Uncovering Environmental Injustice Using Community-Based Participatory Research in Albany, NY

Eliza Sherpa, Nicole Shepherd, & Janet Vidal
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Faculty Advisor: AJ Schneller
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Abstract
Literature on environmental justice often fails to incorporate the perspectives of underrepresented communities most affected by environmental ills. Our research serves to incorporate communities' perspectives on what issues are their top priorities, how they are addressing them, and whether they consider them environmental injustices. Research was conducted through qualitative interviews with community leaders and professional advocates and surveys with community members. Our research found differing understandings of the meaning of environmental justice, a discrepancy between formal organizations and community groups in terms of which issues were top priorities, and an overall division between the mainstream environmental movement and environmental justice communities. To begin repairing this divide, it is necessary to incorporate place-based knowledge through community based participatory research.

Key Words: environmental justice, community perspectives, personal narrative, underrepresented groups, environmental racism, community based participatory research

1. Introduction

Issues of environmental justice are complex, place-specific, and can take many different forms. These complexities lead to various understandings that communities and people might have with regards to environmental justice. Our research emphasizes personal narrative as a tool to explore what issues are considered most relevant in environmental justice communities. Below we address the foundations of environmental justice through the exploration of three case studies: Love Canal, Warren County, and Convent, Louisiana, and provide a literature review. We explore past literature on environmental justice, environmental racism, and the inclusion of marginalized voices through personal narratives. This background addresses our research goals in order to incorporate the voices of those facing environmental and/or social justice struggles in their communities.

1.1 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is an examination of internal perceptions of environmental justice within potential environmental justice areas of Albany, New York as defined by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). This research works to identify how these populations are defining relevant environmental and social justice issues in their community through personal narratives. It assesses how, and if, they are addressing these issues. While past literature and understandings of environmental justice can serve as a framework for our research, we recognize that the intricacies of social and environmental injustice and strategies for addressing these issues are unique and place-specific. The research questions that guided this effort include:

1. What are the most pressing issues facing lower income and communities of color in the Albany-area, in their opinion?
2. To what extent do race and socio-economic status affect communities' perceptions of what is encompassed within the realm of environmental justice?

3. How do these communities interpret the role that various stakeholders are having in their communities, and to what extent do these groups play a role in addressing environmental issues simultaneously?

1.2 Environmental Justice Background

Environmental justice as defined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and DEC is "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" (EPA, 2013). Environmental justice scholar Scholosberg states, "Cultural recognition is certainly central to the attainment of social and environmental justice" (2007 p. 525). Broadly speaking, environmental justice can be understood to be an environmental burden (such as pollution or environmental degradation), which disproportionately affects marginalized populations. However, it becomes necessary to take into account the specifics ways in which environmental injustices might affect a particular community.

In 1982 in North Carolina controversies over landfills served as the origins for the term "environmental racism," resulting in a broader look at environmental justice (Bullard, 2000 p. 555). Several other cases led to increased awareness and in 1991 the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit took place in Washington, D.C. This drew substantial attention and delegates from all 50 states came together to try to find a compromise to address environmental problems that were affecting people of color in the U.S and worldwide. From this a "principle of environmental justice" list that was developed, making the initial development of a vocabulary of environmental justice (Bullard, 2000 p. 557). As more environmental injustice cases gathered national attention and more research was conducted, a clear racial pattern emerged (Bullard, 2000 p. 568).

In its beginnings environmental justice was primarily focused around issues stemming from the waste industry. It became clear that hazardous waste had dramatic effects on public health and the physical environment, and laid the framework for conversations about legal and ethical dilemmas (Bullard, 2000 p. 572). These included issues stemming from the way in which items were produced, especially when one considers them in a greater global context. There were countries that were disproportionately affected because not all countries had the same infrastructure capabilities and regulatory systems in place (Bullard, 2000 p. 572). These discrepancies, alongside unbalanced power dynamics, allowed some communities to be exposed to more harmful products than others, posing environmental justice as a global issue. To contextualize this to communities in the U.S, "those who are low-income and people of color communities are disproportionately affected by waste facilities and 'dirty' industries," Bullard states, "the environmental protection apparatus in the Unites States does not provide equal protection for all communities" (2000 p. 572-573). This often results in the burden for change to fall upon community leaders and activists to advocate for their community's wellbeing.

While environmental justice has come a long way from its origins there is still much work to be done to incorporate the perspectives of underrepresented communities. Although the term is now widely recognized within the larger environmental movement, its sometimes narrow definition still serves to limit our understanding of environmental issues facing communities. Below we present three foundational environmental justice cases that would ultimately lead to profound changes in the way environmental justice is perceived. There are countless other examples of environmental injustices, many of which may never have been named as issues of environmental injustice. The following examples shed light on the breadth and severity of environmental injustice, but are by no means comprehensive.

1.3 Case Studies

In 1978 it was discovered that improperly disposed of hazardous wastes had contaminated schools and homes in the Love Canal area in upstate New York. The 15-acre chemical landfill, created by Hooker Chemical, had been turned into a neighborhood for unsuspecting residents. On August 7, 1978 President Jimmy Carter declared a federal emergency at Love Canal, and Love Canal became the first man-made disaster to be given such a designation, which was based on a variety of environmental and health related studies (Phillips *et al*. 2007, p. 313). It was this case that led to the designation of Superfund sites in 1980, a designation created under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act. The case of Love Canal and creation of the Superfund designation brought about an awareness of human rights in relation to environmental quality. "The interest in Love Canal heightened awareness of not only were there serious threats to human health in the United States but that the burdens associated with these threats were not equally shared amongst the populations" (Smith, 2007 p. 26). Love canal also brought about the start of a new grassroots environmental movement, different from the mainstream environmental movement in that it was focused on the everyday concerns of citizens in effected communities, and "for the first time, the groundswell of public expressions of concern about environmental protection would be matched by an public actions of working-class and minority participants" (Schnaiberg, 2001).

The environmental justice movement was formally recognized in 1982 in Warren County, North Carolina, when a PCB landfill ignited protests and resulted in over 500 arrests. The protests and community outrage over the landfill resulted in a U.S. General Accounting Office 1983 study, "Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation With Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities." This was one of the first studies of its kind and its findings have had long lasting impacts on the environmental justice movement. "The study revealed that three out of four of the off-site commercial hazardous waste landfills in Region 4 (which comprises eight states in the South) happen to be located in predominantly African American communities, although African Americans make up only 20% of the region's population" (Bullard & Johnson, 2000 p. 556). The same protests also inspired the Commission for Racial Justice to conduct "the first national study to correlate waste facility sites and demographic characteristics" (Bullard & Johnson, 2000 p. 556). The study found that race was the most "potent variable in predicting where these facilities were located" (Bullard &

Johnson, 2000 p. 556). The protesters put environmental racism on the national radar and eventually what started as one community turned into a multi regional and multiethnic movement that is now the environmental justice movement.

In 1991, the community of Convent Louisiana went to court against Shintech, Inc. The case was regarding an air permit filed by Shintech to build an $800 million polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plant in the community. Convent's demographic makeup was over 70% African American and over 40% of residents fall below the poverty line. The community's residents already had over a dozen polluting plants located very close to their homes. This case raised concerns over environmental racism, which was supported by Executive Order 12898, binding the EPA to ensure that "no segment of the population, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, as a result of EPA's policies, programs, and activities, suffer disproportionately from adverse health or environmental effects, and all people live in clean and sustainable communities." (Bullard & Johnson, 2000 p. 570). Considering that the proposed plant would add over 600,000 pounds of air pollutants annually, it was clear to residents that it would significantly add to toxic burden already borne by Convent residents, who were primarily lower income and African American. After months of intense organizing the residents were able to convince the EPA to place a hold on the permit, and eventually in 1998 the Environmental Justice Coalition ruled against the plans to build the plant, in what was hailed as a major victory in the fight against environmental racism. This case was a product of community action and stands as an excellent example of the power of communities and organizers (Bullard & Johnson, 2000 p. 570).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Frontline Communities & Environmental Racism

One's understanding of environmental injustice is undoubtedly affected by one's own identity and social position (Taylor, 2000). Mainstream environmental narratives are often dominated by upper to middle class white voices, yet issues of environmental injustice primarily affect lower class communities of color (Pulido, 1996). This discrepancy frequently leads to different strategies of action; for example, more established mainstream groups have the resources to lobby for policy changes while frontline environmental justice activists more often use place-specific direct action tactics (Taylor, 2000). It becomes crucial for the voices of those most affected to be those that shape strategic choices and drive actions to address these linked environmental and social injustices. In some cases change might most effectively be driven through political lobbying, community education, national shows of solidarity, direct action, or any combination thereof and it is the responsibility of groups with access to resources to best support whatever strategic decision the environmental justice community desires rather than pursuing their own agenda. Pulido argues "the majority of environmental racism scholarship seeks to intervene in the legal and policy arena, ignoring the larger issue of movement building" (1996 p. 148). Prindeville and Bretting address concerns over the limited influence minority populations appear to have on public policy agenda setting (1998). There are dramatic discrepancies of both environmental risk distribution and

strategic influence within the environmental movement, with frontline communities facing the majority of risk with little influence within the movement to address those risks. Environmental justice scholars and activists must work to lessen this gap by incorporating the voices of frontline communities and prioritizing their understandings of what environmental justice looks like in their own communities.

