

Ecofeminism: Encouraging Interconnectedness with Our Environment in Modern Society

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Abstract Ecofeminism, like the social movements it has emerged from, is both political activism and intellectual critique. Bringing together feminism and environmentalism, ecofeminism argues that the domination of women and the degradation of the environment are consequences of patriarchy and capitalism. Any strategy to address one must take into account its impact on the other so that women's equality should not be achieved at the expense of worsening the environment, and neither should environmental improvements be gained at the expense of women. Indeed, ecofeminism proposes that only by reversing current values, thereby privileging care and cooperation over more aggressive and dominating behaviors, can both society and environment benefit. This article considers the heritage of ecofeminism as a multiply braided political praxis and an intellectual position. It examines key critiques of earlier perspectives, before exploring its more recent developments. It considers its relationship with, and potential to enhance other feminist and environmental approaches, particularly those concerned with feminist political ecology and environmental justice.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, feminism and environmentalism

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1. Introduction

Ecofeminism, also called ecological feminism, branch of feminism that examines the connections between women and nature. Its name was coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974. Ecofeminism uses the basic feminist tenets of equality between genders, a revaluing of non-patriarchal or nonlinear structures, and a view of the world that respects organic processes, holistic connections, and the merits of intuition and collaboration. To these notions ecofeminism adds both a commitment to the environment and an awareness of the associations made between women and nature. Specifically, this philosophy emphasizes the ways both nature and women are treated by patriarchal (or male-centred) society [1]. Ecofeminists examine the effect of gender categories in order to demonstrate the ways in which social norms exert unjust dominance over women and nature. The philosophy also contends that those norms lead to an incomplete view of the world, and its practitioners advocate an alternative worldview that values the earth as sacred, recognizes humanity's dependency on the natural world, and embraces all life as valuable. The central tenet of ecofeminism is that social and environmental issues are not separate, that the causes for

the mistreatment of women, people of color and the environment stem from the same place. Therefore, from an ecofeminist perspective, it is best to view all of these issues collectively.

Ecofeminism puts forth the idea that life in nature is maintained through cooperation, mutual care and love. It is an activist and academic movement, and its primary aim is to address and eliminate all forms of domination while recognizing and embracing the interdependence and connection humans have with the earth. [2] There are countless ways of viewing the environment. In modern societies, it is important to consider the ways in which we connect with nature as industrial practices move us away from the earth and as biodiversity is lost. Pollution is on the rise, and people all over the world are suffering the consequences of projects constructed in the name of progress. Ecofeminism offers a way of thinking and organizing ourselves by encouraging interconnectedness with our environment and addressing the subjugation of women and marginalized peoples. As a result of this kind of thinking and organizing, new human and environmental connections can be made with a broader perspective, involving less overt social recognitions. Categorizing women and subjugated peoples with the environment allows for the recognition of social and environmental injustices from a unique and often forgotten perspective, which in turn allows for solidarity and solace.

2. Ecofeminism: A Forum for Change in Social Construct

Ecofeminists understand human beings as not being separate from or above nature. They are one small part of a whole, rather than the pinnacle of nature. In separating nature from persons, humanity creates a concept of nature which is made up of dead, unintelligent matter. Given that the subjugation of women and nature is a social construct, not a biological determinant, these relationships have the potential to change. Ecofeminism provides a forum for this change. With burgeoning environmental destruction and historically oppressive power structures, it is important to examine closely alternative solutions to the woes of our communities, land and the earth itself.

While ecofeminists have made many connections between women and nature, the three ties that most strongly bind them are empirical, the conceptual and epistemological. Empirical data supports the notion that women often bear the responsibility of feeding and caring for their children while maintaining a household. In poorer countries especially, these duties make women and their children more vulnerable to the effects of environmental deterioration as they desperately search for basic resources with little to no financial and communal support. Conceptually, women are associated either culturally or symbolically with the earth: The claim is that dualistic conceptual structures identify women with femininity, the body, Earth, sexuality and flesh; and men with masculinity, spirit, mind and power. Dualisms such as reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, heaven/Earth, and man/woman converge. This implies that men have innate power over both women and nature. This dualistic structure was championed in the Greek world, perpetuated by Christianity, and reinforced later during the scientific revolution. [3]

Finally, the epistemological connection results from the theoretical connections between women and nature; this approach suggests that because women are most adversely affected by environmental problems and generally associated with nature, they are in an epistemological privileged place. This means women are in a position to facilitate the creation of practical and intellectual ecological paradigms.

