mechanize humans, enabling them to separate their mind from their bodies and subsequently subject the

natural environment, and those who fell under the category of “non-human,” to exploitation. As this body of reasoning continued to develop, complementary theories and discussion of an environmental ethic surfaced. John Muir and Henry David Thoreau are well-known and largely accepted as fathers of environmental ethic, defining the wilderness, and subsequent environmental romanticism.

Environmentalism and conservation are concepts directly influenced by the fathers of the field; white men interested in escaping the entrapment of cities created a prescriptive, masculine ideal around environmentalism. This environmentalism synonymized the act of exploring the natural environment with masculinity and the ground beneath them with femininity in the way they described and documented their experiences. Contributors to this masculine environmentalism established an anthropocentric hierarchy. However, this anthropocentrism was contingent on conceptualizations central to male experiences. Based on this structure, I would like to suggest a minor change to the denotation of anthropocentrism to man-thropocentrism.

Women in the field are rarely mentioned and require a deliberate detachment from popular works around environmentalism and conservation (Taylor, 2016). Male orientation of environmentalism is reproduced even in a basic search through online platforms. Muir and Thoreau are the first names presented searching for “environmentalism founder” on Google. This is followed by an article entitled: “The Men Who Embraced Mother Earth.” This historical analysis shows us how knowledge that did not originate from white male bodies have been deligitimized and pushed to the periphery. Consider the slave trade in the United States. Harriet Tubman can be, but rarely is, considered a naturalist. Like John Muir, she was born around the 1820s but under the regime of slavery. She became an expert navigator of the land out of necessity. Her knowledge is relegated to history and is rarely analyzed as any form of contribution to the natural sciences. She

is known as the “mother of the underground railroad” and Muir is known as the “father of national parks” (Taylor, 2016). Tubman is entrapped and immobilized in themes around slavery while Muir is a contributor to philosophy, environmental science, transcending bodies of scholarship. Forms of difference are reproduced as historical figures in the United States are represented through this environmentalism which continues to prioritize the contributions of white male elite.

There are many fallacies inherent in earlier attempts to explain characteristics of the natural environment. Their ideas of pristine wilderness significantly overlooked environmental complexities. However, other white male environmentalists, like Aldo Leopold, approached gaps in the biological understandings on the long-term effects of management and non-management of wilderness areas. Although Leopold tokened the “land ethic,” his idea was an appropriation of indigenous pragmatism and their lived experiences from time immemorial. Another example of an attempt to define the natural environment is the application of gender and associated implications of creating a duality. The term “virgin wilderness” coupled women with the physical environment. Loaded with cultural and religious context, applying the status of “virgin” indicated that wilderness areas were meant to be viewed as sacred and in need of boundaries and protection. In this discourse, men were positioned as both the guardian and thief of virgin wilderness. Not only did this discourse unnecessarily sexualize non-human aspects of the environment but it created an order of thought that is phallogocentric (Serano, 2007). A consequence of this rationality purports virginity to be a feminine characteristic and invokes a standard for women to maintain for their own bodies. Virgin wilderness, synonymous with purity, mobilized masculine ideals defined by white men that governed women’s bodies.

Their ideas of management and later ideas of cyclic environmental processes was unoriginal, as the indigenous tenants of the land, prior to dispossession, lived and practiced

adaptive management strategies. Conservation, for example, altogether is premised on a classification system that orders human and non-human factors on a subjective scale of ‘objective’ assumptions that determine worth and leads to spatial and social organization. Given that ideologies function to orient individuals in greater society, the conservation ideology has created roles and expectations to fulfill (i.e., environmentalists, state/federal workers, marginalized people groups, criminals, etc.). National parks are an example of a sociopolitical landscape, nuanced with masculine ideas of dominance and control. This masculinized ideology recreates uneven geographies and marginalization that transcend commonly visible issues associated with coopted conservation agendas; conservation becomes a tool that propagates dispossession. Sanctioning and prescribing “wilderness” areas legitimizes a socially constructed use of space as unchangeable and unchallengeable, limiting the sight and agency of those displaced.