The term "environmental racism" came from a deeper analysis of the environmental justice movement and much of the elitism alive within mainstream environmentalism meant to shift the focus of activist towards frontline communities. Environmental racism represents one category of environmental injustices that affect a certain demographic of people. Environmental racism encompasses not only disproportionate environmental harm to communities of color, but also what Taylor explores with the "limited participation of nonwhites in environmental affairs" (Pulido, 1996 p. 142). Criticisms of mainstream environmentalism are that it is based primarily on rationality, which some claim reduces the enormity of the injustice (Pulido, 1996). Pulido discusses the assumption that "there exists a single form of racism responsible for environmental discrimination" (1996 p. 143). Sociologically, scholars discuss whether race or class is the determining factor in defining environmental justice communities (Pulido, 1996). Since racism, unequal resource distribution, and economic depression are closely intertwined and often institutionalized, one cannot necessarily point to overt discriminatory policies. For environmental activists to effectively bring about change, we must analyze the patterns occurring, demonstrating that those who face environmental injustices are not those whose voices are shaping the predominant discourses within the environmental justice movement. Our research aims to avoid only including the voices of privileged environmental activists, but rather we seek to include the perspectives of community members facing environmental injustices as well.

2.2 Inclusion of Marginalized Voices & Personal Narratives

Previous research has explored strategies for inclusion of marginalized voices both in formalized literature and in effective strategies for change-making that emphasize a more all-encompassing vision for participation. Minker, Vásquez, Tajik & Petersen (2013) use Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) as a way to allow the affected community to shape the initial discourse, while Pridvellie & Bretting (1998) work to build more inclusive politics by centering their discourse on the voices of traditionally marginalized groups. Both authors' research addresses the issue of whose voices are excluded from political agendas and the process of shaping public policies and emphasize the importance of specific place-based narratives. Pridvellie & Bretting used qualitative interviews to amplify the personal narratives of indigenous and Latina women and state that the interviewees "differentiate their perspective from that of the mainstream environmental movement. They claim it [the mainstream environmental narrative] is out of touch with the economic and social realities of the poor, the working-class, and people of color" (1998 p. 50). This research exemplifies the amplification and incorporation of generally marginalized voices within the environmental movement through the use of personal narrative.

In a study of the benefit of narrative-based communication within qualitative research, Riessman contends: "narrative analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning" (2000 p. 24). Riessman discusses how personal narratives add meaning and help create discourses and that the process of sharing lived experiences through narrative promotes empathy across social difference. Riessman argues that, "participants resist efforts to fragment their lived experience into thematic categories— our [social researchers'] attempt to control meaning" (2000 p. 2). Personal narrative represents a powerful tool to reshape environmental discourses based on those affected, rather than an imposition of already constructed, and limiting, ideas. Pridvellie & Bretting's study provides an example as they interview indigenous women in order to "promote a more inclusive politics" (1998 p. 39-40) by representing their voices while dually addressing the complexities of various forms of identity in shaping political opinion around environmental justice and organizing.

3. Methods

3.1 Existing Practices

Currently both the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have different methods for determining areas of potential environmental injustice areas. The DEC determines these areas by using U.S. Census Data, specifically minority status and poverty level (DEC, 2013). This method is limiting for our purposes because the maps produced just show areas in which poor minorities are present in high numbers, and does not take any other factors into account. On the other hand, the EPA uses a tool called the Environmental Justice Strategic Enforcement Tool (EJSEAT), which is divided into four indicator categories: environmental, human health, compliance, and social demographics (EPA, 2012). The EJSEAT is a more comprehensive toolkit, but is still reliant on census data and other federally collected data to determine at-risk areas. While useful to some extent, both of these methods are limiting (for our purposes) because they do not account for the perspectives of the affected communities. This research will work to move away from race and income level as indicators of environmental injustice, by utilizing personal narratives and community perspectives to broaden our understanding of environmental injustice in Albany, NY.

3.2 Population & Setting

The city of Albany has a population of 97,856 people. The racial demographics of Albany is 57% Caucasian, 30.8% Black or African American, and 10.6% Hispanic or Latino of any race. The per capita income for the city is $25,618 and 21.7% of the population is living below the poverty line (U.S Census, 2010). The population of Albany has declined steadily since 1960; meanwhile, the suburbs have seen a dramatic rise in population, exemplifying the pattern of white flight that has plagued many American post-industrial cities. There were several reasons for this decline, including the building of interstates and other highways that allowed for greater mobility, a lack of open land in Albany city center, and the decline of manufacturing industry (Shiro, 1989). Historically, the manufacturing was mainly centered on access to water for means of cheap power and

access to best markets; however, manufacturing has shifted from city centers into the suburbs due to larger space availability (Shiro, 1989). There are currently new industries moving into the suburbs outside of Albany, but since the decline of manufacturing no major industries have moved into the city center leaving the city center economically depressed. There are currently five active superfund sites in the broader Albany metro area, which are all a produce of past industry operations (EPA, 2013).

It was important for us to identify preexisting groups through which we could make connections with community leaders. We identified several means by which to discover the individuals who were important for the interview stage of our research. We contacted several activists, local governmental representatives, and professional advocates in the communities in which we thought there could be potential issues of environmental justice. We identified groups working specifically on environmental justice issues in the Albany area, who provided us information on their experiences in Albany and were able to provide us with other contacts within the community. Through these groups we were able to identify the community leaders and professional advocates that we interviewed.

3.3 Sampling & Instrumentation

Our research team consisted of three undergraduate environmental studies majors, with a focus on the social sciences, and a PhD faculty advisor and environmental studies professor. As formally educated environmental scholars and activists, we use certain rhetoric in our communication and undoubtedly have certain assumptions based on our own social positions that affect our understanding of issues (Taylor, 2000). To the best of our abilities, we reduced our own bias, particularly in interview questions, by using open-ended questions emphasizing the language used by participants rather than our own. We hope this approach allowed us to gain a more accurate understanding of environmental justice issues is Albany.

Research data was collected between the months of February through April 2014. Our research utilized mixed methods with a combination of extensive written surveys and semi-structured interviews, but an emphasis on qualitative data (Crewell, 2013). Surveys looked at perceptions and awareness of environmental injustice of residents in the given area. Survey included eight demographic questions and 15 questions pertaining to environmental justice, with seven closed ended questions and eight open-ended questions (see appendix 1). We utilized results from nine surveys in order to further contextualize interview data, but did not perform statistical analysis nor generalize to the Albany population. The majority of our data was from qualitative interview data (see appendix 2 for interview questions) and Prindeville & Bretting (2008) explain: "qualitative methods are often more useful than quantitative methods for investigating the hows and whys of human behavior" (p. 44).

Case study interview respondents were selected using purposeful and snowball sampling. Interviews identified key exploratory questions to ask that support our research questions, but also included specifics regarding the work of each respondent (Yin, 2012). In addition to written notes all interviews were digitally recorded with the expectation

that the conversations would digress from the structured questions that were formulated prior to the interviews. We conducted a total of eight interviews. All respondents were informed of the anonymity and confidential nature of their participation. Actual respondent names and representative group (NGO, agency, etc) names have only been included with the expressed desire of the respondent.

3.4 Data Collection

In order to collect survey data, we attended three meetings and forums, including a community meeting for People of Albany United for Safe Energy (PAUSE), an open forum for the Council of Albany Neighborhood Associations (CANA), and the Albany Farmers Market. Interview participants were connected with a variety of organizations, including PAUSE, Environmental Advocates of New York, 100 Black Men, RADIX, Sierra, and the Albany Common Council. Many participants were involved in additional form of community engagement as well. Both survey and interview participants resided in the immediate Albany area and eight (8/12 who listed their specific location) lived in what the DEC designated as a potential environmental justice area. All three of the professional advocates whom we interviewed lived outside of the potential environmental justice area. A total of four females and five males were surveyed and a total of two females and six males were interviewed. Additionally, all surveyed participants self-identified as Caucasian or white and five out of eight interview participants identified as Caucasian or white.

3.5 Data Analysis

Interview data was transcribed and coded to identify core concepts touched upon in each interview question. We found consistent patterns for interview data and we coded according to expected patterns while dually taking into account deviant cases (Yin, 2012). From transcribed interviews we highlighted particular quotes and terms we found to relevant to our research themes in order to analyze the data and induce our theoretical conclusions. Surveys were coded and analyzed in Microsoft Excel, but no statistical analyses were conducted.

3.6 Limitations

While we were able to reach respondents through both interview and survey methodology, the majority of people we reached were Caucasian or White identified, despite the statistically high percentage of people of color. This pattern is demonstrative of the larger problem within the environmental movement where voice is not frequently given to people of color, despite their prevalence in the targeted communities. It was also challenging to reach community members who lacked affiliation with larger organizations. While we were able to do this to some extent, a longer research period would have allowed us to immerse ourselves in the communities we were studying to a greater degree and reach more people without formal affiliations.
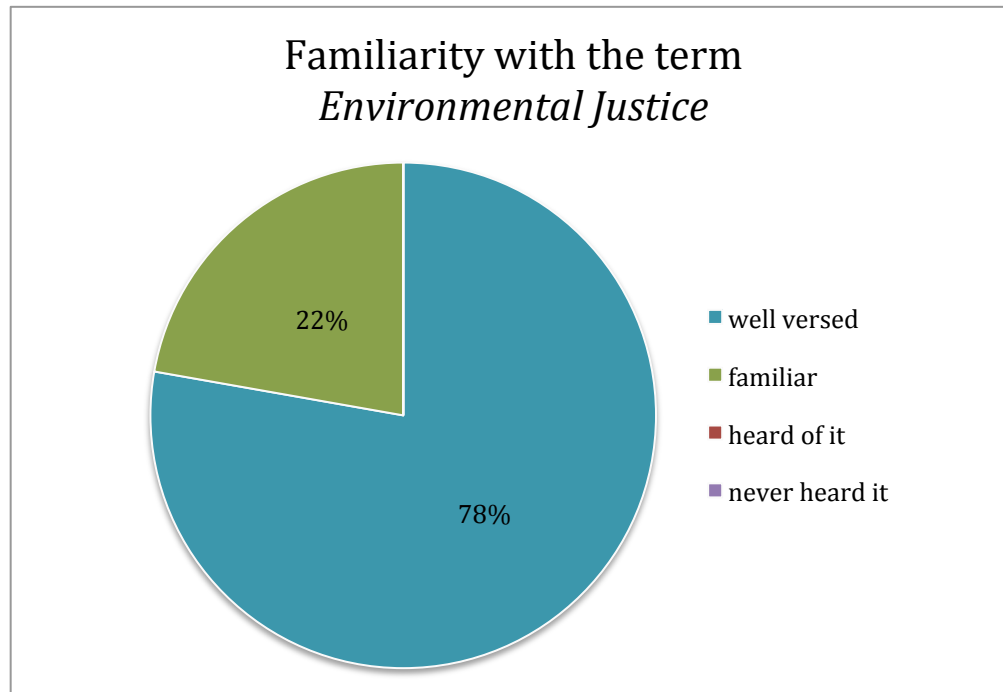
4. Results & Discussion

