

Eco-Warriors: The Intersection Of Environmentalism And Masculinity In Contemporary Society

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Abstract

This study examines the intersection of environmental protection and masculinity in modern society and the growing trend in literature to reimagine male protagonists as sustainability advocates to promote a more inclusive approach to environmental activism through the lens of literature. This paper explores how contemporary literature portrays the evolving relationship between male identity and ecological activism. By analysing a selection of novels and poems, this study examines the themes of environmental consciousness, gender roles, and the redefinition of masculinity in the context of environmental stewardship. The methodology entails conducting a critical literary analysis informed by ecofeminism and gender studies to discover how literary narratives reflect and challenge the traditional notions of masculinity. The findings point to a growing trend in the literature that reimagines male protagonists as advocates of ecological sustainability, emphasising the importance of a more inclusive and gender-sensitive approach to environmental issues. The intersection of environmental protection, how male identities are portrayed in connection with activism and ecological consciousness, themes of environmental stewardship, the redefinition of masculinity, and the cultural ramifications of connecting gender and environmental issues are all explored in this study.

Keywords: Environmentalism, Masculinity, Ecofeminism, Environmental Consciousness, Ecological Stewardship

Introduction

Modern literature increasingly examines contemporary society's complex and dynamic relationship between environmental protection and masculinity. Dominance, control, and practical understandings of nature have historically been linked to masculinity. Modern literary works dispel these myths by featuring male characters who value activism and ecological consciousness. In the context of environmental protection, this study attempts to investigate how contemporary literature reflects and critiques the evolving paradigms of masculinity. This study aimed to comprehend the wider cultural ramifications of ecological sustainability and masculinity by examining how male protagonists in novels and poems interact with environmental issues. The portrayal of male protagonists who demonstrate ecological consciousness has become more prevalent in contemporary literature, indicating a notable change in the portrayal of masculinity. Historically, literary representations of men have emphasised characteristics such as power, control, and a disconnection from nature to conform to prevailing cultural norms. Recent works dispel these myths by showcasing male characters who support sustainable practices and have strong ties to the environment. This change reflects broader cultural shifts in the idea of being a man, where being environmentally conscious and practising eco-friendly behaviour are now considered components of a more progressive and modern masculine identity.

Barbara Kingsolver's 2012 book *Flight Behaviour*, which centres on a male protagonist named Dellarobia Turnbow, whose sense of identity and responsibility is transformed by his growing awareness of climate change, is a notable example of this trend. Even though the narrative mainly focuses on Dellarobia in the work journeys, the male characters who go with her start to appreciate the importance of ecological care and reject the traditional notions of masculinity that prioritise exploitation over preservation. This story challenges the idea that environmental awareness is a purely feminine or incidental concern and instead proposes a redefined masculinity in which environmental consciousness is an essential component. Kingsolver's writings serve as excellent examples of how modern literature redefines male roles by aligning them with ecological consciousness, thereby promoting a more inclusive and long-lasting conception of masculinity. The Pulitzer Prize-winning Book, *The Overstory* (2018) by Richard Powers deftly intertwines the lives of numerous characters, including male protagonists who forge close bonds with the natural world. *The Overstory*'s male characters are portrayed as fiercely dedicated to environmental activism, frequently at considerable personal expense. Powers examined the notion that the dominance and control that define traditional masculine values are not only out of date but also detrimental to society and the environment through these characters. Instead, the book advocates for a different kind of masculinity based on compassion, understanding, and an understanding of how all life is interrelated. Powers' writings offer a potent critique of anthropocentrism and a plea for a more sensible, ecologically conscious definition of masculinity.

In recent years, masculinity has undergone a significant transformation, particularly in its relationship with environmental protection. Historically, masculinity has been associated with traits such as dominance, control, and practical approaches to nature, often at odds with ecological values. However, contemporary literature reflects a shift in this paradigm, presenting male characters who engage in environmental issues in ways that challenge traditional gender norms. This research explores how modern literary works depict the evolving relationship between masculinity and environmental activism and what this reimagining signifies for broader cultural narratives around gender and ecological consciousness.