Whiteness

Hegemonic perspectives and interests define the natural environment and dictate the use of natural resources. Whiteness is the dominant narrative that has constructed the “wilderness” and it continues to influence modern perceptions and understandings of the natural environment. A popular juxtaposition is the commonalities built around whiteness and purity. The word association alone speaks to the conceptualizations of the opposite of whiteness. The concept of whiteness introduces the social construction of race and associated implications. White privilege, “a hegemonic form of racism,” prevails through overt and institutionalized racism and is linked to environmental racism (Pulido, 2000). Whiteness and white privilege labor to reduce racial inequities to identifiable acts premised on individual intentions. However, they operate on both conscious and unconscious dimensions; whiteness manifests spatially (i.e., communities that are largely POC are located near environmentally hazardous and generally undesirable landscapes)

and is reproduced by policies that exonerate effects of whiteness (i.e., zoning policies purposed to create racial stratifications geographically) (Pulido, 2000; Taylor, 2016). Pulido says it best: “white privilege thrives in highly racialized societies that espouse racial equality, but in which whites will not tolerate either being inconvenienced in order to achieve racial equality, or denied the full benefits of their whiteness” (Pulido, 2000: 15). Given the paradoxical function of whiteness in relation to racial equality, diversity is at odds with the discourse of whiteness.

Diversity is the antithesis of traditional orthodoxies around the embeddedness of whiteness in nationalism and nationalistic values. Given that purity and whiteness are pillars to environmentalism in the United States, diversity initiatives should function to undermine and restructure environmental institutions. Racial identity is a key component to understand how workplaces operate; workplaces may overlook issues rooted in racial identity, asserting organizational identity to take precedence in effort to avoid controversial discourses (Pulido, 2000; Chrobot-Mason and Thomas, 2002).

The repercussions of a racialized and gendered environmentalism are a reproduction of hierarchal structures harboring hegemonic priorities that are inherently oppressive. Echoing earlier claims throughout this paper, these interests are primarily in service of the livelihoods and longevity of white men. In the United States, whiteness is preserved through conservation and restoration initiatives and environmental agencies. This form of power and privilege is the result of a complex historical environmental ideology that informs these institutions. Furthermore, the domination of whiteness is rarely problematized; the problem is often articulated problematizes POC, making them the culprit of a diversity deficiency.

Environmental Agencies Reproduce This Genre of Environmentalism

Inheriting Institutional Structures

The aforementioned categories of difference that formed this specific environmental ideology is still enmeshed in the institutional structures that inform environmental agencies (EAs). The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the distributor of the environmentalism described in the first half of this paper. McMahon (2006) contributes to the discourse stating the EPA has been shaped and largely determined by the interests of political leaders. The EPA mission claims the agency strives to protect the environment; this expectation is undermined by political interests prioritizing economic viability (McMahon, 2006). In this way, social stratifications are perpetuated and justified by EA's responsibility to enforce environmental regulations. Environmental regulations are stringent in more affluent neighborhoods and lax in communities predominantly inhabited by POC (Pulido, 2000; Taylor, 2016). Sites of production place a disproportionate burden on those who cannot afford to refute the adverse health effects inherent in the production process (Pulido, 2000).

Presupposing the effects of this environmentalism are the agencies that enforce them. The function of environmental enforcement and regulation centralizes the importance of environmental protection but overlooks social implications. Furthermore, the lasting ideological implications of male-oriented assumptions align women with the environment spills over into the EA workplace. Gender divisions are reified in the workplace and manifest as designated gendered spaces (Rocheleau et al., 1996). As the environmental workforce diversifies, the assumption is that the institutional structure must amend policies to facilitate a space that supports racial and gender diversity. In the following section I discuss how executive orders and political policies commit to prioritizing diversity but still functions to preserve class, race, and gender divides. I also draw on interviews with women of color that work at the Department of Environmental Resource

Management (DERM) to understand how individuals negotiate their identities in ERAs premised on the environmentalism describe in the former half of this paper.

