

TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICAL MASCULINISM

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PREAMBLE:

To date, little attention has been given to the intersection between modern Western masculine identity and the more-than-human world. The masculinities discourse has typically focused on violence, along with racial and sexual issues and the urban/suburban experiences of men's lives. The discourse is easily drawn into essentialist and heteronormative undercurrents, effectively locking men and masculine identities into ways of being that reinforce rather than liberate masculine identity from stereotyped norms. In the context of the masculinities discourse, little if any attention has been given to environmental concerns (Allister (ed), 2004). Similarly, inquires into more-than-human nature in the West are often framed through reductive and atomistic methodologies that typically omit gender matters from the discourse entirely (Bordo, 1999). Ecofeminism is a notable exception. Ecofeminism assumes a primary role in studying this intersection in emphasizing the mutual oppression of women and more-than-human nature by dominant masculine social constructions. In contrast, the contemporary masculinities discourse has provided little deconstructive evidence of the masculinities:nature relationship. This paper follows in the footsteps of ecofeminism by exploring the human:nature relationship through the lens of modern Western masculine identities and more-than-human nature.

To begin with, and in general agreement with ecofeminism are profeminist masculinities theories that examine the ways that traditional masculine identities are bestowed social advantages over subordinated groups such as women, people of colour and gay men (Connell, 1987). Traditional masculine identities are imbued with what O'Brien (1981) refers to as 'malestream' ethics. Malestream ethics 'dare' any challenges to the power and authority bestowed upon traditional masculinities to direct confrontation and reprimand. I borrow the term *ethics of daring* from Rosalyn Wallach Bologh (1990) to describe the set of moral standards and principles such as rational, reductionist, emotionless (except for anger and aggression), powerful, controlling, confident, conceited, selfish, outspoken, strong, competitive, virile, objective, chivalrous, and condescending expressions of the self that feature in traditional Western masculinities, and dominate both the personal and political expressions of masculine identity (Bologh, 1990). Notably, such ethics are lauded by the socio-economic systems that dominate the West. Expressions of caring for self and others are typically confined within the parameters of these traditional masculine character traits, making the presence of caring authentically for self and others difficult to access, especially (but not exclusively) for men who are impacted by prescribed masculine identities most directly.

Ecofeminists have rightly noted that the ethics driving a feminised 'ability-to-care' for, and be 'cared-for-by' wider natural phenomena have been systematically subordinated by the malestream (Warren, 2000). I take the perspective here that these *ethics of caring* (Bologh,

1990) are reflective of fuller, wider and deeper human experiences that favour love, friendship, trust, compassion, consideration, reciprocity and co-operation towards engagements with human and more-than-human life (Noddings, 1984). In contrast to hegemonic masculinities, I argue here that the virtues conveyed through an *ethics of caring* provide access to the fuller flourishing self, immersed in one's surroundings. *Ethics of caring* also encourage the mainstreaming of environmental, social and economic sustainability since to care for self, others and wider nature is to be invested in their sustenance. These ethics are not gender specific but rather are available to both men and women, and masculine and feminine identities alike.

Within hegemonic masculinities, the capacity to 'care' is typically restricted to 'caring-for' or 'caring about' only that which brings about personal and immediate gain. Western masculine hegemonies tend to encourage isolation and anti-ecological sentiment that not only pervades traditional masculine identities, but also has detrimental impacts on personal and societal health. The prevalence of depression, drug and alcohol abuse, violence and suicide, when combined with notably increasing ecological devastation suggest that being a traditional man or subscribing to traditional masculine identities is to participate in an assault on society and environment that is also detrimental to one's personal, interpersonal, physiological and spiritual well-being, along with nature writ-large. Accordingly, hegemonic masculinities produce an unhealthy masculinities praxis where nature is taken as a 'substrate' for rationalised masculinities to push up against, effectively using nature as a foil for personal satisfaction rather than relating to nature as self and self as nature.^{1*} This pattern is indicative of the dominance of logos over eros, and may be the primary source of what is now widely considered an adversarial exchange between humanity and more-than-human nature, which has become characteristic of masculinised Western societies.