4.1 People's Understanding of Environmental (In)justice

The purpose of our research was to provide an opening to broaden our understanding of environmental justice beyond the traditional definitions and applications provided by governmental agencies in order to incorporate other perspectives, particularly those who may be facing environmental justice issues in their communities. While our results will go into depth about the particular issues communities highlighted over the course of our research interviews, the intersection of race and socioeconomic status, the means through which communities are addressing (or not addressing) these issues, it is first important to highlight the various ways in which people understand environmental justice. The following figure (figure 1) indicates the familiarity with environmental justice of survey respondents and demonstrates that all (100%) of our respondents were actually aware of the term, and 78% of them considered themselves well versed with the term. However, this data is not indicative of how "new" respondents were to the term, and there was even a range of respondents who have been working on environmental justice issues for years, and those like common council member Dorcey Applyrs, who consider themselves familiar with the term, but newly so. Applyrs stated:

> I would have to say that up until recently - and recently meaning January when this issue was brought to my attention - I was aware of the concept of environmental justice, but this is definitely the first tangible experience I have had with dealing with an environmental justice issue on this scale. (personal communication, 2014)

Figure 1. Survey respondents' (n = 9) familiarity with the term "environmental justice"

Familiarity with the term
Environmental Justice

- well versed
- familiar
- heard of it
- never heard it

22%

78%

However, it is also important to note that more than half (5/9) of survey respondents considered themselves "very involved" in addressing these issues, and only one interviewee considered themselves "not at all involved," so this proportionate understanding of environmental justice cannot be generalized beyond this particular sample of respondents. Since interview respondents were selected based on their involvement with environmental and social issues, it can be inferred from our conversations that all interview respondents were well versed with environmental justice, as well.

Familiarity with environmental justice is open-ended and could have a host of meanings. In order to parse out peoples' complex understandings of environmental justice, we asked both interview and survey respondents to define the term in their own words (see below chart).

Table 1. Interview and survey respondents' definitions of "environmental justice"

Interviewee or Respondent	What is environmental justice?
Brother Yusuf (100 Black Men)	"Environmental justice for me is the opposite of the injustices. It's giving [to] those underserved communities that have been marginalized and pushed aside…"
Daniel Morrisey (PAUSE)	"What causes environmental injustice is the continuous corporate tactic to place infrastructure of whatever kind in low income communities and communities of color. That is more what environmental justice means to me."
Dominique Calsolaro (Common Counci)	"It has to do with putting issues or stresses on these people [in disenfranchised in communities]. They have all these highways next to them, other industrial pollution. And also, public housing started in the 60s and they wanted to separate them from anyone else. So they moved them to what was an industrial area zone."
Dorcey Applyrs (Common Council)	"I would have to say that my interpretation of environmental justice is [that it] has to do with equity, and equitable treatment regardless of one's socio-economic status, race, or geographic location for equitable treatment as it relates to ones lived environment."
Roger Downs (Sierra Club)	"My personal definition is [a] community of people that traditionally has been disempowered or has been so disadvantaged in terms of education, in terms of economic opportunities, that they don't necessarily have the capacity to interface with a powerful corporation or industry…And in general I tend to think of communities of color but that doesn't necessarily need to be explicit."
Survey Respondent	"Assuring that all members of the community regardless of race and income are treated fairly with respect to environmental issues."
Survey Respondent	"Environmental justice is the need to ensure that impoverished communities lacking resources are not taken advantage of in terms of industrial projects that may result in adverse environmental, health, and safety impacts."
Survey Respondent	"It's always made more sense to me to call it social justice. I suppose the term environmental was used to demonstrate how pollution and destruction of the environment affect the health, safety, and livelihood of people often located in areas of concentrated poverty. The pollution and destruction is an injustice to the people."

Three themes arose in respondents' own definitions of environmental justice and the below are a few responses. People had a tendency to define what environmental justice was by contrasting it with environmental *injustice*. This is reflective of the ease in which people had identifying what was injustice and unfair, but had a harder time conceptualizing what justice would look like without discussion of the current injustices. While this only occurred directly in two definitions, most people spent the majority of time discussing environmental injustice, rather than a conceptualization of environmental justice.

The second theme that emerged relates to the fact that many respondents discussed issues around equity and fair treatment regardless of social identities, with race or class, and geographic location being the most common ones identified as pertinent identifiers. Many respondents also referenced the disproportionate effect of environmental injustice on low income and/or communities of color (some referenced both, others referenced one or the other). The biggest takeaway of this is that, in a society that frequently ignores class disparity and argues that we live in a post-racial nation, respondents in this research were able to identify the disparities that exist with relation to race and class from geographical perspective of their community. However, while 11 respondents directly referenced class, only five directly referenced race, and four of those 16 referenced both. This indicates that, while individuals have differing opinions about the importance of race and class in environmental injustices, more people were comfortable references environmental injustice being based in class oppression than race oppression. It should also be noted that while race and class were a consistent theme in many respondents' definitions, other respondents emphasized "equality," "justice," and "exploitation" without necessarily pinpointing which communities the current burden falls upon.

The third theme that consistently came up in respondents' definitions and discussions around environmental justice was that of infrastructure: particular stresses, financial resources, and pollution. A total of six respondents referred directly to financial resource distribution, pollution, or other particular stressors in their description of what environmental justice is (more broadly, not in references to Albany in particular). Some respondents highlighted corporate influence and exploitation of communities, placing the burden of proof for this exploitation on a tangible stakeholder. While this point was discussed in more depth with many interview respondents, only a select few included this point in their actual definitions of environmental justice. Others highlighted particular stressors that they believed were indicative of environmental injustice in the definition, which most frequently included pollution, health, and safety concerns. Others referenced unfair financial resources distribution or, on the flip side, the need for equitable resource distribution within their conceptualization of environmental justice. However, across the board respondents' own definitions included components that were not always the same components as were included in the EPA's official definition of environmental justice, a point we chose to explore.

As stated in the introduction, the EPA defines environmental justice as, "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national

origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" (US EPA, 2012). When presented to our respondents, zero respondents disagreed with this definition, but many believed it was not as encompassing as they believed it should be. However, there were a variety of results with the majority of survey respondents (>50%) believing this definition matched their understanding of environmental justice and other respondents (primarily interview respondents) saying that yes, it did, but then continuing to explain further intricacies that were not represented in that definition. The following response from a survey respondent indicates the hesitation and difficulty many seemed to have answering the question of whether this definition matched theirs. As states by one respondent: "this more or less matches my interpretation. Again, environmental justice ensures that these groups are not taken advantage of." Another survey response:

> Yes, but I would add that policies and implementation should recognize that lower socio-economic neighborhoods have been disproportionately impacted by previous discriminatory practices and we should look to rectify the past practices and implement new projects taking into consideration the cumulative impact of projects on poorer neighborhoods. (personal communication, 2014).

Only three (3/9) survey respondents (and no interview respondents, 0/8) stated that yes, this definition matched their understanding without adding additional thoughts on the matter.

The EPA's definition encompasses the theme of fair treatment for all social identities, but is focused on environmental policies and ensuring fair treatment in these *policies*. Interview respondent and activist/organizer Daniel Morrissey argued that "[The EPA definition] doesn't go far enough, [it] talks about implementation and enforcement of law but policies aren't environmental justice" (personal communication, 2014). This relates to the further point that the survey respondent included, which is that of historical exploitation and cumulative impact that is not included in this EPA definition. The understanding of environmental justice presented by the EPA refers to current and future policies, but does not incorporate the results of past policies and actions that could be perpetuating environmental injustice. Another anonymous survey respondent argued that "meaningful involvement" is not enough for there to be "just policy" and this point was further complicated by a statement by interview respondent Scott Kellogg who questioned whether meaningful involvement is even occurring:

> From their perspective they [regulatory agencies] are looking at, is everyone has a say in the process of drafting policy and they don't. Who is really actively involved in creating policy? Is the EPA really trying to democratize it? I don't think so. Maybe they look for input, but it is pretty nominal to me. Laws and policy is part of it, but really accountability is a huge part of it, to [hold] people responsible for having created these toxic environments [and holding those] who profited…accountable to discontinue pollution and to clean up what has already been created. (personal communication, 2014).[1]

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[1] This is not factually accurate, CERCLA does hold the polluter responsible for cleanup and the federal government must pay for the remaining balance, but many sites have not been fully remediated.