Mandating Diversification of the Workforce

Diversity and Inclusion

Dobbin & Kalev (2013) discuss how political policies for diversity made diversity a necessary characteristic for government institutions. Making diversity as criteria for institutions to uphold has the risk of facilitating roles (false consciousness) for POC and women to fill as placeholders for nationwide requirements. Although there are positions deliberately created, the space does not cater to POC and women. Because they become a requirement, institutions may oversimplify complex necessities that deliberately benefits POC and women. A few interviewees said:

“They would even bring in people from other departments if they needed to to get the quota, you know, the diversity that they needed.”

“So, I think for women, sometimes it’s hard to be looked at as an equal by a lot of men.”

This shows the awareness that diversity is made necessary by the government and not necessarily to benefit POC, women, or WOC. They are brought into the agency, but their success and vertical movement is undermined by internalized biases (Taylor, 2014). Many interviewees expressed their frustration with incoming employees stating their lack of commitment to the agency upon realizing the difficulty of attaining promotions. Frequent employee turnover is a relatively new phenomenon, according to the interviews. It is not seen as a structural problem and is explained to be an individualized one, characterized as a trait of the current generation.

“Recently being a supervisor is getting very hard [...] Maybe generation gap of the new employees or something. They don't have the same kind of dedication. At least I observe like this [...] That's the mentality right now they are having. We didn't have it like that.”

“They're just here to get a job, you know, they have bills whatever [...] as soon as they find something else, they're gone. The disadvantage for us is that, we put in a lot of training in the beginning. A lot of this time goes into getting these people ready, you know [...] It's a cost to our department and people leave. So you know, probably in the last 10 years or something like that or maybe, at least in the last 10 to 12 years, I've just seen a tremendous turnaround of employees. They don't stay. Whereas prior to that, people came and made this their career.”

Political actions like EO 13583 use rhetoric that presumes overlooking difference would improve diversity. Not only does this not consider means of employee retention but it also avoids the problem of diversity, inclusion, and equity and a culture is created around it. A form of mentorship often increases retention of minority employees (Taylor, 2014; Dobbin & Kalev, 2013). At DERM, mentorship was described as an informal, self-driven process. If mentorship were formalized, the chances of employee retention would improve and assure change is underway to facilitate the success of POC in the agency (Taylor, 2014). Unfortunately, programs structured using the language of this executive order are exacerbating the issue, reifying hegemonic priorities, placing equity in the periphery.

Transfiguring Stasis of Diversity Discourses

Diversity has many roles and is embodied in individuals; it can be a method of protecting existing barriers of including and facilitating a space and culture for POC and women can comfortably navigate (Ahmed, 2012). It is a nuanced concept and practice, functioning to appeal to and satisfy a multiplicity of actors. The language used to communicate diversity goals of the U.S. government in EO 13583 accompanied by the Government-Wide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan reflect how forms of difference have been oversimplified and reoriented to mystified in order to overlook specific forms of inequality.

“By law, the Federal government's recruitment policies should "endeavor to achieve a work force from all segments of society," while avoiding discrimination for or against any employee or applicant on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy or gender identity), national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation or any other prohibited basis.”

It also communicates that diversity is a commodity that is exchanged for human and social capital. “This is more than a legal or moral imperative; it is a business imperative for public service.” In attempt to solve the problem of inequity across race and gender in the workplace, EAs have adopted diversity trainings that discusses more on ideas of politeness; this overlooks critical racial and gender differences, encouraging colorblindness and keeping silent in trivial situations.

“And they didn't call it diversity training. They call, they at that point in time what they are doing they talk more about like equal opportunity type of thing. Not try to deal with, they talk about being politically correct.”

"I think, though, it just is kept quiet. You know instead of creating a big issue out of it.”

It is important to note that “equity” cannot be located in the EO or the follow-up strategic plan document. Diversity could be thought of as a mechanism of indifference; it functions to instigate individuals to accept and accommodate differences with silence, a form of indifference. EA’s create organizational goals that create a focal point for collective identity to which individuals can absolve their responsibility of addressing racial and gender issues to focus on attaining the mission and vision of the organization. An interviewee speaks to an integrated and holistic approach, enmeshed in EA missions and goals, applied to work ethic in this environmental workforce:

“But, at the end of the day, we’re all people and we’re all different when you’re at a job. I feel that you're just there- you're there to do your job, you know. But just because you're the secretary and this is the president doesn't mean that that president should treat this person like you're just the secretary. No. Everybody's function is an important function, and it keeps everything moving.”

