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Food Community and the Fukushima/Daiichi Catastrophe

Panel: Health and Well-Being

The field of political ecology recognizes that environmental problems happen within larger political, economic and social contexts which affect some groups and individuals more than others. In particular, the field of political ecology illustrates the way in which gender shapes vulnerability to disaster. One of the primary pathways for environmentally persistent radioactive substances like cesium and strontium to enter people's bodies is through their ingestion in foods. Food consumption habits are highly gendered and it is not uncommon for women to take a disproportionately large role in making decisions regarding food purchases and meal preparation. At a basic level, the study is aimed at answering a fairly straightforward question: "How do women make decisions about how to keep themselves, their families and their communities safe in a radioactive environment?"

The paper will present the initial findings of interview research conducted in Japan with women bloggers and environmental activists responding to the Fukushima tragedy in order to answer this basic question and to better understand the dominant sources of information used by women; the broad narrative regarding the catastrophe related to the role of woman and mothers; as well as the strategies and behaviors adopted by women to protect themselves and their families. This broad issue is directly related to health and well-being, as well as environmental issues and addresses the notion of sustainable community within the context of environmental disaster.