This quote exemplifies one of the root limitations with the EPA's definition of environmental justice that respondents highlighted. That, beyond just policies, there is limited or no meaningful involvement of people affected by environmental injustices in creating or implementing policies. Although there are opportunities for public input, such as during the NEPA process, lower income residents often lack access to these forums due to time or financial constraints or are not aware of these forums. While laws that reflect equitable policies for all social identities is important, many respondents, including Scott, pointed out that this is not enough, and historical impact must be included, necessitating responsibility and accountability from polluters as integral to environmental justice, something that is not encompassed in traditional understandings of environmental justice.
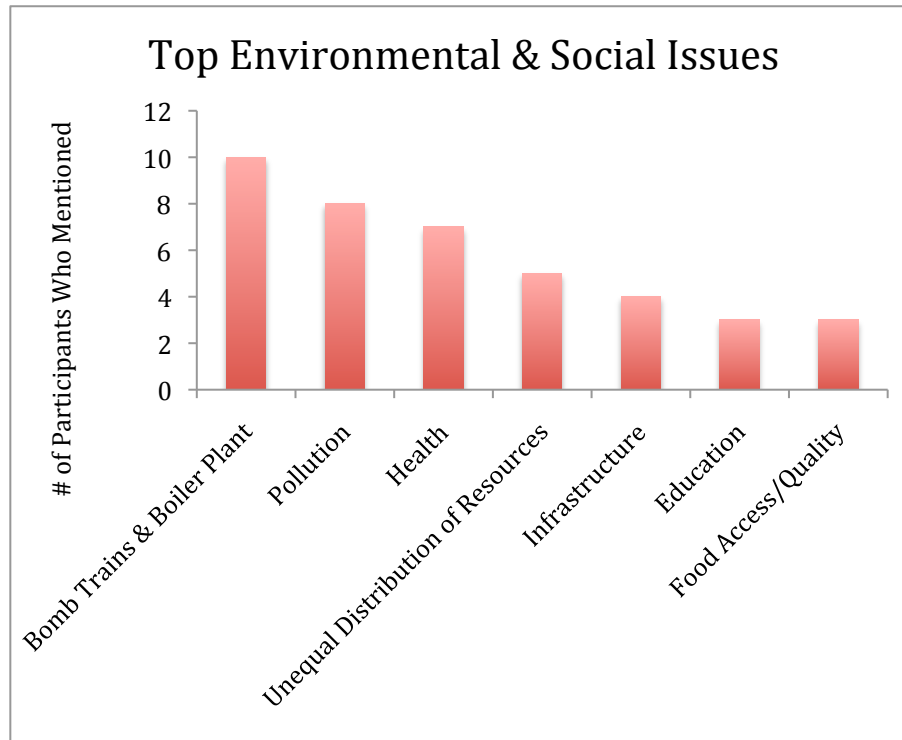
4.2 Social & Environmental Issues in Albany

From the semi-structured interviews we conducted, and surveys we received, it became clear that there was not just one environmental issue facing the city of Albany, but rather many different categories of issues ranging from short term, more recent issues, to issues that have plagued the city for much of the century. However it is important to mention that although our research area was limited to Albany, NY, these issues are by no means unique to this city, but rather can be found in most post-industrial cities around the country. The issues mentioned are not an exhaustive list, but rather a compilation of the issues most prevalently mentioned throughout the course of our research. In our interviews and surveys many respondents listed specific issues found in their communities, but for the sake of our research we made the decision to group similar issues under a more general heading. The top issues we found were: bomb trains and boiler plant, pollution, health, unequal distribution of resources, infrastructure, education, and food access/quality.

Figure 2 demonstrates that several issues were of greater concern than others, but it is not surprising that this issue of Bomb trains came up most often for it is a topic that has been in the news a lot lately in Albany. This issue involves crude oil transportation that is coming through the port of Albany, and is subsequently heated and transferred to barges in the Hudson River. While this issue was not necessarily on the radar prior to 2013, we found it to be a prevalent issue today, especially in relation to public health and safety.[2]

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[2] In July 2013, a 74 car fright train carrying Bakken crude oil derailed in Lac-Megantic, Quebec, resulting in the explosion of multiple tanks, the death of 47 people, and the destruction of much of the town. This event has led to a greater focus on the issue of oil-by-rail and its potential health and safety issues for communities. The Center for Biological Diversity announced plans for a potential lawsuit against the federal government in February of 2014. The lawsuit is over the federal government's proposed oil spill clean-up plan for the Hudson River, which they claim ignores the Atlantic Sturgeon. This relates to the issue of bomb trains in that the oil coming from these trains is transported onto barges in the Hudson River, so the bomb trains oil is the oil potentially spilling into the Hudson. (Times Union, 2014).

Figure 2. Top environmental and social issues identified in interviews and surveys

Top Environmental & Social Issues

# of Participants Who Mentioned

Bomb Trains & Boiler Plant: 10
Pollution: 8
Health: 7
Unequal Distribution of Resources: 5
Infrastructure: 4
Education: 3
Food Access/Quality: 3

As mentioned briefly above, the issue that came up most frequently was that of the bomb trains and an oil boiler plant that is proposed for the South End of Albany. Starting in January, 2014 this issue came to the attention of activists, residents, and the media in Albany, but in reality it began back in 2011. In 2011 the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC) found that Global Companies LLC.'s terminal operations in the Port of Albany could potentially impact an environmental justice area, as determined by the NYDEC. As a result the NYDEC should have followed Commissioner's Policy-29, Environmental Justice and Permitting procedures, and required that Global LLC. comply with these standards. This has not occurred, for Global did not submit to NYDEC a Public Participation Plan, which under CP-29 must be submitted before an application potentially affecting an environmental justice community can be accepted. Despite the clear wording of the law, the NYDEC issued a Notice of Complete Application to Global LLC., which has resulted in the surrounding environmental justice communities and their elected officials not being provided with adequate notification or information regarding Global LLC.'s activities at the Port of Albany. These environmental justice communities are bearing the disproportionate burden of potentially dangerous environmental and public health risks as a result of Global LLC. and NYDEC. Additionally, neither DEC nor Global LLC. had addressed public concerns over the potential risks of Canadian Bakken crude oil shipments or "tar sand oil" entering the City of Albany. Global LLC. has also applied for a new permit for heating capability in the Port of Albany, in order to be able to heat and transfer tar sands oil. Ultimately these trains, many are miles long, sit in the station for days, and are highly explosive, thus pose a major public safety issue, for they could explode due to

derailment, human error, collision, or potentially pose as a target for terrorists. Many in the community and the city in general are both angry and dismayed at the current situation, especially NYDEC's failure to comply with the law (Earth Justice Letter, 2014).

As expected, many of those we interviewed mentioned the bomb trains as a major issue, for as previously stated, it is the timely issue facing Albany. Scott Kellogg, of the Radix Ecological Sustainability Center in Albany, felt that the boiler plant and the general practice of bomb trains posed a major risk to public safety for several reasons:

> As that oil is being heated it is producing volatiles and danger because it exposes a significant risk of an explosion. The train carts are not engineered for that and they are not routinely pressure tested. Derailments are a real possibility as well, granted trains are moving slow but it poses significant risk. (personal communication, 2014).

Dominick Calsolaro, a now retired member of the Albany Common Council, expressed anger and frustration, for it was is belief that it was the DEC's job to ensure that Global LLC.'s port activities met the current regulatory measures. Instead of implementing the regulation DEC allowed Global LLC. to conduct their activities in such close proximity to an already disproportionately overburdened community that was deemed an environmental justice community. Calsolaro stated: "the DEC accepted [incomplete applications] and this is mind boggling" (personal communication, 2014). We also interviewed Dorcey Applyrs, the current Common Council representative from the first ward in Albany, who explained that many residents in the city, and in particular those in the South End, which is located right next to the Port of Albany, were very concerned about the bomb trains issue, but also cited that activists and the media had done, "an excellent job of highlighting this as a public health and public safety issue for residents in the city, but also across the country." (personal communication, 2014). Applyrs also mentioned that residents and others who were not typically involved in environmental justice issues have now been brought together over this issue at the Port. Roger Downs, of the Sierra Club, also cited the interactions between the environmental justice community and activists and organizations over the issue of the bomb trains as it has really been unique in that they have really been able to work together, when it is often more complicated: "for instance, the port of Albany issue (based on our environmental lawyers and our experience with environmental law) we identified that the state didn't comply with its own environmental justice policies so we were able to present that to the EJ community…here is something you can fight for." (personal communication, 2014).

The issue of bomb trains has gained national attention and many environmental organizations are framing this issue in the context of climate change, the need for clean energy, and the tar sands debate. However the community leaders we spoke to saw this issue as more of an immediate public safety and health issue that was affecting these communities, not as a big picture issue. This difference in viewpoint really exemplifies the division between the mainstream environmental movement and environmental justice communities, as former Albany common council member Dominic Calsolaro noted:

The people are looking at it as an immediate problem they are facing. While, the environmental groups are still looking at it as more of a global climate change issue. …right now people are focusing on more of their immediate safety and health than that of climate change. They're concerned that this thing will blow up in their backyard (personal communication, 2014).

Although this was the most prevalent issue that was came across in our research we also identified it as the issue that will potentially not have a long lasting impact on the city and its residents, for over the past few months it has become clear that the issue of bomb trains will be dealt with in a swift manner. However many of the other issues identified by our research are more systemic and endemic issues that have existed for decades and have no short-term solution in sight, many of which are not unique to Albany but can be found in most post-industrial cities. The issues we are highlighting are not all encompassing, but rather are the ones that came up the most in our data.