Environmental philosopher Freya Mathews (2005) has drawn the human:nature discourse towards a 'trans-gendered' (as in 'beyond-gendered') expression of fuller-humanness by encouraging both men and women to reinhabit reality. But a specific ecologisation^{2**} of masculinities theory that keeps pace with *ecofeminism* does not currently exist making this trans-gendered human:nature vision conceptually lop-sided. Additionally, there cannot be an ecofeminist masculinities theory, since to expect ecofeminists to do the work of ecologising masculinities is to place women in the role of nurturer which reinforces the very logic of domination that ecofeminism aims to transcend. Consequently, an *ecological masculinism* is needed to transform gender specific power differentials that afflict men's lives and the ways that masculinities interact (or avoid interaction with) wider nature. Further, the ecologisation of masculinities theory addresses both political and personal concerns, while also giving attention to the internalisation of a 'power-over' dynamic that is unique to masculinities and men.

THE 'MASCULINITIES' OF ECOLOGICAL MASCULINISM:

Clatterbaugh (1990) has identified eight key conceptual frameworks that pervade

*Freya Mathews (2005) speaks of this 'unhealthiness' as a loss of grace, which results from materialistic and individualistic postmodernism that brutishly obscures an innate oneness of humanity with wider nature (pp. 15–23).

**Ecologisation of masculinities theories is defined as the process of recognising relationships between various facets of the masculinities discourse as well as an awakening of ecological principles and practices within masculine identities.

masculinities theory. These have been positioned across a political spectrum from progressive Left to conservative Right:

- Socialist
- Gay/Queer
- Profeminist
- Black/African
- Mythopoetic
- Men's Rights
- Moral Conservatives
- Evangelicals

These conceptual frameworks are not fixed, nor are they discrete. An individual may move between or possess any number of positionalities on an infinite number of issues. Notably, all positionalities give little if any consideration to the connection between masculinities and more-than-human-nature. Introducing ecological considerations into the full spectrum of these positionalities promises to provide a wider spectrum of possibility for masculine ways of being in dropping adversarial binaries and seeing the masculinities discourse as an inter-relating and flexible movement. These conceptual frameworks within masculinities theory can be viewed as both metaphorically and literally ecological. The metaphoric ecologisation of masculinities theory is termed an *ecomasculinity*. Ecomasculinity values the relationships between the eight identified positionalities within the masculinities discourse, and emphasizes active listening beyond political differences. Ecomasculinity is an inclusionary conceptual framework that works towards freeing men from the inner isolation that a dominator mentality instills, and does so by encouraging relationship building across traditional boundaries of difference.

However, ecomasculinity runs the risk of avoiding an ecological praxis if it remains at-best metaphoric, personally focused, and purely relational in the human sense. The personal liberation of masculine identity must also be literally ecologised which is here taken to mean re-becoming one with broader nature. The ecologisation of masculinities theory is informed by three crucial axioms. Firstly, given hegemonic masculinities are centrally complicit in the decline of global environmental health, a specific and on-going examination of the impact of modern Western masculinities on more-than-human nature is essential. Secondly, focusing on 'personal-work' alone will not bring about swift nor broad enough change to improve social and ecological health. Seeking solutions to the problems that exist between humans and the more-than-human world is now a global imperative. Therefore, enrolling the support of *all* men and masculinities as allies for global ecological sustainability is an imperative. Thirdly, and most importantly, *ecological masculinism* presumes that *all* men and masculine identities are good, and that sometimes individuals and gendered identities are expressed in misguided ways that result in losses of affinity with self and others. In other words, ethics of daring sometimes dominate ethics of caring, but the former cannot obscure the latter entirely.