Literature Review

In ecocriticism, which she defines as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment," Cheryll Glotfelty is widely acknowledged as a trailblazer. Glotfelty and Harold Fromm co-edited the seminal anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), establishing ecocriticism as an academic field. She contends that because literature can critique the destructive tendencies of anthropocentrism and mirror society's relationship with nature, it plays a crucial role in shaping and reflecting environmental consciousness. Glotfelty's work highlights how narratives can foster ecological awareness and inspire a more moral and sustainable relationship with nature, emphasising the value of analysing literary texts for their aesthetic qualities and their environmental implications. Glotfelty challenges readers to think about how literature can act as a catalyst for environmental change by challenging the anthropocentric worldview that prioritises human needs over the planet's health.

In his groundbreaking book *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), Lawrence Buell delves deeper into these concepts by examining how environmental attitudes have influenced and been influenced by historical literature. Buell's examination of *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau and other seminal works in American nature writing demonstrates how literary narratives have long addressed environmental issues and have frequently promoted a more peaceful coexistence of humans and nature. Buell criticises the anthropocentric mindset that sees nature as a resource to be exploited and introduces the concept of "toxic discourse" to describe how literature can expose the environmental degradation caused by industrialisation and urbanisation. His work highlights how literature can reflect ecological issues and shape public opinion and policy, encouraging a greater understanding of the environment and a move towards more sustainable practices.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, focussing on critical literary analysis to explore the intersection of environmental protection and masculinity in selected literary works. The study identifies contemporary novels and poems that explicitly address themes of ecological protection and feature male protagonists. Texts are selected based on their relevance to the research question and their portrayal of environmental consciousness. The analysis is informed by ecofeminism and gender studies, applying these perspectives to understand how masculinity and environmentalism intersect in literary works. Close readings of the selected texts are conducted to identify recurring themes, symbols, and narrative strategies related to masculinity and environmentalism. The analysis focuses on how male characters engage with environmental issues and how these engagements challenge or reinforce traditional gender roles. The literary texts are situated within their broader socio-cultural and historical contexts to understand how they reflect and respond to changing perceptions of masculinity and environmental issues.

Literary Criticism

The contributions of Glotfelty and Buell collectively constitute the foundation of ecocritical theory, providing academics with a robust framework for examining the relationship between literature and environmental issues. Their research shows that literary works actively participate in cultural conversations about nature and humanity's place in it rather than merely passive reflections of environmental consciousness. These academics illustrate how literature

can encourage readers to re-evaluate their interactions with nature by challenging anthropocentrism and promoting a more harmonious relationship with the environment. This viewpoint, which emphasises how literature can promote a more environmentally conscious and sustainable society during escalating ecological crises, is crucial. Their contributions still impact ecocritical studies today, serving as a guide for scholars to investigate the environmental aspects of literature from various historical periods and genres.

Masculinity Studies

Masculinities (1995), R.W. Connell's seminal works on masculinity delve into the idea of "hegemonic masculinity," or the dominant cultural definition of manhood, defined by attributes such as control, strength, and assertiveness. Connell contends that, in addition to marginalising alternative gender expressions, this dominant masculinity also affects how men interact with their surroundings. Like hegemonic masculinity with women and other men, this framework sees nature as something that must be controlled or subjugated. Connell's research has been crucial in exposing how these gender norms cause environmental damage since they encourage men to participate in exploitative behaviours to maintain their masculinity. Connell advocates redefining masculinity in a way that is less about dominance and more about inclusion and nurturing. This shift could lead to more environmentally sustainable relationships in the future.