Environmental issues are easy to relate to because every human lives, here, within the earth.

The discourse has built a platform for a diverse group of people to unite and perpetuate a message

of the necessity of unification and holistic interactions. It becomes a common ground for a diverse group of people with diverse interests to come together and form a commonality. This is what makes ERAs unique; there are employees who embody different interests, have differing educational backgrounds, and work in different divisions but are encouraged to overlook race and gender issues to face environmental issues. From this perspective, environmental issues are capable of blurring the lines of distinction of class, race, gender, and sexuality.

McMahon (2004) echoes this same rationale, placing EAs as a space for identity negotiation. EAs facilitate a space where identity is negotiated by their employees. Different sectors or divisions become a space for subcultures. The success of the organization/agency depends on a baseline understanding across subcultures—agreeing with an organizational mission. Horizontal institutional structures prove to be counterintuitive, deepening (class) rifts of difference. Furthermore, literature around self-perception suggest individuals draw on external discourses to confirm identities (Ahmed, 2012; Carollo & Guerri, 2018; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2016). The external discourse women of color must navigate is one of environmentalism while embodying diversity. In DERM, some interviewees describe moments where they faced discrimination and punishment for cultural diversity and hardships, they find being a woman in a historically male dominated field.

“Someone brought it up to the county, to our supervisor, that she's getting bother with our language. Yes. And when I bring it up to the HR, HR punishing me that I'm not supposed to talk in my language. And they told me [...] people here, they don't keep their mouth open while they're eating something. Maybe I do. And people Iranian people do in my country because they don't have [American] culture. And I think that's really the rude and this is like discrimination, totally discrimination. They're not allowed to say that to me. I'm still working for them because I need my job.”

“And being a woman, is a challenge. Sometimes I feel like, I am from another country and I'm a woman, it's double whammies, it's a big handicap. And I am in discipline in engineering, male dominated profession. So, you have to prove every day that you are good, extremely good. When a person, who is a supervisor and it's a man and he says something strong, yeah

like that, they would say oh, he's a strong person. If it's a woman that is saying that, they would call me a bitch. That's what it is. So, you have to be very polite. Extremely polite and being a supervisor is hard for a woman than a man."

Diversity Rhetoric Preserves Legacy of Exclusion

Initially, ERAs were provided diversity trainings, making them mandatory for all employees. But it is now only a voluntary training. The content has also changed from gender inclusion to sexual harassment issues. Now that the workforce has diversified and include more women, and WOC, it could be that the content of the diversity trainings has changed because diversity is embodied. Prioritizing diversity is contingent on how many women and WOC file grievances with human resources (HR) or request diversity training for themselves. The logic was given along with initial diversity trainings: everyone is a human and you must be polite and accept them. Political correctness materializes as a form of self-governance; all employees are different and must be accommodated by each other's acceptance. Employees are guided to avoid acknowledging difference. If no one sees it, it does not exist. As one employee says:

"And they didn't call it diversity training. They call, they at that point in time what they are doing they talk more about like equal opportunity type of thing. Not try to deal with, they talk about being politically correct."

"I think, though, it just is kept quiet. You know instead of creating a big issue out of it."

Furthermore, the domination of whiteness is rarely problematized; the problem that is often articulated problematizes POC, making them the culprit of a diversity deficiency. Ahmed explains these symptoms as part of the "phenomenology of whiteness." After watching a diversity training video that featured POC comparing diversity to ethnic food fusions, I thought about the deliberate invocation of consumption. Diversity has been commodified and is currency

as social capital. Diversity determinism inherently reduces POC to bodies in proximity to whiteness, to be consumed by whiteness.

Women at DERM have exemplified social barriers in EAs. POC must navigate around these barriers because their livelihoods depend on their negotiation. They compromise their traditions and culture, adopting a modified version of American ideals embedded in the environmentalism EAs facilitate. They are faced with up keeping ideals and this further reproduces the dominant narrative that exclude them.