The second most cited issue by our respondents was that of pollution. However, pollution comes in many different forms, and although many respondents deemed it a problem, they gave a specific form of pollution they felt plagued their community. Brother Yusuff works in the Arbor Hill neighborhood of Albany and cited the pollution of Patroone Creek as the biggest environmental issue facing his community that is, as he put it "a dumping ground for hospitals and other institutions... for industrial complexes to dump their waste into, it runs through a park here." (personal communication, 2014). Brother Yusuff described that historically the city has re-routed polluted streams and creeks into the Arbor Hill neighborhood, in order to keep the waterfront area "clean" because it is where people row, and is an attraction for the city. Another respondent, Scott Kellogg, from the Radix Ecological Sustainability Center, felt that many urban neighborhoods suffered from water and air pollution as a result of past industrial practices. Kellogg further stated that,

Pollutants tend to concentrate in vicinities where those facilities are located. It is so present in the dust, in the roads, there are high levels of lead air born and dust born [which] bind in fatty tissues and cause a lot of physiological damage. (personal communication, 2014)

Several respondents also cited major highways, such as highway 787, as a primary source of air pollution issues in the city. Respondents also mentioned the potential disastrous pollution that could occur as a result of the spill of crude oil in the port. The issue of pollution is connected to public health, which was another topic that came up throughout our research as a major issue facing communities in Albany. Dominick Calsolaro, in our interview with him, mentioned the high rates of diabetes, obesity, and asthma that are facing residents in the South End of Albany. He also noted that there was a lack of access to medical facilities within the community, for there are not enough clinics and affordable options for residents. Common councilwoman Dorcey Applyrs cited highway 787 as a major site of air pollution for neighborhoods in the South End, which she believes contributes to the high rates of asthma, especially amongst young residents.

Several of those we interviewed connected the issue of health to the issue of food access and quality. Conor Bambrick, of Environmental Advocates of New York, stated that in the downtown area of Albany, "there is a lack of access to health food or a place where [residents] could go purchase fruits." (personal communication, 2014). He argued that many supermarkets are located outside of downtown, but most inner city residents do not have access to a car to visit these stores. Community organizer Brother Yusuff further supported this idea, stating that although many people call this issue "food deserts" it is really "food apartheid," because inner city residents are forced to "feed off of higher prices, bad food, sugar, chips and McDonalds, so they are not eating right" (personal communication, 2014). It is a terrible cycle that often can lead to further health problems, such as diabetes and obesity, which predominantly affects lower income minorities living in urban centers.

Throughout our research several respondents mentioned more systemic problems that have plagued inner city communities since the decline of the industrial era. These issues are unequal distribution of financial resources, education, and infrastructure, which ultimately are all connected to the central idea of distribution of financial resources, for it is these resources that drive educational systems and infrastructure. Brother Yusuff attributes this lack of resources to the systemic racism that plagues this country:

> The root cause is systemic racism and I have to say that without hesitation. Having been a victim of that in the [Armed] Services and working in the state. Some communities are not even looked at when it comes to programs being brought there, money being allocated in that direction and people being empowered through education. What they can do for themselves as opposed to accepting tidbits...they cater to the schools that are on the periphery. (personal communication, 2014)
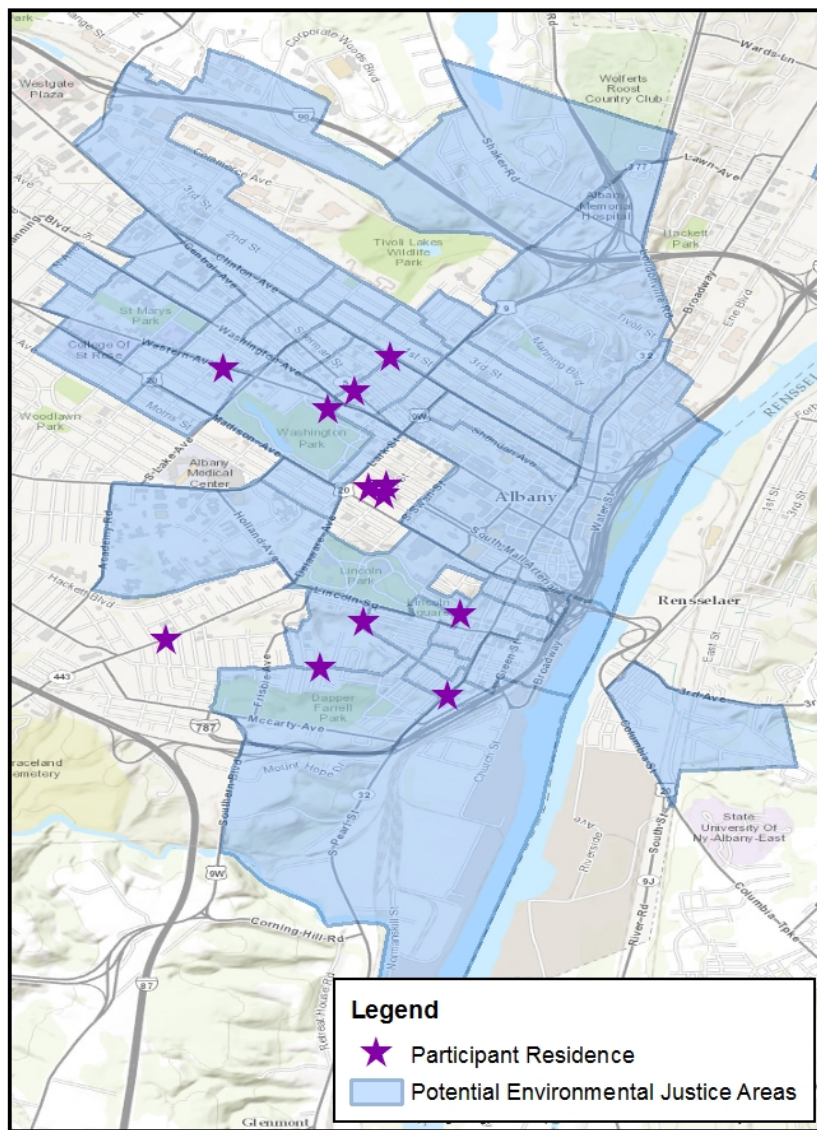
Ultimately if a community lacks the resources needed it leads to other issues, such as low graduation rates, high rates of abandoned buildings, unemployment, gangs, and eventually high crime rates. The communities that Brother Yusuff is referring to are predominantly lower income and largely minority, which is why he argues that systemic racism is the root cause.

4.3 What Environmental (In)justice Looks Like in Albany

During our research we interviewed members of different communities within Albany, as well as received surveys from those in the Albany area, giving us a wide area of perspectives from different communities, both geographically and demographically. Figure 3 demonstrates the locations of those we interviewed, and those who provided their address on their survey, as demarcated by purple stars. We superimposed these locations on to a map of the "Potential Environmental Justice Areas," (PEJA) as defined by the DEC. Out of those who provided their location, all but four of our respondents' communities are defined as a PEJA. As one can see from the map, much of Albany is defined as a PEJA, which the NYDEC determines as a result of census data. In order to be defined as a PEJA a census block must exceed one of the following statistical thresholds (see figure 4 for a visual guide).
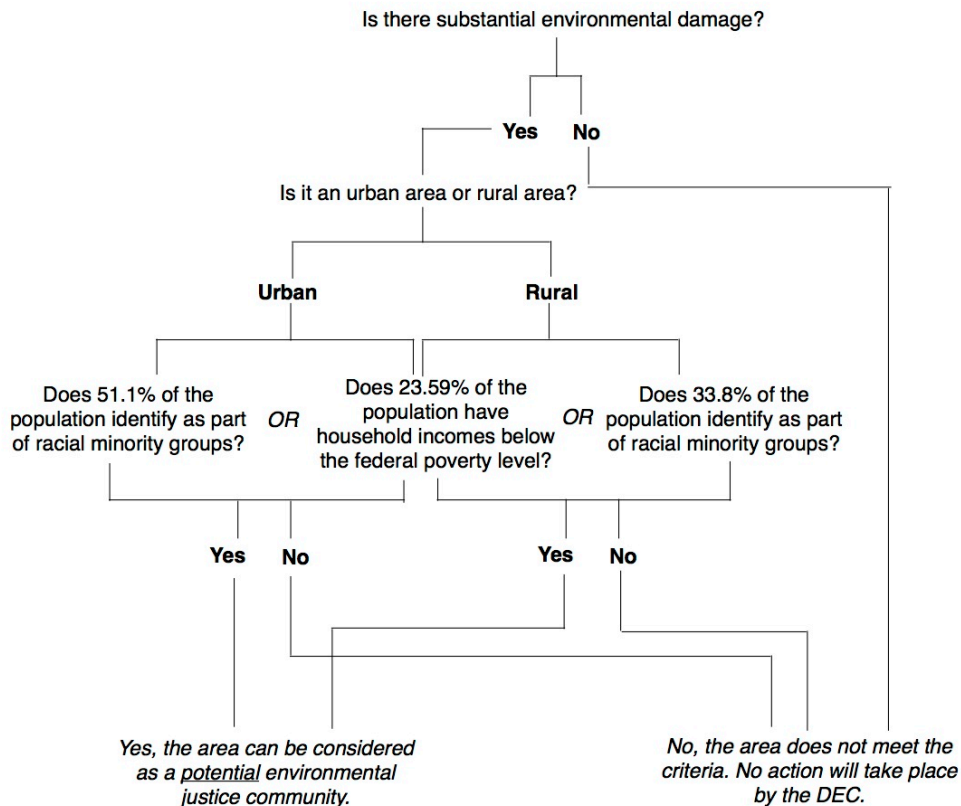
1. At least 51.1% of the population in an urban area reported themselves to be members of minority groups; or

2. At least 33.8% of the population in a rural area reported themselves to be members of minority groups; or

3. At least 23.59% of the population in an urban or rural area had household incomes below the federal poverty level (NYDEC, year).