Ecological impacts extend beyond childbirth and infant care. Women (particularly those in less developed countries) are often responsible for providing basic resources, like water, food, fuel and healthcare, while men move to urban settings for work. "Women in the Third World form the base of ecological activism. They are more likely than men to be tied to their living environment through a deep knowledge of plants animals and local ecology." [4] Women, and subsequently children, have become the most vulnerable to ecological destruction, but they are also seen as being the closest to nature, making their love and attention towards environmental issues the most plausible solution for a better future. Recognizing these intersections makes ecofeminism a valuable lens through which to view the important connections between struggling women and children and their environments, as well as an outlet for mutual support and advocacy.

Women from developing countries pointed to the effects of commercial food production, sweatshop labour, and poverty on their families and their landscapes. They accused white ecofeminists of promoting that exploitation by purchasing goods created as a result of inequity. They also took issue with the appropriation of indigenous cultures and religions for the purpose of advancing a philosophical position. Thus, contemporary ecofeminism must be developed to acknowledge the very real effects of race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality on a woman's social position. Women involved in environmental justice issues and women representing minority cultures have worked to establish their own sense of ecofeminism to include local cultures and spirituality, a celebration of their roles as mothers and caretakers, and a recognition of the ways in which Western colonization compromised those beliefs.

3. Ecofeminism— Advocating the Revaluing of Science

Many ecofeminists were also concerned with what they saw as a heterosexual bias in the movement insofar as ecofeminism appeared to privilege the experience of heterosexual women over homosexual women. To correct that problem, an emerging school of ecofeminism emphasized the need to incorporate the tenets of queer theory into the precepts of ecofeminism. [6] They contended that if ecofeminism is indeed committed to fighting against systems of oppression and domination, then the movement must also acknowledge the ways in which sexuality—and, more specifically, responses to that sexuality—also figure as oppressive mechanisms. Thus, the redemption of women's roles and opportunities must also include a valuing of sexual differences as well as differences in race, class, and gender.

Ecofeminist scholars often contend that the great plurality of beliefs within ecofeminism is one of the movement's greatest strengths. They note that the myriad definitions and applications, which sometimes complement and sometimes conflict with one another, demonstrate the liberating and inclusive aspects of the movement. They also point to the important commonalities shared within the various schools of ecofeminism. All ecofeminists, they say, work toward the development of theory and action that acknowledge the problems inherent in patriarchal and hierarchical systems. [7] They advocate the revaluing of science to acknowledge the role of subjectivity and intuition. They also support the creation of a new worldview that celebrates all biological systems as inherently valuable. Finally, they insist on solving those problems through affirming and nonviolent means.

4. The Ecofeminist Agenda Related to "fixing" the Environment

The female consumer has been given full responsibility for a crisis created primarily by the structure she is so oppressed by. This "servitude" is what Ruether cautioned women about 18 years ago. The responsibility has come in

the form of increased (unpaid) labor in the marketplace as well as participation in local recycling co-ops and grassroots activist organizations for which, historically, women have been the foot soldiers. Studying environmentally-related consumption from an ecofeminist framework allows these discontinuities to be uncovered and thereby assists in the erosion of dominant social and political structures.

It is apparent from this historical look at environmentally-related consumption research that it failed to make an impression on the consumer community. Prior research emphasized the derivation of universal and quantitative measures of environmental behavior, relied on the logic of reason to evoke change in behavior, and promulgated the domination of nature by providing algorithms for change that are based on "fixing" the environment.

The unifying goal of feminist theory is to transform male-dominated society. This goal is to be achieved through research methods that work toward raising consciousness. Feminists employ consciousness-raising research to expose and change structures that are oppressive such as the current system that has left the lion's share of environmental responsibility to women consumers.

With an ecofeminist framework, environmentally-related consumption research would take a more emancipatory approach. The research agenda would be focused on changing corporate and public policy so that the burden for the ecological crisis would not be placed on women alone. Education programs designed to benefit consumers would be developed in order to liberate consumers from the complexities of a marketplace that has profit as its primary motive. These educational programs would be comprised of teaching the consumer not just to consume differently, but to consume less. This redirection would aid in the development of the "green citizen" and not merely the "green consumer". [8]

5. Conclusion

The primary belief of ecofeminism is that the domination of women (as studied in traditional feminism) parallels the domination of nature and that this mutual domination has led to environmental destruction by the

controlling patriarchal society. Within feminism, a locus of scholars believe that a historical, symbolic, and theoretical connection exists between the domination of nature and women. This philosophy is based on four principles:

- 1) there are vital connections between the oppression of nature and women,
- 2) understanding these connections is necessary to understanding the two veins of oppression,
- 3) feminist theory must include an ecological perspective, and
- 4) ecological problems must include a feminist perspective.

Ecofeminism claims that both women and nature are dominated and thus stresses the need for a more interdependent worldview. Ecofeminists believe that all living things are essential to the well being of the planet and that humans are not separate or superior.

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