“Now they’re judging me based on my nationality. They judging me based on, over like the location I was born. I have never judged based on those things when I was working for my company-- my country. It was totally different [...] You never think about those issues. You just go and start working and whatever you are supposed to work. But here, you have to deal with two different things: the project and all those people that they want to tell you something that is kind of related to where you are from.”

ERAs are unique in the use and appropriation of environmental language. Most employees enter the workforce with a natural science degree, loaded with taxonomic, Latin names and biological concepts. It enables them to deflect social issues or reduce them to a science as a way of rationalizing the irrationality of facing discrimination and clear hierarchal biases in the workplace or simply to avert potential conflict. This strategic use of language contributes to a diversity essentialism.

“But, at the end of the day, we’re all people and we’re all different when you’re at a job. I feel that you're just there- you're there to do your job, you know. But just because you're the secretary and this is the president doesn't mean that that president should treat this person like you're just the secretary. No. Everybody's function is an important function and it keeps everything moving.”

“Women are, like, we have no choice. You know we had to leave the house and go out and help. Yeah, yeah, we're...we're a cool breed.”

Environmental language develops secondary functions as an audio jammer in that it obscures ongoing discourses on social blockades in the field (Ahmed, 2012). Reducing social

issues to a science risks oversimplifying and conglomerating individual experiences, rendering any movement to a standstill in the workplace. Women in the environmental workforce are encouraged to overlook their own differences and assimilate to organizational culture—an illusion of diversity is fulfilled. In this setting, a new body is created, and women take on a new shape. However, many of the interviews I conducted at DERM shows, perhaps, a glimmer of potential of the agency to be in a transition to becoming an outlier. This is contingent on the personal dynamics between employees who facilitate a space that receives and embraces differences of race, ethnicity, and gender.

“But, they accepted me and they wanted me to be part of that. So. I think I really like DERM, and the way they accepting other people coming and working for them.”

“So they spent the first day, [...] the project manager [...] went to each cubicle and they introduce us and give us brief information about the person working in that cube and what projects they usually work on. So, I think it was a good introduction to bring people together and make us being accepted in that, like, environment.”

Decolonizing, Decoupling, Unlearning, Learning, Restructuring: Normative Assessment and Discussion

In sum, WOC that work at DERM are un/sub/consciously navigating the environmental workplace. Negotiations are made in proximity to the dominant culture embodied in the office building. Cubicles facilitate a duality of contact which governs employee behaviors and in turn individuals govern in accordance to. In regards to diversity, there is a conceptual bridge between social diversity and biodiversity. As previously stated, environmental language inappropriately fuses environmental concepts with social issues and has the capacity to reduce issues to a science. Reducing women to “a cool breed” enables objectification and subjection to identities created by the ERA—to embody diversity, meet a quota, and report diversity improvement to HR. However, a new type of environmental employee is underway, and they

challenge forms of stratification with higher expectations of social responsibility from themselves and the workplace.

There are many social groups attempting to counter the dominant narrative by bringing inequity to the forefront of environmental discourses. A new narrative that centralizes the experiences of WOC would benefit EAs at large. A necessary change to the institutional structure informing EAs would be to reimagine environmentalism. The counter narrative should bring perceptions of WOC that helped to shape and inform the environmental field and natural sciences. In the EAs themselves, Taylor (2014) suggests implementing mentorship as a way to assist the success of POC and women in the environmental workforce. Furthermore, diversity trainings should also shift to encourage POC to problematize nuanced forms of discrimination they alone experience rather than being made the problem themselves. As the population in the United States shift to a minority majority, structural changes that position the success of historically oppressed groups should be at the helm of restructuring because environmental longevity will be up to them.

Diversity initiatives must be met with realistic standards rather than a rigid prescription of identifiable scenarios of discriminations. Diversity officers should be given the financial resources to invest in research and collaboration from WOC and POC to update current curriculum. Facing whiteness, purposefully engaging with non-POC, and using language that orients POC at the center of diversity trainings would bring idiosyncratic behaviors to the forefront, encouraging people to face their privilege and racial identities. A new environmental workforce could emerge that embody equity, mandated to resist oppressive institutional structures. However, this is contingent on a comingling between individuals and the organization agreeing to form a point of reference that instigates cultural change in the ERA.

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