Figure 3. Map of where respondents' live from those of who provided information

This finding was very interesting because when talking about environmental justice communities, most of our respondents did not talk about their community as a PEJA, but rather cited the South End or Arbor Hill instead, when in reality most of our respondents resided in one of these areas.

Figure 4. Flow chart demonstrating process of DEC classification of an "environmental justice community"

Is there substantial environmental damage?

Yes   No

Is it an urban area or rural area?

Urban   Rural

Does 51.1% of the population identify as part of racial minority groups?   OR   Does 23.59% of the population have household incomes below the federal poverty level?   OR   Does 33.8% of the population identify as part of racial minority groups?

Yes   No   Yes   No

Yes, the area can be considered as a potential environmental justice community.

No, the area does not meet the criteria. No action will take place by the DEC.

From the nine surveys we compiled data on the perceived demographics of our respondents' communities. All of the people who returned our surveys self-identified as Caucasian or White. However, the majority of respondents described their neighborhoods as predominantly a mix between Caucasian and African American, with several respondents adding the presence of Latinos & Hispanics as well (shown in figure 5). We also compiled data on our respondents' perceived socio-economic status, as well as the economic status of their community in comparison to their own. From Figure 6 one can see that 66% (6/9) of respondents self-identified as middle class, 22% (2/9) as lower-working class, and 11% (1/9) as upper class (shown in figure 7). The two respondents who identified as lower class considered the comparative socio-economic status of their community to be higher than their own. Five out of the six respondents who self-identified as middle class considered their class status to be higher than that of their community, while the other respondent considered their class to be the same as the

majority of their community. The single respondent who identified as upper class believed that he/she was of a higher class than the majority of his/her community. From this data it was clear that the majority of respondents were located in neighborhoods that were primarily lower-working class, which is not surprising considering that the majority of the respondents were located within *potential* environmental justice communities.

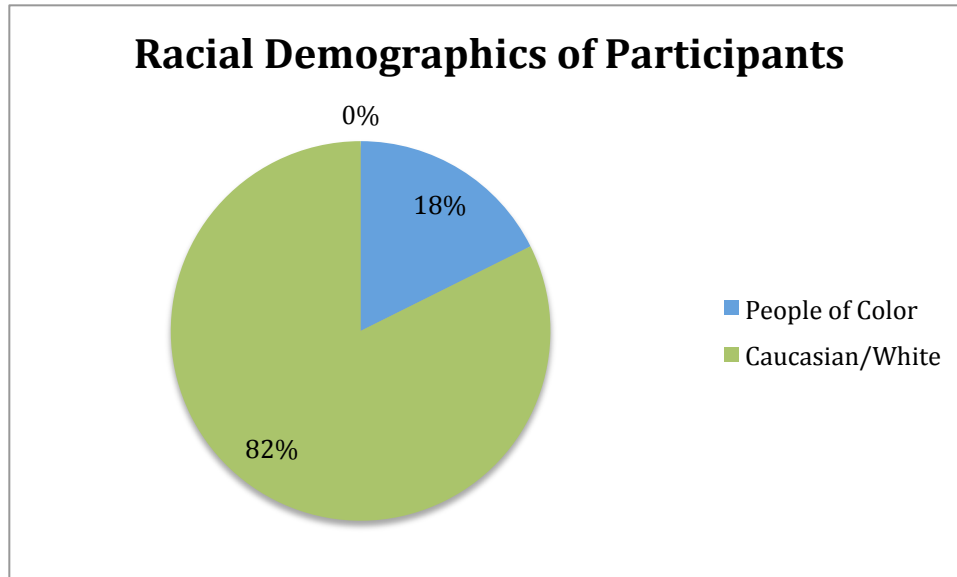Figure 5. Self-identification of race/ethnicity by survey respondents (n=9)

Racial Demographics of Participants

0%

18%

82%

- People of Color
- Caucasian/White

Figure 6. Perceived racial groups in the neighborhoods where survey and interview respondents live (n=17)

Percieved Racial Groups in Neighborhood

# of Participants Who Mentioned

12

10

8

6

4

2

0

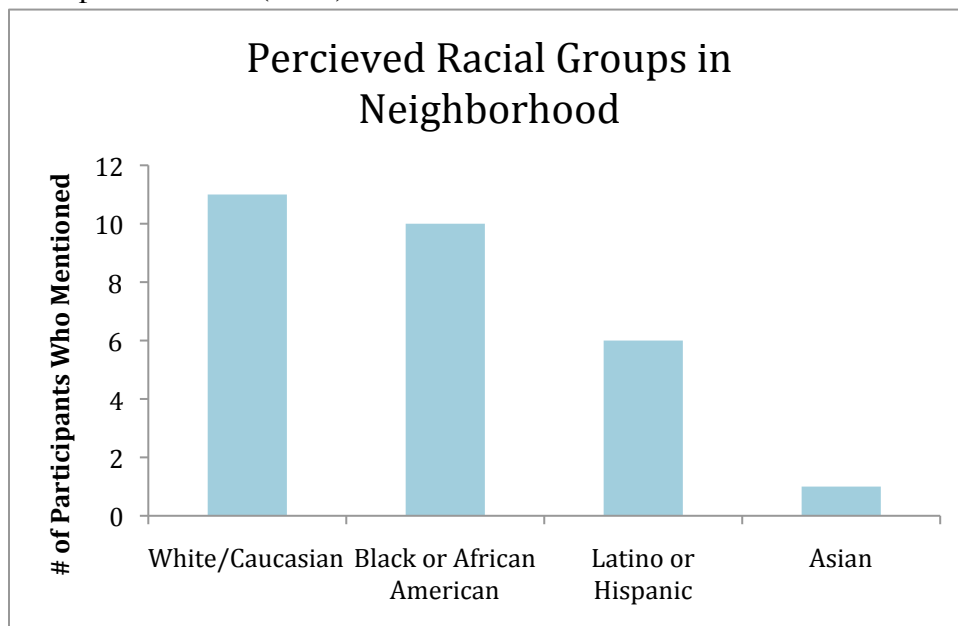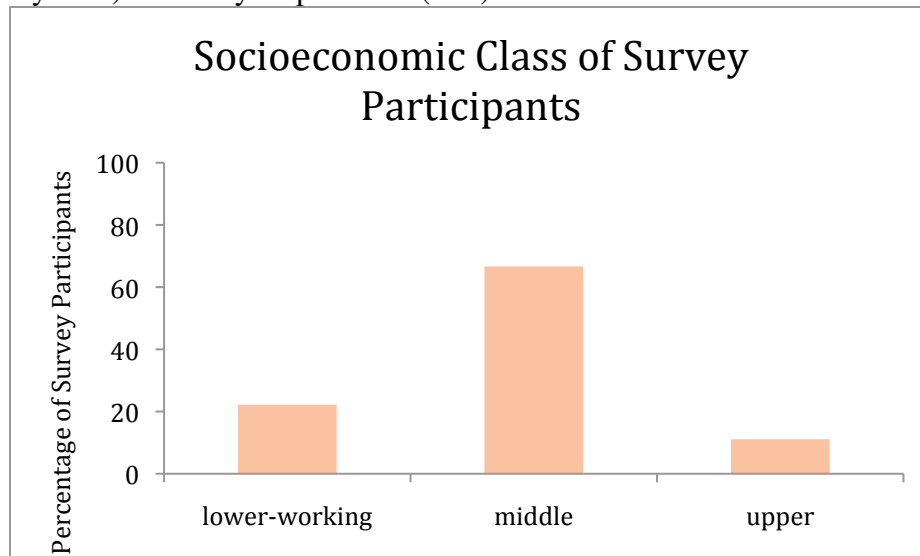White/Caucasian   Black or African American   Latino or Hispanic   Asian

Figure 7. Self-identified socio-economic class (particularly in terms of income and employment) of survey respondents (n=9).

From our interviews we wanted to get a sense of how demographics, specifically race and socio-economic status, play a role in environmental justice, and perhaps if there is a correlation between these factors. In our interviews we asked if our respondents believed that environmental justice issues in their community were a result of the demographics of the area. We received many different answers to this question, and certain respondents were clearly uncomfortable with the question and chose to ignore it. Several respondents felt that race and racism were intrinsically connected to environmental injustices, but for rather different reasons. Roger Downs, from the Sierra Club, felt that there was a preponderance of environmental injustices that were, "dumped on communities of color that you would never see fly in traditional white suburban neighborhoods." We asked him then if he thought that it was because they were communities of color or because urban lower income areas are statistically home to higher percentages of minorities. His answer was that even though class plays an important role, he still felt as though, "race trumps class a lot of the time" (personal communication, 2014), meaning that even if you had a poor white neighborhood and a slightly more affluent minority community, most likely the minority community would bear the burden of an environmental injustice. He followed this by saying that he didn't believe that companies went looking for communities of color to burden, but in his opinion these communities are statistically overburdened by injustices.

Another respondent, community organizer Brother Yusuff, did not hesitate to answer that he felt the connection was "systemic racism." It was his belief that systemic racism has contributed to communities of color being provided with insufficient resources, underfunded public services, and inordinate amounts of pollution. For Brother Yusuff, class did not play a major role, for the majority of people living in urban communities are lower income, but they are also people of color. Brother Yusuff cited the

pollution running in the creeks of his community that was there because politicians and city planners re-routed it into the neighborhoods of color because they knew that these neighborhoods did not have proper representation at the local level, so there would be no one to question their actions. Scott Kellogg of the Radix Ecological Sustainability Center did not directly answer this question, but rather pointed out that centuries of racism, prejudice, and mistreatment have resulted in a mistrust of white people on the part of people of color in his community. They are weary to believe that a Caucasian male could possibly be doing something to better their predominantly minority community, thus one can conclude that the relations between races are very strained, and there is limited basis of trust from which to build upon. Although race certainly plays an important role, not all of our respondents related the preponderance of environmental injustices purely to race and race alone, but rather cited class as a main determinant.