THE 'ECOLOGICAL' IN ECOLOGICAL MASCULINISM:

Beyond ecofeminism, a number of additional scientific, social and philosophical concepts exist that are worthy of further consideration. They are:

- Bioregionalism
- Feminist Sociobiology
- Deep Ecology

Social Ecology
Ecopsychology
Gaia Theory
Inclusionality Theory
Systems Thinking

When examined in combination with *ecofeminism*, these discourses provide a wealth of knowledge about the process of ecologisation. Bioregionalism is both a scholarly and community-based movement that examines human interactions with distinct geographical areas (specifically: watersheds, landforms, soils, native plants and animals, and weather). This movement supports adaptive and inhabitory human attitudes by acknowledging the interplay between inanimate and animate aspects of a bioregion, which thereby reveal the 'natural' characteristics of a specific place. From a bioregional perspective, people's presence within living systems becomes integral (Berg and Dasmann, 1978). Feminist sociobiologists critique biological determinism, suggesting that traditional interpretations of evolutionary theory are patriarchal and erroneously lean on biological arguments to force females into roles of passive and nurturing mothers (Hrdy, 1999). Deep ecology cultivates an expanded ecological and personal consciousness that promotes the emergence of an 'ecological-Self' whose intimate connection with the more-than-human environment permits an individual to acknowledge the 'intrinsic value' of all life (Naess, 1989). Social ecology seeks the creation of ecologically benign societies that function on decentralized libertarian ideals and works towards building 'rounded' human communities that prioritize the resolution of deep-seated social problems while also addressing the ecological future of the planet (Bookchin, 1993). Where ecology illuminates the relationships between organisms 'out there', psychology explores dysfunctions of the mind 'in here' which when combined through ecopsychology unifies this outer/inner division and argues that nature critically determines human physical, mental and emotional wellbeing (Roszak *et al.* (eds.), 1995). Gaia theory offers a scientific study of the interactions between the atmosphere, lithosphere and hydrosphere, noting that cybernetic geophysiological macro-systems are comprised of tightly coupled subsystems, which enable the Earth to function as a single self-regulating organism (Lovelock, 1979). Gaia theory also substantiates cryptic and anthropomorphic agitations of the mainstream by using scientifically valid evidence to suggest that assaults upon the planet's ecological integrity can be replaced with a reverence for the Earth's unique emergent properties (Sautoris, 1989). Inclusionality theory views all living and non-living entities as 'dynamic inclusions' by noting the complex couplings between inner individuals and outer collectives through reciprocal perceptions of the self imbedded in nature (Rayner, 2003). Systems thinking juxtaposes open, interpenetrating and self-regulating dynamic systems against entropically rigid closed systems, using physics to prove that living systems are adaptively self-organizing, internally teleological, and therefore contradict the second law of thermodynamics (Bertalanffy, 1950). Each of these disciplines formulate unique insights into the human:nature relationship. *Ecological masculinism* provides an arena for the exploration of these environmental discourses in the context of modern Western masculine identity. The ecological aspect of *ecological masculinism* is then a transdisciplinary dialogue that explores key theoretical aspects of environmentalism and their impact on masculine identity and men's lives, in a literal sense. For example, viewing the world as a single self-regulating organism through the lens of the Gaia Hypothesis encourages a man to place himself within the broader biota rather than above it. Similarly, masculine identities that are informed by Gaia theory are more likely to access a holistic and broader world-view beyond traditional scientific reduction. The ecological aspect of *ecological masculinism* is then an opportunity to appropriate various environmental wisdoms to the masculine experience and men's lives.

Ecological masculinism is not a panacea. It does not provide a fixed position nor a prescribed definition of what an ecologised man or masculine identity ought look like. Rather, *ecological masculinism* is an invitation to dialogue across the wider spectrum of masculinities theory, inviting all masculinities positionalities to the table. Further, *ecological masculinism* provides a space for the introduction of rigorous and thorough environmental philosophies to the masculinities discourse. In essence, *ecological masculinism* is the union of social and environmental justice in the context of both masculinities politics and men's lives. *Ecological masculinism* assumes that those engaged in this discourse will take a variety of personal and political positions. *Ecological masculinism* provides an opening for caring and being related to others in a world and at a time when men and masculinities are socialised to be discrete, stark and daring. *Ecological masculinism* is then an opportunity for Western men and masculine identities can infuse connection, relationship and caring into ways of being.

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