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Gender and Other Forms of Difference/Diversity

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Diversity is integral to socio-ecological sustainability at all scales and dimensions of education practice. The *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* (*AJEE*) has published research and reports of practice from a variety of novel and established perspectives and methodologies, recognising both small and large research studies and, in the process, becoming an energetic record of what we have been thinking about gender and culture and difference over the past 30 years. The editors of the *AJEE* have promoted diversity, given the purpose of environmental education is to change how we think about our social arrangements and to reconsider how it is possible to act within our world. As with any long-existing journal, the articles reflect historical scholarly trends and societal change, and the publications track what has been counted as legitimate in terms of being and knowing within the academy. Many kinds of useful knowledge were delegitimised and ignored until quite recently, so one of the tasks of researchers and educators and their *AJEE* editors has been to redress these silences and absences. If progress has been imperfect, this is a reflection of the difficulties of the task and not a reflection of the quality of the journal.

Di Chiro's seminal 1987 article argued for the adoption of a critical feminist perspective as an 'appropriate response' towards understanding the socio-ecological crisis. Di Chiro (1987) illuminated how there are clear connections between the repression of women and the repression (destruction and poisoning) of the biophysical world. Both are the result of a dominating historical paradigm that seeks to subdue without care or consideration for others — who can be humans and non-humans, and who become 'othered' through the very expression of this hegemonic worldview. The reason this article is in the 30th anniversary collection is the power and logic with which Di Chiro made the case for the continual necessity to explore dimensions of gender in environmental education research. The original work done in environmental education assumed a male subject, 'Man', and explored 'his' influence on 'the' environment. It took feminist analysis to reveal how this historically entrenched and unproblematised terminology was, in fact, deeply problematic. Many realities are distorted, or lie undiscovered, when a singular masculine subject and a singular environment stand for all the complexities in and of our world. Educational strategies that promote acceptance of difference and social justice cannot be fully supported when the singular is said to stand for the diverse. Feminist analysis was, and is, disordering. This is its purpose. Di Chiro's article remains a philosophical milestone, and its publication in the *AJEE* generated a productive line of inquiry for many researchers.

One of the strongest trends noted in the *AJEE* is that for more than 2 decades a succession of research papers have investigated gender differences in relation to ecological worldviews; gendered constructions of 'nature' and 'the environment';

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environmental knowledge, concern, and attitudes; the need for personal action; and experiences of environmental education. *AJEE* studies have showed a persistent difference between female and male students in relation to surveyed interest in environmentalism at school and a reported capacity and willingness to act. The same difference extends to adulthood. A CSIRO report of a scan of available polling data, conducted in 2011, showed that across a range of polls, women were 6% to 11% more likely to accept the truth of anthropogenic climate change and consequently support action. Women were also more likely to have held these views over a longer period of time (see Nolan, 2014). Women are more likely to be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change for many reasons associated with their long historical estrangement from full economic participation and the fact women tend to carry most of the social caring responsibilities. As we more fully experience climate change (or, perhaps, climate disruption), the differential effects of climate change on gender, class, culture and geography will remain productive lines of inquiry.

In terms of investigating cultural dimensions of environmental education, it is important to remember that Australia is a both a relatively new nation, federated in 1901, and a long settled continent with a complex human history stretching back many tens of thousands of years. The different cultures of Australia have not been as strongly represented as they could have been within the *AJEE*, in that publications addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture are still far too few. And papers investigating the experiences of international cultures are not many either. While a majority of articles have tried to avoid uncritically assuming a colonising truth for all people in Australia, forging a deeper analysis of the political effects of our shared history and how this relates to environmental education remains an area of study where a greater body of work would be useful. Research that draws uncritically on a unified concept of nature and that of wilderness — without paying attention to the historical reality that all of the Australian country was subsumed in a colonial land grab — reflects a 19th- and 20th-century colonial stance. We need new understandings in the 21st century.

The continuing challenge for researchers is always about how differences in seeing and knowing can be more fully represented in the body of Australian environmental education research, even as we know that our similarities are what brings us together. We have 30 years of fine research on gender, locale, class and culture to draw upon, but the project is far from complete. It is our hope that this collection of articles will provide inspiration for research work that is yet to come.

Reference

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