It is often difficult to differentiate whether an injustice is the result of race or class because the majority of the urban underclass is made of minorities. However one respondent, Dorcey Applyrs cited the lack of access to information about environmental justice issues was a result of the high percentage of residents being members of the lower-working class. She considered the ability to attend meeting and have access to the Internet to be luxuries many lower income residents did not have. Thus this lack of information, due to class, made many issues become environmental justice issues. For instance, lower income residence could not read about the dangers of bomb trains online or travel to public interest meetings to gain information. However, as previously stated, race and class are inherently connected in our society, thus it is often difficult to determine if one has more of an impact on environmental justice than the other.

Table 2. Interviewee responses to "What are the racial/ethnic and socio-economic demographics of your neighborhood?" and "Do you think these demographics play a role in the environmental justice issues faced by your community?"

Interviewee	Interviewee's Neighborhood	Racial/Ethnic Makeup	Socio-economic Status	Relation to Environmental Justice
Roger Downs (Sierra Club)	Center Square		We have several large housing units that serve low-income families. So it's an odd mix of by day advocacy organizations and by night the permanent residents here tend to be low income.	There is certainly a preponderance of projects that are dumped on communities of color that you would never see fly in traditional white suburban neighborhoods. I tend to think that still in terms of class issues race trumps class a lot of the time.
Dorcey Applyrs (Common Council)	First Ward	We have maybe 40% African American, 40% Caucasian and we do have a growing Latino population we also have an influx in refugee populations	We are mixed in terms of economic status so we have mixed income ward	Because this community is predominately low income area residents… so they don't often times have the luxury of attending meetings, some don't have internet access in the house, so they are not receiving information by email or they

			don't have access to other social webs about what is going on so I think this contributes to why this is an environmental justice issue.
Scott Kellogg (Radix)	Mansion Neighborhood	I don't know the exact demographic make-up but it is definitely majority people of color and low income	I'm not from this neighborhood or have a similar background and that is always a challenge. Dealing with hundreds of years of bad strains of racial relationships…so building trust is an issue and some people are going to be suspicious of what you are doing
Dominick Calsolaro (Common Council)	South End	When I ran in 2001 it was 55% white, in 2010 it was 40%white. It changed quite a bit…the city changed, we have a lot more refugees and immigrants	Socioeconomically, it still hasn't changed that much. In 2000 almost 25% below poverty rate, almost 40% were children	People who are living in public housing already, kids having kids, you have all those stresses and then you add a little bit of air pollution and it affects them greatly… This is showing that changes in environmental quality, where you live can affect these neighborhoods greatly
Brother Yusuf (100 Black Men)	Arbor Hill	This is an African American/Latino community. I don't know the percentage but it is an underserved community.	The root cause is systemic racism and I have to say that without hesitation. Some communities are not even looked at when it comes to programs being brought there, money being allocated in that direction and people being empowered through education.

4.4 Environmental Movement's Relationship to Environmental Justice

In the literature review we discussed how environmental justice issues and are not always adequately addressed by the mainstream environmental movement, nor are environmental justice communities always given sufficient representation in these movements. Pulido (1996) argued how environmental racism doesn't just refer to disproportionate environmental impact, but also unequal representation and inclusion. Roger Downs, of the Sierra Club, stated:

> I think that part of it is that when you grow up African American or Latino you don't often find people in the environmental community actually advocating for things that affect your community and there aren't many good role models. I am not saying there aren't environmental leaders even in environmental justice communities, I know some inspiring ones, but I think that those leaders tend to go on to do important things that cross many disciplines [and] they don't tend to get pigeon holed just into the environmental movement. (personal communication, 2014)

This lack of representation came up multiple times throughout interviews when discussing the mainstream environmental movement in relation to environmental justice.

For example, Brother Yusuf discussed a disconnect with the natural environment as a common theme he's seen among youth in communities of color he's worked with in the Capital District region. While the theme of environmental justice communities lacking a voice within the mainstream movement came up with other respondents, most others didn't explicitly cite the issue of race. It is also worth noting that the dynamics of white voices being amplified with more ease in environmental research and narrative was something that was perpetuated in the dynamics of our own research as well, a point that will be discussed later on.

Below are quotes highlighting the diverse range of perspectives interview respondents had on the mainstream environmental movement's involvement with environmental justice. When interpreting quotes keep in mind that only one interview respondent considered themselves part of the mainstream environmental movement, and Roger Downs of the Sierra Club indicated some discomfort identifying himself as such since he articulated a critique of paid environmental activists. Two considered themselves "in-between," sort of part, sort of not, while the rest did not consider themselves part of the mainstream environmental movement, so that could influence responses and perspectives.

Table 3. Interviewee comments on the relationship between the mainstream environmental movement and environmental justice communities

Interviewee	What's your understanding of the mainstream environmental movement's involvement with environmental justice?
Brother Yusuf (100 Black Men)	"They [mainstream environmental groups] don't have a connection to this community…There are some folks that are weighing into it and it's picking up [referring to mainstream involvement]…through national program I've touched base with a lot of people who really care about what's going on in underserved communities."
Connor Bambrick (Env. Advocates)	"The difference between environmental justice communities and the environmental movement is the consolidation of all these issues in one particular spot. To look at some of the broader policy issues that [mainstream] organizations work on, they definitely come with a different point of view…there are a number of groups out there that do work with environmental justice communities at large, but theirs don't come to the forefront [with] the big statewide groups."
Dominique Casilero (Common Council)	"Right now because of all the trains, crude oil, and heating facility there's a lot [of organizational involvement], but it didn't used to be that way. Right now we have the Sierra Club, PAUSE, Environmental Justice Advocates and more that are working on it now, but they were not there before. At first when we tried to get people to voice their concerns they were like 'nobody cared about us before'."
Dorcey Applyrs (Common Council)	"Just talking with the residents in the city who have various backgrounds; all of us are coming together to address this issue [bomb trains] and for the first time come to the understanding that there are many environmental justice issues in the city [and] also throughout the country."
Roger Downs (Sierra Club)	"I think that there is a real disconnect between the environmental movement and the environmental justice movement…You can pick out examples of where there is some good integration that they are one in the same but I think that those examples are few and far between. I think that there is still too much separation and that we see those divisions in a lot of ways and that we need to do a much

	better job of integrating the needs of EJ communities and the goals the environmental movement."
	"I think in some ways advocacy for one's environment is almost everyone's responsibility... I just think that this movement has got to grow and that everyone has to have an interest in the health of the community. And so maybe we have to redefine to be mainstream environmental movement because I hope to include the majority of our society in the effort."
Saima Anjam (Env. Advocates)	"I do think that environmental issues and environmental justice issues aren't always addressed and we could do a better job of addressing it as a whole…I do think there are groups out there who think like that but there are groups…whose primary lens is really the environmental justice lens because groups have been missing that perspective."
Scott Kellogg (Radix)	"All this work needs to be done and in all different levels. I understand there is a limit on what can be done on the grassroots level and we need to make changes on a policy level. Ideally, groups can work somewhere in the middle… It depends on the group… Is there a lot of representation and leadership from the communities that they [mainstream organizations] are representing within them? Maybe not as much as there should be."

Many respondents discussed the disconnect between the environmental movement and the environmental justice movement in various ways throughout our interviews. However, a particular prominent theme that arose in addition to the lack of voice for environmental justice communities was the lack of connection the mainstream environmental movement had with particular environmental justice communities. In the literature review Taylor (2000) discussed the importance of different strategies for addressing issues based on place specificity, which is something the mainstream environmental movement would be unable to do without strong connections to the community. Interviewee Connor argues that:

> It is important that those [environmental justice] communities have their
> concerns heard and that we [organizations] don't go forward with
> developments there that continue to burden communities with structures
> that are going to add to the pollution in the area. (personal communication,
> 2014)

This point enforces the idea that it is important that the mainstream environmental movement, or even more structured or removed organizations form ties with the community facing environmental injustices in order to effectively address problems.

Another theme that arose through interviews is how the multiplicity of issues facing environmental justice communities are not always addressed since mainstream organizations often have a more singular focus. Interview respondents placed emphasis on how sometimes the mainstream movement's desire to address larger issues detracted from local concerns. Interviewee Daniel Morrissey stated: "People are realizing that everything is connected and the struggles against oppression are also connected. The way [is to] build a grassroots movement and allow the intersections to give us strength and give us power," indicating a belief that a recognition of these intersecting issues is important for moving forward. A similarly related point arose that while the mainstream environmental movement is involved at times, it is because of the urgency of specific issues, even if they're not normally involved in addressing longer-term issues facing environmental justice communities. Former common council member Dominick
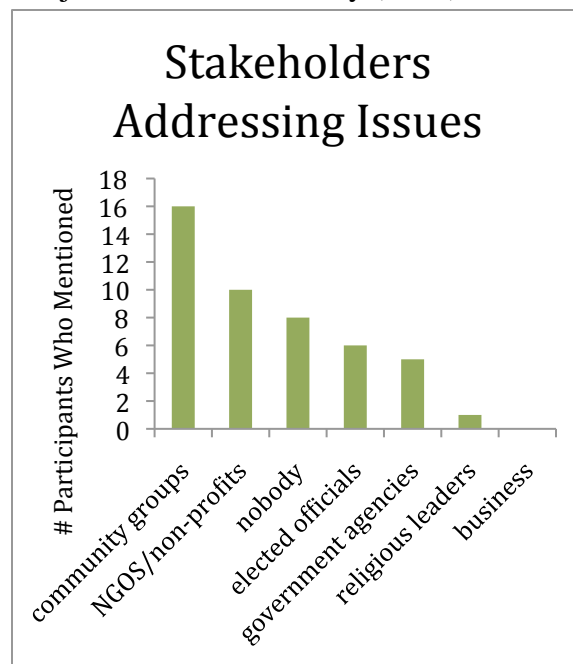
Calsolaro contends that while now "some groups like Sierra Club have gotten much more on a street level…so now these [environmental justice] communities are represented much better," this is particularly because of the recent arise of the bomb train and heating facility concerns in Albany.