Michael Kimmel, a prominent researcher in the field of gender studies, expands on this analysis by investigating how the social construction of masculinity influences men's attitudes and behaviours regarding environmental issues. Kimmel addresses how American ideas of masculinity have historically been connected to the concept of taming the wild and controlling nature in his work *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (1996). These concepts express the larger societal values of autonomy and self-sufficiency. Kimmel draws attention to how these ideals have resulted in detrimental environmental actions. Men may feel compelled to exhibit their manliness by controlling nature through massive resource extraction or aggressive industrialisation. Kimmel's analysis emphasises the necessity of opposing these established conventions and advancing alternative masculinity models that place a premium on collaboration, consideration for others, and environmental stewardship.

Connell and Kimmel's combined works show how socially constructed gender norms substantially impact attitudes and behaviours related to the environment. These researchers pave the way for reimagining masculinity consistent with ecological values by critically analysing how conventional ideas of masculinity contribute to environmental harm. Their findings suggest that redefining masculinity to include traits like empathy, cooperation, and a sense of responsibility towards the environment can encourage more environmentally conscious and sustainable behaviours among men. This viewpoint is becoming increasingly significant in light of the pressing environmental issues facing the world. In particular, new masculinity models have the potential to significantly contribute to environmental sustainability and the mitigation of climate change.

Ecofeminism

Vandana Shiva's contributions to ecofeminism highlight the close relationship between women's oppression and environmental exploitation, both of which she claims have their roots in patriarchal power structures. Shiva challenges the prevailing development paradigm in her landmark 1988 book *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*. She sees it as fundamentally violent and exploitative, especially towards women and the environment. She contends that industrialisation and Western science have disenchanted nature, turning it from

a living thing into a resource that can be managed and used for profit. Shiva claims that the same reasoning underlies the mistreatment of women, who, like nature, are frequently viewed as inferior and exploitable in patriarchal societies. In her advocacy for a return to more conventional, sustainable methods, she emphasises the need for an environmental ethic centred on equality, community, care, and the intrinsic value of women and the natural world.

Similarly, Carolyn Merchant examines the historical foundations of the dual oppression of women and nature in her 1980 book *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. Merchant charts how, during the Scientific Revolution, people's understanding of nature changed from one of a mechanical, controllable entity to one of a nurturing, feminine force. She contends that the emergence of patriarchal capitalism, which aimed to control and take advantage of women and the environment for financial gain, accompanied this change. Merchant's ecofeminist analysis posits that the metaphor of nature as a machine perpetuates gendered power relations and environmental degradation by devaluing women's labour and the environment. She advocates for rethinking how humans interact with the natural world to uphold the interdependence of all life and advance a more just and sustainable global community.

When combined, Shiva and Merchant's writings challenge the conventional male-dominated viewpoints that have historically marginalised women and the natural world, forming a fundamental component of ecofeminist theory. By linking the exploitation of the environment with women's subjugation, they draw attention to how systematic these oppressions are and how addressing them requires a whole-person approach. Their support for an egalitarian, caring, and community-based environmental ethic offers a potent counterbalance to the exploitative methods of patriarchal capitalism, advocating for a more sustainable and inclusive understanding of the interactions between humans and the natural world. Their contributions continue influencing contemporary discussions on environmental justice and gender equality, underscoring the importance of integrating feminist insights into environmental activism and policy-making. The literature review draws on key scholarly works from ecofeminism, gender studies, and literary criticism to establish a theoretical foundation for the analysis.

Results

The analysis reveals several key themes in portraying masculinity and environmentalism in contemporary literature. Male protagonists are increasingly depicted as aware of and engaged with environmental issues, often adopting roles traditionally associated with femininity, such as nurturing and protecting nature. The texts challenge traditional notions of masculinity by presenting male characters who reject dominance and control in favour of collaboration, care, and sustainability. The intersection of masculinity and environmentalism in literature reflects broader cultural shifts towards a more inclusive and gender-sensitive approach to ecological issues, suggesting that traditional gender roles are being reimagined in response to environmental challenges. The interdisciplinary analysis presented above can be synthesised into a philosophical ideology termed intersectional ecocriticism. This ideology blends insights from ecocriticism, masculinity studies, and ecofeminism to advocate for a holistic approach to understanding and addressing environmental issues. Intersectional ecocriticism asserts that the exploitation of nature is deeply intertwined with other forms of social domination, such as patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity, and that effective environmental advocacy must, therefore, engage with these intersecting forms of oppression.