The last theme that arose multiple times in respondents' narratives around the mainstream environmental movement is that we must be addressing environmental issues from a multitude of directions, and that environmental issues affect everyone to some degree. Organizer Brother Yusuf discusses the environment and access to it as a basic human right, and multiple interviewees discussed the need for all sectors to address environmental problems. In this sense, no interviewees directly dismissed the mainstream environmental movement, but rather offered substantial critiques of their involvement with environmental justice communities and offered directions to move in order to increase effectiveness.

4.5 Involved Stakeholders

Another point our research touched upon was who were involved and important stakeholders in addressing environmental justice issues in the Capital District region. Community groups arose as the most discussed stakeholder, with all but one respondent (16/17 including survey and interview data) mentioning them. This was followed by NGOs, which were mentioned by over half (10/17) of the respondents. A few less than half (8/17) of the respondents number (mostly survey respondents) believed that nobody was addressing particular issues they had identified (this was not reflective of all environmental and social issues, but the ones they had pinpointed as the most important). A few respondents mentioned elected officials and government agencies, and one respondent mentioned religious leaders. No one mentioned the business community, despite it being listed as an option for survey respondents.

Figure 8. Survey and interview responses to which stakeholders are involved and addressing environmental justice issues in Albany (n=17)

While respondents identified these as the active stakeholders addressing concerns of environmental injustice, this point does not guarantee that their actions were considered effective. Survey respondents were asked to identify the top three environmental and social concerns facing their community, identify who the most active stakeholder was, and indicate whether or not they perceived that stakeholder to be effective. No answer indicated outright confidence in the effectiveness of action. Seven respondents (7/17) claimed that stakeholders have been entirely ineffective while thirteen respondents (13/17) claimed that stakeholders have been somewhat effective but necessitate more support.

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

In both our literature and first-hand research we found that environmental justice the mainstream environmental movement does not always adequately address issues. Our respondents discussed the lack of representation they felt environmental justice communities have within the environmental movement. They spoke to the differences in focus, with the environmental organizations emphasizing statewide and national issues without respect to local concerns. This is especially relevant in Albany since, as the statewide capital, there is already a heightened emphasis on statewide advocacy and little focus on local issues and their particular effects in Albany. Additionally, we found that respondents' understandings of environmental justice differ substantially from the EPA and DEC's narrow definition of what encompasses an environmental justice community and what is needed to address it. Respondents demonstrated a variety of stakeholders and emphasized the need for increased partnerships in order to effectively address complex environmental justice concerns.

We believe that environmentalists, particularly those working within the mainstream environmental movement, need to utilize place-based knowledge in order to understand the particular needs of environmental communities because each community has a particular historical and cultural context through which these issues are occurring. In order to gain place-based knowledge, one must incorporate the perspectives of those living in environmental justice areas and their own understandings and conceptualizations of the problem and potential solutions. Community-based participatory research, as introduced in our literature review by Minker, Vásquez, Tajik & Petersen (2013) can be defined by Israel, Schultz, Parker & Becker (1998) as:

> A partnership approach to research that equitably involves, for example, community members, organizational representatives, and researchers in all aspects of the research process and in which all partners contribute expertise and share decision making and ownership.

In our research we tried to utilize the first steps to community-based participatory research, by drawing conclusions utilizing the perspectives of community members, rather than just drawing empirical conclusions based on abstract and removed numerical data. In order for the environmental movement to more successfully incorporate the needs of environmental justice communities, they must incorporate the perspectives of community-members who are experts in their own experiences and can bring place-based

knowledge to the conversation for creative solutions. These perspectives can be integrated by utilizing community based participatory research.

While our research offers a substantial beginning, more certainly needs to be done to fully understand and begin addressing environmental justice concerns in Albany. The following recommendations are drawn from a combination of our own analysis of the issues, a survey of existing scholarship, and suggestions extrapolated from first-hand interviews with community leaders. We recommend that next steps should continue encompassing community based participatory research by creating forums for dialogue and coalition building among the various stakeholders in the Capital District region. While community groups are frequently the stakeholders to bring attention to local issues, they often lack the time and financial resources that larger organizations have in order to address said issues. Community groups also often lack the connections and accreditation to interface with politicians, legislators, and funding associations. Creating forums to continue the dialoguing process can serve both to allow formal organizations to incorporate community needs into their action plans and for community groups to gain access to organizational resources in order to implement their own solutions.

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Appendix 1: Survey

An Exploration of Environmental Justice
Nicole Shepherd, Janet Vidal, & Eliza Sherpa
Skidmore College- Environmental Studies Department

We are a group of students conducting research for our senior capstone on the topic of environmental justice in the Capital Region. More specifically, we are examining the ways in which various people understand environmental and social justice issues and their intersections.

What is your gender?

What community/neighborhood do you live in now?

How long have you been living in this community/neighborhood?
a. <1 year
b. 1-3 years
c. 4-5 years
d. 6-10 years
e. >10 years

What is your age?
a. <18
b. 19-25
c. 26-35
d. 36-45
e. 46-50
f. 51-60
g. 61-70
h. >70

How do you identify racially and/or ethnically?

What are the primary racial and/or ethnic groups in your community?

In terms of employment and earnings, would you define yourself as…
a. Lower/Working class
b. Working/Middle class
c. Middle class
d. Upper class

Would you say that your socio-economic status is…
a. Lower than the majority of people in my community
b. About the same as the majority of people in my community
c. Higher than the majority of people in my community

Do you perceive there to be health, environmental, or social issues facing your community?
a. Yes, a lot
b. Some
c. I don't know of any

In your opinion, what are the three most important health, environmental, or social issues in your community.
a.
b.
c.

If you had to choose one, who do you think is the most active stakeholder addressing issue A?
a. Citizen Organized Community groups
b. NGOs/non-profit organizations
c. Government Agencies
d. The business community
e. Religious groups
f. Elected officials
g. Nobody is addressing these issues

To what extent are they effective in working to solve the problem? Please explain

If you had to choose one, who do you think is the most active stakeholder addressing issue B?
a. Citizen Organized Community groups
b. NGOs/non-profit organizations
c. Government Agencies
d. The business community
e. Religious groups
f. Elected officials
g. Nobody is addressing these issues

To what extent are they effective in working to solve the problem? Please explain

If you had to choose one, who do you think is the most active stakeholder addressing issue C?
a. Citizen Organized Community groups
b. NGOs/non-profit organizations
c. Government Agencies
d. The business community
e. Religious groups
f. Elected officials
g. Nobody is addressing these issues

To what extent are they effective in working to solve the problem? Please explain

Are you personally involved in working to solve any of these issues?
a. Yes, very active
b. Somewhat involved/involved when I can be
c. Not involved, but I would like to be
d. Not at all involved

Have you heard the term "environmental justice" before?
 a. Yes, I am well versed with it
 b. Yes, but I don't use it regularly
 c. Yes, but I don't know what it means
 d. No, I've never heard it before conducting this survey

How would you define environmental justice?

Environmental justice can be defined as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies." Does this definition match your understanding of environmental justice? Why or why not?

Would you define any of the issues you identified above as environmental justice issues?
a. Yes
b. No

If yes, which ones? (Please explain why).

What one thing would you improve in your community in relation to health, social, or environmental issues?

If you would be interested/willing to participate in an interview regarding these topics, please provide contact information below.

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

- Where do you live now? How long have you lived there? Is it the same community in which you work?
- If you consider yourself an active member of your community, what role do you see yourself playing?
- What social and/or environmental issues do you see as being the most important for this community?
- In what ways are you/your organization actively engaged in bringing about change, and/or benefitting this community?
- We looked at your website, but could you tell us a little about your organization and what role it plays in the community? (*include specifics here)*
    - Particularly- are you doing anything to address the issues you highlighted?
- What tools or actions does your organization utilize to bring about change? Are they effective?
- What other stakeholders do you see addressing these issues and how are they addressing them?
- In your opinion, what is environmental justice?
- Would you consider the issues you discussed above to be environmental justice issues? Why or why not?
- Environmental justice can be defined as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies." Does this definition match your understanding of environmental justice? Why or why not?
- Could you explain what the community in which you work looks like in terms of demographics (racially, ethnically, socio-economically), and aesthetically?
- Could you please explain the extent to which you think race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status influence the community in which you work?
- What role do you see these demographics playing, if any, in the environmental/social issues you discussed?
- *You mentioned other stakeholders before*, is your organization/group/you involved in partnerships and/or coalitions with like-minded [organizations/groups/people]? If so, what are they, and have these partnerships been beneficial for your work, the environment, and the community?
- To what extent do you think further coalition building would be beneficial? If so, with whom would you like to develop new relationships?
- How difficult has it been for you to connect with other like-minded [organizations/groups/people] working on similar issues as yourself?
- Do you consider yourself to be a part of the mainstream environmental movement?
- To what extent do you think that the mainstream environmental movement represents the needs of environmental justice communities?