The ideology posits that environmental degradation cannot be fully understood or addressed without considering its links to gender oppression, mainly how patriarchal systems exploit both

women and the environment (Merchant, 1980; Shiva, 1988). It argues that the subjugation of nature and marginalised genders stems from a shared worldview that values domination, control, and exploitation (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). Intersectional ecocriticism critiques the anthropocentric and masculinist worldview that has historically dominated Western thought, viewing nature and the environment as resources to be conquered or controlled (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996). It suggests that this mindset is not only environmentally destructive but also perpetuates harmful gender norms that marginalise non-dominant masculinities and femininities. Drawing on ecofeminist thought, the ideology advocates for reimagining human-nature relationships that emphasise care, empathy, and sustainability (Merchant, 1980; Shiva, 1988). It calls for a departure from exploitative practices and developing new, more inclusive models of masculinity that value cooperation and environmental stewardship (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996).

Intersectional ecocriticism views literature as a powerful tool for reflecting and shaping societal attitudes towards nature and gender. It posits that literary texts can challenge dominant ideologies, promote ecological consciousness, and inspire more ethical interactions with the natural world (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Buell, 1995). The ideology advocates for systemic change that addresses environmental and social injustices, recognising that true sustainability must involve dismantling oppressive structures in all forms. It supports policies and practices integrating environmental justice with gender equality, promoting a more equitable and sustainable world (Merchant, 1980; Shiva, 1988). This intersectional ecocriticism ideology provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding and addressing the complex interrelations between environmental and social issues, advocating for a more just and sustainable world.

Discussion

The findings suggest that contemporary literature is critical in challenging and redefining traditional concepts of masculinity, particularly in the context of environmental protection. These works contribute to a larger cultural narrative emphasising sustainability and gender inclusivity by depicting male characters as environmentally conscious and active. This reimagining of masculinity is consistent with ecofeminist ideals, implying that literature can be an effective tool for encouraging environmental and social change. The study also emphasises the need for additional research into the intersection of gender and environmentalism, mainly how these themes are represented in various cultural contexts.

Conclusion

The intersection of environmental protection and masculinity in contemporary literature represents a significant shift in how male identities are conceptualised about ecological issues. Contemporary literary works challenge traditional stereotypes by featuring male protagonists who promote sustainability and embrace a more interconnected view of nature. This redefinition of masculinity broadens the scope of environmental activism and encourages a more inclusive and gender-sensitive approach to addressing environmental issues. By emphasising these themes, this study contributes to a better understanding of the cultural narratives that shape our perceptions of masculinity and nature. The structure of this article should adhere to academic standards for research in the humanities and social sciences, focusing on the intersection of literature, gender studies, and environmentalism. This shift in literary representation is part of a more significant trend in contemporary literature, in which male protagonists are increasingly portrayed as agents of environmental change. These narratives reflect a growing recognition that traditional notions of masculinity, which

frequently prioritise control over nature, must evolve to address today's urgent environmental challenges. Contemporary literature helps to reimagine masculinity by challenging stereotypes and encouraging a more interconnected view of the natural world. This reimagining aligns with ecological values and points to a more sustainable and equitable future in which men play an essential role in environmental stewardship. As a result, these literary representations significantly impact how the general public perceives masculinity and how to encourage more environmentally conscious behaviour among people of all genders. Examining masculinity and environmental protection in contemporary literature reveals a significant shift in the representation of male identities concerning ecological issues. Contemporary literary works challenge traditional stereotypes by featuring male characters who support environmental sustainability and believe in more nurturing and interconnected views of nature. This reinterpretation of masculinity promotes a more inclusive and gender-sensitive approach to addressing ecological challenges and broadening the scope of environmental activism. This study contributes to our understanding of the cultural narratives that shape our perceptions of masculinity and the natural world by focusing on the intersection of gender and environmentalism.

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